

**A COMPARISON:  
THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION OF 1979 AND IRAN'S GREEN MOVEMENT OF 2009**

By

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University of Pittsburgh, 2011

In the summer of 2009 thousands of voices combined as Iranians, young and old, cried out in reaction to the presidential election from their rooftops—"Marg Bar Dictator" (death to the dictator) and "Allahu Akbar" (God is great). In the weeks following President Ahmadinejad's "victory", voices from the rooftops of Tehran and other major Iranian cities reverberated with revolutionary phrases that had not been heard in almost thirty years. This widespread civil disobedience, along with the daily demonstrations taking place on the street, signaled the Iranian people's challenge of the Islamic government.

But after months of mass protests, why was there no political change after the 2009 Iranian presidential election? Why did the demonstrations that had up to 3 million protestors stop while in 1979 similar dissent developed into a revolutionary movement? These questions will be addressed by comparing four significant variables common to both the 1979 Revolution and the 2009 Green Movement; international pressure, internal pressure, strength of opposition, and governmental tactics used against the opposition. The analysis of these variables will illuminate the similarities and differences between 1979 and 2009 and examine under what conditions a political opposition movement could be successful in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The simple fact that Iranians were yelling from the rooftops like they did 30 years ago against the Shah, demonstrates they have not forgotten about the Islamic Revolution of 1979. And they have certainly not forgotten about the outcome—the capture of the political movement, which began

as a democratic process, by Islamic extremists. The Iranian people eager to rid themselves of an autocratic government, but realize true regime change takes time. Iranians today have learned the lessons of the 1979 Revolution.

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## PREFACE

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Professor Jonathan Harris for his guidance and continual support. The insightful advice he provided was indispensable and I would not have been able to complete this project without his kind supervision, intellectual stimulation, and friendship. I will cherish the countless hours I spent in his office discussing everything and anything—I am forever in your debt, Professor Harris. I would also like to acknowledge all the members of my thesis committee for their time and patience with me, especially Professor Ronald Linden, who has overseen my academic development since I was a naïve freshman. I am grateful for the unwavering support and encouragement of all my friends—specifically Emily Dotson and Molly Kalish—who have been like sisters to me during this process.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

On New Year's Eve of 1977, Jimmy Carter visited Iran to demonstrate American support for Reza Shah Pahlavi's regime. During his stay, he described Iran as "an island of stability in one of the most troubled areas of the world."<sup>1</sup> Only six months later, the first surges of the Islamic Revolution had begun and by January 1979, the Shah, the monarch of the "island of stability" had fled to Europe. At this time, Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile to begin a revolutionary movement that would transform the political face of the Middle East.

Similarly, just before the 2009 Iranian presidential elections there was also an atmosphere of political stability. Supporters of all the presidential candidates were extremely passionate about the election and the issues involved in the campaign. Iran was filled with excitement and anticipation. The government proudly proclaimed that each person's vote would count in the election while citizenry, especially the young, believed that change would occur within the governing system, reassured by the vast amount of political freedoms granted during the elections. Public rallies, debates between candidates, and outspoken protestors on the streets emerged after more than a thirty year lapse. Accordingly, the presidential election of 2009 had one of the highest voter turnouts in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Voters willingly stood in line for hours to be able to cast their vote; convinced that this time, the election would mean something. However, as soon as the government announced the election results, these sentiments rapidly changed.

When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's victory was announced on June 12th, Mir Hossein Mousavi's supporters had an immediate reaction; the feelings of excitement and hope were transformed into sentiments of disappointment and anger. Immediately after the government released the results, people took to the streets in protest. Each day the size of the demonstrations against the government continually increased. By the end of the first week of protests, demonstrators came into violent confrontation with the Iranian military. Peaceful protesters were beaten and killed in the streets, hundreds were arrested and charged with conspiracy, and suddenly, the newly "free" election atmosphere had been transformed into political and social upheaval. The Supreme Leader himself, Ali Khamenei, announced that any public protestors would be "going against the will of God" and would not be tolerated. Despite the threat of imprisonment or death, intense protests continued in the streets of all major cities in Iran—Tehran, Shiraz, Mashhad, Isfahan, and Tabriz.

The protests that occurred in the aftermath of the presidential election had been deemed "The Green Revolution" by the global media. Although the movement is still alive today the intensity of the movement has decreased and it seems as though "stability" has returned to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Why did no political change occur? Why have the protests that had upwards of 3 million supporters cease? Why did the Green Revolution not become a revolution like the events of 1979? I will attempt to answer these questions by comparing four significant variables common to the 1979 Revolution and the 2009 "Green Revolution"; international pressure, internal pressure, strength of opposition, and governmental tactics used against the opposition. The analysis of these variables will illuminate the similarities and differences between 1979 and 2009 and examine under what conditions a political opposition movement could be successful in Iran today.

## 1.1 IRAN'S RULING HISTORY

Until the beginning of the popular revolution in 1979, Iran was perpetually ruled by a monarchy. Iran's last great empire had been established in 1501 by King Ismail of the Safavid dynasty who deemed *Shiism* the official state religion and united the territory that is now deemed Iran. The most famous king of this monarchy, Shah Abbas I, transformed the new Iranian capital, Esfahan, into one of the most beautiful and well built cities in the Middle East. He also encouraged immense cultural growth and established trade with European cities. Eventually the Safavid rule declined and by the late eighteenth century the Turkish speaking Qajars took control. The Qajar period which occurred from 1794 to 1925, is regarded by scholars and the Iranian public alike as an age of political, economic, and social decline. The self proclaimed Qajar monarchs were unable to achieve fiscal or political stability. Furthermore, corruption and incompetence were widespread because the Qajar monarchs received kickbacks from Western countries. After years of frustration, protests finally broke out in 1905 and led to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. Iranians protesting high tariff prices forced the Qajar monarch to establish a constitution and a Majles, or Parliament. However, over the next ten years, the constitution was regularly suspended and re-established due to shifts in political power. Finally, after years of political frustrations, the leader of the Persian Cossack Brigade, Reza Khan Pahlavi, carried out a coup against the government in 1921. Over the next four years, he captured several powerful positions within the new Qajar government such as prime minister and war minister while slowly eliminating all the Qajar influence in Iran. By 1926 he established his own monarchy, the Pahlavi dynasty, and changed his name to Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Reza Shah Pahlavi greatly improved Iran's social and economic infrastructure, creating the foundation for the modern day Iran. However, he also ruled as an autocratic dictator,

constantly imposing political oppression. Reza Shah Pahlavi repeatedly clashed with his Western allies; he adamantly opposed the occupation of Iran by Russia and England during World War II and had extremely close ties to Germany. Because of the Shah's inability to cooperate with the Allied forces, British and Soviet troops invaded Iran in 1941 and forced him to abdicate the throne. His son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, then became Shah and continued the Pahlavi dynasty. By the mid 1940s he quickly alienated pro-democratic Iranians by expanding his constitutional powers and by overriding decisions made by the Prime Minister and members of Parliament. After an assassination attempt in 1949, thought to be planned by the Communist Tudeh party, the Shah extended his powers even more. In addition to minimizing political freedoms, Reza Mohammad Shah was also more easily swayed by Western influence than his father. This added to the growing disapproval by the Iranian public and brought Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadegh to the forefront of Iranian politics in the early 1950s.

Mossadegh, best known for his liberal and nationalistic ideology, began a campaign to eliminate Iran of all British control of oil—he disbanded the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in Iran and nationalized the industry. Mossadegh, a promoter of democracy, encouraged hostility toward the Shah and acted as the catalyst that moved Iran into an age of modernization, mass political awareness, and political participation. His actions and policies encouraged political freedom; not only for the pro democratic parties, but for all beliefs in the political spectrum. However, Mossadegh's influence in Iranian politics ceased in 1953 with Operation Ajax—a CIA operation that overthrew him and put him under house arrest until his death in 1967. The Shah made sure his reforms would not continue by banning Mossadegh's political party, and persecuting its prominent leaders.

Before the removal of Mossadegh, Iran had developed a more democratic political system, noted by a large increase in political participation. But Mossadegh's overthrow did not stop the pace of political development, but simply changed its course. With the banning of opposition parties, political life migrated to the mosque; one of the only places the Shah could not punish citizens for expressing anti-monarch sentiment. Therefore, instead of focusing on secular ideas, a large majority of the body politic continued its political development in the religious environment. Clerics then became the leading socializing force from the period of the overthrow of Mossadegh until the start of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Instead of moving toward democracy and secularization, many of the Iranian people turned to religiosity and theocratic ideals to fight the Shah's despotic rule. No matter their political affiliation, Iranians, both elites and the body politic, were politically active in 1979 because it was an opportunity to build a new, democratic state.

### **1.1.1 Post Islamic Revolution**

In the days immediately following the revolution of 1979 a diverse array of forces combined to fight for political power—students, communists, socialists, traditionalists, liberals and Islamists. Western and Iranian experts alike did not expect the outcome to be clerical rule (Brownlee 64). However, the Islamic groups within the revolution had the best mobilizing resources, overpowering the other prominent political ideologies.

Accordingly, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution was approved on October 4, 1979 despite protest from secular politicians and strata of Iranian society. The new constitution was largely based on the principles outlined in Khomeini's famous work, *Islamic government (hukamnti Islami)*. In this work, Khomeini supported a very radical Islamic concept, the *velayat-*

*e-faqih*, or the guardianship of the jurist on the basis that only a “mystically inspired jurist, who knew the sacred law” could lead the nation.<sup>2</sup> The constitution created this position, the office of the jurist, which would be filled by the highest ranking Shia clergy and known simply as the Supreme Leader, or *Rahbar*.<sup>3</sup> It also created the Council of Guardians, whose duties include enforcing Islamic law, interpreting the constitution, and overseeing all elections. The council was made up of six clerics and six laypeople; the non-cleric members are chosen by the Majles, or parliament, from candidates that need to be approved by the head of the judiciary.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the constitution created a unicameral legislator, the Majles, and an elected President.

The Islamic Republic of Iran seemed to have some democratic institutions, but it was created to have little room for movement or opposition. All of the governing bodies and leadership positions were dependent upon each other. For example, the constitution described the President as the second-highest ranking official in the country. In practice, however, presidential powers were circumscribed by the clerics, conservatives in Iran’s power structure, and by the authority of the Supreme Leader. It was the Supreme Leader, not the president, who controlled the armed forces and made decisions on security, defense, and major foreign policy issues. While the 290 members of the parliament, who were elected by popular vote every four years, had the power to introduce and pass laws, as well as to investigate and impeach cabinet ministers or the president, all Majles bills had to be officially approved by Guardian Council.<sup>5</sup>

The relationship between the Supreme Leader, Council of Guardians, and the Assembly of Experts best exemplified Iran’s circular, closed system. The latter is responsible for overseeing the Supreme Leader’s actions and had the power to reappoint a new *Rahbar* if necessary. However, the Council of Guardians, appointed by the Supreme Leader, needed to approve all members of the Assembly of Experts.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the Council of Guardians was

appointed directly by the Supreme Leader. Therefore, the body (Council of Guardians) that selected the institution (Assembly of Experts) that oversaw the most powerful government official in Iran (the Supreme Leader) was in fact, appointed by the Supreme Leader himself.

After the ratification of the constitution, more conflict developed between political elites over the development of the Islamic state. Normally, during the beginning stages of regime formation, a ruling party could still develop if political elites could resolve their disagreements. A ruling party was essential to act as the mediator of disputes and enable the opportunity for solutions among rivals.<sup>7</sup> But Iran never had this type of a ruling party—only a ruler, a Supreme Leader, Khomeini. He acted as the only authority among rival elites and instead of negotiating he merely silenced all opposition. Khomeini “spent much energy and political capital to ensure that the opposing factions were kept in rough balance.”<sup>8</sup> Instead of pursuing consensus within the regime, Khomeini’s leadership prevented the formation of a ruling political party and made sure that no one faction became too powerful.

Most scholars agree that Iran’s post-revolutionary leaders were divided into three main factions—the traditionalist right, the modernist right, and the Islamic left.<sup>9</sup> The traditionalist right was led by Khomeini and the founders of the Islamic Republican Party. They were the most conservative and favored a clerical rule by a hierarchy of religious figures. They adhered to a strict interpretation of Islamic law and allowed, but did not fully support the popular election of offices such as the president and members of parliament. The modernist right grew from the traditionalist right, diverging their opinions on the political structure of the country, supporting more neo-liberal views.<sup>10</sup> Led by Hashemi Rafsanjani, the modernist right’s goal was focused on enacting growth and economic prosperity.<sup>11</sup> Lastly, the Islamic left believed deeply in popular sovereignty and attempted to include more of the public in the governing system. For example,



they proposed the popular election of members of the Majles. Although many in this group supported Khomeini as the Supreme Leader, their main focus was popular participation and concern for the masses.<sup>12</sup>

While Khomeini was still alive, political tensions arose, but he was the mediator and final word on governing the country. Khomeini's death in 1989 only solidified the party lines more deeply and large disagreements plagued the political elite. There was an opportunity for the country's ruling clerics and political powers to create a more democratic and pluralist system for Iran, but the diverse ideologies split the leaders into factions with conflicting ideas of the state. At this time, elites including Khamenei, Rafsanjani, Montazeri, and Khatami came to the forefront of Iranian politics.

### **1.1.2 Political Elite Conflict**

After the death of Khomeini, the new Supreme Leader Khamenei and President Rafsanjani became two of the most powerful leaders in the Islamic regime. Since the 1990s, Khamenei and Rafsanjani disagreed over domestic policy enforcement, foreign relations strategies, and other issues concerning the state. But these disagreements escalated to new heights in summer 2009 during the presidential campaign when Rafsanjani publicly criticized Khamenei. He denounced the Supreme Leader for not stopping the "lies and insults" of Ahmadinejad, the most conservative presidential candidate. Ahmadinejad accused another candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi of being "the puppet masters of lies" in Iran. In response, Rafsanjani condemned Khamenei in a well-known Tehranian newspaper and said,

"One expects your eminence, given your position, responsibility and personality, to take effective measures as you see fit to resolve this problem and eliminate

dangerous plots....Put out the fire whose smoke is already visible and prevent its flames from rising and spreading through the elections and beyond...Without a doubt society and especially the youths need to be informed of the truth. This truth is seriously tied to the system's credibility and the nation's beliefs. I would not have written this letter had this been about the rights of a few individuals...many of our old companions in arms who either attained the lofty station of martyrdom or hastened to the remaining life are no longer with us. You (Khamenei), and myself and a small number of old companions and peers remain.”<sup>13</sup>

This is just one example of the public disagreements that continued throughout the summer between members of the clerical elite. The significance of this criticism is that although Rafsanjani is the Chairman of the Assembly of Experts (the political institution that monitors/can dismiss the SL) and Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council (unelected position in which the Council oversees legislative disagreements), he is still criticizing the Supreme Leader, the dominant authority in the Iranian political system. The obvious outrage of Rafsanjani and his public cry of disapproval demonstrate the significance of elite quarreling in Iranian politics. If this type of denunciation is seen in the public sphere, there must be much more tension behind closed doors in holy city of *Qom*.

The division of the Iranian political elites does not end with Khamenei and Rafsanjani. Once speculated as the successor to Khomeini, Ayatollah Montazeri, has been extremely vocal in his criticism with the current regime's actions, especially those of Khamenei and Ahmadinejad. Throughout his clerical life, Montazeri has been an opposition force to the Islamic regime. He was demoted and stripped of his Grand Ayatollah title by Khomeini himself for criticizing the

Supreme Leader's decision to support the killing of author Salman Rushdie and for endorsing protests against Khomeini's *fatwa* on the issue.<sup>14</sup> Montazeri is also very well known for his disdain of the government's treatment of Bahai's in Iran. Not surprisingly, by the middle of June 2009, Montazeri had already repeatedly expressed his doubts about the results of the presidential elections. He even denounced the Iranian regime for no longer acting in accordance with the laws of Islam. Furthermore, once brutal violence began in Iran in June 2009, Montazeri was even more outraged, criticizing the government for attacking its own people. In a public letter to the moderate cleric, Dr. Mohsen Kadivar, he points out the inconsistencies of the regime and encourages the Iranian masses to express themselves, saying:

“As I said, those who have lost, religiously and reasonably, the credibility for serving the public, are automatically dismissed, and the continuation of their work has no legitimacy. If they want to use force, or fool or cheat people in order to keep their power, people must express their opinion about the illegitimacy and lack of their approval of their performance, and seek their dismissal through the best and least harmful way. It is clear that this [dismissal of the officials] is a societal duty of everyone....”<sup>15</sup>

It would seem that with clerics such as Montazeri and Rafsanjani opposing the established rule in Iran, there would be more clerical (and of course secular) elite support for reform. However, even though there is a large divide between the clerical and secular elites in Iran, lack of information regarding leadership complicates understanding elite dynamics. Besides the famous political players such as Khamenei, Rafsanjani, Montazeri, Ahmadinejad, Khatami, and the like, it is very hard to pinpoint other Iranian political elites and their government

positions. Furthermore, it is difficult to obtain accurate information from the Iranian government. The majority of clerical debates take place in the holy city of *Qom* or in secret meetings.

Because of the mass protests against the election of 2009, more Iranian government officials appeared in the public sphere address the social tension; to prevent an all out revolution. Many of these governmental figures are being held responsible for the atrocities committed during the 2009 demonstrations. These men are the most fervent supporters of Khamenei and the theocratic Islamic Republic of Iran. For example, Mojtaba Khamenei, son of the Supreme Leader and rumored possible successor, reportedly took direct control of armed militias during the post-election protests. The result was the killing of hundreds of peaceful demonstrators. Another political figure, Hassan Taeb, is commander of the paramilitary Basij force. He was accused of sanctioning and then covering up the rape and torture of demonstrators in Iran's prisons in June and July of 2009. Furthermore, Tehran's chief prosecutor, Saeed Mortazavi, was in charge of interrogating political prisoners arrested during the demonstrations in Tehran. Under his authority photojournalist Zahra Kazemi was tortured, brutally beaten, and then killed. Lastly, Brigadier General Qassem Suleimani is currently commander of the Supreme Leader's military unit, the Quds Force. According to a number of Iranian news sources, he was one of the advisors who suggested to Khamenei that he should use violent force against protestors in the streets. All of these men stand by Khamenei's side and are in direct opposition to the views of reformers such as Rafsanjani, Khatami, and the 2009 presidential candidates Mahdi Karubi and Mousavi.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.2 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 2009

After months of screening almost 500 candidates,<sup>17</sup> the Guardian Council finally choose four presidential candidates on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009—Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mehdi Karrubi, Mohsen Rezai, and Mir-Hossein Mousavi. Ahmadinejad, an ultra conservative, ran on a platform of fighting poverty and corruption and emphasized his intent to share Iranian oil profits with the people. Accordingly, he had the backing of the Supreme Leader, the military, and most conservative Iranians. Karrubi, former Speaker of the Parliament and the only clerical candidate, was a reformer who encouraged compromise between conservative and reformist factions in order to achieve social, political and economical improvement in Iran. He was also the only candidate who openly criticized Ahmadinejad for his comments regarding the Holocaust and the destruction of Israel. Mohsen Rezai, former commander of the Revolutionary Guard during the Iraq-Iran war, was the only other conservative candidate. A PhD in Economics, Rezai's platform focused on fiscal reforms and stressed the reduction of inflation, poverty, and unemployment. The last candidate, Mousavi, was best known for his position as Prime Minister from 1981-1989. A strong reformist, he called for the expansion of personal freedoms and the elimination of restrictions on political rights such as freedom of speech.

Normally during election campaigns in Iran, political and social restrictions had been relaxed, and in the summer of 2009 Iranians took full advantage of this opportunity and were even more engaged than usual. Support for candidates was shown in public rallies all over the country, especially on university campuses. Furthermore, this was the most expensive presidential campaign in Iran's history—Ahmadinejad and Mousavi spent almost ten million dollars each to sway voters.<sup>18</sup> The election was also the first in which public debates between candidates were broadcast on Iranian television. A week before the election, there were six

debates in total; each consisting of two candidates facing each other once. The debate between Mousavi and Ahmadinejad was extremely heated—Mousavi criticized Ahmadinejad’s foreign policy and his denial of the Holocaust while Ahmadinejad accused Mousavi of being supported by corrupt clerics who were living an un-Islamic lifestyle. The debate became personal when the incumbent accused Mousavi’s wife, Zahra, of lying about her education credentials. The comment angered Mousavi supporters and encouraged Zahra Mousavi to get more involved in the campaign, especially lobbying for women’s rights. Consequently, the debates sparked discussion among the Iranian public and intensified the campaign. According to Iranian media, at least 40 to 50 million people watched the debates each night.<sup>19</sup>

Just days before the election, support for Mousavi soared and a public rally was held in Iran’s international stadium. The stadium was full of his supporters, young and old, wearing green to represent their support for his platform. Additionally, the day before the election thousands of his supporters had formed a “human chain” on one of the main streets in Tehran to demonstrate their support and hope for the future. Mousavi’s reformist ideas included encouraging more dialogue with the West, increasing transparency in the government, supporting the increase in women’s rights, and pushing for more social and political freedom really resonated with young Iranians. Excitement escalated when a few independent Iranian polls showed support for Ahmadinejad dwindling, especially in rural areas. Therefore, most Iranians expected a close race. In fact, observers predicted the elections would force a run-off between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi.

On the day of the election, approximately 40 million ballots were cast—the largest voter turnout in Iranian history. After the closing of polls on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the Interior Minister announced that Ahmadinejad had won with 62% percent of the vote. The next day, Sunday, June

13<sup>th</sup>, unrest was already developing. There were small demonstrations in the capital and other major cities and a feeling of anticipation and unease overtook the country. By Monday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, hundreds of thousands of Mousavi supporters took to the streets in the largest rally since the beginning of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Furthermore, witnesses stated the next day's demonstration was even larger than the previous, adding to the momentum of the movement. A counter demonstration in support of Ahmadinejad was held at Vali Asr Square in Tehran, but observers say it was much smaller than the Green Movement's protest. The highest estimate of attendance at the Ahmadinejad rally is estimated to be around 10,000 people. Furthermore, there had also been accusations that the television coverage was distorted to create the illusion of a larger mass of people.

After the Ahmadinejad rally, anti-government protests grew rapidly and the initially peaceful demonstrations became increasingly more intense. Every day, more people took the streets yelling phrases like "where is my vote?", "death to the dictator", and "down with the dictator [Ahmadinejad]". The people's ardent opposition caught the attention of the government and more police emerged at the demonstrations. Yet Mousavi still urged peaceful demonstrations and made it clear that violence was not to be used. However, by the third day of protests, June 15<sup>th</sup>, there had already been reports of deaths on the streets of Tehran.

On June 19<sup>th</sup>, during his Friday prayer sermon, Supreme Leader Khamenei declared that the government would use force to protect the Islamic Republic and prevent further demonstrations. He emphasized his support for the reelected President, encouraged the opposition to take peaceful action, and finally blamed "foreign" enemies for causing problems in Iran's internal affairs. After the protests continued, the Iranian Basij and Revolutionary Guard forces began to use tear gas, batons, and even guns to control crowds on June 20<sup>th</sup>. At this time

ten deaths were recorded by the Iranian government, bringing the total to at least 17.<sup>20</sup> However, the overwhelming number of clashes between protestors and military forces in almost all of Iran's major cities led many to believe that deaths were more widespread than reported. This same day the Guardian Council convened to discuss the election results with all of the presidential candidates. All were present except Mousavi, who allegedly refused to attend the meeting unless the idea of a new election was on the agenda. The next day, June 21<sup>st</sup>, members of Mousavi's campaign were arrested along with Rafsanjani family members, a clear sign that the government considered both of the reformers a threat. On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Guardian Council admitted that there had been some "irregularities" in the voting process, but claimed none would have affected the elections results.

Over the next week, despite government violence against the demonstrators, protests continued to intensify. Not surprisingly, Khamenei and other prominent clerics such as senior cleric Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, continued to accuse Western powers such as Great Britain and the United States of foreign interference in Iran's domestic affairs. Accordingly, nine British Embassy staff members were taken into custody on June 28th for allegedly "inflaming post-election tensions in Iran."<sup>21</sup> Eventually, eight of the nine members were released but the government still blamed the West, in hopes of distracting Iranians from the violent protests inside Iran. Although two of the four candidates, Mousavi and Karrubi, still contested the validity of the election, the Guardian Council officially confirmed the results were accurate on June 29<sup>th</sup>. Their decision was made after a random recount was done on 10% of the total votes. Khatami, Mousavi, and Karrubi all called for the hiring of an independent organization to arbitrate the election disputes, but the government refused. Demonstrations continued, and on July 1<sup>st</sup> the Iranian government estimated that 27 were killed and 627 arrested since the start of



the protests on June 13th; however, human rights organizations believe the numbers to be significantly higher. For instance, just 10 days later Iran's prosecutor general admitted that over 2500 people had been detained in Tehran alone.<sup>22</sup>

Although protests continued into July and August, they were much smaller. The Green Movement was not powerful enough to challenge the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij. Furthermore, Khamenei and his military apparatus were willing and determined to sustain the election outcome by force—the stability of the regime depended on it. Even though in the short-term no political change was accomplished, the movement created many long term possibilities for the Iranian state and society. Primarily, the election disputes created even more tension between the members of the political elite. In fact, in the holy city, Qom, clerical factions were torn over the issue. One of the most influential clerical groups, the Society of Scholars of Qom Seminary, happily accepted Ahmadinejad's victory. However, another group, the Association of Researchers and Teachers at Qom Seminary, disagreed with the decision of the Guardian Council and went so far as to encourage the government to arrest and punish its own officials for the “beating, death, and damage” that occurred post election.<sup>23</sup> Although Iran did not experience any drastic political change, it now has a growing social movement, a faction of society that is willing to openly support reform. Although the “Green Revolution” did not see immediate results, it is still developing underground in Iran today.

## 2.0 COMPARISON—1979 AND 2009

How did the Iran of 1979, a political system with a wealthy middle class, powerful Western international allies, a repressive dictator, and large military force fall prey to an Islamic Revolution while the Iran of 2009, a oppressive theocracy with a growing lower class, no Western allies, an autocratic clerical elite, and a military comparable to the Shah's was able to repress the opposition with relative ease? Before exploring comparisons between the two events, it is necessary to first answer the question, why did the Islamic Revolution occur? While there are different scholarly views, many academics agree that the Islamic Revolution was the outcome of ideological and political processes that had starting evolving as early as the 1950s.

For example, Hamid Dabashi, Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, asserts in *Theology of Discontent* that Islamists had been long prepared for a religious revolution by the relentless political attacks they had suffered from the Shah. He had forced them to practice in the private sphere and it was here that religious clerics set their Islamic agenda, far away from the observation of the Shah's government. Within mosques and *hawzehs* (Shi'i religious seminaries), they recruited, preached, and mobilized their followers so that they would be ready when the time was right to oppose the Shah. Others like Stephen Kinzer, a foreign correspondent, trace the roots of the revolution back to the 1953 overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadegh. In *All the Shah's Men*, Kinzer argues that if the coup had not occurred,

there may not have been an Islamic Revolution. If Mossadegh was not replaced, Iran could have developed into a mature democracy.

Other Middle Eastern specialists like Fred Halliday, Nikki Keddie, and Mohsen Milani attribute the Shah's fall to socioeconomic development, specifically the inequality in Iranian society at the time. In *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution* Milani assesses the role of Iran's social groups and coalitions, such as the *bazaaris* (bazaar merchants and shopkeepers), the intelligentsia, the Shi'i clerics, and the middle class, in facilitating the rise of the clerical elite to power. Milani also states that the overthrow of Mossadegh in 1953 had a large impact on the formation of the 1979 Islamic Revolution; it created a platform for diverse political groups to organize against the Shah. Finally, other academics like Ervand Abrahamian, Professor of History at City University of New York, emphasize Khomeini's role in the revolutionary process. While in exile and even after he returned to Iran in February of 1979, he constantly criticized the Shah's actions, promoted an Islamic government, and incited students with anti-Western sentiments. Abrahamian argues that without Khomeini's hundreds of interviews, sermons, interviews and political announcements between 1962 and 1989, the revolution would have never developed or been able to be maintained.<sup>24</sup>

Although all these scholars stress different elements, there is one common link—they all agree that the Pahlavi monarch was regarded as a creature of the United States and the United Kingdom—and therefore was seen as illegitimate. All of the opposition groups, whether religious or otherwise, recognized the Shah's illegitimate rule and joined together to overthrow his government. Even though the theocratic regime established was not an ideal form of government for most of the Iranian population, it was at least free from foreign influence.

### **3.0 THE FIRST VARIABLE—THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM’S RESPONSE**

#### **3.1 1979**

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was a shock to the world. No one, not even close Western allies of the Shah, expected any threats to his reign. With this in mind, there was no international pressure for a revolution against the regime from the West; in fact, because the Shah was their ally, American and European powers did not want him to be overthrown. The Shah had so easily suppressed Khomeini in the 1963 uprising that international actors did not see the possibility of a revolution developing. They viewed the Pahlavi monarch as a stable regime and only supported the new governmental coalition when it was clear the Shah was exiled from Iran permanently.

However, some academics such as Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi argue that the weakening of the relationship between Iran and its international supporters, mainly the United States, could have made Iran more susceptible to a revolutionary movement. But the evidence for this idea is insufficient. Although the US and UK did not militarily support the Shah, they always spoke out diplomatically in favor of his rule. Up until the Shah left Iran in January of 1979, his international allies stood behind him; for instance, in October of 1978, only three months before the revolution, American Ambassador William Sullivan reiterated U.S. backing of the Shah by saying, “...our destiny is to work with the Shah.”<sup>25</sup> When opposition protests began, the U.S. and the UK continued their unwavering support. National Security Advisor,

Zbigniew Brzezinski, advised the Shah to stand firmly against the Iranian opposition. Even when the Shah's military killed unarmed protestors in the streets, President Carter phoned from Camp David to demonstrate his continuing support.<sup>26</sup> And finally, even after the Shah was deposed, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger welcomed the Shah into the U.S. for medical care, despite warnings from the new Iranian government and the State Department that the action would hurt American relations with the new Iranian government. He believed the U.S. "should offer refuge to a man who had once been a loyal friend."<sup>27</sup> Although the Carter Administration tried to form a relationship with the new de facto government of Iran, by the end of the hostage crisis in January 1981, all diplomat ties were cut between Iran and the United States.

Other international actors at this time, such as the USSR, did not have major effects on the politics inside Iran. The USSR and Iran had a hostile relationship since the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when British colonialism expanded into India. The USSR consistently saw Iran's geographical position as a strategic stronghold from where they could control the region. This rivalry continued into the Pahlvi era when by the West's influence, the Shah took a strong anti-communist position. The USSR supported the communist party in Iran, the Tudeh Party, even when the monarch banned the party. In fact, in 1978 the USSR welcomed the overthrow of the Shah. It actually referred to a 1921 treaty to deter any US intervention to help the Shah and even defended the new Islamic regime against US criticism. However, the theocracy eventually banned the Tudeh party again, despite disagreement from the USSR.

Accordingly, the strong backing of the Shah by the US and UK acted as a motivator for the religious opposition movement. The *ulama*, the religious community, knew it had no Western allies outside of Iran. The Iranian regime led by the Shah was a creature created by the American

and British governments. If the Islamists were going to enact change, they would have to do it themselves and from within the country.

### **3.2 2009**

With the 2009 protests, however, the situation was completely different. Iran's relationship with the West had never recovered from the tension produced by the Islamic Revolution and negotiations over nuclear weapons between the U.S. and Iran. When the subsequent demonstrations against the government began in June, Western countries proclaimed their verbal support of the Iranian people. American and European leaders encouraged Iranians to demand democratic rights such as fair and free elections; support was behind the opposition movement in this case. However, because the international pressure was not tangible, nothing came of it. The US or the EU did not provide any military aid, just verbal support. Green Movement members knew the Western powers were on their side, but were receiving no help in the cause. They were empowered knowing they had the backing of Western pro-democratic forces, but intangible support did nothing to progress the freedoms they were demanding. Additionally, Western actors did not present a united front—which would have helped the opposition—each country reacted differently.

### 3.2.1 The American Response

The United States was one of the last Western countries to comment on aftermath of the Iranian elections; many claim the late reaction was due to Obama's concern that support for the opposition would affect nuclear weapons negotiations with Iran. The US President's first official response was on June 15<sup>th</sup> when he stated he had "deep concern about the elections", but ruled out any direct involvement on the grounds that it would not be "productive, due to the history of U.S.-Iran relations". Furthermore, he called on the Iranian leaders to "respect the democratic process", a pro forma statement. The Iranian people were protesting the election results for exactly this reason—the Islamic Republic had no democratic processes or institutions. He also told White House reporters that same day that how Iran goes about electing its leaders, "is something ultimately for the Iranian people to decide."<sup>28</sup> But the Iranian people had already decided—they wanted free and fair elections. Although most Iranians did not want direct military involvement from the U.S., they hoped for a stronger stance against the regime's violent actions. Iranians on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter demonstrated these sentiments by commenting repeatedly with statements such as, "We need people around the world to help to raise the issues, put pressure on the Iranian government."<sup>29</sup>

Obama's strategy was extremely generalized; to verbally support the Iranian protestors while not completely alienating the Iranian leadership for fear of its effect on American national security interests. He did not want to be seen as meddling in Iran's domestic affairs and risk a future chance at negotiations with Iran about its nuclear program. However, the Iranian government would have accused the U.S. of involvement in the election process with or without comments from Obama. For instance, the headline of *Kayhan News*, a major Iranian paper, read "400 Million Dollar CIA Budget for Creating Riots after the Election", only a few days after the

protests began.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, even before the President made any statement about the election, Supreme Leader Khamenei deemed the United States as an “interventionist” force in the aftermath of the presidential elections, claiming that the U.S. was trying to incite opposition movements.

Many Iranians saw Obama’s acceptance of the Ahmadinejad’s presidency, especially without significant changes in Iran’s political conditions, as a betrayal of the protestors’ objectives. When Obama failed to condemn the Iranian government for its use of violence, some Iranians saw this as a green light for Khamenei and the military to use force to break up the demonstrations.<sup>31</sup> Even American officials in the Obama administration, such as Vice-President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, also remarked they would have liked to see the President take a firmer stance on supporting the demonstrators in Iran.<sup>32</sup> The American President was also subject to criticism for his comment made on June 17<sup>th</sup>:

“It’s important to understand that although there is some ferment taking place in Iran, that the difference between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi in terms of their actual policies may not be as great as has been advertised. Either way the United States is going to be dealing with an Iranian regime that has historically been hostile to the United States, that has caused some problems in the neighborhood and is pursuing nuclear weapons.”<sup>33</sup>

Many regarded this comment as undermining Mousavi’s cause. Members of the Iranian opposition thought the comment implied that no matter the outcome of the situation, Iran will still be seen as a nuclear threat, and nothing else. The struggle for democracy was of no importance. An Iranian expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Karim Sadjadpour called the statement an “egregious error”. The Iranian people were risking their own



lives because they wanted a significant political change; the American message to them shouldn't have been that it didn't make a difference to the United States what happened.

Furthermore, Obama's comments were a huge disappointment to pro-democratic Iranians, specifically the younger population. During the U.S. presidential elections of 2008, they had been encouraged by Obama's promise to engage Iran and to promote democracy. After human rights violations were committed by the government against the Iranian people in the aftermath of the elections, they expected more direct support from his administration. However, there was none. In fact, young Iranians were even more angered when it was revealed that Obama corresponded with Khamenei while post election protests were still continuing, but only discussed nuclear program negotiations.<sup>34</sup> In one of the Green Movement protests in the fall of 2009 protesters against the regime shouted, "Obama, you are either with us—or with them"<sup>35</sup> Accordingly to Iranians, Obama's previous vow to engage in "aggressive personal diplomacy" fell short and it seemed like he was "with them".

Many have concluded that the United States had not put enough pressure on Iran during the aftermath of the elections when violence was used on the Iranian people, and the Obama administration should have taken a stronger stance in opposing the election fraud and violence. In fact, more negotiation attempts and tools like economic sanctions were used against Iran for pursuing its nuclear program than for its killing of thousands of innocent people demonstrating for a free and fair election process.

### **3.2.2 The European Response**

The European response to the Iranian elections was very different—although most EU leaders did recognize the need to continue to negotiate with Iran over its nuclear program, they were

much more vigorous and outspoken in opposing Ahmadinejad's reelection and the violence that followed. For instance, on June 22<sup>nd</sup> Franco Frattini, the Italian foreign minister deemed the violence against the protesters and the deaths that followed as "unacceptable" in the eyes of the international community. Similarly, the Czech Foreign Ministry expressed "revulsion at the documented police violence against peaceful protesters" and urged that other EU members send this message to all Iranian diplomats.<sup>36</sup> In the same week, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel strongly criticized the arrests of Iranian citizens and the ouster of foreign media from Iran. She also called for an investigation into the election fraud and for the immediate release of arrested opposition members. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and French President Nicholas Sarkozy condemned the election as fraudulent and the subsequent violence. On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, Sarkozy backed the UK's call for united and strong EU action by saying, "a strong response is required so that Iranian leaders will really understand that the path that they have chosen will be a dead end."<sup>37</sup> Finally, Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief, criticized Iran's actions in the aftermath of the protest, specifically the expulsion of foreign media.

Unlike the U.S. President, European leaders also threatened Iran with direct action. For example, Italy's foreign minister threatened to rescind Iran's invitation to the G-8 talks if the violence continued. Italy's foreign ministry spokesman also announced that Italy instructed its embassy to provide "humanitarian aid" to any wounded protesters in Iran.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, EU foreign ministers declared, "the EU is determined to pursue these issues and to act with a view to put an end to this unacceptable situation" referring to the government restricting all types of communication between Iranians during and after the presidential election. Accordingly, the EU did call on Iranian officials to stop censorship and went so far as to stop exports of electronic

devices that could be used to disturb the internet connection or to intercept private conversations.<sup>39</sup>

### **3.2.3 Non Western Response**

While Western leaders condemned the Iranian government for its use of violence, Russian leaders did not have the same reaction. On June 16<sup>th</sup>, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov Moscow expressed “serious concern” about the violence used against Iranian protestors. However, he also said, “At the same time, we will not interfere in Iran's internal affairs. Our position is that all issues that have emerged in the context of the elections will be sorted out in line with democratic procedures.”<sup>40</sup> Russia was also the only member of the G8 that refused to condemn Iran in the aftermath of the election. The Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, sent congratulations to Ahmadinejad on his reelection and even expressed hope that relations between Iran and Russia would expand for the benefit of both the countries. In fact, Ahmadinejad’s first official business as newly elected president was a visit to Russia where he attended a conference of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, of which Iran is an observer. The Russian government openly welcomed him to the country without reservation despite the turmoil in Iran.<sup>41</sup> Besides Russia, the presidents of Turkey, China, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Venezuela also all congratulated Ahmadinejad on his victory. Members of the Green Movement were very hostile toward these countries, specifically Russia and China for their close ties with the Islamic government.

Both Russia and China support the hard line Iranian regime, not only in the diplomatic sense but also through commercial trade and military spending. For instance, Russia has not only publicly backed Iran’s right to a peaceful nuclear program, but has also provided most of the

materials and technical guidance of its existing nuclear plants . China, on the other hand, imports over 700,000 barrels of Iranian oil a day and the Iranian Ministry of Oil recently announced that China plans to invest 40 billion dollars into Iran's oil refining industry. Some sources report that Iran has moved much of its foreign currency reserve from European banks to Chinese banks.<sup>42</sup> Many Green Movement members believe that Russia and China's unwavering support prevents regime change because the Islamic Republic is financially dependent on these two countries.

#### **4.0 SECOND VARIABLE—INTERNAL PRESSURE**

The vast internal response from the Iranian people in both 1979 and 2009 reflected the Iranian people's discontent with the governments', specifically in two areas—political and economic grievances.

#### **4.1 POLITICAL GRIEVANCES—THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION**

While some scholars trace the roots of the Islamic Revolution to the 1950s, dissatisfaction with the Pahlavi dynasty occurred much earlier during the reign of Reza Shah from 1925-1941. Political life was extremely limited during his rule because of the Shah's persecution of opposition forces and tyrannical controls over the government. All types of opponents, including poets and writers, religious clerics, and even secular politicians were suppressed.<sup>43</sup> More importantly, the monarchy had no roots in tradition. The Pahlavi dynasty was only established because clerics and feudal lords refused to accept the idea of a republic.

Despite his faults, Reza Shah created modern day Iran by introducing vast political and economic modernization policies. During his reign, he created the modern public health system, improved Iran's infrastructure by building highways and a railroad system, and founded the University of Tehran. But public attitudes during his rule were ambivalent—he changed the traditional tribal order of the country; a positive to some Iranians who wanted a more modern

state, but also disappointing to those who held on to tradition. His rapid modernization policies, coupled with his autocratic rule often angered different factions of society. For example, one modernization reform, the Shah's decree that encouraged women to discard the traditional Islamic covering angered religious clerics in the city of Mashhad and created a strong religious opposition, deeming Reza Shah's policies anti-Islamic. Besides clerics, members of the new intelligentsia, specifically young academics who had studied abroad, were also against the Shah. Under his reign, the Majles complied with all royal decrees, political opposition was persecuted, and dissenting opinions were not tolerated. These same frustrations would carry over to the reign of Reza Shah's son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, when he came to power in 1941.

As Ervand Abrahamian puts it, "The 1941 Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran destroyed Reza Shah—but not the Pahlavi state...the Allies... realized that the Iranian state could be useful in achieving certain goals..."<sup>44</sup> Muhammad Reza Shah's reign was defined by the way he came into power. From 1941 until his overthrow in 1979, many viewed him as a puppet of the United States and Britain; a figurehead by which the West could protect its interests in the Middle East, especially regarding oil. While this was the main source of the Shah's lack of political legitimacy; three main political events—Mossadegh's overthrow in 1953, the 1963 uprisings and the resulting exile of Khomeini, and the vast political oppression and violence the Shah imposed on opposition in the late 1970s—undermined support for his rule and led to the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

#### **4.1.1 Mossadegh's Overthrow**

For the first two years of Muhammad Reza Shah's regime, the Majles remained the same because of Allied encouragement. Then, between 1943 and 1945 political activity blossomed and

several small parties emerged. These parties included the National Will party, the Communist, Tudeh party, and the Nationalist Front led by Mohammad Mossadegh. Consequently, during this time period the nationalization of oil became a dominant issue in mainstream Iranian politics. It is crucial to understand Iran's attempt to nationalize the oil industry, since it is the root of the 1953 overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadegh.

As early as 1949, the public expressed its disapproval of the Shah. After an assassination attempt in Feb 1949, instead of support, street demonstrations against the Shah emerged. While celebrating the founding of Tehran University the Shah was shot by a man thought to be affiliated with the Tudeh Party; however, it was later rumored that he was an Islamic fundamentalist.<sup>45</sup> The Shah's popularity continued to wane and the 1950 Majles elections were dominated by the National Front, Mossadegh's Party, one of the most powerful and anti-monarchical groups in Iranian politics at the time. The National Front's main platform was economic freedom from the British owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

After the Shah appointed Ali Razmara, a military leader sympathetic to British oil interests, the new Prime Minister in June of 1950 political tensions in the country intensified. Mossadegh gathered middle and lower class support for nationalizing the oil industry. Petitions and passionate street demonstrations followed. In the meantime, the Tudeh party also championed Mossadegh's oil cause. This issue escalated and on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1951 Ali Ramzara was assassinated by a member of Fadayan-e Islam, a militant Islamic group; most likely because of his secular, pro-British policies.<sup>46</sup> Then, in mid March, a Majles committee recommended the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry. The Tudeh Party reacted by leading a general strike in the oil industry in early April. With this help, by April 28<sup>th</sup> the bill was approved and

reluctantly signed by the Shah. By May of 1951 Mossadegh was named the Prime Minister, replacing the Shah's choice.

During Mossadegh's time as Prime Minister, the Iranian Oil Company was created and democratic institutions and processes developed rapidly; mostly because Mossadegh's regime forced the Shah to reign instead of rule. Mossadegh was always trying to find a way to limit the Shah's constitutional powers. However, this took a backseat toward the end of 1951 when the British government refused to support the Iranian Oil Company and blocked all exportation of Iranian oil. In response, Mossadegh traveled to the United States and lodged a formal complaint against the British to the United Nations Security Council. While there, he also negotiated with the American administration for financial aid, requesting a loan from the Truman Administration. But the American government refused to accept any of Mossadegh's requests and the British retaliated against Iran by freezing all of its assets.<sup>47</sup>

Mossadegh struggled to balance his commitment the nationalization of oil, which called for a focus on foreign policy, and his promise to the Iranian people for domestic reforms. Economic difficulties created by the British boycotts and internal disagreements among prominent National Front members only worsened the situation. Despite these struggles, Mossadegh was named Time's Man of the Year in 1951. The article described him as "...the most noteworthy figure on the world scene" and deemed him the "Iranian George Washington."<sup>48</sup> Even though Mossadegh was struggling to make tangible progress, his commitment to rid Iran of foreign control was well known internationally.

The conflict between the Shah and Mossadegh came to a climax in mid 1952. As allies of the British, the Shah and his loyal supporters wanted Mossadegh replaced. Therefore, in July 1952 the Shah dismissed Mossadegh as Prime Minister after he had insisted on the constitutional



right to appoint the Minister of War and the Chief of Staff of his new administration (Keddie 126). Mass protests emerged and lasted for five days, even though the Shah dispatched the military to end the resistance. Over 250 Iranians were killed during the demonstrations and the Shah was forced to reinstate Mossadegh. This event, deemed the *Siyeh-e-Tir* (the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month of *Tir* on the Iranian calendar), demonstrated that despite Iran's economic struggles, the Iranian people still backed Mossadegh's political agenda.<sup>49</sup>

Mossadegh was initially able to forestall the coup against him. On August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1953 Colonel Nassiri of the Imperial Guard planned to present the Prime Minister with a royal order demanding his resignation and replacing him with General Zahedi. But the Chief of the Iranian army tipped off Mossadegh's regime, and with the help of the Tudeh Party, prevented the coup. Mossadegh then announced via a radio broadcast that Colonel Nassiri had been arrested and that the Shah, American, and British forces were behind the failed coup. The Shah immediately fled to Baghdad and anti-monarchical riots spread throughout Iran's major cities.<sup>50</sup>

While trying to control violence on the streets, Mossadegh alienated his own supporters and specifically angered his former ally, the Tudeh party. He began to lose support of various allies and only two days later, protests against Mossadegh began. Furthermore, Mossadegh no longer had support of the religious *ulama*. Prominent clerical leaders, such as Ayatollah Sayyed Abul-Qassem Kashani, fully supported Mossadegh in the summer of 1952, but in 1953 helped organize his downfall. Mossadegh provided former religious supporters a secular alternative, taking away the religious base.<sup>51</sup> The main advocates of Operation Ajax, the plan to overthrow the Prime Minister, were the United States and the British, along with a few disgruntled royal military officers. However, internal dissatisfaction from the Iranian population was necessary for the coup to be fully executed.

Without the support of the Tudeh Party and the religious elite, it was much easier for General Zahedi to capture Mossadegh. On August 18<sup>th</sup>, as protests on the street continued, Zahedi surrounded the Prime Minister's private home with military tanks. After a nine hour struggle, Mossadegh was finally arrested. The army and Zahedi took temporary control of the country until the Shah returned on August 22.<sup>52</sup> Eight other high ranking officers who supported Mossadegh were also arrested and served a minimum of a five year prison sentence. Mossadegh was tried by a military court shortly after the Shah's return and received three years in prison; then he was on house arrest until his death in 1967.<sup>53</sup>

Most Iranian specialists agree that the 1953 coup changed Iranian political development and eventually led to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. For instance, Professor Mohsen Milani and Nikki Keddie identify a number of ways the political and social developed was affected. First, the United States replaced Great Britain as the dominant power in Iran and the Shah was forever deemed as a creature of the U.S.—resulting in the Shah's total loss of legitimacy. Second, American participation in Operation Ajax and its support of the Shah, limited the possibility of internal democratic reforms. With the knowledge of the West's unwavering backing, Muhammad Reza Shah was able to engage in oppressive and tyrannical acts against his own people. Third, to prevent further opposition, the Shah created the internal secret police, SAVAK. This action was a direct result of Mossadegh's rise to power. SAVAK protected the monarchy, to infiltrated the opposition groups, and to enforced the Shah's mandates; it eventually became one of the most powerful and dangerous institutions in Iran's history.

Fourth, after Mossadegh's removal, the Shah dealt with opposition in two specific ways; by jailing and killing or by co-opting it into the already existing Pahlavi regime; for example, giving any irresolute individual opposition, government positions. The Shah would never again

let any individual or group become too powerful. Sixth, the coup destroyed any relationship between Mossadegh's party, the National Front, which represented the desires of the professional middle class, and the Shah. This left the monarchy without any protection against "radicalism of the left" or "fanaticism of the right"—the political forces that would force Muhammad Reza Shah to flee in 1979.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the repressive ways of the monarch combined with massive economic inequality, made it inevitable that an effective opposition force would have to appeal to the masses. Finally, seventh, the interference of foreign powers in Iranian internal affairs damaged the middle class's pride and their opinion of the Shah. Consequently, their cooperation against the Shah was necessary for the Islamic Revolution of 1979 to be successful.<sup>55</sup>

Other scholars and foreign policy experts agree that the coup greatly affected Iran's political development. For instance, Professor James A. Bill, former Director of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas, Austin comments, "American policy in Iran during the early 1950s...paved the way for the incubation of extremism, both of the left and the right."<sup>56</sup> Richard Cottam, a previous Foreign Service officer in Tehran and former Professor at the University of Pittsburgh also remarked, "U.S. Policy did change Iran's history in fundamental ways. It helped oust nationalist elite which had looked to the U.S. as an ideological ally and its one reliable external supporter. In helping eliminate a government that symbolized Iran's search for national integrity and dignity, it helped deny the successor regime nationalist legitimacy."<sup>57</sup> Finally, Professor Mark Gasiorowski of Louisiana State University notes, "In retrospect, the United States sponsored coup d'etat in Iran of August 19, 1953, has emerged as a critical event in postwar world history...had the coup not occurred, Iran's future would undoubtedly have been vastly different."<sup>58</sup>

Fifty years later, in 1997, representatives of the U.S. finally admitted that intervention in the 1953 coup of Mossadegh had a negative impact on the Iranian political system. In 2000, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright commented:

"In 1953 the United States played a significant role in orchestrating the overthrow of Iran's popular Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadegh. The Eisenhower Administration believed its actions were justified for strategic reasons; but the coup was clearly a setback for Iran's political development. And it is easy to see now why many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America in their internal affairs."<sup>59</sup>

#### **4.1.2 The 1963 Uprisings**

In the aftermath of the coup, the development of political pluralism that occurred from 1941 until Mossadegh's overthrow abruptly ceased. The Shah ruled with no constitutional limits—marital law was enacted until 1957. With the exception of 1960-1964, the twenty years after the overthrow of Mossadegh was relatively stable politically. The opposition was forced underground, rarely active in the public sphere. The Shah had complete control over the government; however, he evidently realized his lack of legitimacy. Therefore, he decided to create the impression that Iran had a two party system political system. He ordered two of his friends, Manouchehr Eqbal and Assadollah Alam, to establish parties that would be controlled entirely by the Shah's supporters. They created *Melliyun* (The National Party) and *Mardom* (The People's Party), but the population was not fooled. The parties were nicknamed the "yes party" and the "yes, sir party", respectively, by the Iranian public.<sup>60</sup>

By the late 1950s, the United States government was also frustrated with the autocratic rule of the Shah insisted he make democratic reforms. To appease Washington, he promoted “free and fair” elections for the Twentieth Majles in 1960. But since the two recently created royalist parties were the only participants, the Shah was forced to cancel and annul the election results because of accusations of fraud. After severe pressure from the Kennedy administration for political reform, the Shah appointed Ali Amini, an economist who had no party affiliation, Prime Minister in 1961.<sup>61</sup>

Amini attempted to implement significant land reforms with the help of his Minister of Agriculture, Hasan Arsanjan; however, the Shah forced Amini to resign in 1962 and personally assumed responsibility for economic reform. The six original points of the reforms were first announced in fall 1961, but the official decree and ratification of the Shah’s White Revolution occurred in January 1963, despite objections from political leaders and citizens. The Shah was convinced the program would be successful and in 1963 held a nationwide referendum to legitimize the program; according to the results, 99.9 percent of Iranian voters supported the reforms of the White Revolution.<sup>62</sup> The lack of genuine support for the reforms became clear when in the summer of 1963 thousands of Iranians encouraged by Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini demonstrated against the Shah’s White Revolution. In 1953 the Shah had survived his first political crisis with Mossadegh, but would he be able to do the same with the second threat to his rule, Ruhallah Khomeini?

Khomeini’s opposition marked a significant turning point in the relationship between the state and the Iranian religious community. Until the early 1960s, the relationship between the clerical elite and the Shah’s regime had been amiable, if not conciliatory. The primary leaders of the religious community (the ulama), Ayatollahs Boroujerdi and Kashani, had supported the

Shah in the overthrow of Mossadegh. Therefore, until 1961 when his mentor, Boroujerdi, died Khomeini had remained politically silent. But in 1961 he became an Ayatollah and began to speak out in opposition of the monarch's policies between 1962 and 1963, reviving the traditional hostility between the state and the clerical leadership. He also emerged as the leader of anti-monarchical movement because the regime had destroyed the remnants of the leading secular forces like Mossadegh's National Front by imprisoning its most vocal leaders. With Mossadegh on house arrest outside of Tehran, the party had no unifying leader. By the mid 1960s it basically ceased to exist, besides underground in Iran and sporadically in Europe. Therefore, without much prominent secular resistance to the monarchy, the ulama, specifically Khomeini, was driven to the forefront of anti-monarchical politics.

Khomeini was not the only member of the religious community to oppose the Shah—with Ayatollah Boroujerdi's death and Ayatollah Kashani's illnesses, members of the ulama who had not approved of the policies toward the Shah could finally express their disapproval of the government openly. Their first opportunity was presented by the Local Council Elections Bill of 1962, which gave women the right to vote and changed "holy Quran" to "holy book" in mandatory oaths of office. The ulama strongly opposed the bill, calling it unconstitutional and offensive to Islam. Although most of the religious establishment was against the bill, Khomeini was even more vocal. The bill was withdrawn as a result of the ulama's protests almost two months later. This was the first time Ayatollah Khomeini was recognized nationally as a political opponent of the Shah.<sup>63</sup>

In January 1963, the Shah launched his economic reform, the White Revolution. Immediately, Ayatollah Khomeini began to criticize the program, declaring it corrupt, disrespectful to the poor, and conciliatory towards the United States. In response, the Shah's

military attacked Khomeini's base of support—the Fayziya theological school in the holy city of Qom. Several students were beaten and killed, intensifying the opposition. At the funeral of the students on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1963, Khomeini called for the ouster of the Shah. Two days later, June 5<sup>th</sup> (15<sup>th</sup> of Khordad on the Persian calendar), he was arrested and protests erupted immediately. Demonstrations continued for a week after his arrest in all major Iranian cities—Tehran, Shiraz, Mashhad, Isfahan, and Qom—crowds of thousands filled the streets chanting anti-government slogans. The government reacted violently and the military killed thousands of Iranians.<sup>64</sup> One observer reported, “machine gun fire still echoed through the rubble-strewn streets of the bazaar area...the troops moved through ruins tracking down enemies of the Shah.”<sup>65</sup>

Khomeini was released in August of 1963 after six weeks in prison, but refused to stop criticizing the regime's policies. He urged his followers to boycott the parliamentary elections in October 1963 and continued to personally attack the Shah. He was arrested shortly after and held until May 1964 when he again resumed criticism of the Shah. Khomeini attacked the Shah for approving a law which granted U.S. military officers in Iran diplomatic immunity, after accepting a 200 million dollar loan from American as a “payoff.”<sup>66</sup> In October 1964, he condemned the Shah in a speech saying, “He reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog.”<sup>67</sup> After Khomeini's criticism was circulated as a pamphlet, he was deported and exiled; first to Turkey, then to the city of Najaf in Iraq, and finally to Paris in 1978.

The June uprising of 1963 and the deportation of Khomeini had a large impact on the political orientation of the religious community. In the Shah's attempt to repress clerical opposition, he grouped all religious opposition together, rather than recognizing their differences and using this to his advantage. With Khomeini in exile, he boasted that his regime defeated “the forces of medieval black reaction.”<sup>68</sup> This assault unified the ulama, despite their differences,

and encouraged supporters of Khomeini to keep his legacy alive in his absence. The Shah's actions also made Iran's Islamic organizations more radical and anti-monarchial. The confrontations in June of 1963 "symbolized the end of peaceful coexistence with the Shah and justified the start of an armed struggle against his regime."<sup>69</sup> Groups of university students now formed to discuss the use of aggressive political tactics that had emerged in Cuba, Vietnam, and Algeria. For example, a student member of one of these organizations commented on the affect of the 1963 uprisings:

"The bloody massacres of 1963 were a major landmark in Iranian history. Until then, the opposition had tried to fight the regime with street protests, labor strikes, and underground networks. The 1963 bloodbath, however, exposed the bankruptcy of these methods. After 1963, militants—irrespective of their ideology—had to ask themselves the question: "What is to be done?" The answer was clear: "guerrilla warfare."<sup>70</sup>

This ideology spread rapidly among the young intelligentsia in Iranian universities, who were frustrated with the lack of success they had encountered with traditional political parties like the National Front and the Tudeh Party.

Accordingly, from 1960 until Khomeini's exile, the Shah experienced formidable challenges to his rule. But the opposition was not unified behind one effective leader or party, so he was easily able to overcome the dissent with military repression. The most important political event, however, was Khomeini's transformation from an unknown cleric to a religious and political leader. Iranians, even those with no regard for Islam, respected Khomeini's talent and courage in mobilizing opposition forces against the Shah.



### 4.1.3 Political Oppression after 1963

After 1963, Mohammad Reza Shah ruled as a monarchic dictator who refused to allow any political opposition. Like his father, he maintained power by solidifying the institutions of his rule—the bureaucracy, the control of oil revenues, the apparatuses of social control and repression (SAVAK), and the most important, the loyalty of his military. He kept these institutions alive and dominant by massive military expenditures. For instance, from 1963 to 1973, the army grew from 180,000 to 200,000; the air force from 7,500 to 100,000; the navy from 2,000 to 25,000; and the Imperial Guard from 2,000 to 8,000. The military budget also increased from \$293 million to \$1.8 billion.<sup>71</sup> The regime expanded so much it had full control over the everyday lives of citizens— by the early 1970s, the government hired one of every two full time employees. This gave the regime the power over citizens’ benefits, wages, and a wide range of social necessities.

After the 1963 Uprisings, the Shah also went out of his way to disenfranchise one group in particular, the religious clerics. In 1971, the regime created a “Religious Corps” whose members travelled the country teaching the regime’s version of Islam. By 1975, the Shah closed and destroyed most of the theological seminaries in the holy city of Mashhad, claiming to be clearing the area around the shrine of the Eighth Imam so that visitors could worship more freely. He also shut down the nation’s primary clerical school in Qom, *Fazieh-e Ghom*, and accused some of the most scholarly *ulama* of incompetence; he forbade them from giving sermons or leading prayer. The Shah even changed the official state calendar from the Islamic version to a new, imperial one.<sup>72</sup>

From 1965-1975, the number of mosques in Iran plummeted from 20,000 to 9,015.<sup>73</sup> The regime left no religious organization untouched; even student associations were infiltrated and dissolved by SAVAK. In Iranian Universities, all political student groups prohibited and any noticeably politically active students faced severe punishment that ranged from expulsion from school, torture, imprisonment, and even death, even during periods of relative calm. Many witnesses claim that overly political or religious students would disappear and never be seen again.

During this period, the religious clerics also increasingly feared the Shah's modernization policies would take away all of their influence. The regime secularized the education and legal systems and made drastic cuts in government subsidies to the ulama. When the regime forcefully encouraged women in the mid 1970s to remove the traditional Islamic dress in public, both the clergy and religious lay people were outraged. The religious community viewed the Shah's actions as a violation of the sanctity of women and the imposition of a moral threat to society. However, the clerics used this repression to gain support from the Iranian population. For instance, a prominent cleric attributed "the awakening of Iran's religious community" to the "frontal attack of his Majesty" in an interview in late 1975. His assertion was correct—in 1976 a survey found there were over forty eight publishers of religious books in Tehran, thirty six of which had started publishing between 1965 and 1975, a direct result of political restraints on religious materials.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, when female students wearing chadors (traditional Islamic dress) were forbidden to register for classes at the University of Tehran, mass protests broke out on university campuses all over Tehran. Hundreds were injured from being beaten by SAVAK. The Shah decided he needed another means by which he could to consolidate his power and fully control the state.

In March 1975, the Shah announced the dissolution of the two existing political parties and the establishment of a single majority party, *Hezb-e Rastakhiz-e Melli*, The National Resurgence Party. In 1960 he had denounced the one party system as “communistic and not be tolerated in Iran”, but now the Shah insisted the Resurgence Party would be the only legal political party. He demanded Iranians support the party fully, or face being imprisoned or forced to leave the country. The formation of the Resurgence Party caused a drastic increase in political tensions. One of the main theological schools in Qom shut down in protest and a street confrontation with the government followed. Over 250 seminary students were detained or beaten. By the end of 1975, the government had hundreds of religious clerics, professors, novelists, film makers, lawyers, and political leaders imprisoned for opposing the Resurgence Party and its growing control over government ministries.<sup>75</sup>

Accordingly, international human rights organizations began to express concerns about the Shah’s regime. In late 1975, Amnesty International announced that Iran had anywhere between 25,000 and 100,000 political prisoners. The organization reported,

“No country in the world has a worse record in human rights than Iran...The Shah of Iran retains his benevolent image despite the highest rate of death penalties in the world, no valid system of civilian courts and a history of torture which is beyond belief.”<sup>76</sup>

In 1976, Abul Hassan Bani-Sadr, who would become the Islamic Republic’s first president, could no longer hide his condemnation of the Shah. While in exile in Paris, he published an oppositional pamphlet titled “Fifty Years of Treason” criticizing the Shah for murdering political opponents, shooting unarmed protesters, ignoring the traditional Iranian national identity, and most heinous, hijacking religion for use in politics. The work, released on

the fiftieth anniversary of the Pahlavi monarchy, accused the dynasty of political, economic, cultural, and social abuses saying, “These fifty years, contain fifty counts of treason.”<sup>77</sup>

Ayatollah Hassan Bani-Sadr’s article represented many members of the young intelligentsia and the religious community who were appalled by the lack of political freedoms under the Shah. For example, in May, 1977, a group of sixty four lawyers signed a petition demanding the establishment of an independent judiciary and formed an Association of Jurists to monitor the enforcement of Iranian law. Only a month later the Iranian Writers Association began a similar initiative, demanding that the regime end media censorship and allow the publishing of independent political journals. Their requests were denied and in response, SAVAK black listed the lawyers and writers petitioning for political freedom, calling them “hooligans” and “supporters of international terrorism.”<sup>78</sup> In the next weeks, seven separate politically active citizens (mostly lawyers, writers, or party leaders) were beaten and their houses were bombed, including Mehdi Bazargan, the future head of Iran’s interim government in 1979.

The regime’s violent tactics could not obliterate the political opposition, but did force much of it underground. Because secular parties like the National Front, the Tudeh Party, and the Liberation Movement were closely monitored by SAVAK, the religious opposition emerged from the safety of the mosque to lead the movement against the Shah. By alienating the ulama from the public sphere, political organizations and events had to be moved to the mosques. As a result, even secular Iranians ventured to religious centers to express their political views against the regime. More importantly, the Shah’s persecution of the entire ulama, encouraged diverse religious leaders to unite despite their previous ideological differences.

By summer 1977, the Shah had been made aware of the national frustrations and tried to remedy the situation by publicizing “liberalization” policies such as freedom of the press and

free and fair elections. The regime began to tolerate a certain amount of criticism, the Red Cross visited Iranian prisons, and approximately 400 political prisoners were released. However, these efforts were too late. Frustrations against the Shah's political and economic policies had been developing for more than two decades; slight liberalization would not appease the opposition. Moreover, shortly after these new "freedoms" were announced, the regime made its position on dissent very clear. The harassment, beating, and imprisonment of opposition became common again in the fall and in October 1977, Ayatollah Khomeini's oldest son, Mustafa, mysteriously died, thought to be another victim of SAVAK. The regime's violent political oppression aided in the development of the mass protest movements that would begin in 1978.

On January 7, 1978, the Shah's regime published an article in a Tehran newspaper slandering Ayatollah Khomeini that claimed he was a descendent of Indian immigrants and a supporter of British colonialism, hoping to decrease his popularity with the masses. Instead, the article set off a wave of protests in Qom with anywhere from 4,000 to 10,000 Iranians protesting; anywhere from ten to eighty Iranians were killed in the confrontation with the military. The violence incited protests that occurred regularly at 40 day intervals, commemorating the deaths of protesters according to Islamic tradition.<sup>79</sup> These cyclical demonstrations are considered the beginning of the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

The government's ruthless killings forced fairly moderate clerics, such as Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari, to deem the Shah's regime "un-Islamic". By the spring of 1978, the oppression and violence became intolerable to the ulama. Imperial Guards raided Ayatollah's Shariatmadari's home in the holy city of Qom, allegedly mistaking it for the residence of a more radical cleric. They shot and killed two of Shariatmadari's seminary students who had taken refuge in his home. Witnesses claim the students were killed because they refused to chant

“Long Live the Shah”. Shortly afterwards, the government made a formal apology. In fact, the Shah personally apologized to the Ayatollah, began a media campaign criticizing the imperial guards, replaced the head of SAVAK, and pledged to continue the program of political liberalization. The Shah also promised the people free elections in the future and extended free press freedoms. The Shah’s conciliatory approach seemed to appease the Iranian people temporarily; the number of protests dropped drastically over the next few months. But in late summer 1978, two events—a fire at the Rex Movie Theatre and the Black Friday protest in Jaleh Square—served as the breaking point for internal pressure.

On August 19, 1978 (the anniversary of the overthrow of Mossadegh in 1953) over four hundred people were burned alive in the Rex Movie Theatre in a working class section of the city of Abadan. It was the sixth theatre that was burned during the holy month of Ramadan in Iran that year, most likely a reaction to the Shah’s modernization policies (Fischer 197). The regime blamed internal religious opposition to Western culture, but locals suspected SAVAK. Multiple witnesses said it took fire fighters over thirty minutes to get to the scene and many of the fire hydrants were defective. Another witness accused the police, whose station was located only a block from the theatre, of failing to free those trapped in the building. One witness recounted, “The screams of the dying carried into the streets as would-be rescuers stood by helplessly.”<sup>80</sup> After the burials of the victims, 10,000 relatives and friends marched into the city shouting “the shah must go” and “burn the shah, end the Pahlavi’s.

The Shah tried to appease the opposition by giving it more freedom. In late August 1978, he announced that Iran would be “a Western-styled democracy”; all parties except the Tudeh would be allowed to run in the next parliamentary elections.<sup>81</sup> But these “freedoms” did not stop the development of the resistance movement. On September 4, hundreds of Iranians celebrated

the end of the religious holiday, Ramadan, with outdoor prayer. After the religious observances, almost 100,000 protesters gathered and marched peacefully in Tehran. Three days later, the crowds grew even larger, forcing the Shah to ban all street demonstrations and to declare martial law for twelve major Iranian cities, the first time it had been imposed since 1963.<sup>82</sup> Because the Shah announced the imposition of martial law in the early morning hours of September 7<sup>th</sup> 1978, many Iranians were not aware of the decree. Therefore, on the morning of September 8<sup>th</sup> thousands marched to Jaleh Square to demonstrate.

Large crowds marched and gathered together at Jaleh Square, the area where most of the bazaaris resided in Tehran. When the military ordered the opposition to leave, about 5,000 protesters staged a peaceful sit in. Military commandos and tanks surrounded the square, but the protesters refused to disperse. Observers say shots were fired first in the air, then at the crowd. A European reporter said, “The scene resembled a firing squad, with troops shooting at a mass of stationary protesters.”<sup>83</sup> The government claimed 87 were killed and 205 wounded in the protest, but the actual total has been estimated somewhere between 3,000 to 4,000 casualties.<sup>84</sup>

The Jaleh Square Massacre, also known as “Black Friday” or “Bloody Friday”, symbolized the contradictory nature of the Shah’s regime—after hearing about the murder of hundreds of Iranians, the Shah was reportedly horrified and shocked at the ruthless approach of Tehran’s Military Governor . But the killings were a result of his government’s lack of efficiency; he had evidently given one passive order to the civilian authorities and another more confrontational order to the military. For the first time during his rule, crowds began to shout, “Death to the Shah.”<sup>85</sup> The Massacre at Jaleh Square eliminated any possibility of a government compromise and sent Iran into political anarchy.

To regain control, on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1978 the Shah replaced the government of Prime Minister Sharif Emami with a military regime led by General Azhari. Even so, the Shah still insisted on publicly announcing his “liberalization” efforts. But these contradictory stances only fueled the opposition; when the Shah lifted censorship in the fall of 1978, newspapers were flooded with reports of SAVAK’s political torture chambers and personal accounts of horrifying interrogation tactics. The reports only exacerbated the resentment of Iranians who participated in the Jaleh Square demonstrations.<sup>86</sup>

Intensifying tensions even more, the Shah acknowledged “the revolution” developing throughout the country and arrogantly claimed he would lead it. He said in a nationally broadcasted speech on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1978:

“Dear Iranian people, in the climate of liberalization which gradually began two years ago, you arose against oppression and corruption. The revolution of the Iranian people cannot fail to have my support as the monarch of Iran and as an Iranian. I have heard the message of your revolution...Remember that I stand by you in your revolution against colonialism, oppression and corruption. I will be with you in safeguarding out integrity and national unity, the protection of Islamic precepts, the establishment of fundamental freedoms, and victory in realizing the demands and aspirations of the Iranian nation.”<sup>87</sup>

The speech only demonstrated the Shah’s ignorance of the Iranian public’s desire for regime change. Many observers and scholars believe this marked the collapse of the monarchy—Milani deems it, “the obituary of the Pahlavi’s read by the Shah himself.”<sup>88</sup> It became evident to both the opposition and supporters of the monarchy that the Shah had lost control of the state. Accordingly, the opposition, especially those led by Khomeini, capitalized on the opportunity by



provoking strikes that started on university campuses and spread to government offices, banks, bazaars, private businesses and factories, and even the oil industry. The whole country had gone on strike. Demonstrations also continued to break out; the most violent occurred during the ten holy days of *Muharram* (the beginning of December and the first month of the Islamic calendar), when thousands were killed by the military across the country. On the tenth day of *Muharram*, Ashura (December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1978) two million protesters marched in a peaceful demonstration in Tehran, the largest of its kind. But by mid December, violence in the streets and labor strikes were daily occurrences; it was apparent the Shah would have to leave the country.

On December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1978 the Shah appointed Shapour Bakhtiar, a leader of the National Front, Prime Minister. But he was immediately disowned by his own party because of his negotiations with both the monarch and Khomeini. By January 13<sup>th</sup>, the Shah created a regency council headed by Bakhtiar and it was announced the monarch would shortly be leaving the country for a short “vacation.”<sup>89</sup>

Finally, on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1979 the Shah left Iran and would never come back again. With the absence of the Shah, the developments of the revolution unraveled quickly. By February 1<sup>st</sup>, Khomeini had returned to Iran from Paris and only four days later he appointed Mehdi Bazargan, a well known religious intellectual, the “real” Prime Minister. During the weekend of February 9<sup>th</sup> through the 11<sup>th</sup> there was intense fighting and hundreds of casualties. The Imperial Guard attempted to repress rebellions of air force trainees and technicians along with other movements led by guerrilla groups like the *Mojahedin* and *Fedeiyan*. After a weekend of armed struggle, the army was finally defeated on Sunday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1979. That same day, Bakhtiar resigned and went into hiding, giving Khomeini and his coalition the opportunity to take control. On

Sunday evening the nation radio announced, “This is the voice of Tehran, the voice of true Iran, the voice of the revolution. The dictatorship has come to an end.”<sup>90</sup>

#### **4.2 POLITICAL GRIEVANCES—GREEN MOVEMENT 2009**

The new regime’s political oppression began in the weeks and months following the Islamic Revolution. The interim government and its military courts harshly sentenced prominent figures of the former regime to death and had them executed. Between February 1979 and June 1981 revolutionary courts had officially executed 497 “political opponents” of the regime, but the actual death toll is thought to be no higher than one thousand.<sup>91</sup> The rapidity and brutality of the executions was explained by a provisional government official:

“We believe...that to destroy and kill evil is part of the truth and that the purging of society of these persons means paving the way for unified society in which classes will not exist...to execute evildoers is the great mission of Moslems in order to realise the perfection of nature and society. We execute...to break the chains and fetters that confined and restricted the weak in our society for many years...Our aim is to execute the corrupt regime. The execution of the traitor Generals is the beginning of the execution of the regime.”<sup>92</sup>

In addition, members of the newly created “Revolutionary Guard” engaged in ad hoc executions throughout the country. Political retribution became extremely common and there was no authority to stop it during the interim government. These brutal tactics foreshadowed the strict political and social policies that would emerge under the rule of the Islamic Republic.

The new regime rapidly consolidated its power with the enforcement of the new Islamic constitution in early December 1979. Then, in September 1980 the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war provided the Islamic government with justification to centralize power and expand the state apparatus. For instance, the Ministry of Justice extended its power over the legal system and the Ministry of Islamic Guidance created the “Cultural Revolution” in April 1980 to eliminate “cultural imperialism”, rid all forms of cultural resistance to Islamic rule, and purge Iran of all foreign culture—any Western political ideas or social norms had to be expelled. By May 1980 Khomeini created the Council of the Cultural Revolution (CCR) to enforce the reforms and proclaimed to the nation:

“Culture forms the identity and being of a community. With a perverse culture, no matter how powerful a community may be economically, politically, industrially, and militarily, that community is vain and empty...Iran had been hurt more by Westernized intellectuals than by any other group of men. Cultural reform and freeing our youth from dependency on Western culture precede all other reforms”<sup>93</sup>

The Council of the Cultural Revolution strictly enforced Islamic dress code rules, removed and arrested all employees who practiced the *Bahai* Faith (a monotheistic religion emphasizing unity that had been founded in 19<sup>th</sup> century Persia) from government positions, imposed state control over television and radio, banned all foreign films, music, art, and literature, and prohibited the wearing of foreign fashion. The Cultural Revolution also diminished women’s rights— the Family Protection Law of 1967 was repealed, lowering the legal marriage age for young girls to thirteen and permitting husbands to divorce their wives without court approval. Additionally, all women employees, including notable judges, were

purged from the judicial system. Those who opposed the Cultural Revolution were fined, physically punished, or imprisoned. The Ministry of Islamic Guidance spent the next decade purging Iran of everything and everyone that was “non- Islamic”.

The Iranian education system was most affected by the reforms of the Cultural Revolution. The government closed all universities and colleges across the country for three years in order to restructure the curricula. Khomeini approved the removal of all “subversive elements” in Iranian universities on the grounds that they had only produced communists and atheists.<sup>94</sup> Thousands of secular professors were purged from the system, some even exiled for their “Western” approaches to education. By the time universities reopened, it is estimated that almost 15 percent of the courses required to graduate dealt with Shi’i Islamic law.<sup>95</sup>

More importantly, however, the “cleansing” of the universities allowed the Islamic regime to begin its campaign to eradicate all political opposition, specifically the *Mojahedin* and the Leftists, who had used universities from 1979 to 1981 to engage in ideological debate. In the summer of 1980, the Council of the Cultural Revolution ordered all political groups to leave campus or face punishment. Bloody clashes between students and government forces occurred all over Iran, killing anywhere from 20 to 200 students and injuring many more. By 1984, most political opposition—the monarchists, the Tudeh, the Mojahedin, Fadaiyan, and the nationalists—was destroyed by the Islamic Republic. Widespread violent repression against party leaders coupled with intimidation tactics used against their constituents, forced the majority of these parties to conduct their activities in exile in Europe, the United States, or Iraq. As a result of the regime’s brutal oppression, by June 1985 over 8,000 political opponents had been executed.<sup>96</sup>

Besides political oppression, the new Islamic state also sought to suppress all ethnic movements, specifically the Kurdish opposition movement, which demanded more cultural and political rights for ethnic minorities. The Kurds and other minorities like the Turkmans and the Baluch were mostly Sunni Muslims and were persecuted for their religious differences. For example, in the fall of 1984, 94 members of a Peasants' Council in Turkman-Sahra, in northeast Iran, were arrested—their bodies were later found dumped in a remote area of the region. Shortly afterwards Ayatollah Khalkhali, a loyal supporter of the regime, admitted without remorse, "I myself executed these people. I executed ninety-four people, not just one person...I beat the people of the Turkman."<sup>97</sup> These types of ethnic killings were not uncommon in the first decade after the revolution and still continue sporadically.

Political, religious, and ethnic repression continued throughout the mid to late 1980s, but the regime focused most of its energy on the war with Iraq—Khomeini viewed the conflict as an opportunity to export the regime's revolutionary ideology. However, by 1988 he had to accede to the reality that in order for the Islamic state to survive, the war must end. Over 1 million Iranians had been killed during the eight year struggle. Weeks after consenting to the U.N cease fire Khomeini expressed his disappointment, "Death and martyrdom would have been more bearable to me...How unhappy I am because I have survived and have drunk the poisonous chalice of accepting the resolution."<sup>98</sup>

Following the end of the war, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, who was now eighty eight years old, was forced to deal with growing criticism of the Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Hoseyn Ali Montazeri, Khomeini's hand-picked successor, had begun to speak out against the Islamic government in the late 1980s and promoted a more open and democratic political system. When Iran executed over 3,000 war prisoners, he publicly criticized Khomeini and accused the

government of human rights violations. Furthermore, he encouraged the regime to apologize for its wrongdoings and admit past mistakes. Shortly after in early February 1988, Khomeini warned Montazeri in a private letter and insinuated that his actions were liberal and unacceptable. He wrote, “I shall not allow the government to fall in to the hands of the *liberalha* (liberals).”<sup>99</sup> Only weeks later, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* calling for the death of the author Salman Rushdie, who had written the *Satanic Verses*. The novel questioned the authority of the Koran and depicted Muhammad in a manner that some Muslims deemed insolent. Khomeini called the work blasphemous and accused Rushdie of being an apostate for satirizing the Prophet—he even offered bounty for Rushdie’s assassination.<sup>100</sup> Montazeri quickly resigned in protest and went into hiding in Qom. He warned Khomeini and other conservative members of the regime that the world was starting to believe “that our business in Iran is just murdering people.”<sup>101</sup>

#### **4.2.1 After Khomeini’s Death**

The death of Ayatollah Khomeini on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1989 brought about a drastic change in political leadership that has been described as a shift “from paternalism to presidentialism” by many scholars.<sup>102</sup> An amended constitution gave the President more authority by eliminating the position of the Prime Minister and by weakening the independence of the Council of Guardians. Additionally, Article 107 of the new constitution diminished the Supreme Leader’s (*faqih*) religious authority by eliminating the condition that he must be a *marja’-e taqlid*, a source of religion emulation or imitation.<sup>103</sup> This echoed one of Khomeini’s last fatwas, which had placed the interests of the Islamic state over the authority of Islamic law. Therefore, by instituting these constitutional reforms, Khomeini strengthened the institutions and populist nature of the state, ensuring the survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran despite his absence.

Ayatollah Seyed Ali Hoseyni Khamenei was selected as the new Supreme Leader immediately following Khomeini's death and on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1989 Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani won the presidential election. Khamenei, who had just been given the title of Ayatollah, spent most of his first years as Supreme Leader solidifying his authority and seeking supporters—proving to the Iranian public, government, and military that he had legitimate political and religious power. Simultaneously, President Rafsanjani publicly announced that all covert organizations used for political repression would be terminated and that a sense of order would be restored to the nation. He combined the country's law enforcement units into one central organization and created strict exams which would eliminate unqualified members of the Revolutionary Guard. Additionally, governing religious bodies that were once in Qom were brought to Tehran to be better supervised. These measures sounded impressive, but the much of the process was never completed. Most of the *ad hoc* revolutionary councils remained intact and large religious foundations responsible for violence after the revolution went untouched—Rafsanjani's promises of liberal reconstruction never materialized.

In fact, during Rafsanjani's terms as president, the Guardian Council did not approve one application to create a political party. Furthermore, it refused more than 1,000 of the 3,000 candidates in the Majles election of 1992.<sup>104</sup> By 1994 censorship had become so intolerable that 134 of Iran's leading intellectuals and authors published a statement criticizing "certain individuals, institutions and groups related to the government" for prohibiting necessary academic and journalistic research and defending "the human and civil right of free thought."<sup>105</sup> Almost half of the signatories were either imprisoned or murdered by the regime. That same year, a United Nations report deemed Iran one of the most repressive regimes in the world, estimating its number of political prisoners to be approximately 19,000. The UN cited the

following as inexcusable: “the high number of executions, cases of torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment...lack of adequate protection for minorities... excessive force in suppressing demonstrations, restrictions on the freedom of expression, thought, opinion and the press...”<sup>106</sup>

But the violence was not only within Iran—the government also assassinated opposition figures in exile—the most notable were the killings of Kurdish leader Abdol Rahman Qasemlu in 1990 and Shahpour Bakhtiar, the head of Iran’s first interim government, in 1991. Another four Iranian Kurdish oppositionists were assassinated in Berlin in 1992 and the Islamic regime is also blamed for a myriad of assassinations in that occurred in Argentina and Israel. Furthermore, John Deutsche, former director of the CIA, stated that from 1989 to 1996, the Islamic regime had murdered at least 48 of its Iranian political opponents who lived abroad.<sup>107</sup>

The continuation of oppression and violence, abroad and within the country, not only frustrated the public, but also prominent political leaders associated with the Islamic regime. For instance, shortly before his death in 1995, Mehdi Bazargan told the German newspaper, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, that the regime was losing legitimacy and that theocracy had the support of less than five percent of the Iranian population. A few months later, the leader of Iran’s leading secular party, Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi, reiterated Bazargan’s assertions and said, “We have a political crisis. We have an economic crisis. We have a social crisis. That creates uncertainty and unpredictability...”<sup>108</sup> Frustrations were rapidly developing; it was time for a new period of reform.



#### 4.2.2 Khatami's Rule

In May 1997, an overwhelming 70 percent of Iran's electorate voted for Mohammad Khatami, a mild mannered cleric with a liberal reputation, as president. His unexpected victory broadened political participation and prompted the growth of a new reform movement. Immediately after the victory, reformers established a new newspaper *Khordad* (May), which promoted free and public discussion of Iranian politics. The president's government encouraged the expansion of the Iranian media—within the first two years of his inauguration, the country's press publications quadrupled.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, the authorities tolerated more modern Islamic dress and Western influenced stores and coffee shops flourished all in urban areas. The judiciary was reopened to women, the marriage age was raised, and legislation restricted distinctions between men and women in all universities and legal courts.

Despite the gradual progress, the Islamic regime used its judicial power to fight the reforms, which it saw as a violation of the theological foundations of the state. Conservative MPs obstructed Khatami's legislative efforts, and the government shut down media outlets and imprisoned vocal reform leaders. As Maloney remarks, the conservatives, "stripped the reform movements of its strategists, its initiatives, and its popular mandate."<sup>110</sup> Additionally, in the end of 1998, four well known reformers and political activists were found brutally murdered, presumably by the regime. The assassinations were supposed to be a warning to reformers, but instead incited even more unrest and protests, especially from the student community. In July 1999, the conservatives were preparing to institute a harsh press law and on July 8<sup>th</sup> closed the journal *Salaam*, the first liberal effort in the post Khomeini period.<sup>111</sup> Peaceful protests immediately broke out on university campuses. The next day, July 9<sup>th</sup>, the government decided this violation of the law needed to be stopped—a vigilante group associated with the government

(Ansar-e Hezbollah, Friends of the Party of God) stormed dorms at the University of Tehran, beating and harassing students who looked as though they were a part of the reform movement.

A student described his experience saying,

“God, it could not be described in any words: walls demolished, cupboards destroyed, students' belongings thrown out through the windows. Even some students who had been sleeping or doing their morning prayers were thrown out through the windows from the second and the third floors... I was arrested by the agents of the intelligence ministry, while standing by the gate of Tehran University. They put me in a cage, which was laid on the back of a pickup truck, and took me to a building which belonged to the police... Then they beat me and two other students severely... they beat me on the soles of my feet with a cable for four continuous days and I was also subject to psychological torture for a month.”<sup>112</sup>

In reaction to the brutal violence upwards of 70,000 people demonstrated in the streets of Tehran in the six days following the incident. Over 1500 protestors were arrested and dozens of students were severely injured or killed.<sup>113</sup>

Khatami immediately responded to the attacks, saying, “Violence in any shape or form is abhorrent and deplorable...their [supporters of violence] guilt is compounded when they use violence on the basis of religious sanctions”. Moreover, Khatami’s intelligence minister, Hojatoleslam Ali Yunesi, also condemned the violence, vowing to find and prosecute the vigilantes.<sup>114</sup> But the attempts of the Khatami’s regime to take control of the aftermath failed—the government cracked down on reformists, continued to restrict free media, and put harsh

constraints on student gatherings. While the demonstrations signaled the people's desire for political freedom, the government made it clear that protests, even peaceful ones, would not be tolerated and would be met with violent repression.

In early 2000, the reform movement attempted to encourage change within the regime by promoting participation from disenchanted constituents. As a result over 80 percent of the voting population gave the reformist camp the majority of seats in the Parliament.<sup>115</sup> This gave Khatami's coalition the power to win support for over one hundred bills of reform in the *Majles*—the most prominent banned torture, gave political prisoners the right to legal counsel, granted women equal rights in divorce court, mandated trial judges had at least ten years of court experience, and allowed the president to remove judges at his will. Khatami also increased financial support to nongovernmental organizations—cultural centers, theatres, musical venues, student organizations, and independent media began to develop again. For example, the number of daily newspapers rose from five to twenty six and their total daily circulation rose from 1.2 million to 3.2 million. However, in the months after the parliamentary elections the government retaliated again by imprisoning the most prominent leaders of the reform, weakening the organization of the movement. It also launched a campaign to restore the laws Khatami's coalition had overturned.

Despite the threat of violence, student activism remained powerful throughout Khatami's presidency. In November 2002, hundreds of students demonstrated against the proclamation of the death sentence for the prominent Professor, Hashem Aghajari, who had been charged with the crime of apostasy for questioning the regime's interpretation of Islamic law. Only months later, in June 2003, riots broke out over the possibility of the privatization of universities and the demonstrations, which lasted several nights, quickly turned into forceful protests against the

regime. Rioters yelled slogans like “Death to the Supreme Leader” and “We want democracy” and placed tape over their mouths to comment on the lack of free speech.<sup>116</sup> Then, in October 2003, the reform movement was encouraged when Shirin Ebadi, a human rights lawyer who fought for women and children’s rights in Iran, won the Nobel Peace Prize. The conservatives reacted with repugnance, while the reformists celebrated—she was the first Iranian and the first Muslim woman to be given the award.

However, the reformists’ joy in 2003 was premature; the last two years of Khatami’s presidency saw little progressive improvements. The 2004 parliamentary elections were manipulated by the Guardian Council that denied over 2,000 candidates for being too liberal. By 2005, conservative and hard line tendencies in the government had been strengthened and the Majles was dominated by conservative MPs, paving the way for president to emerge.<sup>117</sup>

#### **4.2.3 Ahmadinejad’s Election**

From 1997 until 2005, Iran’s politics was dominated by the hope of progressive reform. Even though most Iranians knew political change would be difficult to achieve, as long as Khatami was in office there had been a viable mechanism for altering the Islamic system. However, with the election of the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, the hostility between the proponents of change and the traditional Islamic regime was significantly heightened.

From the beginning of his presidency, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a populist “in style and substance”, was determined to make the revolutionary ideals the center of Iranian politics.<sup>118</sup> He rapidly increased the powers of the Revolutionary Guard and the regime’s security agencies and filled his cabinet and administration with former Revolutionary Guards. He also immediately purged the ministries of interior, finance, national planning, and foreign affairs ministries of all

those appointed during Rafsanjani's or Khatami's presidency. Furthermore, he blatantly ignored presidential procedures and regulations. For example, he stopped attending meetings of the Defense Council and bypassed the foreign ministry by appointing his own envoys to Middle Eastern Countries.

It is important to note that Ahmadinejad's power to make such changes does not come from the office of the presidency, but from his alliance with the most powerful man in Iran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. Their partnership stems from their similar views—the importance of Islamic values in Iran's politics, a distrust of the West and its policies, and most importantly, the revival of the Islamic Revolution's original ideas and political tactics. Referring to Ahmadinejad, Ayatollah Khamenei commented in 2007, “Thanks to the Iranian nation's endeavor and the nation's choice today, a government has been elected whose principled and fundamental slogans are the same as the original slogans of the revolution...and this is why I thank God for this government...”<sup>119</sup> With the unwavering support of Khamenei, Ahmadinejad has rid his cabinet of any liberals, forced the resignation of prominent rivals such as Ali Larijani, and been able to rescind reforms made under Khatami's presidency. Therefore, only two years into Ahmadinejad's term, the Revolutionary Guard had become an economic and political authority. Their members headed the ministries of culture, intelligence, and interior and even controlled state television. Press censorship and the persecution of journalists, bloggers, and literary critics greatly increased and students became the new target of Ahmadinejad's conservative platform.

Ahmadinejad aggressively prohibited student activism—in 2006 he publicly expressed his disgust for “liberal and secular university lectures” and promised to rid campuses across the country of progressive political environments.<sup>120</sup> His approach was effective in repressing

opposition because 70 percent of Iran's population at the time was under the age of thirty and their central meeting place was Iran's university campuses. In the months that followed dozens of students were imprisoned, hundreds of liberal professors were forced to retire early, and Ahmadinejad appointed a radical cleric as the new chancellor of the University of Tehran. One student commented on the changes since Ahmadinejad became president, saying,

“They have sent our professors into early retirement; prevented many students from continuing their studies; forbidden not only protest, but even the act of breathing freely; and transformed our universities into military garrisons. Don't think that our patience is unlimited. Someday, the pot will boil over.”<sup>121</sup>

The pot finally boiled over in December 2006, when students commemorated Student's Day by interrupting an Ahmadinejad speech, burning his picture, and shouting anti-government slogans. Again, in May, October, and December of 2007 demonstrations broke out demanding more social and political freedoms.

By 2008, frustrations in Iran were rising rapidly. Ahmadinejad's constant rhetoric denying the Holocaust and promoting Iran's nuclear weapons program created tension abroad and conflicts between ruling clerics. Additionally, his economic promises to help the disenfranchised were not even close to fulfillment. But most importantly, the young population, disillusioned and resentful, was becoming increasingly unable to cope with the severe pressure of the Islamic regime's policies. Education and urbanization produced a new form of widespread animosity towards the harsh social and political controls imposed by the Islamic government. For example, although satellite television had been officially banned since 1994, they were in widespread use and gave millions of Iranian access to Western news, film, art, and music. The

younger population became more aware than ever of the distinct contrast between the limitations on their personal lives and the freedoms enjoyed by many other countries.

The harsh enforcement of Islamic dress code for both men and women were just the beginning of government's effort to control the cultural life of youth under Ahmadinejad's first term. Strict regulations regarding alcohol and interaction with the opposite sex were constantly monitored and intermittent crackdowns created an atmosphere of tension and uneasiness. Additionally, since the university was one of the only settings where social interaction amongst the sexes was permitted, high school graduates were put under a vast amount of stress to do well on the college entrance exam, *concour*. However, in 2008, there were only 400,000 places for the 2 million aspiring applicants. These pressures have taken a drastic toll on the youth of Iran. The UN announced in 2008 that Iran had one of the highest rates of drug usage in the Middle East; it harbors over two million addicts. Suicide rates had rapidly increased in the past ten years and the Islamic government itself reported that prostitution had risen by 635 percent.<sup>122</sup> The youth of Iran needed hope; an outlet in which they could express their frustrations and discontents—this would be provided in the formation of the Green Movement in 2009.

In the 2009 presidential election, 500 candidates filed for candidacy, but only four—Ahmadinejad, Mousavi, Karrubi, and Rezai—were approved by the Guardian Council. As the campaign began, Mousavi emerged as the reform candidate emphasizing Iran's need for more political freedom, less censorship, and more efficient economic policies. He also championed women's rights, the disbanding of the "morality police" who enforce dress codes and interactions between the sexes, and the expansion of social and political rights on university campuses. His platform resonated with the young and progressive—networks of supporters were created all over the country, formerly silent women's groups and student organizations took on a new, more

confrontational approach, and his supporters reached out to all Iranians via social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. By the day of the presidential election, June 12<sup>th</sup>, the excitement in the country was palpable—citizens waited in line for over 4 hours to be able to cast their vote. Most Iranians believed not only that their vote would count, but that it could enact drastic change in their everyday lives.

Immediately after Ahmadinejad was announced the winner, hundreds of thousands converged on the streets of Tehran to protest the decision and the government reacted violently. As protests continued, the paramilitary forces unleashed by the government beat and arrested hundreds of demonstrators. The opposition to the government at one point numbered 3 million protestors—the largest anti-government movement seen since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

### **4.3 ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES—THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION**

Until his removal in 1941, Reza Shah had engaged in intense reforms, modeled after the policies of Ataturk in Turkey. His goal was to complete the process of “Western” modernization based on government control over the economy. His most significant reform was the transformation of the transportation industry—the Trans Iranian Railway was built and created approximately 14,000 miles of highway.<sup>123</sup> This infrastructure allowed the growth of both a new Iranian army and a modern, bureaucratic state. Although Reza Shah’s reforms did have a significant effect on improving the economy and the standard of living, most of the public were ambivalent to his policies.



Muhammad Reza Shah, however, was known for his erratic economic policies from the beginning of his reign in 1941. As early as 1943, Muhammad Reza Shah's was attacked by those within the regime for financial extravagance and lavish expenditures. His official economic policies began in 1947 when he launched the Five and Seven Year Development Plans, but they proved to be unsuccessful. Inflation increased, foreign currency reserves were depleted, and agrarian reforms were not even addressed. By the 1950s and 1960s two economic issues defined his rule—the nationalization of foreign oil companies and the implementation of the White Revolution Program.

#### **4.3.1 The Nationalization of Oil**

In 1947 Mossadegh raised the issue of nationalization of oil policy when he created and chaired the Majles' (Parliament) Oil Committee to protest the latest oil agreement between the Shah and the British controlled Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) (Milani 72). Mossadegh's objections against the AIOC were extensive, but focused on the evident inequities of the agreement; his primary grievance was the unequal distribution of profits. While the AIOC had made over 200 million pounds by 1933, Iran had only received under 10 million pounds of the profit, while 28 million pounds went directly to the British Treasury.<sup>124</sup> When Mossadegh was named Prime Minister in 1951, he immediately took an "oil-less" stance on economic policy. He realized the struggle over the nationalization of oil would not come to a quick end and therefore, decided to restructure the Iranian economy independent of its oil profits. He announced to the Parliament in late 1951:

“We should assume that like Afghanistan and the European countries we do not have oil, we should reduce our spending and increase our revenues, the nation

should tolerate [the burden of hard times] in order to free itself from the yoke of slavery.”<sup>125</sup>

By the spring of 1952, the oil-less economy was the official economic policy of the Mossadegh regime. Although it did diversify Iran’s trade, it did nothing to stabilize or stimulate Iran’s economy.

During his reign as Prime Minister, from April 1951 to August 1953, Mossadegh nationalized the oil industry, established the National Iranian Oil Company, and fostered the development of the bazaar class and the national bourgeoisie. He also implemented successful land reform policies that helped the agricultural sector—Mossadegh forced landlords to increase their financial contributions to the villages they owned by 10 to 20 percent and outlawed the use of labor without pay, a traditional practice in rural Iran.<sup>126</sup> Mossadegh also nationalized the bus and telephone companies and even opened new bakeries to reduce food prices. Moreover, he created an import substitution sector to stop Iran’s need for Western made products. Although Mossadegh’s economic policies were effective, they could not make up for the loss of oil revenues that occurred during the attempt to nationalize Iranian oil. The support he had from the bazaaris, the urban poor, and the middle class was not enough to defend him from the political opposition—which attacked him from both inside and outside the country. Mossadegh could not overcome the alliance between the United States and British and the royalists and pro-British factions within Iran. However, he stood by his ideology until his overthrow in 1953—sacrificing his political leadership for democracy and nationalism.

After the overthrow of Mossadegh in 1953, the landlords, military, and royal court regained most of their economic power quickly. Then, Iran experienced rapid economic growth because of the resumption of oil revenues and the increase in foreign aid, both of which had been

stagnant under Mossadegh. Gross national product increased by 6 percent per year in the mid to late fifties and oil profits increased from 34.4 million in 1954 to 358.9 million in 1959 (Milani 79). But this economic prosperity was short lived. Beginning in the early 1960s, the government deficit and the subsequent public dissatisfaction with the economy undermined the Shah's ability to rule. Income inequality rose rapidly—between 1959 and 1960 the top twenty percent of the population accounted for almost 52 percent of the income expenditures, while the lower forty percent represented only 13.9 percent. The dissatisfaction was widespread; Abrahamian observed that “The number of major strikes, which had totaled no more than three in 1955-1957, jumped to over twenty in 1957-1961...some ending in bloody confrontation between strikers and the armed forces.”<sup>127</sup> In 1960 alone, there were more than one hundred separate strikes and demonstrations by students, workers, and even government employees. The Shah realized something drastic needed to be done. Therefore, by mid 1962 the Shah replaced Amini, Iran's Prime Minister and champion of land reforms, and took personal responsibility for the socioeconomic reform initiatives, created the White Revolution.

#### **4.3.2 The White Revolution**

The White Revolution began with the Shah's decree in November 1961 and was finally ratified by the Majles in January 1963. The six main points were: land reform, the sale of state owned enterprises to the public, women's suffrage, the nationalization of forests, a profit sharing plan for industrial workers, and the establishment of a literacy corps. The Shah saw himself as the leader of a progressive reform movement, as a “revolutionary monarch, egalitarian and autocratic.”<sup>128</sup> More importantly, he viewed the White Revolution as a way to gain legitimacy—the reforms would cause the people to form a social and political alliance in support of their

monarch—unfortunately, the Shah’s vision of himself as a “revolutionary monarch” never materialized.

Although some positive changes were made under the program, the White Revolution is deemed by scholars as intrinsically flawed—it created more social, political, and economic tension than improvements. For example, the focus of the program was land reform; however, most farmers received little or no land, villages were left without necessary amenities, and food prices favored the urban regions of the country—the White Revolution did not touch about half of Iran’s countryside. Additionally, the rapid growth of the education system was a success in increasing literacy rates, but also created high unemployment for recent graduates. In 1966, high school graduates had a higher rate of unemployment than those Iranians who were illiterate. There was a lack of management for the industry and business sectors, which negatively affected Iran’s export capacity in the late 1960s. Finally, the social programs involved did improve health and other civic facilities, but after a decade Iran still boasted one of the world’s highest infant mortality rates and there were more Iranian trained doctors in New York, than there were in any city besides Tehran.

After the first decade of the White Revolution, there is no doubt that Iran was struggling economically. Despite the explosive surge of oil prices in the 1970s, inflation and other problems created by the fast pace development, produced hardships for many Iranians. For instance, the population increased rapidly, from 1970 to 1977 Tehran’s population alone increased by 2.5 million. But the overall level of agricultural production could not keep up with the increasing demand for more and more food, sending many into dire poverty. The working class also suffered; 73% of all workers were making less than the legal minimum in 1976.<sup>129</sup> And most detrimental, the gap between the rich and the poor continued to grow. During the 1950s, Iran

was a country with one of the largest gaps between rich and poor; by the 1970s, it had one of very worst in the world, according to the International Labor Office. For instance, Central Bank surveys revealed in 1973-1974, the richest 10% accounted for 37.9% of total income expenditures while the poorest 10% only accounted for 1.3% of expenditures. Despite these vast inequality gaps, the Shah's personal wealth in the late 1970s was estimated to be around 1 billion with the Pahlavi family assets totaled over 20 billion.<sup>130</sup> Public unrest began to rise and protests against the reforms became more common—the Shah's reform attempts were backfiring, galvanizing opposition to his regime.

According to Professor Mohsen Milani, the White Revolution had three major flaws that contributed to its ultimate failure. First, it was unable to modernize Iran's traditional society, creating dualism in the economy. The power of the industrial sector was rapidly increased, while the bazaaris and merchants also clung on to their previous power. Secondly, the program modernized the economy of the nation, but not the politics, which resulted in an uneven development. Finally, the program had no real support from the people or the government and lacked an overarching ideology, making the opposition against the Shah even stronger. The opposition, specifically Khomeini and his followers, used the White Revolution's failure as a tool to mobilize the masses. Khomeini targeted his message to the disenfranchised. He reiterated slogans that eventually became the declarations heard during the Islamic Revolution. Some of these common phrases were,

“Islam belongs to the oppressed, not the oppressor”.

“Islam represents the slum-dwellers, not the palace dwellers”.

“Islam is not the opiate of the masses, the poor die for the revolution, the rich plot against the Revolution”

“The duty of the clergy is to liberate the poor from the clutches of the rich”<sup>131</sup>

These slogans were extremely effective in motivating the lower class to join the revolution. Khomeini had persistently denied that economic factors contributed to the overthrow of the Shah, commenting that “Iran’s Islamic Revolution was not about the price of melons.” But the contribution of economic grievances cannot be ignored—they did contribute to the revolution, along with other political and social factors. According to Professor Ervand Abrahamian, “The White Revolution had been designed to preempt a Red Revolution. Instead, it paved the way for an Islamic Revolution.”

However it is extremely important to understand that economic factors alone did not cause the revolution—it was the disparity between political, economic, and social growth that isolated various constituencies and united the opposition against the Shah. Again, Professor Abrahamian gives the most comprehensive explanation,

“The revolution came because the Shah modernized on the socioeconomic level and thus expanded the ranks of the modern middle class and the industrial working class, but failed to modernize on another level—the political...this failure inevitably strained the links between the political structure and the social structure, blocked the channeling of social grievances between the political system and the general population, widened the gap between the ruling circles and new social forces, and most serious of all, cut down the few bridges that had in the past connected the political establishment with the traditional social forces, especially the bazaar and the religious authorities...In short, the revolution took place neither because of overdevelopment nor because of underdevelopment, but because of uneven development.”<sup>132</sup>

#### 4.4 ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES—GREEN MOVEMENT 2009

Despite the emphasis of Khomeini's revolutionary rhetoric on the equal distribution of wealth and improving social justice, Iran's economy is no better today than it was during the Shah's reign. In fact, most of Iran's economic problems—overused subsidies, a large bureaucracy, an inefficient state sector, and widespread corruption—are a direct result of the Islamic Republic's policies and have led to massive unemployment, rising inflation, and extreme division between the rich and the poor. After almost thirty years of egalitarian social policies in post revolutionary Iran, income inequality has not seen a significant change.

All aspects of the Iranian economy had declined in the first few years following the revolution, mostly because of the cost of the war with Iraq; but the oil industry was the most effected of all the economic sectors. For instance, Iran produced over 6 million barrels of oil per day in the Shah's final years, but by 1980 production fell to 1.5 million barrels a day.<sup>133</sup> Additionally, in order to manage economic hardships during the war, basic food, medical goods, petroleum products were all subsidized and rationing began in 1980 after Iraq's invasion of Iran. During the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1989), the Iranian economy continually worsened, per capita gross domestic product severely decreased and inflation accelerated rapidly. By the mid 1980s, The Islamic Republic's conception of social justice was failing—a report by Iran's own Planning and Budget Organization stated that “absolute poverty” rose 45 percent from 1979 to 1985.<sup>134</sup> By 1988, when the cease-fire finally occurred, Iran's economic infrastructure was in ruins—urban poverty doubled, per capita income decreased 45 percent, massive inflation continued to grow, productivity was at a record low, per capita GDP had decreased to half its pre revolution peak reached in 1976, and the country had suffered over one million casualties.<sup>135</sup>

#### 4.4.1 Rafsanjani's Presidency

Khomeini's death in 1989 and the election of the new President, Rafsanjani, represented a significant transformation in the regime's economic policies—Iran was entering “a self proclaimed era of reconstruction.”<sup>136</sup> Damages from the war had totaled around 1 trillion dollars and Rafsanjani portrayed the liberalization of the economy and interaction with the international community as essential to fostering economic growth. His economic reforms involved: infrastructure expansion, the privatization of state enterprises, the reduction of subsidies, the creation of free trade regions, and foreign exchange liberalization (Maloney, Wright, 96). During 1990 and 1992 Iran experienced a period of rapid economic growth in which poverty decreased—the boom of oil profits lifted those at the bottom of society up very quickly. However, by 1993, Iran had massive external debt resulting from the undertaking of foreign loans and the printing of large quantities of money; this sent the country into a recession for the next two years. Iran's economic growth remained relatively low during most of the 1990s. Rafsanjani's economic reforms, especially during his second term, were constantly criticized by the Parliament and other branches of the regime. Many Islamic leftists viewed the acceptance of free market liberalization as compromising the revolution's ideology, making it extremely difficult for Rafsanjani to enact market based reforms.

When Khatami was elected president in 1997, the country still faced economic hardships such as rising inflation and unemployment. During his two terms in office, he achieved moderate economic improvements, but as with Rafsanjani, some of his policies were blocked by conservatives in different branches of the government. However, Khatami did accomplish the following during his presidency: he unified the exchange rate, created the first private banks, increased Western investment, authorized the Oil Stabilization Fund as a backup in case of



economic crisis, and liberalized the regulations regarding foreign investment (Maloney, Wright 97). Despite moderate gains, by January 2003, unemployment rose to 16 percent. In February 2003, a study leaked from the Ministry of the Interior estimated that 28 percent of the Iranian population wanted “fundamental changes in the regime’s structure” and 66 percent wanted gradual economic reforms.<sup>137</sup> When the 2005 presidential elections began, the economy was the central focus of debate.

#### **4.4.2 The Iranian Economy after 2005**

Because the 2005 presidential election was centered on economic issues related to poverty and inequality, Ahmadinejad capitalized on the issue and vowed to decrease poverty, fight corruption, and to “bring the oil money to people’s dinner tables.”<sup>138</sup> However, in the aftermath of his election, Ahmadinejad did not take advantage of the rising price of oil and ignored the underlying problems that affected Iran’s economy. Instead, he raised the Revolutionary Guards retirement funds, expanded the government’s credit spending, disbanded the planning bureaucracy and dismissed government technocrats. Leading political leaders and economists, both outside and inside Iran, condemned Ahmadinejad’s economic policies, deeming them “interventionist” and “spending based.”<sup>139</sup> Under Ahmadinejad’s reign, economic development was stifled and the government was forced to face increasing fiscal pressure and dissatisfaction from the public.

The most prominent economic grievance was unemployment—in 2005 it was still 12 percent and the number of young people entering the work force had increased by four fifths, the highest it had ever been. Additionally, even those who did have jobs could not afford the cost of living in urban areas. In 2005, Iran had one of the highest urban housing costs relative to

incomes in the world—the average cost of a house in 2005 was ten times the average annual salary. As a result, the number of men and women who live with their parents rose from 50 percent in 1984 to 75 percent in 2005. The younger and immigrant populations could not afford urban living on the salaries they were being given. Although the level of abject poverty was relatively low, the distribution of wealth was extremely unequal—in 2006, the ten percent of Iranians with the highest incomes represented 45 percent of the total consumption. This meant that 10 percent of the population controls 76 percent of Iran’s total resources.<sup>140</sup>

The lack of economic opportunities led to major “brain drain”—between 150,000 and 200,000 Iranians left the country each year in 2005, one of the highest rates in the world accordingly to the IMF.<sup>141</sup> Iranian economist Fariborz Raisdana said in 2005, “We cannot offer them [the youth] opportunities in the fields of politics, economics, or science. So they simply move on.”<sup>142</sup> Those young Iranians who don’t leave the country, had a very limited chance of acquiring a job that carried a salary ample enough to support themselves, not to mention their families. One student commented in June 2005, “It really doesn’t matter what your graduation grade is, it makes no difference what contacts you have. You just cannot find a decent job.”<sup>143</sup>

By late 2008, inflation rates soared above 30 percent and unemployment remained in the double digits. Public frustration, especially amongst the disillusioned youth, was at an all time high. Ahmadinejad tried to appease the population by declaring that even if oil prices dropped to 5 dollars a barrel, Iran’s economy would remain stable—a completely illogical assertion. As the 2009 presidential elections approached, the economy became the dominant issue in the campaign again.

Just weeks before the election, unemployment hovered around 17 percent and there were no improvements in the level of inflation. In the nationally televised debates, Ahmadinejad

continued to insist that the Iranian economy was secure and strong—he held up several graphs demonstrating how the Iranian economy was prospering as a recession hit the rest of the Western world. The other presidential candidate in one particular debate, Mehdi Karrubi, angrily replied to Ahmadinejad’s comments, “Do you think I came from the desert, and that I don’t know anything about figures?”<sup>144</sup> He went on to criticize Ahmadinejad’s economic policies over the past few years and accused him of fabricating the figures he had just shown to the Iranian people. Ahmadinejad’s outlandish observations about the Iranian economy infuriated a large majority of the population, who was struggling to find a well paid job. His comments further solidified reform support and incited more of the public to vote for Mousavi on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Supporters of reform in Iran could no longer stomach Ahmadinejad’s economic ineptitudes—policies that consistently inflicted hardships on the Iranian people. Therefore, when Ahmadinejad was named the winner, hundreds of thousands of protestors rushed the streets to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the government for its continual mismanagement of the Iranian economy. When protestors held up signs that read “Where is my vote?”, they were demanding the Islamic regime be accountable, for the alleged election fraud and for the myriad of economic blunders committed during the presidency of Ahmadinejad.

## 5.0 THE THIRD VARIABLE—STRENGTH OF THE OPPOSITION

### 5.1 1979

The most important factor that led to the success of the 1979 Islamic Revolution was the participation of a massive popular base that represented a significant cross section of Iran's social, economic, and political strata. For instance, on September 4, 1978, the Iranian religious holiday of *Aid-Fetr* demonstrations took place in every major city. Upwards of 100,000 people protested in Shahyad Square in Tehran. But the most astonishing aspect of the protests was not the number of people, but the diversity of social classes. One foreign journalist from Time Magazine commented, "the vast crowd contained incongruous elements: dissident students in jeans, traditional women in chadors, workers in overalls, merchants in suits, and most conspicuous of all, bearded mullas in black robes."<sup>145</sup> Three days later the protesting crowd grew to more than half a million. Finally, by December 11, 1978, approximately one-fifth of the entire Iranian population, 8 million people, demonstrated against the Shah in one day.<sup>146</sup> How did the opposition to the Shah engender such mass participation from all aspects of Iranian society? The movement had three crucial characteristics that galvanized the population and subsequently led to its success—effective opposition organizations, capable leadership, and a unifying goal.

### **5.1.1 Opposition Organizations**

One of the most prominent reasons the Shah and his military could not suppress the Islamic Revolution was because the opposition was formidable, diverse, and effective. The 25 years of repression under the Shah created opposition organizations from all levels of society. Three types of organized opposition—political parties, radical guerrilla organizations, and clerical groups—dominated the revolutionary movement and represented all social and political strata of Iranian society.

#### **5.1.1.1 Political Parties**

Despite harsh government controls, a myriad of political parties continued to flourish under the Shah. The most prominent and influential were the National Front, the Liberation Movement, and the Tudeh (Communist) Party. The National Front, which was founded by former Prime Minister Mossadegh, was severely repressed after the 1953 coup. However, it resurfaced in the midst of the 1963 uprisings and officially reemerged in December 1977 in staunch opposition to the Shah. Karim Sanjabi, the party's new leader, announced the basic principles of the organization included, "independence from all chains of imperialism, personal and social freedoms, and an independent foreign policy."<sup>147</sup> Even though the party had been politically inactive for some time, it engaged sympathizers from its former base—the middle class and the intellectual community—by organizing rallies, publishing oppositional newspapers, and inciting demonstrations on university campuses. Most importantly, in the fall of 1978 the National Front created a wave of anti-shah momentum when they refused to cooperate with the government on reforms and instead publicly allied with Khomeini. This political alliance brought many middle

class members and secular intellectuals into the opposition movement and solidified their opposition to the Shah.

Another prominent party, the Tudeh, rapidly declined after the 1953 coup, mostly due to the regime's concentrated efforts to destroy the organization. Immediately after the overthrow of Mossadegh, 40 Tudeh advocates were executed, 200 received life in prison sentences, and 14 were killed during torture; comparatively, only 1 National Front activist was executed and the others had been given short prison sentences. The Tudeh's influence continued to decline in the next two decades, but by the early 1970s the party had regained its influence and even began to attract new, young members with the help of its headquarters abroad. Still illegal in Iran, the Tudeh had around 50 full time party workers in exile—the group organized rallies, created a radio station, and also established an anti-Shah organization called the Confederation of Iranian Students in Europe. Most importantly the party published two papers—*Mardom*(People), a regular newspaper, and *Donya* (World), a journal focused on political and social theory—that were distributed abroad and clandestinely inside Iran.<sup>148</sup> Additionally, the Tudeh had around 5,000 members in Iran located in underground cells in universities, industrial centers, and oil regions across Iran. The Tudeh, along with these activists, were able to organize an annual strike on national student day, December 7<sup>th</sup>, to commemorate the three students (two of which were members of the Tudeh Party) that were killed during protests in 1953. The event became a significant symbol of the opposition and brought hundreds of thousands of Iranians together in 1978 to protest the Shah's rule.

The final party, the Liberation Movement, had the most influence in the making of the Islamic Revolution because of its close ties with Khomeini. The party was officially banned in 1963, but continued to hold meetings in secret in Iran and created a wide base in North America

and France. Overseas the party recruited thousands of members and effectively helped Khomeini present himself as an appealing and moderate cleric to the Western press. Inside Iran, the Liberation Movement faced harsh oppression, but used its hardships to show the international community Iran's blatant violation of human rights. The party proudly declared, "We are Muslims, Iranians and constitutionalists: Muslims because we refuse to divorce our principles from our politics; Iranians because we respect our national heritage; and constitutionalists because we demand freedom of thought, expression, and association."<sup>149</sup> The party's main source of mobilization was the mosque; they encouraged the religious to join the cause against the Shah. Mehdi Bazargan, the party's leader, was even more knowledgeable than some of the clerics on Shia Islamic Law and he used this skill to engage the masses; he incited traditional Iranians to protest against the Shah and be loyal to Khomeini. Consequently, after the Shah was overthrown, Liberation Movement members received the leading positions in the first provisional government headed by Mehdi Bazargan.

Without these political parties a large portion of the Iranian population, especially the middle class and secular intellectuals, would not have been mobilized. Even Khomeini noted the significance of official political parties becoming heavily involved in the opposition. In September 1977 he praised them and wrote to the alumna, "Today in Iran, a break is in sight; take advantage of this opportunity...Today, the writers of political parties criticize and voice their opposition; they write letters to the Shah and to the ruling class and sign those letter. You, too, should write the same."<sup>150</sup> The presence of political parties is a compelling causal factor in the development of the Islamic Revolution.

### 5.1.1.2 Radical Guerrilla Organizations

There were about a dozen guerrilla organizations operating in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s, but the two organizations that had the largest impact on the revolution were the Fadiman and the Mujahidin. Both attracted young students and intellectuals and the organizations never had a lack of enthusiastic supporters—their “apocalyptic overtones and powerful utopian tendencies” were appealing to impatient minds. Their tactics were extremely effective, shaming the regime the claimed to be the most stable and powerful in the Middle East—the Fadiman and the Mujahidin had a substantial role in the overthrow of the Shah.<sup>151</sup>

The Fadiman was established in 1971 as the combination of two separate Marxist organizations. Similar to the Tide, the organization followed a Marxist-Leninist ideology, but emphasized guerrilla warfare. Secular students and intellectuals frustrated with their political parties were attracted to the organization and inspired by the effective use of guerrilla tactics in Cuba, China, Vietnam, and part of Latin America. Despite the Shah’s campaign to eliminate the organization, the Fadiman expanded quickly. It published and distributed a myriad of underground papers, actively recruited members, established hundreds of safe houses in Iran’s major cities, and even executed several armed military operations against the monarchy. The strength of the Fadiman was that its members were all well trained, extremely dedicated, and armed—they were willing to do anything to abolish the monarchy.

The other guerrilla organization, the Mujahidin, was established in 1965 by disillusioned members of the Liberation Movement and made armed struggle their main approach to destroy the Shah’s regime. The organization professed, “It was the duty of all Muslims to continue this struggle to create a classless society and destroy all forms capitalism, despotism, imperialism and conservative clericalism.”<sup>152</sup> They viewed Islam as the mechanism to engender the masses



against the Shah and recruited members of the urban poor to take up arms. The Mojahedin committed 6 bank robberies, bombed several foreign businesses, and assassinated prominent members of the regime, including Tehran's police chief.<sup>153</sup> Although the group was heavily persecuted and had internal division, when the revolutionary upsurge started in 1977 it had a vast network of trained members with readily available weapons and the desire to fight the regime. In fact, during the violent confrontations that took place during February 9-11, 1979, it was the Mojahedin and the Fadaiyan who forced the collapse of the Shah's army and completed the official victory of the revolution. Therefore, the contribution of the guerrilla organizations in the revolution was truly indispensable.

### **5.1.1.3 Clerical Groups**

The relationship between the clergy and the state began to decline in the early 1960s when the Shah introduced land reform—something most religious leaders opposed because it would diminish the property owned by mosques and individual clerics. Many religious leaders also found the Shah's modernization policies to be morally reprehensible and incompatible with Islamic Law. However, it is essential to note that the Iranian clergy were not a uniform social class—during the time of the revolution up until present day, the clergy ardently disagree on principles of Islamic Law and how (or even if) these should be applied to the state. But the Shah's repression of religion, rapid modernization policies, and land reform proposals acted as a unifier for the different elements of the clergy. Still, scholars divide the clerical opponents into three distinct groups: the apolitical ulama, the moderate clerical opposition, and the militant clerical opposition.

The apolitical ulama, estimated to be the largest group, believed that clergy should focus strictly on spiritual matters and stay completely out of politics. They were eventually forced to

take a political stance against the Shah in the late 1970s when religious establishment began being attacked by the regime. The moderate clerical opposition opposed the regime's policies, but did not call for its overthrow. They promoted compromise with the Shah and supported the reemergence of a true constitutional monarchy. The moderate clerics, like the apolitical ones, could not stay neutral after the Shah's assault on the Iranian religious community. Finally, the militant clerical opposition, spearheaded by Khomeini, promoted a complete removal of the monarchy and more importantly, the formation of an Islamic state. Their political theory and principles stem directly from Khomeini work *Vela at e Faith: Hukomat e Islami* (The Jurist Trusteeship: Islamic Government), which maintains sovereignty comes only from God. The militant clerical group also constantly criticized the former two clerical groups for being politically inactive, accepting of secularization, and acting as "imperialists."<sup>154</sup> Despite their differences, the clerical opposition groups unified in support of Khomeini during the final days of the revolution.

The religious leadership, which numbered well over 90,000, used Iran's mosques to educate and mobilize the Iranian people against the Shah. This process began after the uprisings in 1963, but rapidly increased in the mid to late 1970s. The mosque acted as the revolutionary headquarters—it was a safe space that the Shah could not shut down and provided a constant source of human and financial resources. In the mosque, religious leaders gave anti-Shah speeches, opposition forces organized strikes and rallies, citizens produced opposition material, and Iranians were recruited for mass demonstrations. By 1978, mosques were receiving enormous amounts of funding from bazaar merchants and the religious upper class that was used to develop and finance the revolution. Islamic *komitehs* (committees) responsible for gathering supporters and promoting the Islamic revolutionary message were established in every

neighborhood in Tehran. The Islamic network set off the first Qum protests and organized the *Ramazan* and *Muharram* demonstrations, where over 8 million Iranians gathered to protest against the Shah in 1978. As Zahedi puts it, “the *mullahs* could virtually command the people...clearly the religious establishment served as the most formidable mobilization force in the country.”<sup>155</sup> Without the participation of the Islamic network—which includes all three of the clerical opposition groups—the Islamic Revolution would not have been successful.

In conclusion, without these political parties, clerical groups, and guerrilla organizations the Islamic Revolution would not have occurred. According to Professor John Foran, out of this diverse opposition came,

“...the ideas that would mobilize millions of Iranians in 1977-1979: nationalism, democracy, socialism, Islamic fundamentalism, radicalism, and liberalism all appealed in sometime complex and overlapping fashion to the various constituencies—young *ulama*, merchants, students, artisans, intellectuals, urban marginals—that would loosely coalesce into an urban populist social movement. Without these orientations it is hard to see the shape that a revolutionary movement could have taken; their presence then is a significant causal factor in the making of the revolution.”<sup>156</sup>

### **5.1.2 The Charismatic Leader—Khomeini**

Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini was born in 1902 to a family of landowners, traders, and minor clerics. After the death of his father, he was raised by his mother’s family, most of whom were religious clerics. Khomeini studied in various religious institutions in Qom, Esfahan, and Arak and eventually became a teacher of Islam Law in Qom. He published his first political work in

1943, *Kashf al Asrar (Secrets Unveiled)*, which advocated the establishment of an Islamic government; however, he did not become active and well known in Iranian political until 1963. Khomeini began to criticize the government in late 1962; he condemned the Shah's land reform program and denounced the regime for its corruption, violation of the constitution, undermining of the nation's Islamic principles, manipulation of the election system, oppression of the poor, and censorship of the media. Khomeini's outspoken defamation of the regime led to the three days of protests in June 1961, during which thousands died or were injured in major cities all over the country. In the months after the violent demonstrations, Khomeini was repeatedly arrested and finally exiled by the Shah.

Even in exile, Khomeini constantly communicated with his supporters in Iran via written and recorded sermons, speeches, and declarations. For the first six years of his exile, he focused on teaching Islamic jurisprudence and preparing academic works. But in early 1970, Khomeini shocked the clergy and the rest of the Iranian public with a series of 17 lectures condemning the apolitical and moderate *ulama* and officially denouncing the monarchy as an institution. These lectures eventually became entitled *Velayat e Faqih: Hukomati e Islami* (The Jurist's Trusteeship: Islamic Government). In the lectures, Khomeini adamantly asserted that compromise would not be successful with the Shah—Shi'ism and the institution of the monarchy would never be compatible. Khomeini's declaration made him the first religious leader to demand the overthrow of the Shah. Consequently, the release of these lectures automatically placed Khomeini in the forefront of the anti-Shah movement—it buttressed his position as the most outspoken member of the opposition and also gave religious legitimacy to dissent against the Pahlavi monarchy. Throughout the 1970s, Khomeini continued to activate a religious

political culture of opposition and began to develop his plan for the implementation of an Islamic state.

Khomeini first targeted the lower and working class Iranians and encouraged them to join the opposition movement. He described Iranian society as made up of just two opposing classes: the oppressed (*mostazafin*) and the oppressors (*mostakberin*) and vowed to eliminate these strata from the system. Furthermore, he promised to create an Islamic utopia free of worldly injustice, corruption, inequality, political repression, and crime. He professed, “The Islamic Revolution will do more than liberate us from oppression and imperialism. It will create a new type of human being.”<sup>157</sup> Khomeini also related to the public by addressing them as “the aware, the dear and courageous nation”, “the oppressed of Iran”, “the Iranian Muslim people”, and “children of the revolution”—evoking intense nationalistic sentiments. Khomeini commented on his own appeal to Iranians, “The symbol of the struggle is the one who talks with the people...That’s why the Iranian people consider me a symbol. I talk their language. I listen to their needs. I cry for them.”<sup>158</sup> His disciples reiterated this image by portraying him as an ideal “man of the people”, who lived simply, just like the rest of the Iranian people.

Khomeini’s tremendous charismatic and popular allure, combined with his simple living style and religious legitimacy, enabled him to act as a unifier for the opposition movement. Using populist rhetoric to engage the masses, he convinced Iranians the only way to stop the regime’s repression was by overthrowing the monarchy. Moreover, Khomeini realized that to do this, the opposition needed to be undivided. Therefore, he specifically propagated a “unity of purpose”, never committing himself to a specific policy or program or affiliating with a certain political party. In fact, during the revolution he never even publicized his philosophy of *velayat e faqih*; even some of his closest followers were ignorant of its true, political implications.

By October 1978, Khomeini was forced to leave Iraq and eventually settled in France after several Arab countries denied him entrance. Khomeini's expulsion from Iraq triggered three days of protests—government ministries, hospital employees, postal service workers, taxi drivers, railroad employees, and Iran Air all went on strike to support Khomeini. In the meantime Khomeini was issuing a constant flow of interviews, declarations, and sermons—by the beginning of 1979 he was making daily declarations and giving press interviews whenever possible. His followers used the mosque networks to recruit and mobilize new opponents, most of which were lower class bazaaris who were drawn to Khomeini's magnetism and his ability to articulate his message in simple terms.<sup>159</sup> Finally, at the end of January in 1979 Khomeini completed his goal of unifying the opposition—both the Tudeh and the National Front openly announced their support for Khomeini and vehemently called for the overthrow of the Shah.

Violent demonstrations continued and the regime used brutal means to repress the opposition; however, the revolutionary movement could not be stopped. The Shah and his family left Iran on January 16<sup>th</sup> and hundreds of thousands immediately cried out for the return of Khomeini. In late January over 30 people were killed protesting the closing of the Tehran airport to prevent Khomeini's arrival back to Iran. Then, on February 1<sup>st</sup> approximately 3 to 4 million Iranians (possibly the largest human gathering to date) lined the street of Tehran all the way to the airport to celebrate Khomeini's return. Without a charismatic leader to unify the Iranian opposition and the public, the revolution would not have materialized. Ervand Abrahamian, one of the foremost scholars of Iran, emphasizes the importance of Khomeini's role in the development of the Islamic Revolution. He says, "Without Khomeinism there would have been no revolution—at least, not the Islamic Revolution."<sup>160</sup>

### 5.1.3 Unifying Goal

During the revolution there was a diverse array of political ideologies—including liberal democrats, Islamic leftists, Marxist and socialist guerrilla groups, secular constitutionalists, and many more. Although each opposition group had its own distinct credos, they also had a unifying goal—to put a stop to the political, economic, and social repression imposed by the Shah. By 1978, it was clear structural government changes would not improve conditions—the removal of the Shah was necessary. Therefore the cooperation between opposition groups began as a reaction to regime oppression—the government’s actions were the primary mobilizing force of the revolutionary movement; they affected every political and economic strata of Iranian society.

The best example of this “unifying effect” is the case of the Iranian liberal opposition, who originally vehemently opposed revolution. The liberals were the party with the most access and representation in the regime compared to other opponents—but in the 1970s they failed to make any real changes. In 1978, the liberal movement realized the opposition was much larger than they had anticipated and were surprised with the amount of participation Khomeini and his followers attained. In the next months, the liberals joined the revolutionary movement, not because their ideology changed, but because they felt it was too strong to counter. In fact, one prominent liberal activist accused Khomeini in November 1978 of “irresponsibility and acting like a false god” but also commented he or his fellow oppositionists would never criticize Khomeini publicly.<sup>161</sup>

This unity of purpose was also felt among everyday citizens who participated in the revolution. They were personally affected by the Shah’s oppressive policies and were committed

to doing anything to stop him. For instance, acts of repression that affected individuals created intense revolutionary zeal. One anthropologist observed,

“People felt this emotion and gained this attitude through hearing about or participating in events in which government forces treated people with violence and injustice...Villagers reported to me their fury, horror, and frustration upon hearing such events, as well as their resolve that they would never rest until the Shah and the government that did such things to their fellow Iranians no longer existed.”<sup>162</sup>

These sentiments brought Iranians together, despite their class, professional, or even gender. As one participant in the 1978 protests put it, “It was not an individual decision. Everyone was of a piece. When everyone is of a piece, one person cannot stay separate.”<sup>163</sup> Without this unity, the cooperation between Iranian of different classes and political groups, the Shah would not have been overthrown in 1979.

## 5.2 2009

The Green Movement produced the most extensive protests since the Iranian Revolution of 1979—at its height almost 3 million demonstrators turned out on the streets of Tehran. With so much support, why did no political change occur? The Green Movement had three essential weaknesses that led to its stagnation—its lack of effective political organizations, lack of cohesive leadership, and the absence of a unified platform for change.



### 5.2.1 Lack of Political Organizations

After the Islamic regime consolidated power in the early 1980s, almost all political parties in opposition to the government were officially banned or harshly oppressed and persecuted. The only political views that were officially represented were Islamic ones—factions of the government were split into leftists, conservatives, ultra conservatives, reformists, and other various Islamic ideologies. But no one Islamic political faction ever dominated the system—and this was no coincidence. In fact, it was a calculated political strategy employed by Khomeini to assure that the structure of the Islamic Republic would remain just as he created it. Khomeini intentionally vacillated his views on major political issues to secure the regime’s stability. As one Member of Parliament commented after Khomeini’s death,

“In all stages and through different means the Imam tried to keep the wings [factions] in balance and use the executive, ideological, populist or political power and efficacy of each wing for the benefit of the state. He tried to preserve this balance in order to keep one wing from becoming too powerful, and every time he felt that one was aiming to monopolize power he would put his weight behind others to keep the [balance of] power intact.”<sup>164</sup>

Khomeini’s strategy was extremely effective and still permeates Iranian politics today. Even progressive factions within the regime have no real power to make significant changes. Many powerful politicians like Ayatollahs Montazeri and Rafsanjani vehemently disagreed with the government’s response to the 2009 protests, but could do nothing to foster the impact of the Green Movement on the regime.

Although all of the political parties that were active during the 1979 revolution still existed in 2009, they were either operating in exile or in clandestine, underground organizations

within Iran. Therefore, the Green Movement had no effective way to mobilize resources or opponents to the government, at least inside Iran—it had no hierarchical structure. Without a pre-existing network of opposition supporters to call to action, the Green Movement had to rely on social networking sites to galvanize followers. This tactic worked until the Iranian government slowed the internet speed of all computers nationwide and completely denied access to sites like Facebook and Twitter. Another problem that stems from lack of political parties is that diverse strata of society are not represented. For instance, in the 1979 Revolution, oil workers and other laborers played a huge role by striking—their actions were the breaking point of the Shah’s regime. In 2009, however, workers had no political or social representation. The Green Movement could not reach out to a class of Iranians that could have helped them tremendously in its opposition to the regime.

Furthermore, without political organizations, there was no unifying ideology or credo that brought the protestors together. The opposition “came together as a *movement*, a politically minded collection of individuals united around a conspiracy theory, rather than a *party* united by a political theory”. The lack of cogent political parties severely hindered the Green Movement, but the lack of cohesive leadership was an even larger weakness of the movement.

### **5.2.2 Absence of Leadership**

The Green Movement received its name from a green sash that reform leader Mohammad Khatami gave to presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi in 2009. During the last weeks of the presidential campaign, Mousavi drew enthusiastic crowds of hundreds of thousands and created a vast community of supporters. He became a symbol of hope and reform to many Iranians who thought his election could bring change to the Iranian system. But when

Ahmadinejad claimed the election, Mousavi spoke out against the regime and encouraged his supporters to demonstrate their frustrations through nonviolent protests. Thousands of demonstrators glorified Mousavi, yelling "Ya Hossein, Mir Hossein" and continually looked to him for guidance and direction—Iranians viewed him as the most prominent symbol of the Green Movement. Despite Mousavi's image as the founder and head of the Green movement, there was no centralized, charismatic leadership during the protests of 2009. Iranian political activist Ali Afshari reiterated this perspective when he commented that Mousavi, "Grew into his role as the face of the opposition, but even he admits that he was an 'accidental leader' who was not guiding the protest movement."<sup>165</sup>

At first, Mousavi seemed to enthusiastically accept the role as the leader of the movement and came out fervently against the government. On his website, he said,

"I'm warning that I won't surrender to this manipulation. The outcome of what we've seen from the performance of the officials...is nothing but shaking the pillars of the Islamic Republic of Iran's sacred system of governance with lies and dictatorship."<sup>166</sup>

And Mousavi backed these statements with action—on the third day of protests after the election, Mousavi appeared dressed in all green to a rally in Freedom Square, Tehran. He stood on top of a car, with thousands of people around him and encouraged the people to take back their rights; he yelled, "The vote of the people is more important than Mousavi or any other person!"<sup>167</sup> The day after Ayatollah Khamenei announced unrest would not be tolerated, June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Mousavi and most of his campaign leaders were officially put on house arrest. But Mousavi comforted the followers of the Green Movement, saying, "Rest assured that I will always be at your side."<sup>168</sup> He continued to release statements and encourage the protestors, but

the government shut down all of his networking sites and was closely monitoring his home. With this type of security, it was extremely difficult for him to communicate with members of the movement.

Mousavi's gradual decline as the leader of the Green Movement coincided with his house arrest and the increase of revolutionary rhetoric in his approach. He began to describe important protests as "showing the roots of the revolutionary spirit" and emphasized that reforms should work with the original Islamic constitution. He also refused to publicly criticize Khamenei and refused to establish a position on the *velayat e faqih*. Mousavi's conciliatory actions toward the regime worried more progressive and youthful members of the Green Movement that maybe he no longer symbolized the movement's views. Additionally, Mousavi began to stress the role of Iranians as the true leaders of the movement. Comments like, "you the Iranian nation, continue your nationwide protest in a peaceful and legal way" and "it is the people who are the leaders" forced followers to realize that Mousavi was unwilling to become the central leader of the Green Movement.<sup>169</sup> Ironically, during this period, the Green Movement's greatest unifying force became its opposition—President Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Khamenei. Their hostile words and actions provided the opposition with a common cause and the strength that came with millions of supporters. Mousavi continued to be the symbol of the Green movement, despite his inability to appear publicly. However, one of the primary reasons the movement stagnated in the fall of 2009 was because of its lack of charismatic, centralized leadership.

### **5.2.3 No Unified Platform**

Another weakness of the Green Movement was its lack of a cogent and unified platform for change. The movement began as a reaction to the alleged election fraud, but spread to encompass

aspirations for a more democratic and free Iran. Therefore, some of its members simply wanted a new election, while others called for the resignation of the Islamic regime altogether. Various leaders of the movement called for different demands, but there were no official ideological or practical goals the movement followed. Therefore, it was extremely hard for the movement to attract new supporters and maintain current members without a clearly defined objective. Reform leaders both inside and outside Iran recognized this problem, and began to address it in the beginning of 2010.

On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, Abdolkarim Soroush, Islamic scholar and reform movement leader, published a manifesto of the Green Movement's demands. Soroush, who was in exile in the United States insisted, "if there is going to be another movement, it has to have a theory. People should know what they want, not just what they don't want. So we are trying—in a modest way—to put forward a theory for this movement."<sup>170</sup> Coordinating with some of the leaders of the Green Movement like Mousavi, Karroubi, and Khatami, Soroush created the manifesto that calls for an independent judiciary, government recognition of student and women's groups, freedom of the press, and many other democratic freedoms. Although the manifest was a positive step for the movement, it was drafted outside of Iran and was very difficult to spread among the Green Movement in Iran. Therefore, in June 2010, Mousavi proposed his own precise platform, calling it "the new covenant."<sup>171</sup> It insisted the government's legitimacy be based on the will of the people and proclaimed the Green Movement demanded a rule of law be enforced. It went on to discuss the role of the state and foreign policy as well. Despite these efforts, this platform has not changed the organization of the Green Movement—none of the above reforms have even been initiated, much less accomplished and followers of the movement still have no clear goals to support. Without effective political organizations, strong leadership, and a cogent platform,

the Green Movement had a difficult time attracting followers from all classes in Iranian society—and this was the most important factor contributing to the success of the 1979 Revolution.

## **6.0 THE FOURTH VARIABLE—GOVERNMENT TACTICS USED AGAINST THE OPPOSITION**

### **6.1 1979**

#### **6.1.1 SAVAK**

SAVAK, the Iranian acronym for the National Intelligence and Security Organization (Sazeman-e Ettla'at Va Amniyat-e Keshvar), was established in 1957 with the help of the CIA and MOSSAD and acted as the Shah's primary mechanism to combat political opposition. At its height the organization had over half a million members and had virtually unlimited power—SAVAK was viewed by the Iranian people as omnipotent and omnipresent throughout the country. Although SAVAK used harsh interrogation and torture methods on political opponents, it was most effective because of the fierce reputation that the regime created and perpetuated for SAVAK to instill fear in the Iranian public.

SAVAK's influence was not restricted to security—it controlled all labor and teacher unions in Iran, implemented the censorship of press, books, and films, and even infiltrated prominent political opposition groups. For instance, in the 1950s, SAVAK spent most of its energy finding and destroying underground Tudeh cells. In 1954, sixty active members were discovered and most were imprisoned, tortured, or executed. In the mid 1960s, the guerrilla

group Fadaiyan became the primary target—the campaign lasted for years and ended in the killing of over 106 of Fadaiyan’s leaders.<sup>172</sup> Then, beginning in the 1970s, SAVAK took full control over the Ministries of Information, Culture and Art, Science and Higher Education, and the National Iranian Radio and Television Organization.

With SAVAK’s extensive control of both political and social institutions and repression used throughout Iranian society, how did the revolutionary opposition result in an overthrow of the Shah? Why was the state unable to protect the monarchy? There are numerous explanations, but the most rational blames two specific weaknesses of the Pahlavi state—over centralization and inconsistent responses to the opposition protests.

The Shah considered the Iranian military, SAVAK and the army in particular, his “chief pillars of support”—the relationship between the crown and the military was closely intertwined throughout his reign. Different branches of the military had overlapping responsibilities, rivalries, and no lateral communication with each other to prevent the possibility of political rivals or a military coup replacing the Shah. SAVAK also operated under the personal command of the monarch. This system was extremely effective, but had one condition—in order to be successful it depended solely on a fully functioning Shah.<sup>173</sup> The power over the military was controlled completely by the Shah himself—this resulted in the over centralization of the Pahlavi state.

### **6.1.2 Failure of the Military State**

But by 1978 this approach was impossible to maintain because the Shah had not only lost control of the state, but was also sick with cancer. Without orders coming directly from the Shah, the military struggled to keep together. Finally, when the Shah left the country in mid January 1979,



much of the military lost the desire to serve. For instance, the army was isolated and became easily demoralized at attacking peaceful crowds whose ideology was motivated by Islam. By the end of January 1979, it was estimated there were almost 1,000 defections a day—conscripts had no reason or will to fight.<sup>174</sup> Without the Shah present, the military could not effectively defend the regime from the revolutionary opposition.

The second, and most important, factor that contributed to the fall of the Shah's regime was his vacillating policies against the opposition—he constantly wavered between concession and repression. Most of the time, the regime employed brutal tactics to suppress the opposition. For example, in an effort to stop *Muharram* protests in 1978, SAVAK created its own Underground Committee of Revenge—an organization that threatened intellectuals, kidnapped prominent opposition activists, and even bombed a handful of political offices. Members also dressed in civilian clothes to infiltrate the opposition. In one instance, SAVAK killed over 30 people who were celebrating a religious holiday in the garden of a National Front politician. Moreover, police forces broke up protests using batons and other weapons, often severely injuring whoever was in their way—man, woman, or child.<sup>175</sup> The military also held oil and other industry workers who were on strike at gunpoint and forced them to return to their posts or face death.

However, once in a while the Shah would impose “liberation” policies where he allowed the opposition to gather and lifted political restrictions. For example, during one of the final protests in 1978, the regime compromised with the opposition to allow a peaceful protest where no violence would be used. Additionally, between January and August 1978, SAVAK's harsh director was replaced by a more “liberal” General and numerous high ranking SAVAK

officials were demoted. The constant oscillation only aided the opposition movement. Professor Kurzman describes the consequences of these policies,

“The combination of concession and repression is said to have encouraged protestors while providing them with new reasons to protest. Because of this vacillation...the Iranian revolution grew from a small and sporadic movement into a massive and continuous upheaval. The implication is that a more one sided policy—either reform or crackdown—would have been more effective in stifling protests.”<sup>176</sup>

The founders of the Islamic Revolution took this lesson in stride—from the beginning of its rule, the government never allowed the development of political opposition.

## 6.2 2009

After the overthrow of the monarchy, the Islamic Republic created the *Ebrat* Museum (meaning “example” or lesson”), which documented the torture of revolutionaries—the new government wanted to ensure that the Shah’s brutal tactics against the opposition were not forgotten. However, the Islamic Republic created new methods to eliminate dissent. Historians today discovered the Islamic regime’s tactics were more savage than the Shah’s. For example, Professor Abrahamian recounts,

“Whereas less than 100 political prisoners had been executed between 1971 and 1979, more than 7,900 were executed between 1981 and 1985...in the prison literature of the Pahlavi era, the recurring words had been ‘boredom’ and

‘monotony’. In that of the Islamic Republic, they were ‘fear’, ‘death’, ‘terror’, ‘horror’ and most frequent of all, ‘nightmare.’<sup>177</sup>

The two military organizations that enforced these harsh attacks against opponents, both immediately after the revolution and in 2009, were the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij Resistance Force.

### **6.2.1 The Revolutionary Guard and the Basij Resistance Force**

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was established in 1979 to eliminate all opposition to the new Islamic state and to enforce Khomeini’s vision of the guardianship of the jurist. The Guards surpassed the conventional military and now act as the leading internal and external security force for the nation. The IRGC is the protector of the regime’s principles and is responsible for the security and stability of the regime. It has its own exclusive land, air, and sea forces and would be most likely to operate a nuclear weapon, if the regime had the capability.<sup>178</sup>

But the IRGC power is not limited to control of the military forces—in 2009 it was estimated that the Guards controlled over 70 percent of Iran’s economy, ranging from medical clinics, factories, telecommunications companies, and construction firms. Additionally, in 2008 and 2009, it received at least 6 billion dollars from Iran’s budget.<sup>179</sup> The IRGC is also linked to hundreds of private companies that seem independent, but are actually headed by former IRGC members. Therefore, according to scholars like Cyrus Bina, since the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, the IRGC had inflicted a “para-militarization of the economy, polity, and social space in Iran.”<sup>180</sup>

The paramilitary organization operating under the IRGC, the Basij Resistance Force, was created in 1980 to provide the Islamic Republic with a “people’s militia”. The Basij have

branches in almost every city in Iran and aid with law enforcement, internal security, and moral policing. During the Iran- Iraq War the Basij saw an increase in volunteers, numbering over 100,000; however, by 2009 the IRGC Human Resources director reported there were 11.2 million members in the organization. Since the election of Ahmadinejad, a former member of the Basij, the organization had grown and became more involved in Iranian politics. The regime recruited the young and disillusioned, promoting the benefits of joining the organization and instilling the values of the revolution in its members. The branches of the organization include most mosques, government offices, public institutions and universities.<sup>181</sup> However, because the Basij received less formal training than the Revolutionary Guards, their approach to opposition could be brutal, even dangerous. This was the case when the Basij were ordered to suppress the Green Movement protests in the summer of 2009. Both the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij played a crucial role in suppressing the demonstrations that followed the election.

Months before the June elections, the Iranian government began to repress political opponents associated with the reform movement. In the spring of 2009, Amnesty International reported a drastic increase in “arbitrary arrests and harassment” in just one three month period. As the campaign progressed, the government realized the Green Movement was rapidly developing and it took preemptive measures to combat it. For instance, the Brigadier General of the Revolutionary Guard, Yadollah Javani said the use of the color green as a symbol of the reform movement was a “sure sign of the Velvet Revolution project”, but declared this type of movement “impossible in Iran.”<sup>182</sup> Again, on the night before the election, he warned, “Any move toward Velvet Revolution will be nipped in the bud...the opposition, through heavy propaganda and a media-created atmosphere intend to thrill their supporters by early announcement of their victory, so that they will claim election fraud in case of their rival’s

victory”. Javani’s statement demonstrated that the regime anticipated mass frustration and anger if Mousavi did not become president—and it was more than prepared to suppress it.<sup>183</sup>

Immediately after the election results were announced, hundreds of thousands of protestors swarmed the streets of Tehran. At first, the regime was slightly paralyzed by the seize of the demonstrations, but it quickly released more security forces—the Revolutionary Guards, Basij units, and forces known as *Lebas Shakshi* (regular clothed), who would blend into the crowd. The IRGC also used its weekly magazine, *Sobhesadegh*, to threaten to “destroy anyone who attempts to bring a velvet revolution”; a clear warning that Ahmadinejad’s government would not tolerate the reform movements.<sup>184</sup> But hundreds of thousands continued to protest and in the first week thousands were beaten, hundreds were imprisoned, and dozens were murdered by snipers. On June 18<sup>th</sup>, Supreme Leader Khamenei gave a Friday prayer sermon in which he endorsed Ahmadinejad’s victory and blamed “opposition leaders and agitators” as the source of violence on the streets. He also gave the Iranian people an ultimatum—if protestors took continued to rush the streets, the regime would do whatever it took to suppress the demonstrations.<sup>185</sup> But the Supreme Leader’s stern comments only encouraged more protestors to take to the streets in opposition.

The next three days, the weekend of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup>, were the bloodiest days of the summer demonstrations. The Revolutionary Guard and the Basij dispersed tear gas and fired directly into crowds of protestors while the *Lebas Shaksi* infiltrated the masses, beating and killing the opposition. They also followed demonstrators to their homes, breaking and entering to arrest or execute any opponents. The exact number of casualties is unknown; the government even prohibited hospitals from cataloging deaths that resulted from protests. Additionally, every day the Basij mobilized thousands of more volunteers to combat the opposition.

As a result, even Iranians yelling “Allah Akbar” from their rooftops were in danger—the Basij patrolled neighborhoods, marked the apartments or houses with loud noises and returned in the morning to detain its residents. Stories of thousands of opponents being detained, beaten, raped, and even killed in secret facilities all over the country, spread rapidly. But the most significant incident that illustrated the regime’s violent tactics was the killing of Neda Soltani—on June 20<sup>th</sup> the 26 year old student, who was not participating in the protests, was gunned down by a sniper on her way to a music lesson. Her death was filmed and was broadcasted worldwide—the gruesome killing became a unifying symbol of the uprising and the primary example of the Iranian regime’s onslaught against its own people. For the next six months, the regime continued to use these methods, including violence, to suppress the Green Movement.

But the strategies used to crush the opposition were not limited to military violence. Iran was one of the most technological savvy countries in the Middle East in 2009—the government Iranian government estimated there were 28 million internet users, more than 53 million cell phone users, and millions of households with satellite televisions in urban areas.<sup>186</sup> Iran also had somewhere between 60,000 and 110,000 active blogs that discussed issues ranging from politics to environmental issues to sports. Therefore, the government spent millions to block the use of technology during the demonstrations. Immediately after the election results were announced on June 12th, the state drastically decreased the internet speed to 56 KB. Additionally, all social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, were completely shut down. Internet surveillance was greatly increased and the regime used ISP addresses to monitor, track, and arrest any Green Movement activists. The regime also blocked Western satellite television channels and inhibited the sending of text messages. This approach, which one Revolutionary

Guard commander deemed “cyber jihad”, significantly impeded the Green Movement’s ability to organize and develop formidable opposition.<sup>187</sup>

Because the Islamic regime learned the lesson of the overthrow of the Shah, it did not waver between repression and concession in dealing with the 2009 Green Movement protests. As Brigadier General Javani of the IRGC stated, “...no one is impartial. There are two currents—those who defend and support the Revolution and the establishment and those who are trying to topple it.”<sup>188</sup> Many prominent clerics and politicians, such as Ayatollahs Rafsanjani, Montazeri, and Karroubi criticized this approach and rebuked the violent manner in which protestors were handled. Despite their vocal objections, nothing was done to stop the violence. Consequently, the military remained tightly united in support of the regime’s violent repressive tactics—one of the primary reasons the Green Movement was successfully suppressed.

Political Science Professor Dariush Zahedi described the Islamic regime’s effective strategy against opposition in *The Iranian Revolution: Then and Now* in 2000. However, his depiction of the regime’s tactics correctly portrays the method of oppression in 2009 as well. He explains:

“...In the post Khomeini era, Iran’s rulers have continued the pattern (set during Khomeini’s supervision of the Islamic system) of not allowing internal divisions to hamstring them in contending with external challenges to their collective rule...from 1990 to 1995 seven major spontaneous urban uprisings rocked Iran. The regime’s response to all disturbances, supported unanimously by all the competing factions and personalities, was consistently swift, overwhelming, and ruthless repression. In sharp contrast to the Shah, the Islamic system has not responded to disturbances with trepidation and half measures. Instead, it has

created and made effective use of special antiriot forces, which are adept at rapidly suppressing uprisings in order to prevent them from spreading.”<sup>189</sup>

Supreme Leader Khamenei reiterated this position in August 2009, when he said, "The enemies must know that the protests, which are caricature of the pre-revolutionary ones, cannot undermine the system". No matter how similar the Green Movement protests were to the 1979 revolution, the Islamic regime was determined to suppress the movement and was willing to do anything to protect the stability of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



## 7.0 CONCLUSION

In the weeks following the election of President Ahmadinejad in June 2009, Iranian voices yelling “Allah Akbar” and “Down to the Dictator” reverberated from the rooftops with revolutionary phrases that had not been used in almost thirty years. The opposition to the Islamic government, the Green Movement, was not simply the largest opposition movement since the Islamic Revolution, but it was mimicking the tactics used 30 years ago that had forced the overthrow of the Shah. This specific type of widespread civil disobedience, coupled with the mass demonstrations taking place on the street, signaled that the Iranian people were ready to challenge the government.

Not only were the Green Movement’s tactics similar to those used in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but the opposition also experienced some of the same conditions that fostered the overthrow of the Shah. For instance, the vast majority of Iranians were worse off in 2009, economically speaking, after 30 years of Islamic rule than they had been during the Shah’s era. Income inequality, high inflation, extensive government corruption, and unemployment had not been eliminated—oil revenue acted as the sole pillar of the Islamic regime’s economy and the people’s frustrations became palpable. Additionally, political repression and violence against the opposition became even more prominent in post revolutionary Iran. During the Shah’s reign, political life was restricted, but in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century political, social, and cultural restraints had inhibited everyday activities. Therefore, in 2009, just as in 1979 there were

legitimate political and economic grievances that had the potential to create a successful opposition movement. With these factors present, why did the existing regime prevail? Why did the Green Movement, which had up to 3 million protestors have no direct impact on the governing system? After comparing the Green Movement with the Islamic Revolution, the two most significant factors that impeded the 2009 opposition were the unwavering repressive strategies used by the Iranian military and the weakness of the opposition movement.

During the Islamic Revolution the opposition included a diverse array of social, economic, and political strata from Iranian society. Furthermore, the movement had a charismatic leader and a common goal that temporarily united all the opposition groups. The overthrow of the Shah occurred due to the strength of the opposition movement and the fact that the military was divided and was unable to use force to keep the regime in power. In 2009; however, every branch of the security apparatus—the Revolutionary Guard, the Basij, the regular army, and even volunteer *Lebas Shaksi* (plain clothed, undercover forces)—remained extremely loyal to the regime and its orders to use violence against dissenters. The Green Movement was also decentralized, had no cohesive leadership or platform, and had no means (once the internet was shut down) to reach the Iranian public—all characteristics that inhibited the movement from mobilizing resources and enacting tangible change.

Accordingly, the Green Movement was forced underground for most of 2010, developing through social media networks and private meetings. Although no more large protests occurred after February 11, 2010 the opposition still tormented the regime with smaller acts of defiance—writing anti-government slogans on Iranian money and buildings. But then, in January of 2011 the Green Movement reemerged in response to mass demonstrations taking place in Tunisia and Egypt. Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators took the streets just as they did in the summer of

2009 and were met with the same violent response. Demonstrations continued into late March, but the regime quickly suppressed the opposition—calling for the execution of Green Movement leaders, imprisoning members, and putting Mousavi and Karroubi under house arrest immediately. The regime feared that even a limited amount of reform, would develop into a demand for massive political change—and its fear was not unfounded—as the opposition, leaders of the Islamic Republic themselves benefited from the Shah’s periodic liberal reforms. The regime would not give the Green Movement or any reform organization the same opportunity the Shah gave the revolutionary opposition.

The Islamic Republic of Iran demonstrated in the summer of 2009 it was willing to do anything in its power to maintain political stability. Although the mass and violent oppression of its own people preserved the establishment temporarily, the regime lost two essential characteristics of governance—legitimacy and authority. Yes, opponents of the regime have been questioning these aspects of Islamic Republic since its inception, but the government actually alienated some of its own supporters—traditionally loyal clerics and politicians expressed extreme disappointment and anger with the government’s actions. The disagreements between governing factions specifically the clerical elites, has significantly weakened the regime’s power and has raised questions about its future stability.

Although the Green Movement has not accomplished any apparent political change, it has had a profound and long-lasting impact on the Iranian regime. There are millions of Iranians who support progressive reform, but they have no political representation. There is a vast desire for political, social, and cultural change—but it seems impossible to reach and organize Iranians willing to back liberal reform. Fear of government punishment inhibits political activism, but the

Green Movement can offer Iranians an outlet for information, discussion, and even action. The movement is engaging and creating a group of politically aware and active Iranian citizens.

Consequently, the Green Movement is true to its name—it is a movement, not a revolution. It has not been completely obliterated by the brutal tactics of the Iranian regime, but also has not transformed Iran in to the idyllic model of democracy overnight. Although many were disappointed with the lack of tangible results, the Green Movement is still developing and is actively organizing reform strategies. In fact, a slowly developed movement that can create a bona fide program for change has more long term potential than a short term insurrectionary movement that results in ineffective reforms. Also, comparatively, the primary cause of the Islamic Revolution was a reaction to the overwhelming pressures that had built up over decades of frustration. A handful of opposition attempts, like Mossadegh's liberalization attempts and the 1963 uprisings against the White Revolution, developed and were repressed by the Shah before any political change occurred. Over the more than 30 years since the Islamic Revolution, the scale and scope of social and political support for the regime has continued to drop, it is simply a matter of time before the pressure causes a transfer of power.

However, Iranians who lived through the Islamic Revolution have not forgotten about the 1979 outcome—the capture by the Islamic extremists of the political movement, which had originally been democratic in nature. Iranians who support democratic reforms are eager to rid themselves of an autocratic government, but they realize that true regime change takes time and are willing to wait for an opportunity to accomplish authentic governmental reforms. Furthermore, the leaders of the Iranian democratic movement, such as Ebrahim Yazdi, the founder of the secular Freedom Movement Party are confident regime change will occur eventually. For instance, in 1997 Yazdi said confidently, “Democracy will eventually win in

Iran. They [the regime] must recognize this fact”, and he still stands by that statement (Peterson). Even Islamic clerics recognized the impact the Green Movement had on the stability of the country. Shortly before his death in December 2009, the key revolutionary leader Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri made an unforgettable prediction about the Green Movement. He commented: “In the end the state will have no choice but to capitulate to the Green Movement.”<sup>190</sup> As the Green Movement continues to develop into a well organized social movement and the Islamic regime’s legitimacy perpetually declines, the government will have no choice but to yield to the reformists’ demands or face an uprising that they might not be able to suppress.

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