



ISLAM IN IRAN XIII. ISLAMIC POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN 20TH CENTURY IRAN

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xiii. ISLAMIC POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN 20TH CENTURY IRAN

New Islamic political movements first emerged in the Near East, the Indian Subcontinent, and Indonesia in the middle of the 19th century in response to European imperial expansion and encounter with European intellectual currents, social values, political thought, and technological advances. They represented, at least in part, the weakness of Islamic societies in resisting Western encroachment and its accompanying modes of modernity. A variety of religious responses and political ideologies emerged in this context with pro-democracy, fundamentalist, and socialist tendencies each having an elective affinity with the interests of different social classes and strata. These movements paved the way for subsequent Islamic movements that emerged in early 20th century Iran and in other Islamic societies, and have continued to the present time (for earlier “Muslim” reactions to and engagements with Western political influences, ideologies, and “modernity,” see Hairi, 1988; see also Hourani, pp. 57-160; for a comparative treatment of these broad categories of Islamic ideologies, see Enayat, pp. 93-159).

Following a brief discussion of the historical background to the emergence of



the above movements in a number of Muslim societies, this entry will focus only on Iran's Islamic political movements. Examining the main phases in the development of various Islamic political movements in 20th-century Iran—before and after the 1977-79 Revolution—this entry will treat the main ideological orientations of pro-democracy Islamic groups and those leaning toward Islamic socialism and fundamentalism. The final section of the entry focuses on the three ideological platforms in practice since the 1979 Revolution.

A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Under the influence of Western liberal ideas, the underlying political-religious discourses of the early Islamic movements asserted the compatibility of Islam with democracy—for example, in cases of Refa'a Rafi' Tahtawi (1801-73) in the early-19th century and the al-Nahda (al-Nahḏa) movement in the latter half of that century in Egypt. Some of these discourses advocated the rights of the citizenry to free and equal participation in national political processes. Another contemporary example of a modernizing movement was the “Islamic Reformist” platform of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan Bahadur (1817-98) in Aligarh, India. These movements, in turn, influenced Iranian lay and religious intellectuals in the course of the 1905-11 Constitutional Revolution (q.v.). The translation in 1909 of Adolrahman Kawakebi's work, *Tabāye' al-estebdād* (The Nature of Tyranny), by Mirzā Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Nā'ini, a prominent clerical figure in Najaf religious center, was another source of influence on the Iranian constitutionalists (see below; for intellectual influences from Egypt and India, see [CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION i](#); [INDIA ix](#)).

Other forms of religiously inspired responses to European imperial expansion and various aspects of modernity included a broad spectrum of ideological movements characterized by “traditionalist,” “revivalist,” and “fundamentalist” attributes. Some of these movements emerged with messianic undertones, such as the Babi movement in Iran (q.v.) and the Qadiri Sufi resistance to Dutch rule in Indonesia in mid-19th century, and the Mahdist movement in Sudan in late 19th century (see [ISLAM IN IRAN 2. MILLENARIANISM AND MESSIANISM IN ISLAM](#)). An example of the traditionalist movement with a fundamentalist leaning was the Deobandi/Devbandi movement, which emerged in British-controlled India in the second half of the 19th century in opposition to British domination as well as the Islamic reformist tendencies, and the pro-British stance of the Aligarh movement (see Metcalf, 1982). The news of these movements also had some



influence on the new generation of emerging Iranian intellectuals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see [INDIA ix](#)).

The most influential and distinctly Islamic fundamentalist movement to emerge in reaction to European imperial ambitions, secular political ideologies, and Western modernity was Hasan al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood (*Eḳwān al-moslemin*), which began in Egypt in 1928, and quickly spread to Syria, Jordan, and Palestine. In Iran it contributed to the formation of the Devotees of Islam (see [FEDĀ'ĪĀN-E ESLĀM](#)) in the mid-1940s. A younger generation of Muslim Brotherhood further radicalized in the 1960s-70s and moved from right-wing fundamentalism of Banna to the left-wing fundamentalism of Sayyed Muhammad Qutb (1903-66). Qutb had set forth his leftist ideas in a popular work, *'Adālat al-ejtemā'īya fi'l-Eslām* (Social justice in Islam), which was translated into Persian as *'Adālat-e ejtemā'i dar Eslām*, and reprinted several times from 1962 to 2001 (8th printing). Qutb's other works were also translated into Persian and frequently reprinted during this period.

Islamic movements with socialist leanings emerged later in the Near East and Iran. Mustafa al-Siba'i (*MosĀṭafā al-Sebā'i*), Dean of the Law School of Damascus University in late 1950s, and the author of a highly acclaimed socialist textbook in the Arab world, *Ešterākiyat al-Eslām* (The Socialism of Islam), is widely viewed to be the pioneering figure of both Arab and Islamic socialism (see Enayat, 1982, p. 144-50), whose ideas influenced a number of radical Islamic movements. The traditionalist, revivalist, fundamentalist, and socialist religious movements challenged Western ideas of modernity, including the notion of the compatibility of Islam with Western democracies.

In practice, the various Islamic movements partly adhered to ideal-typical forms of democracy and socialism or even traditionalism and fundamentalism. Some sought to combine Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic socialism, as in the case of al-Siba'i, the leader of the Syrian organization of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood. Compared with Sayyed Qutb, Siba'i leaned more toward socialism than Islam, as can be seen by the name he selected for his fundamentalist organization, the "Islamic Socialist Front" (see Enayat, 1982, p. 144-50). Others have sought to fuse Islam with fascist ideologies, as in the case of the Egyptian Nationalist Islamic Party, founded in 1940 (formerly Young Egypt; see Gershoni and Jankowski, 1995).

In the broader discourse of Islamic modernism, one must include the recent contributions of those who have advocated democracy for Islamic societies,



including Harun Nasution, Mohammed Arkoun, Abdolkarim Soroush (‘Abd-al-Karim Soruš) and Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari (Moḥammad Mojtahed Šabestari). Drawing from modern hermeneutics in theology (see [HERMENEUTICS](#)), these “neo-Mu’tazelite” thinkers emphasize the primacy of “reason” in addressing modern social and political problems instead of relying on the “authentic sources” of scripture and tradition (see further below; for the advocates of neo-Mu’tazelism in Islamic societies, see, e.g., Martin and Woodward).

DEVELOPMENT DURING THE PERIOD OF 1905-79

This period may itself be divided into several phases with respect to the development of Islamic political ideas and movements.

The 1905-1911 Constitutional Revolution. The platform of liberal nationalism, which was introduced in the second half of the 19th century, flourished in the course of the Constitutional Revolution. The idea of popular sovereignty, in particular, became the rallying call for the advocates of constitutionalism, progress, and equality. A rudimentary form of liberal nationalism, advocating the compatibility of Islam with democracy, also found a few adherents among high-ranking Shi’ite clerics who supported the Constitutional Revolution. These included Sayyed Moḥammad Ṭabāṭabā’i and Mirzā Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Nā’ini as well as influential preachers, including Sayyed Jamāl al-Din Eáfahāni (see [CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION i-ii](#); see also Yaġmā’i), though some members of this group later abandoned the liberal tenets of the constitutionalist movement, such as some degree of tolerance toward secularism and equality of all faiths before the law.

An Islamic fundamentalist orientation, led by Shaikh Fażl-Allāh Nuri, also emerged in this period. This was in response to liberal nationalism and in direct opposition to the clerical and lay supporters of constitutionalism. In his lawāyeḥ (pamphlets), published in 1907 in the form of leaflets, treatises, and manifestos, Nuri argued that a constitutional regime and the key ideas of “modernity” are contrary to the tenets of Islam. His condemnation of constitutionalism—attacking liberty, equality, and representative government as “un-Islamic innovations” (bed’a)—provided Moḥammad-‘Ali Shah with a religious justification for the bombardment of the Majles premises and the suspension of the constitutional regime in June 1908. Nuri’s orientation shared certain key characteristics with other fundamentalist movements of the 20th century (see below). It differed from other contemporaneous movements in



the Islamic world, such as those espoused by Sayyed Jamāl-al-Din Asadābādi (see [AFĠĀNI](#)) in the 19th century and his disciple, the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh, in being “reactive” rather than “revivalist” (for the revivalist ideas of Jamāl-al-Din and Abduh, see Hourani, 1983, pp. 71-160; for comprehensive original, primary sources on Nuri’s ideas see Nuri, ed., *Torkamān*, 2 vols., 1983–84, which includes a revealing debate on the fundamental principles of “pro-democracy Islam” and “Islamic Fundamentalism” between Ṭabāṭabā’i and Nuri, see Nuri, II, 1984, pp. 172-75; for English tr. of one of Nuri’s major manifestos, see Hairi, 1977b, pp. 327-39; Martin, 1989, pp. 181-96; see further ISLAM IN IRAN xvi. ISLAM AND FUNDAMENTALISM, forthcoming, online).

To refute Nuri’s criticisms of the constitutional regime as incompatible with the fundamental principles of Islam, Nā’ini published *Tanbih al-omma wa tanzih al-mella* (The Admonition of the Religious Community and the Refinement of the Nation) in 1909. With a preface written by two leading mojtaheds of Najaf’s important Shi’ite religious center, Aḳund Mollā Moḥammad-Kāẓem Ḳorāsāni (q.v.), and Shaikh ‘Abd-Allāh Māzandarāni, this book became an influential treatise in the constitutionalist period. However, like other works of the time in support of pro-democracy ideas in Islamic societies of the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent, Nā’ini’s treatise was criticized by some on the grounds that he misunderstood the Western concepts of freedom, equality, democracy, and separation of powers, and therefore glided over the problem of reconciling them with Muslim scripture (see, e.g., Hairi, 1977b, pp. 218-22; cf. Enayat, p. 134).

The 1941-53 period. Islamic protest movements in Iran, which had waned in the 1910s-30s, re-emerged during the 1940s. A significant development in this period was the appearance of religious intellectuals with ideological leanings toward democracy or socialist platforms at the University of Tehran, and in high schools in response to the challenge of the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party’s propaganda campaign among the intelligentsia, and the increasing popularity of the Party’s Youth Organization (*Sāzmān-e javānān*) among students (see [COMMUNISM ii](#)). The adherents of both democracy and socialism in Muslim societies attempted to offer ideological alternatives to Marx’s then-popular historical materialism, which claimed to offer a “scientific” interpretation of social problems and historical development (Rahnema, 1998, pp. 6-7, 12-19, 40-41, 50-51, 100-101; Ja’fariān, pp. 15-46).

The ideas of the compatibility of Islam with democracy in the Constitutional Revolution also gained a new generation of adherents among the religious



intelligentsia, mostly rallied around Mehdi Bazargan (Bāzargān), Yad-Allāh Şahābi, and Ayatollah Sayyed Maḥmud Ṭāleqāni. The continuity of these Islamic ideas from the Constitutional era may be seen in the reprint of Nā'ini's *Tanbih al-omma* in 1955, with an introduction by Ṭāleqāni (see Bazargan, 1998, pp. 73-84; for Ṭāleqāni's "Last Sermon," see Kurzman, 1998, pp. 46-48; for a detailed survey of the movement in this period, see Chehabi, pp. 103-39).

The Devotees of Islam (see [FEDĀ'ĪĀN-E ESLĀM](#)) was a fundamentalist Islamic movement that was founded during the 1940s and early 1950s, led by a young, charismatic religious student, Nawwāb Şafawi. The movement held a hostile attitude toward the then secular Iranian state and the highest-ranking Shi'ite leader and source of emulation, the Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ḥosayn Ṭabā-ṭabā'i Borujerdi (q.v.), on the grounds of the latter's accommodating stance toward the regime. The Devotees of Islam influenced the course of political events in this critical period by carrying out two political assassinations: that of 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Hażir (q.v.), a former prime minister and powerful minister of the royal court, on 4 November 1949, which led to the suspension of the elections of the 16th Majles, and calls for new elections in Tehran. The assassination of Hażir, and the active participation by the Fedā'īān in protecting the ballot boxes from tampering by professional thugs, were instrumental in the successful election of Moḥammad Moşaddeq and a number of other National Front candidates to the 16th Majles from Tehran ('Erāqi, pp. 41-45). Furthermore, with the assassination of Prime Minister Ḥāj-'Ali Razmārā on 17 March 1951, the Fedā'īān paved the way for the approval of Moşaddeq's proposal for the nationalization of the oil industries by the Majles, and his appointment to the premiership on 2 May 1951 (for a detailed account of their role in the politics of the early 1950s, see Rahnema, 2005, pp. 53-97).

An Islamic movement with socialist leanings, seeking the egalitarian transformation of society within an Islamic framework, also emerged in 1943 with the publication of a manifesto by Moḥammad Naḳşab, "Divine-worshipping socialists" (*Sosiālisthā-ye Ḳodāparast*). Although this movement remained in the shadow of liberal nationalism in this period, it significantly influenced the next generation of religious intellectuals in the radicalized era of the 1960s-70s, with the number of its adherents surpassing the adherents of Bazargan's Iran Liberation movement in universities at this period. Naḳşab's ideas were a form of "humanist Islamic socialism" based on the teachings of the Qur'ān, emphasizing social justice and equality of all pious Muslims based on the teachings and examples from the life of the Prophet, Imam 'Ali b. Abi



Ṭāleb (q.v.), and Imam Ḥosayn (see further, ISLAM IN IRAN xv. ISLAM AND SOCIALISM, forthcoming, online; Nekuruh, 1998; for an account of this movement, see Rahnema, 1998, pp. 24-34).

The 1960s-70s period. Following a relatively dormant phase after the 1953 coup d'état (q.v.), the period of 1960s-70s saw the revitalization and expansion of all brands of political Islam, inspired by the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini as the charismatic political source of emulation (with access to religious networks and financial resources). Incited by his increasingly militant rhetoric, scores of veterans and sympathizers of the Devotees of Islam and other like-minded religious activists organized in a number of mourning religious groups (hay'athā-ye 'azādāri-e ḥosayni) during the 1950s-early 1960s, founded the Coalition of Mourning Islamic Groups in 1963 (Hay'athā-ye mo'talefa-ye eslāmi, changed later to Jam'iyat-e mo'talefa-ye eslāmi [q.v.] and to Ḥezb-e mo'talefa-ye Eslāmi in 2004). They played a key role in the 1963 urban riots in reaction to Khomeini's arrest, as well as in the assassination of Prime Minister Ḥasan-'Ali Maṣṣur in 1964. They also participated in the revolutionary movement of 1977-79, forming a powerful right-wing fundamentalist camp following the revolution (for two insiders' accounts of the development of the Coalition of Islamic Groups by their founders and leaders, see Mehdi Erāqi; Bādāmčīān; see further ISLAM IN IRAN xvi. ISLAM AND FUNDAMENTALISM, forthcoming online).

Also reemerging in this period was Bazargan's pro-democracy nationalist movement that began in the 1940s adhering to the idea of the compatibility of Islam with democracy. It became a political party in 1961 as the Liberation Movement of Iran (Nahzat-e āzādi-e Irān). In its 1961 platform, the Liberation Movement advocated national sovereignty, freedom of political activity and expression, social justice under Islam, respect for Iran's constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Charter of the United Nations. Although this movement had lost the support it enjoyed in the 1940s-50s in the University of Tehran, it played an important role in the political religious movements of this period, and also later in the 1977-79 Revolution. The popularity of Mehdi Bazargan and Yad-Allāh Ṣahābi stemmed from their presumed mastery of modern sciences. They were seen as examples of a pious Muslim, modern scientist, and pro-democracy nationalist all rolled into one. Bazargan and Ṣahābi endeavored to theorize the idea of the compatibility of Islam with democracy through discovering the basis of human rights and democracy in "pristine Islam," that is, through obtaining the needed



theological and jurisprudential support from scripture and the deeds of the fourteen infallible Shi'ite leaders (see further, ISLAM IN IRAN xv. ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY, forthcoming, online; for a comprehensive treatment, see Chehabi, pp. 140-312).

Of all Islamic political orientations, “militant Islamic socialism” became most popular in the 1960s-70s, the period that also witnessed a surge in the popularity of secular socialist ideologies among the youth throughout the world. Beginning in the mid-1960s, Ali Shari'ati (‘Ali Šari’ati), influenced in part by Naḳšab’s ideas, became a source of inspiration to many religious-minded students and, more specifically, the members of the guerrilla organization, People’s Mojahedin of Iran (Mojāhedīn-e ḳalq-e Irān) as well as other Islamic leftist groups, including the Party of Islamic Nations (Ḥezb-e melal-e eslāmi; for a treatment of this current and other small Islamic groups with militant leftist orientations, see Ḥosayniān, pp. 499-543, 806-74; see also Ja’fariān, pp. 92-94, 145-70). The increasing popularity of Shari’ati among religious students derived from his passionate and mesmerizing style of sermons and writings, which featured a radical reading of the Shi’ite idea of human commitment to revolt against tyranny through martyrdom and jihad, combined with the revolutionary ethos of the French left in the era of rising radical movements throughout the world (see below).

The Islamic leftist currents emphasized the ideas of an Islamic classless society as well as solidarity with third-worldist national liberation movements and the Palestinian cause. Shari’ati made many bold innovations in the interpretation of Shi’ite doctrines, particularly as it applied to the relationship between religion and politics, and he supported the use of violence in transforming society into an Islamic utopia. He envisaged a classless society of Muslims (jāme’a-ye biṭabaqa-ye tawḥīdi) under the leadership of committed religious intellectuals with no room for the clergy (Eslām bedun-e ruḥāniyat). Shari’ati’s ideology was a blueprint for a social revolution and a radical transformation of the social order, and his followers were primarily made up of young students (see further ISLAM IN IRAN xv. ISLAM AND SOCIALISM, forthcoming, online; for a detailed discussion of Shari’ati and his ideas, see Rahnema, 1998, pp. 35-370; for his relation with various Islamic orientations, see also Ḥosayniān, pp. 762-98; for his ideological orientations, see below).

With the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini as a militant populist in the 1960s-70s, combining personal charisma and the will to power with the spiritual charisma embedded in the office of the Shi’ite source of emulation, all



variants of Islamic political currents gradually found a place under the canopy of his leadership. They were later joined by a large number of leftist and liberal political forces in the final years of the 1970s, contributing in various ways to the success of the 1977-79 Revolution (see ISLAM IN IRAN xvii. ISLAMIC REVOLUTION OF 1977-79, forthcoming, online; for Khomeini's charismatic authority, see Ashraf, 1994, pp. 101-55; for a discussion of various urban forces in revolution, see Ashraf and Banuazizi, 1985, pp. 3-40; idem, 2001, p. 237. Bazargan, 1982, pp. 16-76; for the role of clerical forces in the revolution, see Ruḥāni, 1985; Ḥosayniān, pp. 551-902; Ja'fariān, pp. 47-91, 171-92).

DEVELOPMENT DURING THE PERIOD OF 1979-2000

With the founding of the Islamic state in 1979, many of the leaders and cadres of the revolutionary struggle representing the competing "Islamic" political orientations emerged as the elites of the new regime and began engaging in intense factional politics that continue to this day.

Revolutionary honeymoon. The immediate aftermath of the February 1979 Revolution was a brief period of revolutionary honeymoon. In this period, the liberal factions of both religious and secular currents in the revolutionary coalition, including Mehdi Bazargan's Liberation Movement and secular veterans of Moḥammad Moṣaddeq's National Front, occupied most upper and middle-echelon positions within the official bureaucracy. Yet from the beginning the "unofficial" bureaucracy was taking shape behind the scenes made up of both right-wing fundamentalists and socialist Islamic forces, which controlled local revolutionary committees (Komitahā-ye enqelāb-e eslāmi), and the newly founded Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (Sepāh-e pāsdārān-e enqelāb-e Eslāmi; hereafter, the Revolutionary Guards or Guards) and its affiliated organization, Mobilization Resistance Force (Niru-ye moqāwemat-e Basij or Basij-e Mostaz'afin, hereafter Paramilitary forces). The militants also controlled various foundations, which were established to manage confiscated property and nationalized enterprises with enormous assets. The militant groups monitored and obstructed the daily activities of the government (see Bazargan, 1982, pp. 79-209; idem, 1983, passim).

Constitution of the Islamic Republic. As early as August 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini banned twenty-one newspapers of liberal-nationalist and secular-leftist groups who were critical of certain provisions of the new Constitution. The main controversial issue at this time was the nature of the Constitution of



the new republic: either an outright republican regime with sovereignty of the people or a hybrid of republican super structure and Islamic sub-structure with the supreme authority of the guardian jurist (*welāyat-e faqih*). A sharp division evolved between the followers of Khomeini's platform (*Kaṭṭ-e Emām*), who supported his concept of the sovereignty of the guardian jurist or supreme spiritual leader, and those who opposed it, including Bazargan's Liberation Movement and his cabinet, National Front supporters, People's Mojahedin of Iran, and most secular leftist forces, including the *Fedā'iān-e kālq*, who had a large group of followers among the students and youth (see [COMMUNISM iii](#)). Yet, the Assembly of Experts, whose members were popularly elected and predominantly supporters of Khomeini, approved the Constitution of the Islamic Republic in August, establishing rule by the Jurisconsult, consolidating the power of the highest political authority and the highest religious authority under Ayatollah Khomeini. According to the Constitution, the supreme leader is commander in chief of the armed forces and security forces, appoints the clerical members of the Guardianship Councils, a body of six cleric and six lay members, to approve the laws enacted by the Majles with veto power, and also appoints the head of the judiciary. He is the official arbiter between competing camps and separation of powers and, more specifically, between the Revolutionary Guards and other branches of the government. In other words, the Islamic Republic was founded as a hybrid of a Western type republican regime with an elected president, elected parliament, and elected Assembly of Experts, combined with an Islamic fundamentalist apparatus with no accountability to the Majles (see [CONSTITUTION ii](#); for the debate on the Constitution, see Montazeri, pp. 522-57; Schirazi; Bakhash, pp. 71-91; for the structure of power in the Islamic Republic, see Buchta).

The radicalization process. In the years immediately following the revolution, several circumstances contributed to an atmosphere of terror, a resort to brutal repression, violent confrontations with the armed opponents of the regime, and, more generally, a move toward radicalization of politics in the Islamic Republic. These included the takeover of the American Embassy by Islamic leftist students in November 1979 and the ensuing hostage crisis, which led to the collapse of the liberal provisional government of Prime Minister Bazargan, and helped mobilize the radical forces of the secular and Islamic left in a new "anti-imperialist" front against the United States and the West in general (see Bazargan, 1982 pp. 77-154; *idem*, 1983, *passim*; Chehabi, pp. 253-304). Also of help to the radicalization process was Iraq's invasion of



the Iranian territory in September 1980 and the onset of the Iran-Iraq War (q.v.), which required a massive mobilization of nearly every segment of Iranian society for support of the war effort.

In January 1980, the first presidential elections were held and Abul Hasan Bani Sadr (Abu'l-Ḥasan Bani Ṣadr), who had leaning toward the Islamic left and liberal nationalism, emerged as the victor. His victory, in spite of intense objections by the Islamic republican party (IRP: Ḥezb-e jomhuri-e eslāmi, whose nominee was Ḥasan Ḥabibi), would have not been possible if Bani Sadr had not enjoyed the outright support of Ayatollah Khomeini. As a result from the beginning of his presidency Bani Sadr faced increasing obstructions by the IRP (see Montazeri, pp. 258-59). The subsequent elections of the First Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majles-e šurā-ye eslāmi), held in March, resulted in the landslide victory of the IRP and Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution (Mojāhedīn-e enḡelāb-e eslāmi) and a small group from Liberation Front, Bani Sadr's supporters, and others (see Ḥajjārīān, pp. 140-41).

Following the hostage crisis and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88, the Islamic regime faced a period of intense crisis marked by internal conflict and instability, which culminated in the impeachment of President Bani Sadr. This event led to a series of assassinations, masterminded and implemented by the People's Mojahedin of Iran. They assassinated the powerful head of the judicial system, Ayatollah Moḡammad Ḥosayni Behešti, Prime Minister Moḡammad-Jawād Bāhonar, and President Moḡammad-'Ali Rajā'i as well as scores of powerful provincial clerics, cabinet members, and Majles deputies, most of whom were members of the Islamic Republican Party (for a diary of this critical period, see Hashemi Rafsanjani [‘Ali-Akbar Hāšemi Rafsanjāni], 1998).

The rise of Islamic left: 1981-89. This period saw a shift toward the left when Majles approved the appointment of Mir Hosayn Musavi (Mir Ḥosayn Musawi) as prime minister. In this period, the leftist Islamic forces rose to prominence with the support of Ayatollah Khomeini (hereafter referred to as “leftists”). During the last years of Khomeini's life, the infighting between these leftist forces and the right-wing fundamentalist groups within the regime intensified over a number of basic socio-economic and cultural issues as well as over which faction monopolized the powerful state agencies and the media. An increasing factional conflict led to the dissolution of the Islamic Republican Party (1979-87), the bastion of the right-wing camp, as well as the leftist Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution (Mojāhedīn-e enḡelāb-e eslāmi).



Meanwhile, the left-wing clerics left the Militant clerics association (Jāme‘a-ye ruḥāniyat-e mobārez) and formed a new organization, the Combatant clerics society (Majma‘-e ruḥāniun-e mobārez). These developments led to a sweeping victory of the left in the elections for the Third Majles in 1988. Now in command of all branches of the government, the leftist cabinet of Musavi championed the interests of the peasants and workers. However, the Guardianship Council rejected a number of radical laws enacted by the Majles, including a progressive labor law, a law for imposing a ceiling on agricultural lands as well as urban commercial lands and real estates, and nationalization of foreign trade. To pave the way for the approval of these laws, Khomeini declared the absolute authority of the spiritual leader (welāyat-e moṭlaqa-ye faqih) and created the “Expediency Council” (Majma‘-e taškīṣ-e mašlahat-e nezām) in 1988 to review controversial bills, in the event the Majles (at the time dominated by the left-wing camp) and the Guardian council (dominated by right-wing camp) failed to reach a consensus on theological and legal matters. The members of the Expediency council, in addition to the conservative members of the Guardian council, included the heads of the legislative and judicial branches, as well as the then Prime Minister Musavi, who frequently supported the aforementioned radical laws. Khomeini’s son Aḥmad, as well as his chief of personal bureau, Majid AnsĀari, who supported the radical laws, also became members of the Expediency council. President Ali Khamenei (‘Ali Kāmena‘i) was the only relatively moderate addition to the new review board. The absolute authority of the faqih (Shi‘ite guardian jurist; now specifically Khomeini as the supreme leader), it was now argued, would augment the powers of the legislative bodies, including both the Majles and the Guardian Council (see Ashraf, 1994).

At least four factors contributed to the leftward gravitation of the regime in the 1980s: the legacy of both the secular and religious left in Iranian society during the 1960s-70s; the exigencies of the Iran-Iraq War and Iran’s worsening international relations in the aftermath of the American hostage crisis, as well as the antagonism of regional regimes to Khomeini’s revolutionary stance, the revolutionary aura and prestige of Khomeini around the world and the expectations of militant Islamic movements in different parts of the world (irrespective of sectarian divisions in Islam) for emulating the example of the Islamic Republic; and, above all, the preservation and cultivation of Khomeini’s charismatic authority, intended to transcend all competing Islamic political currents in Iran.



The post-War/post-Khomeini era. The early post-war/post-Khomeini era, from 1989 to the mid-1990s, witnessed the demise of the Islamic left and the formation of Islamic pragmatism, a process inaugurated by the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-97) and the incorporation of the offices of president and prime minister. Under these circumstances, a new centrist and pragmatist faction, seeking to strike a balance between the right and the left, was formed. The right-wing fundamentalists and their base of support in the bazaar-mosque alliance tactically supported this more moderate, pragmatist camp.

Iran's many setbacks in the long and costly war with Iraq and the eventual acceptance of a UN-sanctioned settlement by Ayatollah Khomeini, who had previously declined all offers of a cease-fire after having publicly declared the overthrow of the Iraqi regime as one of Iran's war objectives (referring to the humiliation of the cease-fire as "swallowing a chalice of poison"), led to the disillusionment of the people and discontent among the Revolutionary Guards (see IRAN-IRAQ WAR; for blaming the Guards for the setbacks, see Reżā'i, pp. 9-11). Furthermore, the heavy death toll suffered, the destruction of cities and the country's ravaged infrastructure, and the shattered economy all contributed to the growing sense of frustration among people from all walks of life.

The main issue in the immediate post-war period was the path to be followed in reconstructing the country. The pragmatists, enjoying the support of the new middle classes, promoted an economic policy of greater privatization and international trade, combined with a social policy of relative tolerance. The pragmatists advocated a mixed economy based on the coexistence of public and private sectors. However, they also wanted rapid economic development with foreign investments and assistance. This policy proved unsavory not only to the "left," which pushed for a state-dominated economy, but also to the conservative forces opposed to Iran's opening up to foreign powers, keeping in mind also reliance of some prominent members of the conservative camp on the traditional bazaar middle class who were wary of outside competition. The pragmatists' social bases of support consisted of the new middle classes, the industrial entrepreneurs, modern commercial bourgeoisie, government employees, and the intelligentsia (Ashraf, 1994, pp. 101-55). However, following the victory of the right-wing fundamentalist factions such as the Militant Clerics Association and the Coalition of Islamic Groups in the elections of the Fourth Majles (1991-95), they obstructed moderate policies of the pragmatist president Hashemi Rafsanjani.



The new pro-democracy ideas and the 1997 reform movement. The period of the 1990s ushered in two new Islamic discourses in Iran: the “new pro-democracy” and the “new fundamentalist,” both either substantively or instrumentally informed by the new philosophical and social science discourses.

The most eloquent expression of the new Islamic pro-democracy reformist discourse may be found in the publications of the “Kiān circle” (Ḥalqa-ya Kiān), formed around the weekly intellectual journal Kiān, founded by Abdolkarim Soroush, Mojtabeh Shabestari, Moḥsen Kadivar, ‘Ali-Reżā ‘Alawitabār, Sa‘id Ḥajjārian, and ‘Abbās ‘Abdi (see below; for details of their ideas, see ISLAM IN IRAN xiv. ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY, forthcoming, online; see also Soroush, 2000a; 2000b; Mojtabeh shabestari, 2002; ‘Alawi-tabār, 2000; idem, 2007; Ḥajjāriān; Bāqi). The new “reformist” political discourse broadened the social base of support for pro-democracy Islamic forces. While the old, pristine “pro-democracy” discourse of Bazargan had lost its appeal for the intelligentsia, the new reformist ideology enjoyed overwhelming support among the younger generation of religious and even secular intelligentsia and, more specifically, among a large group of religious “leftist” forces who now shifted their ideological orientation from Shari’ati’s emotional discourse of authenticity to the rational political philosophy of Soroush and Mojtabeh Shabestari as well as the modern social sciences. This ideological shift, which began in the late 1980s, was also influenced by the increasing disillusionment of many younger religious intellectuals with the authoritarian and repressive character of the post-revolutionary Islamic-leftist-dominated government, and coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of pro-democracy movements in countries such as China.

The coalition of the new pro-democracy currents, the reformed Islamic-socialist currents (including Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution and the Bureau of Consolidating Unity [Daftar-e taḥkim-e waḥdat]), and Hashemi Rafsanjani’s pragmatist clique, known as the Executives of Construction (Kārgozārān-e sāsandagi), succeeded in securing the confidence of the people, which led to the sweeping victory of Muhammad Khatami (Moḥammad Kātami) in the presidential elections of 1997 over Nāṭeq Nuri, the nominee of the right-wing fundamentalist camp. The 1997 presidential elections ushered in a new era in post-revolutionary Iranian politics. Mohammad Khatami’s campaign platform emphasized the rule of law, establishment of a civil society, a moderation in foreign policy and improved international relations, and the protection of civil



liberties guaranteed under the Islamic constitution (see Bāqi, pp. 32-90; Ḥajjāriān; 'Alawi-tabār).

Khatami's election victory in 1997 was followed by the triumphant performance of reformist candidates in both the municipal elections of 1999 and the Majles elections of 2000. This unmistakably pro-reform popular mandate at the polls, however, did not translate into the legislative authority and effectiveness of the reformists. This failure can be attributed in part to internal divisions over the extent and priority of pro-democracy reforms among the main constituents of the reformist coalition. But the chief reason for this failure was that the new fundamentalists retained control of the security forces as well as the judiciary and, along with their allies from extremist currents, staged an offensive against the more popular reformers in the three elections. The offensive by the Paramilitary forces consisted of various tactics of intimidation, vigilantism, and acts of terror directed against their political rivals. They also launched a systematic crackdown against the pro-reformist press, intellectuals, students, and the pro-reform political activists, as well as the growing number of outspoken critics of the regime. These circumstances manifested the emergence and rapid expansion of a "garrison-state" (*dawlat-e pādḡāni*) with the new fundamentalist orientation. The garrison-state is primarily concerned with maintaining control over the key political positions and the enormous economic resources they have appropriated, without any accountability as required in a democracy (see Ḥajjāriān, pp. 237-45, 596-603, 689-703; Bāqi, pp. 121-205; 'Alawi-tabār, 2000, pp. 187-98; Yazdi, pp. 179-84; and Banuazizi, 1995, pp. 563-78).

The new fundamentalist current. After the mid-1990s a substantial discursive shift also occurred in the formulation and presentation of "fundamentalist" ideas, with the soon-to-be principal fundamentalist faction adopting a new language in order to reach the younger generation of devout Muslims. Notably, this transformed fundamentalist discourse also included an appeal to the Western philosophical tradition of anti-Humanism. This marked a major rupture with the former discourse of fundamentalism reminiscent of the *Fedā'iān-e Eslām*, *Hay'athā-ye mo'talefa* (originally formed to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn), Militant Clerics Association, and Preachers Association of Tehran (*Jāme'a-ye wo'āz-e Tehran*). Immersed in traditional religious jurisprudence (*feqh-e sonnati*) and the popular religion of the masses, the right-wing fundamentalist discourse of these earlier organizations not only had no appeal to the university students, it was even unable to evoke



support among the young veterans of the Iran-Iraq War who, with a populist agenda, found an organizational base in the Revolutionary Guards and its Paramilitary forces. Instead, these veterans were attracted to the new fundamentalist discourse as articulated, among others, by the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute at Qom (Mo'assesa-ye āmuzeši wa taḥqīqāti-e Emām Kōmayni), directed by Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi (MesĀbāh Yazdi). This new fundamentalist discourse was heavily influenced by the discourses of anti-Humanism and anti-modernism in Western philosophy (see below). Equipped with these instruments of ideological debate, the leading new fundamentalist thinkers could claim to provide philosophically more sophisticated and fundamental critiques of the reformist and pro-democracy Islamic ideologies, as well as of the Islamic currents with socialist leanings (for ideological orientation of new fundamentalists, see below).

As the new Islamic reformist and pro-democracy forces were engaged in a bitter factional struggle with the older right-wing fundamentalist groups (symbolized by Khatami and Nāṭeq Nuri) in the latter half of the 1990s, the new fundamentalists appeared on the scene from within the Paramilitary forces as an Islamic third current (“jarayān-e sevvom,” see Reżā’i, pp. 9-11; for ideological orientation of new fundamentalism, see below; see further, ISLAM IN IRAN xvi. ISLAM AND FUNDAMENTALISM, forthcoming, online).

IDEOLOGICAL DIVISIONS IN ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

The opposition and rivalry between Islamic pro-democracy reformist ideas, Islamic socialism, and Islamic fundamentalism—in addition to the vested material, as well as the more immediate political and cultural, interests of their adherents—also stems from their disparate ideological orientations vis-à-vis four key related issues: Islam and modernity; Islam and militancy; Islam and economic policy; and above all, the degree of an individual’s freedom in relation to God and the compatibility of Islam with democracy, human rights, gender equality, and the rights of minority groups.

Islam and modernity. Notwithstanding the diversity of Islamic political movements in contemporary Iran, their conception of “modernity” was, and remains, relatively stable: it refers to certain ideas, institutions, norms, and practices associated with the West since the late 18th century. While the various Islamic movements differ in their analyses of the particular European historical processes and perspectives comprising “modernity,” they



nonetheless are shaped considerably by their respective response to Western influences. The pro-democracy Islamic movements emphasize Islam's doctrinal recognition of the ideas of freedom and political participation, hence Islam's receptiveness to "modern" concepts of constitutionalism and individual rights (for different pro-democracy perspectives, see below). The "socialist" Islamic movements, on the other hand, equate modernity with social and economic development combined with social justice and egalitarian distribution of wealth (similar to Liberation Theology, often characterized as a form of "Christian socialism" and enjoying widespread support in Latin America). For their part, the fundamentalist Islamic movements (similar to their Christian, Hindu, and Jewish counterparts) vilify Western "humanism" and, more specifically, the underlying "subjectivism" inherent in modernity. The fundamentalist movements also uphold a moderate or deep belief in messianic millenarianism. In modern Iranian history the deep conviction in the imminent coming of the Mahdi emerged for the first time in its extremist form in the ideological pronouncements of the new-fundamentalists (see below). Meanwhile, fundamentalists criticize modernity as a product of Christianity and/or Western imperialism. Fundamentalist and socialist Islamic movements—like their Western counterparts—often criticize the stagnant conservative religious establishment for not utilizing modern technologies and modes of mass mobilization to fight back against anti-Islamic elements of the political establishment and modernity. Their more radical elements even advocate an "Islam without clerics" (e.g., Ali Shari'ati and the People's Mojahedin of Iran; see below).

In Iran, as elsewhere in the Islamic world, an ongoing debate is raging over which modern institutions, practices, and ideologies may be deemed to be consistent with the Islamic faith. Pro-democracy and socialist Islamic movements, despite their embrace of modernity, agree that some elements of Western modernity are inconsistent with Islamic doctrines and ought to be rejected; for pro-democracy Islam these would include totalitarian state ambitions and even secular liberalism, and for Islamic socialism the tenets of imperialism, capitalism and consumerism are seen as counter to many egalitarian and puritan Islamic values. Fundamentalist Islamic movements, despite their outright hostility toward the Western model of modernity, nevertheless agree that some elements of modernity are essential under new circumstances, such as modern science and technology and organizational skills. The essential cause of the animosity between fundamentalists, on the one side, and religious modernists—with both pro-democracy and socialist



leanings—on the other, stems from controversy over Humanism, as a main element of modernity (see below, “The compatibility of Islam with democracy”).

Islam and militancy. Militant Islamic movements, whether with fundamentalist or socialist leanings, have significantly diverged from the moderate worldview of the mainstream religious establishment of the ulama and the popular Shi‘ism of the masses. To mobilize their followers for radical political action, both fundamentalists and Islamic socialists have interjected the spirit of revolt into their interpretive framework of the principle of *amr be ma‘ruf* (q.v.)—“enjoining what is proper or good” (a principle religious duty in Islam)—radicalizing the otherwise quietist discourses of millenarianism, jihad, and martyrdom.

Amr be‘l ma‘ruf. Since the advent of Islam in the 7th century, the topic of the legitimacy of resorting to physical force in resistance to oppression has been a key debate in interpreting the principle of *amr be‘l ma‘ruf*. From the very early days, two polarized perspectives emerged: those who viewed *amr be‘l ma‘ruf* merely as a moral standard for admonishing corrupt and unjust rulers and members of the Muslim community; and those who proclaimed it a mandatory religious justification for armed revolt against unjust rulers and their loyal subjects. The Majority of Sunnite and Shi‘ite scholars generally have upheld the former quietist reading of *amr be‘l ma‘ruf*, while certain movements since the early years of the advent Islam—ranging from Kharijites to more recent “militant” Islamic currents—have espoused the activist “combative” reading of this principle (see further [AMR BE‘L MA‘RU](#)).

Millenarianism and Messianism. The “quietist millenarianism” of the majority of the ulama and of the masses simply anticipates the return of the Mahdi before an unspecified millennium to commence it. This “expectant” (*entezār*) perspective had nurtured an attitude of quietism among most Twelver Shi‘ites for centuries and, more specifically, since the Safavids. This orientation led to noninvolvement in protest movements and accommodation with the established political order during the “Greater Occultation” of the Mahdi (see [ĠAYBA](#)). The active millenarianism of the militants, on the other hand, anticipates the return of the Mahdi only after the millennium, having been inaugurated by the faithful themselves. Yet, the earlier “political” fundamentalists such as *Fedā’iān-e Eslām* and *Jam‘iyat-e mo‘talefa*, as well as the Islamic socialists, adopted a more moderate version of militant millenarianism, primarily against the quietist stand of the *Ḥojjatiya*



Association (q.v.; see also [ḤALABI](#)), and other admirers of the Mahdi (welāyatis) who ardently advocated an accommodationist stand vis-à-vis the temporal authority. Therefore, the doctrine of millenarianism and the return of the Mahdi remained at the periphery of Islamic political movements and the Islamic regime in the period of the 1980s-90s (for a detailed survey, see [ISLAM IN IRAN 2. MILLENARIANISM AND MESSIANISM IN ISLAM](#)).

Militant conception of jihad. The activist idea of amr be'l-ma'ruf and militant conception messianic millenarianism requires a new reading of the principles of jihad and martyrdom. There are two basic views of jihad in Islam: defensive and offensive (for other views, see [ISLAM IN IRAN xi. JIHAD](#)). A fight to defend Islamic society (dār al-Eslām) against the aggression of enemies of the faith is incumbent upon the faithful in Islam. The ulama and the masses adhere to the defensive idea of jihad. The legitimacy of offensive jihad and, more specifically, a revolutionary call for jihad during the greater occultation of the Mahdi, is questionable in Twelver Shi'ism. It has been strongly prohibited by numerous Hadith attributed to the Imams (see [ISLAM IN IRAN x. THE ROOTS OF POLITICAL SHI'ISM](#); [xi. JIHAD IN ISLAM](#)). While the ulama cast doubt on the legitimacy of offensive and revolutionary jihad during the absence of the Mahdi, militants have appropriated the idea of jihad to mean not only a duty to defend the Islamic community (omma), but also an offensive revolutionary strategy.

Ayatollah Mortaza Motahhari (Mortazā Moṭahhari), who, along with Shari'ati, is considered as the ideologue of the Islamic Revolution, declares that, "There is a complete agreement amongst scholars that the essence of jihad is defensive, not offensive." However, he extends the notion of "defensive" jihad to rebellion against the tyrannical regimes, to the export of Islamic revolution, and even against cultural aggression. "Islam says that we must fight those tyrants so as to deliver the oppressed from the claws of tyranny." This militant conception of jihad is also extended to the export of revolution: "Rushing to the defense of the oppressed, especially if they are Muslims, such as the Palestinians, is certainly permissible; in fact it is obligatory." Finally, the idea of jihad is also extended to the defense of Islamic society against cultural aggression, "So, when we say that the basis of jihad is defensive, we do not mean defensive in the limited sense of having to defend oneself when one is attacked with the sword, gun or artillery shell. No, we mean that if one's being, one's material or spiritual values are aggressed or in fact, if something that mankind values and respects and which is necessary for mankind's prosperity



and happiness, is aggressed, then we are to defend it” (all quotations from Motahhari, 1991, online, see bibliography). The new fundamentalists go even further and propagate the idea that jihad is necessary and essential in expediting the coming of the Mahdi (see Saviyon). Another conception of jihad, which is also popular among many Shi’ites and most Sufis, is spiritual jihad, the idea of individual struggle to elevate the mundane existence of the faithful up to the realm of the sacred, leading to refinement and concern with the higher things in life (see [ISLAM IN IRAN x. THE ROOTS OF POLITICAL SHI’ISM; xi. JIHAD IN ISLAM](#)).

Militant conception of martyrdom. The activist reading of *amr be’l-ma’ruf*, millenarianism and jihad, in turn, has evolved into an innovative interpretation of the meaning and significance of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn. The popular Shi’ism of the masses is marked by such symbolic religious rituals as “passion play,” commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn (*ta’zia*), and collective mourning, which includes such practices as self-mutilation and flagellation by mourners (see DASTA). Whereas the militants’ interpretation of the martyrdom evolved in the 1970s to become a rallying call for making individual sacrifices to propagate the establishment of a utopian Islamic society or against the tyranny of the existing order. The turning point was the dissemination of Shari’ati’s idea of martyrdom in his lectures in Ḥosayniya-ye eršād in early 1970s, later published as *Šahādat*, and publication of a provocative and controversial book, *Šahid-e jāvid*, Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali, (The immortal martyr, Hosayn b. Ali) by Ne‘mat-Allāh Šāleḥi Najafābādi, with two prefaces by Ayatollahs Ḥosayn-‘Ali Montazeri and ‘Ali-Akbar Meškini, both ardent supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini.

The interpretation of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn by Shari’ati and Ne‘mat-Allāh Šāleḥi Najafābādi initiated a new debate on the subject in the 1970s. Šāleḥi believed that the Imam possessed a clear religio-political agenda when he mobilized a war against the usurpers of the Islamic government. Thus, he did not intend to attain martyrdom for its own sake, as understood by the masses and disseminated by the ulama, but rather, Šāleḥiá argued, the Imam acted as the exemplar for his faithful followers for generations to come to make permanent revolutionary sacrifices until the establishment of the “divinely guided” Islamic government. This bold innovation on a pre-existing deep-rooted quietist belief was met with the overwhelming indignation of the religious hierarchy on the pulpit, turning the masses against the author (see Šāleḥi Najafābādi; for a discussion on Šāleḥi’s idea, see Modarresi, chap. 2;



Enayat, pp. 190-94). Like the traditionalist conception of martyrdom, Shari'ati propagated the idea that Ḥosayn b. 'Ali, The Lord of Martyrs (Sayyed-al-Šohadā'), believed in "martyrdom for the sake of martyrdom," and that he was aware that he would be martyred when he staged a war with a small force of 72 against the large and well-equipped army of the tyrannical government. He deviated from the traditionalist reading of martyrdom, however, when he glorified martyrdom by propagating the idea that the Imam staged a war to set an exemplar for his faithful Shi'ites to be martyred as a dramatic act of protest and revolt against the tyranny of the established order, "if you are not able to be a victor, be a martyr" (see Shari'ati, 1973; Rahnema, 1998, pp. 312-27).

The new apocalyptic mood. The recent rise to power of new fundamentalists brought different readings to the activist conceptions of *amr be'l-ma'ruf*, millenarianism, jihad, and martyrdom. The radicalization of Shi'ite millenarianism, leading to the rise in the cult of the Mahdi, may be seen as a bold innovation by the new-fundamentalists. It originates in a sort of extremist Shi'ism (see GŌLĀT), a well-known and recurrent movement in the history of Shi'ism. The new apocalyptic mood helped the burgeoning of Jamkarān edifice near Qom, believed to be the abode of the Hidden Imam. Believing that the well of the mosque in Jamkarān is the host of the Mahdi, the faithful Shi'ites drop prayers and personal requests therein. The new fundamentalists brought, for the first time, the idea of imminent anticipation of the return of the Hidden Imam to a central place in the politics of the Islamic Republic. They have expressed, on various occasions, their deep belief in the universality of the return of the Mahdi, his imminent return to form a divinely ordained state throughout the world. To expedite the appearance of the Hidden Imam, they call for revolutionary mobilization and confrontation with the enemies of Islam through jihad and *šahādat*. The cult of the Mahdi is replacing the historical place of the drama of the Martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn. The drama of martyrdom for the return of the Mahdi is even more inciting and more "real" in the mind of believers than the commemoration of the Martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn. It shifts the orientation from the past to the imminent future. The new cult of the Mahdi, however, encountered growing criticism from the sources of emulation to religious intellectuals of both pro-democracy and socialist camps. They often accuse it of spreading superstition in society (for a survey of the emerging cult of the Mahdi in primary sources, see Saviyon and Mansharof).

Islam and economic policy. The controversy over the priority of public or



private sectors became the main point of contradiction and dividing lines in factional politics during the period of 1982-89. In control of the state apparatus during wartime, the radical left championed land distribution among the peasantry, nationalization of foreign trade, imposing limitations on the ownership of urban real estate, and progressive labor laws. Both Shari'ati and Motahhari provided the Islamic left with a socialist platform. While Shari'ati contributed to such rhetorical slogans as “divinely ordained classless society” or “wretched of the earth,” Motahhari's contribution was mainly a moderate and systematic treatment of an Islamic economic system as mediating between socialism and capitalism, public and private sectors of economy (see Motahhari, 1989; for Shari'ati, see above). On the other side were pro-democracy groups, right-wing fundamentalists, and pragmatists with modern capitalist agendas who fought for private ownership and freedom of economic activities. The right-wing fundamentalists even opposed the establishment of a minimum wage or any control by the state over economic enterprises, arguing that capital and labor are in constant interaction in the Islamic free market, and that labor accepts the proposed wage on its own free will. Thus, no intervention by the state in the economic life of the community should be permitted (see Ashraf, 1994). However, the new fundamentalists, with their populist agenda, have adopted more support for the public sector at the cost of private enterprises.

Compatibility of Islam with democracy. A more fundamental and controversial aspect of modernity for Islamic movements is Humanism and, more specifically, the degree of freedom of human agency and compatibility of Islam with democracy. Modern Humanism can be simply defined as “a system of thought that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science as well as a concern with the needs, well-being, and interests of people.” Secular Liberalism and Marxism may be considered as the two major political manifestations of Humanism, both having influenced particular Islamic movements. In Abrahamic religions, there evolved two polarized perspectives in response to the spread of modern secular Humanism: an uncompromising outright rejection of Humanism by fundamentalists versus a more moderate, compromising view that propagates the compatibility of religious faith with a modified conception of humanism as mediated by God. The receptive attitude toward modified definitions of humanism is evident in the pronouncements of the compatibility of Islam with democracy and socialism (see below).



Fundamentals of Fundamentalism. As with the adherents of fundamentalist movements in Abrahamic faiths in general—Judaism, Christianity, and other branches of Islam—a primary target of Iranian Shi'ite new fundamentalists is “humanism,” conceiving Man to be “the center of the universe.” The cardinal objective of fundamentalism is, therefore, to reinstate the idea and practice that “God, not man, is the center of the universe.” They also maintain that the path to social justice lies in a return to the original, fundamental message of the scripture (for Islamic fundamentalists, the šari'a law), and the formation of a religious state combined with the rejection of “innovations” (bed'a) and perceived anti-religious ideas and practices stemming from the secularization of the world. The targeted innovations include the modern secular state with its tolerance towards institutions of a pluralistic civil society, and the separation of “church” and state. In addition, most fundamentalist movements bitterly scorn any tolerance, much less the collaboration of their religious establishments with, the secular state. In the same vein, they oppose all religious intellectuals with pro-democracy or socialist orientation, accusing them of succumbing to the evils of “Humanism” and the ostensibly false belief of the compatibility of Western forms of democracy or socialism with Islam (for a comparative survey of fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, see Almond, Sivan and Appleby; see further ISLAM IN IRAN xvi. ISLAM AND FUNDAMENTALISM, forthcoming, online).

This stance also signifies the fundamentalists' conviction of being the guardians of ‘absolute truth’—founded upon immutable and historically unchanging religious principles in pursuit of the right path enjoined by God (al-sÂerât al-mostaqim)—as well as possessing the sole blueprint for establishing the perfect society in all its aspects of life (political, social, economic, religious, and cultural). The concept of “absolute truth” is evident, for example, in the title of the manifesto by the Fedâ'iân-e Eslâm, “The Guide to truths” (Râhnemâ-ye haqâyeq). Such a rigid notion of an invariable “absolute truth” rests upon a dualistic Manichean vision of the world and its division into two opposing forces of good and evil, faith and blasphemy, Allâh and tâqût, true Islam (Eslâm-e râstin) and false Islam, and friends and foes of Islam. This worldview justifies extreme and violent political action without constraints in defense of Truth, serving as a rationalization for the envisaged totalitarianism of the Fedâ'iân-e Eslâm and Jam'iyat-e mo'talefa, or even the extremist totalitarian worldview of the new fundamentalists. Another feature of fundamentalism in this regard has been the frequent recourse to violent enforcement of “prescribed” religious codes of conduct when and where



possible by resorting to a principle of religious duty in Islam, *al-amr be'l-ma'ruf*. It should be noted that the belief in the existence and knowledge of “absolute truth” also exists among the adherents of secular as well as religious left such as certain trends within Liberation Theology in Latin America and Islamic left, including People’s Mojahedin of Iran, who justify recourse to violence in bringing about their own order of truth in the form of “social justice” (see above section on militancy).

The new fundamentalist discourse and Western philosophy. The underlying epistemological difference between secular humanism and fundamentalism in Iran has been intensified by the new fundamentalists’ adoption of anti-humanist ideas, drawn from Western philosophy. These ideas could be treated in two related currents: perennial Traditionalism and Heideggerian anti-Humanism. The perennial Traditionalist perspective—which can be characterized as essentially metaphysical, esoteric, and primordial—began to emerge in Europe and America at the beginning of the 20th century through the work of René Guénon (1886-1951), and Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947). It was developed further by Guénon’s disciple Frithjof Schuon (1907-98), and their followers, including Sayyed Hossein Nasr, who edited *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon* (New York, 1986). Most of the adherents of perennial Traditionalism converted to Islam, including Guénon, who adopted the name, Abd al-Wahid Yahya, and Schuon, who adopted the name, Isa Nur al-Din. A number of the works by these Traditionalist figures have been translated into Persian in the last two decades and have further bolstered the ideological position of new fundamentalism in Iran.

Martin Heidegger’s anti-humanism and anti-modernism has also influenced Persian religious thought through Henri Corbin (q.v.), an influential scholar in Islamic philosophy, and his disciple, Sayyed Hossein Nasr and, more specifically, through Ahmad Fardid (Corbin was the first to translate Heidegger into French; for the influence of Heidegger on Corbin, see Nemo, “From Heidegger to Suhrawardi: An Interview with Henri Corbin,” and Green, pp. 219-26; Corbin, 1983; Nasr, 1990; idem, 1998).

Heidegger’s ideas of the decadence of the West through the concept of the “Darkening of the world—”a recurring theme in his philosophy—introduced and articulated by Fardid through the coinage of its Persian equivalent, “*garbzadagi*.” This term means, metaphorically, the dusk of illumination (the Sun) in the West (translated as Occidentosis or Westoxication, meaning Darkening of the Western world, which has also contaminated the East). Drawing from this



concept, Fardid and his disciple, Reżā Dāvāri Ardakāni founded a new version of Heideggerian fundamentalism in post-revolution Iran (see Fardid, 2000). Heidegger spoke of a “darkening of the world,” to mean the loss of humanity or enfeeblement of the spirit and forgetfulness of Being in the modern world. Following Heidegger, Fardid emphasized that the decadence of the West had already begun with Greek philosophy which marked a human being’s (wojud) loss of “oneness” with spiritual consciousness (del-āgāhi). Western man, immersed in technology, is more concerned with his being than with his spiritual calling in the world. The Liberal conception of civil society and democracy are illusions in a world in which being and spiritual consciousness are no longer in unison but at odds (for an influential vulgarization of Fardid’s Heideggerian concept of *garb-zadagi*, see Āl-e Aḥmad, 1977, and its English tr. as *Occidentosis*, 1983). Fardid claimed that the Islamic Revolution served as the vehicle for a return to the authentic spiritual ethos of the Orient. Fardid asserted, “Heidegger is the only philosopher whose thought corresponds to the fundamental ethos of the Islamic Republic, founded by Imam Khomeini.” Fardid gained followers among a circle of people in seminaries and the intelligence forces, as well as in the editorial staff of the major daily *Kayhān* newspaper, and in journals such as *SĀura*, *Ḥawza-ye andiša*, and *Honar-e eslāmi* (for Fardid’s ideas, see the posthumous publication of his lectures by one of his loyal students in 2000, particularly pp. 12, 347-65; Dāvāri, 1984; idem, 2000).

These ideas, drawn from anti-modernist currents in Western philosophy and religious thought, were transmitted to Iranian audience through translation of a number of works of Western adherents of anti-Humanist ideas and by such scholars as Sayyed Hossein Nasr. Following the perennial Traditionalism of Guénon and Schuon, as well as the Heideggerian-Corbinian anti-Humanist ideas, Nasr advocated an apolitical Traditionalist Islam vis-à-vis both modernism and fundamentalism. Yet his ideas of anti-modernism have substantively buttressed the ideological position of new fundamentalism with a hard-line political agenda in the last two decades. These ideas are also transmitted to Iranian advocates of new-fundamentalism by such instructors as Gary Muhammad Legenhausen, among others, who have further equipped the proponents of new fundamentalism, such as Mesbah Yazdi, in developing discursive ammunition against humanism and the “pro-democracy” ideas of such religious intellectuals as Soroush and Mojtabeh Shabestari (Legenhausen, an American student of philosophy with perennial traditionalist and new fundamentalist leanings, who converted from Catholicism to Shi’ism, has



taught and propagated Western traditionalist and anti-modernist ideas at the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute at Qom since 1996; see Legenhausen, 1999; see further ISLAM IN IRAN xvi. ISLAM AND FUNDAMENTALISM, forthcoming, online).

Consequently, the main division within the respective political factions since the 1990s has come to be defined by the conflicting ideological poles of “new fundamentalism,” with its totalitarian proclivity, on the one hand, and the “new Islamic pro-democracy thought,” on the other hand.

The pro-democracy and socialist Islamic ideas. The proponents of pro-democracy and socialist oriented Islamic platforms often resort to the idea that man, as God’s caliph (emissary) on earth, has been entrusted by God with a relative freedom of action (for a concise treatment of the basic ideas of religious intellectuals, see Narāqi, pp. 177-200). They often refer to Article 56 in the opening section of Chapter V of the constitution of the Islamic Republic on “the right of national sovereignty” and the powers deriving therefrom: “Absolute sovereignty over the world and man belongs to God, and it is He Who has made man master of his own social destiny. No one can deprive man of this divine right, nor subordinate it to the vested interests of a particular individual or group. The people are to exercise this divine right in the manner specified in the following articles” (Blaustein and Glanz, p. 39).

Referring to this Article, the proponents of varying brands of Islamic humanism occupy a middle ground between secular humanism and religious fundamentalism. This stance, in contrast to the absolute and diametrically opposed worldviews of religious fundamentalists and secular humanists, asserts the centrality of both God and man at the center of the universe. In this way, religious intellectuals with pro-democracy and socialist orientations rationalize the idea of human agency mediated by God’s will and God’s endowment of humanity with the capacity for freedom and creativity (for an application of Jurgen Habermas’s theory of inter-subjectivity to these debates, and the use of the notion of “mediated subjectivity,” see Vahdat, 2000; see also Narāqi, pp. 171-88).

The proponents of mediated humanism can be divided into two distinct orientations: First, those like Bazargan and Shari’ati, who meditate the distance between man and God by referring to the original sources, thereby demonstrating the compatibility of Islam with democracy or socialism through the adoption of universalistic Western political principles and their Islamic



textual corroborations. Second, those like Mojtabah Shabestari and Soroush who, transcending the above old way, reconstructed a new theological approach concerning the question of the compatibility of Islam with the ideas of freedom and democracy (see below).

Compatibility of Islam with democracy through authentic sources. As a French educated engineer in the 1930s who was familiar with the modern sciences and political philosophy, Bazargan developed a pristine approach in a number of influential books, expounding the compatibility of Islam with Western science and technology, freedom and democracy. In *Ensān o Kōdā* (Man and God), Bazargan sought to bridge the deep chasm between the place of God and Man in the center of the universe (*pol-e bozorg miān-e do binahāyat-e dur*). Bazargan maintained that the common element in both religion and democracy is the principle of “Man’s nobility,” from which the ideas of human freedom and human rights, responsibilities, and political participation are derived. In his view, Islam along with the monotheistic religions bestows great respect on human rights and considers mankind as free, responsible and autonomous agency. He makes a sharp distinction between the essence and precepts of religion, which belongs to God, and the administration of the polity, which belongs to the people. The former falls under religious rules and the latter under man’s rules. He concludes that “freedom to oppose and criticize and object” is vital and necessary for both government and religion. “When freedom is banished then tyranny will take its place” (Bazargan, 1976a; *idem*, 1998, pp. 78-82).

Religious intellectuals with socialist tendencies such as Shari’ati, have shown a similar inclination towards mediated humanism and authenticity. Shari’ati, given his emphasis on “authentic man” and his own version of attacking “West-toxification,” as evident in works such as *Fāṭema*, *Fāṭema ast* (Tehran, 1971), that were heavily influenced by Louis Massignon, has shown a strong leaning toward authenticity (see also Afary, 2003, pp. 7-35). Inspired by Jean Paul Sartre’s existentialist conceptions of “being” and “becoming,” Shari’ati developed a theory that found equivalents of Sartre’s concepts with the Qur’anic terms “bašar” and “ensān,” arguing that God has created man as bašar, or merely “a being,” but with the ability and potential of “becoming” human “ensān.” Thus, he claimed, “from among all humans, everyone is as much bashar as the rest, but there are some who have attained insanīyat, and there are others who are in the process of becoming an ensān. . . . bashar is a “being” while ensan is a “becoming” (Shari’ati, “Humanity and Islam,” 1998, p.



188). Divine revelation, Shari'ati argued, has left certain matters up to human creative and inventive intervention, not because the revelation is incomplete or imperfect but because humans have been granted the capacity for rational and moral action. He argued that we are justified in using these powers to create a "social-democratic" system because these powers are what make us truly human (*ensān*). Shari'ati maintained that man is created by God with the ability to make choices and to create social and political systems in keeping with their authentic values, including the rejection of "traditional" clergy.

Islamic socialists may even go so far as advocating Deism, a belief in God based on reason rather than revelation, subscribing to the view that God has created the universe but does not interfere with how it proceeds, thereby underscoring the primacy and creativity of human agency and recognizing the role of socio-economic factors as a driving force of history (see, e.g., Mojāhedīn-e *kalq*, *Tabyīn-e jahān* [Explaining the world]).

A theological breakthrough. Both Soroush and Mojtabeh Shabestari have constructed a novel theory of the compatibility of Islam with democracy, which seems to be based on a new theological approach. The old pro-democracy approaches—from the Constitutional Revolution to Bazargan's Liberation Movement—referred mostly to the ideas of freedom, human rights, and democracy as contained in the original sources of scripture and tradition. This new paradigm, however, advances a "pro-democracy" Islamic theory by focusing on extra-religious sources. The new theory's main objective is to seek answers to the following questions: "How is a system of democracy, freedom, and human rights possible in Islam?"; and "By what theological method and in what sources may one find an answer to the preceding question?"

Soroush begins his argument in support of the compatibility of Islam with democracy with the premise that human beings aspire to freedom in the modern age and that the best way to attain freedom is democracy. Yet, since the values of freedom and democracy and its criteria are extra-religious values, democracy cannot be reconciled with Islam without unearthing available sources for rationalization of the basis of democracy in religion. The task of the political philosophers in the world of Islam, Soroush believes, is to reconcile religion and freedom by giving a new interpretation of religion to make it possible to link religion with democracy (Soroush, 2000a, chap. 1).

Inspired by Iqbal Lahury (1877-1948) and new Mu'tazilite theology, Soroush calls for an essential reconstruction of the archaic orientation of Islamic



philosophy (*ḥekmat-e elāhi*), theology (*‘elm-e kalām*), and traditional jurisprudence (*feqh-e sonnati*). His mode of reconstruction recognizes the autonomy of the sphere of human values from that of religion (Soroush, 2000a, pp. 30-32). Resorting to philosophical and theological traditions in medieval Islam, Soroush shows that there are ideas which “could be independent of Islam without being incompatible with the faith.” To this end, Soroush constructs a new interpretation of religious ideas and principles by making a distinction between the absolute, immutable principles of religion and its mutable aspects. The main task for Soroush is, therefore, to unfold the basic purposes of the *šari‘a* by way of interpreting the concepts, theories, and principles of religious texts. Once we unfold the basic purposes of Divine law, Soroush contends, we would be able to undertake a new reading of the mutable aspects of the text. To meet the requirements of modern times, he suggests the theory of interpretation of Islamic theology, known as the “contraction-and-expansion of *šari‘a*” (*te‘ori-e qabẓ o baṣṭ-e šari‘at*; see Soroush, 2000a, pp. 30-38).

In expounding his theory, Soroush makes a distinction between maximalist and minimalist perspectives of religion. Maximalists believe that all aspects of Islamic social life must be derived from religion. Soroush contends that most of the current problems in Islam can be traced to such a perspective. It leads, he maintains, inexorably down a path towards a totalitarian regime. Replacing this position with a minimalist view would solve the problem. He argues that some values cannot be derived from religion, such as respect for human rights and even freedom. Therefore, freedom has to be treated from the favorable sources of theology. Islamic philosophers, Soroush says, should change their conception of man and focus on the idea of justice (*‘adl*), connoting man’s freedom of action in his relation with God’s justice—one of the five principles of Shi‘ism and one of the key concepts in Mu‘tazilite theology. Mu‘tazilite theologians, Soroush argues, “have already explored this area extensively and provided us with the tools to solve many of our problems” (citations from Soroush, 2000b; see also Soroush, 2000a; and ‘Alawitabār, 2000, pp. 124-36).

Mojtahed Shabestari, a pro-democracy theoretician of clerical background, maintains that “democracy” and “human rights” are historically-evolving concepts and as such were not, either in their current form or substance, conceived at the time of the revelation of the Qur‘ān and the formation of Islamic “traditions.” The foundational religious sources cannot, therefore, be expected to contain guidelines on attaining democracy and human rights in



our time (for the very recent formulation and definition of “human rights,” as enshrined in the charter of the United Nations, see Ishay; Donnelly). The answer to the compatibility of Islam with democracy and human rights, Mojtabeh Shabestari contends, should therefore be sought not in the foundational “religious sources,” but in “extra-religious sources.” He further suggests that in order to bring about democracy and human rights one must consult and follow models outside the foundational religious sources, even if these models tend to be secular and grounded in Western modernity and humanism. Not unlike Soroush, Mojtabeh Shabestari espouses the view that, due to the limited capacity of religious dogmas to address the many complex issues and needs of the modern world, religion should be complemented with the extra-religious rational values and practices that have emerged in response to the new circumstances, challenges and requirements of modern societies. The complex political, social, economic, and cultural characteristics of modern times are historically specific and evolving variables and thus distinguishable from the “eternal values of religion,” which by definition are assumed to be unchangeable (Mojtabeh Shabestari, 2000, pp. 143-44). Refuting Mojtabeh Shabestari’s theory, new fundamentalist ideologues such as Mesbah Yazdi argue that, as an integrated system, the šari‘a does not allow any distinction between the eternal values of religion and the evolving values of democracy and human rights (Mesbah Yazdi, 1999a).

With the application of modern hermeneutics (q.v.) to Islamic theology and jurisprudence, Mojtabeh Shabestari has thus made a significant methodological breakthrough in the controversy between pro-democracy religious intellectuals and those advocating Islamic fundamentalism. He constructs his concept of “variability of religious knowledge,” by refuting the validity ascribed to the totalitarian concept of political jurisprudence (*feqh-e siāsi*) and “official reading of religion” (*qerā’at-e rasmi az din*), as advocates of new fundamentalism such as Mesbah Yazdi, who claim exclusive knowledge of the absolute truth (see Mesbah Yazdi, 1999a). Drawing on modern hermeneutics, Mojtabeh Shabestari debunks any claim that God’s absolute truth could ever be accessible to man. In his view, the ideas of freedom and democracy are compatible with Islam not, as Bazargan believed, because one finds parallel terms in the Qur’ān or the traditions, but because one can rationally assume that these modern ideas are compatible with the spirit of Islam and its concept of justice (see Mojtabeh Shabestari, 1996).

In a telling debate on Islamic democracy between Mojtabeh Shabestari and



two new fundamentalist disciples of Mesbah Yazdi (Moḥammad Fatā'i Oskū'i and 'Ali Ḍu'elm), presented in four articles published in 1998, Mojtabeh Shabestari summarizes their argumentations in a seminal article, entitled "Democracy of Muslims, Not Islamic Democracy" ("Demokrāsi-e mosalmānān, na demokrāsi-e eslāmi"). He suggests that his detractors, in their criticism of his article on "Democracy and Religiosity" (Demokrāsi wa din-dāri), claim that on the basis of the following considerations they endorse "Islamic democracy, but not absolute democracy." Firstly, Mesbah Yazdi's followers believe that "in an Islamic democracy, the state functions as the guardian of Islam, and cannot, therefore, afford to view other religions and worldviews indiscriminately." Secondly, "Muslims must follow the divine laws, and the laws of Islam have not sanctioned such concepts as the equality of Muslims and non Muslims or gender equality. . . . Muslims, therefore, are not allowed to seek a democracy which is not bound by principles and rules of šari'a." Thirdly, "democracy, particularly in its absolute form, far from being merely a framework for a political system, derives its inner substance from humanistic concepts such as freedom, equality and the citizen's right and ability to make rational choices." And last, but not least, that "absolute democracy is based on the sovereignty of the people, which affirms the priority of man's will over divine will, and the primacy of Man's laws over divine laws" (see Mojtabeh Shabestari, 2000, pp. 143-44; for the above four articles, see *ibid*, pp. 107-51). These arguments are intimately informed by anti-modernist ideas of perennial Traditionalist school and anti-Humanist ideas of Heidegger and Corbin (see above).

Mojtabeh Shabestari suggests, however, that the preceding considerations laid out by Mesbah Yazdi and his followers are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept of democracy. Whether people should follow divine laws and values in establishing a political order is in the domain of the philosophy of law and ethics and is, therefore, irrelevant to the nature of government itself. He further suggests that, "democracy is not divisible into Islamic and non-Islamic forms." The nature of government in any society is either "democracy or dictatorial." Summing up his arguments, Mojtabeh Shabestari concludes that "although there are various models of democracy, any attempt to constrain the form of government by religious laws and beliefs would lead not to the establishment of a specific form of democracy, but to the emergence of a specific model of dictatorship" (see Mojtabeh Shabestari, 2000, p. 144).



ISLAMIC POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IN PRACTICE

Considerable differences and animosities have emerged among the various proponents of Islamic pro-democracy ideas, Islamic socialism, Islamic fundamentalism, and a newcomer, Islamic pragmatism in the post-Revolution era, when their position was transformed from opposition forces, mobilizing against the previous regime, to one of competing factions for scarce political, economic, and social resources within the Islamic Republic. They often deny the shared elements of their ideas and practices, and their competition for the same Islamic political space has frequently involved denunciations and violence. Does this antagonism stem merely from their material interests and thirst for political power or is it born out of their conflicting ideas and utopian beliefs, or combinations thereof?

To answer this question one must note that ideology as an organized collection of ideas—forming the basis of a political philosophy or program—often shows an elective affinity with the material and non-material interests of certain social classes and groups who adopt them. This selection of ideas in turn influences the mode of thinking and behavior of the people. Political ideology either offers a rationalization for the survival of an established order or suggests blueprints for a desired change in social, political, or economic systems. A shift in conflicting ideological issues in society may also influence the competing political currents in modifying their ideological orientations. For example, the question of religiosity versus non-religiosity or allegiance to Islam versus anti-Islamic or even non-Islamic orientations became the main controversial issue during the early post-revolutionary period, whereas focusing on the priority of public versus private sectors of the economy became the main conflicting ideological issue during the period of Iran-Iraq War under the leftist government of Musavi (1981-89). Finally, democracy versus totalitarianism became the main controversial issue in factional politics during the period of the 1990s-2000s.

The proponents of various Islamic ideologies often formed coalitions and counter-coalitions depending on the political imperatives of the time. They have engaged in continuous intra—and inter-factional competitions and rivalries that have reflected their material and political interests no less than their ideological positions. A telling example is the coalition of the Islamic reform movement formed in the latter half of the 1990s by pro-democracy, pro-socialist, and pragmatist currents to compete in the 1995 and 1997 elections with the right-wing fundamentalist faction, who dominated the



Fourth Majles and much of the security forces. Each current in the new coalition had its own political or politico-ideological agendas of either maintaining their hold on power or returning to power or changing the structure of power. The pragmatist “Executives of Construction,” organized around President Hashemi Rafsanjani, and the resourceful mayor of Tehran, Ḥosayn Karbāsči, as their campaign manager, were primarily concerned with maintaining their hold on political power by dominating Khatami’s government. The socialist currents, particularly the Mojāhedīn-e enqelāb-e eslāmi and Majma‘-e ruhāniyun-e mobārez, who lost their hold on political power following Khomeini’s death and the fall of Musavi’s Cabinet in 1989, were fighting a life and death struggle to return to power. Neither the pragmatists nor the Islamic left could be considered to have genuine pro-democracy intentions in their ideological formation. Yet a large number of reformed socialists and, more specifically, the students organized around Daftar-e taḥkim-e waḥdat, who were influenced by the new pro-democracy ideas of Ḥajjārian, ‘Abbās ‘Abdi, Soroush and Mojtaḥed Shabestari, became the sincere supporters of democracy in the reformist coalition. Religious intellectuals, student activists, and the Islamic Participation front (Jebha-ye mošāarakat), were the only segment of the coalition who were genuinely concerned with effecting basic changes in the structure of power in the Islamic Republic. Yet instead of entering a coalition with Bazargan’s Liberation movement, with whom they shared a genuine ideological affinity, they made it with the pragmatist and socialist leaning forces, in a well-thought out and rational political choice (for a round table discussion on factional politics in post-revolution period, see Yazdi, 2000, pp. 251-92; ‘Alawitabār, 2007; Yusofi Eškevari).

Since its formation in the early years of the revolution, the Revolutionary Guard Corps and its affiliated agencies, including the Paramilitary forces, intelligence services, security forces, and large commercial and industrial enterprises has vastly expanded its powers in relation to all other parts of the state. In the first phase of this expansion, which took place during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, the Revolutionary Guards served as a military force that was entirely subordinate to the top leadership of the Islamic Republic, that is, Ayatollah Khomeini, as the commander-in-chief. In the last years of the war and, more specifically after the death of Khomeini, the Guards’ performance was criticized often by some leading figures of the clerical establishment (bozorgān-e enqelāb, in the words of Moḥsen Reżā’i, the Guards’ commander during most of the war period; see Reżā’i, pp. 9-11) for the War’s



prolongation and setbacks. This prompted some commanders of the Guards to seek a relatively independent power base from the clerical leadership of the regime. By the late 1990s, the Guards had succeeded in achieving considerable power and were fast becoming a semi-independent force, “a state within the state.” As such, they exerted increasing influence over most government agencies and in many instances managed to appoint senior officers to key positions in the civilian bureaucracy. They also promoted a new hard-line fundamentalist ideological orientation, one that had emerged from within the Guards and its Paramilitary forces in the 1990s. In the ensuing years, and particularly since the defeat of the reformist movement in the 2005 presidential elections, the Guards and its affiliates and allies seem to have gained a near complete monopoly of power and control over the entire state.

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