

THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN:
A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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I

BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION. Is what has transpired in Iran a miracle? The Islamic Republic will soon celebrate its third anniversary even though its demise has been predicted on many occasions, not without valid reasons. If any other regime were to have been put to the test by an analogous ordeal, normally it would have been expected to succumb. The Iranian economy which has been unsettled since the downfall of the monarchy, continues to deteriorate, giving rise to growing misery among the population. The machinery of state has been frequently disrupted. The challenges by religious, ethnic, and tribal minorities—Arabs in the south, the Baluch to the east, Kurds to the west, among others—have weakened the central authority which now battles not the Kurdish insurgents who are well-armed and well-organized, but also, since the autumn of 1980, the Iraqi army which occupies part of the Iranian territory.

1.2 INTERNAL SCENE. The internal situation abruptly worsened last summer after Bani-Sadr was dismissed from his functions as commander in chief of the armed forces and as president of the republic. The leadership class was, so to speak, "decapitated" by the bombing of the headquarters of the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) which cost the lives of seventy-four personalities of the regime, including that of the IRP's president, Ayatollah Beheshti. The guerilla war unleashed by the People's Mujahidin (Mujahidin-e Khalq), the strongest of the opposition movements, has been characterized by its amazing effectiveness. More than a thousand political and religious leaders have been killed, among them Bani-Sadr's successor as head of state, Muhammad Ali Rajai, and the prime minister, Hojatolislam Bahonar. Armed assaults against government offices, police stations, and the barracks of Pasdaran (revolutionary guards) have been the occasion for bloody fighting between insurgents and the forces of the regime.

Even the extremely brutal methods of repression practiced by the government ran the risk of redounding against the regime; at least, that was what was thought at the time. Some two to three thousand people, mostly young men, have been executed since last summer under conditions which should normally have aroused the disgust and anger of public opinion. Death sentences were pronounced at the end of so-called "trials" behind closed doors that lasted anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours. The accused did not have the right to a lawyer, and some of them were shot

despite the fact that they had refused to reveal their identities. Others failed to save their heads even after having admitted their "crimes" and begged the indulgence of the authorities in front of television cameras. There were massive arrests; in November, the authorities admitted to having imprisoned some six to seven thousand people. Some observers have estimated that this figure would have to be at least doubled even to approach accuracy.

1.3 PRESENT OUTWARD SCENE. Nevertheless, despite the foregoing statements, it would be a mistake to conclude that the Khomeini regime has lost its popular foundations to the extent of being threatened. Hundreds of thousands of Iranians in Tehran alone have demonstrated their support for Khomeini on a variety of occasions. The flow of crowds in the mosques remains substantial, although somewhat reduced in comparison to the early months of the republic. Two presidential elections have been held without notable incidents, a fact which is remarkable for a country in a state of civil war. Three successive governments have been sworn in by the parliament after sharp debates which were concerned as much with the qualifications of the proposed prime minister as the policies he intended to follow.

Life in Tehran is practically normal. Western businessmen who spent time in the Iranian capital this past autumn were surprised at the order and calm that reigned in the city. Nighttime outbursts of gunfire, which were a matter of course last summer, have virtually ceased. However, major traffic arteries are carefully watched, drivers are often subjected to identity checks, and their vehicles are meticulously searched at roadblocks set up by members of Islamic committees or by Pasdaran. Nevertheless, despite rationing and the high price of gasoline bought on the black market, traffic is intense. The lines at the doors of foodstores are longer than before, but the residents of Tehran do not evince a great degree of impatience. Foreign products, either legally imported or smuggled into the country, are available for those who can afford the cost. The crowds in the bazaar would seem to indicate that internal commerce is not doing too badly.

II

FACTORS FOR STABILITY AND INSTABILITY

2.1 PRELIMINARY. In a situation as complex as that prevailing in the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is difficult to assess the relative importance of factors that contribute to upholding the apparent stability of the regime. Paradoxically, some these stabilizing factors contain the risk of having an opposite, undermining effect in the long run. The following analysis of the most important of these factors should enable us to shed some light on the general picture, if not to draw any definite conclusions.

2.2 KHOMEINI'S PRESTIGE. Although diminished since the revolution, the Imam's prestige remains intact and dominant among the Shi'ite population, especially among the more disadvantaged, less "westernized" classes of Iran. Khomeini has the double merit of being a respected religious "guide" as well as a political leader whose long resistance to the Shah has not been forgotten. Many Iranians still regard him as the champion of the struggle against imperial autocracy and foreign influence, the guarantor of their national identity. They do not hold him responsible for the misfortunes that have befallen Iran since the revolution; these are blamed on the "enemies of Islam" from within as well as from without. They believe that if the "great Satan" America, its allies and its agents, were to be defeated, then Iran would experience peace, prosperity, and social justice.

The fact that Khomeini does not have any direct governmental responsibilities presents obvious advantages, but also some disadvantages. Although he is surrounded by advisors who constitute a kind of parallel government under the direction of his son, Ahmed, he does not control the machinery of state. This responsibility, in principle, is in the hands of the IRP which relies on a clergy said to be completely devoted to the Imam. At least that is how matters appear. In practice, the structures of power are not as solid as one would be led to believe.

2.3 THE CLERGY. The religious establishment—with its 180,000 mullahs, its network of mosques that covers the country like a spider's web, its schools, its social and philanthropic associations—constitutes the basic power structure of the Islamic Republic. Mullahs are active in all the offices of the state, supervising military operations as well as radio and television programs. As a result of exercising this authority, they are suffering an erosion of power because the shortcomings, defects and failures

of the bureaucracy which affect the various sectors of public life are attributed to them. The clergy, then, constitutes both an asset and a liability for the regime: on the one hand, the mullahs are used to defend the regime, but on the other, they are also a cause of its weakness and could even be an instrument of its downfall.

Khomeini, by his position and by his convictions, is condemned to reliance on the "Party of God" in which he has only mild trust. Indeed, a significant portion of the higher-level clergy either does not share all of his opinions, or is openly hostile to him.

2.4 CRITICS AMONG THE CLERGY. Among his opponents is the Ayatollah Shariat-Madari, a "moderate," who is opposed to the religious and political doctrines of the "Guide of the Revolution." After having criticized the very foundations of the Islamic constitution, he has taken refuge in silence as a way of expressing his complete disapproval. He was placed under house arrest in December 1980. As for the Ayatollah Qomi, he has circulated—in the form of a tract—a letter addressed to Khomeini in which he denounced the policies of the IRP and of the government. Using the same means, the Ayatollah Mahalati distributed a text consisting of nine points in which he challenged the religious direction (velayat faghih) of the state. At the time of the conflict between Khomeini and Bani-Sadr, several religious dignitaries publicly took up sides in favor of the latter.

The opposition has crept into the midst of Khomeini's very own family. His grandson, Hojatolislam Hussein Khomeini, gave on May 1, 1981 one of the most scathingly critical speeches against the regime to date. Before tens of thousands of the faithful assembled at the mosque of Mashhad, he declared:

"The new dictatorship established under the mask of religion is worse than that of the Shah. ...Our country is governed by fascists who are more dangerous than the founders of fascism. ...People are arrested and executed for trifles. ...The massacres perpetrated in our land are appropriate to the Middle Ages. ..."

Addressing his grandfather, he continued:

"Imam, they will say to you no doubt that I have joined the ranks of the counter-revolution! They will try to have me arrested or assassinated, but that will not keep me from spreading the truth through the country. You already know it, Imam. Ninety percent of the mullahs agree with my opinion and they will not be quiet either!"

No doubt, Hussein Khomeini is exaggerating the size of the clergy's opposition. But it is nonetheless true that a number of ayatollahs and hojatolislams like himself have been forced to keep quiet. Others continue to criticize specific fundamental aspects of governmental policies, but without challenging Khomeini or his regime.

Such is the case of Golpayegani who, like Khomeini, is one of the six "great ayatollahs" (ayatollah ozma) who are at the top of Shi'ci Islam's upper hierarchy. Golpayegani has chosen to propagate his political ideas by means of professorial lectures which he gives at the theological school of Qum. Without attacking by name the nationalization of banks and industries, he declared several months ago that "private property is sacred in Islam." In October, he returned to the charge, upholding specifically that the agrarian reform project was "against the precepts of the Prophet." Another of the "ayatollah ozma," Marashi-Najafi, supported him by affirming that to occupy "the lands of Muslims" was contrary to God's will. Khomeini is alone among the six "ayatollah ozma" in his desire to modify the socio-economic system of Iran. Considering the influence that his colleagues exercise among the clergy, the seriousness of his isolation on this matter cannot be underestimated. Indeed, it must be understood that the teachings of the "ayatollah ozma" can have repercussions throughout the country by means of a complex network of disciples, the faithful, and mosques. In this way, a simple opinion expressed in Qum may take on the value of law in Tehran.

2.5 INFLUENCE OF THE CLERGY ON THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS. In light of the above, it is easier to understand why two legislative bills to which Khomeini attaches great importance have been blocked in the Majlis (Parliament) for several months. Article III of the first bill which contains radical provisions for the cutting up of the great landed estates, has been suspended sine die. The second text has to do with the nationalization of external commerce. The majority of the deputies have still not voted on this text even though its principle is written into the constitution. In order to avoid making a decision, the members of parliament have had recourse to various delaying tactics that have been effective in Western legislative assemblies: they merely keep sending the two bills from one subcommittee to another, seeking (for example) "additional information" or "an examination in greater depth."

They know that as a last resort, they can always rely on the rulings of the Council for the Protection of the Constitution, a kind of supreme court whose responsibility it is to judge whether laws passed by the Majlis conform to Islamic precepts. This body, consisting of six religious dignitaries and six lay experts on

Islamic law (shari^ca), had been conceived as an instrument of intervention in legislative affairs to be applied by the Imam Khomeini. However, the Council also disfavors too radical agrarian reform and is expected to use its power of veto if the Majlis votes to enforce Article III of the bill concerning landed property.

In a fit of exasperation, Khomeini called upon the Majlis deputies to disregard the Council which he accused of slowing down the forward march of the revolution. In a letter addressed to the Majlis in October, he stated that its members should pass legislation in the interests of the Islamic regime, even if that meant opposing the will of the "twelve sages." To the best of anyone's knowledge, this was the first time that the Imam publicly advocated violating the constitution. By the end of November, the deputies had still not obeyed the order of the "Guide of the Revolution."

In the light of these factors, it is possible to draw an initial conclusion: the Shi^ci clergy is deeply divided and the upper echelon of its hierarchy is far from being unconditionally "Khomeinist." However, it is doubtful that the silent opposition will be transformed into open dissidence until the founder of Islamic Republic disappears from the scene because of his charisma and influence among a good portion of the population including the lower clergy. Of course, an exception to this circumstance would be if there arose a major crisis which might force an unavoidable confrontation. Such a crisis is not out of the question, especially if Iran were to suffer a crushing defeat in its war with Iraq.

2.6 WAR WITH IRAQ. This conflict is, indeed, one of the most influential factors for the future of the regime. From its outset, the war has been one of the principal elements in the struggle for power. In the name of "sacred unity" which was indispensable in order to confront the invading forces, the IRP succeeded in eliminating one after another all the competing "decision centers" starting with the one led by the former chief of state, Abolhasan Bani-Sadr. The government launched a widespread purge in the ministries, the universities, and the telecommunications and print media. All voices of opposition were stifled. Once the control of the machinery of state was achieved, it became possible to remove Bani-Sadr from the presidency and, even more importantly, from supreme command of the army.

2.7 ARMY AND THE REGIME. Contrary to what has been believed, the army was never under the control of the former chief of state to the extent that he himself imagined. Bani-Sadr had become persuaded that his presence on the front lines or in the center of military operations, his constant visits to the fighting units and to the bases had assured him the loyalty of the armed forces. In

reality, the "Guide of the Revolution" has all along exerted his authority over the armed forces through intermediaries. Khomeini's representatives on the National Defense Council, as well as the large number of mullahs posted to various fighting units, serve as his transmission cables. All nominations of officers to key posts are submitted for his prior approval.

Nevertheless, the Islamic regime does not altogether trust the army. After having been vilified and humiliated during the revolution for supporting the Shah, the army has progressively cleared itself of this image in the eyes of the people. This has been possible on the political level by its demonstrated loyalty to the new regime and on the national level by its courageous and amazingly effective combat action against the invading Iraqi forces. Despite equipment and arms that are inferior in quantity and quality to those used by the Baathist forces, the Iranian ground troops have succeeded in containing and, in some instances, even in driving back the Iraqis. The air force has seriously damaged major parts of the oil industry in Baghdad. It is precisely the popularity which these successes generate that worries the Islamic leadership which is already thinking about what will happen after the war is over. Since no one in Iran doubts that Iraq will be defeated, the mullahs are now asking themselves how a victorious army might behave, all the more urgently since the officers are considered to be potential "counter-revolutionaries." In any case, the officers are suspect in the eyes of the militant clergy because they are "westernized" in both the real and the figurative senses of the term, either having actually been trained in the United States or Europe, or else because they come from the middle class.

2.8 ARMY AND PASDARAN. From the outset of the Iraqi-Iranian war, Khomeini's agents undertook to ward off any danger of "bonapartism," by enlarging the ranks of the Pasdaran (revolutionary guards) and by adding to their responsibility for maintaining internal order the extra mission of defending national territory alongside the army.

The Pasdaran were entrusted with the duty of suppressing popular resistance on all fronts of the war and with furnishing volunteer fighting units. According to official sources, they are said to have recruited, trained and armed a million men and women, more than triple the size of the regular forces. It was a paramilitary civilian force commanded by Pasdaran that defended the city of Khorramshahr for six weeks; it was again a paramilitary civilian force that resisted for almost a year the assaults of the Iraqi units on Abadan. For political as well as military reasons, the Islamic ruling power has done its best to place these irregular forces in the limelight, entrusting them with the primary defense of towns and villages, while using the regular army to back them up. This

strategy has yielded results in the field since the Iraqi forces, having suffered heavy losses in the conquest of Khorramshahr, now avoid occupying urban centers and are content to lay siege to them or to bypass them.

Even when the army conducts a successful military operation, the merit is attributed, rightly or wrongly, to an equal degree to the "heroic struggle" of the Pasdaran. The political implications of the "people's war" are obvious. Any victory belongs to the people and those who support them, whereas any defeat can be attributed to a failure of the army.

2.9 WAR OBJECTIVES. The Islamic leaders see only advantages to the prolongation of the war, the tide of which they consider to have turned in their favor ever since their "great victory" at Abadan at the end of September. Not only was the blockade of the port smashed, but the Iraqi forces were driven back in disorderly retreat, leaving behind some six hundred dead and more than two thousand soldiers captured by the Iranians. It is reported on good authority that the staff officers in Tehran considered carrying the offensive on to Basra, but Khomeini, on the advice of his entourage, apparently opposed the plan. According to the same sources, the Iranian generals were instead given the mission of reconquering the frontier locality of Qasr al-Shirin which commands the road, less than 200 km. long, that leads to Baghdad.

Khomeini's objective remains unchanged: to provoke the downfall of the Baathist regime (which has been an object of hatred for him ever since his years of exile in Iraq) and to replace it by a government of Islamic leaders. In order to achieve this goal, he is betting heavily on the demoralization of the Iraqi army and on an uprising among the Shi^cis, who constitute a majority of the Iraqi population. His stubborn determination in this regard is unshakable, so say some of his close associates. Even as early as his return to Iran from exile, he was of the opinion that, in order for the Islamic Republic to become solidified, the three most dangerous enemies of all would have to be eliminated: the Shah, President Carter and Saddam Hussein. The first one is dead; the second was not re-elected president after his failure to free the American hostages; there remains only for Hussein to disappear from the scene for Khomeini to feel that he has accomplished a "sacred" mission. This objective helps to explain how improbable it is that the Tehran government would accept any kind of compromise that would put an end to the war with Iraq. Still, it is essential that the conflict not last too long and that its consequences not lead to a divorce between the Iranian people and their leaders.

2.10 POPULAR DISCONTENT. Although presently controlled, popular discontent continues to spread. While it is true that nationalist feeling contributes to maintaining the combativeness of the Iranian people in the war with Iraq, it is nevertheless also true that the high number of casualties—thirty to forty thousand dead, at least as many wounded, and approximately 1.5 million displaced persons—is undermining the morale of the population whose standard of living has deteriorated dramatically. Even taking into account the hundreds of thousands of young people enlisted in the popular militias, the number of unemployed remains high—2.5 to 4 million according to various estimates. As a result of nationalization policies, the exodus of professionals, businessmen, and intellectuals, and the drop in the importation of equipment and raw materials, Iranian industry is producing only at about one third of its pre-revolutionary capacity. As regards agriculture, negligence by the state, the anarchy that reigns in the countryside, and the dislocation of the distribution network have plunged that sector of the economy into a depression.

2.11 ECONOMIC DISLOCATION. Rajai's government had expected to start the economy moving again at the beginning of this year by doubling exports from the petroleum sector. Oil revenues were projected to have increased from between \$16 to \$18 billion per year to \$33 billion for the fiscal year March 1981/March 1982. Thirty-three billion dollars were considered the minimum amount necessary to balance the budget. That objective was not reached despite the technical and material means that were available to the government. Indeed, except for the refineries at Abadan and Kermanshah, all the other refineries remain intact and operational, as are the oil fields and most of the pumping stations and pipelines. The political crisis, government instability, a saturation of the oil market, and the excessively high price of Iranian crude as compared to that of neighboring countries, have all contributed to keeping oil revenues below income requirements.

Insufficient revenues for the treasury led the authorities to decree that the cost of imports would have to be reduced by half before next March—from \$1.5 billion to \$900 million per month. If from this amount is deducted the cost of imported military equipment—estimated at around \$300 million per month—there would remain only a quite modest sum to ensure the functioning of the economy on one hand, and to satisfy the consumption needs of the population on the other.

Everyday consumer products, many of which are imported, are becoming increasingly rare and costly. Theoretically, an Iranian can obtain provisions at relatively reasonable prices thanks to subsidy food coupons delivered by the authorities. But given the frequent shortages in available stock, he is often forced to resort

to the black market. For example, the official cost of veal is 400 rials per kilogram, but the black market price is 1500 rials; sugar is bought for 240 rials instead of for 30 rials. The official price of motor oil has doubled, gasoline has tripled, and the fuel oil cost has quadrupled. At the same time, the salaries of bureaucrats and workers' wages have not changed.

2.12 PROFITEERING, CORRUPTION, INEFFICIENCY. While one segment of the population is experiencing the effects of a huge dent in its purchasing power and while millions of citizens are on the brink of famine, a minority of merchants, racketeers, and speculators have grown rich at a faster rate than under the Shah's regime. The president of the budget commission in the Majlis scandalized his compatriots last summer when he revealed that the private sector (essentially the bazaar merchants) realized net profits during the fiscal year 1980/81 of 1,200 million rials (\$17 billion), a level three times higher than during the most profitable year under the old regime. The Islamic ruling power, which had wanted to present itself as the defender of the "mostazafin" (the disinherited), has thus suddenly appeared as the protector of the "exploiters."

In truth, the Iranians were not really surprised by the revelation made in the Majlis. The prosperity of the bazaaris is a secret to no one, since they make no effort to hide their ostentatious style of living. It is obvious to everyone that no serious steps have been taken to put an end to smuggling and the black market or to impose strict price controls. The fiscal system, which is particularly unfair, has not been reformed. Despite its exorbitant profits, the private sector accounts for less than 20 percent of taxes collected, the rest coming from the salaried workers and excises levied on consumer goods. The government has also not been able to eliminate tax evasion which is practiced on a wide scale in business circles.

This seeming governmental indifference cannot be ascribed solely to the failures of the bureaucracy and to the anarchy that reigns in the state administrative apparatus. It appears obvious that for political and economic reasons, the authorities have not wanted to take the risk of attacking the bazaar, which was one of the driving forces behind the revolution. The bazaaris now constitute one of the pillars of the Islamic Republic because of the traditionally tight bond between the mullahs and the merchants. In addition, in a developing country like Iran, where industrial and financial activities are modest, the merchant class plays a pre-eminent role in economic life.

Nevertheless, the prevailing impression in November was that the government would be forced to take energetic steps against "the haves" because of the economic crisis and growing discontent among

"the have nots." Various signals confirm this impression. On 4 November, the daily Azadegan, mouthpiece of the religious circles, denounced the "money lovers" and went on to say: "If the state is truly Islamic, it must prevent the concentration of wealth in the hands of a group of profiteers and pillagers." The organ of the clerics proposed "the destruction of capitalism" and "the expulsion of the great landowners" so that "the masses might rebuild the country."

2.13 RISKS OF SOCIAL REFORMS. The most precise threat was formulated by the president of the Majlis, the Ayatollah Rafsanjani, who back on October 25 declared: "The victory of Islam and of our revolution will be assured...once we have seized the possessions illegally amassed by the haughty oppressors and have implemented Article 49 of the constitution..." This article gives the state wide ranging power to expropriate property owners and redistribute their riches.

It is generally admitted that the Ayatollah Rafsanjani, one of the men closest to the Imam Khomeini, would not be allowed to make such a statement and to quote specifically Article 49 of the constitution without prior authorization from the "Guide of the Revolution." Khomeini appears now to be set on opening the "social" phase of the revolution, which is perceived as breathing into it new life which is necessary for its survival. It is clear that he has entrusted the Majlis with this mission. While asking the deputies to ignore the opinions of the Council for the Protection of the Revolution," which he deems to be too conservative (see above), he has authorized them to adopt exceptional laws of a temporary nature in order to confront critical situations or to eliminate obstacles "that prevent the implementation of other laws." Some observers are of the opinion that this is Khomeini's way of referring to Article 49.

It remains to be seen who will follow Khomeini down this snare-laden path that leads to a confrontation with the bazaaris. If the bazaaris join the opposition, it will no doubt have serious political repercussions, because their influence extends well beyond the Majlis to the machinery of state. The civil servants, the higher and middle-level managers of nationalized industries, the army officers, the university professors—all these are from middle-class backgrounds. A significant portion of the upper middle class has shied away from the regime owing to the wave of nationalization, the seizure of some 100,000 buildings, houses and apartments and most of the hotels and cinemas, and because of various other measures taken against the wealthier groups during the months following the downfall of the imperial regime. Moreover, the lower middle class is now showing signs of teetering over to

the side of the counter-revolution. In any case, the recent threats and actions of the Islamic leaders do not inspire trust among the lower middle class. If one takes into account the progressive disaffection of the bazaar, to which may be added popular discontent fed by the economic depression and social injustice, a fundamental question arises: to what extent are the opposition groups capable of taking advantage of the circumstances to put the regime in jeopardy?

III THE OPPOSITION

3.1 THE "MOSSADEGHISTS" (MODERATE NATIONALISTS). There is no doubt that next to Islam, nationalism is the most widespread ideology among the Iranian people. Had the Shah not succeeded in annihilating the National Front as an organized political force, it is probable that Mossadegh's spiritual heirs would have taken over leadership of the revolution. They would have benefitted from the support not only of the bazaaris and a significant segment of the clergy, but as well from the support of the general public, which wanted to recover its national identity just as much as it wanted to enjoy the political and social freedoms denied them by the Shah. However, the leaders of the National Front had progressively become metamorphosed into notables who were cut off from the realities of the country. The revolutionary movement of 1978/79 took them by surprise and they were unable to join the revolution in time to use their past prestige to launch a movement that might have altered the course of events.

The "Mossadeghist" leaders have splintered roughly into three groups. One group, under the leadership of Shapur Bakhtiar, named prime minister by the Shah before his flight into exile, sought to keep a working relationship with the monarchy. Consequently it has become identified with the royalist exile groups whose popular appeal is currently very low. Another group, under Karim Sanjabi, who was for a brief time Khomeini's foreign minister, lost its secular nationalist identity by being too closely associated with the Islamic movement. Mossadegh's grandson, Matin Daftari, took the opposite direction and created a revolutionary nationalist party that seemed at its beginning capable of becoming a mass movement. However, soon after its creation, this "Democratic National Front" committed three errors that precipitated its ruin: its nucleus was allowed to be infiltrated by leftist cells; it presented itself as an alternative to "Khomeinism;" and it prematurely took on the Islamic movement in combat. It has now completely disappeared from the political scene.

In the absence of a party to carry the banner of their aspirations, the moderate nationalists turned over their trust to men who, if they were not capable of overthrowing the regime, were at least able to crystallize the opposition. Admiral Madani was one of these men. Defense minister in the Islamic Republic's first government, and then governor of Kurdistan, he received more than 2 million votes in the presidential elections of January 1980. However, Admiral Madani, like many other personalities of the

opposition, chose exile in Europe where practically nothing more is heard of him.

In contrast, Mehdi Bazargan, whose ideology places him midway between Islam and secular nationalism, refused to leave Iran, but his fate is hardly more enviable. The former head of the provisional government no doubt retains the esteem and respect of hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, of Iranians, especially among the middle classes. But his reformist stance with regard to internal matters and the reputation he has gained for being "pro-American" ever since the hostage crisis, do not allow him to play a front line political role. The "Movement for Liberation" which he leads does not possess either the structural components, the managerial talent, or the kind of constituency that are necessary for making it a political party of the masses. The party's newspaper, Mizan, which had a circulation of more than 100,000, was forbidden to continue publication last spring. Bazargan has no access to radio and television broadcasts. As an elected deputy, he took the floor of the Assembly in October to denounce the tactics of repression and the summary executions, but his fellow deputies prevented him from finishing his speech by shouting jeers and insults. The eight other members of the Assembly who, like him, are pejoratively called "liberals" have also been reduced to silence while awaiting their probable exclusion from the Majlis.

3.2 BANI-SADR. More than anyone else, Abolhasan Bani-Sadr raised the hopes of all segments of the moderate opposition. In addition to being a militant Muslim from the very beginning and Khomeini's "spiritual son," he was also president of the republic and commander in chief of the armed forces. Westernized Muslims, nationalists, social democrats, and even those who were royalists at heart—all saw him as a person in whom they could place their hopes. He was as widely acclaimed in Tehran's bazaar as in the streets of Zahedan (one of the fiefs of the Pahlavi dynasty), or in the barracks of Khuzistan.

Nevertheless, the former chief of state committed a series of errors, the worst of which was to believe that his popularity was even more widespread than that of Khomeini. In this regard, he emphasized the fact that he had been elected to the presidency of the republic by a majority of more than 70 percent of the votes. But for some reason, he seems to have forgotten that he would not have been elected had he not benefitted from Khomeini's guaranteed support. This lapse of judgement was fatal for it led him to embark on a foolhardy struggle, first against the IRP, and then against Khomeini himself. A few days prior to his removal from office, he declared to a newspaper reporter that if such an event were to occur, the army and the people would rise up in his support.

But he failed to consider an essential factor in any political confrontation: he did not have at his disposal a political party, indeed any organization, to mobilize a defense by his supporters.

Many of his former admirers now say that Bani-Sadr should have maneuvered in such a way as to remain, at any cost, as the head of state and the armed forces. In that way, he would have retained his chances of inheriting real power in the event of a major crisis, either before or after Khomeini's demise. Few people today believe that he has a political future. By exiling himself in France he runs the risk of being forgotten, like so many others, by his compatriots. He had been advised, at the time when he was living clandestinely in Tehran, that he should seek refuge instead in Kurdistan where the autonomist guerillas would have given him access to the radio they had installed in their "liberated territory." However, he preferred to leave the country in the company of Massud Rajavi, the leader of the People's Mujahidin, a Muslim movement which he had reproached for a long time because of its "Marxist deviations."

3.3 THE MUJAHIDIN. However, the Mujahidin constituted the only political force that compared favorably in terms of strength and organization with the IRP. Just as the latter bases its strength on the "network of mosques," Rajavi's party constructed a remarkable organization that included both lay and religious members and which was capable of mobilizing hundreds of thousands of followers, a fact confirmed by attendance at public meetings and the number of copies printed of its publications. The movement's appeal can be explained not only by the courageous struggle that it led against the Shah's regime, but also by its ideology which was both Muslim and progressive at the same time. Khomeini was not mistaken when he denounced the "munafikin" (hypocrites, a term used to designate the Mujahidin in the official vocabulary) more often and more violently than the other opposition groups because he considered them to be a more dangerous threat. Because they were Muslim, organized and numerous, they had the potential for defeating the Khomeinists on their own ground by progressively taking control of the mass organizations, such as the Islamic committees and the Pasdaran, and by creating Mujahidin cells within them.

It appears in retrospect that in order to attain their objectives, the Mujahidin should have observed the rules of underground movements, limited their activities to the political arena, and armed themselves with patience while awaiting their hour. However, their leaders decided to proceed otherwise. During the crisis provoked by the ouster of Bani-Sadr last June, they initiated armed hostilities, especially in the form of political assassinations. This decision was based on two premises that proved to be erroneous:

that the physical elimination of the leaders would precipitate the downfall of a deeply unpopular regime, and that Khomeini, considered by the majority of the population as a "bloodthirsty madman," would lose control of the situation. At least that is what was revealed by the declarations of Massud Rajavi when he arrived in Paris last July. However, the leader of the Mujahidin has since revised his opinion. He admitted in a recent interview that Khomeini continued to enjoy the benefits of his "charisma" but that "it would not be long before the regime would fall to pieces."

Observers in Tehran do not share the same opinion, or in any case, they are not aware of any factors that would permit such a prediction. The bloody repression that has befallen the Mujadidin—more than a thousand executions and several thousand arrests—has weakened them considerably. Several of their leaders and quite a few lower party officials have either been killed or detained. Reports from Tehran also indicate that the organization has split into two factions, one which wants to continue the armed struggle, the other desiring a political compromise with the Islamic ruling power. The latter faction blames Massud Rajavi for having "deserted the battlefield" in order to indulge in "deluded political action" in Paris.

The head of the Mujahidin justifies his presence in France by his self-assigned goal: to unite the opposition into a "National Council of Resistance." This mission is obviously still in a formative stage. The National Council presently includes only Bani-Sadr, the Mujahidin and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI — the Qassemlou faction). The royalist groups have not been invited to join the coalition, and the various Marxist-Leninist organizations (the Minority Fedayin, Peykar, Komaleh, the Maoists, and the Trotskyists) refuse to join because of the presence of Bani-Sadr whom they brand a "bourgeois liberal." It must be added that none of these groups of the extreme right or the extreme left enjoy any substantial popular following in Iran.

3.4 THE KURDS. This is not true, however, for Qassemlou's KDPI, despite two successive internal schisms that have factionalized his party. The leader of the Kurdish autonomists is directing a guerilla campaign in the western part of the country that is forcing the central government to commit as many as twenty thousand regular army troops and some five thousand Pasdaran to fight him. Even though Qassemlou employs radio broadcasts in behalf of his cause, his influence outside of Kurdistan remains modest because of his acknowledged alliance with the Iraqi government, a connection which is viewed by many Iranians as a "betrayal." Baghdad supplies him with arms, provisions, and logistical support. In any case, the Kurdish guerilla war contributes seriously to

weakening the resistance of the Iranian armed forces in their confrontation with the Iraqis, although it does not appear to threaten the Tehran regime in the immediate future.

IV CONCLUSIONS

4.1 **CONTINUED INSTABILITY.** The stability of the current regime is not assured in the intermediate term. Mussavi's government has not offered, any more than did its predecessors, a coherent program that is likely to reinvigorate a failing economy. If the slump in petroleum sales persists, the government will not have the means to carry out essential development projects and to continue indefinitely the war with Iraq. Even if steps were taken to ensure a better distribution of national revenues, they would still be insufficient to reduce unemployment, the high cost of living, and the general level of poverty. The closing down of the universities over the last eighteen months is a sign of the profound malaise among the young people. The government has not shown itself capable of employing the young or of mitigating their discontent.

4.2 **ISOLATION OF THE REGIME.** The ideological intransigence of the rulers is more than ever deepening their political isolation both internally and on the international scene. They reject with equal vehemence both the "great Satan" America and the Soviet "devil," although it must be said that out of necessity, they have recently reactivated commercial exchanges with Moscow. They abstain from developing their relations with the other Muslim countries which are accused of betraying Islam. They also do not look upon the non-aligned nations favorably because most of them are considered to be, in practice, clients of either Moscow or Washington. The United Nations is an instrument of American imperialism in their eyes. Even the rare countries which they used to consider "friendly" in the past — Libya and Syria — are now held in suspicion.

4.3 **THE TUDEH PARTY.** Who will profit from the progressive weakening of the Islamic ruling power? More and more observers point to the communist party, Tudeh, and its allies, the Fedayin (Majority), who have chosen, against wind and tide, to stand behind "Imam Khomeini's political line." This strategy has enabled them so far to escape repression. While it is true that Mardom, the main organ of the Tudeh party, was banned from publication last summer, the party continues to sponsor a large number of professional, trade union, and cultural publications which appear without political labels. Taking advantage of the relative degree of tolerance they enjoy, the communists are developing their clandestine activities and, it appears, are systematically setting up

cells within the Islamic organizations and the various administrative departments of state.

4.4 THE PASDARAN AGAIN. Nevertheless, observers admit that the Tudeh party has only a relatively limited number of militants and that it will take several years for it to see the fruits of its labor. In the interim, other forces may modify the course of events. The most often mentioned in this context are the Pasdaran whose paramilitary and political strength continues to grow within the ranks of the present government. Just as the ruling party and its opposition, the Pasdaran too are divided into several factions. Depending upon whichever one wins out over the others, there will be a change in the image and perhaps even in the very nature of the Islamic Republic. However, caution requires the exercise of care in making such predictions which, given the complexity, changeability, and uncertainty of events in Iran today, must have about them as much speculation as projection.