



## STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN IRAN<sup>(1)</sup>

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*The author suggests that the very changes brought about by the 20-year-old Islamic republic has so changed the country's people and structures as to undermine the rule of conservative forces. A new generation yearns for a free, more normal existence. The state's poor performance on a wide range of issues increases the pressure for major alterations in the country's governance. Revolutionary mobilization has given way to reformist mobilization. The author assesses the numerous strong points of the current regime but concludes that it can stop the pressure for change only, perhaps, by actions that would also bring its own destruction.*

By basing itself on mass-based popular support, the Iranian revolution changed the nature of state-society relations in Iran. Although the new political elite has tried to reduce the people's role as the majority turned against it, the major transformations made over the last 20 years are not so easily reversed. It is my contention that this historical experience along with current socioeconomic and political realities has brought Iran for the first time in its long history to the verge of inaugurating a viable democratic political system. The problem, of course, is crossing that threshold, a process that should take a very long time. Still, the next few years could see the emergence of a meaningful institutional democracy in Iran despite the continuing struggle and the power of a faction that opposes such a development.

The idea to establish an "Islamic Republic" after the 1978-1979 Revolution gathered immediate support among the revolutionaries and populace alike. The only short-lived debate was over whether to include the word "democratic" in the "Islamic Republic" to emphasize the democratic nature of the new state. This matter was soon resolved in a rather undemocratic fashion when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini decided the matter was closed to debate since Islam had already embraced democratic values in its core. At any rate, the popular image and belief that Islam is an all-encompassing panacea to all socioeconomic and political ills of society

was overwhelming and widespread. After all, how could Allah and his messengers be undemocratic?

The problem of course was not so much with the Will of Allah but with the quarrel among mortal followers over interpreting Allah's words and intentions as presented in the Koran; the tradition, *Sunnah*; and deeds and sayings, *Hadith*, of Prophet Muhammad and the *Shi'a* religious authorities, the *'Ulema*. While Iranians through a national referendum gave their support to the creation of the "Islamic Republic," they entrusted their faith with the 'ulema and religious intellectuals to work out the details, all without a serious and open national debate on what Islamic Republicanism would entail. The ideological foundation of the new state was thus from the beginning bound to create rifts both in the state leadership and in society.

Over twenty years later, in March 2001 Iranians gathered to celebrate, as they have for centuries, the beginning of Norouz, the ancient pre-Islamic tradition that marks the first day of spring and the beginning of the new year. Millions across the country put on their new clothes and visited relatives and elders to pay their respects and to renew friendships and acquaintances. This past year's celebration also marked Muhammad Khatami's first four years as president. President Khatami's plan for establishing a democratic Islamic Republic, however, in light of the crackdowns by conservative

elements in the government in recent months, seemed all but unraveled. The latest assault on reformists by conservatives<sup>(2)</sup> after their severe loss in the 6th *Majles* (Parliament) elections, started in summer 2000 and accelerated by March 2001. It included the closure of pro-reform publications, imprisonment of influential journalists, curtailing of the powers of the reformist-dominated *Majles*, and the arrest of 16 prominent Islamist-nationalist<sup>(3)</sup> personalities charged with "plotting against the regime," followed by the detention of some students activists under the same accusations.<sup>(4)</sup>

The Islamic revolution tribunal of Tehran on April 8, 2001, arrested 40 members of the Iran Freedom Movement (IFM) and personalities affiliated to the nationalist-religious current. The judiciary officially banned activities of the IFM and the nationalist-religious on the eve of Norouz when, in similar operation, 21 prominent personalities belonging to these movements were detained during a night raid on the house of Mr. Muhammad Basteh-Negar, an IFM activist.<sup>(5)</sup> In July 2001, Tehran's Revolutionary Court issued a warrant for the arrest of IFM Secretary-General Ebrahim Yazdi, who had failed to meet a court order issued in April to return to Iran by May 1. Dr. Yazdi has been residing in the US, undergoing cancer treatments.

Continuing with harassing their opponents, Iranian conservatives have also taken aim at the reformist-dominated *Majles* (parliament). Mrs. Haqiqatjoo, an outspoken MM (Member of the *Majles*) was detained in late March for six hours before being released on bail. She had already been summoned by a court on charges of inciting public opinion and insulting the judiciary after she openly criticized the judiciary over the arrest of Mrs. Fariba Davoudi-Mohajer, a journalist affiliated with the Islamist-nationalists. Mrs. Haqiqatjoo further had revealed that "Mr. Ali Afshari, a student leader who was sentenced to a five-year jail term for his participation at the now famous Berlin Conference of April 2000, has been made to confess under duress."<sup>(6)</sup> Mr. Ahmad Salamatian, an independent political analyst based in Paris, contends that "by extending the scope of its

prerogatives to the entire nation, the Tehran Islamic revolution tribunal has also replaced the Intelligence Ministry, the Interior Ministry, the security services, the Law enforcement Forces and above all the Supreme Council. It is acting as the army in times of martial law."<sup>(7)</sup>

In a March 20 Norouz address, President Khatami himself suggested that "opponents of reform are threatening the country's future: Those who do not understand the nation's genuine and historical demands for freedom, independence, and progress, those who sow the seeds of hatred and violence have chosen an ill-fated journey.... The Iranian nation will say no to them all."<sup>(8)</sup>

President Khatami's overwhelming victory in the May presidential elections was, however, the manifestation of continuing popular support for his campaign for the rule of law, civil society and democracy. President Khatami won 21,659,053 out of 28,160,405 votes cast in the elections, breaking his own record of the May 1997 presidential elections. Khatami scored 77 per cent of the votes, up from 70 per cent he got in the 1997 race. The huge turn out of some six million first-time voters was a major factor explaining the incumbent president's huge victory margin.<sup>(9)</sup>

Although at least one-third of the 42 million in the electorate did not take part in the exercise, against a mere 5 million in the previous elections, Khatami has become the first Iranian president to increase his votes from earlier elections, against both Ayatollah Ali Khameneh'i and Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani who got much less votes in winning a second term.<sup>(10)</sup> So, as Mr. Hamid Reza Jala'ipoor, publisher of several influential and mass circulation reformists dailies, all banned by the Islamic Judiciary, has commented: "If by voting for Khatami in the May 1997 elections, people wanted to reject the candidate of the conservatives and by the same token, express their opposition to the present theocracy, in [May 2000's presidential] elections, they showed great maturity by insisting on the continuation of reforms, notwithstanding the blows the conservatives dealt to the process."<sup>(11)</sup>

Despite popular support for Khatami's mandate, the conservatives have continued

their assault on the media and religious and nationalist reformists. A month after Khatami's victory, the Paris-based international press watchdog Reporters Sans Frontieres (Reporters Without Borders, RSF) warned that the situation of press freedom in Iran was "getting worse." RSF reported that 27 journalists were behind bars, with twenty-one of them in an unknown place. The organization also called on the Islamic republic Judiciary Head Ayatollah Mahmood Hashemi-Shahroodi to order the release of the detained journalists.(12)

The critics have argued that despite the recent presidential victory and two more "historic" successes in municipal and legislative elections, "Khatami's promises of reform has proven unrealized. Not only the defeated conservatives, led by the fundamentalist leader Ali Khameneh'i, continue to control all key positions, including the Judiciary, Radio and Television, the Armed Forces, Security services, but [they] have also dumped Mr. Khatami's reforms process all together."(13)

Iran has so far oscillated between democratic tendencies, autocratic control, and sporadic repression. But the question remains: What is in store for the future of democracy in Iran given the present power struggle among the state's political leadership and the enduring socioeconomic problems that have haunted Iran's population since the early days of the revolution? The skeptic might argue that the experiment to blend Islam with republicanism was doomed to failure from the beginning since Islam as a religion and as a way of life does not permit the separation of church and state. This argument is that the notion of an Islamic democracy is an oxymoron. So it has been observed: "The dichotomy that Khatami faces is essentially the political dichotomy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, enshrined in its Constitution. The contrast between a government based on allegiance to God and a government legitimated through political participation may prove to be an unbridgeable gap."(14)

On the other hand, it has been argued that Islam and its tenets are basically misunderstood: textual Islam like Christianity

and Judaism embraces a mixture of divinely-ordained "democratic" and "undemocratic" laws, values and principles. Our true understanding of Islam must therefore go beyond reading the mere form of religion (e.g., rites and rituals) but to understand the very content of religion. Religion "encompasses precepts, rites, and canons...[yet] these precepts and canons are important not in themselves but in their capacity to guide us to the essential purpose of religion: the spiritual enrichment and moral elevation of human beings through the worship of God."(15) So, a modern and dynamic Islamic state can adopt democratic institutions, procedures, values and principles without losing the "essence" of Islam.

But, what is perhaps even more important is the degree to which democracy can contribute to the peaceful resolution of inevitable disputes in society arising from competition over resources. Democracy is not about religion per se, it is about the management of competition over socioeconomic resources and political power within agreed-upon normative principles and values and institutional arrangements, whereby individual citizens through elections and other forms of political participation determine their own future through elected representatives.(16)

This article argues that democracy is essentially about a power struggle over socioeconomic resources and political power in the state-society relations, and given the structural changes in the state-society relations in the past twenty years, Iran for the first time in its long history is faced with real opportunities for inaugurating a viable democratic political system. The evolution of the Iranian state-society relations based on democratic principles and values will obviously take many years to come and will have its own unique dynamics, but the next few years may at least see the emergence of a more meaningful institutional democracy in Iran, the indispensable requisite for the expansion of political and civil rights in the long run.

**DEMOCRACY IS ABOUT  
EMPOWERMENT**

The debate over democracy, its definition and fundamentals, as well as its impact on governments' domestic and foreign policies, has continued for centuries. Is democracy the best political system for promoting political, civil, and economic rights? Can democracies continue to keep the average citizen involved in politics? Are democracies really more peaceful than non-democracies?(17) Above all, is democracy appropriate or desirable as a political system for non-Western societies (e.g., Middle Eastern countries)? That is, can an essentially Western ideology be applied to non-Western societies?

To answer these questions, proponents of democracy have looked to socio-economic, political, cultural, historical, and international factors that help mold forces responsible for the structure of political systems in different countries. Although this article does not address these important issues, the contention here is that democracy is about empowerment of ordinary citizens and that prospects for democracy in any given society is contingent upon the presence of certain requisites.(18) Without these requisites in place, prospects for establishing and maintaining democracy are dim and can lead to democratic breakdown.(19)

Furthermore, democracy as a political system is attractive to many--if not most--people around the globe. It can be said, "nobody likes to be imprisoned, tortured, or killed, and that everybody tries to escape when confronted with harm." Citizens in Western countries remain fundamentally free from arbitrary and random state repression, enjoying rights not shared by people under authoritarian regimes that often do not respect even fundamental human rights. These political and civil rights should be understood not as Western or non-Western but rather as universal rights entitling individuals, within their own particular historical and cultural settings, to shape their own future and be protected from abusive government.(20)

The development of democratic ideals and principles, e.g., the expansion of widespread respect for political and civil rights of the individual, occurs not overnight but over decades and even centuries. The expansion of such rights in the West itself, where modern

democracy first emerged, has taken centuries to develop to where today political democracy is equated with freedom. But more important to the process of democratic development is that the expansion of political and civil rights has been the result of struggle and competition among contending groups in society (e.g., labor, women, minorities) over political power and socioeconomic resources.

It is only through a power struggle for the expansion of such rights that a polyarchy,(21) a system based on multiple power centers, can eventually emerge. The struggle for democracy in Iran must be understood within this broader context: the politics of electioneering and establishing the fundamental institutional framework for competitive politics (e.g., parliament, presidency), despite all its shortcomings and even seemingly undemocratic features (e.g., the absence of real political parties, the all-too-powerful office of the rahbar or *velayat-i faqih*) can in the long run develop more democratic features. The politics of electioneering on its own is educational and also has a mobilizational impact on the populace in large. This is not to argue that elections on their own represent democratic states or having elections means the beginning of a successful journey toward a fully democratic state. But, it is inconceivable to witness the emergence of a democracy without elections and electoral processes in place.

Modernization theory proposes that economic, social, and political mobilization lead to social mobilization, economic development and political democracy.(22) But political democracy results from such development only where social and economic, as well as political power resources become more evenly distributed and that this cannot be assumed to occur, at least not initially. The development of civil society through organized and active groups, clubs, and associations can also help the cause of democracy by challenging the hegemony of the state over socioeconomic resources and political power. So, it is argued that civil society is correlated to democracy. Historically, the term "civil society" has been used to mean different things, but its current

usage clearly points to a particular type of relationship between the state and society.(23) Specifically, civil society exists where "clubs, organizations and groups act as a buffer between state power and the life of the citizen."(24) In the absence of such groups and associations, the state dominates socioeconomic and private affairs.

However, most developing societies like Iran suffer from structural inadequacies: Social, economic, and political settings are such that a widespread number of people, though in varying degrees, remain relatively poor, uneducated, and in poor health. This, coupled with underdeveloped and ineffective social organizations and the absence of a civil society, has often meant the domination of society by the state, which leaves the society vulnerable to the whims of elites in and out of power.(25) The strong position of the state vis-à-vis a weak civil society is responsible for the disproportionate share in power by the state in less developed countries.

So, state control over vast resources in many developing countries has made the state a formidable force in the distribution of socioeconomic resources and political power, through its control over mineral and natural resources, development projects, police and intelligence, permission for the opposition to organize into political parties, labor unions, and associational groups, etc. The ruling elite naturally resists expanding political and civil rights, especially if such a move would threaten its interests or its very survival and benefit opposition groups. A compromise resolution can emerge only when the cost of oppression to the state supersedes any potential benefits, and concessions offered to the opposition ultimately results in a net gain.

The popularity of Islam as a religion and as a panacea to all social ills poses a serious challenge to political and religious leadership of the 'ulema in the Islamic world. The 'ulema have always claimed that Islam is not merely a religion but a way of life, and, as such, Islamic values, laws and moral codes should guide Muslims and their political leadership throughout ages. The 'ulema must then play a central, if not dominant, role in the daily affairs of the state, since there is no separation of religion from politics in Islam.

But, the modern state in Muslim countries, as elsewhere in the developing world, has established itself as a dominant entity, adhering to "modern" secular values, and representing for the most part the powerful elites with entrenched interests and resistant to societal pressure for power sharing.

On the other hand, the religious leadership, as well as religious groups and intellectuals in Iran and elsewhere in Muslim countries, has found itself in the midst of a power struggle between the state and society over socioeconomic resources and political power. The 'ulema have enjoyed overall religious legitimacy over the past centuries, and have proven themselves capable of mobilizing the population at large in either opposition to (e.g., during the Iranian Revolution) or in support of (e.g., Iran under the shah, Saudi Arabia) the state. However, they have yet to truly prove themselves as successful statesmen and political leaders. In Iran, the experimentation with an "Islamic" Republic has proven very challenging, to say the least. Questions over the extent of political and religious authority of the state and the political and civil rights of the citizens have been daunting the state authorities since the early days of the revolution.(26)

### **THE INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TO DEMOCRACY IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC**

The new ruling elites'--consisting of 'ulema, religious and secular intellectuals and, at least initially, democrats and liberal nationalists--solution to mass popular participation and support for fundamental change in the state-society relations after decades of being marginalized by the Pahlavi regime was the creation of an Islamic Republic. In doing so, soon after the revolution the institutional foundation of a representative government was laid out, including a new constitution, a legislative body, *Majles*, and an independent judiciary.

Iran today has a complex cleric-dominated but popularly driven political system. The institutional framework designed for the *Shi'a* Islamic Republic embraces both popular participation and a balance of power within the ruling elite circle. The supreme authority

is the guide (rahbar) of the revolution, currently Ayatollah Ali Khameneh'i, who was appointed by the popularly elected 83-member Assembly of Experts (*majles-i khubregan*) which has constitutional rights to dismiss him if it decides he abuses his authority. The guide is not expected to interfere with the daily affairs of the government, although he is commander-in-chief of the armed forces and has the power to dismiss the president and to appoint the heads of the judiciary, the revolutionary guards, the media, and the military. The Council of Guardians (*shura'-i negahban*), comprised of religious lawyers appointed by the guide and of lay lawyers elected by the parliament ensures that all legislation conforms to Islamic law.

Since 1988, the Expediency Council (*shura-i maslahat-i nezam*) has been in charge of resolving disagreements that often arise between the Council of Guardians and the popularly elected parliament. The reshaping of the Expediency Council in the weeks prior to former president Hashimi Rafsanjani's departure from office resulted in an increase in the power and prestige of the Council, which Rafsanjani now heads.(27) In contrast to all these appointed bodies, members of the parliament and the president are popularly elected.

The creation of an Islamic republic was beset with difficulties from the start. Ayatollah Khomeini aimed to replace a tyrannical leader with a just, popular rule under the tenets of Islam. The challenge to the Islamic republic has been to establish popular sovereignty under clerical rule and preserve a government with a divine mission whose real secular task was to run a modern state in a Western-dominated capitalist world.(28) However, with the exception of the government-controlled Islamic Party, no provisions were made for independent political parties. And soon after the fall of the provisional government of Bazargan, all opposition was suppressed, including the liberal National Front and the leftist Mojahideen-i Khalq, which accused the ruling 'ulema of monopolizing power and eventually declared an armed struggle against the government. The new religious leadership

ignored that "institutional approach to democracy necessarily implies that no group in civil society--including religious groups--can a priori be prohibited from forming a political party." And that, "Constraints on political parties may only be imposed after a party, by its actions, violates democratic principles," and "the judgment as to whether or not a party has violated democratic principles should be decided not by parties in the government but by the courts."(29)

The *Majles* itself, in light of the absence of true political party opposition to the state, has been a battleground for factionalism, broadly divided into conservative and reformist camps: Elite factionalism among clerics began almost immediately after the revolution. The ideological and political fragmentation in the fifth, and now in the sixth parliament, remains along three lines. The Association of the Hizballah consists of conservative-minded individuals and blocs of parliamentarians who reject President Khatami's agenda for the supremacy of the rule of law, the expansion of civil society and individual freedoms, within a yet-fully-developed Islamic framework. The Hizballah Members of the Parliament stand in opposition to Khatami and his supporters in the parliament. They are generally suspicious of the direction of domestic reforms and closer relations with the West that they see leading toward the erosion of the supreme leader's authority, and ultimately the secularization and subordination of Iranian society to "external powers" at the expense of Islam. They perceive the notion of individual rights in opposition to the *Shi'a* principle of guided leadership by a *faqih* (leader).

The central issue is over whether the guide should be popularly elected or not, given that his leadership is ordained by the *Shi'a* belief in the infallibility of Imams and by implication, the leader (i.e., the guide, not the president).(30) The Independent Hizballah Members are parliamentarians who supposedly remain independent in their political and ideological orientations and whose votes in the legislator is not either in support of or in opposition to President Khatami but can swing between the other factions. Overall, the debates over the

ideological and practical application of clerical rule among and between clerics have intensified in the past 20 years.

The ideological and political division within the *Shi'a* clergy-dominated ruling government is the natural outcome of the struggle for power and resources, including ideological hegemony, within the state and between the state and society at large. That is, the behavior of the state in Iran can convincingly be explained based on the clergy's efforts to sustain itself and in doing so to dominate society. The debate over the place of Islam in the "Islamic Republic" is not merely a matter of theological interest but reflecting a long historical struggle over the "proper" role the 'ulema should play in Islam and the Islamic community, the *Umma*'.

The historical view has been that Islam without the leadership of the *velayat-i faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurists) is not possible. Indeed, without the leadership of the Guardians Islam, like Christianity in the West, may even be destined over time to lose its hold in society and be overshadowed by forces of secularism and capitalism. This will not only undermine Islam and Islamic tenets, it will severely undermine or even destroy the "rightful and legitimate" clerical leadership of the 'ulema as the guardians of Islam. After all, the presumption is that the survival of Islam in the past fourteen centuries without the leadership of the 'ulema would not have been possible.

The experiences of the Islamic Republic since the revolution, however, has demonstrated that religious leaders once in power are not immune to the corrupting influences of politics. Regardless of the ideological foundation of the state, modern politics is about the management of conflict over the distribution of socioeconomic resources and political power. The management of the state-society relations, however, without the benefit of effective institutions is not possible. It is through the clashes of ideas and interests, managed and organized in political, economic and social institutions that peaceful resolutions to conflicting interests can be tested and implemented. In the political arena, opposition political parties, religious or not,

and different associations and clubs like labor unions are instrumental in the process of democratization.

But, democratic institutions do not appear overnight and during the transitional period from authoritarian to democratic rule they often coexist with authoritarian institutions. So, in Iran the democratically elected institutions, such as the president and parliament, must share power with equally powerful, if not more powerful, authoritarian and unelected elements of the government.(31) Therefore, the question should not be whether Islam can function without the benefit of the 'ulema or the *velayat-i Faqih*. Instead, the question is what are the appropriate institutional arrangements where religious and secular forces can openly compete for political power without undermining the rules of democracy and democratic bargaining. Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri, the most prominent critic of Ayatollah Khameneh'i with millions of supporters, for example, has called for changes to the Iranian constitution so that the concentration of powers in the hands of a single person does not occur. Montazeri also has suggested that "either the post of president and spiritual leader should be combined to create a powerful elected leader or the president should be given more powers and the spiritual leader should just fill an advisory role."(32)

### **SOCIAL MOBILIZATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS**

The aggressive effort by conservatives to suppress the reformists in Iran raises the question of whether the future of democracy in Iran is doomed. Can the limited democratic gains in Iran, through fairly open and competitive local and national elections, be rerouted by conservative forces who see democracy and popular sovereignty as Western values and incompatible with Islam? In other words, can conservatives through their control of central political institutions and the military erase the Republic from the Islamic Republic of Iran? While it is impossible to predict exactly what is in store for the future of democracy in Iran, my

contention is that the nature of the state society relations in Iran in the past 20 years has been altered drastically by domestic and international events, making a return to authoritarian rule, under any ideological disguise, very unlikely.

The Iranian society's experiences in the post-revolution era have been intense, violent, and widespread. The revolutionary upheaval, anti-government armed insurgencies by opposition groups, the eight-year-long war with Iraq, the rapid population growth and urbanization, the flood of Afghani and Iraqi refugees, the U.S. economic sanctions and most of all the persistence of economic crisis have had enduring impacts on the Iranian society. These events, along with the deliberate state policy of "Islamization" and populist economic policies to give priority to rural development and an overall a more balanced approach to development, have reshaped the foundation of Iran's socioeconomic and political structure. Despite all its shortcomings, Iranian society's outlook on the state and its own self-image has fundamentally changed.

The power distribution in the state-society relations in modern Iran until the 1978-1979 revolution had been structured by a complex relationship among the monarchy and its supporters, the 'ulema and the religious establishment, and the traditional small merchants or the *Bazaris*. The politically powerless middle and working classes did not play central roles in setting the national agenda. Similarly, the intellectuals' influence over masses in the national struggle for freedom--which since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution had focused against anti-colonialism and foreign domination, and not democracy per se--remained marginal for the most part.(33) But today, intellectuals, professionals, the media, filmmakers, and artists are among the forerunners in the national struggle for democracy and freedom.

It is only in the past 20 years that we have witnessed the disappearance of the monarchy as a central contender for power, and the weakening of 'ulema as the legitimate heir to Allah's rule on earth in the absence of a *Mahdi* or the Messiah. The rise of the 'ulema to political power, moreover, has exposed

their vulnerabilities to trappings of power, thereby raising doubt about their ability and sincerity to act simultaneously as both political and religious leaders. The 'ulema, now contenders for power, are no longer perceived as sincere men of God and immune from corruption. The result, in the words of Naser Momayesi, is that, "the clergy's direct involvement in state affairs has made it the main target of blame for the ills of society and the state. The cleric's mismanagement of the economy, totalitarian control over the country's cultural life, and above all, abuse of power, have severely undermined their once untarnished moral authority."(34)

Similarly, the post-revolutionary period has mobilized the Iranian population, creating space for young educated males and females from all socioeconomic backgrounds, and helped energize the intellectuals and professionals who have been on the forefront of the drive for democracy. Ironically, much of the changes in the fabric of Iranian society, prompting the drive toward democracy, have been the result of policies promoted by the central government itself. Even throughout the war with Iraq, "The building of schools and roads between rural areas and the towns (sometimes for strategic reasons), the electrification of the villages, and the building of modern facilities (public bath, hospitals, houses, etc.) was undertaken at a relatively fast pace."(35) In that sense, Islam in Iran has played a central progressive role in the ongoing process of development and empowerment of the traditionally poor and powerless.(36)

Despite positive developments in Iran in uprooting the historical relations of power, the past 20 years has also created new obstacles for democracy. The revolution brought an end to the royal court and its powerful allies who had long controlled vast amount of economic resources and political power. But, since the new state's institutions have created new networks of interest articulation--that along with their allies among bazarri merchants and social conservatives remain resistant to economic restructuring--social reform, calls for accountability and democratic rule is being fiercely resisted by some government institutions.

The creation of state-run foundation-conglomerates following the revolution to help consolidate state control of society has had long-term economic and political consequences. The Revolutionary Guards, for example, was created to help the police and security forces to combat anti-revolutionaries, but it has developed into a powerful organization, with its own ground, naval, and air forces to defend and maintain order throughout the country. The Dispossessed Foundation (*Bunad-i Mostazafin and Janbazan*) also employs hundreds of thousands of people, linking their livelihood with the state. It controls thousands of workshops, factories, hotels and other properties it inherited from their nationalization in the earlier years of the revolution.

These para-statal foundations enjoy extensive economic endowments and political backing, and have become a source of wealth and political power for those in charge of these foundations. Some of these foundations are exempt from taxation and have grown into influential forces blocking any attempts for economic privatization and reforms. Perhaps the most notable example is the Dispossessed Foundation, whose budget is close to equaling 60 percent of the entire national expenditure on development. The Dispossessed Foundation is under the authority of the spiritual guide and is exempt from any parliamentary investigation,(37) although parliament has increasingly called for bringing such organizations under its jurisdiction.

The transformation of the state and society in Iran has been a function of sociopolitical and ideological transformations within both the state and society, compounded with severe and persistent economic crises. The state policy to propagate "Islamic justice" mainly to the dispossessed has helped mobilize Iranian population from the ground up. Through the expansion of access to clean water, electricity, roads, education, and even political power through local elections, the government has opened the gate to the flood of massive social mobilization. So, "by homogenizing the people, the Iranian revolutionary regime indirectly has

contributed to the consciousness of the new society that demands participation in political matters and refuses henceforth the transcendence of the state over society."(38)

Despite the state's populist policies in giving priority to the needy, the *Mostazafin*, the weight of economic difficulties in Iran continues to be placed on the backs of the poor that now also includes large segments of working and middle classes. An over-bloated, inefficient public sector, dominated by narrow, monopolistic special interests, high levels of unemployment and inflation and the devaluation of Iran's currency in the international market have had devastating impacts on the standard of living in Iran. The middle class has declined in size and wealth and the working class is plagued with high levels of unemployment. The repeated devaluation of the rial in the international market and persistent inflation and unemployment have also hurt a wide majority of the people, while benefiting some state organizations and black-marketers, and helping to spread corruption and bribery in almost every sector of the economy. As a result, hard currencies such as the dollar have replaced the rial as a medium of exchange in the open market.(39)

Thus, the government, in light of the gradual transformation of Iranian society, faces an increasing legitimacy problem. It can no longer justify itself by insisting that it is bringing about the creation of an ideal Islamic society that embraces equality, justice and freedom while it cannot provide for socioeconomic needs and fundamental political freedoms of its people. The resolution of ideological splits within the state can help sustain the state and to legitimate its existence, but the long-term solution for the survival of the "Islamic" republic rests with the extent of its success in providing material benefits and fundamental freedoms to Iranians through further redistribution of political power and socioeconomic resources.

Iranian society under the shah for the most part "was undemocratic in its institutions, in the distribution of power and in the material outlook of its elites and the majority of its citizens."(40) But, the populist revolutionary approach to education and rural development,

broader minority autonomy, internal migration because of the eight-year-long war with Iraq and continued rapid urbanization have promoted the cause of cultural homogeneity in Iran. After two decades, the society is "culturally more homogeneous than ever before: even in remote areas, young boys and girls speak and write in Persian, including ethnic regions like Azerbaijan, Baluchistan, Kurdistan, and the predominantly Arab area of southeastern Khuzistan."(41) As one author observed in 1997:

The new generation is better educated on the whole, at least in the case of popular groups from the lower and lower middle class and particularly in rural areas. It is much more politically aware than the one that took part in the Revolution because it is devoid of a utopian turn of mind and has experienced the harsh facts of life resulting from two decades of economic difficulties (the decline in oil prices, the flight of the capital outside Iran, the eight years of war and its heavy toll in terms of destruction and brain drain, etc.)(42)

Civil society in Iran, despite fundamental structural changes in the fabric of the Iranian society and the social mobilization of women, students, and intellectuals, remains relatively weak. Civil society is basically used to label any group or movement outside the state apparatus and control, regardless of its purpose or character. But the relations among groups and movements and between them and the state are also assumed to be at least minimally cordial and not totally conflictual. This view has led the concept of civil society's becoming so general that it is sometimes indistinguishable from the general term, "society." However, the pressure for change toward civil society and democracy in Iran emanates not so much from agents of civil society--which remains relatively few in numbers, organizationally weak and mostly ineffective in influencing public policy--but from the overall mobilized population across all sectors of society.

Post-revolution Iran witnessed a revamping of the education system both in the content of the curriculum and in the opportunity of access to lower and higher education. First, the new agenda for national education was to include priorities for incorporating Islamic values and culture into the curriculum. Second, the lower strata of the Iranian population that included the lower and lower middle classes, were given priorities of access in the national education scheme. The new regime felt compelled to respond to its mainstream constituency, the dispossessed, for ideological and political support during the crucial years of consolidating power. Thus, the expansion of new schools and universities to villages and small towns became a natural policy option. New quotas were accorded by the state to the families of martyrs (those killed during the revolution, in the service of the mobilized "vanguard" revolutionary guards, or in the eight-year war with Iraq) to compensate them for their sacrifices and continued support of the regime. In higher education, particularly, "martyrs' siblings and children were allocated special quotas, a form of "positive discrimination." Sometimes almost half the university places were reserved for them, easing the accession of the popular classes to higher education, with the middle classes grudgingly accepting the situation."(43)

In the years following the Cultural Revolution of 1980-1982 and the reopening of universities, "The lower class students were instrumentalized by the [Hizballah] to put down any student or faculty opposition. They were mobilized in demonstrations and muzzled protests by intimidating students and by helping the [Hizballah] scrutinize their 'Islamic mores.' Many joined the Bureau for the reinforcement of Unity (*daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat*), a student association under the aegis of the [Hizballah]." (44) However, with the new generation of students entering universities, a gradual shift of the lower class students from a Hizballah ideology toward a new perception of politics was evident. As Farhad Khosrokhavar, a professor at *Ecole des Hautes en Sciences Sociales* in Paris has observed:

By the second half of the 1990s, the shift was clear, as evident in the massive attendance at Soroush's(45) classes and the sporadic protest movements against the poor quality of dormitories and cafeterias. The [Hizballah] had lost its popular support among students, even among those who owed their studies to the quotas of the regime and its financial contributions, mainly through the Revolutionary Foundations, which were controlled by the [Hizballah]. Progressively, the Bureau for the Reinforcement of the Unity shifted from a [Hizballah] ideology to an open and reformist one."(46)

Women have also experienced a great transformation in their status and self-image in society. Before and during the revolution, "Women had thought of each other either as archaic and non-intelligent (the arrogant attitude of Westernized middle class women toward the popular ones) or as selfish, immodest and dehumanized (the attitude of women in the lower classes in popular districts of Tehran toward those living in the Westernized residential neighborhoods in the northern parts of the city)."(47)

The initial imposition of strict Islamic dress code, the repeal of family planning laws and other restrictive family and individual laws, affecting women for the most part, have either been loosened or reversed. The status of Iranian women, entrapped in chauvinistic and patriarchal rules and norms of behavior, still has a long way to go. It can also be argued that Iranian women along with other sectors of society have suffered from severe economic hardships and an overall decline in the standard of living and severe limitations on their freedom of statement and other civil liberties. The general population including women, however, has been mobilized by the revolutionary upheaval and has gained a greater sense of awareness and social consciousness.(48)

The ideological foundation of the state itself has been instrumental in the mobilization of women and the population in general. Despite the wide range of

interpretations on the role of women in Islam, most religious and political leaders have not objected to women participation in politics, in the market and in social activities. After all, the popular image of women in Islam often reverts back to Prophet Muhammad's wife, Khadijah, and his daughter, Fatima, both symbolizing strength, independence, comradeship with their husbands in life and successful individuals in their own rights.

The wider access to education for women and the intermingling of women from different socioeconomic stratum and cultural groups, because of the eight-year war and internal migration and rapid urbanization, have helped the mobilization of women in society. Thus, "Women are much better educated than before, and they are by far more conscious of their unjust situation.... In comparison to the Shah's times when they were accorded a partial juridical equality with men, they are now more mature in terms of human agency. Before the Revolution, the great majority of women had no clear consciousness of their rights; now, they are much more aware of the necessity to engage in social action to convince public opinion (particularly men) to change the laws in the name of social justice."(49)

The achievements by women in creating a social space for themselves have not been due solely to opportunities granted to them by men in power. Women, when possible, have proved themselves very apt to mobilization and statement of their views. They poured their support behind presidential candidate Muhammad Khatami in 1997 and again in 2001 and have been among his strongest supporters.

The leadership of the women's movement itself is divided between secular women like Mehrangiz Kar, Shirin Ebadi and Islamist ones like Faezeh Hashemi and Shahla Sherkat, among others. But both groups have in common their dedication to the cause of women in Iran. Women have learned:

To respect each other in spite of their differences and not to demonize each other for their divergent views on religion.... The Islamist feminists, for example, defend women's rights in the

name of the complementarity of men and women in Islam; they ask for separate swimming pools, duplication of the facilities for women whenever possible, defense of women in the name of Islamic justice, and interpretations of religious law in a way that is favorable to women. Secular feminists try to show the equality of men and women in modern institutions and international treaties to which Iranian government adhered long ago.(50)

### **HOW ABOUT THE MILITARY AND ARMED FORCES?**

What role do the military and armed forces play in the struggle for political power and democracy? Although the armed forces have been instrumental in the survival of the regime thus far, the probability of a direct military intervention to gain control of the state remains unlikely.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Forces (IRGC) and the corps of volunteers, the Basij, have remained central in maintaining security and political stability. They were instrumental during the eight years of war with Iraq in keeping the regular armed forces checked and preventing possible plots for military coups. The Iranian leadership even during the war years remained suspicious of the regular army.(51) The IRGC, in light of its experience during the Iran-Iraq and Gulf wars, has developed itself into a more structured and professional body with new uniforms, rank structures, naval and air forces, all under the direct command of the leader, Ayatollah Ali Khameneh'i. The regular army remains under the command of the chief of staff of the armed forces and is loyal to the leader.

Both IRGC and the Basij forces, along with the law enforcement forces, have also been active in helping police and security forces in maintaining civil order in cities and villages across the country. These often young and ideologically dedicated militia volunteers are known to obey orders without questions, whether in putting down demonstrations in cities as in Tehran, Isfahan, and Arak, or fighting the Iraqi-supported armed

Mujahiden-i Khalq opposition in the Western frontier, or engaging armed drug smugglers in the eastern frontiers bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Basij remains a dedicated force supporting the government, especially in controlling unrest, as in the 1994 Qazvin unrest or the July 1999 student demonstrations.

During the summer 1999 student demonstrations the heads of the IRGC boldly threatened the possibility of the guards' intervention if things were to "get out of hand." A letter was signed by (24) commanding officers warning President Khatami for failing to recognize the threat to Iran's national security because of students' demonstrations and the possibility for the guards' armed intervention should Khameneh'i deem it necessary. While the armed forces have begun to recover from the eight-year war with Iraq, it remains qualitatively poor, financially strapped, and faces even more potential adversaries today than ever before in its modern history. Iran today is surrounded by potential adversaries in all its borders; whether Iraq or Turkey to the West, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the East, Turkish-Israeli-American influence to the north or the American forces stationed in the Gulf in the south. Added to all this is the thriving network of drug trafficking, originating in Afghanistan and through Iran and Turkey, eventually finding its market in Europe.

Iran's efforts to rebuild its military after the eight-year war with Iraq initially faced severe financial constraints since the economy was in no shape to support major expenditures. So, the projected \$2 billion annual military budget was cut drastically. By the second half of the 1990s, however, with the turning around of oil prices and a more disciplined approach to economic management, Iran's military expenditures began to rise again and also involved major arms purchases from Russia and China.(52)

However, despite recent increases in its defense budget, the quality of Iran's armed forces remains low and its offensive capabilities marginal. The armed forces also remain structurally weak and organizationally divided.(53) The division of the armed forces

into regular military and revolutionary guards has created a dual military structure that has made command control more difficult. The status of IRGC and whether it is totally dedicated to the conservatives' vision and mission of the Islamic Republic has also come to be questioned in recent years.(54)

The status of the armed forces in Iran, particularly with respect to the revolutionary guards, is linked to the future of democratic rule. The politicization of IRGC, the "Islamization" of the command and control of the regular army, and the overall low quality of the status of armed forces have made the Iranian military less of an enduring threat to civilian rule. Contrary to its neighbor's militaries in Pakistan and Turkey, who have a virtual *carte blanche* to intervene in civilian rule, when deemed necessary, civil-military relations in Iran has not been so favorably institutionalized on behalf of the military.

This is not to argue that military in Iran and particularly the IRGC may never attempt to gain control of civilian rule especially if the current regime faces an imminent threat of being overthrown, but given the historical absence of military rule in Iran and the present civil-military relations, prospects for a direct military intervention remains unlikely. This, of course, can help the cause of democracy in Iran.(55)

## CONCLUSION

The Iranian revolution marked a new beginning in the state-society relations in that country. The new elite in charge of the state from the beginning attempted to separate itself from the old structure of power that relied mainly on support from powerful wealthy families, the military, technocrats, the affluent upper middle class and foreign powers. The clergy-based government instead has relied fundamentally on mass-based popular support to deliver its populist agenda for the country. Both the state and society in the past 20 years, however, have experienced major transformations, altering forever the nature of the state-society relations in Iran. The revolution, eight years of war with Iraq, post-war reconstruction experiences, and the ideological split within the state have marked the transformation of state-society relations.

The mobilization of the post-revolution generation in general and students and women in particular, led by intellectuals and professionals, has drastically changed the fabric of society. The state itself can no longer persuasively blame monarchists, counter-revolutionaries and foreign plots for its own shortcomings. Given the ideological split within its ranks and leadership, the conservatives must either bend to popular will or formulate mechanisms to share political power with the opposition.

The implications for Iran's experimentation with republicanism and democracy are more profound than a simple formulation of a developing country's struggle to achieve political democracy. Democracy, understood as empowerment of the citizenry, has a very strong appeal in Iran today. It has taken a revolution, a bloody eight-year war with its neighbor, and isolation in the international community to demonstrate to Iranians themselves and the outside world that the country has indeed embarked upon a new path to political assertiveness and self-reliance. Iran has indeed been more independent in formulating its domestic and foreign policies than ever before in its recent history. One can of course disagree with the extent of Iran's successes and failures in political, socioeconomic and diplomatic arenas. But the current debate on the rule of law, civil society and democracy and the "reevaluation" of the regime's past 20 years' performance are due to Iranians' genuine experiences with trials and errors in creating an "Islamic" republic. Iranians are learning that the price of freedom most often is high and the road to accountable governance and responsible citizenship requires continuous struggle.

The clampdowns on reformist-oriented individuals and the media and the imprisonment of reformists under bizarre interpretations of "Islamic" tenets only indicate the state's vulnerability in responding to rapid changes in Iran, ironically promoted by the state itself in the past two decades.(56) Whatever one's view on the debate on Islam and democracy, it is my contention that the final verdict will largely depend on the successes and failures of the ruling elite in delivering tangible economic, social, and

political benefits to Iranians in general and to their immediate constituencies in particular. That is, the notion of an Islamic democracy is far easier to instill where the general population benefits from the state's public policies that help legitimate and consolidate the elites' position in society at large.

The new generation of Iranian electorate "has not seen the shah's regime, did not take part in the revolution, and yearns for a non-heroic, non-puritanical and pluralist social life. This generation does not think any more in revolutionary terms but rather in reformist ones. This change is due not only to external factors (the collapse of the Soviet Union, the aspiration for democracy in many parts of the world, etc.) but also to internal reasons within Iranian society." (57) However, the resolution of what role the top religious leadership, rahbar, must play in the overall distribution of political power is the most immediate challenge facing the regime.

Khatami's first four years were not a total failure. Despite serious setbacks to Khatami's reform agenda, the population in general and the post-revolution generation in particular has become energized and mobilized, demanding structural and enduring change. Khatami's limited success has been due not so much because of his incompetence, lack of vision, or leadership but due to persistent acts of sabotage of his reform ideas by the conservatives. Khatami has insisted throughout on primacy of the rule of law and civil society, *Jama'ah Madani*, as requisites to socioeconomic and political development.

On November 26, 2000 Khatami gave a major speech confessing he has no power to implement the Constitution and his own duties as president. Nevertheless, in the May 2001 presidential election, Iranians continued their support for reform. Khatami's failure would be the failure of the Islamic Republic, and given the socially mobilized Iranian population one wonders how long the conservatives can continue to rule with an iron-fist before either giving into reformist Islamists-nationalists reform agenda or further lose their religious/political legitimacy and perhaps succumb to yet another revolutionary upheaval.

The view presented here is that the changes in Iran have been structural and there are no real prospects for a return to the authoritarian ruling style of the past. It is possible that the conservatives will triumph, perhaps using some form of military intervention against the reformists. Another scenario would be for the regime--possibly based on a broader consensus--trying to follow the Chinese model of blending economic growth with political stagnation. Yet the outcome lies not only with personalities or factional struggle but also with some of the deeper shifts and developments visible in Iranian society over the last two decades. This factor, along with the strong popular base of support for the reform movement, offers hope for the future.

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## NOTES

1. Portions of this article have previously been published in either my book or article on Islam, state-society relations and democracy, see Ali R. Abootalebi, *Islam and Democracy: State-Society Relations in Developing Countries: 1980-1994* (New York and London: Garland, 2000); "The Struggle for Democracy in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, *MERIA*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (September 2000): 43-56.
2. Reformists in Iran refer to intellectuals, nationalists, and Islamists (those Islamic leaders whose vision of Islam is more in tune with democratic rule and compatibility of Islam with modernity) and other groups and personalities; those who reject the more restrictive and traditional view of the conservative religious leaders on Islam and its role in society, economy and polity.
3. Reformists are also referred to as Islamist-nationalist, a coalition of Islamists and nationalist personalities who share their

opposition to traditional religious readers' orthodox view of Islam and modernity.

4. As reported by Iran Press Service, April 4, 2001, on the Internet at <http://www.Iran-Press-Service.com>.

5. Iran Press Service, April 4, 2001.

6. Iran Press Service, March 28th, 2001.

7. Iran Press Service, April 8, 2001.

8. As reported in the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Iran Report, Vol. 4, No. 12, 26 March 2001.

9. Iran Press Service, June 10, 2001.

10. Iran Press Service, June 11, 2001.

11. Iran Press Service, June 10, 2001.

12. Iran Press Service, June 14, 2001.

13. See comments by Iran Press Service's Editor, Safa Haeri, May 24, 2001.

14. A. Reza Sheikholeslami, "The Transformation of Iran's Political Culture," *Critique*, No. 17 (Fall 2000): 105-133. Quotation is from p. 133.

15. See the short essay in Persian that appeared in now-closed newspaper *Asr-e Azadegan* on January 2000, "on Form and Content in Democracy and Elections" by Hasan Youssefi-Eshkevari, who was arrested in August 2000 for attending an April 2000 conference in Berlin on democracy and reform in Iran. For translated version and quotation used here, see Mahmoud Fazeli Birjandi, "Playing with the People's Choice," published under "Voices from Within: Selections from the Iranian Press," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (October 2000): 139-46; 140.

16. See, Abootalebi, Islam and Democracy.

17. On this topic see, for example, William J. Dixon, "Democracy and the Management of Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 37, 1(March 1993): 42-68.

18. The literature on democracy and its requisites is rich. For a brief discussion of qualitative and quantitative approaches to democracy and its requisites, see Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Evelyne Huber Stephens and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See, also, Ali R. Abootalebi, "Democratization in Developing Countries: 1980-1989," *Journal of Developing Areas* 29 (July 1995): 507-30. A more comprehensive list includes:

Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Robert Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward A Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2 (April 1970), pp. 337-63; Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971); Robert Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976). On Democracy and dependency, see Edward N. Muller, "Dependent Economic Development, Aid Dependence on the United States, and Democratic Breakdown in the Third World," *International Studies Quarterly* 29 (1985): 445-69; Guillermo A. O'Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics* (Berkeley Institute of International Studies: University of California, 1973); Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967); Fernando H. Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The World Capitalist System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). On Culture and Democracy, see Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1942); Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1958); Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); Gerhard Lenski and Jean Lenski, *Human Societies* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974); Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, and Jae On Kim, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven Nation*

Comparison (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Samuel H. Barnes and Max Kaase, et al., *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979); Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba eds., *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980); Kenneth A. Bollen and Robert W. Jackman, "Political Democracy and the Size Distribution of Income," *American Sociological Review* 50 (August 1985): 438-57; Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Edward N. Muller and Mitchell A. Seligson, "Civic Culture and Democracy: The Question of Causal Relationships," *American Political Science Review* 88 (September 1994): 635-52.

19. Democratic breakdown in developing countries are caused by a number of sources, including foreign intervention, dependency, and military intervention in politics. See, for example, Edward Ned Muller, "Dependent Economic Development, Aid Dependence on the United States, and Democratic Breakdown in the Third World," *International Studies Quarterly* 29, 1985: 445-69.

20. Giovanni Sartori, "How Far Can Free Government Travel?" *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 3 (July 1995): 101-11, p. 103.

21. The term Polyarchy was first coined by Robert Dahl and it refers to a political system where both the opportunity for participation and contestation for political power among elites are widely open. See, Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy*.

22. A great deal of the literature on modernization during the 1950s and 1960s was dedicated to social mobilization. See, for example, Karl W. Deutsch, *A Social Mobilization and Political Development*, *American Political Science Review* 55 (September 1961): 493-514; David E. Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958).

23. See Ernest Gellner, "Civil Society in Historical Context," *International Social Science Journal*, August 1991: 495-510. For

more recent discussion on the civil society debate, see the two volumes (1994, 1996) produced by the New York University Civil Society in the Middle East Project, edited by Augustus R. Norton and Farhad Kazemi, *Civil Society in the Middle East* (New York: New York University Press).

24. Muhammad Muslih and Augustus Richard Norton, *Political Tides in the Arab World*, *Foreign Policy Association*, no. 296, Summer 1991, p. 11.

25. There is, noticeably, in LDCs a lack of local and national groups and associations that can bring people together with common interests. This is, however, not surprising, given that the existence of and participation in such interest groups is highly related to the amount of free time and resources that people have. In societies where most people are relatively poor, and are mainly concerned with the essentials of life like food, clothing, and shelter, organized group participation becomes something of a luxury that most cannot afford.

26. See Ali R. Abootalebi, *Islam and Democracy*.

27. The decision by Ayatollah Khamene'i to reshape the expediency council has led to thirteen more members and has taken voting privileges concerning questions unrelated to constitutional matters away from the six religious lawyers of the council of guardians who are also members of the expediency council.

28. It should be clear to Muslims that in the Quran and Shari'a, Allah is the ultimate sovereign, and everything on earth and heaven is under His command. Yet, there is nothing in either source to deny Muslims' freedom of action to improve their individual and communal lives, nor does Shari'a promote subservience to the state as a proof of proper Muslim behavior. On the contrary, individuals are regarded as responsible for the salvation and well being of themselves, their families, and their communities. See, *The Quran*, Surah (chapter) 10, Aya (verse) 108 (NJ. Dawood, trans., New York: Penguin, 1993). The writings of Hasan Turabi, Mehdi Bazargan, Abd al-Karim Soroush, as well as the late Ayatollah Taleqani, also discuss the sovereignty issue. Mehdi Bazargan, for

example, in response to Samuel Huntington's assertion of "the clash of civilizations," commented, before his death, on the positive relationship between Islam and individual rights, peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims, economic development, freedom of action, and democracy. See Mehdi Bazargan, "Is Islam a Global Threat?" (*Aya Islam yek khatar-i Jahani Ast?*), *Rahavard* no. 36 (Tir 1373 [1994]): 48-57. For a recent discussion of various Islamic concepts with implications for democracy (e.g., *tawhid*, *shurah*, *khilafah*, etc.) see, John Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

29. Alfred Stepan, Religion, Democracy, and the "Twin Tolerations," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 11, no. 4 (October 2000): 37-57, p. 40.

30. See also, Shaul Bakhash, "Iran's Remarkable Election," *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 9, No. 1 (January 1998): 80-94, 83, 84.

31. Naser Momayesi, "Iran's Struggle for Democracy," *International Journal on World Peace*, Vol. XVII, 4 (December 2000): 41-70, p. 66.

32. See Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Iran Report*, Vol. 4, No. 27 (23 July 2001).

33. On a history of intellectual participation in the democratic struggle in Iran, see Merhzaad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

34. Naser Momayesi, p. 53.

35. *Jahad-e Sazandegi* (Crusade for Construction) was heavily involved during and after the war in rebuilding Iran, see Eric Hooglund, "Jihad-e Sazandeghi and Rural Change," in *Proceedings of the 100th Birth Anniversary of Imam Khomeini Conference in Tehran* (Tehran: *Majmeh'e Jahani Islam Ganjineh m'aruf Quran*, 2000). Cited in Khosrokhavar, p 7.

36. Islam and Islamic leaders play different roles in different countries, depending on the underlying socioeconomic and political structure prevalent in any particular country and whether Islam is in power, as in Iran and Sudan, or it is a contending force competing for power, as in most Muslim countries. I

have elsewhere discussed this point in more detail. See, Ali R. Abootalebi, *Islam and Democracy*.

37. *Akhbar-e Iqtisad*, Vol. 2, April 24, 2000, p. 2.

38. Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Toward an Anthropology of Democratization in Iran," *Critique*, no. 16 (Spring 2000): 3-29, p.10.

39. For Iran's post-revolution economy, see, for example, Hooshang Amirahmadi, *Revolution and Economic Transition: The Iranian Experience* (N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990); Jahangir Amuzegar, *Iran's economy under the Islamic Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993); Massoud Karshenas and M. Hashem Pesaran, "Economic Reform and the Reconstruction of the Iranian Economy," *Middle East Journal* Vol. 49, No. 1, (Winter 1995): 89-111; Jahangir Amuzegar, "Iran's Post-Revolution Planning: The Second Try," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. VIII, 1 (March 2001): 25-42.

40. Khosrokhavar, p. 4.

41. Khosrokhavar, p. 9.

42. See Eric Hooglund, "Letter from an Iranian Village," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 1 (Autumn 1997): 76-84, as cited in Khosrokhavar, p. 9.

43. Khosrokhavar, p. 19.

44. Khosrokhavar, pp. 19-20.

45. Abdolkarim Soroush is perhaps the leading Islamist intellectual in Iran. Soroush published works are numerous and there is an Internet site dedicated to his works, at <http://www.seraj.org/seraj.htm>. He is currently a visiting fellow at Harvard.

46. Khosrokhavar, p. 20

47. Khosrokhavar, p. 22.

48. My comments about women, students and the youth and the overall transformation of society in Iran also reflect my own personal observations during my last two visits to Iran in summer 1997 and 2000. I spent several weeks in Tehran and visited the western provinces of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan and the eastern province of Khurasan, as well as the Caspian region, and held personal formal and informal interviews with a number of people.

49. Khosrokhavar, p. 23.

50. Khosrokhavar, p. 22.

51. For more on civil-military relations in Iran, see Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War* (London: Routledge, 1988); Nader Entessar, "The Military and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran," in Hooshang Amirahmadi and Manoucher Parvin, eds., *Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Boulder, CO: westview Press, 1988); Michael Eisenstadt, "The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

52. Iran expenditures on arms imports, according to its Central Bank figures stood at \$1.625 billion in 1989-90; \$1.6 billion in 1990-91; \$1.678 billion in 1991-92; \$808 billion in 1992-93; and \$850 million in 1994-94. Figures cited in Michael Eisenstadt, "The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Assessment," MERIA, March 2001, endnote 1. By March 2001 after a large Iranian delegate visit to Russia, that included high military officials including Admiral Ali Shamkhani the head of the regular military and IRGC, it was all but certain that major arm purchases from Russia was forthcoming.

53. For a recent account of the status of Iran's armed forces, see Michael Eisenstadt, March 2001.

54. The support of IRGC personnel for Khatami in 1997 Presidential elections and the refusal of their commander units in opening fire on demonstrators during the 1994 Qazvin demonstrations has raised some questions about IRGC's outlook of the power structure in the Islamic Republic. See, Michael Eisenstadt, "The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran. "

55. For a discussion on democracy, military, and politics in Turkey and Pakistan, see *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2000 issue. See, Eric Rouleau, "Turkey's Dream of Democracy," pp. 100-14 and Jessica Stern, "Pakistan's Jihad Culture, pp. 115-26.

56. The number of arrests, imprisonment, newspaper closure, and an overall crackdown on reformists in Iran dramatically increased since summer 2000 (1379 in Iranian calendar). Among victims have been secular reformists, religious-nationalists), religious personalities and politicians, and a series of newspapers and other publications.

57. Khosrokhavar, p. 8.