Chapter Five:

Dynamics of Political Development – State -Society Relations
5-1. Preface

The history of the Iranian political system since the early days of the revolution might be called a "transformation process." An analytical study of this experience can provide clues on the system's future shape. The revolutionary elite, operating under the heavy impact of the Shii legacy concerning the legitimacy and authority of political relations, created an ideological political system which has been controlled by a set of institutions dominated by religious leaders and pro-revolutionary elites. The gradual transformation of the political system has led to a two-track model, based on the hegemony of bureaucratic institutions or state elites.

Arguments based on notions of "failure of political Islam" or "Iranian Westernization" are not the best way to understand the evolution of the Iranian institutions, political thought, or the system as a whole. What is going on in Iran is less a failure of the Islamic revolution or of Islam itself than it is an ongoing experiment, a search for a new Muslim identity, in which various ideas and structures are being tried and in some cases rejected.

According to Mehran Kamrava, an analysis of Iranian civil society on the intellectual level would reveal three main features of civil society in Iran. First, Iranian intellectuals have made extensive efforts to keep away from western concept of civil society in terms of religions and culture.
Second, as part of this indigenization process and as a result of it, Iranian intellectuals and politicians emphasize the role of the state in promoting civil society. According to them, the rule of law is an essential condition for the existence of civil society. The rule of law is the state in which all citizens — irrespective of their gender, age, class and political and religious affiliations — abide by laws. This cannot be achieved without the help of the state. Yet they urge for the abstention of the state from interfering in citizens' daily life.

Third, by and large Iranian intellectuals, even those with secular background, are unable to ignore the role played by religion in the Iranian experience throughout its history. The writings of Abdolkarim Soroush stand as a good example in this regard. Soroush, whose ideas helped fuel the revolutionary zeal during the early days of the revolution, reexamined the role played by religion in Iranian society. He believed that religion and religious texts are sacred, yet our understanding of them is not. Thus, we should maintain a room for human interpretation and understanding of religious instructions.

5-2. The State and Democracy in Contemporary Iran

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 leader of the revolution, currently Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was appointed by the popularly elected 83-member Assembly of Experts which has constitutional rights to dismiss him if it decides he abuses his authority. The leader 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 comprised of religious lawyers appointed by the leader and of lay lawyers elected by the parliament ensures that all legislation conforms to Islamic law.

Since 1988, the Expediency Council 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. 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. 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 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 leader 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 (not the president). 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 30 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 Guardianship of the Jurisprudent 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 ulama 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 ulama 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.

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, it is certain that the nature of the state society relations in Iran in the past 30 years has been altered drastically by domestic and international events, making a return to authoritarian rule, under any ideological disguise, very unlikely.

Iran’s leadership is divided into broadly defined conservative and moderate Islamic camps. These groups, along with their media organs, have provided some debate on issues of national concern, such as the role and function of Iran’s leader. These issues remain explosive and have already led to arrests, newspaper closures, and public demonstrations. The central issue is over whether the leader 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 (not the president).

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.

It is only in the past 30 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, as Naser Momayesi claims, 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."6

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." 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.

Despite positive developments in Iran in uprooting the historical relations of power, the past 30 years have 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 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.

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.

5-3. Development of Civil Society

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." 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." 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.)

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.

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 three decades.\textsuperscript{12} 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.

Khatami's years in office 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 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 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.

Iran's civil society resembles that in other developing countries, but is somewhat livelier and more vigorous. Despite tight state control of society, "there is also a sense in which society stands apart from and in opposition to the state," and some "public space exists, even if in a restricted form."13 Over the past two decades, socio-economic modernization has created a fairly large middle class, and the intellectual and professional community has taken advantage of any possible avenue to press for Iranians' political and civil rights. Particularly since Khatami's 1997 election, the Ministry of Culture has been more tolerant of the press, and has allowed serious debate about civil society, religion and politics, and Islamic leadership. Independent filmmakers have also enjoyed some degree of freedom, though outspoken writers, editors, and journals that have criticized the top state leadership have been punished.14 The post-revolution generation, deprived of economic normality or basic social freedoms,
and politicized by controversial events, has also come to question state policies.

However, the presence of some professional, artistic, and cultural associations does not imply that an effective civil society exists, where organized groups determine or even influence policy outcomes. Acts of defiance in Iran, though they might challenge the state, hardly represent the "way in which society, or groups within it, keep at bay the repressive instincts of the state."\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, the state's tolerance for limited popular acts of defiance can be attributed to factionalism within its leadership and the state's inability to combat persistent economic and social problems.

An important agent of civil society, organized labor, is particularly weak in Iran. Powerful labor federations and confederations can use such tools as collective bargaining, strikes, and other means to compete with both the state and corporate interest groups.\textsuperscript{16} It is in labor's interest to push for political democratization, which would improve its bargaining position vis-à-vis the state and business groups. Organized labor has the potential capability to either cripple or boost the economy (e.g., the oil workers' strike during the Iranian revolution that helped defeat the shah's government) and therefore be a formidable force checking the state's power.\textsuperscript{17}

One major confrontation between the reformist and the conservative camps has been over freedom of the press, specifically, the print media's right to question state policies or the legitimacy of
the unelected leader. The state has repeatedly, and predictably, charged the pro-reform press with violating the state's Islamic precepts, and closed down several popular reformist papers. The reformists' hope to revise the very restrictive Press Law, passed by the outgoing conservative-dominated fifth parliament was, at least temporarily, dashed by Khamenei's order to the parliament to drop the debate on press reforms in August 2000.\textsuperscript{18}

5-4. Political Development Discourse in Post-Revolutionary Iran

Realizing a politically developed society requires going through a risky political transition, which if too long, may lead to a rebound to the past situation. Replacement of a totalitarian system with a democratic one which would recognized the right to vote, political parties and civil bureaucracies, requires general will of citizens, on the one side, and acceptance by the rulers, on the other side. History has shown that in Iran, political development discourse has been a function of the political power’s discourse. That is, every time that the political power has been stable, political development discourse has been limited in action. When a central power has been shaky, political development discourse has been the rule of the day. Therefore, political development discourse is closely related to power discourse and studying the dominant discourse in various historical junctures will lead to recognition of the ideas of the ruling system about power distribution, political participation and freedom. From Fairclough’s
viewpoint, discourse means power and is among systems that are involved in power transition.\textsuperscript{19}

In 1979, victory of the Islamic Revolution changed the dominant discourse in political fields. In that year the absolute rule gave way to the Islamic revolutionary discourse and was marginalized. Subsidiary discourses, for example, sub-discourse of “insider” and “outsider” emerged afterwards. In 1992, reconstruction discourse was dominant and the government tried to make up for economic shortcomings. Finally, in 1998, “political development” emerged, for the first time, as the main indicator of the dominant political discourse. They believed that without transparency in politics, economic development could not be achieved. In that period, attention was paid to establishment of civil institutions, democracy, government’s accountability, growth of free press and respect for the rights of citizens.

We have chosen a newspaper that reflects the dominant discourse of each period in order to review that discourse and have chosen two famous texts out of every paper to discuss them through discourse analysis methods which avails of Norman Fairclough’s methods and Van Dijk’s theory. The findings have been elucidated on the basis of the analysis of political, historical and social grounds. The newspapers that have been taken to reflect the dominant discourse of every period of time include: \textit{Jomhuri Eslami} newspaper, printed in 1979, and \textit{Abrar} newspaper, printed in 1992; as well as \textit{Jameh} and \textit{Tous} newspapers, printed in 1998.
Hossein Bashiriyeh, who has carried out extensive studies on the power structure and obstacles to political development in Iran during recent years, has mentioned three important factors as barring political development: centralized control of political power source, noncompetitive political culture, and fragmentation in political society. The description on which this discussion is based is as follows: “Political development is a process in which all simple authoritarian systems give way to a system of public votes, political parties, representation and civil bureaucracies.” In general, liberty; democracy; cultural, social and political values; public supervision; political competition and participation; continued criticism of society and government’s policies and proposing consistent solutions are major concepts of the political development. Since political and social institutions in civil society, that is, media, associations and civil societies, can play a great role in public supervision, political development can be taken as tantamount to development of civil society, efficient bureaucracy, specialized tasks, the ability to meet the demands, the ability to establish political order and stability, indirect democracy, as well as organized and institutionalized transfer of power among the elite.

Here, the results of discourse analysis of editorials of the said newspapers related to the post-revolutionary period will be presented.

5-4-1. First Period, 1979
Editorials carried by Jomhuri-e Eslami newspaper are the texts to be analyzed in relation to the Iranian year 1358 (1979). They appeared in
the second and the 39th issues of the paper. Basically, the discourse of the said editorials leaves no room for an element to be called political development and democracy because they were neither the main concern of the editorialists, nor a priority for the government. Both texts emphasize on the Islamic ideology that was accepted by people in order to reach an “agreement” and stress on the charismatic legitimacy and authority of the political system emerging from the revolution and its leadership. In general, the dominant discourse of that time is “Islamic idealistic discourse” or “Islamic revolutionary discourse,” which relies on political and social conditions to spread its area of influence. Some of the characteristics of that discourse include endeavors aimed at realizing the global Islamic ummah, classless monotheistic society under the rule of Allah, ideological unity, independence seeking and prescription of violence against the opponents in order to realize the ideals of the Islamic Revolution. Therefore, there were no serious and modern signs of political development in the said discourse, but emphasis was put on such elements as participation, negation of racial discrimination, and negation of the importance of differences in color and language in the Islamic ummah. Both texts indicate the emergence of a totally ideological atmosphere subsequent to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The “self” and “other” are constantly defined and redefined and the range of “the other” that is standing in the face of the revolution is continuously expanding. Anti-modernistic traditionalism is securing its foothold and its signs such has opposition to legacy of intellectualism, wary reaction to liberalism, humanism, and democracy; freedom and democratic lifestyle; as well as the hierarchy of political authority
became more and more evident. Indirect or direct opposition to the establishment of political parties will lead to nothing but prevalence of a monologue in the society.

The ideological political atmosphere depicted in both editorials is at loggerheads with democracy, personal freedoms and democracy. Such an ideological atmosphere which is not denied in the said editorials, but is rather emphasized upon, leads to prevalence of totalitarianism in almost all social fields. There are no signs of “relative agreement” or “relative opposition” in the said texts and their attitudes are absolute. Therefore, one cannot expect the government to put a political development discourse on its agenda during the said period. In fact, as the authority of the government and its control over the political and social environment increases, political development emerging in the early months after the victory of the Islamic Revolution gradually wanes and mass mobilization of people in 1979 leaves no room for the activities of civil society forces. In other words, political development in that period was neither a preoccupation for revolutionary activists and leaders, nor political developments and interactions left a room for it.

5-4-2. Second Period, 1992

“Media and Public Satisfaction” and “Avoiding of Pretension” were titles of two editorials that were published in Abrar daily in 1992 (reconstruction period). The positive words in both texts reflected on the necessity of satisfying people and reducing public discontent. Although existence of sympathy, sincerity and the wish to serve is
taken for granted and though emphasis is put on efforts made in the
direction of prosperity and welfare of people, the writers still believe
that the existing discontent is the result of the lack of good information
and absence of dialogue between people and officials. They say
avoiding of pretension and explaining the reasons behind shortages
and economic problems will increase people’s tolerance in the face of
difficulties. In this way, it is evident that that the political and social
criticism in the said editorials does not amount to serious challenges
in such fields as the fundaments of legitimacy, freedom, competition,
and political participation. In other words, development was limited to
reconstruction of the country and people’s economic welfare and
government’s controlling role in drawing up and implementing
development plans had been accepted in advance. The main
problem, therefore, was lack of suitable communication with people or
enemies’ intrigues. Such an argument abounds in editorials related to
1973 when the writers talk about the necessity of informing people
about social realities. From this viewpoint, social realities are positive
and reliable enough, government’s developmental measures (social
and economic development) are satisfactory and the only setback is
the absence of correct information to people.

In general, there is no mention of such indicators of political
development as democracy, personal and social liberties,
participation of the elite and intellectuals, political and social pluralism,
rule of law and meritocracy, civil rights, and the establishment of civil
institutions in the said editorials. Also, the necessity for détente in
foreign relations is largely ignored and believing in the existence of
the “other” in international relations is quite rife. Of course, this does
not mean that the difficulties of converting a “war discourse” to “reconstruction discourse” have been ignored. If attention to economic development and people’s economic needs had been paid through a far-reaching approach, it would have been a big stride forward. But even efforts made in this regard were mainly superficial and the society, which was grappling with the problems and consequences of development of market economy, did not avail of its advantages. In addition, imbalanced development in that period led to inattention to a lot of political and social demands and major groups such as intellectuals and the political elite were marginalized because it seemed that the government was not ready to share the political power. Therefore, some advances in economic fields and lack of progress with regard to opening up the political atmosphere, worsened conflicts and inequalities. At the same time, privatization widened class divide and led to widespread administrative corruption. Perhaps a collection of those events led to the social movement which reached its peak in late May 1997. People’s discontent at that time was the result of imbalanced development and ignorance of political realities.

5-4-3. Third Period, 1998

And editorial of *Jameh* newspaper and another editorial published in *Neshat* newspaper have been chosen to represent the Iranian year 1377 (1998). The editorials are titled “Request on Researchers and Writers” and “Political Development through What Kind of Grouping?” The following is a review of the discourse contained in those writings.
1. The writer does not believe in aggrandizing “other” as a member of reform community. Therefore, the demarcation between “self” and “other” is done very subtly.

2. The negative prepositions in both texts are much less severe than preceding texts and basically no harsh negative words have been used. Therefore, the language used in both editorials encourages understanding, which characterizes discourse in a politically developed society.

3. The writer avoids of stressing on irrational and emotional issues and does not pursue to cast the country’s political atmosphere along ideological lines, but avails of scientific and rational arguments to prove his viewpoints.

4. Totalitarianism has no place in either of the two texts. This is a requisite for political development.

5. The dominant idea of both texts is political development and civil society. Repetition of that idea in both texts shows that the writer is serious about the necessity of political development and the establishment of civil society. In the first text, “civil society” has been used 10 times while “institutions independent of state” has been used four times. In the second text “political development” has been repeated six times. Also, such terms as competition, participation, political stability and law are major keywords of both texts.

6. The writers of both texts are trying to bolster public consensus on such words that define political development. Therefore, it seems that the writer maintains that awareness of the public and officials of such concepts should be promoted.
7. If multiplication of power sources; developing communication between government and the nation through intermediate institutions; promotion of consensus, understanding and solidarity; meritocracy; free speech; healthy competition; and emphasis on the role of respect for law are taken as major indicators of civil society and political development, then it follows that the writers of both texts have been trying to institutionalize those concepts. This is the role that, as put by Lucian Pye, should be played by the print media in a civil society to pave the way for the emergence of a logical discourse with regard to political and social issues.

8. The writer and his newspaper, as members of elite community of Iran, have tried to pay more attention to serious topics related to the political development and civil society, such as legitimacy of government, people’s rights and government’s obligations, and strengthening the role of civil institutions. Before that time, such topics had no place in the Iranian society and press, save for the early years after the Constitutional Revolution or for a short period under prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq.

9. The columnist has tried to promote the political culture of participation instead of the political culture of followership. Also, tendency for the creation of legal and popular authority is quite evident as the dominant political discourse of the said editorial.

10. The effort made by the writer to marginalize the “self” and “other” discourse and classify socially active forces according to majority vs. minority discourse, indicates that the social movement of
May 23, 1997 aimed to pay more attention to those social forces that had been marginalized and ignored.

In sum, if such elements as freedom (freedom of press and expression), rule of law, establishment of civil institutions, pluralism, stability, as well as political competition and partnership were considered as components of political development, the following conclusions would be reached:

1. In the first period (1979) we see political instability resulting from the Islamic Revolution in addition to pluralism, some degree of freedom, and the rebirth of print media and political parties in parallel to gradual evolution of an ideological political atmosphere and mobilization of the masses. Therefore, political development discourse of that period was incomplete. The said elements arose from the nature of Iran’s social movement and were not directed by the government.

7. The second period (1992) was a period of imbalanced development with more attention paid to economic and social reconstruction in the absence of political development discourse. Lack of competition and true political participation, limited liberties, absence of pluralism as well as political parties and civil institutions independent of government are major features of this period.

8. The third period (1998) was a rare occasion when despite existence of a powerful, central government, that government was trying to promote political development and the civil society. Emergence of free press and civil institutions as well as emphasis on the rule of law and meritocracy were major features of that period.
Therefore, political development discourse in Iran has only been prominent at the time of political transition and absence of a centralized political power. The situation in 1998 was a double situation. On the one side, it was a period of political transition that should have connected the previous undeveloped period (in political terms) to the more developed and irreversible situation of future years, while on the other side, the government itself was promoting the political development despite facing serious challenges. The elite, intellectuals and print media played a determining role in that period.

5-5. Prospects for Development of Civil Society
Respecting Iran’s prospects for the development of civil society, promotion of human rights and in general, democratization of the country, alternative responses capitalize on the demographic overhaul in Iran. Whereas the pro-democracy reformists capitalize on the intellectual capacity of the younger and modern middle classes, the conservatives expound on the subsistence needs of the youth, traditional middle class and older generation, particularly the clerical establishment.

Based upon this favorable demographic structure, it is further presumed here Iran is structurally all time best-ever fit for democracy. Notwithstanding this favorable structure, the hypotheses of this essay arise from the discrepancy between this favorable demographic
structure with both unfavorable political culture and scarce hardware-software resources.

After more than a century struggle for democracy, Iran is still plagued with its deficient democratic institutions, and the ineptitude of its political activists to demonstrate a solid commitment to political compromise and to institutionalize political skill in negotiating to resolve their conflicts rather peacefully. Iranian civil society though is weak in pushing the incumbent conservatives to bow to its democratic demands, it has enough power to frustrate conservative brutal repressive measures. As a result, Iran has become a “liberated” society. Whereas the civil society is no longer tolerant of the undemocratic measures, its incumbent conservatives have enough hardware resources to retain their oligarchic rule. There is a precarious balance between them. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the ruling conservatives are aware of the ultimate inevitability of democratization, they are scared of rapid process of democratization. Therefore, they would like to delay the democratic processes as far as they could retain their threatened oligarchic rule. Last but not the least blow to the quick process of democratization is the fact that neither them nor their rival reformists or alienated dissenting oppositions are prepared to make a compromise deal in favor of democracy.

At the same time, the ruling conservatives have both the means and the resolve to prolong their oligarchic rule. As long as they do not feel necessary, they will not initiate any compromise with the dissenting opposition. However, the events in Iraq have both encouraged the conservatives and at the same time discouraged the
pro-democratic forces. The conservatives have increasingly become assertive in their incumbent positions. The subsidiary hypothesis is about the high-grade probability that the incumbent conservatives under pressure will change their attitudes. It appears their weak electoral successes, combined with changing environment in favor of secular values and interests including democracy, and their lasting political ambition to remain in power at any price would inadvertently place them within a process of political “metamorphosis:” either to use unwise “iron fist” in implementing their totalitarian agenda or otherwise to legitimate their rule through welcoming democratic means of political power.

In spite of the fact that conservatives hope for reversing the ongoing structural changes through more restricted cultural means and political repressions in Iran, thanks to both prevalent demand for democracy arising from domestic social transformations in Iran reinforced by the global trend in favor of democracy, as well as fundamentalist zeal to remain in power by any means, it is hoped they would be compelled to comply with the imperatives of the democratic reform. The paradigmatic changes in anthropological, cultural, economic, political and social fabric of Iran are so deep that force the incumbent conservatives to reluctantly concede to the rising popular pressures for democracy in Iran.

The claimed policies of the other political activists including the ruling factions concur with this proposition regarding the ultimate victory of democratic forces. Nonetheless, their actual policies demonstrate the otherwise: they attempt to reverse the previous
achievements and block new initiatives in support of a full-fledged democracy. The incumbent conservatives translate their religious democracy into their political agenda which involves only one component of democracy: accountability. Their approach to implement “accountability” has always been selective. In spite of the fact that the Supreme Leader has an active role in managing the state, this institution is safeguarded from any criticism. At times, this immunity is extended to the members of the institutions supervised directly by the Supreme Leader including The Guardian Council, the Judiciary, the military and rich foundations such as “The Foundation for the Oppressed.” Rafsanjani established pragmatists recently expressed his new opinion in favor of democratic rule and against both autocratic and oligarchic rule. Rafsanjani has been impressed by the underlying structural-cultural changes in Iran. He expressed his skepticism in respect to the previously cited views by jubilant conservatives in the following terms: “No longer can political systems impose their rule on people through non-democratic mechanisms: people are the real sovereign and they are entitled to define the shape and content of political rule…We must avoid building a system on the arbitrary rule of an individual or in fact any particular individual-since Iran is replete with much creative managerial potential.” However, in spite of his shrewd capabilities the public opinion is not in favor of him.

Against this claimed policies in favor of democracy, the real politics of the ruling conservatives and their pragmatist partners is more ambiguous and mixed in respect to democratization of Iran. In spite of the fact that all agree the demographic change is in favor of
democracy, recent steps taken by the incumbent politicians were less encouraging. According to data used by Mahmood Sadri in his debate with Ramin Jahanbegloo over in/or-compatibility of Islam and democracy, recent public survey demonstrates out of 79% of Iranian practicing Muslim population, 64% look for a democratic government which is inherently secular. Unlike the other 15% who are staunch fundamentalists, in their bid to democratize Iranian governmental system, this 64% is in favor of moderation, tolerance, and collaboration with the secular democratic forces amongst the remaining 21%. In this debate, Sadri concurs with Jahanbegloo in respect to what he calls “objective secularism” in respect to the separation of Mosque and the state. However, he emphasizes his differences with Jahanbegloo in terms of philosophical viewpoints. Accordingly, he is a religious person and believes in the religious theosophy. Hence, he has to distinguish between democratic and non-democratic governmental systems on the one hand and the “subjective” and “objective” secularism on the other. Jahanbegloo does not care for the semantics and philosophical explanation in respect to the issue. Rather he is concerned with practical issues concerned.

He argued for something beyond theoretical speculation and asked his counterpart to be rather more specific. For Jahanbegloo, history had a proven precedence in favor of secular and against religious governmental regimes. For him, “If the West was able to transform itself from traditional life to a modern one, it is because of its successful attempt to give away its religious-political paradigm in favor of human rights, law and democracy, all concepts emerging in
the last phase of traditional era, in which the logic of religious politics has reached its terminal stage… Religious community can transform. However … this transformation will duly involve an ontological transformation from a religious community to a non-religious society.\(^{22}\)

The mere possibility of holding such a scholarly debate is the most telling about the infra-structural transformation of Iran.

At the same time, Siamak Namazi another participant in this conference is reporting of the emergence of more assertive position amongst hitherto conservative businessmen. He wrote in an op-ed, one of these private sector reps (the MD of a prominent foods company) spoke frankly, critically and boldly of the problems Iranian private companies face, saying that the general macro statistics that the official speakers were boasting about is not largely due to high oil prices while there obstacles to private sector growth persist.

Presently, the carrier opposition groups engage in soft measures and more often occasional protests against the government policies. The assertiveness of middle class in protesting the government policies herald a new step ahead in favor of Iranian political development. The conservatives themselves have involved in broadcasting critiques against government policies, and get never tired in proclaiming on the accountability of the government officials.\(^{23}\)

The conservatives and pro-democracy forces are divided on the relevance or necessity of democracy in Iran. Whereas conservatives deem democracy as irrelevant, unfavorable and trouble making for political structure and culture, pro-democracy forces deem it now rather as a political necessity. For them, Iranians are already fed up
with their consecutive failures to achieve democracy. Accordingly, democracy is no longer a cosmetic human value and political aspiration to enrich the quality of life of a particular isolated nation aspiring only for a more open political regime. Instead, it is deemed to be an inevitable necessity for a very strategically important state whose stability is required for pre-empting both domestic turbulences and regional instability.

Historically speaking, revolutions and upheavals have been more frequent in Iran than many other countries: Tobacco uprising, Constitutional Revolution 1906-11, Two coup d'etats of 1920 and 1941 in favor and against the First Pahlavi rule, and two coup d'etats of 1941 and 1953 in favor of the second Pahlavi rule, the unfulfilled bloody uprising of the 1963 against the “White Revolution” of 1963, the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the non-violent but unfulfilled reform of 1997. Iran once again is facing another historical watershed in its volatile politics.
Notes and References:


2. The decision by Ayatollah Khamenei 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.

3. 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.


8. 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.

9. Ibid., p. 11.

10. Ibid. 20.

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.

Among better-publicized cases have been the earlier closure of newspapers "Jama'ah" (Society) and "Gozarest-i Ruz" (Daily News) in Summer 1998. Both were supporters of President Khatami. They were charged with violating rules of ethics. The harassment, detention and eventual death of activist Sa'idi Sirjani while in custody is another well-publicized case of abuse of power by factions within the government. Conservatives’ crackdown on pro-reform papers between April 22-24, 2000, alone resulted in closure of 12 pro-democracy papers.

Following the parliamentary elections, the state closed down more than 20 newspapers including such reformist dailies as "Asr-e Azadegan," "Fath," and "Mosharekat." Leading reformist journalists like Mashallah Sham al-Vaezin, Akbar Ganji, and Ahmad Zeid-Abadi found themselves in jail on charges that their newspapers had "undermined" the Islam precepts of the state and had violated the Press Law—a set of vague or undefined principles passed by the outgoing fifth Majlis that virtually made any criticism of the top leadership a serious crime, punishable with long-term jail sentences.

- Ibid., p. 64.