A STUDY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE OFFICE OF THE VALI-E-FAQIH (THE LEADER)

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DECLARATION

The research work printed in this thesis entitled ‘A Study of the Islamic Republic of Iran with special reference to the Office of the Vali-e-Faqih (The Leader)’ for Ph.D degree was conducted at the department of Political Science, Lucknow University, Lucknow.

The work is original and has not been submitted for any degree or diploma of this or any other university.

HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT

SUPERVISOR
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>I-IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL MAP OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
<td>1-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO</td>
<td>55-88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>VELAYAT-E-FAQIH ACCORDING TO THE SHIA THEOLOGY</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE</td>
<td>89-112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POWERS, FUNCTIONS AND THE ROLE OF THE LEADER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td>113-146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE PERIOD OF AYATULLAH RUHULLAH KHOMEINI (1979-1989)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE</td>
<td>147-180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE PERIOD OF AYATULLAH ALI KHAMENAI (1989- )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SIX</td>
<td>181-197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>198-227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

The Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 was one of the most historic events of the 20th century. A mass movement led by a religious leadership brought an end to the rule of the Pahlavi regime thereby abolishing 2500 years old institution of monarchy in Iran. The leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatullah Khomeini successfully established the rule of the Islamic jurist based upon his version of the doctrine of Velayat-e-Faqih or the guardianship of the Jurist. Ayatullah Khomeini did not propound the doctrine of the Velayat-e-Faqih rather he was the first Islamic Jurist who interpreted this doctrine in the political realm. He advocated the direct role of the clergy in the political affairs of the state. It was he who institutionalized the doctrine of Velayat-e-faqih.

Iran’s uniqueness lies in the fact that it is the world first modern constitutional theocracy. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been called ‘a hybrid of theocratic and democratic elements.’ Iran has a very complex and unique political system. It is outside of conventional left-right political spectrum. It is based on a hierarchy of religio-political institutions headed by the office of Vali-e-Faqih or the Leader. The office of the Leader is a novel institution in the sense that it is above the office of the President which is the highest popularly elected office. The Leader is the highest religious and political authority in the state based on his mastery of Islamic laws. He has a final say in each and every decision making. He supervises over the legislative, the executive and the judiciary as well as commands the armed forces.

Ayatullah Khomeini as the first Vali-e-Faqih or the Leader of the Islamic Republic (1979-1989) played a significant role in strengthening the foundations of the
Islamic Republic. Khomeini in his life time named the then President Ali Khamenai as his successor. At that time Khamenai lacked the status of Marja (the highest ranking shia cleric) which was required for becoming the Leader. Therefore The Constituion of the Islamic Republic of Iran was amended in 1989 and the clause related to the ‘Marjaiyyat’ was dropped in order to elevate Ali Khamenai to the Office of the Vali-e-Faqih or the Leader. Khamenai has been leading Iran as Vali-e-Faqih since 1989. Though he lacked popular charisma of his predeseccsor, Iran under the leadership of Khamenai has grown stronger.

The study of ‘the Office of the Vali-e-Faqih or the Leader’ is important to understand the historic evolution of the concept of the Velayat-e-faqih or the ‘guardianship of the religious jurist’ upon which the office of the Leader is based as well as Ayatullah Khomeini’s justification for the direct rule of the ulema according to the Shia theology. Focus has been also on the religio-political dynamics of the Iranian political system. The role of Ayatullah Khomeini during his tenure as the first Vali-e-Faqih of the Islamic Republic of Iran from 1979 until his death in 1989 as well as the role of the present Vali-e-Faqih Ayatullah Ali Khamenai since 1989, have been discussed in detail.

The researcher has adopted a descriptive, historical and analytical approach in the present work. The researcher has based the study on the primary and secondary sources available in India and Iran.

The thesis is based on the material published in India and Iran in the form of books, articles, editorials, documents, monographs and reports etc.

The researcher visited and consulted libraries of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (New Delhi), Iran Culture House (New Delhi), Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi), Jamia Millia Islamia University (New Delhi), Department
of Political Science (Lucknow University) and Tagore Library (Lucknow University).

The researcher also visited Islamic Republic of Iran in October 2012, for twenty days upon a research fellowship provided by the Iran Culture House, New Delhi. The researcher visited and consulted National Library of Iran (Tehran), Library of the University of Tehran (Tehran), Library of Imam Khomeini University (Tehran), Library of the Institute for the Compilation & Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works (Tehran). Library of World Ahlulbayt Assembly (Qom), Library of Al-Mustafa University (Qom), Library of Ayatullah Marashi Najafi (Qom), Library of Imam Riza Shrine (Mashhad). Besides visiting various libraries of Iran the researcher also made interactions with some faculty members of the department of Political Science at Tehran University (Tehran), department of Theology at Al-Mustafa University (Qom) which proved to be quite beneficial. The general interactions with some common people of Tehran, Qom and Mashhad gave valuable insights into the contemporary Iran.

At the moment of this accomplishment, I pay sincere regards to my mentor and supervisor Professor. Shashi Shukla, Department of Political Science, Lucknow University, Lucknow. The researcher is extremely thankful to her for the inspiration and exceptionally intelligent insight provided by her in the completion of the present work. Her learned suggestions and illuminating remarks and comments were of great help, without which the research work would never have been accomplished.

The researcher wishes to place on record his sincere gratitude to Professor R.K. Mishra, Head of the Department, Political Science, Lucknow University, Lucknow, for his support and encouragement for the research work.
The researcher is extremely thankful to the Iran Culture House (New Delhi) for providing a research fellowship in 2012 to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran and also to *Hojjatuleslam* Mahdi Mahdipour, Representative of the Leader in India, for providing travel grant to the researcher for the above mentioned purpose. The researcher is indebted to his interpreters in Tehran, Qom and Mashhad for providing accurate interpretation of the Persian language.

The researcher is particularly indebted to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi for providing the Short Term Doctoral Fellowship in 2013, without which this daunting task of the research work would not have been completed.

I take this opportunity to sincerely acknowledge the efforts of Mr.Basharat Husain for typing the whole research work in a very short period of time despite his busy schedule. I am also grateful to Mr.Haider Husain for his inspiration and encouragement. I pay high regards to my whole family especially my Father, Father-in-Law, Mother-in-Law, my wife, my sister and my brother-in-laws for their sincere support and motivation throughout the research work.

I would also love to mention my son’s name Mohammad Azm Riza who has brought great joy to my life.

I am also thankful to my close friends, Mr.Atul Kumar Verma and Dr.Hassan Mahdi for their moral support.

Finally I would like to pay homage to my beloved mother who reached her heavenly abode on 23rd July 2014. I dedicate my research work and all my achievements to her.

**WASI RAZA**
ABBREVIATIONS

ACC  Assembly of Combatant Clergy
EU   European Union
GCC  Gulf Cooperation Council
GNP  Gross National Product
IAEA International Atomic Energy Agency
IRP  Islamic Republican Party
IRGC The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
ISIL Islamic State in Iraq and Levant
IS   Islamic State
MEK  *Mujahiddin-e-Khalq*
NIOC National Iranian Oil Company
NPT  Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
OIC  Organization of the Islamic Conference
OPEC Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
SAVAK *Sazeman-e-Ettela’at Va Amniyat-e-Keshvar*
SNSC Supreme National Security Council
SCRC Supreme Cultural Revolution Council
SCC  Society of Combatant Clergy
POLITICAL MAP OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

SOURCE- www.Mapsofworld.com
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Iran, also known as Persia, officially the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979, is a country in West Asia. It is bordered on the North by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, with Kazakhstan and Russia across the Caspian Sea; on the east by Afghanistan and Pakistan; on the south by Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman; on the west by Iraq and on the northwest by Turkey. Comprising a land area of 16,48,195 square kilometers (6,36,372 sq mi), it is the second largest in West Asia and the eighteenth largest in the world and with over 77 million inhabitants, Iran is the world’s seventeenth most populous nation. It is the only country that has both a Caspian Sea and an Indian Ocean coastline.¹

A geographically diverse but mostly mountainous country, Iran has a significant geopolitical importance due to its location at the crossroads of Central Asia, West Asia and South Asia. Tehran is the capital and the largest city, serving as the cultural, commercial and the industrial centre of the nation. Iran is the major regional and middle power, exerting considerable influence in international energy security and the world economy through its large reserves of fossil fuels, which includes the largest natural gas supply in the world and the fourth largest proven petroleum reserves. It hosts Asia’s fourth largest number of UNESCO World Heritage sites.²
Etymology

The name Iran and Persia, although both are used to designate the same country, are not the true synonyms. ‘Persia’ is derived from the classical ‘Persis’ which signifies the province of ‘Parsa’, the arabicized form of which is ‘fars’.

The word ‘Iran’, on the other hand, is derived from the ‘Airiya’ of the Avesta and signifies the ‘land of the Aryans’ or ‘Illustrious’. In Sasanian times, when the vast Iranian empire was at its zenith it was called Iranshahr. In 1935 the Iranian government adopted Iran as the official name of the country in order to overcome the confusion caused by the use of regional names dating back to the middle ages.

Pre-Islamic History

Iran’s history as a nation of people speaking an Indo-European language did not begin until the middle of the second millennium B.C. Before that, Iran was occupied by people with a variety of cultures. There are numerous artifacts attesting to settled agriculture, permanent sun-dried brick dwelling and pottery-making from the sixth millennium B.C. The most technologically-advanced area was ancient Susiana, the Elamites were using semi-pictographic writing, probably learned from the highly advance civilization of Sumer in Mesopotamia, to the west.

Some groups of nomadic, horse-riding people speaking Indo-European languages began moving into the Iranian cultural area from Central Asia near the end of the second millennium B.C. Population pressures, overgrazing in their home area, and hostile neighbors may have prompted these migrations. Some of the groups settled in Eastern Iran, but others, pushed farther west towards the Zagros mountains.

Three major groups are identifiable – the Scythians, the Medes (the Amadai or Mada), and the Persians (also known as the Parsva or Parsa). The Scythians
established themselves in the northern Zagros Mountains and clung to a semi-nomadic existence in which raiding was the chief form of economic enterprise. The Medes settled over a huge area, reaching as far as modern Tabriz in the north and the Esfahan in the south. They had their capital at Ecbatana (present day Hamadan). The Persians were established in three areas to the south of Lake Unmia, on the northern border of the kingdom of the Elamites; and in the environs of modern Shiraz, which would be their eventual settling place and to which they would give the name Parsa (what is roughly present day Fars province).  

During the seventeenth century B.C. the Persians were led by Hakamanish (Archaemenes in Greek), ancestor of the Archaemenid dynasty. A descendant Cyrus II (also known as Cyrus the Great), led the combined forces of the Medes and the Persians to establish the most extensive empire known in the ancient world.

The Achaemenid Empire (550-330 B.C.)

By 546 B.C. Cyrus had defeated Croesus, the Lydian king of fabled wealth, and had secured control of the Aegean coast of Asia Minor, Armenia, and the Greek colonies along the Levant. Moving east he took Parthia, Chorasmis and Bactria. He besieged and captured Babylon in 539 B.C. When he died in 529 B.C., Cyrus kingdom extended as far east as the Hindu Kush in present day Afghanistan. His successors were less successful. Cyrus’ unstable son, Combyses II, conquered Egypt but later he died in 522 B.C. as the result of either an accident or suicide.
during a revolt led by a priest Gaumata, who usurped the throne until overthrown in 522 B.C. by a member of a lateral branch of the Achaemenid family, Darius I.\textsuperscript{9}

The Achaemenids thereafter consolidated areas firmly under their control. It was Cyrus and Darius, who by sound and farsighted administrative planning, brilliant military manoeuvring and a humanistic worldview, established the greatness of Achaemenids and in less than thirty years raised from an obscure tribe to a world power.\textsuperscript{10}

In 334 B.C., Alexander the Great invaded the Achaemenid Empire, defeating the last Achaemenid Emperor Darius III at the battle of Isus in 333 B.C. Following the premature death of Alexander, Iran came under the control of Hellenistic Seleucid Empire. In the middle of the second century B.C., the Parthian empire rose to become the main power in Iran and continued as a feudal monarchy for nearly five centuries until 224 B.C. when it was succeeded by the Sassanid empire\textsuperscript{11}.

**Sassanid Empire (224 – 642 A.D)**

The Sassanids established an empire roughly within the frontiers achieved by the Achaemenids, with the capital at Ctesiphon. The Sassanids consciously sought to resuscitate Iranian traditions and to obliterate Greek cultural influence. Their rule was characterized by considerable centralization, ambitious urban planning, agricultural development and technological improvements. Sassanid rulers adopted the title of Shahanshah (king of kings), as sovereigns over numerous petty rulers. Sassanid rule and the system of social satisfaction were reinforced by Zorastrianism, which became the state religion.\textsuperscript{12}
Khoro II Aparviz, who ruled from 591 A.D. to 628 A.D., was the last great Sassanian monarch. At the end of 627 A.D., Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor defeated Khosro Nineveh. The mighty kingdom was now plunged into anarchy under the rule of incompetent kings. It was however not long before the dynasty fell. But it was not the tribes from the Stepps who were conquerors, but the tribes from the Arabian Peninsula, where the new religion of Islam had transformed them into a cohesive group.¹³

**Islamic History**

The Sassanidshad repulsed initial moves by Arab raiding parties into Mesopotamia but the royal army under the King Yazdegard III was defeated at Qadesyyya (near Hilla in modern Iraq) in 637 A.D., after which the Arabs took Ctesiphon (Sassanid empire’s capital) and the whole of Mesopotamia. Arab generals persuaded the Caliph to continue the offense against the Persians rather than allow the Yazdegard to counterattack, and they defeated him a second time at Nahavand near Hamadan in 641 A.D. After this Sassanid resistance effectively collapsed and Yazdegard fled east, begging local rulers to help him against the Arabs (he was killed at Meru in 651 A.D. not by the invaders but by one of his own subjects). The Arabs established their dominion over the Iranian plateau. Khorasan was conquered by 654 A.D. and despite resistance in the outlying territories along with the southern coast of the Caspian sea and in the north-east they were all taken and Balkh captured by 707 A.D.¹⁴

Although the conquerors, especially the Umayyads (the Arab rulers who ruled from 661 A.D. to 750 A.D.) tended to stress the primacy of Arabs among Muslims, the Iranians were gradually integrated into the new community.
The Muslim conquerors adopted the Sassanid coinage system and many Sassanid administrative practices, including the office of vizier, or minister and the divan, a bureau or register for controlling state revenue and expenditure that became a characteristic of administration through Muslim lands. Later caliphs adopted Iranian court ceremonial practices and trappings of Sassanid monarchy. Men of Iranian origin served as administrators after the conquest and Iranians contributed significantly to all branches of Islamic learning, including Physiology, Literature, History, Geography, Jurisprudence, Philosophy, Medicine and the Sciences.  

The Arabs were in control, however. The new state religion, Islam imposed its own system of beliefs, laws and social mores. In regions that submitted peacefully to Muslim rule, landowners kept their land. But land, abandoned by fleeing owners, and land taken by conquest passed into the hands of the new state. Arabic became the official language of the court in 696 A.D., although Persian continued to be widely used as the spoken language.

Another legacy of the Arab conquest was Shia Islam, which although has come to identified closely with Iran, was not initially an Iranian religious movement. It originated with the Arab Muslims. In the great Schism of Islam, one group among the community of believers maintained that leadership of the community following the death of Prophet Muhammad rightfully belonged to Muhammad’s son-in-law, Ali and to his descendants. This group came to be known as the Shia-e-Ali, the Partisans of Ali, or the Shias.

Another group, supporters of Muawiya (a rival contender for the Caliphate following the murder of third Caliph Usman), challenged Ali’s election to the caliphate in 656 A.D. After Ali was martyred while praying in a mosque in Kufa in 661 A.D., Muawiya was declared Caliph by the majority of the Islamic community.
He became the first caliph of the *Umayyad* dynasty, which had its capital at Damascus.  

Ali’s youngest son Husain, refused to pay the homage commanded by Muawiya’s son and successor Yazid and went to Mecca, where he was asked to lead the Shias-mostly those living in present day Iraq against the tyrant Yazid. At Karbala, in Iraq, Husain’s band of 200 men and women followers, unwilling to surrender was finally martyred by thousands of *Umayyad* troops. The *Umayyad* leader received Husain’s head, and Husain’s death in 680 A.D. on the tenth of Moharram continues to be observed as a day of mourning for the Shia community.  

Tension and dissent reached a crescendo in the middle years of the eight century. In the 740 A.D. there was a revolt against the *Umayyads* in Kufa, and they suffered external defeat by the Turks in Transoxiana and by the Byzantines in Anatolia. Then in the late 740s a Persian convert, Abu Muslim began a revolt against *Umayyad* rule in Khorasan. He led his revolt in the name of the Prophet’s family, thereby concealing his final purpose and ensuring a wide appeal. Drawing support from Arab settlers in Khorasan, who resented their taxes and felt betrayed by *Umayyads*, Abu Muslim and his followers defeated local opposition and starting from Meru, led their armies westward under a black banner. They defeated the forces sent against them by the *Umayyad* caliph in a series of battles in 749-750 AD and in the latter year proclaimed a new caliph in Kufa-Abul Abbas who was not a descendant of Ali but another cousin of Muhammad. But long before the new caliph, uneasy at the continuing strength of Abu Muslim’s support in Khorasan, Abul Abbas executed him in 755A.D. The effect of this was to endorse orthodox sunnism and to marginalize once again the followers of Ali, and other desperate groups that had supported the revolt originally.
The *Abbasid* system relied first on the local networks of control set up by provincial governors across the vast territories of the empire, and second on the bureaucracy that tied those governors to the centre in Baghdad. The governors collected tax locally, deducted for their expenses, and remitted the remainder to the Abbasid court. The hand of central government was relatively light, but these arrangements put considerable power in the hands of the governor, which in the long run was to erode the authority of the caliphate.\(^20\)

Iran’s next ruling dynasties descended from nomadic, Turkic-speaking warriors who had been moving out of Central Asia into Transoxiana for more than a millennium. The Abbasid caliphs began enlisting these people as slave warriors as early as the ninth century. Shortly thereafter the real power of the Abbasid caliphs began to wane; eventually they became religious figureheads while the warrior slave ruled. As the power of the Abbasid caliphs diminished, a series of independent and indigenous dynasties rose in various parts of Iran, some with considerable influence and power. Among the most important of the overlapping dynasties were the Tahirids in Khorasan (820 A.D.-72 A.D.) Saffarids in Sistan (867 A.D.-903 A.D.); and Samanids (875-1005). Originally at Bukhara the Samanids eventually ruled area from Central Iran to India. In 962 a Turkish slave governor of The Samanids, Alptiga conquered Ghazna (present day Afghanistan) and established a dynasty, The Ghazvaid, that lasted to 1186 A.D.\(^21\)

Several Samanid cities had been lost to another Turkish group, The Seljuks, a clan of the Oghuz Turks, who lived north of the Oxus River. Their leader, Tughril Beg, turned his warrior against the Gazanavids in Khorasan. He moved south and then west, in conquering but not wasting the cities in his path. In 1055 the caliph in
Baghdad gave Tughril Beg robes, gifts and the title King of The East. Under Tughril Beg’s successor, Malik Shah (1072-1092), Iran enjoyed a cultural and scientific renaissance, largely attributed to his brilliant Iranian Vizier, Nizam-ul-Mulk. After the death of Malik Shah in 1092, Iran once again reverted to petty dynasties. During this time, Genghis Khan brought together a number of Mongol tribes and let them on a devastating sweep through China. Then, in 1219, he turned his 700,000 forces west and quickly devastated Bukhara, Samarkand, Balkh, Merv, and Neshapur. Before his death in 1227, he had reached western Azarbajjan pillaging and burning cities along the way.

The Mongol invasion was disastrous to the Iranians. A large number of people, particularly males, were killed between 1220-1258, the population of Iran dropped drastically. Tamerlane, described as Mongol of Turkic origin, was the next ruler to achieve emperor status. He conquered Transoxiana and by 1381 established himself as the sovereign ruler. He did not have forces of earlier Mongol leaders, so his conquests were slower and less savage than those of Genghis Khan or Halagu Khan. Tamerlane’s regime was characterized by its inclusion of Iranian administrative roles and promotion of architecture and poetry. His empire disintegrated rapidly after his death in 1405, however, Mongol tribes, Uzbeks and bayudur Turkomans ruled roughly the area of present day Iran until the rise of safavid dynasty, the first native Iranian dynasty in almost 1000 years.
The Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722)

In the late 13th century, Shaykh Safi-al-Din Ishaq founded a Sufi order at Ardabil in Azarbaijan, which attracted followers among the nomads of eastern Anatolia and Azarbaijan. From the 14th to the mid 15th century, The Ardabil shrine continued to attract sufis and increase in wealth and fame. The shaykhs of Ardabil were Sunni Muslims until the mid 15th century, when they espoused Shi’ism. By that time, the shaykh Safi’s successors had become increasingly militant and their armies had come to wield significant power in the region. The Safavid family intermarried with Aq Qoyunlu Turkmen dynasty of Tabriz, which controlled most of western Iran during the last quarter of the 15th century. Eastern Iran and nearby sections of central Asia were ruled by rival Timurid dynasty.25

In 1488, the Shaykh Haydar, the leader of the Safavid order was killed in battle with the Aq Qoyunlu forces, leaving seven sons. In an effort to destroy the power of Safavid order the Aq Qouunlus seized Hayder’s eldest son Ali Mirza, and two of the latter’s brothers, Ibrahimand Ismail, and imprisoned them far from their supporters near the city of Shiraz. In 1493, during the struggle between rival Aq Qoyunlu princes, Haydar’s sons were released and allowed to regain their Sufi followers. After his release Ali was recognized as leader of Safavid order. For the next four years Ismail received instructions in the Quran and in Persian and Arabic Languages.

In 1499, Ismail made his bid for power by moving into Anatolia. By 1501, he had secured Azarbaijan and crowned himself Shah at Tabriz.26 At the time of his conquest of Tabriz Ismail also proclaimed Twelver Shi’ism as the new religion of his territories. 27
In 1514, Ismail’s armies were defeated by the Ottomans, who occupied Tabriz for only one week. They returned to their capital, but the Ottoman threat continued into the next reign. Upon Ismail’s death in 1524, he was succeeded by his first son, Tahmasp. During the course of Tahmasp’s fifty-one year reign, the Safavids, sandwiched between the Ottomans to the west and the Uzbeks and Mughal in the east, were constantly challenged to keep their domain intact.\textsuperscript{28}

In 1588 Abbas I was brought to the throne. Realizing the limits of his military strength, Abbas made peace with the Ottomans on unfavourable terms in 1590 and directed his onslaughts against Uzbeks. Meeting with little success, Abbas engaged an Englishman Sir Robert Sherley to direct a major army reform. With his new army, Abbas defeated Turks in 1603, forcing them to relinquish all the territory they had seized, and captured Baghdad. Shah Abbas’ remarkable reign, with its striking military successes and efficient administrative system, raised Iran to the status of a great power. Despite the Safavid Shiite zeal, Christians were tolerated and several missions and churches were built. After the death of Shah Abbas I (1629) the Safavid dynasty lasted for about a century, but except for an interlude during the reign of Shah Abbas II (1642-66), it was a period of decline. Esfahan fell to the Ghilzai Afghans of Kandhar in 1722, seven years later Shah Tahmasp II recovered Esfahan and ascended the throne, only to be deposed in 1732 by the Afsharid lieutenant Qoli Beg (the future Nader Shah).\textsuperscript{29}

**AFSHARID DYNASTY**

Nader Shah or King Nader, the founder of Afsharid Dynasty, an enigmatic figure in Iranian history ruled from 1736–1747 A.D. Nader was Persia’s most gifted military genius and is known as ‘The Second Alexander’ and ‘the Napoleon of Persia’. Although he restored national independence and effectively protected Iran’s
territorial integrity at a dark moment of the country’s history, his obsessive suspicions and envy plunged Iran into political turmoil. His grandiosity, his insatiable desire for more conquests and his egocentric behavior suggest a narcissistic personality disorder and in last years he seems to have developed some paranoid tendencies. Towards the end, even his own tribesmen felt that he was too dangerous a man to be near. In 1747 a group of Afshar and Qajar tribal chiefs killed Nader Shah.

A period of anarchy and a struggle for supremacy among Afshar, Qajar, Afghan, and Zand tribal chieftains followed Nader Shah’s death. Finally Kasim Khan Zand (1750-79) was able to defeat his rivals and unify the country, except for Khorasan, under a loose form of central control. He is remembered for his mild and beneficent rule.31

THE QAJAR DYNASTY (1795-1925)

At Karim Khan’s death, another struggle for power among the Zands, Qajars, and other tribal groups once again plunged the country into disorder and disrupted economic life. This time Agha Mohammad Qajar defeated the last Zand ruler outside Kerman in 1794 and made himself master of the country, beginning the Qajar dynasty that lasted until 1925. Under Fateh Ali (1797-1834), Molhammad Shah (1834-48), and Naser-ud-Din Shah (1848 – 96) a degree of order, stability, and unity returned to the country. The Qajars revived the concept of the Shah as the shadow of God on earth and exercised absolute powers over the servants of the state. Under the Qajars, the merchants and the Ulema, religious scholars, remained important members of the community. A large bureaucracy assisted the chief
officers of the state, in the second half of the nineteenth century, new ministers and offices were created.\textsuperscript{32}

Early in the Nineteenth Century, the Qajars began to face pressure from two great world powers, Russia and Britain. Britain interest in Iran aroused out of the need to protect trade routes to India, while Russia’s came from desire to expand into the Iranian territory from the north. In two disastrous wars with Russia, which ended with the treaty of Gulistan (1812) and the treaty of Turkmanchay (1828), Iran lost all its territories in the Caucasus north of the Aras River. Then in the second half of the century, Russia forced the Qajars to give up all claims to territories in Central Asia. Meanwhile, Britain twice landed troops in Iran to prevent the Qajars from reasserting a claim to Herat, lost after the fall of the Safavids. Under the Treaty of Paris in 1857, Iran surrendered to Britain all claims to Herat and territories in present day Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{33}

The two great powers also came to dominate Iran’s trade and interfered in Iran’s internal affairs. They enjoyed overwhelming military and technological superiority and could take advantage of Iran’s internal problems. Iranian central authority was weak; revenues were generally inadequate to maintain the court, bureaucracy, and army; the ruling class was divided and corrupt; and the people suffered exploitation by their rulers and governors.

When Naser-ud-Din ascended to the throne in 1848, his Prime Minister, Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir, attempted to strengthen the administration by reforming the tax system, asserting central control over the bureaucracy and the provincial governors, encouraging trade and industry, and reducing the influence of the Islamic clergy and foreign powers.\textsuperscript{34}
These reforms antagonized various notables who had been excluded from the government. They regarded Amir Kabir as a social upstart and a threat to their interest, and they formed a coalition against him, in which the queen mother was active. She convinced the young Shah that Amir Kabir wanted to usurp the throne. In October, 1851 the Shah dismissed him and exiled him to Kashan, where he was murdered on the Shah’s orders.\(^{35}\)

A new first minister, Mirza Agha Khan Nuri took Amir Kabir’s place, and proved more to the liking of the court: he was as corrupt and reactionary as they (Britian\&Russia) could have wished, and no further reform went forward. Throughout this period and decades that followed the British and Russian interfered so insistently in government that in some respects the Shah’s independence appeared merely nominal.\(^{36}\)

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE ULEMA UNDER SAFAVID AND QAJAR**

During the course of the consolidation of Safavid reign in the sixteenth century Shi’ism was imposed as a monolithic national religion. The creation of the elaborate Shia clerical apparatus with its differentiated hierarchy and specific judicial and administrative strata was an integral part of the construction of the centralised Safavid state. Moreover, the pre-eminent role of the Shia clergy gave the Safavid polity a structural and ideological profile distinct from its Ottoman rival. The clerical and state power had become so intertwined that it was customary for Safavid shahs to marry the daughters of the supreme Shia clergy However, in the post-Safavid period, particularly during the reign of Nader Shah (1736-1747), the Shia clergy lost its position of power within the state and Shi ’ism was demoted to
the status of a fifth Islamic school alongside the four Sunni schools. Prominent Shias were persecuted and many of the clergy fled to Najaf and other sanctuaries in Iraq. Yet at the same time the general weakening of centralized state authority throughout the eighteenth century allowed the local clergy 'to assume the role of the local governors, arbitrators of disputes, executors at law and so forth'.

Meanwhile the settlement of a long divisive theological dispute within Shiism prepared the way for the clergy's resurgence in the nineteenth century: the Akhbaris, who had contested the clerical prerogative of *ijtihad* (independent judgement), were definitively defeated by the superior organisation and armed might of the Usulis. The Usuli victory had important political consequences. During the decades of persecution the Akhbaris had gained a broad following based on the fear of social and political involvement that the power of *ijtihad* implied. Had they continued to be the dominant current within Shiism, the legitimacy of the clergy's political role would have been drastically undermined, and it is doubtful whether an organized clerical hierarchy would have survived. Their defeat, on the other hand, helped to precipitate a militant revival of the social and political leadership of the clergy.

The return of relative political stability under the long reign of the Qajars (1795 onwards) stimulated economic growth and expansion. In particular, the increase in trade with Europe gave an unprecedented impetus to commercial activities and urbanization. With the official support of the Qajar shahs, the revitalized Shia clergy greatly extended its spheres of influence and range of administrative power. It reestablished control over the courts, waqflands and innumerable other social and political functions. Each *mujtahid* (independent legalist) was distinguished by his
own retinue of *mullahs* and gangs: the former transmitted the *mujtahid's* influence to the local population, while the latter, representing his executive power, were charged with collection of religious taxes (*khums and zakat*) as well as the administration of religious punishments. Only the death sentence remained subject to ratification by the shah.\(^\text{39}\)

There was, however, an important difference between this revival of clerical power under the Qajars and the earlier role of the Shia hierarchy in the Safavid state. Although the nineteenth-century clergy enjoyed great power and influence derived from their control over many functions ordinarily associated with state administration, they were not a formal part of the state executive as they had been in the time of the Safavids. The semi-autonomous position of the Shia administrative and judicial institutions was perhaps more advantageous to the conquest of an organic social hegemony than their officially incorporated status under the Safavids. For instance, discontented social layers could now turn to the Shia clergy for assistance, and the homes of the clergy became famous as sanctuaries for such diverse proscribed groups as persecuted grain merchants or bandits. On the other hand, the clergy could deploy its popular base and its ability to manage social discontent as potent bargaining counters against the court and the secular state bureaucracy. Repeatedly during the nineteenth century it mobilised the masses to thwart the state's attempts to undermine or restrict its power.\(^\text{40}\)

After 1850 the areas of conflict between clergy and state began to widen considerably, as the religious hierarchy opposed all initiatives to modernize and strengthen the Qajar government (secular courts, modern schools, a new army, etc). Clerical resistance to reforms in the state apparatus that might threaten their own prerogatives was also linked to the struggle against economic concessions to
foreign non-Muslims. In this manner the traditional social interlocking of the clergy and the native merchant community acquired a new socio-political expression in the form of a clerically-led movement against western penetration in any form - whether as administrative rationalization, economic competition or simply the diffusion of non-Muslim ideas. The clergy, however, did not enjoy a monopoly of influence over popular unrest. Increasingly their leadership role was contested by a new generation of reformers and modernizers. While sharing most of the clergy's apprehension about the increasing subordination of the Iranian economy to world market forces, as well as militantly opposing the Qajars' concessions to European imperialism, the young Iranian reformers believed that national cultural and political sovereignty could only be preserved by the adoption of European technology and forms of government. They opposed the old regime from an opposite point of view to that of the clergy, seeking radical reforms at all levels to modernize the state structure and establish a constitutional government. After the failure of a series of half-hearted state reforms, this modernist component of the opposition abandoned any hope in the reformation of the Qajar monarchy or in progress through existing organs of power. Although eventually the reformers and the clergy were driven into joint opposition against the Qajars, their alliance within the constitutional movement remained uneasy and full of conflict.\textsuperscript{41}

**THE CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT AND THE ROLE OF CLERGY**

When Naser-ud-Din Shah was assassinated by Mirza Reza Kermani in 1896, the crown passed to his son Mozaffer-ud-Din, who was a weak and ineffectual ruler. Royal extravagance and the absence of incoming revenues exacerbated financial problems. The Shah quickly spent two large loans from Russia, partly on trips to
Europe. Public anger fed on the Shah’s propensity for granting concessions to European in return for generous payments to him and his officials.\(^4^2\)

Concessions to foreign nations and invasion of foreign goods gradually integrated Iran’s local and regional markets into the world markets. This integration had far-reaching consequences. Although increasing the volume of foreign trade, it contributed to chronic problems: an unfavorable balance of payments, high inflation, increased bankruptcy among merchants and economic depression in certain areas of the country. The problems and concerns of the merchants became national in scope. They became the first group to challenge the Qajars, demanding protection against foreign intrusion and imposition of laws to regulate commerce. The Qajars’ failure to satisfy the merchants made them more belligerent.\(^4^3\)

The merchants could not seriously challenge the Shah; they sought and received the critical support of the clergy or the Ulema, their traditional allies.

Western penetration in many ways adversely affected the fortunes of the Ulema, it increased their political clout. Some of the Ulema became opponents of Western imperialism and a component of the rising Persian nationalism. Alone they did not have the resources to oppose the Great Powers and the Qajar Kings, but together with the merchants they became a force to be reckoned with.\(^4^4\)

In June 1906, Sayyed Abdallah Behbehani and Sayyed Mohammed Tabatabai – two of Tehran’s three most respected Mujahids (senior cleric) – led a procession of some thousand seminary students to the sanctuary of Qom. At Qom, the two were joined by Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, the other senior Mujahid. The three threatened to move en mass to Karbala and Najaf, (two of Shia Islam holiest sites in Iraq), and thus deprive the country of religious services unless the Shah, besides fulfilling
other demands, established an ‘Adalat Khaneh’ (House of Justice), the most important of all demands.

The Ulema’s demand for the House of Justice soon turned into the most radical demand with the support from merchants and secular intelligentsia, the demand for a written Constitution drafted by an elected National Assembly (Majlis-e-Melli).

At first the Shah dismissed the protestors as ‘Bahai heretics’ and ‘British hired traitors’ because protestors mainly from ‘bazaar’ and of secular outlooks, gathered at the residence of the British Legation at northern Tehran, where the very idea of elected National Assembly had seen evolved.

The Shah faced with an ongoing general strike, a barrage of telegrams from the provinces, threats of armed intervention by emigrant communities in Baku and Tiflis and importantly the threat of defection from his Russian trained army i.e. the COSSACKS, he eventually backed down.45

On August 5, 1906 – Mozaffar al-Din Shah signed the royal proclamation to hold nationwide elections for a constituent assembly. Five days before his natural death on December 30, 1906, he signed Iran’s first written Constitution.

The Constitution of 1906 stated explicitly that the Shah’s sovereignty derived from the people, as a power given to him by trust, not as a right bestowed directly by God. But the power of the Ulema and of Shiism as the dominant faith of the country was also confirmed in the Constitution. Shiism was declared to be the state religion, Sharia law was recognized, clerical courts were given a significant role, and there was to be a five men committee of senior Ulema to scrutinize legislation passed by the Majlis, to confirm its spiritual legitimacy, until the Hidden Imam (Last of 12 Shia Imams, whom Shia Muslims believe will return before the Day of
Judgment, to restore justice and peace on the earth) – whose proper responsibility this was – should reappear.46

Mozaffar ud-Din Shah’s successor, his son Mohammad Ali Shah, had more autocratic instincts than his father. He resolved from the start, although he took an oath of loyalty to the Constitution, to overturn it and restore the previous form of untrammeled monarchy, with Russian help.47

Through 1907 and the first half of 1908 the Majlis passed measures for the reform of taxation and finance, education and judicial matters. The last was particularly disturbing to the Ulema, because they saw their traditional role encroached upon. Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri was prominent among the Ulema who changed his mind at this time. He had supported the protests of 1905-1906, but by 1907 he was saying that the Majlis and its plans were leading away from the initial aims of the movement and that the constitutionalists were importing the customs and practices of the West.48

Sheikh Nuri attacked the supplementary law to the Constitution which was the product of a fragile compromise between the secular reformers and the Ulema, as a ‘book of error’ and labeled the constitutionalists atheists. For Nuri sovereignty belonged exclusively to God. The Quran, he argued, contains all the regulations for administration of the state, therefore any legislative assembly was superfluous. He favored an Islamic Government based on the fusion of Shiism with monarchy in which the Majlis was an extension of the Ulema's power.49

However, there were other Mujtaheds like Sayyed Mohammad Tabatabai and Mirza Mohammad Hossein Gharavi Naini, who were not of the same opinion of Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri. Tabatabai was willing to accept western ideas into the
framework of political structure that was necessary to govern human affairs in the absence of Hidden Imam. Naini argued that a constitutional form of government that limits the ruler’s arbitrary power and grants people limited sovereignty was less abhorrent than other forms. He further stated that the sovereignty of the people and equality before the law were the foundation of the government set up by the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca.

The division of the *Ulema* into two hostile factions of constitutionalist and anti-constitutionalist, on the one hand, and the rancorous relationship between the secular reformers and the constitutional *Ulema*, on the other hand, had weakened the constitutional movement. 50

In June, 1908, the Shah decided that he had enough support to act and sent the Cossack brigade to attack the *Majlis*. The troops fired shells at the building until the delegates gave in, and the assembly was closed. Many leading members were arrested and executed, while others escaped overseas. The Shah’s coup was successful in Tehran, but not in all the provinces. The constitutionalists unified their forces from various parts of Iran and surrounded Tehran. On July 16, 1909, Mohamad Ali Shah took refuge in the Russian Legation. He was deposed, went into exile in Russia, and was replaced by his young son, Ahmad.

The constitutionalists were back in control, but the revolution had turned more dangerous. The divisions between radicals and conservatives had deepened. The *Ulemas* were divided, and many sided with the royalists, effectively rejecting the whole project of constitutionalism. But within a few days the leader of the conservative *Ulema*, Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri was arrested, tried and hanged for his alleged connections with the coup of June, 1908. 51
There were disorder in many provinces, it became impossible to collect taxes, and tribal leaders took over in some areas, and brigandage became common place. To try to restore order, to counter the influence of the Russian officered Cossack brigade, and above all to establish a body that could enforce tax collection, the Majlis set up a gendarmerie trained by Swedish officers.\textsuperscript{52}

When the Majlis invited an American, Morgan Shuster, to come to Iran to reform the country’s chaotic finances, both Russia and Britain opposed the appointment of this concerned adviser, fearing that his reforms would be detrimental to their interests. The Russians gave the \textit{Majlis} an ultimatum to dismiss Shuster, which it ignored. As Russian troops marched towards Teheran, Shuster was dismissed and the \textit{Majlis} was dissolved in December, 1911.\textsuperscript{53} That date is the one normally taken for the end of the Constitutional Revolution.

**ACHIEVEMENTS OF CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION**

The revolution fell victim to violent factionalism among the Iranians themselves, and also to the machinations of the Russian and the British. But the Constitutional Revolution was an important event in the history of Iran. It was the first attempt in the region by a people to set up a liberal representative government by their own efforts. The experience of representative government had a powerful, unifying effect in confirming and energizing Iranian nationalism. The spirit and the goals of constitutionalism stayed alive and vigorous, and were a major factor in Iranian political life for the rest of the century.

Subsequent regimes repeatedly bypassed or flouted it, but the Constitution of 1906 remained in force until the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The \textit{Majlis} continued
to be elected and to meet, and in 1919 was instrumental in preventing a post-war attempt to establish a British protectorate in Iran.54

The Constitutional Movement popularized the notion that the King’s power cannot be unlimited, arbitrary and granted people rights and powers they hitherto had not enjoyed, such as equality before the law. In many ways, it was an auspicious victory for the Iranian people.

The events of Constitutional Revolution were also present in the minds of Iranians in the 1970’s as a warning. In particular the more politically minded among the clergy had learned the lesson that the Ulema should not allow political leadership to slide out of their hands as they had in 1906. 55

Ahmad Shah who succeeded to the throne at the age of 11 proved to be pleasure loving, effete and incompetent and was unable to preserve the integrity of Iran or the fate of his dynasty. The occupation of Iran during World War-I (1914-18) by Russian, British and Ottoman troops was a blow from which Ahmad Shah never effectively recovered. With a coup d’etat in February, 1921, Reza Khan became the pre-eminent political personality in Iran: Ahmad Shah was formally deposed by the Majlis in October, 1925 while he was in Europe and the assembly declared the rule of the Qajar dynasty to be terminated.56

RISE OF REZA KHAN

Following the Russian Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the new Soviet government unilaterally cancelled the Tsarist concessions in Iran, an action that created tremendous goodwill towards the new Soviet Union and, after the Central Powers were defeated, left Britain the sole Great Power in Iran. In 1919 the Majlis, after
much internal wrangling, refused a British offer of military and financial aid that effectively would have made Iran into a protectorate of Britain. The British were initially reluctant to withdraw from Iran but because of international pressure, they removed their advisors by 1921. In the same year British diplomats lent their support to an Iranian officer of the Persian Cossack Brigade, Reza Khan, who in the previous year had been instrumental in putting down a rebellion in Iran’s Northern Province of Gilan. In collaboration with a political writer, Sayyid Ziya-al-Din Tabataba’I, Reza Khan – first as war minister and later as prime minister under Ahmad Shah – built an army that was loyal solely to him. He also managed to forge political order in a country that for years had known nothing but turmoil. Initially Reza Khan wished to declare himself President in the style of Turkey’s secular nationalist president, Mustafa Kamal Ataturk – a move fiercely opposed by the Shia Ulema – but instead he deposed the weak Ahmad Shah in 1925 and had himself crowned as Reza Shah Pahlavi.57

**THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY (1925 –79)**

During the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi, educational and judicial reforms were affected that laid the basis of a modern state and reduced the influence of the religious class. A wide range of legal affairs that had previously been the purview of Shia religious courts were now either administered by secular courts or overseen by state bureaucracies.58

The custom of women wearing veils was banned, the minimum age for marriage was raised, and strict religious divorce laws were made more equitable. The number and availability of secular schools increased for both boys and girls, and the University of Tehran was established in 1934, further eroding what had
been once a clerical monopoly on education. Nonetheless, Reza Shah was selective on what forms of modernization and secularization he would adopt. He banned trade unions and political parties and firmly muzzled the press. Oil concessions were first granted in 1901, during the Qajar period, and the first commercially exploitable petroleum deposits were found in 1908. Reza Shah renegotiated a number of these concessions, despite the ire these agreements raised among the Iranian people. The concessions were to remain a violent point of contention in Iran for decades to come.59

By the mid 1930s Reza Shah’s dictatorial style of rule caused dissatisfaction in Iran, particularly among religious and intellectual elites.60

At the outbreak of World War II, Iran declared its neutrality, but the country was invaded by both Britain and the Soviet Union. Britain had been annoyed when Iran refused allied nations demands that it expel all German nationals from the country. When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the Allies urgently needed to transport war material across Iran to the Soviet Union, an operation that would have violated Iranian neutrality. As a result, Britain and the Soviet Union simultaneously invaded Iran on August 26, 1941, the Soviets from the northwest and the British across the Iraqi frontier from the west and at the head of the Persian Gulf in the south. Resistance quickly collapsed.61

Reza Shah knew that the Allies would not permit him to remain in power, so he abdicated on September 16 in favor of his son, who ascended the throne as Mohammad Reza Shah Pahalvi. Reza Shah and several members of his family were taken by the British first to Mauritius and then to Johannesburg, South Africa, where Reza Shah died in 1944.62
In January 1942 Britain and the USSR signed an agreement with Iran to respect Iran’s independence and to withdraw their troops within six months of the war’s end. In 1943, at the Tehran Conference, the United States of America reaffirmed this commitment. In 1945, the USSR refused to announce a time table to leave Iran’s northwestern province of East Azerbaijan and West Azerbaijan, where Soviet-supported autonomy movements had developed. The USSR withdrew its troops in May, 1946, but tensions continued for several months.  

Mohammad Reza Shah succeeded to the throne in a country occupied by foreign powers, crippled by wartime inflation, and politically fragmented. However, the war and the occupation had brought a greater degree of economic activity, freedom of press and political openness that had been not possible under Reza Shah. Many political parties were formed in this period, including pro-British National Will and the pro-Soviet Tudeh (Masses) parties. These, along with fledgling trade union movement, challenged the power of the young Shah, who did not yield the absolute authority of his father. At the same time, the abdication of Reza Shah had strengthened conservative clerical factions, who had chafed under that leader’s program of secularization.  

Following the war, a loose coalition of nationalists, clerics, and non-communist left-wing parties, known as the National Front, coalesced under Mohammad Mosaddeq, a career politician and lawyer who wished to reduce the power of the monarchy and the clergy in Iran. Most important the National Front, angered by years of foreign exploitation, wanted to regain Iran’s natural resources, and, when Mosaddeq became Prime Minister in 1951, he immediately nationalized the country’s oil industry. Britain, the main benefactor of Iranian oil concessions, imposed an economic embargo on Iran.
The crisis with the Shah came to head in mid 1952, precipitated by Mosaddeq’s attempt to reform the electoral law to weaken the monarch and the landed magnates. He then instigated a confrontation with the Shah by asserting that he, as Premier, had the constitutional authority to appoint the War Minister as well as other members of the cabinet. This was the first time that royal control of the military had been seriously threatened. When the Shah resisted, Mosaddeq took his cause directly to the public. In a radio broadcast, he argued that he needed supervision over the armed forces to prevent nefarious forces from plotting to undo oil nationalization. The public promptly poured into streets, and after three days of general strikes and bloodshed, forced the Shah to back down. The crisis became known as 30th Tir (July 21).  

THE COUP (1953)

By this time the British were encouraging the US to cooperate in engineering a coup to get rid of Mosaddeq. Finally, in August, 1953 the plan went ahead, to have Mosaddeq removed as Prime Minister and to replace him with General Zahedi, a fervent monarchist. But the plot misfired; there was a delay, Mosaddeq found out about the coup and was able to forestall it. The Shah fled the country and anti-royalist rioting broke out. Mosaddeq sent in police and troops to control the riots and they succeeded; but it also alienated many of Mosaddeq’s own supporters, and Tudeh. So when a new demonstration, this time against Mosaddeq, appeared two days later on 19th August, Mosaddeq’s supporters stayed away. This demonstration included bazaar, supporters of Ayatullah Abol-Ghsem Kashani (who had previously been an important supporter of the National Front, but had switched sides) and numbers of people instigated or paid to participate by the CIA (who had given the
coup the codename Operation Ajax). Many member of the murky underworld of South Tehran took part.  

Mosaddeq was arrested, the army and Zahedi were in control, and the Shah returned. Mosaddeq was tried and convicted of treason by a military court, but was allowed to live under house arrest until his death in 1967.  

**MUHAMMAD REZA SHAH AND HIS PRO-U.S. STANCE**

The coup of 1953 had drastic consequences for Iran and for U.S-Iranian relations. Because it was generally believed that the United States had saved his throne, the Shah lost much of his political legitimacy. His relationship with the nationalists was irrevocably damaged. From then on, he was tainted as the U.S. Shah, a label that stuck to him throughout his life. The coup also created for the Shah a psychological dependence on Washington, thus depriving him of the ability to act independently during a crisis, which proved fatal during the last year of his reign. Shaken by Mossadeq’s meteoric rise to power, the Shah became determined never to allow anyone to become too powerful.

The coup also marked the start of Iran’s ever-increasing dependence upon the United States and became a catalyst for the emergence of the United States as the hegemonic foreign power in Iran. The logic of the United States’ support for the Shah was summarized in a report submitted to the then US President Dwight Eisenhower’s National Security Council in 1953:

“Over the long run, the most effective instrument for maintaining Iran’s orientation towards the West is the monarch, which in turn has the army as its only real source of power. The US military aid serves to improve army morale, cement
army loyalty to the Shah, and thus consolidate the present regime and provide some assurance that Iran’s current orientation towards the West will be perpetual.”

The United States, therefore, was laying the foundation of its policy in Iran based on relationship with one man, whose only source of support was the army. Its primary objectives were to keep Iran immune from communism, to have easy access to its oil, and to perpetuate western domination over the strategically vital Persian Gulf region.70

Shah’s Prime Minister Zahedi had settled the oil dispute. The United States granted $45 million in emergency financial assistance to Iran. In return, a twenty five year oil agreement had been signed by Iran. According to this agreement an oil consortium consisting of the major western oil companies was created in which the British oil companies lost their dominant position and a group of US companies became one of the major share-holders.

THE SHAH AND HIS AUTHORITARIAN RULE

By the end of 1954, the Shah was determined to destroy all sources of independent power in his drive towards absolute rule. In 1955 he dismissed his Prime Minister Zahedi and appointed Husain Ala, his close confidant, as a new Prime Minister. Candidates for the elections to the eighteenth Majlis were selected by the regime and the assembly proved duly obedient.

The Shah’s most critical move was to consolidate his power over intelligence gathering agencies. In 1957, with generous support from the US intelligence agency CIA and Mossad of Israel, SAVAK, the Sazeman-e-Ettela’at Va Amniyat-e-Keshvar (Information and Security Organization of the Nation), was established.
General Teymur Bakhtiyar, one of the key figures in the 1953 coup, headed the organization. At the same time, the Shah created the Second Bureau within the ranks of the armed forces to prevent any coup against the Pahlavis. He also organized the Royal Inspection Organization to supervise all state activities. All three agencies were directly accountable to the Shah.⁷¹

Mossadeq’s National Front was disbanded and Tudeh sympathizers were relentlessly pursued by SAVAK, which grew increasingly efficient and brutal. Two puppet political parties were set up for the Majlis, controlled by the Shah’s supporters – Melliyun (National Party) and Mardom (People’s Party).⁷²

Thus, Mohammad Reza Shah had moved along way, from the powerless monarch in 1941 to a powerful autocrat in 1960.

**THE SHAH AND HIS WHITE REVOLUTION**

In 1960 the Shah put forward a proposal for land reform, prompted by the new Johan F. Kennedy administration in the US which was putting some pressure on the Shah to liberalize. At that time the measure was stalled due to the protest from the Ulema because their extensive land holdings from endowments appeared to be threatened and many considered the infringement of property rights to be un-Islamic.

When the government’s initial proposals for land reform stalled, in 1962 the Shah brought forward a new Land Reform Act, which he in January 1963 presented for a national referendum as part of a six point plan he called the ‘White Revolution’. The six points are as follows-
--Land Reform.

-- Nationalization of Forests.

-- Sale of state-owned enterprises to the public.

-- Workers profit sharing plan.

-- Women’s suffrage.

-- Creation of the Literacy Corps.

Out of the total vote cast in the referendum, 55, 98,711 votes were in favor of reforms and only 4,115 votes were cast against reforms.

The fraudulent referendum was boycotted by the opposition to the Shah. However U.S. President Kennedy immediately sent a telegram congratulating the Shah on his “victory in the historic referendum”.

The most important provision of the Shah’s White Revolution was the Land Reform Program, which had far reaching consequences.

1. It drastically curtailed the political power of the landed upper class and for all political purpose eradicated absentee ownership.

2. It created a large petty-landowning stratum from the ranks of the sharecroppers. In 1961, there were more than 2.1 million sharecroppers. By 1971- 17,66,625 or 92 percent of them had received legal title to the land they worked.
3. The absolute authority of the landlords was replaced with that of the state as manifested in the creation of dozens of new institutions in the rural areas such as Village Organization, House of Justice, the Literacy Corps, the Health Corps and the Religious Corps. Most important, state-controlled banks penetrated the rural areas and made new landowners and the entire rural community dependent upon the state.

4. In the decades of 1960s and 1970s, agriculture output declined drastically because land reform did not provide necessary capital for the peasants who had acquired lands and did not create a sufficient infrastructure in the rural regions to assist the new landowners in managing their lands. This increased the needs for exports and Iran’s dependence on western nations.

5. Even though land reform contributed to the political stability of the rural communities, it indirectly caused tension in urban areas as millions of landless peasants migrated to the major cities to become the soldiers of the Islamic Revolution.

6. The land reform generated bitter feelings between the Ulema and the Shah. There were more than 40,000 religious endowments called Waqf holdings in 1960. Under the provisions of the second phase of land reform, waqf holders were required to negotiate a ninety-one-year tenancy agreement with the sharecroppers. In most cases, the annual rents paid by the sharecroppers came to less than they had paid under the old system. This curtailed the Ulemas’ revenues from the waqf holdings.73
THE SHAH AND THE ULEMA

The relationship between the Shah and the Ulema was peaceful if not amicable from 1953 to early 1960. The leading Ulema of that time had tacitly supported the military coup of 1953 because they had showed displeasure to Mosaddeq’s growing secular and leftist tendencies. In fact the top Marje-e-Taqlid or source of emulation of Iranian Shias, Ayatullah Hossein Borujerdi sent a welcome telegram to the Shah after his return to Iran from Rome in the aftermath of the coup.

During this period the Shah made several visits to Shia religious places in Qom and Mashhad and gave handsome donations to the religious shrines as well as to the major theological centers in order to please the Ulema.

However, this period of goodwill between the Shah and the Ulema came to an end with the introduction of land reform bill in 1959. Ayatullah Borujerdi had criticized this move of the government and stated categorically that the imposition of any limitation on landownership was contradictory to the Islamic laws. Due to his prime position as a Marja-e-Taqlid, the government did not want to antagonize him, thus the bill was withdrawn for a time being but with the death of Borujerdi in March, 1961, the Shah implemented the land reforms which popularly known as ‘the White Revolution’.

The period immediately following Borujerdi’s death also coincided with the revival of the Ulema’s fervent opposition to the government. Those Ulema who had not approved of Borujerdi’s conciliatory and cooperative policy with the Shah were now in a position to publicly express their grievances against the government. Among them the most prominent was Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini. Khomeini first came to national attention as a political figure with his opposition to the Shah’s
White Revolution, and the granting of capitulatory rights to US advisers and military personnel and their dependents in Iran in 1964.

When Khomeini was first arrested in Qom during the violent crackdown by the regime’s forces beside killing of several students, the Shah claimed that he was leading a rebellion against the government and was also an agent of enemy state i.e. Egypt. These accusations against Khomeini served only to make him popular.

The other top Ulema of Iran at that time like Ayalullahs Kazmi Shariatmadari, Najafi Marashi and Hossein Ali Montazeri demanded the immediate and unconditional release of Khomeini. Shariatmadari warned the authorities that according to Article 2 of the supplementary laws, high ranking Shia Ulema enjoy immunity and may not be jailed, tortured, or exiled.

However after spending six weeks in jail, he was released and later allowed to return to Qom. By this time he had emerged as a popular religious leader of Iran.

On Shah’s granting capitulatory rights to the US advisors, Khomeini made a statement which became historical.

“Even if the Shah himself were to run over a dog belonging to an American, he would be prosecuted. But if an American cook runs over the Shah, the head of the State, No one will have the right to interfere with him... If any American servant assassinates your ‘marja’ in the middle of the bazaar, or runs over him, the Iranian people do not have the right to apprehend him.”

Now the Shah could not tolerate Khomeini anymore. Thus he decided to send him in exile. Turkey accepted Iran’s request to provide sanctuary to Ayatullah Khomeini, and on November 4, 1965, he was forced to leave Iran for that country.
From Turkey he went of Najaf, in Iraq, where he was destined to spend thirteen years.

Ayatullah Khomeini’s courage to confront the Shah politicized a whole generation of the *Ulema* and left a legacy in Qom. His arrest and exile increased cooperation among the *Ulema* in general and among his own students in particular. After Khomeini’s exile, seventy of his supporters were defrocked by the government and denied the right to use the pulpit. This small core kept Khomeini legacy alive. They were often jailed or sentenced to internal exile.74

**AYATULLAH KHOMEINI AND ALI SHARIATI**

The two most outstanding figures of the 20th century Iran were, Ayatullah Ruhollah Moosavi Khomeini, who had been exiled in 1965 for opposing the policies of the Shah; and Dr. Ali Shariati, a French-educated social scientist, highly popular among college and high school students. For some, Shariati, who died in 1977, was the true ideologue of the Islamic Revolution. For others, Khomeini was not only the leader of the revolution, but also the Faqih (jurist) who formulated the concept of ‘*Velayat-e-Faqih*’ (Guardianship of the Jurist), the cornerstone of the future Islamic Republic.75

Living in Najaf after 1965, Khomeini gradually developed his own interpretation of Shia Islam which can be best described as a form of clerical populism. He articulated his ideas first in a series of lectures to seminary students in 1970, which later on published under the title ‘*Velayat-e-Faqih: Hokumat-e-Islami*’ (The Jurist’s Guardianship: Islamic Government). According to this interpretation, the senior ‘*mujtaheds*’ specializing in *fiqh* (law) had the ultimate authority to rule the state. He
came to this conclusion from conventional Shia premises: that God had sent the Prophets and the Imams to guide the community: that these Prophets and Imams had left behind the ‘sharia’ to keep the community on the right path; and that in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, his deputies in the world, the senior ‘mujtaheds’, became guardians of the ‘sharia’. The traditional Ulema had used the term ‘Velayat-e-Faqih’ to mean the ‘mujtaheds’ jurisdiction over religious foundations and those in dire need of guidance – namely minors, widows, and the mentally incapacitated. Khomeini however expanded the term to encompass the whole population. He also interpreted the Quranic injunction “Obey God, the Prophet, and those who have authority”, (Verse 4:59) to mean the contemporary ‘mujtaheds’.

Khomeini argued that monarchy itself was a pagan (tagut) institution left over from the age of polytheism (shirk) and therefore incompatible with true Islam. He condemned the regime on a host of political, social and economic shortcomings. He denounced the Shah for supporting Israel against the Muslim world; allying with the West in the Cold War; undermining Islam by blindly imitating all foreign things and there by spreading ‘gharbzadegi’ (westoxication), wasting resources on the ever-expanding military: neglecting agriculture in order to turn the country into a lucrative dumping ground for American food exporter; failing to bring essential services, especially schools, clinics, electricity, and clean water, to the villages; neglecting to build low-income housing and thereby creating huge shanty towns; bankrupting the bazaars by failing to protect them from foreigners and court-connected entrepreneurs; and compounding urban problems by failing to combat crime, alcoholism, prostitution and drug addiction. In making these denunciations, Khomeini increasingly resorted to potent terms he had rarely used before – such as ‘mostazafen’ (oppressed), ‘shaheed’ (martyr), ‘tagut’ (pagan), ‘tabegheh’ (class) and
‘engelab’ (revolution). He sprinkled his declarations with radical sound bites that were later adopted as revolutionary street slogans:

- Islam belongs to the oppressed (mostazafeen), not to the oppressors (mostakbaren).

- Islam represents the slum-dwellers (zazghehneshin), not the palace-dwellers (kakhneshin).

- Islam is not the opiate of the masses.

- The poor die for the revolution, the rich plot against the revolution.

- The oppressed of the world unite.

- Neither East nor West, but Islam.

- We are for Islam, not for capitalism and feudalism.

- Islam will eliminate class difference.

- Islam originates from the masses, not from the rich.

- The duty of the clergy is to liberate the poor from the clutches of the rich.

Ayatullah Khomeini’s denunciations had become more vociferous. Some of his disciples were openly calling for the replacement of the monarchy with a Islamic republic.77

Ali Shariati’s prolific works have one dominant theme: that the true essence of Shiism is revolution against all forms of oppression, especially against feudalism, capitalism and imperialism. This had been marked by a false Shiism of superstition and deference to monarchy, which he called Black Shiism or Safavid Shiism, but
the essential truths of the religion were timeless, centreing on the revolt and martyrdom of Imam Husain and his companions. Shariati hoped to rekindle the spirit of Imam Husain among the young Iranians. Shiism, he insisted, is the religion of protest, of continuous struggle against tyranny, and of action. Its objective is to construct the city of God on this planet, a ‘Tauhidi’ (Unitary) society free from oppression and exploitation. Unlike Marx, who assigned to the proletariat the task of building his utopia, Shariati looked to the Shia intellectuals to build the ‘Tauhidi’ society.

Shariati politicized many Shia concepts, including ‘entezar’ (waiting for the return of the Hidden Imam).

‘Entezar’, for Shariati, had a new meaning: “Belief in God’s promise to the Muslims, in the final realization of the wretched masses’ ideal and hope; in the final triumphant emergence of the classless society, a society freed from tyranny, injustice and deceit. He made a highly emotional argument that those who are actually killed in defense of Shiism will be eternally alive. In his words, “In own culture …martyrdom is death by choice, chosen by the strugglers with complete consciousness, logic, and awareness.” Shariati adds further: “The Safavids bewitched Shiism, they altered the nature of Red Shiism – which the eternal colour from Ali till eternity (having begun with his martyrdom) – to Black Shiism which is the garment of death which in the name of mourning the Safavids have clothed it with … making Ashura a form of opium for the Iranians”

In drastically reinterpreting Islam, Shariati did not shy away from denouncing the conservative and apolitical Ulema. He accused them of using religion as a mass ‘opiate’, draining away its living soul and turning it into a dry dogma; obsessing with esoteric issues, mumbo-jumbo, and ritual cleanliness; collaborating with both
the ruling class and the bazaar petty bourgeoisie; replacing the Red Shi’ism of the Imams with the Black Shi’ism of the Safavid dynasty; and, on the whole, being more concerned with theology, philosophy, and ‘fiqh’ (law) that with faith, action, and commitment. He drew sharp contrasts between Islam of the ‘mujtaheds’ (clerical leaders) and Islam of the ‘mujaheds (religious fighters).  

He further takes on the clergy for giving themselves fancy new titles such as ‘Ayatullah’ and ‘Hojjatal-Islam’; for hiding from the people the fact that their leaders had been shepherds, craftsmen, and farmers; and for diluting Islam’s radicalism into watered-down paternalism. He concludes that since the Ulema have forfeited task of propagating the true message of Islam, that mission has been passed on to the intelligentsia. 

For the Shah’s regime he was too hard to handle. He was imprisoned in 1972, released in 1975, kept under house arrest, allowed to go to England in 1977. He died there, apparently of a heart attack, in June the same year (but many Iranians believe he was murdered by SAVAK). Khomeini would never endorse Shariati’s thinking directly, but was careful never to condemn it either. Shariati’s radical Islamism, both fully Iranian and fully modern, was a strong influence on the generation of students that grew to adulthood in the 1970s. 

THE FALL OF MOHAMMAD REZA SHAH AND THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

Between 1963 and the latter part of the 1970s Iran enjoyed a huge economic boom that saw per capita GNP rise from $200 to $2,000. Industrial output increased dramatically in new industries like coal, textiles and the manufacture of motor
vehicles, and large numbers of new jobs were created to absorb the increase in population and the large numbers leaving agriculture.

Improved living conditions, sanitation and health services all contributed to a big drop in the infant mortality rate and a spurt in population growth that continued until the 1990s, in the mid-70s half the population were under sixteen, and two-thirds under thirty – this was to be the generation of the revolution.\textsuperscript{84}

Investment rose dizzyingly as Iran benefited from a windfall bonanza of oil income – especially after the Shah renegotiated terms with the oil consortium to give himself more control over production levels and prices.\textsuperscript{85}

But the economy was overheating by late 1976 and 1977; it was evident that the Iranian economy was in trouble. The Shah’s attempt to use Iran’s vastly expanded oil revenues after 1973 for an unrealistically ambitious industrial and construction programme and a massive military buildup greatly strained Iran’s human and institutional resources and caused severe economic and social dislocation. Widespread official corruption, rapid inflation, and a growing gap in incomes between the wealthier and the poorer strata of society fed public dissatisfaction.\textsuperscript{86}

The regime even attempted, in the late ‘60s and ‘70s (as part of the White Revolution programme), to replace the traditional Ulema with a new religious structure of ‘mosques’ and ‘mullahs’ answerable to the state. There was little popular enthusiasm for the state religion (\textit{Din-e-Dawlat}), but it succeeded in alienating the \textit{Ulema} as a whole even further from the Shah. Ayatullah Ali Montazari and Ayatullah Taleqani (the most senior \textit{Ulema} at that time in Iran) were arrested and sentenced to internal exile after disturbances at Tehran University and in Qom in 1970-72. But where Tudeh, the National Front and the violent radicals
were battered and disrupted by years of conflict with SAVAK, the informal nationwide network of ‘mullah’ and religious leaders, reaching into every social class, every bazaar guild and every village, was still there in the late 1970s, as it had been in 1906; reflecting the enduring power of this alternative source of authority in Shia Iranian society. The Shah was aware of the rising resentment and dissatisfaction in the country and the increasing international concern about the suppression of basic freedoms in Iran. Organizations such as the International Council of Jurists and Amnesty International were drawing attention to mistreatment of political prisoners and violation of the rights of the accused in Iranian courts. More important, United States President Jimmy Carter, who took office in January, 1977, was making an issue of human rights violation in countries with which the United States was associated.

Beginning in early 1977, the Shah took a number of steps to meet both domestic and foreign criticism of Iran’s human right record. He released political prisoners and announced new regulations to protect the legal rights of civilians brought before military courts. In July the Shah replaced Amir Abbas Hoveyada, his Prime Minister of twelve years, with Jamshid Amuzegar, who had served for over a decade in various cabinet posts. Unfortunately for the Shah Amuzegar also became unpopular, as he attempted to slow the overheated economy with measures that, although generally thought necessary, triggered a downturn in employment and private sector profits that would later compound the government’s problems.

By 1977 there was enormous discontent in all strata of Iranian society with the Shah’s rule and his programmes.

On November 13, 1977 the Shah visited the United States. At his reception ceremonies at the White House his opponents demonstrated against his rule and
shouted slogans such as ‘Death to the Shah’, and ‘Down with US imperialism’. These events, broadcast in the US and around the world, reinforced the opposition in Iran.\(^91\)

On the eve of the New Year of 1978, while the movement was gradually taking shape, Jimmy Carter, the US President visited Iran and praised the Shah and his leadership, which he said had turned Iran into an ‘island of stability’ in a very unstable region of the world.

If the above incidents could be counted as the pre-revolutionary movement and not yet the revolution itself, one can argue that the Islamic Revolution started with the following: On January 7 1978, an article was written in the evening newspaper Ettela’at directly attacking and labeling Ayatullah Komeini. The article labeled him a reactionary and irreligious cleric with a questionable record, who was an agent of British imperialism. On January 9, theology students in the city of Qom held massive demonstrations and sit-in to protest the article. The police intervened to disperse the demonstrations that led to the death of many people.\(^92\)

These killings began a cycle of protests that culminated on the ‘arba’in’, or the traditional day of mourning on the fortieth day after death. Despite the effort of senior clerics to assure that the February 18 ‘arba’in was peaceful, events got out of control in Tabriz and a major riot ensued. Forty days later, there were riots resulting in deaths in several cities, which in turn led to extensive protests forty days later. The cycle was broken on June 17, when the Islamic activists decided on a stay-at-home protest.\(^93\)

The protests that rocked Iranian cities in the first half of 1978 were led by religious elements and were centered on mosques and religious events. They drew
on traditional groups in the bazaar and among the working class for support. The protesters used a form of calculated violence to achieve their ends, attacking and destroying carefully selected targets that represented objectionable features of the regime: nightclubs and cinemas as symbols of moral corruption and the influence of Western culture; banks as symbols of economic exploitation; Rastakhiz (the party created by the Shah in 1975 to run a one-party state) offices; and police stations as symbols of political repression. The protests, moreover, aimed at more fundamental change: in slogans and leaflets, the protesters attacked the Shah and demanded his removal, and they depicted Khomeini as their leader and an Islamic state as their ideal. From his exile in Iraq, Khomeini continued to issue statements calling for further demonstrations, rejected any form of compromise with the regime, and called for the overthrow of the Shah.\(^{94}\)

The government’s position deteriorated further in August 1978, when more than 400 people died in a fire at the Rax Cinema in Abadan. Accusing the regime of being the culprit, thousands of the relatives of the dead in the following days demonstrated against the regime and chanted slogans such as ‘Death to the Shah’, ‘Down with the Pahlavi regime’, and ‘The army is our brother, Khomeini is our leader’.

In response to these events, on August 27, 1978, the Shah replaced Amouzegar with Sharif Emami as the Prime Minister. Jafar Sharief Imami, an experienced politician, took measures including extending freedoms, legalizing demonstrations, reducing censorship, allowing for political parties to operate and restoring the Islamic calendar.\(^{95}\)

Ayatullah Kazem Shariatmadari, one of the prominent religious leaders in Qom, was repeatedly condemning the regime’s repressive measures and asking the
Iranian people to calm down. Though Shariatmadari was calling for the implementation of the Constitution while Khomeini was asking for the overthrow of the regime.⁹⁶

Following the prayer marking the end of the fasting month of Ramzan on September 4, hundreds of thousands of people spread into the streets of northern Tehran. This was the massive demonstration against the regime to that point. In this demonstration, people were then invited to participate in another demonstration in southern Tehran on September 8.

To preempt these moves, the Shah ordered martial law effective from the morning of September 8, in eleven major cities, including Tehran. Unaware of the martial law declaration, people gathered in Jhaleh Square on that Friday morning, as was planned. The military forces encircled the gathering and fired directly at the people from helicopters and from the ground with tanks and machine guns. In this event, later on called ‘Black Friday’, according to the regime 87 people were killed.⁹⁷ The French philosopher Michel Foucault, who had rushed to cover the revolution for an Italian newspaper, claimed that some 4,000 had been shot in Jhaleh Square.⁹⁸

In the following weeks, strikes spread from colleges and high schools to the oil industry, bazaars, state and private factories, banks, railways, port facilities, and government offices. The whole country, including the Plan and Budget Organization, the ‘crème de la crime’ of the central government, had gone on strike.⁹⁹

In the meantime, the Shah demanded from the Iraqi regime to expel Ayatullah Khomeini from Iraq, where he was exiled. The Iraqis forced him to leave Iraq.
After attempting to enter Kuwait, he finally travelled to France and took up residence near Paris. His residence outside that city made it possible for Iranian politicians and clergy to see and collaborate with Ayatullah Khomeini. Among these were some of the leaders of the clergy, Freedom Movement of Iran, National Front and bazaar.  

On the day of *Ashura* i.e. 11 December, 1978, upto two million people demonstrated in Tehran against the regime and many millions more in other demonstrations throughout Iran, despite a martial law was being in force by the order of the Shah.

In a last ditch effort to save his crown the Shah had chosen, Shahpur Bakhtiar, leader of the Iran Party, one of the constituents of the National Front, as a new Prime Minister. Bakhtiar introduced a bill into the Majlis, which dissolved SAVAK, and made a promise to hand over power to an elected government once proper constitutional procedures had been followed. With the support of the US, which realized that the Shah was doomed, Bakhtiar persuaded the monarch to leave Iran, and on 16th January, 1979 the Shah left the country.

Bakhtiar’s strategy of managing a peaceful transition to a democratic regime was failed. By accepting nomination from the Shah, he discredited himself with the rest of the opposition, and both Khomeini and his own colleagues in the National Front denounced him. Khomeini termed the Bakhtiar government as illegal and sought his dismissal.
RETURN OF AYATULLAH KHOMEINI

When Ayatullah Komeini had announced that he would return to Iran in next few days, Shahpur Bakhtiar, the Shah’s beleaguered Prime Minister, despite his earlier statement that Khomeini was free to return, closed down the Mehrabad airport of Tehran. The closure of the airport resulted into many deaths of demonstrators outside the airport, who were protesting against Bakhtiar’s decision to prevent the return of Khomeini. These deaths finally sealed Bakhtiar’s fate. He appeared like just another of Shah’s prime ministers, presiding over the killing of demonstrators.

However, the airport reopened and Ayatullah Khomeinireturned in triumph on 1st February, 1979 two weeks after the Shah had left the country. On his return, Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan as his prime minister and initiated a tense period in which there were briefly two governments in Iran. But eventually after the armed confrontation between air force personnel and Imperial Guard troops loyal to the Shah at the Dosh Tappeh air base near Tehran, Bakhtiar and the military commanders saw the impossibility of the situation and gave in. Bakhtiar gave his resignation and announced that they would remain neutral. From that point onwards Ayatullah Khomeini and his supporters were in control. 103

The regime of Mohammad Reza Shah, the king of kings, the last symbol of more than two thousand years old monarchy had been overthrown by the popular revolution termed as the Islamic Revolution due to its religious leadership of Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini.
CAUSES OF THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

There were many causes of the Islamic Revolution, both political and non-political. The three major causes are discussed below.

First - The Pahlavi regime had come to power and maintained its position by coups, thereby crushing the democratic opposition and violating the Constitution. In the decade prior to 1978 the Shah had continued to crush his opponents and deny them any form of legal expression. It was therefore easy for his opponents to claim that the Pahlavi regime was illegal; Khomeini and his supporters were able to give this charge of illegitimacy a potent expression in religious terms by casting the Shah as the violator of the Quran and as an enemy of Islam.

Second - Corruption and nepotism played a major role in dividing the state and the ruling class, and making it easier for Shah’s opponents to rally a wide coalition against him once the regime had begun to crumble.¹⁰⁴

Third - Repeatedly, since the late nineteenth century, when secular government had got into trouble, ordinary, pious Iranians had turned to the other authoritative institution in Iranian society for leadership – the Shia clergy or Ulema. Up to the 1960s and 1970s, the Shia clergy were faced with the challenges of social change, economic change and western influence, had as a body been divided and uncertain about how to respond; now siding with liberal intellectuals; now with the monarchy. But by the 1970s Ayatullah Khomeini had learned from previous episodes and could provide new answers and clear principles for the leadership of the clergy in its own right. Allied to that was the popular enthusiasm for Islam, in opposition to westernization and foreign interference in the country. Since 1906, the longstanding demands from a broad swath of the Iranian people had been for a free
society and representative government. The mechanism of the revolution was determined by the gradual gathering of confidence and solidarity among the Iranian people through 1978, but the form the revolution took was determined by the leadership of Khomeini and the clergy, and the demand for free institutions.\textsuperscript{105} Khomeini’s success lies in the fact that he maintained an uncompromising stance and skillfully drew all opposition forces to his side.

**FRENCH PHILOSOPHER MICHEL FOUCALUT ON IRANIAN REVOLUTION**

Michel Foucault (1926-84) historian, philosopher and activist, was one of the most influential intellectual figures whose works have had an enormous impact on various fields in humanities and social sciences. Foucault made two trips to Iran in 1978. He met with many people while there, including several leading opposition clerics and was able to arrange meetings with Iranian exiles – including Ayatullah Khomeini – upon his return to France.

Foucault identified the Iranian revolution in 1978 as a ‘political will’, a will for “political spirituality that yearns for the end of dependency, the disappearance of the police, the re-distribution of oil revenues, an attack on corruption, the reactivation of Islam, another way of life, and new relations with the West, with the Arab countries, with Asia, and so forth.”\textsuperscript{106}

Emphasizing the important role of Shiism in the revolt, Foucault understands how Shiism is able to organize the resistance into a unified force that could effectively oppose the Shah. He was struck by the unified collective will that he experienced in his visits – as will with one aim, the end of the Shah’s regime.
Seeing that Shiism focused this will, Foucault hoped that it would have positive consequences: that Islamic government would avoid hierarchies as he believed that the Shia clergy is not determined by a hierarchy and also protect liberties which were not possible in the Shah’s regime. He said that the Islamic government would allow the introduction of a spiritual dimension into political life as political spirituality.\textsuperscript{107}

Foucault was also criticized for his approach towards Islamic Revolution. His response to the criticisms was that Islamism was to become a major political force in the region, and the West must treat it with respect rather than hostility.\textsuperscript{108}

Despite an economic slump and middle class disillusionment with the corruption and oppression of a regime as well as a nationalistic dislike of the unequal relationship with the United States of America, the revolution drew great strength from its Shia form, which lent cohesion and a sense of common purpose to disparate elements, even those that were not overtly religious at all and from the clarity and charisma of Khomeini, which gave an otherwise disunited collection of groups and motivations a centre and a unity. Unlike other revolutions in history, the Iranian revolution was genuinely a people’s revolution, in which the actions of a large mass of people were crucial to the outcome, and outcome was a genuine expression of the people’s will.\textsuperscript{109}

The most striking feature of the Iranian revolution was the speed with which the state apparatus collapsed. No one had expected that the Shah’s regime would have collapsed in such a manner, not even the Shah’s closest ally, the United States. The Then US President Jimmy Carter during his visit to Iran in December 1977 termed Iran under the leadership of the Shah as ‘an island of stability.’ But that island of stability destabilized in such a way as if it never existed.
Islamic revolution in Iran ended the reign of Pahlavi dynasty and for the first time in the modern history paved the way for the establishment of the theocratic rule under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini. Thus Khomeini became the founding father of the Islamic republic and eventually the first *Vali-e-faqih* of the Islami Republic of Iran according to the new Constitution promulgated after the victory of the revolution.
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CHAPTER TWO
VELAYAT- E- FAQIH ACCORDING TO THE SHIA THEOLOGY
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VELAYAT-E-FAQIHK ACCORDING TO THE SHIA THEOLOGY

‘O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you do believe in Allah and the Last Day: That is best and most suitable for final determination’.

The Holy Quran, Verse 4:59 Translated by Yusufali

Literally translated ‘Velayat-e-Faqih’ means ‘mandate of the (Islamic) jurist’ or ‘guardianship of the jurist’, ‘velaya’ meaning government or legal authority, combined with ‘faqih’ which is the standard Islamic term for someone who interprets the law authoritatively. The concept as elaborated by Syed Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-89) is a forthright attempt to legitimize governance by Shi’i clergy according to the above mentioned verse of the Holy Quran in the temporal as well as the spiritual realm. Concretely speaking, it implied that the highest authority of the Islamic Revolution, namely the Guide or Leader (rahbar) or The Vali-e-faqih should be one of the highest religious authorities (marja’al-taqlid or authority of emulation) and the political leader, who, ‘understands his time’ and therefore could lead a mass movement.

Before elaborating on the concept of Velayat-e-Faqih and its roots in the Shia Islamic doctrines, it is important to throw some light on the earlier days of Islam and its subsequent division between the two major sects i.e. Shia and Sunn
PROPHET MUHAMMAD

Muhammad ibn Abdullah was previous to his declaration of prophethood a merchant in the then commercial centre of the world, Makkah (Mecca) in today’s Saudi Arabia. Born in 571 A.D, as an orphan, he quickly came under the patronage of his uncle Abu Talib, a prominent member of the Banu Hashim clan of the leading Quraysh tribe of Makkah, who was to forestall Muhammad’s suffering until his death.2

During his early life in Makkah, Muhammad was acknowledged as al-Sadiq or the truthfull and as ‘al-Ameen’ or the Trustworthy. He was married at an age of 25 years to a woman named Khadijah, a powerful business woman of Makkah.

At the age of 40, when Muhammad was retiring from the city atmosphere, he used to think over the attributes of God in the Cave of Hira on Jabalan Nour (Mountain of Light), where he was approached by Archangel Gabriel who revealed that he is Allah’s Final Messenger on Earth.3

When Muhammad first began to preach the revelation of Islam in Mecca in 613 A.D., he soon faced opposition from the leading families of the city. They drew their prosperity partly from their trusteeship of the pagan shrines in Mecca, which Muhammad was not favoring, and they felt threatened also by his emphasis on fair dealing in business and generosity to the poor. Most of what Muhammad preached either stated or implied a criticism of the status quo, of which the Quraish were the prime proprietors and beneficiaries.4

The Quraish retaliated against the growing number of Muhammad’s followers with ridicule, and later with violence. Soon on the one hand, in the form it has come
down to us, we have a picture of wealthy, corrupt, impious, unjust rulers; and on the other, virtuous, poor, oppressed Muslims, bravely speaking out against them. This image of arrogant power and virtuous resistance repeats itself again and again in the history of Islam and especially in the history of Shia Islam, reinforced each time by new examples, right down to modern times and the 1979 Iranian Revolution.  

Eventually the hostility to Muhammad from the powerful families of Mecca made his position there untenable. As a result the Prophet decided to leave his hometown of Mecca and move with his supporters to the northern city of Yathrib. This ‘hijrah’ (or withdrawal) to Yathrib occurred in the year 622 A.D. and is an integral part of the Islamic consciousness, even today. On the Prophet’s arrival the people of Yathrib changed the name of the city to al-Madinah al-Nabi (or Medina in English), which means ‘City of the Prophet’.

The arrival of the Muslims of Mecca to join their compatriots in Medina marks not only the beginning of the Muslim Calendar but also marks the beginning of the victory of Islam and the fulfillment of the prophesies of Muhammad. The difficulties and triumph over adversity experienced during the ‘hijrah’ has remained a cornerstone of the Islamic faith and psyche throughout the ages. The eight years spent in Medina further developed the Islamic way of life, together with the religious, political, economic and social practices that were necessary to maintain it. The development of a community beyond tribal or kinship bonds produced a religion that transcends class or family bonds, giving it mass appeal.

Initially while Muhammad was building his Islamic society in Medina, he sought a truce with the people of Mecca to allow his followers to visit the holy site of Kaba. However, such tranquil relations with their neighbours were short-lived and following the breaking of the truce of al-Hudaybiyya it became inevitable that a
final victory over the idolaters was necessary. Eventually (in 630 A.D.) the Medinans triumphed, occupied Mecca, converted the Meccans to the new religion, removed pagan idols from the Kaba in Mecca and made it the central shrine of Islam that it has been ever since. Islam became the dominant religion of the Arabian Peninsula.

DEATH OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD AND THE PROBLEM OF SUCCESSION

But in 632 A.D. Prophet Muhammad died, and the new religion faced a crisis over who should succeed him as the leader of the Ummah (Islamic Community). The way it was resolved was fateful for the future of Islam.

According to Sunni tradition, Prophet Muhammad died without naming successor, and thus leaders of the Muslim Community, known as the people who bind and loose (ahl al-hal wa al-‘aqd), met and reached a consensus (ijma) that Abu Bakr, the father of the Prophet’s wife Aisha and the eldest among the Prophet’s companions, should become Caliph. Abu Bakr was to survive only two year in his position and on his death bed named Umar as his successor. He ruled from 632 to 634 A.D. Umar in turn appointed a six-member council, on his death bed, which chose Uthman as his successor. Uthman as the third rightly guided Caliph lasted from 644 till 656 A.D. After Uthman was murdered, the nascent Islamic community plunged into civil war. Aisha, along with her brothers-in-law Talha and Zubayr (two of the Prophet’s close companions), fought Ali in the Battle of the Camel in the year 656 A.D. Ali won and he consolidated his leadership of the community of the faithful.
However, the Islamic community plunged again into Civil War after Mu’awiyya challenged Ali’s leadership or Khilafat. They met in the Battle of Siffin in the year 657 A.D., which witnessed an ebb and flow until the tide started to turn in the direction of Ali’s forces. The cunning Mu’awiyya ordered his army to raise the Quran on top of their swords, asking for a truce in order to find a just arbitration between them. Ali conceded to arbitration after his army was split between his faithful followers, the Shias, and the secessionists (the Khawarij). The Khwarij fought him and lost. As retribution, a Kharajite killed Ali in the year 661 A.D., and as such Mu’awiyya became the uncontested leader of the community, especially after Hassan, Ali’s son, abdicated to him.\textsuperscript{17}

The Sunnis, unlike the Shia, believe that after the death of the Prophet, his successors wielded only political and not religious authority. According to the Sunni tradition, during the period that has been termed by some scholars as the Golden Age of Islam, that is the ten year rule of the Prophet in Medina from 622 A.D. till 632 A.D., the year of his death, religious and political authority were both consummated in the Prophet himself.\textsuperscript{18}

According to the Shia tradition, the problem of succession of the Prophet has been neatly solved since the Prophet during his lifetime had appointed Ali and his two sons Hassan and Husain as his successors and named all the twelve Imams till Imam al-Mahdi. As such the Shia believes that their leadership had been duped from their divine and inalienable right of succession after the death of the Prophet. They exercised patience and ‘taqiyya’ (expedient dissimulation) and conceded to the Caliphate of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman in order to preclude the community of the faithful from plunging into civil war and schisms. They patiently waited for Ali to become the leader of the faithful, but he was cheated and killed out of his
rightful rule. As such, he Shias’ only chance to lead the Ummah ceased to be and the Sunnis monopolized political power, maintaining it throughout the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties.¹⁹

THE DOCTRINE OF IMAMATE

One of the important evidences, Shia gave in favour of their assertion that Ali was the real successor of the Prophet of Islam, was an incident of Ghadir Khumm.⁰¹⁹

According to Shia belief, on returning home from the last pilgrimage to Mecca on way to Medina at a site called Ghadir Khumm, the Prophet chose Ali as his successor before the vast crowd that was accompanying him. The Shia celebrates this event to this day as a major religious feast marking the day when the right of Ali to succession was universally acclaimed.²⁰

Prophet Muhammad is said to have appointed Ali to the Valayat-e-Ummah, the ‘general governorship’ of the Muslim Community, and to have designated him their new Vali, that is, their ‘guardian’.

The Shia held that the selection or appointment of the leader of the Muslims belongs to Allah alone and after the Prophet Muhammad, guardianship or ‘velaya’ vests in Ali and his offspring, and that these Imams are infallible men endowed with perfect divine illumination and guidance to lead the Muslim Community.²¹

The Imam is not required the divine revelations, that is, he does not enjoy ‘wahy’ (revelation), because it was completed over the Prophet of Islam, but is endowed with ‘Lutf’ (illumination) so that he can correctly interpret the revelations already given and guide the community.²²
According to Prof. Abdulazziz Sachedina:

“The Imam, like Prophet, is blessed with special grace (Lutf) from God, who renders him immune to sin (ma‘sum) before God makes him His witness (shahid) to the people and His proof (hujja) for them.”

The Shia concept of the divinely-inspired Imam developed to the point where it was believed that each Imam, in turn, was God’s Vicegerent on earth, one endowed with a full knowledge not only of true religion but also of the true interpretation of the Quran.24

According to S.H.M. Jafari:

“The second fundamental principle embodied in the doctrine of Imamate as elaborated and emphasized by sixth Imam Jafar al-Sadiq was that of ‘Ilm’. This means that an Imam is a divinely inspired possessor of a special sum of knowledge of religion, which can only be passed on before his death to the following Imam. In this way the Imam of the time becomes the exclusively authoritative source of knowledge in religious matters, and thus without his guidance no one can keep to the right path. This special knowledge includes both external (zahir) and the esoteric (batin) meanings of the Quran”.25

IMAM AS ‘VALI’

In many verses of the Quran, God introduces himself as ‘Guardian of the Believers’ (Vali-ul-Momineen):

■ “Allah is the Guardian of the believers.” (Chapter 3, verse 68)
■ “Allah is the Guardian of those who believe.” (Chapter 2, verse 257)
“Allah suffices as a Guardian.” (Chapter 4, verse 45)

And according to several verses of the Quran, this guardianship has been delegated to the Prophet, so his authority is rooted in the aforementioned Divine Authority.

“Only Allah is your Guardian (vali) and His Apostle.” (Chapter 5, verse :55)

“The Prophet has a great claim on the faithful than they have on themselves.” (Chapter 33, verse :6)

Verses such as these illustrate that the authority and guardianship of the Prophet was originally established and legitimizd by God’s appointment.

There are a series of words derived from the root of ‘Vali’ for instance ‘Velayat’, ‘Mawla’ and ‘Mawala Alayh’. By considering the context to which these are applied, it becomes apparent that they apply to the situation that someone’s affairs have been taken charge of by someone else. Therefore whoever takes charge of these affairs is the latter’s Valî, and consequently it is often applied to governance as well.

When the term “Velayat” is attributed to the Imams, it carries the implications of “mastership”, “sovereignty” and “lordship”. This is to indicate the authority of the Imam over the believers, who are subject to his guardianship. Shia theologians refer to the Quran, especially Chapter 5, verse: 55 i.e. “Only God is your Wali and His Apostle and those who believe; who perform prayer and pay alms while they bow” and prophetic traditions to support the exclusive authority (Velayat) of the Imams.
The last phrase of verse 55 of Chapter 5, i.e. ‘those who believe’, Shia commentators refer to the Imams, who’s *Velayat* was instituted through their appointment by the Prophet.27

The Twelve Imams are as following:

1. Imam Ali ibne Abu Talib  600 A.D.- 661 A.D.
2. Imam Hasan ibne Ali  625 A.D.- 670 A.D.
3. Imam Husain ibne Ali  626 A.D.- 680 A.D.
4. Imam Ali ibne Husain or ZainulAbedin  658 A.D.- 712 A.D.
5. Imam Muhammad Baqir  677 A.D.- 732 A.D.
6. Imam Jafar Sadiq  702 A.D.- 765 A.D.
7. Imam Musa Kazim  744 A.D.- 799 A.D.
8. Imam Ali Riza  765 A.D.- 817 A.D.
9. Imam Taqi Jawad  810 A.D.- 835 A.D.
10. Imam Ali Naqi  827 A.D.- 868 A.D.
11. Imam Hasan Askari  846 A.D.- 874 A.D.
12. Imam Muhammad Mahdi (The Awaited One)  868 A.D.

THE PRE-OCCULTATION PERIOD

The interim phase between the martyrdom of Imam Husain and the occultation of the twelfth Imam who is believed to have gone into ‘ghayba’ or hiding, in the ninth century, is one which best epitomizes the accommodationist stand of Shia political culture.

In the face of severe repression of Shia followers by the *Umayyads* and the *Abbasids*, the depoliticisation of Shias was enunciated by the Imams. Beginning
with the Fourth Imam, Zainul Abidin, a policy of political quietism was instituted. Fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Baqir cautioned one of his followers against participating in Ali ibn Zayd’s resistance to the Ummayads, was taken as an indication of endorsement of his father’s policy.²⁸

By the mid-eight century, Shia depolitisisation became firmly established by the Sixth Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq. He declared ‘taqiyya’ (precautionary dissimulation) and laid the doctrinal basis of political quietism.

The renunciation of political power coupled with the preservation of the Imamate’s moral authority was translated practically as submission to Abbasid rule without according it any legitimacy. The moral logic behind this political realism was that Shia militancy against the Abbasids, (which came to power after overthrowing the rule of Ummayads), would be futile and self-destructive. It is believed that the Imams did not feel that their adherents had the necessary degree of political awareness or loyalty for political activism.²⁹

According to the Shia traditions, the task of forming the true Islamic rule would be given to the Twelfth Imam, al-Mahdi. The doctrine of ‘raj’a’ is based on the messianic belief that upon his ‘qiyam’ or rise, the Mahdi will islamicise the whole world and institutes a rule of justice on earth that will represent the Shias’ golden age.

LESSER OCCULTATION (GHYBAT-E-SUGHRA)

Imam Al-Mahdi was born in 868 A.D. in Samarra, Iraq and succeeded his father, the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-Askari, as Imam in 874 A.D. after latter’s martyrdom by the Abbasid ruler. Imam Al-Mahdi went into hiding soon after
assuming the role of Imam before making only one appearance as a young boy at this father’s funeral.

For the next sixty-seven years, the twelfth Imam communicated with the Shia community through four different agents, or they were called by the Shias, ‘sufrac’ or deputies. This period was called the lesser occultation. A few days after the death of the fourth deputy, Muhammad at Samarra in 941 A.D., the Imam is believed to have declared the end of lesser occultation and hence all communication with community.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF VILAYAT-E-FAQIH

“The earth shall not remain but there will always be a learned authority (alim) from among us, who will distinguish the truth from falsehood.”

Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, the Sixth Imam.

The prophecy of Imam al-Sadiq has been fulfilled for the Shia community throughout their history following the occultation of their last Imam, al-Mahdi, during which there has always been an ‘alim’ or learned authority to direct the community to its goal.

The contribution of the Shia scholars to the preservation of the Imamite worldview strengthened belief of the Shia in the continuation of religious leadership, and this gradually prepared the way for the Shia learned authority to assume the much wider socio-political leadership of the Imamite community as the functional Imam. More significantly, the acknowledgment of the faithful made it possible for the Shia jurist
to assume the all-comprehensive authority (al-velayat-al Umma) of the Imam as a just ruler, when historical circumstance made it necessary for him to do so.\textsuperscript{30}

The development of the authority of the deputy of the Infallible Imams was not something that awaited the period of the complete occultation of the last Imam, rather it had begun during the time when the Shia Imams, living under difficult political circumstances of the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., could not assume full responsibility for directing the affairs of their Shia. Hence they delegated their partial authority to those among their close associates who proved their loyalty to them by believing in them (sound belief) and learning from them (sound knowledge). This was the beginning of the deputyship (niyaba) of the Imams, on whose authority those trusted disciples managed the religious and socio-political affairs of the Shia in widely separated areas like Kufa in Iraq as well as Qum and Ray in Iran.

**POST-OCCULTATION PERIOD**

The post-occultation period also terms as a greater occultation or ghybat-e-kubra, which will end with the reappearance of the twelfth Imam. With the occultation of twelfth Imam, his deputies assumed wider authority among the Shia community. Historical vicissitudes required the community to respond without compromising the central doctrine of the Imamate. This response was worked out by the Shia jurists as the spokesmen of the community and the deputies of the Imam, with due intellectual about the nature of the authority of the Shia jurist during the occultation.\textsuperscript{31}
BAGHDAD SCHOOL OF SHIA JURISPRUDENCE

The Baghdad School of Shia Jurisprudence emerged during the reign of Buyid dynasty (945-1055 A.D.), the first Shia dynasty. The eminent Shia jurists of this age were Sheikh Mufid, Sharif al-Murtada and Sheikh Tusi. They discussed the ‘velaya’ (authority) of the ‘faqih’ and delineated this authority in their jurisprudential works wherever necessary.

The juridical works produced under the guidance of Sheikh Mufid and his Baghdad school indicate that assuming the leadership of the Imamite community was not only a logical extension of the Imamate of the Hidden Imam, but also that the necessity to do so was not problematic legally. The jurists realized all too soon that continuation of the institution of the deputyship of Imam, not on the Buyid Sultans, who had allowed the Sunni caliphate to continue as symbolic of the unity of the majority of Muslims. The deputyship of these jurists, became a sort of trust in the Hidden Imam, one that could assume functions that the Imam, had he been present, would have undertaken himself or would have delegated to someone qualified to represent him, such as the Khalifat al-Imam. Thus, deputies were authorized to undertake functions with theologico-political implications, as functional Imams, with the potential of becoming ‘sultan al-zaman’ (the ruling authority of the time), in the general interest of the Shia.  

HILLA SCHOOL OF JURISPRUDENCE

The Hilla School of Jurisprudence emerged during twelfth and fourteen centuries in the post-Seljuq and Ilkhanid era. The prominent jurists of the school were Ibn Idris al-Hilli, Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, Allama al Hilli, and Shahid I. Most of the scholars
belonged to the city of Hilla, in the present day Iraq hence the school was named after it.

Jurists during this period were witnesses to the political turmoil following the breakdown of Sunni Seljuq authority and destruction of the Abbasid caliphate by the Mongols. This unfavorable situation more than anything else convinced them that the existence of Shia political authority (other than that of the Imam) willing to consider the implementation of the Sharia was not only expedient but necessary because it fulfilled one of the basic obligations of Islam i.e. ‘enjoining the good and forbidding the evil.’ The fulfillment of this obligation also provided legitimate grounds to apply the phrase al-sultan al-adil or the just ruler to any Shia authority committed to the promulgation of the Sharia.\textsuperscript{33}

Among the administrative institutions that had grown up in the Islamic empire, al-qada, administration of justice, became one of the most important in preserving the popular sense of universal justice. In Shiism, al-qada became the most fundamental aspect of the growing political power of the jurists, who, in their position as the lawful administrators of justice, were regarded as the protectors of the people against the unjust behavior of those in power. The license and tyranny of those in power, in addition to the expectations of the Imamite community, required jurists to undertake the wider role of the functional Imam (beyond their already well-established role as the interpreters of the Islamic revelation), in their capacity as the ‘general’ deputy of the Hidden Imam. The new role was carefully worked out in all its details under the rubric of ‘velayat-e-faqih’ in subsequent eras.\textsuperscript{34}
DOCTRINE OF VILAYAT-E-FAQIH DURING SAFAVID ERA (1501-1736)

During the reign of Safavid rulers of Iran, jurists like Muhaqqiq al-Karaki, Shahid II, Muhaqqiq al Sabzawari, and Fadil al Hindi wrote their commentaries on the works of the Hilla jurists and discussed the authority of the jurists, explaining its wider implications for Imamite temporal authority. The most significant argument justifying the authority of the jurists was that it made it possible to implement Islamic laws before the return of the Imam from occultation by asking jurists to undertake the responsibility of their execution, because they had been considered as the ‘ulu al-amr’ (those who possess authority) through the exegetical extrapolation of the prescript written by the twelfth Imam. In other words, the jurist among the Imamites could exercise authority similar to that of the Sultan or King among the Sunnis inasmuch as the Sultan likewise held the position of ‘ulu-al–amr’ (those who were invested with authority) in the Sunni community. The ‘velaya’ of the jurist, more specifically his wielding of ‘al-velalyat al amma’ (the comprehensive authority) had the same legal validity as the authority of ‘ulu–al-amr’ in the Muslim public order. Moreover, just as the investiture of ‘velaya’ was necessary to carry out any official political function, so that investiture of ‘al-velayat al amma’ was necessary to carry out the obligation of ‘enjoining the good and forbidding the evil’. This obligation was the main revelational justification for the existence of any government during the occultation. Because the Imam had invested the ‘general’ deputyship in the jurist, he was the most qualified among the Imamites to undertake the implementation of the obligation in his position as one of the category of ‘ulu-al-amr’.35
DOCTRINE OF VELAYAT AL FAQIH DURING QAJAR AND THE POST-QAJAR ERA

During this period monumental works on jurisprudence produced by great scholars like Naraqi, Ansari, Naini, Ruhallah Khomeini, and other modern jurists defined and set the authority of the jurists, as adumbrated in the works of the previous generations of the Shia jurists, on a firm theological basis of the ‘general’ deputyship of the Hidden Imam.

The significant aspect of the doctrine of Velayat-e-Faqih during this period was that the position of the jurist became centralized and institutionalized in the position of ‘Marja-e-taqlid’ (the authority who was followed by the general membership of the Shia as their religious leader). With the failure of those invested with power to uphold justice, the comprehensive authority of the jurist began to be seen as an alternative authority that could replace the corrupt ruler and fulfill the function of the just ruler. In the eyes of the Shias the jurist, who was appointed by the Imam on the basis of his general permission, had more legitimate claim than did the monarch to exercise al-velayat al amma in the name of the Hidden Imam pending his return.

Moreover, the jurist enjoyed the confidence of the faithful as their religious guide, for they regarded him as the deputy of the Imam, sharing in the Imam’s charisma. In a distinct way, then, the jurist had a popular mandate to function as the ‘vali al-amr’ of the Shia, in a way the monarch lacked. Thus, ‘al velayat al-amma’ of the jurist who possessed ‘sound belief’, ‘sound knowledge’ and ‘sound character’ substituted for the ‘velaya’ of the Imam and generated loyalty to Imami Shiism through the process of pledging obedience to the authority of a learned jurist.36
The elevated religious standing of the religious jurist under Qajar rule was further bolstered by the victory of the Usulis over the Akhbaris in the late eighteenth century.

**USULI AND AKHBARI SCHOOLS OF SHIA ISLAM**

The Usuli School has stressed the necessity of a ‘marja’ (authority of emulation) for the believers to emulate. By emulating the ‘marja’, the believers are guided in their religious affairs as well as their daily dealings, even those matters pertaining to marriage, inheritance, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, alms giving etc. These authoritative views have been elaborated into something like a comprehensive theory in the wake of the Qajar era and the advent of the constitutional revolution of which a leading jurist was Sayyid Muhammad Husain al-Naini. Since then the central issue does not only centre upon the following of the fatwas of the ‘marja’, but rather emphasis the importance of the participation of the Ulema and ‘marja-e-taqlid’ in the authority as al-Naini has stipulated.

In contrast, the Akhbaris stressed the holiness of the traditions of Imams as an obligatory grace that believers should abide by without any distortion or hermeneutic interpretation or the use of rational sciences. Akhbaris stressed the importance of being aloof from politics during the occultation period of the Infallible Imam.37

The controversy between Usuli and Akhbari schools became prominent during seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the Usuli School prevailed over the Akhbari School. The Akhbaris were against ‘Ijtihad’ (The process of reinterpretation of Sharia laws) and rendering a salient stance to the ‘mujtaheds’ (those who
practiced *ijtihad*); they based Shia jurisprudence on ‘*akhbar*’ or tradition and not on rational principles or the ‘*usul of fiqh*’ (jurisprudence) that are used in ‘*ijtihad*’, thus rejecting rational principle upon which ‘*ijtihad*’ and ‘*fiqh*’ were based.

After the victory of the *Usuli* School, which came to be known as *Jafari* School, religious seminaries across the Shia world adopted universal guidelines that were set in order to choose the leading ‘*mujtahed*’, who after passing stringent theological requirement becomes a ‘*marja*’.  

**TRADITIONAL EVIDENCES FOR VELAYAT-E-FAQIH**

There are the three most reliable traditional evidences, which *Shia* jurists refer to support the absolute guardianship of the jurist or ‘Velayat al- amma al faqih ‘.

1- A signed letter from Twelfth Imam.

One of the most reliable traditions mentioned by the scholars is a letter from the hidden Imam. Sheikh al-Sadiq transmits in his book ‘*Ikmal al Deen wa itmam an–Ni’ma*’ that Ishaq ibn Yaqub wrote a letter to the hidden Imam asking him about some concerns that he had. The Imam’s deputy during the period of lesser occultation, Muhammad ibn Usman al-Umari conveyed the letter to him.

The Imam replied: 39 “As for events that may occur (*al-hawadith-al-waqi’a*) (when you may need guidance) refer to the transmitters (*ruwat*) of our teachings who are my *Hujjah* (proof) to you and I am the proof of God (*Hujjatullah*) to you all.”
Sheikh al Tusi also transmits the narration in the book ‘Al Qayba’ and other collections of Imami ‘ahadith’ (tradition) report the tradition from the books mentioned above.

Advocates of Velayat-e-Faqih often refer to the second part of the tradition, namely, “they are my proof to you, and I am the proof of God to you all” to establish the authority of the jurists. However jurist like Ayatullah Khomeini maintain that the first part of the hadith may also be used to establish the authority of the jurist or faqih. He said that the first section of this narration encourages people to ask those who relate the traditions of the Imams about any new occurrences that they encounter.

Regarding the second part of the hadith, Ayatullah Khomeini describes a ‘proof of God’ (or Hujjah) as someone who God has designated to conduct affairs; all his deeds, actions and sayings constitute a proof for the Muslims.

Khomeini says: 40 “If the proof commands you to perform a certain act and you fail to obey him or if despite the existence of the proof, you turn to oppressive authorities for the solution of your affairs, and then God Almighty will advance a proof against you on the Day of Judgment.” 41

Therefore, the advocates of the ‘velayat– al amma al faqih’ imply that the ‘hujjat’ is the authority of one over his followers, and hence the injunctions of the holder of such a status must be complied with. Since the Imam as God’s ‘hujjat’ (the ‘proof’ that God will not accept any excuses for disobeying) has designated the ‘fuqaha’ as his ‘hujjat’, the commands and directives of the Fuqaha are as those of the Imams. 42

2- Maqbula of Umar ibn Hanzala:

According to the Science of hadith, the ‘maqbula’ is a narration that has been accepted by jurists as a valid tradition without examining the authenticity or
weakness of its chain of transmission. In other words, even though some of those who appear as its transmitters may be weak and unreliable, some evidences that support the soundness of the text compel the jurists to ignore such weakness.

Umar ibn Hanzala, who was a disciple of the sixth Infallible Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, said:

“I asked Imam Sadiq whether it was permissible for two of the Shia who had a disagreement concerning a debt or an inheritance to seek the verdict of the ruler or judge. He replied: Anyone who has recourse to ‘tahut’ (i.e. the illegitimate ruling power), whatever he obtains as a result of their verdict, he will have obtained by forbidden means, even if he has a proven right to it. For he will have obtained it through the verdict and judgment of the ‘taghut’, the power that Almighty God has commanded him to disbelieve in.43

“They wish to seek justice from illegitimate powers, even though they have been commanded to disbelieve therein.”

(The Holy Quran: Chapter 4, verse 60)

Umar ibn Hanzala then asked what was the correct action for two Shia to take under such circumstances.

Imam Sadiq replied:

“They must seek out one of you who narrates our traditions, who is versed in what is permissible and what is forbidden, who is well acquainted with our laws and ordinances and accept him as judge and arbiter, for I appoint him as ‘hakim’ (judge)’.44)
No Shia jurist disputes that this tradition firmly establishes the authority of a faqih with regards to the administration of justice (velayat al-qada). However, many leading jurist such as Mirza al-Naini, Sayed Mohammad Reza Gulpaayigani, Sheikh al-Ansari and Ayatullah Khomeini believe that the text does not confine the authority of a faqih to ‘velayat al-qada’. They assert that the Imam designated the faqih as trustees of universal authority or ‘velayat al-amma’ when he said, “I appoint him (faqih) as ‘hakim’ (judge)”. They believe that by appointing the faqih as ‘hakim’, the Imam made it incumbent upon all Shia to refuse any kind of recourse to illegitimate authority. Hence in all aspects of disagreement it is necessary for them to refer to a faqih, whether it is in a governmental or judicial capacity.45

THE TRADITION OF ABU KHADIJA

Ayatullah Khomeini refers to a famous transmission of hadith that was narrated by Abu Khadija, to argue in favour of ‘velayat al-amma’ or the absolute guardianship of the jurist. Abu Khadija was one of the companions of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq. This hadith or tradition is mentioned by Shikh Tusi, Sheikh Sadiq and Sheikh Kolayni. According to them, Abu Khadija said:

“I was commanded by the Imam Jafar al-Sadiq to convey the following message to our friends:

“When enmity and dispute arise among you, or you disagree concerning the receipt or payment of a sum of money, be sure not to refer the matter to one of these malefactors for judgment. Designate as judge and arbiter someone amongst you who is acquainted with our junctions concerning what is permitted and what is prohibited, for I appoint such a man as judge over
you. Let none of you take your complaint against another of you to the tyrannical ruling power.”

The explanation of the above argument given by the Shia jurists was that the Imam Jafar al-Sadiq had prohibited his followers from referring to other illegitimate powers with regard to non-judicial issues, while in the previous tradition of Maqbula of Umar ibn Hanzala, Imam al-Sadiq had commanded his followers to turn away from illegitimate judges. This tradition has prohibited the followers of the Imam, from recourse to tyrannical authorities in matters relating to the executive. This indicates that the appointment of faqih is necessary in all matters of judgment and of government.

THE RATIONAL ARGUMENT FOR VELAYAT- E-FAQIH

Mullah Ahmad Naraqi, the author of the famous book ‘Avaed al Ayyam’, was the first jurist who appealed to logical reasoning to support the concept of absolute guardianship of the jurist or ‘velayat – al-amma al faqih’.

This approach adopts a similar structure to those rational arguments upon which Shia scholars base the necessity of Prophethood and Imamate; that it was necessary for God to appoint some people as Prophets and Imams in order to provide divine guidance to mankind. Therefore, it is only reasonable to assume that in the absence of such infallible guidance, God would entrust the responsibilities of religious and political leadership to those people best qualified to undertake it as deputies of the absent and infallible Imam. Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli, a Mujtahid of Qom, Iran, based his justification of ‘velayat al-faqih’ on rational grounds. His arguments are as follows:
a) “Man is a social being and therefore necessarily needs social order to
everstand many of his conflicts and affairs.
b) Human social life and order should be designed so that it provides
individual social happiness.
c) A set of adequate and perfect laws and the existence of one who is
capable of executing these laws and leading society are two necessary
conditions for the establishment of an ideal society.
d) It is not in the power of human beings to establish an ideal, just and truly
well-ordered society without the aid of God and His divine laws.
e) To avoid any deficiency, interference or possession of God’s message
(revelation), the Prophets who delivers His message must be infallible.
f) The explanation of the contents of the perfect religion and the execution
of its laws prerequisite the appointment of infallible Imams.
g) When there is no access to infallible Imams for attaining the above-
mentioned three aims, the leaders who are just and are expert in religious
knowledge (Just faqih), establishes the just rule.”

The first four premises prove the necessity of prophecy and that it is
necessary for God to send prophets. The sixth one extends the reasoning
to the question of Imamate and the necessity of an infallible Imam. And
the final premise establishes the necessity of a qualified religious leader in
the era of the absent Imam.
AYATULLAH AL-NARAQI AND AYATULLAH MURTADA ANSARI INTERPRETATIONS OF VELAYAT-E-FAQIH

It was Ayatullah Ahmad bin Muhammad Mahdi al-Naraqi, who for the first time supported the political role for the jurist or faqih. Al-Naraqi found 19 different arguments for confirming the validity of the concept of ‘velayat-e-faqih’ in his book ‘Awa’id al-ayyam’. But his student Ayatullah Murtada Ansari rejected his mentor’s vindication of absolute guardianship of jurist.

In keeping with the Usulis’ insistence that the clergy were the ‘general agents’ of the Absent Imam, Ayatullah Naraqi argued that the ‘marja-e-taqlid’ (the source of emulation) represented the Imam and therefore had a worldly authority. Al-Naraqi employed the term ‘velayah’ to denote the jurist delegated authority on behalf of the Hidden Imam during the occultation.

There had been references to ‘velayat-e-faqih’ in earlier treatments of law, such references had been diffused in various sections of books on jurisprudence dealing with topics ranging among zakat, hudud, al-amr bi al-maruf wa al-nahy an al-munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil), qada (justice), jihad, khums and ijtiham. Thus it is said that the legal compendiums of Shia law did not contain a separate chapter on the concept of ‘velayat-e-faqih’. It was Naraqi’s achievement to give the principle a broader thrust. Although Naraqi distinguished between ‘general’(amah) and ‘particular’(khasah) velayah, he argued that the jurist was entitled to exercise either kind.50

Naraqi’s own student, Murtada Ansari, who surpassed his teacher’s erudition and enjoyed the title of ‘marja al-mutlaq al taqlid’ (The absolute source of emulation), revisited Naraqi’s 19 arguments for a robust concept of ‘velaya-e-faqih’ and restricted its scope to a jurist’s supervisorship over financial affairs of those
unable to protect their own interest, for example minors, widows, orphans, the mentally infirm and the administration of religious endowments (awqaf) on behalf of those unable to do so themselves. Ansari listed the functions of the jurist as follows:

1- Issuing authoritative opinions;
2- Arbitrating disputes;
3- Exercising guardianship for the disposal of properties and persons.

He also maintained that this guardianship is residual in the sense that only certain kinds of power can be exercised, and then, only with regard to those Muslims who, for different reasons, are unable to administer their own affairs, such as the minor, the insane, the ailing and the beneficiaries of public endowments.⁵¹

AYATULLAH NAINI AND THE THEORY OF VELAYAT-E-FAQIH

Sayed Muhammad Husain al-Naini (1861-1936) is considered the first modern Shia thinker who produced a dialectical treatise on the traditional Shia view of the Imamate on the outskirts of the twentieth century.

Al-Naini assumes that infallibility and wisdom are important personal traits of the ‘imami ruler’, and it is the guarantee for righteous ruler to reach its ends i.e equality and freedom, even in the absence of Infallible Imam. And thus in the absence of the above mentioned traits, the alternative is to find other external means that do not depend on the personal traits of the ruler. Among these is to institute a written Constitution, a ‘shura council’ and the separation of powers, making it possible for the Ummah to practice various kinds of checks and balances that render
despotic rule difficult, if not impossible. By this, al-Naini endeavors to transfer the infallibility of the Imam to the authority as a whole whose fulcrum is the populace. When the ruler delegates his authority to others as a trusteeship, he has transferred the authority from the person of the infallible ruler to the institutions of society, basing its functioning on clear mechanisms that limit the waywardness of the ruler.52

Al-Naini builds upon a development in Shia jurisprudence which took place in the beginning of the nineteenth century which was built upon old Shia jurisprudents such as al-Mufid, al-Tusi, al-Murtada and Ibn Idris, who considered that the ruler usurped two rights: the right of the Imam, and the right of the people.

Al-Naini relies upon such distinction in order to come up with a jurisprudential solution that settle the ambiguity between the holy and divine authority on the one hand, and the human one on the other. While giving the general idea about the right of the people, al-Naini resorts to ‘shura’, which allows the person who took the reins of government not to usurp the right of the people and the Ummah by exploiting the concept of trusteeship (al-wikala or al-inaba) that they bestowed him with.

Concerning the right of the infallible Imam, the issue of usurpation could be surmounted by obtaining the legitimacy from the deputy of the Imam or the ‘vali-al-faqih’, by taking his permission and consent on the principle and form of government.53

According to Al-Naini, government is a necessity for the community in order to uphold its general order (nizam’am) and the people’s salient interests, He stresses that this has nothing to do with ritual worship (ibadat), which people refer to the
jurisprudents in order to construe the humanistic and the civil dimension of the authority. He emphasizes people’s ownership of the state because he considers that the rulers govern on the concept of trusteeship and deputyship (*wiklah*) which is susceptible to change.\(^{(54)}\)

Al-Naini legislated the concept of majority in an unprecedented manner that has not been done before by any jurist. He based this innovative thinking on the faqih concept of the ‘mark of fame’ (*inarat al-shura*) and its likelihood to validate the legitimacy of majority decision.

Al-Naini was able to transfer the legitimacy of the authority from the Absent Imam to the *Ummah*, the community, and the populace by stipulating humanistic mechanisms and institutions that limit the tendency of the ruler towards coercion and tyranny. Thus, al-Naini has presented a religious vision for a democratic state based on *shura*, linked to the society and a product of it while at the same time allowing the *Shia* to take part in the contemporary political system, and thus not keeping their political-societal effectiveness paralyzed awaiting the return of the absent Imam who is the real wielder of power.\(^{(55)}\)

Al-Naini was well conversant in *velayat-e-faqih*; he partially acknowledged it in its non-litigious matters, like guardianship of the orphans, taking care of religious endowments etc. but he did not extend it to the political domain in the sense of absolute *velaya* as Ayatullah Khomeini has done. Al-Naini has placed this theory of *velayat al-umma* on its own outside the political sphere, in order to establish a modern theory of government which stresses that the *Ummah* can take care of itself, and it is the source of authority, and the framework of reference of this authority is the Constitution and that *shura* is the basis of this political system.\(^{(56)}\)
AYATULLAH KHOMÉINI INTERPRETATION OF VILAYAT- E-FAQIH

Ayatullah Ruhulla Moosavi Khomeini, while in exile in Najaf, Iraq, gave a series of lectures between 21st January and 8th February 1970, focused on the doctrine of ‘velayat-e-faqih’. These lectures later collected and published into a single volume, in the name of Hukumat-e Islami translated further into several languages. In the beginning of these lectures, Khomeini made an appeal to his students not to be misled by alleged enemies of Islam, who wished to maintain that Islam was merely a corpus of ethical teachings devoid of political dimensions and a concern with government and state. He rejected this by appeals to reason as well as actual developments. He tried to uphold the idea of ‘velayat-e-faqih’ by references to the tradition – that is Quran, the Sunnah of the Prophet and the sayings (ahadiths) of the twelve Imams.

Khomeini reverts to Naraqi’s broad definition of the term ‘the absolute authority of the jurist as a ruler or governor’, acting as a deputy (na’ib) of the Twelfth Imam. He cites a number of traditions, where he described jurist as ‘fortresses of Islam’ and ‘the heirs to the Prophets’. As a jurist himself, Khomeini considered it vital to demonstrate the validity of his interpretation of ‘velayat-e-faqih’ by reference to the scripture. He also never tired of maintaining that one could also advance that interpretation by reference to reason (aql). (57)

The most important tradition which Khomeini referred as an evidence for his version of ‘velayat-e-faqih’ was the ‘maqbula’ (accepted) tradition involving interrogatory between the Sixth Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq and his disciple, Umar bin Hanzalah, which the researcher has mentioned earlier in this chapter.
Ayatullah Khomeini maintains that the tradition is directly attributed to the Sixth Imam, is the legal warrant for jurists not only to be the arbiters of disputes but to exercise executive power i.e. to rule over society.

He believed that ‘countless’ Mujtahids had been exemplars of knowledge or justice in the course of Shia history. He held that if only they would come together, they could establish universal justice in the world. And if one person combining these two qualities were to emerge and establish a government, he would have the same ‘velayah’ that the Prophet had in the matter of administrating society and ‘everyone would have to obey him.’

Khomeini maintains that it is wrong to say that the governmental powers of the Prophet were greater than those of Imams, and that the Imams’ governmental powers were greater than those of the jurists. The powers wielded by these are equal. He adds immediately that of course he is not saying that virtues and status of the Prophets, Imams and jurists are the same. He says it is not a question of virtues and status, but of duty (wazifah). He says:

“Velayah means government, administering the country and implementing the holy laws of the ‘shariah’. These are a weighty and important duty, and they do not mean bringing unusual stature or status upon someone and lifting that person above the normal human being. In other words, the ‘velayah’ that is under discussion here means government, implementation and administration. Contrary to the conception that many individuals have, it is not a privilege but an important duty.”

Jurists who exercise the ‘velayah’ of the Prophet and the Imams must not be loath to take on this task, says Khomeini. Interestingly, although he has dispensed with Ansari’s limited idea of ‘velayat-e- faqih’, Khomeini is still too much of a
legal scholar to ascribe ‘existential’ or ‘substantive’ *velayah* to jurists. He adds further: *(60)*

“*Velayat-e-faqih* is among the rational, extrinsic matters and has no reality apart from appointment, like the appointment of a guardian for a young person. Guardianship over the nation and guardianship over a young person are no different from each other in regard to duty and position. It is like the Imam appointing someone to be the guardian of a young person, or appointing someone to govern, or appointing him to some post. In such instances, it is not reasonable to suggest that the Prophet and the Imam would differ from the ‘faqih’. *(61)*

In asserting that the jurist’s *velayah* or authority is an extrinsic attribute of him, Khomeini means that it does not inherit him because of who he is, as is the case with the Prophet and the Imams. Rather, it accrues to him because of his merited qualities of knowledge of the law and justice. Khomeini maintains that just because the jurist has the equivalent governmental powers of the Prophet and the Imams, this does not mean that he is an ‘absolute authority’ or ‘vali –e- mutlaq’. He has no authority over the other jurists of the age and cannot dismiss or appoint other jurists. There is no rank ordering among the jurists in this sense.

According to Khomeini in his ‘*Kitab al bay*’, no *vali* (ruler) of an Islamic state will govern arbitrarily because he will be constrained by Islamic law. But the ‘*vali*’ is entitled to take initiatives on behalf of the well-being of the Muslims. On the face of it, such initiatives might appear arbitrary, but according to Khomeini they are not so, because they are motivated by the interest of the Muslims. The latter cry out for an Islamic government as their greatest need; in its absence, the only possibilities are self-serving actions that will lead to turmoil. Since Allah abhors the notion that
the affairs of the Muslims should be in chaos, it is a collective obligation upon the jurists to establish this Islamic government.\textsuperscript{(62)}

After the victory of the Islamic revolution and the subsequent creation of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini’s theory of *velayat-e-faqih* was incorporated into the newly adopted Constitution of the country. Thus for the first time in the history of Iran, doctrine of *velayat-e-faqih* was personified and Khomeini became the first *Vali-e-Faqih* or the Leader. The power, function and the role of the Leader according to the Constitution of the Islamic republic will be discussed in the next chapter.
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CHAPTER THREE
POWERS, FUNCTIONS AND THE ROLE OF THE LEADER
POLITICAL POWER STRUCTURE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

On Purpose, the Iranian Constitution Distributes Power Across an Interlocking Web of Overlapping Authorities


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CHAPTER THREE
POWERS, FUNCTIONS AND THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

Iran witnessed two revolutions in the 20th century, the first was a liberal Constitutional Revolution which ushered in a constitutional monarcy in Iran, and the other was an Islamic Revolution which established an Islamic Republic in Iran. The Constitution (Qanun-e-Asasi) of the Islamic Republic was adopted on October 24, 1979 and was enforced on November 3, 1979. It was significant in two ways: one, it abolished monarchy and declared Iran a Republic and two, replaced secular laws with Islamic codes of laws and established an Islamic theocracy in Iran. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran consists of the Preamble and 177 articles divided into 14 chapters. The political system of Islamic Republic of Iran is a constitutional theocracy and democracy in a format of syncretic politics that is guided by an Islamist ideology. The December, 1979 Constitution, and its 1989 amendment, define the political, economic, and social order of Iran, declaring that Shia Islam of the Twelver School of Thought is Iran’s official religion.¹

THE ISLAMIC CHARACTER OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Preamble of the Constitution reveals the ideological, distinctly and thoroughly Islamic character of the document begins with the expression ‘In the name of God’ followed by a historical sketch of the Islamic revolutionary movement—‘The fundamentally distinct characteristic of this revolution, in comparison to other Persian movements during the past century, is its ideological (maktabi) and Islamic
nature.’ Khomeini is referred to as ‘the imam’ throughout and is presented as the undisputed leader, who had fueled the Islamic revolutionary movement with his continuous proclamations and messages from exile and who had presented ‘the plan for Islamic government on the basis of Velayat-e-Faqih at the height of repression. . . ’The referendum of 30-31 March 1979, in which 98.2 percent voted to establish the Islamic Republic, is mentioned in the Preamble.²

The Iranian Constitution cites Quranic verses fourteen times,³ The Constitution is then described, an attempt by the nation, which in the course of revolution has cleansed itself of godless government and foreign ideas and returned to the ‘authentic intellectual positions and world view of Islam,’ to ensure continuation of the revolution at home and abroad, in order to create a united and universal community of believers (ommat-e waḥed-e jahani). The document is intended to realize the creedal basis of the revolution and to lay the groundwork for active participation by all members of society in the process of making political or other vital decisions, in effect the government of the disinherited upon the earth, according to verse 28:5 of the Quran. This background seems to explain the necessity for ‘an ideological (maktabi) army’ (Article 144), the sense of the terms maktab and maktabi representing a political innovation, and also for a systematic resort to the media of mass communication (Article 175). The distinctively Islamic nature of the movement requires an Islamic government in the form of ‘Velayat-e-Faqih on the basis of Velayat-e-amr (mandate to rule) and the uninterrupted (mostamerr) imamate.’⁴ The Preamble states further that the establishment of the office of the Vali-e-faqih is according to the tradition or ‘hadith’ of Prophet Muhammad. The tradition states ‘The direction of (public) affairs is in the hands of those who are learned concerning God and are trustworthy in matters pertaining to
what He (God) has made lawful and unlawful.’ Thus such leadership will prevent any deviation from authentic Islamic duties by the various organs of the State.\(^5\)

The Constitution makes clear its objective to promote Islam worldwide.\(^6\) Its also states that ‘the mission of the Constitution’ is ‘to create conditions conducive to the development of man in accordance with the noble and universal values of Islam’ and that the aim of government is to foster the growth of man in such a way that he progresses towards the establishment of a Divine order (in accordance with the Quranic phrase ‘\textit{And toward God is the journeying} [3:28]).’

The preamble states that the Constitution ‘provides the necessary basis for ensuring the continuation of the revolution \textit{at home and abroad}’ and ‘will strive with other Islamic and popular movements to prepare the way for the formation of a single world community (in accordance with the Quranic verse ‘\textit{This your community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me} [21:92].’\(^7\) The Preamble of the Constitution also states that ‘the creation of a judiciary system based on Islamic justice’ and implies that ‘the economy is a means, not an end,’ in contrast to materialist doctrines in which the economy is taken as an end in itself. The preamble thus defines the Constitution as both an ideological and a theocratic document. More extraordinary and far-reaching than the general ideological character of the Constitution is its specific theocratic nature.\(^8\)

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran also includes some concepts of the Western liberal democracy. In the words of Asgar Shirazi, "Despite this claim [that the Constitution is based solely on the Quran and the sunna] the Constitution of the Islamic Republic contains important elements which have been borrowed, not from the \textit{shari’ah}, but from Western secular sources and stand out as concepts such as

THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF THE CONSTITUTION

The General Principles of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran guide the policy making in Iran. The General Principles discuss the objectives and goals of an Islamic state. Some of the relevant principles are discussed below.

Article 3

- Creation of a favourable environment for the development of moral virtues based on faith and piety, and struggle against all forms of vice and corruption.
- Raising the level of public awareness in all areas through proper use of the press, mass media, and other means.
- Complete elimination of imperialism and prevention of foreign influence.
- Elimination of all forms of despotism, autocracy, and monopoly.
- Ensuring political and social freedoms within the framework of law.
- The people’s participation in determining their political, economic, social and cultural destiny.
- Abolition of all forms of unjust discrimination and provision of equitable opportunities for all, in material and intellectual spheres.10
Article 4

All laws and regulations pertaining to civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political and other spheres must be based on Islamic criteria.\(^{11}\)

Article 5

During the Occultation of the Wali al-Asr (may God hasten his reappearance), the wilayah and leadership of the Ummah devolve upon the just (‘adil) and pious (muttaqi) faqih, who is fully aware of the circumstances of his age; courageous, resourceful, and possessed of administrative ability, will assume the responsibilities of this office in accordance with Article 107.\(^{12}\)

Article 6

The country’s affairs in the Islamic republic of Iran must be managed on the bases of public opinion as expressed through elections, including the election of the President, the representatives of the Islamic Parliament of Iran, and the members of the councils, and the like, or through referenda, in cases specified in other articles of this law.\(^{13}\)

Article 9

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the country’s freedom, independence, unity and territorial integrity are inseparable from one another, and it is the duty of the government and individual citizen to safeguard them. No individual, group, or authority has the right to compromise, in the slightest degree, Iran’s political, cultural, economic, and military independence and territorial integrity under the pretext of exercising freedom, and no authority has the right to withdraw legitimate
freedoms under the pretext of preserving the country’s independence and territorial, not even by enacting laws and regulations.¹⁴

**THE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE IN IRAN**

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran guarantees that the primary purpose of the state is to create conditions under which may be nurtured the noble and universal values in Islam. Iran appears to have two government structure: a state structure with an elected President, Parliament and Assembly of Experts; and an unelected religious-ideological structure with the Leader, a Guardian Council (an unelected institution that can object the decisions of the elected institution-parliament), and an Expediency Council (that mediates between the Guardian Council and the Parliament). They are in turn supported by numerous intelligence centres, security organizations like Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).¹⁵

In other words, Iran’s political power structure comprises of ‘competitive formal and informal political power centres’. The formal power centre represents state institutions and their aligned institutions, including the office of the Leader, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. In addition to the formal power centre, there is an informal power centre which consists of different political factions; the Radical, the Conservative, the Pragmatist, and the Reformist factions.¹⁶

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran gives the Vali-e-Faqih or the Leader total control over the affairs of the state. Article 57 states:

“He (The Leader) is to have supervision over the legislative, executive and judiciary branches of the government.”¹⁷
All religious and political powers hence rest in one person, thus the powers of the Leader are far beyond those of any contemporary head of the state.

In Iran the terms ‘rahbar-e-enqelab’ (leader of the revolution) and \textit{Vali-e-Faqih} (ruling jurisprudent) or the Supreme Leader are generally used synonymously.\textsuperscript{18} 

The Original Constitution provided for the office of Prime Minister but it was abolished by the amendment in the Constitution in 1989. During the period, from 1979 to 1989, the Prime Minister shared his executive powers with the President but due to the dominant personality of Ayatullah Khomeini and duel power structure of the executive branch, the Prime Minister had little to offer. The constitutional amendment of 1989 enhanced the powers of the President but asserted that he has to remain subservient to the \textit{Vali-e-Faqih} or the Leader, who has a final say in every policy matter.

However, the Iranian Constitution also has strong democratic elements in the sense that the Constitution recognizes the principle of popular sovereignty and separation of powers, makes frequent references to individual rights, and bestows upon the electorate the right to elect the President, members of Parliament, Assembly of Experts (which can elect and dismiss the Leader) and local city and village councils. This blending of theocratic and democratic features in the Iranian Constitution provides a rather novel and indigenous experiment in political statecraft.\textsuperscript{19}
CONSTITUTIONAL POSITION OF THE VALI-E-FAQIH (THE LEADER)

The Leader heads the pyramid of the political power structure in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Leader is Iran’s highest ranking political, military and religious authority and therefore country’s most powerful figure. The office rests above the office of the President of Iran. This inclusion of the office of the Leader in the Iranian Constitution provides the political system of Iran a uniqueness that cannot be compared with other political systems around the globe.

The political system of Iran is based on the doctrine of Velayat-e-Faqih and thus the creation of the office of the Vali-e-Faqih, who enjoys extensive powers make the Iranian political system a theocracy.

Article 2 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran declares that:

“"The Islamic Republic is a system of government founded on the principles of ‘imamate and rahbari’(leadership) based on the exercise of continuous ‘ijtihad’(independent judgment) by the fully qualified ‘fuqaha’(religious jurists) in accordance with the Holy Book, the Sunnah of the Prophet and the sayings of the Infallible Imams."20

In the words of M Mahmood, “This ideal concept of Velayat-e-Faqih is operationalized by Article 5 of the Constitution which declares that during the occultation of the Hidden Imam, the governance of the state and leadership of the community in all spiritual and temporal matters is vested in a ‘Just and pious faqih’ (religious Jurist) who is well aware of the conditions of his time, courageous, capable of governance and a statesman. In common parlance he is called ‘rahbar’ (The Leader) but he is a formally designated the ‘valiyy-i-amr-i-Muslimeen-i-Jahan"
Article 107-110 describe the office and the function of the Leader who, as ruling authority, is concerned with the dominion of God, the Prophets and the Imams, and is responsible for the management and leadership of the community.22

Article 107 of the Constitution of 1979 had laid down ‘marjaiya’ as the first and foremost condition for choice of a ‘mujtahid’ as the Leader. Only an acknowledged ‘marja-i-taqlid (source of emulation) possessing the qualities expected of a leader can be considered for a choice. That excludes non-mujtahids from competition for the Supreme Office. In case no such person was available, a ‘shura-i-rahbari’ (leadership collegiums) may be elected to perform the functions of the Leader.23

In 1979 no person could match Ayatullah Khomeini either as a ‘marja-i-taqlid’ or as a statesman. So he was co-opted as Leader for life by the universal consensus of the community. After the Revolution of 1979 his followers began calling him as Imam because he was acknowledged as being the trustee and deputy of the Hidden Imam.24

After the death of Ayatullah Khomeini in 1989 none of the theologian-jurists were found to be fit to become his successor. So in 1989 Article 107 of the Constitution was amended to drop the condition of ‘marjaiyat’ for the choice of the Leader and the provision regarding election of Leadership collegiums in case of lack of consensus over the choice of the Leader was also scrapped.25
The amended Article 107 reads:

“After the demise of the eminent ‘marja-i-taqlid’, the great leader of the Global Islamic Revolution and the Founder of the Islamic Republic, Hazrat Ayatullah al-uzma Imam Khomeini, may God sanctify his noble spirit, who was recognized and accepted as ‘marja’ and Leader by a decisive majority of the people, the appointment of the leader shall be vested in the Assembly of Experts elected by the People.”

“These Experts will review and deliberate concerning the merits of all the qualified jurists possessing the qualifications specified in Articles 5 and 109.”

“In the event of them finding someone more learned in Islamic ordinances and subjects of Islamic law or in political and social issues, or possessing general popularity or a special prominence in respect of the qualification in Article 109, he will be appointed as the Leader. Otherwise, they shall elect one of them as the leader. The Leader thus appointed (or elected) by the Expert shall assume the “velayat al-amr” (governance of the affairs of the community) and all responsibilities arising from it. The Leader is equal to all other citizens in the eyes of Law.”

**QUALIFICATIONS OF THE LEADER**

The qualifications of the Leader as lay down under Article 109 of the Constitution as follows:

1- The scholarship required for giving (fatwa) legal opinions in various fields of Islamic law (*fiqh*).
2- The integrity (adalah) and piety required for leadership of the Islamic Ummah.

3- A sound political and social vision, prudence, courage, administrative skills and adequate leadership abilities.

In case of multiplicity of persons fulfilling the above qualifications and conditions, the person possessing better jurisprudential and political understanding will be given preference.27

M Mahmood explains the above qualifications of the Vali-e-Faqih as given below-

- “Necessary academic competence to issue fatwa (legal opinions) in most branches of twelver Shia jurisprudence.
- Righteousness and piety necessary for the leadership of the twelver Shia community, and
- Proper political and social knowledge, statesmanship, courage, administrative competence and enough capability to command and lead.”28

ELECTION OF THE LEADER

The Vali-e-faqih or the Leader is elected by the Assembly of Experts or (Majles-e-Khobargan) according to the provisions laid down in the article 107 of the Iranian Constitution. The Assembly of Expert is also in charge of overseeing the Leader.
According to the Article 111 of the Iranian Constitution:

“In the event of the death, resignation, or dismissal of the Leader, the Assembly of Experts shall expedite the appointment of a new Leader. During this time a Council consisting of the President, Head of the Judiciary, and the Jurists from the Guardian Council, as decided by the Expediency Council, shall provisionally assume the duties of the Leader. In the event of any one of them being unable to fulfill these duties, for whatsoever reason, another person shall be appointed by the State Expediency Council, with due observance of a majority of jurists on the Provisional Leadership Council.”

“This Council will carry out the functions of the Leader in respect of clauses 1, 2, 3, 5 and 10 and sub-clauses (d), (e) and (f) of clause 6 of Article 110, with the approval of three-fourth of the members of the State Expediency Council.”

The article states further:

“Whenever the Leader becomes temporarily unable to perform the duties of Leadership owing to illness or some other accident, the Provisional Council mentioned in this article shall assume his duties.”

Ayatullah Khomeini was an unelected Leader of the Islamic Republic until his death in 1989. The present Leader Ayatullah Ali Khamenai was elected by the Assembly of Experts in 1989.
REMOVAL OF THE LEADER

The Assembly of Experts, besides electing the Leader, can also remove him from his office.

Article 111 states:

“Whenever the Leader or Vali-e-Faqih is incapable of carrying out the constitutional duties, or loses one of the qualifications mentioned in Article 5 and 109, when it becomes known that he did not initially possess these, he will be dismissed.”

However, in practice the question of removing the Leader never arises.

FUNCTIONS AND POWERS OF THE LEADER

According to Iran's Constitution, the Leader or the Vali-e-Faqih of Iran is responsible for the delineation and supervision of the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Leader has been vested with sweeping powers and the lower echelons of power are enjoined to work in subordination to and under direction of the Leader. The Constitution gives the Vali-e-faqih total control over the affairs of the state.

As listed under Article 110 of chapter VII of the Constitution, powers and functions which the Leader exercises in his own discretion are:

1- Defining the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran after consultation with the State Expediency Council.
2- Supervision of the proper execution of the general policies of the regime.
3- Issuing of decrees for national referenda.
4- Supreme Command of the armed forces.
5- Declaration of war and peace, and mobilization of the armed forces.
6- Appointment, dismissal, and acceptance of the resignation of:
   (a) The Jurists of the Guardian Council.
   (b) The Head of the Judiciary
   (c) The Head of the radio and television network of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
   (d) The Chief of the joint staff.
   (e) The Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).
   (f) The Commanders-in-Chief of the armed forces and the law-enforcement forces.
7- Resolving differences between the three powers of the state and regulation of their relations.
8- Resolving problems irresolvable by conventional means through the state Expediency Council.
9- Signing the President’s appointment orders after his election by the people. The competence of candidates for the Presidency, in respect of the qualifications specified in the Constitution, must be confirmed by the Guardian Council before elections, and also by the leadership during the first term.
10- Dismissal of the President, in consideration of the country’s interests, after the Supreme Court finds him guilty of violating his constitutional duties, or
following a vote of no confidence by the Islamic Parliament of Iran on the basis of Article 89.

11-Pardon or reduction, within the framework of Islamic criteria of the sentences of convicts upon the proposal of the Head of the Judiciary. The Leader may delegate part of his functions and authority to another person.32

In the words of Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, “The powers of the Leader are formidable, encompassing functions normally assigned to a head of state or head of government”.33

According to Asghar Shirazi,

“These powers far exceed a simple supervisory role, and yet they do not amount to the plenipotentiary authority which is bestowed upon the Leader according to the concept of Velayat-e-faqih in its absolute form (as interpreted by Khomeini) and certainly do not extend to the scale of power which Khomeini himself exercised in this capacity”.34

According to Stephen Hughes,

“The Leader almost never uses his statutory powers to impose policies or decisions upon the system, relying instead on more discrete statements and actions to guide the decision-making process to the desired endstate. The system is designed to give the leader a sort of plausible deniability and its outcome, shielding him and his position from the repercussions of policy failures…The leader is capable of mandating a new decision as per the concept of velayat-e-faqih.”35
THE SYSTEM OF THE LEADER’S REPRESENTATIVES

One of the key elements in the Leader’s power closely connected with the office of the Leader are the ‘nemasyandeha-ye-rahbar’ or the representatives of the leader), whom the Leader personally appoints or approves.³⁶

These ‘clerical commissars’ are positioned in every important state ministry and institution, as well as in the most revolutionary and religious organizations. Almost all the representatives are clerics, and most hold the rank of ‘hojjastoleslam’. These representatives form a diverse, countrywide control network dedicated to enforcing the authority of the Leader, ensuring the greatest possible vigilance against ideological deviation. They are more powerful than ministers and other government functionaries, and they have the authority to intervene in any matter of state. Through this system, the Supreme Leader is able to wield his power in five different spheres:

- Ministries in the executive branch
- The armed forces and security services
- Provincial representatives (Friday ‘imams’)
- Revolutionary and religious organizations
- Iranian cultural centers in foreign countries³⁷

The incumbent Leader, Ayatullah Ali Khamenai consolidated much of his power base through this system of representatives, which is only accountable to him.
RELATION OF THE LEADER WITH OTHER ORGANS OF THE GOVERNMENT

The Leader or Vali-e-Faqih apart from delineating general policies and supervising over the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, also plays an authoritative role in his relation with these branches of the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The President (Sadr)

The Office of the President of the Islamic Republic is the second highest office after the office of the Supreme Leader. Article 113 of the Iranian Constitution states that the President is responsible for implementing the constitution and presiding over the Executive, except in matters directly concerned with the Leader.\(^{38}\)

The election of the President is supervised by the Guardian Council whose half members are appointed by the Leader. According to the Article 110 of the Constitution the Leader signs the certificate of appointment of the President after the latter’s election by the people.

According to Article 122 of the Iranian Constitution the President is accountable to the people, the Leader and the Parliament of Iran.\(^{39}\)

Article 130 states that the President will submit his resignation to the Supreme Leader, and according to Article 131, Vice-President will assume the authority and responsibilities of the President with the approval of the Leader. If there is no Vice-President then the Leader will appoint another person to his office until the election of the new President.\(^{40}\) In the national interest, Supreme Leader can dismiss the President if the Supreme Court declares that the President has violated his legal duties, or if the Majlis certifies that he is politically incompetent.
While the Leader remains the most important figure in the country, since the constitutional reforms of 1989 – which abolished the post of the Prime Minister and consolidated his powers in those of the President – the presidency has been the key institutional actor in the day-to-day running of the country, particularly on issues of foreign policy.

**The Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran (Majlis Shoraye Eslami)**

According to the article 62 of the Iranian Constitution, the *Majlis Shoraye Eslami* (The Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran or the Islamic Parliament of Iran) is constituted by the people’s representatives, elected by secret ballot. The Majlis is a unicameral house and the term of it is four years. It has 290 representatives. All the candidates running for the election of the *Majlis* or the Parliament must be approved by the Council of Guardians as well as all the legislations passed by the Majlis must also be approved by the Guardian Council, whose half of the members are appointed by the Supreme Leader. Thus the Supreme Leader holds considerable leverage over the activities of the Parliament.

**Council of Guardian (Shora-ye Negahban)**

Article 91 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states;

“A Council to be known as the Guardian Council is to be constituted to safeguard Islamic laws and the Constitution and to verify the compatibility of legislation passed by the *Majlis* with them”

The Guardian Council is composed of 12 jurists, including six clerics appointed by the Leader or *Vali-e-Faqih* and six jurists elected by the Majlis, at the recommendation of the Head of the Judiciary, who is himself appointed by the Leader. The Guardian Council approves candidates for all elected offices. The
Guardian Council blocks legislation it deems un-Islamic or unconstitutional. It is worth noting that the ability to block legislation deemed un-Islamic rests with the majority of the members appointed by the Leader, and to block legislation deemed unconstitutional with a majority of those recommended by the Head of the Judiciary and elected by the Majlis.\textsuperscript{41}

**The Expediency Discernment Council (The Majma-e- Tashkhis-e-Maslahat-e Nezam)**

According to the Article 112 of the Iranian Constitution, the Expediency Discernment Council will meet by the order of the Leader to decide what is most expedient whenever the Guardian Council considers a bill approved by the Majlis to be contrary to the principles of the ‘Shariah’ (the Islamic laws) or the Constitution and the Majlis is unable to secure the satisfaction of the Guardian Council on the basis of national expediency.\textsuperscript{42} In other words Expediency Discernment Council exists to break deadlock between the Majlis and the Guardian Council.

The Expediency Discernment Council advises the Leader and the appointment of the permanent and provisional members of the Expediency Council is done by the Leader.

When the Expediency Council was created in 1988 it comprised of thirteen members but in 1997 current Vali-e-Faqih Ayatullah Ali Khamenai expanded its membership to 34.

**The Assembly of Experts (Majlis-e-Khobregan)**

The Majlis-e-Khobregan or the Assembly of Experts is Iran’s highest ranking religious and political authority. It was formed in 1983 and consists of 86 Islamic scholars. According to the Article 107, it is responsible for electing the Leader of
the Islamic Republic. Though members are elected by popular vote, all candidates are vetted by the Guardian Council.43

The Assembly of Experts besides having responsibility of electing the Leader, also monitors his progress in office and in exceptional cases, to remove him of he is no longer fit to assume his duties.

**The Judiciary (Qovveh-e-Qaza’iyeh)**

The Judiciary is responsible for maintaining the rule of law and enforcing order within the Islamic Republic. According to the Article 157, The Leader appoints a mujtahid, possessing integrity and administrative and problem-solving abilities, and well-versed in judicial affairs as the head of the judiciary (comparable to a chief justice) for a period of five years, to carry out the judicial, administrative, and executive responsibilities of the judiciary. The Head of judiciary, in turn, elects the head of the Supreme Court and the Chief Public Prosecutor. The head of the judiciary is the highest judicial authority in the country.44

**The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC)**

The Supreme National Security Council (Shoraye Aliye Amniate Melli) was created by the revised Constitution in 1989. According to the Article 176 of the Iranian Constitution, SNSC is charged with the development of the defense and national security policies within the framework of general policies determined by the Leader. The Vali-e-Faqih or the Leader sends two special representatives in the meeting of the Supreme National Security Council. Decisions of SNSC are subject to confirmation by the Leader.45
The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab) is the parallel military establishment to the regular military. Along with a paramilitary force, the Basij, which was placed under the IRGC’s command in 2007, the Guards have a key role in defending the Velayat-e-Faqih. IRGC directly report to the Leader.46

The Iranian Constitution (Article 150) grants the IRGC the authority and responsibility to maintain Iran’s religious nature and spirit. Due to its close relationship with the Supreme Leader, the IRGC plays a prominent role in Iranian domestic and foreign affairs.47

Thus the authority system of the Velayat-e-faqih is made operative through the above mentioned pillars and organizations. In the words of M Mahmood, “The Leader is omnicompetent and omnipresent loyalist through his personal loyalties and through his personal representatives posted in all state and public organizations.” 48

THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

The Leader or Vali-e-Faqih is not directly elected by the Iranian people but he controls the entire governmental machinery. There is a separation of power between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary but the Leader stands above these organs of the government. He largely plays the role of a guide, facilitator, mediator and arbiter in the politics of Iran. The Vali-e-Faqih is the supreme leader of the
system and source of all authority and legitimacy. He is the summit of the political system and the topmost rung of the power-structure.⁴⁹

In the words of M Mahmood, “Like the philosopher-king of Plato’s ideal state he (the Leader) is at the summit of the political system. He is the repository of absolute authority of the Imams. He personifies the unity of the church and the state and he is the focus of the supreme loyalties of the faithful.”⁵⁰

Iran is the only country in the world where the President does not control or command the armed forces and it is controlled by the religious jurist or the Leader. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is loyal to the Leader and the power of IRGC has risen immensely over the years benefiting the Vali-e-Faqih.

The Iranian economy is largely state-controlled and the Leader has enjoys the authority over how the country’s oil revenue is spent. He has also control over the country’s bonyads – charitable foundations with billions of dollars in assets – in addition to the millions more his office receives in charitable donations offered to Iran’s holy shrines.⁵¹

In theory, Iran’s Constitution is meant to combine theocracy with democracy. But in practice, Iran’s unelected institutions, namely the Leader and 12 members Guardian Council, wield far more power than elected institutions like the presidency and parliament. The Guardian Council has the authority to vet all candidates for public office and disqualify any one who are not deemed sufficiently loyal to the Leader.⁵²

Since 1989, the role of the presidency of the Islamic Republic has gained importance but the decisions of the Leader ultimately prevail.
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CHAPTER FOUR

THE PERIOD OF AYATULLAH RUHULLAH KHOMEINI (1979-1989)
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(1979-1989)

The Islamic Revolution resulted into the creation of the first theocratic government in the history of Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini. The period of Ayatollah Khomeini as the Vali-e-faqih or the Leader of the Islamic republic from 1979 until his death in 1989 was highly tumultuous in the history of the Post-Revolutionary Iran. The newly created Islamic Republic from its very outset faced several internal and external challenges, which on many occasions brought the very existence of the Islamic Republic on stake. However it was Khomeini’s charismatic personality and his beliefs, that despite all even and odds, Islamic Republic not only survived even after his death, it has continued to grow stronger.

During his brief stay in Paris before returning to Iran, Ayatullah Khomeini was surrounded by Western educated intellectuals such as Abol Hasan Bani-Sadr, Sadeq Qotbzadeh and Ebrahim Yazdi, however on his return his insular network of former students and associates from the Coalition of Islamic Societies, which was formed against the Shah’s regime in 1962, became close to him.\(^1\) Khomeini had appointed the most senior members of the Coalition of Islamic Societies, including Ayatullah Beheshti, Musavi Ardabili, Mahdavi Kani, Hojatoleslam Bahonar and Ali Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani, as the members of the Revolutionary Council who were to rule the country until a new form of government could be established. The council also included some secular politicians, the most notable being Mehdi Bazargan.\(^2\)
Ayatullah Khomeini had appointed Mehdi Bazargan as the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government on the recommendations of the Revolutionary Council. The decree of appointment entrusted Bazargan with the tasks to arrange for the administration of the country, organize referendum for the Islamic Republic, call a constitutional assembly composed of the people’s elected representative to ratify the Constitution of the new system and organize parliamentary election based on the new Constitution.  

Meanwhile, Khomeini relied on the Revolutionary Council using it as a coordinating body for his most loyal supporters. Through it, he could communicate with the local revolutionary committees (komiteh) and revolutionary courts that had been set up throughout the country, and with the Friday prayer leaders in the mosques, over whom he also gained control within a short period of time. Khomeini and his followers had also set up the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) in February, 1979, to represent the political interests of his followers. Among the ‘ulema’ Ayatullah Beheshti was the leading figure in the IRP from the beginning, along with others including Hojatoleslam Hashmi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Javad Bahonaar and Ali Khamenai, and Mir Hossain Musavi (an associate of Beheshti and one of the several non-clerics).

Mehdi Bazargan formed a cabinet consisting of religious modernists and men of the new middle class as well as from the members of his Liberation Movement and the National Front. No religious clergy was the member of the cabinet. But the government remained subordinate to the clergy dominated Revolutionary Council. The Komitehs, Islamic Courts and the Revolutionary Guards (which was formed by Khomeini to defend the Islamic revolution) under clergy patronage turned provisional government into a system of dual authority.
Bazargan’s first brush with Khomeini came as early as in March, 1979, when the country prepared to vote either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in a referendum on instituting an Islamic Republic. Bazargan wanted to give the public the third choice of a Democratic Islamic Republic. Khomeini refused with the argument:

“What the nation needs is an Islamic Republic neither a Democratic Republic nor a Democratic Islamic Republic. Don’t use the Western term ‘Democratic’. Those who call for such a thing don’t know anything about Islam. Islam does not need adjectives such as Democratic. Precisely because Islam is everything, it means everything. It is sad for us to add another word near the word Islam, which is perfect.”

The referendum held on April 1, 1979 produced 99 per cent “yes” votes for the Islamic Republic. After the referendum results were certified, the Islamic Republic of Iran came formally into being.

After the declaration of the Islamic Republic, Bazargan’s Provisional Government earnestly set about the practical tasks of getting the country back to work and to prepare way for a new Constitution while on the other side the IRP and Khomeini’s followers in other bodies gradually extended their institutional grip and their political influence, inexorably undercutting Bazargan and his colleagues.

In addition to the running disputes over the activities of the revolutionary courts, there were many other disagreements: for example over the lower-intensity intimidation, arrests and confiscation of property carried out by the Komiteh. In each case whenever Bazargan regarded the matter as serious enough, he appealed to Khomeini for redress. But such appeals only strengthened Khomeini and his supporters, even if he initially gave decisions that appeared to be a compromise.
Each appeal reinforced still further Khomeini’s position as the ultimate arbiter in the state – cementing his personal power and reconfirming the classical, traditional position of the *ulema* as a class.\(^8\)

**AYATULLAH KHOMEINI AND THE DRAFTING OF THE CONSTITUTION**

Work on a draft constitution for the Islamic Republic had begun at least as early as January, 1979, and a tentative text was published on 28\(^{th}\) April, 1979, followed by a revised draft on 18\(^{th}\) June 1979.\(^9\) Few elements of the draft Constitution were taken from the French Constitution of the fifth Republic like strong Presidency. However, the Constitution did not differ markedly from the Constitution of 1906 and did not give clerics an important role in the new state structure. Interestingly the *Velayat-e-Faqih* was present neither in terms nor in spirit.

Khomeini was prepared to submit this draft, virtually unmodified, to a national referendum or, barring that, to an appointed council of forty representatives who could advise on, but not revise, the document. Ironically, it was the parties of the left who most vehemently rejected this procedure and demanded that the Constitution be submitted for full scale review by a constituent assembly.\(^10\)

A newly elected seventy-three member Assembly of Experts convened on August 18, 1979 to consider the draft Constitution\(^\dagger\)

Clerics and members and supporters of the Islamic Republican Party dominated the assembly, which revamped the Constitution to establish the basis for a state dominated by the clergy.\(^11\)
Under the shrewd and domineering guidance of Ayatullah Beheshti, the Assembly of Experts proceeded to revise the draft Constitution drastically, incorporating the key ideas of Khomeini’s *Hokumat-e-Eslami*, including a decisive and direct role for the clergy and the establishment of the all powerful office of the Faqih. Therefore, debates in the Assembly over the *Velayat-e-Faqih* were the most heated, and the crucial article declaring the authority of the *Faqih* when went for voting only eight members voted against, four abstained, (including future President Bani-Sadr, who stayed away) and the remainder voted in favour.

Many groups which had supported Khomeini against the Shah’s regime like *Mujahiddin-e-Khalq* (MEK) Organization, the *Fedayan*, the Kurds and other regional groups, were unhappy as the constitution did not address their demands. Even Ayatullah Shariatmadari, who had played pivotal role in the opposition against the Shah when Khomeini was living in exile, was opposing the excesses of the Islamic Republican Party and Khomeini’s followers, and specifically the principle of *Velayat-e-Faqih* as it appeared in the constitution. He warned: “We seem to be moving from one monarchy to another.”

However, despite all these oppositions to the Constitution, the Assembly of Experts completed its work on November 15 1979 and the Constitution was approved in a national referendum on December 2 and 3, 1979.

**INTERNAL CHALLENGES**

Soon after assuming office, Khomeini had to face some serious challenges, both internal and external in nature.
A brief description of the internal challenges faced by the Islamic Republic during the period of Ayatullah Khomeini is as follows:

**The first major challenge Khomeini came across was from his religious colleague** over the inclusion of the absolute guardianship of the jurist in the newly drafted constitution. Ayatullah Kazim Shariatmadari’s role in criticizing the doctrine of *Velayat-e-Faqih* was prominent among other *ulemas*, which did not support the rule of the Guardian Jurist. Ayatullah Shariatmadari was one of the most respected religious leaders of the Iranian Shias. He had played a leading role in saving Khomeini’s life during 1963-64 by getting him declared a ‘*Mujtahid*’. A *mujtahid* was immune from punishment under an article of the Iranian Constitution. Throughout Khomeini’s exile in Iraq, Shariatmadari worked in various ways building up his image and popularity among the people. During the course of revolution, Shariatmadari on numerous occasions declared that religious leaders were merely giving moral support to the masses to enable them to get legal rights under the Iranian Constitution and that *Ulema* were not after power and authority. Shariatmadari was against the absolute authority vested in the hands of the religious leader. He wanted constitutional monarchy in the country. He had dispelled the fears that Islamic orthodoxy would hold sway in the Islamic Republic. He said the present Islamic Republic in Iran would be very different from the one under the Prophet Muhammad or Imam Ali. He stressed they were God’s appointed representatives, whereas then, when no Prophet or Imam existed, the leaders of the government would be ordinary men elected or dismissed by the people. Shariatmadari had made severe criticism against the new Constitution and the principle of *Velayat-e-Faqih*. Pro-Khomeini groups accused Shariatmadari of colluding with former SAVAK agents and the United States. He was put in house arrest and remained under it until his death in 1986.
Another significant internal challenge to Khomeini’s reign came from Mujahiddin-e-Khalq (MEK). MEK was founded in 1965 by a group of left-leaning University students as an Islamic and Marxist political mass movement. The MEK was originally devoted to armed struggle against the Shah and his supporters. In the wake of Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the MEK initially supported Ayatullah Khomeini but it parted away from Khomeini, firstly because it demands were not incorporated into the new Constitution and secondly its leader, Masud Rajavi was barred from contesting the election of the President of the Islamic Republic by Khomeini. During that period several serious clashes between supporters of the MEK and the Islamic Republic Party occurred in which hundreds of people were killed. Masud Rajavi had left the country with deposed President Bani-Sadr and called for an armed resistance against the Islamic Republic. Khomeini termed the MEK, ‘monafeqin’ (hypocrites). MEK inflicted a serious blow to the Islamic Republic and particularly to Khomeini by assassinating his close loyalist Ayatullah Beheshti and several other prominent figures of the Islamic Republican Party on 28th June, 1981 by blowing up the IRP headquarters building. Later on 30th August, 1981, the newly elected President after Bani-Sadr, Mohammad Ali Rajai as well as newly elected Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahnor both were killed in another bomb blast. The bombs and assassinations had achieved almost a clean sweep of the regime’s senior office holders and the IRP leadership. The loss of Beheshti, who had dominated discussion of the Constitution and had been probably the most influential personality among Khomeini’s followers, was particularly grave. The IRP response to the killings was harsh – the activity of the revolutionary courts, the number of arrests and executions was stepped up. Eventually the majority of the MEK leadership and members fled to France, where its leader Masud Rajavi was living in exile but later in 1986 the MEK shifted its base to Iraq.
The initial years of the Islamic Republic were also dominated by the power struggle between the first elected president and the prime minister. Abul Hasan Bani-Sadr after his election to the office of the president according to the newly adopted Constitution, wanted to secure the dissolution of the Revolutionary Guards and the Revolutionary Courts and Komitehs, which were formed by Khomeini to secure the Islamic Revolution. But he failed to achieve his above mentioned objectives. Bani-sadr also wanted to establish control over the judiciary, on the radio and television networks. However Khomeini himself appointed IRP members - Ayatullah Beheshti as Head of the Judiciary and Ayatullah Abdol-Karim Musavi-Ardabilli as Prosecutor General. Bani Sadr’s appointees to head the state broadcasting services and the Revolutionary Guards were forced to resign within weeks of their appointments.\textsuperscript{16}

The first parliamentary elections were held in two stages in March and May, 1980. The Islamic Republican Party won more than 130 out of 241 seats in the Majlis. Having the majority, the IRP consolidated its power by rejecting the credentials of some elected National Front and pro-Bani-Sadr deputies, including Admiral Ahmad Madani, who was accused of having connections with the United States, as well as Karim Sanjabi, the leader of the National Front. Ali Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani, member of the IRP’s Central Committee, was elected as the Speaker of the Majlis. Thus with the Islamic Republican Party dominating the Majlis, Bani-Sadr suffered his first major setback.\textsuperscript{17}

The dispute over selecting the Prime Minister created the first constitutional crisis for the new republic. The Constitution stipulated that the President would choose and the Majlis would confirm the Prime Minister. Bani-Sadr tried in vain to bypass the Majlis and to pressure it to confirm his nominee, Mostafa Mir Saleem. In the
end, a committee, whose members were choosen by the *Majlis* and the President, proposed a list of potential candidates to Bani –Sadr. From that list, Bani –Sadr chose Mohammad Ali Rajai. He later claimed that he was pressured by that committee to choose Rajai.¹⁸

Mohammad Ali Rajai was a former street peddler, a school teacher and a protégé of Ayatullah Beheshti. It was obvious from the start that the President and the Prime Minister could not ‘cohabit’. Their different socio-economic, educational and ideological backgrounds turned them into bitter rivals.

In many ways these men represented two different breeds of activists. Rajai had the perfect profile of a dedicated, homegrown Shia fundamentalist who bragged about his humble family background and his face-to-face confrontation with the Shah’s regime inside Iran. Bani-Sadr in contrast, exemplified that upper class, western educated, Islamic intellectuals who, championing a version of the modernist Shiism that Ali Shariati had advocated, fought against the Shah from their safe sanctuaries in the West. Bani Sadr could hardly hide his disdainful attitude towards Rajai for his lack of advanced formal education and his ignorance of the proper protocol of diplomacy.¹⁹

Therefore, it was no surprise that the two men, Bani Sadr and Rajai, representing two different constituencies and outlooks, could only agree to disagree with each other. Their first major dispute revolved around the selection of the cabinet members. Rajai focused on the ideological commitment of the ministers, whereas Bani-Sadr emphasized on expertise. Unable to reach a consensus, they were forced to leave some of the cabinet posts vacant throughout Bani-Sadr’s term.
Their dispute over the selection of ministers reflected their diametrically opposed views on the role and responsibilities of the President. Bani-Sadr desperately sought to create an imperial presidency, with him formulating the policy and his prime minister implementing it. Rajai backed by the Islamic Republican Party and the Majlis, was an advocate of a weak presidency, as the constitution stipulated. His goal was to keep the President a figurehead with merely ceremonial responsibilities.\textsuperscript{20}

To a large extent Rajai succeeded in his mission. During his tenure, Bani-Sadr was outmuscled by the fundamentalists who controlled the revolutionary institutions, the Majlis, the Office of the Prime Minister, and the judicial branch.

The American embassy hostage settlement served as a further bone of contention between Rajai and Bani-Sadr. Bani–Sadr had charged the Iranian negotiators with accepting terms that were highly disadvantageous to Iran. Rajai and the Islamic Republican Party were in no mood to listen to provocative criticism. They emphasized that the Algiers Accord was blessed by Khomeini and equated criticism of it with a personal insult toward him.\textsuperscript{21} Unable to unify the opponents of the fundamentalists over the Algiers Agreement, and outmaneuvered by the Islamic Republican Party on all major domestic and foreign policy issues, Bani-Sadr felt frustrated and powerless. To blow further, his credibility, on March 11, 1980 the Majlis passed a law permitting the Prime Minister to appoint acting cabinet ministers, which meant Rajai could now bypass Bani-Sadr and appoint his own choice of ministers.\textsuperscript{22} However, when friction between the President Bani Sadr and the Islamic Republican Party was proving fatal for the survival of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini intervened. On 15\textsuperscript{th} March, 1980 Khomeini held a meeting to try to resolve the strife. Bani-Sadr declared that only he had legitimate authority in
the state and his opponents were ignorant and unfit to take part in government while others said it was impossible to work with him. In the end Khomeini ruled that both sides should stop their personal attacks on each other and banned speeches and inflammatory articles. He appointed a three-man commission to investigate the disputes and to monitor the media for infringement of his ban. The choice of the three was intended to produce a commission that would be impartial. But the settlement did not endure: the IRP chiefs had no intention of backing down, and Bani-Sadr had no intention of dropping his confrontational line. In the end Bani-Sadr was accused of spreading division and dissent, opposing Khomeini and lacking faith in the principle of *Velayat-e-Faith* and finally he was removed from the post of the President.

**EXTERNAL CHALLENGES**

Apart from internal challenges, the Islamic Republic also faced external challenges during Khomeini’s era which had far reaching ramifications on Iran’s relations with the regional countries as well as the United States of America.

**American embassy hostage crisis came as the first external challenge confronted by the Islamic republic.** The impact of that crisis was unprecedented in such a manner that even after three decades of the resolution of the crisis, Iran and the US still do not have normal diplomatic relations. On 22\textsuperscript{nd} October 1979, the United States gave asylum to the former Shah Mohammad Reza Shah Pahelvi on the pretext of treatment of cancer. This created firestorm of protests and demonstrations in Iran. On 4\textsuperscript{th} November, 1979 a group of students affiliated with Islamic Association of the University of Tehran led by *Hojjatoleslam* Mosavi-Khoeniha (a member of the IRP central committee and another former student of
Khomeini) took advantage of the situation to attack and seize control of the American Embassy in Tehran. The sixty-three staff members at the embassy were held hostage and three others including Bruce Laingen, the Charge d’Affairs, who happened to be in a meeting at the Foreign Ministry, were detained there.\textsuperscript{13} The students were convinced that the CIA was using the embassy as its headquarters and planning a repeat performance of 1953 coup.\textsuperscript{24}

There is no direct evidence that Khomeini ordered the action. There are some indications that Khomeini himself, when first told of the embassy occupation, saw the incident as an unimportant act of unruliness and believed that the students would leave the embassy quickly. But the occupation was very much in line with trend of Khomeini’s agitation against the US over the preceding hours and days. When perhaps he was assured that the students involved were solidly loyal to him personally and perhaps when it became clear that the US and the West would not threaten military action, he decided that occupation should be supported and be continued at least in the short term.\textsuperscript{25}

On 5\textsuperscript{th} November, 1979, Ayatullah Beheshti, Ayatullah Montazeri and a section of other figures and bodies aligned with Khomeini issued statements supporting the students. It was because of the disapprovemnent with Khomeini over the hostage issue that the Prime Minster of the provisional government Mahdi Bazargan had resigned on 6\textsuperscript{th} November 1979. In a speech addressed to visitors from Isfahan University Khomeini commented: “Mr Bazargan is respected by everyone… He was a little tired and preferred to stay on the sidelines for a while.”\textsuperscript{26}

The United States’ strategy was that the international pressure and negotiations being conducted with the assistance of the United Nations’ Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim would resolve the hostage crisis. To up the pressure, it froze about 11
billion US dollars in Iranian assets in the United States and secured a U.N. Security Council Resolution demanding the release of the hostages as well as a ruling to that effect by the International Court of Justice. None of this made much difference.\textsuperscript{27}

Having no hope of a diplomatic solution, the United States launched a rescue attempt on April 25, 1980, which quickly collapsed due to poor preparation, multiple equipment failure and lack of enthusiasm about the whole enterprise by the key US policymakers. The ignominious failure, after months of ineffective diplomacy, made the United States look weak and bumbling and this was no small factor in President Jimmy Carter’s defeat at the polls of that November.\textsuperscript{28}

In September, 1980, perhaps believing the hostage crisis could serve no further diplomatic or political end, Iran indicated to the United States through a diplomat of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) that it was ready to negotiate in earnest for the release of the hostages.

Iran had softened its demands for the resolution of the crisis.\textsuperscript{29} Khomeini announced four conditions for its resolution:

- A pledge by the United States not to intervene in Iran’s internal affairs,
- To return Iran the assets frozen in the United States,
- The cancellation of all US claims against Iran,
- The extradition of the Shah’s wealth to Iran (Shah had died by that time).

Talks opened on September 14 1980, in West Germany and continued for the next four months, with the Algerians acting as intermediaries. The hostages were finally released and flew out of Iran on 20\textsuperscript{th} January 1981, after 444 days of captivity.\textsuperscript{30}
However, Iran had received only something over $4 billion of the $12 billion of assets that the Carter administration froze at the beginning of the hostage crisis.

A deadly war with its neighbour Iraq turned out to be another major external challenge to the Islamic republic during its early years. On 22\textsuperscript{nd} September 1980, Iraqi forces bombed Iranian airfields and invaded Iran at several points along with its sparsely defended border from Kurdistan in the north to Khuzestan in the south. This was the opening salvo in a bitter war that lasted for almost eight years and claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and cost tens of billions of dollars.\textsuperscript{31}

Ostensibly, the war was over Iraqi claims that Iran had violated some provisions of the 1975 Algiers Accord, which had recognized the thalweg (main navigation channel) of the \textit{Shatt-al-Arab} waterway as the border between the two countries. Iraq had resented this agreement, which it had accepted as the price for getting Mohammad Reza Shah to end his support for Kurdish rebels in Iraq, and started clamoring for its revision shortly after the revolution. Five days before invading Iran, on 17\textsuperscript{th} September Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi President had declared the agreement abrogated in view of what he called continued Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs.\textsuperscript{32}

The Iraqi thought that Iran would crumble soon due to the domestic upheavals in the newly established Islamic Republic but that did not happen. In the first days of the war, Iraqi forces captured several Iranian cities and brought others under siege or artillery barrage, but the Iranian navy and air force struck back at targets in Iraq with surprising success.
When the U.N. Security Council called for a ceasefire on 28th September, 1980, Iraq had indicted the willingness to consider it but Iran flatly rejected it.\(^{33}\)

Iraq’s President, Saddam Husain expected that Arab population of Khuzestan in Iran would support the invasion but it did not happen rather the invasion rallied almost all the Iranians behind Khomeini. In addition to the regular army and \textit{Pasdaran} (Revolutionary Guards), large numbers of \textit{Basij} volunteers were recruited. The Iranian regime constantly harped on \textit{Ashura}, Imam Husain and Karbala to maintain support for the war and to motivate the troops. The huge casualties on the Iranian side resulted partly from the human wave tactics they employed against the Iraqis, who were normally better equipped.\(^{34}\)

The technological imbalance was the result of the policy of Western nations who, despite their declared neutrality sent a variety of advanced weapons to the Iraqis while keeping the Iranians starved of spare parts for the weapons that Shah had bought in the previous decade. The arsenal supplied to Iraq included chemical weapon technology that was used against Iranian soldiers as well as Kurdish civilians in the north of Iraq, whom Saddam treated as rebels.\(^{35}\)

Iran recaptured Khorramshahr from Iraq in the spring of 1982 eventually forced Iraq to withdraw to the border. Khomeini was demanding the removal of Saddam and huge war reparations. Now the Iraq went defensive, but the Iranians were able to make minor territorial gains only.

The hope of an Iraqi Shia rising to support the Iranian attacks in southern Iraq proved as illusion, like Saddam’s hope of an Arab rising in Khuzestan in 1980, and the land war became a stalemate.\(^{36}\)
From 1984 Iraq attacked Iranian shipping in the Persian Gulf trying to damage Iran’s oil exports. The Iranian responded in a kind, resulting in what came to be known as the Tanker War.

As stalemate prevailed in the land war, the Iranians and Iraqis bombarded each other’s capitals and other towns indiscriminately with long range missiles and with bombs dropped from aircraft killing many civilians.

In 1988 a US warship (USS Vincennes) was sailing into the Iranian territorial waters and shot down an Iranian civilian airliner with a pair of surface-to-surface air missiles, killing 290 people. The Ronald Reagan administration gave explanations that contained more misleading inaccuracies and self-justifications than contrition and later awarded the commander of Vincennes a campaign medal thus many Iranians still believe that destruction of the airliner was not an accident but a deliberate act. 37

Finally, with the terrible cost of the war mounting and failing to oust Saddam from Iraq, Khomeini was persuaded by Majlis Speaker Ali Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani to accept what Khomeini called the chalice of poison. Rafsanjani had insisted that after the Vincennes incident, the US would never allow the Islamic Republic to succeed in the war.

On July 18, Iran announced it would unconditionally accept a United Nations Security Council resolution 598 of a year before aimed at ending the hostilities. 38K
AYATULLAH KHOMEINI AND THE CULTURAL POLICY

The cultural policy that was put forward after the victory of the Islamic Revolution was better termed as the Cultural Revolution. It was a period from 1980 to 1987 when the academia of Iran was purged of western and non-Islamic influences to bring it in line with Shia Islam.

The religious euphoria, moral rigorism and negative nationalism helped to create a new Islamic order. The Iranians in denouncing cultural imperialism and restoring Islamic authenticity opted for an ascetic culture. The process of Islamization was geared to ensure purification and enlightenment. Purification consisted in cleansing of the soul of all vices, while enlightenment was a conscious effort to remove all ill-effects of the doing of the past. This redemptive ventures was oriented to foster a social environment congenial to keep the believer on the path of righteousness.\(^ {39}\)

In the Islamic Republic with a view to cultural restoration, Khomeini imposed compulsory veiling on 7th March, 1979. Women protested against it. Huge demonstration and protest rallies were held. Prime Minister of Provisional government, Mahdi Bazargan and Ayatullah Taleqani had tried to restore normally and assured women that veiling was not compulsory and the intent of Khomeini was misconstrued.\(^ {40}\)

However, Khomeini reinstated the necessity of ‘hijab’. The traditional petty bourgeois, working classes and rural migrants hailed the decision. Pro-Khomeini demonstrations voiced support for Islamic veiling.

The Islamic Republic also abolished co-education; put a ban on mix public gathering etc.
Cultural Revolution had extended to universities also. The newly established Supreme Cultural Revolution Council (SCRC) initially closed universities for three years (1980-1983) and after reopening banned many books and purged out thousands of students and lecturers from the universities. The Cultural Revolution sometimes involved violence in taking over the university campuses. Higher education in Iran had many leftist forces who were opposed to Khomeini’s doctrine of *Velayat-e-Faqih*. The resistance to the regime’s control at many universities was largely unsuccessful.\(^{41}\)

The Cultural Revolution also extended to the media and films. Broadcasting musical programmes was prohibited. The Cultural strait-jacket led to the development of an underground culture. The state imposed puritanical life-style ushered in proliferation of video-recorder and mini concerts at home. The elders kept in touch with the latest film released in Hollywood, Paris and Rome. Khomeini condoned this cultural aberration on the pretext of not interfering with people’s privacy.\(^{42}\)

**AYATULLAH KHOMEINI AND THE ECONOMIC POLICY**

In the economic realm, the Islamic Republic was formally committed to the Islamic ideal of social justice and the formation of an egalitarian society. Ayatullah Khomeini as *Vali-e-Faqih* had sought to place the spiritual and religious development of its citizens ahead of the economic growth, profits and the accumulation of wealth.\(^{43}\)

Khomeini famously said that the Islamic Revolution was not about the price of watermelons, which was dubbed as a statement given by a leader who was indifferent to economic matters. However, in his book *Hokumat-e-Eslami*, he
had charged that non-Islamic government had created an ‘unjust economic order’ that divided people into two groups: oppressors (*mostakbarin*) and oppressed (*mostazafin*).”

Khomeini was a staunch defender of property rights and the role of the private sector, a view shared widely among clerics and reinforced by their alliance with the bazaar. However, at the onset of the Islamic Revolution, the powerful leftist component of the anti-shah movement had adopted 1960s era Marxist dogma that sought an economy centered on social justice. Therefore, major sectors of the economy were nationalized. The assets of the Pahlavis and other elite families were absorbed by newly created semi-governmental organizations, broadly known as ‘*bonyads*’ or foundations.

Throughout the Iran-Iraq war period, sharp divisions persisted between ‘the Islamic Socialists’ and traditional conservatives. Proposals to nationalize foreign trade, expand land reform and to establish new labour protections sparked fierce conflicts between the Parliament and oversight body empowered to vet all legislation. Iran’s Guardian Council consistently favored a more conservative interpretation of Islamic law, and rejected radically statist measures advanced by the Islamic leftists who dominated Parliament.

Khomeini initially tried to balance the two camps. He eventually took steps that appeared to help the radicals yet ultimately paved the way for greater pragmatism. In a decision with sweeping long-term political implications, he mandated that the interests of the state took precedence over either the Constitution or Islamic law. This principle was institutionalized in 1988, with the establishment of the Expediency Council, which was empowered to mediate between Parliament and the Guardian Council.
AYATULLAH KHOMEINI AND THE FOREIGN POLICY

Revolutionary Iran’s foreign policy was based on the principles enunciated by Ayatullah Khomeini, best described by the phrase ‘Neither East, nor West, Only Islamic Republic’ (nah sharq van a gharb, faqat jamhoori-e-Eslami) and ‘the Export of the Revolution’ (sodor-e-Engelab).48

With respect to the first principle ‘Neither East nor West’, Khomeini had declared in 1979 that, “a nation that rises in unison that it wants an Islamic Republic, it wants neither East nor West but only an Islamic Republic – this being so, we have no right to say that the nation that engaged in an uprising did so in order to have democracy…” In Khomeini’s world view, ‘Islamic Democracy’ is superior to both eastern and western varieties.49

While on the Export of Revolution Khomeini said:

“We must endeavor to export our Revolution to the world. We should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution, because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently and is the supporter of all the oppressed people of the world. On the other hand, all the superpowers and the great powers have risen to destroy us. If we remain in isolation, we shall undoubtedly face defeat”.50

Khomeini’s views on the export of revolution are directly related to his characterization of the Iranian revolution. For him the revolution is an Islamic one, by which he means that it is not exclusive to Iran: “Islam is revealed for mankind … An Islamic movement, therefore, cannot limit itself to any particular country.” This Universalist understanding of Islam is repeated throughout his
sermons and writings. Indeed Khomeini equates the idea that “Islam is for mankind” with the need to export the revolution: “when we say we want to export our revolution we mean we would like to export this spirituality and enthusiasm we see in Iran”. It is this spirit and enthusiasm that change ‘the heart’ of the people, causing them to rise up and change the situation in their societies.51

The Government line was that Iran should be an example for other countries and that it should spread its message only by the word. Ayatullah Khomeini in a gathering of envoys from the Islamic countries had explicitly rejected armed measures or military conquest for the export of the revolution.52

The emphasis in exporting the revolution was laid on propaganda (tablighat). This was done through radio and television broadcasts, sermons, conferences and seminars for clergy, as well as the Iranian embassies and the example of Islamic behavior of visiting officials in the Gulf States. Arabic language programmes were broadcast from Tehran, Ahvaz, Abadan, NIOC (National Iranian Oil Company), Chah Bahar, Bandar Torkaman and Kish Island. They consisted inter-alia of broadcasts denouncing the Gulf governments’ harsh treatment of opposition groups and attacking the United States. They aired not only Islamic Republic government statements or sermons but also announcements by Iranian students or Arab opposition groups.53

As for the role of the clergy, it was not only the Iranian ulema who were to use their sermons to export the revolution, but also the Arab clerics-Shia and Sunni alike – who were to import it. For that purpose, seminars were organized to establish an international network of activist clerics.54
The prime targets of the export of the revolution consisted of four major geographic areas: the Persian Gulf, the Soviet Caucasus and Central Asia, Afghanistan and Lebanon. In the Persian Gulf the specific targets were Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In the Soviet area they were Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. In Afghanistan and Lebanon, Shia Muslims were the primary targets.55

IRAN AND THE GULF STATES

Ayatullah Khomeini was particularly critical of the Saudi and Gulf governments, both because they were ‘un-Islamic’ monarchies and because of their military and economic ties with the United States, an influence he disdainfully referred to as ‘American Islam’.56 On one occasion he made a statement regarding Saudi Arabia:

“The ruling regime in Saudi Arabia wears Muslim clothing, but it actually represents a luxurious, frivolous, shameless way of life, robbing funds from the people and squandering them and engaging in gambling, drinking parties and orgies. Would it be surprising if people follow the path of revolution, resort to violence and continue their struggle to regain their rights and resources?”57

In November, 1979 Saudi Arabia was rocked by two explosive events. On November 20, as Muslims prepared for ‘hajj’ the Grand Mosque at Mecca was seized and occupied for two weeks by Saudi–led Sunni militant who denounced the Saudi monarchy. While Saudi Arabia reeled from the seizure of the Grand Mosque, riots broke out a week later in the oil-rich eastern Province where Shias constituted the majority. Pent-up emotions and grievances among Shias, who felt discriminated against by their Sunni rulers and called for a fairer distribution
of oil wealth and services, had exploded earlier in the year in response to Iran’s revolution.\textsuperscript{58}

The Iran-Iraq war also soured relations between Iran and its neighbors. The Gulf States organized the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and threw their substantial financial support to Iraq. Ayatullah Khomeini called up the GCC to “return to the lap of Islam, abandon the Saddam Hussein regime in Baghdad, and stop squandering the wealth of their people.”\textsuperscript{59}

The Saudi Arabia government countered such statements by making following statement:

“Ever since the Iranian and Islamic people were afflicted by the Khomeini regime, this regime has failed to render any noteworthy service to Islam, and the Muslims … This regime has tried to create schism among Muslims, not only in their politics but also in their mosques. The Khomeini regime sends its agents everywhere to foment discord.”\textsuperscript{60}

Iran used the annual pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca to propagate its revolutionary message. Ayatullah Khomeini and other senior clerics rejected the Saudis claim to be the keepers of the holy sites and maintained the ‘hajj’ had a rightful political dimension. Iranian pilgrims displaying posters of Khomeini and chanting slogans against the United States, the Soviet Union and the Israel, clashed with Saudi security in June, 1982. The tensions continued during subsequent years and reached climax in 1987, when more than four hundred people were killed in a confrontation between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security forces.\textsuperscript{61}
Bahrain and Kuwait had also been threatened by Shia unrest. In 1981 the government of Bahrain foiled an Iranian-inspired coup by the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. Kuwait, 30 percent of whose population is Shia, was troubled by car bombings of the U.S. and French embassies in 1983 and cracked down on Shia unrest in 1987 and 1989.62

Yet despite these sporadic disturbances and government fears of massive unrest, revolutionary Iran was unsuccessful in rallying Iraqi Shia against Saddam regime during Iran-Iraq war despite the fact that the Shias constituted majority in Iraq. Pockets of Shia militancy in the Gulf States did not translate into significant revolutionary movements as regime used a carrot and stick approach, addressing socio-economic grievances while increasing security and prosecuting dissidents.63

LEBANON

The most direct, forceful and sustained Iranian influence has taken place in Lebanon. Lebanon’s Shia community, essentially apolitical until after the Second World War, became increasingly politicized in the 1960s and 1970s.64 During the 1970s Musa al-Sadr, the Iranian born and educated religious leader, interpreted Shia symbolism, which paralleled Khomeini’s revolutionary interpretation of Islam during his exile from 1964 to 1978, to support an activist movement of social and political reform out of which grew the militia, the Amal. The movement escalated in 1978 with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the disappearance of Musa Sadr. The second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the massacre at Sabra and Shatila refugee camps further radicalized Shia politics and set the stage for the influx of significant Iranian resources.65
Lebanon’s experience in the 1980s was a sharp contrast to that of the Gulf States. Iran had diverted an array of resources to Lebanon since 1982 in an effort to export the Islamic revolution and to spread Iranian influence among the more than one million Shia Muslims who account for one-third or more of Lebanon’s population.66

Millions of dollars in funds were poured into Lebanon. These funds had been used to arm and underwrite Hezbollah movement which was established at the behest of Iran during Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Money was also spent on array of social services, including hospitals, schools and sanitation services. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards or Pasdaran contingent was deployed at Baalbek in 1982 to provide military training for Shia militiamen and transferred arms to Hezbollah. The Iranian Embassy in Damascus played a significant role in guiding Hezbollah’s activities and according to published accounts, had also been the planning center for sensational acts of political violence, such as the 1983 attacks on the US Embassy in Beirut and the US Marine contingent of the multinational peace-keeping force.67 In many ways Lebanon provides the clearest and boldest example of the direct impact of Iranian revolution.

**IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIRS**

The revelations of secret dealings among Iran, Israel and the United States termed as Iran-Contra affair. The roots of the affair ran back to Israel’s arms supplies to Iran at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, to Iran’s involvement in Lebanon after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The deal was for Israel to supply Iran with much needed weapons and weapon spares, for Israel to feed the proceeds of sales to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua and for Iran to use its
influence to bring about the release of American hostages being held by pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{68}

It became public when Mehdi Hashmi, an Iranian national, leaked information on secret meetings between the US and the Iranian negotiators to a Lebanese newspaper Al-Shira, which published them on 3 November, 1986.\textsuperscript{69}

Hashmi was arrested on charges of ‘counter-revolutionary activities’ and was executed in 1987. The Mahdi Hashmi episode gave a severe blow to the probable successor of Ayatullah Khomeini, Ayatullah Hussain Ali Montazari. Mahdi Hashmi was a close associate of Montazari and latter’s refusal to denounce the former provided the base that Montazari was giving aid and comfort to the enemies of the Islamic Republic.

Montazari also criticized some actions of the Khomeini regime such as the killings of the political prisoners associated with the Mujahiddin-e-Khalq (MEK), fatwa by Khomeini against the Indian born, British writer Salman Rushdie over his controversial novel ‘The Satanic Verses’.

On 26 March 1989, Khomeini sent an angry letter to Montazari telling him that he was no longer eligible to succeed him as the legitimate leader of the state. Khomeini wrote that he had never really regarded Montazari as a suitable candidate, but as had been the case also with Bazargan and Bani-Sadr, he had allowed himself to be persuaded by friends. He said he was heartbroken, and his breast was full of agonizing pain that Montazari, ‘the fruit of my labour’, was so ungrateful. He accused Montazari of being in league with the liberals and the MEK; he alluded to Montazari’s patronage of Mahdi Hashmi. He ordered
Montazari to stop taking money in religious donations and to refrain from interfering any further in political matters.\textsuperscript{70}

Faced with the letter, Montazari had no choice but to accept it. He immediately acquiesced, gave up his office, returned to teaching at his religious school in Qom, where he was kept under virtual house arrest\textsuperscript{71} and since then he had been a frequent critic of the Islamic Republic’s domestic and foreign policy until his death on 19 December 2009.

\section*{REVISION OF THE CONSTITUTION}

Ayatullah Khomeini had already begun a series of reforms designed to tidy-up the system, to adjust it to changed conditions and get it in good order for the future.\textsuperscript{72}

The reform made by him in the system was dissolution of the Islamic Republican Party. By mid 1987 the factionalism and infighting within the IRP, among other problems, had led to a widespread disillusionment with the party as an institution. On a report by the then President of the Islamic Republic Ali Khamenai and Majlis Speaker Hashmi Rafsanjani, which was critical towards IRP, Ayatullah Khomeini took action and dissolved the party in 1987.\textsuperscript{73}

On 25\textsuperscript{th} April, 1989, Ayatullah Khomeini directed President Ali Khamenai to undertake a review and revision of the country’s Constitution. To this end, a special committee was established with twenty members appointed by Khomeini himself and the remainder elected by the Majlis. Khomeini indicated towards a number of problems the committee should address, the most crucial being the selection and authority of the Faqih and the distribution of the power in the
executive branch. The review committee did not complete its work until after Khomeini’s death, but it seems to have followed the basic outline of ideas he had endorsed.\textsuperscript{74}

Khomeini had established an Expediency Council on 6\textsuperscript{th} February, 1988 to resolve differences between the Majlis and the Council of Guardians, but it had not been very effective and had been criticized by Montazeri as unconstitutional. The committee solved this by adding article 112 to the Constitution. It confirmed the institutionalization of the Expediency Council.\textsuperscript{75}

There was also agreement that the original Constitution had dispersed the power of the executive branch too widely. The rift between Bani-Sadr and Rajai had shown from the start that how easy it was for the President, Prime Minister, and Majlis to come into conflict. Even under the best of circumstances, the Prime Minister, appointed by the President but confirmed by the Majlis, was in the awkward position to try to serve two masters. This had been a major factor in the ineffectiveness of the ministry of the Prime Minister Mir Hussain Mousawi from 1981 to 1989. The committee thus recommended the office of the Prime Minister be abolished, at the same time the office of the President was to be greatly strengthened. The President was recognized as second only to be the Vali-e-faqih in authority and he was to have executive control of all matters except those directly related to the office of Vali-e-Faqih.\textsuperscript{76}

Among the numerous articles the committee either added or revised, the most important applied to the office of Vali-e-Faqih itself. The original Constitution had specified that the representative of the Twelfth Imam (i.e. the Supreme Authority) would be “an honest, virtuous, well-informed, courageous, efficient administrator and religious jurist, enjoying the confidence of the majority of the
people”. It further allowed that if no person fitted to these qualifications could be found, a ‘leadership council’ of three to five qualified candidates could exercise this authority. The revised Constitution stipulated that there should be a single *Faqih* only, and that preference should be given to a candidate on the basis of ‘public support’ or knowledge of ‘social and political issues’ as well as Islamic jurisprudence.\(^77\)

Ayatullah Khomeini died on 3\(^{rd}\) June, 1989. The mass emotion that followed, especially at his funeral on 6\(^{th}\) June, was comparable only with that on the day of Khomeini’s return from exile ten years earlier. Several million people (estimates range between 2 and 5 million) came out for the funeral, and Shia mourning traditions combined with the unique devotion Khomeini had inspired to produce extraordinary scenes.\(^78\)

Until his death, Ayatullah Khomeini kept his theoretic system intact through the force of his personality and charisma, besides he sought to legitimize his rule by relying on the popular appeal of Islam and by instituting populist policies. Under the Islamic Republic, participation in the political process by the people had given legitimacy to the system. The incorporation of the masses into the political process began with the popular referendum of March, 1979, whereby the new system was approved by some ninety-eight percent of the voters, and grew increasingly more intense with the meteoric rise of the IRP, the mobilizing sermons of the Friday Prayer *Imams*, open debates in the *Majlis* and with each successive Parliamentary and Presidential election.\(^79\)

Gradually, the fusion of the masses into politics resulted in the growth of an incredibly strong post-revolutionary state, capable of outlasting the crippling
effects of violent internal purges, terrorist assassinations, a costly war, and eventually Khomeini’s death.\textsuperscript{80}

Whereas the monarchy withered away with the Shah’s departure from the scene, the Islamic Republic survived Khomeini’s death with little difficulties. The inclusive, populist politics has so far been the most lasting contribution of the 1979 revolution. In the process, what has emerged is a state with a degree of strength and power unsurpassed in Iranian history.

Khomeini himself named the then president Ali Khamenai as his successor. He also made certain that Rafsanjani and other pragmatists have the upper hand over the doctrinaire and radical elements. Ali Khamenai’s effectiveness as a Vali-e-Faqih and Rafsenjani’s political longevity as his lieutenant were the crucial tests that the Islamic Republic would undergo in the post-Khomeini era.\textsuperscript{81}
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CHAPTER FIVE
THE PERIOD OF AYATULLAH
ALI KHAMENAI (1989- )
CHAPTER FIVE

THE PERIOD OF AYATULLAH ALI KHAMENAI (1989-)

Ayatullah Khomeini was succeeded by the then President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sayed Ali Khamenai. Since 1989, Khamenai has been leading Iran as the ‘Vali-e-Faqih’ or the Leader of the Islamic Republic.

Ali Khamenai’s association with Khomeini goes back to the years, when Khamenai was studying in Qom. When the Shah exiled Khomeini in 1964, Khamenai remained one of several loyal disciples in Iran who disseminated Khomeini’s teachings about Islamic government. Khamenai was arrested on several occasions by the Shah’s secret police SAVAK. He spent several years in prison, endured torture and solitary confinement, and eventually was exiled to a remote area of the country until the 1979 Islamic revolution.¹

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatullah Khomeini asked Khamenai to serve in various important positions in the newly formed revolutionary government. He served briefly as Minister of Defence in 1980 and later as the supervisor of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war. Known for his oratorical skills, he eventually secured the influential post of Tehran’s Friday prayer leader.²

The year 1981 proved to be momentous for Khamenai. In June, he narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by the radical opposition group Mujahiddin-e-Khalq (MEK) when a bomb-concealed in a tape recorder at a press conference exploded beside him. He lost the use of his right arm and to this day suffers pain from the injuries sustained. Later on in the same year, MEK carried out a massive
bombing attack that killed more than 100 high-ranking Iranian officials, including the then President Mohammad Ali Rajai. The turmoil provided an opportunity for the 42-year-old Khamenai to run for the post of the President. With Khomeini’s backing he won two presidential elections overwhelmingly, serving as Iran’s first clerical President from 1981 until Khomeini’s death in 1989.³

**ELECTION OF ALI KHAMENAI**

Ali Khamenai’s election to the office of the Supreme Leader is significant in the religio-political and constitutional history of Iran due to the following reasons.

The removal of the constitutional requirement that the *Vali-e-Faqih* or the Leader had to be a ‘*marja-e-taqlid*’ (source of emulation), paved the way for Khamenai to be elected as the successor of Ayatullah Khomeini.

The Assembly of Experts had convened on 4th June, 1989 the next day of Ayatullah Khomeini’s death, to elect a new Leader or *Vali-e-Fqih*. The then Speaker of the Majlis Ali Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani, also the Head of Assembly of Experts had recalled some anecdotes about Khomeini including that Ayatullah Khomeini personally wanted Ali Khamenai to be his successor and also managed to convince the members of the Assembly to elect Ali Khamenai as the Supreme Leader.⁴

Therefore, the Assembly of Experts chose Ali Khamenai, the then President of Iran, as *Vali-e-Faqih* with a majority of more than fourth-fifth of the members present. With 60 votes in favour out of the 70 members present, the Assembly also elevated him from ‘*hojjat al-Islam*’ to Ayatullah.⁵

The problem with Ali Khamenai’s selection was that he enjoyed neither Ayatullah Khomeini’s popularity nor his status as a grand ‘*ayatullah*’. He was a ‘*hojjatolislam*’, which in the Shia clerical hierarchy ranks a level below the
ayatullah. The challenge for the Islamic Republic, therefore, was to legitimize his selection not only to the population at large but also to the clerical establishment.6

The legitimization campaign consisted of both persuasion and tough warnings to potential critics. At least publicly, the elites of the Islamic Republic collectively endorsed the selection. In his congratulatory letter to Khamenai, son of Ayatullah Khomeini, Ahmad Khomeini wrote: “The Imam (Khomeini) consistently spoke of you as a qualified ‘mujtahid’, and regarded you as the most qualified leader for the Islamic Republic.” Rafsanjani declared that it was incumbent upon on all Muslims to obey the new Faqih and that disobedience would not be tolerated.7

As the legitimization campaign was proceeding, Khamenai moved cautiously to consolidate his position. He faced major difficulties because he lacked the religious credentials and charisma of Khomeini. Aware of his shortcomings, Khamenai in the early stage of his rule stayed above factional politics, as Khomeini had done earlier. Stressing the need for unity, he warned the ulema of the conspiracy to divide their ranks and assured them that he would do everything possible to increase their participation in politics.8

Most important he sought to capture the control of Khomeini’s vast personal networks by not removing Khomeini’s many appointees. He promised to carry on Khomeini’s torch to the very end. Thus, he refused to rescind Khomeini’s ‘fatwa’ against Salman Rushdie for writing The Satanic Verses and denounced the United States as the enemy of the Islamic Revolution.9
KHAMENAI AND SUCCESSIVE PRESIDENTS OF IRAN

Since Khamenai’s election as the new Leader or Vali-e-Faqih of the Islamic Republic, four Presidents have served under his guidance and supervision. Largely he played a role of guide and facilitator but many a time disagreement also surfaced between him and the Presidents.

PRESIDENT ALI AKBAR HASHMI RAFSANJANI (1989-1997)

In July 1989 – seven weeks after Ayatullah Khomeini’s death – the Reform Council submitted its amendments of the Constitution to a national referendum. In the same elections, Majlis Speaker Hashmi Rafsanjani ran for the office of President to replace Ali Khamenai who by that time was appointed as the Leader. The amendments passed with 97 percent voting ‘yes’ and Rafsanjani won the presidential election with massive majority.10

Rafsanjani’s election as Iran’s fourth President helped the newly elected Vali-e-Faqih, Ayatullah Ali Khamenai to consolidate power more quickly. The close collaboration between the two men goes back to the early 1960s when they were a part of Khomeini’s small network in Iran. They were both associated with the United Islamic Societies, formed when a few small groups were unified by Khomeini’s order in early 1960.11

Rafsanjani had indicated that his long friendship with Khamenai would be an advantage.
“My cooperation with the great leader in the past 30 years has been with honesty, sincerity, harmony and unanimity … Until this day, we have been together in the most difficult situations, and not even once have we allowed doubts to creep into our hearts in carrying out our divine duties.”

The duumvirate of the Leader Ayatullah Ali Khamenei and the President Ali Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani had initiated a period that is termed as an era of reconstruction.

President Rafsanjani with the support of Vali-e-Faqih Ayatullah Ali Khamenei took immediate measures to liberalize the economy. The two leaders abolished rationing, relaxed price controls and tried to balance the budget. They also tried to trim the bureaucracy, and although they failed, they managed to reduce the total number of ministries from twenty-five to twenty-one by merging the ministries of Heavy Industry with Industries, Higher Education with Education, Revolutionary Guards with Defense, and Reconstruction with Islamic guidance.

In addition, Rafsanjani administration imported consumer goods as well as essentials to relieve shortages, stopped the anti-hoarding campaigns, returned some real estate to previous owners, printed less paper money, narrowed the gap between the official and the black-market price of the dollar, revitalized the national stock exchange, started five free trade zones, lowered business taxes and most important of all reduced the defense budget – which had been as high as 17 percent of the gross national product (GNP) in the Shah’s last year – to less than 2 percent of GNP.

Thus resources continued to flow into development programmes: education, health, electrification, rural roads, urban renewal, city parks and the Tehran subways as
well as into capital-intensive projects such as steel, car manufacturing and petrochemicals – even the nuclear programme was restarted, which still remains a bone of contention between Iran and U.S. led Western nations.\textsuperscript{16}

But as Rafsanjani entered his second term it was evident that he was encountering formidable difficulties in delivering on economic front. During his first term, Iran had borrowed heavily from abroad to fund his reconstruction and development initiatives. While the economy started growing again, it did not grow fast enough to sustain the rising debt burden; by 1993, Iran faced a debt crisis. Rafsanjani administration negotiated a rescheduling of payments to the country’s major creditors, but the resulting reduction in new credit constrained domestic consumption, causing the economy to contract during 1993 and 1994.\textsuperscript{17}

Facing increasing resistance to his economic agenda, Rafsanjani shied away from more politically challenging reforms, including wider privatization, which promised bigger developmental pay offs but would temporarily lower living standards for significant segments of the population. In the end, his administration made at most a down payment toward serious structural adjustment. In a still strained economic climate, his policies met with greater skepticism from all quarters of establishment and the public at large.\textsuperscript{18}

Relationship between the Leader Ayatullah Ali Khamenai and President Rafsanjani seemed to be cordial on foreign policy issues also. Both the leaders raised the expectations of the world community that they would de-radicalize Iranian foreign policy which was based on ideology rather than national interest during Khomeini’s era.\textsuperscript{19}
With the help of the Leader, Rafsanjani tried to engage the world and end the Islamic Republic’s diplomatic isolation. As a result, experts in Iran termed Rafsanjani as a pragmatic president. Both leaders departed from Khomeini’s foreign policy to some extent. They interpreted Khomeini’s concept of the ‘export of the revolution’ in less radical and more rhetorical terms. 

Khamenai endorsed Rafsanjani’s pragmatic foreign policy and argued that:

“The export of the revolution did not mean that we would rise up and throw our weight and power around and begin wars, forcing people to revolt and carryout revolutions. That was not the Imam’s (Khomeini’s) intention at all. This is not part of our policies and in fact it is against them… This is what exporting the revolution means to enable all nations in the world to see that they are capable of standing on their own feet, resisting submission with all of their strength by relying on their own will and determination, and by replacing their trust to God.”

Ayatullah Khamenai had supported President Rafsanjani on all important issues, signaling his approval of the new direction of the Islamic Republic espoused by Rafsanjani and thus taking part in the de-revolutionization of Post-Khomeini Iran.

The prime focus of Iran’s foreign policy during this period was rebuilding cooperation with advanced industrial countries, the European Union (EU), and the Gulf countries. The improved relations between Iran and the Gulf countries were evident during the GCC summit in Qatar in December, 1990, when the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) declared that it would welcome future cooperation with Iran and the country’s participation in regional security arrangements. In November, 1991, Rafsanjani suggested a joint regional market for economic and technical cooperation between GCC countries and Iran, which could possibly lead
to a comprehensive security arrangement. In addition to the high price of the lengthy war with Iraq the presence of the US forces in the Arabian Gulf also compelled Rafsanjani to change Iranian policies from radical to pragmatic in order to protect the Islamic Republic from unforeseen risks, and minimize the option of American military intervention against the country.

As far as the relationship between these two leaders was concerned, Rafsanjani constantly found himself on the defensive because Khamenai had the tendency to take the initiative or intervene in important policy issues. Rafsanjani and Khamenai had tactical, not substantive, disagreements on matters such as the US intentions and the best strategy and tactics for dealing with the US. Khamenai was more vocal in condemning American politics, particularly the Middle East peace process, whereas Rafsanjani was careful and calculating in expressing his views. However, as expected, radicals supported Khamenai and strongly criticized Rafsanjani’s approach of neutrality in the Kuwait crisis and expressed their serious concerns about the growing presence of the U.S. forces in the region.

In Rafsanjani’s second term, his economic plan and management became target of Khamenai’s criticism. The fraud, abuse, and corruption in the government and the increasing hold of ‘oligarchy’ on the economy became the central topics of Khamenai’s speeches.

**RIFT BETWEEN KHAMENAI AND RAFSANJANI**

Khamenai and Rafsanjani, however, parted company when the latter, after a state visit to China, toyed with the Chinese model of economic development. Rafsanjani talked of cutting subsidies for food, fuel and gasoline; trimming financial support
for the clerical foundations; bringing these foundations under state supervision, privatizing companies that had been nationalized in 1979 and most important of all attracting foreign and expatriate capital by allowing free flow of profits; permitting citizens living abroad to hold foreign citizenships; convening conferences for foreign and expatriate investors; granting territorial concessions to foreign oil companies. He also talked of deleting the labour law to make factory ownership more profitable; and drafting a new investment law to allow foreigners to own as much as 45 percent of companies. These proposals aroused the opposition not only of Khamenai and the Guardian Council, but also of the majority in the Majlis and the dominant figures in the bazaar.

On foreign policy front, Vali-e-Faqih, Ayatullah Khamenai favoured maintaining reasonable distance between Iran and the West, especially the USA.

Rafsanjani sought to strengthen the powers of the President vis-à-vis the Supreme Leader – by trying to fold the Revolutionary Guards into the regular military. But Khamenai rebuffed these initiatives, solidifying his status as a guardian of the system’s overall functioning and welfare.

PRESIDENT MUHAMMAD KHATAMI (1997-2005)

Rafsanjani was succeeded by Sayed Muhammad Khatami as the new President of Iran. Rafsanjani was pragmatist while Khatami was a moderate, liberal and reformist. Khatami won 70 percent of the vote in an 80 percent turnout. While his opponent Natiq Nuri backed by Khamenai got only 25 percent.

In 1997, Khatami rode to power on a wave of public support by employing the slogans that has become increasingly popularized in post-revolutionary Iranian
society. These slogans – which championed concepts such as democracy, the rule of law, freedom, transparency and accountability – were part of the newly emerging discourse in post-revolutionary Iran. This discourse stood in sharp contrast with that of previous generation of Islamic revolutionaries, who had employed slogans that called for defending Islam against a global onslaught and rallying calls such as ‘death to America, the hypocrites, and the enemies of Velayat-e-Faqih’.

Khatami used this new discourse in his presidential campaigns, assuring the voters that he was going to deliver on his promises during his tenures. Thus he managed to gain broad popular support, particularly among the youth, who were very much attracted to his pledges to deliver change and a better future. On the other hand, these same slogans earned him the ire of the conservatives, who publicly criticized him for giving away the concepts of the revolution and making Iran amenable to cultural penetration.

The main difference between the reformists and the conservatives centered on their interpretation of Islamic principles, since the vast majority of Iranians, even the reformists aim to initiate changes from within the confines of the Islamic Republic. Thus their aim was not to completely abolish the system, but rather to modernize it, while upholding its Islamic character.

These differences in Islamic interpretation extended to virtually every aspect of political life in the Islamic Republic. The conservatives were very rigid in observing the centrality of the Vali-e-Faqih and recognizing his ultimate absolute power as the wielder of authority in society. On the other hand, the reformists tried to remove the halo of the Vali-e-faqih; they called for reducing his powers in favour of the institution of the presidency. They also stressed the salient role of the people in decision making as opposed to Vali-e-Faqih.
During its first term Khatami administration made notable progress in expanding individual, cultural and media freedom. It also took concrete steps to strengthen the rule of law, including in cases involving abuses by government security agencies (most notably the alleged complicity of officials in the alleged chain-murders of Iranian dissidents). None of these actions would have been possible without Khamenai’s acquiescence.  

After Khatami’s reelection as the President, with a reformist majority in the Majlis, he renewed his efforts to enact his policies into law, but the reformists continued to encounter strong opposition from the Guardian Council. In a few cases, Khamenai himself intervened to persuade the Council to let bills pass into law, which was evident in the case in 2002, when Parliament enacted a measure authorizing equal compensation in ‘blood money’ for Muslim and non-Muslim crime victims.  

But Khamenai was not ready to facilitate the passage of measures that he believed threatened the integrity of Velayat-e-Faqih. And this stalemate underscored Khatami’s biggest failing as President: his inability to articulate a coherent argument squaring the kinds of constitutional changes it would take to realize the reformist agenda with the preservation of Khomeini’s vision of Islamic government.  

His failure was most graphically displayed in 2002, when Khatami presented what he described as his signature ‘twin bills’ to the Majlis. One of them sought to expand the President’s authority relative to other institutions; the other would have eliminated the Guardian Council’s power to vet and veto candidates for office. Together they would have begun changing the workings of the Islamic Republic’s constitutional order in significant ways; thus they were certainly too radical for either Khamenai or conservative power centre to agree with it.
Yet even though according to Khatami, twin bills were essential to realizing the agenda on which he had twice campaigned for the presidency, he did not fight for them. When the Guardian Council declared them invalid, he withdrew both bills from the *Majlis* – raising angry calls from reformists for his resignation.\(^{38}\)

Reformists also annoyed with Khatami for his alleged failure to reform the institution of *Vali-e-faqih* by stripping the institution of some of his prerogatives and transfer these to the institution of the presidency. Khatami at the end of his first tenure had realized that his objective of reforming the office of the Supreme leader would not be achieved. So he changed course and supported the centrality of the stature of the *Vali-e-faqih* in the system and the Constitution.\(^{39}\)

Despite disagreement between the Leader, Ayatullah Khamenai and President Khatami on domestic issues, Khamenai supported his approach towards Saudi Arabia and the European Countries. However Khamenai was highly skeptical about any diplomatic relations with the United States. Khamenai knew that Iranian national interests required a different relationship with its neighbours, as well as its European trading partners. He would disagree with Khatami over the latter’s approach towards engaging the U.S., but at least in the initial stages of Khatami’s presidency he was willing to allow him some leeway.\(^{40}\)

An important turning point in Iran’s relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries was the summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Tehran in December, 1997. The conciliatory approach of the Khatami administration had attracted a large number of attendants to the summit. The OIC meeting in Tehran at the same time signaled an attitude of normalization by the Arab States towards Iran. Khatami saw the Arab countries as particularly important for prosperity and security in the region and like his predecessor Rafsanjani,
Khatami recognized the important role of Saudi Arabia. The improvement in relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia during Khatami’s presidency was unprecedented. In 1999 Khatami became the first Iranian President to visit Saudi Arabia. He believed that besides regional security concerns, good relations with the Gulf countries would positively contribute to Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) policies and the investments by the Gulf States in Iran.¹⁴¹

Relations between Iran and the Gulf States thus improved owing to the shift in Iran’s foreign policy which now was guided by national interest instead of ideology. Although Khatami was in favour of dialogue with all countries, the policy towards Israel remained as obdurate as in earlier regimes. The Iranian attitude on Israel (non-recognition of the existence of Israel) continuously affects Iran’s relations with Europe and the US in a negative manner.⁴²

Iran’s relations with Europe were also improved during Khatami’s presidency. Iranian support to Palestinian Hamas and Lebanese Hezbullah and continuing disagreements over the Rushdie fatwa had dramatically made for growing tension in the relations between Iran and the European Countries. During the Rafsanjani presidency, trade relations between Iran and the European Countries were going down day by day. Khatami had to tackle these contentions issues, and offer concessions to the Europeans.⁴³

The issue of ‘fatwa’ against Rushdie was settled during this period. Interestingly, the Leader, Khamenai had also offered his support to Khatami during this period. In response to Iran’s moves, the European policy changed from ‘critical dialogue’ to constructive engagement’. The new policy led to a lifting of the prohibition on ministerial meetings and the full resumption of commercial relations. In July, 1998, the Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi, became the first European official to visit
Iran since the imposition of the diplomatic embargo. Overall, it can be argued that Khamenai had given Khatami some space to make the reapproachments with both the Europeans and Saudis feasible.44

However, Khamenai made a distinction between the US and Europe and mentioned that, “we do not look at all countries in the same light: we respect the countries that have healthy relations with us.” Khatami was also well aware of the strong anti-American mind set of the conservatives, and hence, was very cautious in his approach towards the US He encouraged a gradual exchange of scholars, activists and athletes between the United States and Iran. He believed that such exchanges – along with possible US economic concessions – would hopefully offer him an opportunity to influence the conservatives at time, particularly the Leader.45

In an interview with the US news channel CNN on January 7, 1998, Khatami made it clear that his goal was to improve Iran’s relations with the US through a ‘dialogue of civilization’. He wanted to end the confrontation with the West and argued that, ‘making enemies is not a skill; real skill lies in the ability to neutralize enemies … And this is not incompatible with our principles.’ He also added that, ‘being mighty does not mean fighting the world at any cost and this debate does not mean abandoning the principles and values of society and revolution.’ Khatami apologized for the hostage crisis and denounced terrorism in all its forms.46

Khatami’s interview with CNN was not received well by the conservative groups at home. Khamenai led the charge by claiming that the US was seeking to ‘bring about instability and insecurity to the nation.’ He and his conservative groups held that a dialogue with America was even more harmful than establishing ties with that country. Furthermore, in order to stop Khatami from implementing his moderate policy, Khamenai set up a new consultative institution to advise him on foreign
policy issues. During this period Iran even helped the US indirectly by supporting US efforts in Afghanistan in the wake of September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the US.

However, Khatami and his foreign policy orientations suffered a blow from the U.S. when the then U.S. President George W. Bush in his State of Union speech in January, 2002, included Iran in “axis of evil” along with North Korea and Iraq. In naming Iran as a major threat to world peace, he accused it of aspiring to build nuclear weapons and of financing international terrorism directed at the United States. He also accused its “unelected leaders” of depriving the Iranian people of their freedoms.

NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

During Khatami Presidency, France, Germany and Britain (the E.U+3) undertook a diplomatic initiative with Iran to resolve questions about its nuclear programme. On 21st October 2003, in Tehran, the Iranian government and E.U.-3 Foreign Ministers issued a statement known as the Tehran Declaration in which Iran agreed to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to sign and implement an Additional Protocol as a voluntary, confidence building measure, and to suspend its enrichment and reprocessing activities during the course of negotiations. The E.U.-3 in return explicitly agreed to recognize Iran’s nuclear rights and to discuss ways Iran would gain easier access to modern technology.

Therefore, abiding by the commitments made under the Tehran Declaration, Iran during the Paris meet on 14th November, 2004, announced a voluntary and temporary suspension of its enrichment programme and the voluntary
implemmentation of the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The measure was said at the time to be a voluntary, confidence-building measure, to continue for some reasonable period of time (six months being mentioned as a reference) as negotiations with the E.U.-3 continued.\(^\text{50}\)

In February 2005, Iran pressed the EU-3 to speed up talks, which the EU-3 refused to do so. The talks made little progress because of the divergent positions of the two sides. Under pressure from US, the European negotiators could not agree to allow enrichment on Iranian soil. Although Iranians presented an offer, which included voluntary restrictions on the enrichment volume and output, it was rejected. The EU-3 broke a commitment they had made to recognize Iran’s right under NPT to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.\(^\text{51}\) Civil uranium enrichment is a legitimate activity under NPT, but the difference between enrichment to levels consistent with civil use and the levels necessary for weapons is difficult to verify from outside once the enrichment process has begun.\(^\text{52}\)

**PRESIDENT MAHMUD AHMADINIJAD (2005-2013)**

Mohammad Khatami was succeeded by Mahmud Ahmadinijad as the new president of Iran. He was the second non-clerical president after Bani Sadr. He was a conservative and hardliner. During the 2005 presidential election campaign, many Iranians thought it was a foregone conclusion that former President Hashmi Rafsanjani would win, however Mahmud Ahmadinejad – a relatively unknown candidate won. During the run-off election, the Leader Ali Khamenai threw his support behind Ahmadinejad discreetly. In a May, 2005 speech Khamenai declared, “I personally would like someone to be elected whose main goal is to serve the public… Who is faithful to the ideals of our revolution and Islamic system and who
really aims to administer justice and combat corruption”, extolling the values of Ahmadinejad while making veiled hints at corruption charges that had been lobbied at Rafsanjani.53

Ahmadinejad belonged to a very humble family which reflected in his modest living as well as in his election campaign which was focused on poverty alleviation, delivering social justice and the distribution of oil wealth inside Iran.

Iran’s economy experienced a significant transformation during Ahmadinejad’s presidency. Ahmadinejad initially suspended many of the economic reforms of earlier years but gradually came to embrace them after imposing significant modifications that reflected his ideological views and political interest. Unlike his predecessors, Ahmadinejad with the support from the Leader, Ali Khamenai, was finally able to implement the subsidy reform programme, which would be remembered as an important component of his economic legacy.54

FOREIGN POLICY

Mahmud Ahmadinejad’s presidency injected a new tone in Iran’s foreign policy, making a total change from Khatami’s policy of ‘dialogue among civilization’. From beginning of his tenure, Ahmadinejad adopted a radical foreign policy, especially towards Israel and the US.

In October 2005, Ahmadinejad quoted a statement of Ayatullah Khomeini on Israel which drew international condemnation against him. The original statement was that ‘this Jerusalem occupying regime must disappear from the page of time’. But the statement was interpreted by the western media as ‘Israel must be off wiped from the map’ and also as an oblique threat to Israel. Ahmadinejad has since stated that his speech was exaggerated and misinterpreted. He denied that he meant
military intervention and said instead that Israel's ‘Zionist regime’ would eventually collapse on its own. Khamenei responded to Ahmadinejad's remark by saying that "the Islamic Republic has never threatened and will never threaten any country."

However, at the same time, Ahmadinejad made it very clear that Iran would continue to maintain cordial relations with the neighboring countries, especially with the Gulf States. Ahmadinejad also pointed out that:

“…the expansion of relations with neighboring countries as well as Islamic and Arab countries, are among the priorities of our foreign policy… Our cultural, political and economic relations are truly extensive. (And) they will remain extensive and they will be consolidated as well. The (Arabian) Gulf is the gulf of peace, friendship, and fraternity… We are interested in cooperation among the Arabian Gulf littoral. We will try to ensure that there will be deep, rational and mutual bonds among the Arab countries. Thus, they must defend the interest of their own nations and peace in the (Arabian) Gulf.”

NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

When Mahmud Ahmadinejad became President, he made it very clear that he would fight for the right of the Islamic Republic of Iran to develop a nuclear energy programme. In support of his statement, Ahmadinejad further clarified that Iran would enrich its nuclear programme for civilian purposes only. Ahmadinejad’s nuclear policy was strongly welcomed by the Leader Khamenai and his conservative followers, both inside and outside parliament. In his support of the nuclear policy, Khamenai said:

“Using nuclear technology … is a national obligation and a public demand and going back is the same as losing the country’s independence at a high price.”
Khamenai dismissed the allegation that Iran was seeking a nuclear bomb, and called it, ‘an irrelevant and wrong statement, and … (a) sheer lie. We do not need a nuclear bomb... We consider using nuclear weapons against Islamic rules…’

In 2006 Ahmadinejad announced that Iran had enriched uranium successfully at Natanz plant from its own resources and had joined the nuclear club. This announcement had raised suspicion among the US and its allies that Iran was making a nuclear bomb. By that time IAEA had referred the matter to the UN Security Council and Security Council called upon Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, and eventually, with Resolution 1737 on 23rd December, 2006, imposed the first of a series of sanctions measures.

Ahmadinejad’s confrontational, declamatory stance on the nuclear issue shocked and worried many among the international community, and even in Iran some were worried. After the resignation of Hassan Rouhani, Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator appointed during the Khatami’s presidency, in October 2007 his successor, Ali Larijani resigned as nuclear negotiator, because like Rouhani, he had been constantly undercut by Ahmadinejad’s statements. Larijani was replaced by Saeed Jalili.

However, within Iran the nuclear issue produced an upsurge of nationalist feeling in favour of Iran’s right to nuclear power. People were drawing parallel to the Mossadeq episode in 1953 and asserting the belief that foreigners were once again interfering in Iran’s right to exploit its own natural resources.

During that period war rhetoric was high by Israel and the US Israel had warned that it would take unilateral military action against Iranian nuclear programme. The Bush administration also appeared to be considering the idea of military action
against Iran but pulled backed after senior military commanders rebelled against the idea. This was due to the US National Intelligence Estimate report of 2007 which drew conclusion that Iran had halted progress toward a nuclear weapon by the end of 2003.

In May 2010, Brazil, Turkey and Iran announced a deal whereby 1,200 kgs of Iranian uranium enriched to a low level could be exported and swapped for 120 kgs of uranium enriched to the 20 percent level, which would have meant that Iranians would no longer have needed to enrich the uranium themselves. But despite having encouraged the initiative earlier, the US would not endorse it when it neared reality. The deal was not implemented, and in November, 2010 the IAEA announced that Iran had enriched 25.1 kgs of uranium to the 20 per cent level at Natanz.\footnote{58}

In the summer of 2010 it emerged that a computer virus or worm called ‘stuxnet’ had been used to target Siemens industrial software used on computers that the Iranians had been using to control uranium enrichment and other processes related to the nuclear programme. Centrifuges were damaged, and the enrichment process was delayed. The origin of Stuxnet was never directly avowed, but it has been assumed that the Israeli and possibly the US governments were behind it.\footnote{59}

**SANCTIONS**

Since 2005, the U.N. Security Council approved six resolutions demanding that Iran suspend uranium enrichment, four of which have applied sanctions against Iran, freezing assets, imposing an arm embargo and banning the supply of nuclear-related goods. Many countries have set up their own bilateral sanctions in addition, with varying degrees of severity, often focusing on dual-use goods and financial contacts. United States banned almost all economic activity involving Iran. It also
pressurized foreign firms as well as countries with Iranian contacts to curtail them or face adverse consequences in their dealings with the U.S.\textsuperscript{60}

Sanctions had a damaging effect on the Iranian economy, causing shortages, inflation, devaluing of Iranian Rial and high level unemployment. The most severe impact of sanction was on Iranian currency i.e. Rial. It fell from 8000 Rials to the dollar, in November 2011, to 40,000 Rials to the dollar in October 2012.

Despite everything, Iran continued to enrich uranium. It is hard to know how far Ahmadinejad’s nuclear policy had benefited him politically within Iran, but many Iranians who would be critical of him in other respects had supported his defence of Iran’s nuclear interests.\textsuperscript{61}

**CONROVERSIAL ELECTION OF 2009**

On June 12, 2009, the Islamic Republic held its tenth presidential election. The incumbent, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who was seeking second term, was opposed by three candidates: a former Prime Minister Mir Hussain Mousavi, a former Speaker of the Majlis, Mehdi Karroubi, and a former Commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Mohsen Rezai.\textsuperscript{62}

The reformists approached the 2009 presidential election as an opportunity to apply the lessons that they had learnt in the bitter aftermath of Khatami’s presidency. Unlike previous election campaigns in 2005 and 2007 in which reformists divided into a variety of competing camps, reformist leaders were for the most part allied with one another during the 2009 election campaign.
The run-up to the hotly contested election saw the birth of ‘mowj-e-sabz’ or the ‘green wave’, a campaign to support the presidential bid of Mir Hussain Mousavi, who was the strongest of the three contenders.63

Despite this effort to consolidate reformist support, and despite massive participation in the polls, Ahmadinejad was declared the official winner. Many observers raised doubts about the fairness of the election. After Mousawi was deemed to have been defeated in the election, the ‘mowj-e-sabz’ or green wave campaign was transformed into a massive social movement or the Green Movement, which began demonstrating against the official results of the election and openly pressing for greater civil liberties.64

After the election results came out the Leader Ali Khamenai spoke forcefully in support of Ahmadinejad re-election, acclaiming it as a divine judgment. However within a few days, the number of protestors had grown to hundreds of thousands. Western media portrayed these demonstrations as the biggest since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the ultimate goal of these demonstrations was to topple the Islamic regime.

The ruling clique responded to the outcry, the demonstrations and the accusations of an electoral coup by alleging an attempted coup by the other side – saying that the regime had foiled a Western-backed attempt to overthrow the Islamic Republic, along the lines of the Velvet Revolution of 1989 in Czechoslovakia, the Rose Revolution of 2003 in Georgia or the Orange Revolution of 2005 in Ukraine. They declared that the instigators of this new Velvet Revolution were the U.S. and Britain.65
More importantly, Iranian reformists during this period were keen on emphasizing that they were not seeking to overthrow the regime. As Mehdi Karrubi wrote in his party’s newspaper, *Etemad-e-Melli*, on 24th June, 2009: ‘Most of those who have objected to the trend of the Presidential election in the country and its result are those who fought for the establishment of the Islamic system in Iran.’

According to Hooman Majd, a New York based Iranian scholar, Green Movement has been widely misunderstood by the Western media as an effort to overthrow the regime. The Movement, he wrote, should be seen, ‘not as a revolution but as a civil rights movement – as the leaders of the movement do see themselves’, Majd noted that the reality of Iran’s Green Movement might ‘disappoint both extremes of the American and Iranian political spectrum …especially the US conservatives hoping for regime change’, because the movement’s aim is not for a sudden and complete overthrow of Iran’s political system.

However, the crackdown on protestors by Revolutionary Guards and *Basij Milita* resulted into ‘killings of dozens of protestors and prosecution of more than a hundred critics including former reformist officials on charges of spying. The government also kept opposition leaders and rival presidential candidates Mir Hussain Mousavi, leader of the Green Movement and Mehdi Karoubi under house arrest. Large numbers of reformists, politicians, journalists and other left the country and went into exile since June 2009.

Although the Green Movement failed to topple the Iranian leadership, it inspired many in the Arab world to stand against the totalitarian regimes in the region. The revolutionary wave, the ‘Arab Spring’ which began in 2010 succeeded in removing many autocratic regimes in the region. Khamenai called the ‘Arab Spring’ an ‘Islamic awakening’ which reflect his revolutionary ideals based upon the vision
RIFT BETWEEN KHAMENAI AND AHMADINEJAD

The conservatives led by Ahmadinejad were not only challenged by the reformists but also by the Leader Khamenai himself, who brought him to power and supported Ahmadinejad controversial election to the second term in office. Khamenai not only drew criticism for his support to Ahmadinejad but also for the first time slogans against him were chanted during the demonstrations by the Iranian public. The first occasion when a rift between Khamenai and Ahmadinejad appeared was when Ahmadinejad, after his re-election in 2009, appointed his close relative Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, to the office of the first Vice-President. The decision was opposed by Khamenai in a letter to the President that ordered Mashaei’s resignation. Ahmadinejad initially defended his decision, saying ‘it would not be revisited’, in what some say was an act of defiance and an assertion of the prerogative of the President. It was not until the letter was read aloud on state television days later that Ahmadinejad partially complied but rather than dismissing Mashaei entirely, he instead appointed him as his Chief of Staff.68

A similar contest of authority ensued when in 2010 Ahmadinejad appointed Mashaei and three other allies to newly created offices of special envoys for foreign affairs in what was widely regarded as an attempt to create a parallel diplomatic apparatus to the Foreign Ministry, which falls under the authority of the Leader. Ahmadinejad only partially reversed the decision under heavy pressure from conservatives, demoting his special envoys to advisors.69

and politics of pan-Islamism and aspiration of the political unity of the world of Islam. Therefore Khamenai has sought to depict the popular uprising as a replay of 1979 Islamic Revolution.
The tension between the *Vali-e-Faqih* and the Presidency became quite obvious when the Leader insisted on reinstating the Iranian Intelligence Minister, Haider Moslehi, when he was ousted by the President in April 2011. Khamenai even went to the extent of giving Ahmadinejad an ultimatum to either accept his decision to reinstate the Intelligence Minister or resign from the Presidency. Moslehi was reinstated; but to show his annoyance, Ahmadinejad boycotted the Presidential palace for about eleven days, declined to chair cabinet meetings, and did not attend religious services at Khamenai’s home.70

Moslehi’s forced resignation not only antagonized the Leader but also the President’s past supporters, especially Ayatullah Taqi Mesbah Yazdi (Ahmadinejad’s spiritual mentor and member of Assembly of Experts), who said, “A human being who would behave in a way that angers his closest friends and allies and turns them into opponents is not logical for any politician.” He also added that disobeying the *Vali-e-Faqih* was equal to ‘apostasy’. Yazdi’s statements came after Ahmadinejad fired Moslehi without consulting the Leader. In his statement, the Expediency Council Secretary, Mohsen Rezai also said:

“Obstacles in the way of the nation’s progress can be removed if all political groups support the *Vali-e-Faqih*, and Iranian … officials should follow the Supreme Leader’s directives and avoid political disagreements because internal disputes could negatively affect important national missions.”71

Ahmadinejad and his allies were also accused of promoting a deviant movement which sought to synthesis ancient Persian nationalism with doctrines of Islam and thus minimizing the role of clergy.
Despite the alleged rift between Khamenai and Ahmadinejad, after the end of his presidencial term was immediately appointed by Khamenai a member of the Expediency Council.

PRESIDENT HASSAN ROUHANI (2013 – )

Mahmud Ahmadinejad was succeeded by Hassan Rouhani as Iran’s new President. While Rouhani during his election campaign emphasized on ‘moderation’ he is not a reformist. The only cleric on the ballot, Rouhani belongs to the Society of Combatant Clergy (SCC), the conservative antipode to the Assembly of Combatant Clergy (ACC) founded in 1988 by Mehdi Karroubi, Mohammad Khatami, and others notables in what would become Iran’s reform movement. For more than twenty years, Rouhani’s most important patron has been former President Ali Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani. But his ties to the Leader, Ayatullah Khamenai is also strong. After Rouhani stepped down as Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council in 2005, Khamenai made Rouhani his personal representative on the Council.72

President Rouhani’s major success on foreign policy front was an interim agreement signed between Iran and P5+1 i.e. Permanent members of U.N. Security Council (USA, Russia, Britain, France and China) and Germany on 24th November, 2013.

Lead negotiators for P5+1 and Iran met in Geneva on 15-16, October, to discuss elements of a possible framework for resolving questions about Iran’s nuclear programme. Experts from the P5+1 and Iran met in Vienna on 30-31 October to exchange detailed information on those elements. Lead negotiators met again on 7-
8 November to negotiate that framework, joined at the end by Foreign Ministers from the P5+1, but despite extending the talks past midnight on 9th November, were unable to agree on that framework and agreed instead to meet again on 20\textsuperscript{th} November.\textsuperscript{73}

On 24\textsuperscript{th} November, 2013, the Foreign Ministers of Iran and P5+1 agreed to a six-moth interim deal that involves the freezing of key parts of the Iranian nuclear programme in exchange for a decrease in sanctions, to provide time to negotiate a permanent agreement. Iran will stop enriching uranium beyond 5\% and will stop development of their Arak plant. The U.N. will be granted greater access for inspections. In exchange Iran will receive relief from sanctions of approximately 7 billion US dollars and no additional sanctions will be imposed. The United States President Barak Obama called the agreement an ‘important first step’.\textsuperscript{74}

Following further negotiation of implementation details, a summary of which was released by the US government on 16\textsuperscript{th} January 2014, implementation began from 20\textsuperscript{th} January 2014.

The P5 +1 and Iran held meetings at the senior levels on February 18-20, 2014 and agreed on a framework for future negotiations. On February 20, 2014 the IAEA reported that Iran was implementing its commitments to the P5+1 and its commitments to the IAEA under the joint statement of 24\textsuperscript{th} November, 2013.\textsuperscript{75}

Iran’s agreement with P5+1 would not have been possible without the endorsement of the Leader, Ayatullah Ali Khamenai. He for the first time, even while expressing his lack of optimism about direct negotiations with the United States, explicitly said, “But I don’t oppose them.” And while noting that Washington seems to have no inclination to complete the nuclear negotiations and resolve the issue, Khamenai
nevertheless said that the solution to the conflict “is very near and very simple.” Iran’s only demand, he said, was recognition of its right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes, and it would be ‘very simple’ to eliminate foreigners’ concerns. “They can implement the nuclear agency’s legal regulations; from the start, we, for our part, have had no opposition to implementing these supervisions and regulations.”

THE IMPACT OF THE RISE OF IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS ON THE POSITION OF KHAMENAI IN IRANIAN POLITICS

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps of Iran or IRGC (Pasdaran-e-Enqelab-Iran) was founded in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution as an ideological custodian charged with defending the Islamic Republic against internal and external threats, but analysts say it has expanded far beyond its original mandate. Today, the IRGC presides over a vast power structure with influence over almost every aspect of Iranian life. The country’s premier security institution of more than one hundred thousand strong personnel, the IRGC fields an army, navy, and air force, while managing Iran’s ballistic missile arsenal and irregular warfare operations through its elite Quds Force. It current forces consist of naval, air and ground components of total roughly 1, 50,000 fighters. The IRGC’s primary role is internal security, but can assist Iran’s regular army, which has about 3, 50,000 soldiers.

During Iran-Iraq war, the IRGC transformed into a conventional fighting force organized into a command structure similar to other armies in the world. The IRGC also controls Iran’s Basij Resistance Force, an all volunteer paramilitary wing, which consists of as many as one million volunteers.
As the IRGC emerged from fighting Iran’s war with Iraq, it became engaged in reconstruction in the 1990s, acquiring a taste for commercial dealings and associated profits.\textsuperscript{79}

The IRGC has now become one of Iran’s most influential economic players, wielding control over strategic industries, commercial services, and black-market enterprises. The IRGC oversees or owns important interests in numerous sectors of the Iranian economy including oil, constructions, agriculture, mining, transportation, defence industry and import-export.\textsuperscript{80} The IRGC are also thought to control much of Iran’s burgeoning business investment in Dubai. Iran using its business investment in Dubai as a means of bypassing international sanctions, and Dubai commonly referred to as ‘the best city in Iran’.

The IRGC’s political influence began its ascendancy as a counterweight to former reformist President Mohammad Khatami. The IRGC political involvement grew as networks of active and retired IRGC officers began to take on an increasingly political role that enabled the IRGC to emerge as a sort of Praetorian Guard for conservatives seeking to displace Khatami supporters from political power.\textsuperscript{80}

In the 2003 Municipal elections, former IRGC members or associates won a majority of seats on numerous city and town councils, paving the way for their entry into legislative politics during the 2004 Parliamentary elections. Many of the 152 new members elected to the \textit{Majlis} in February, 2004 had IRGC backgrounds, and 34 former IRGC officers held senior-level posts in the government. During the June 2005 Presidential elections, there were besides Mahmud Ahmadinejad, three candidates with an IRGC pedigree.\textsuperscript{81}
The IRGC is also playing a major role with Khamenai’s blessings in defending Iranian strategic interests in the region through its Special Forces unit ‘the Quds Force’ or Jerusalem Force which is responsible for the exter-territorial operations. The Quds Force reports directly to the Supreme Leader. Its size is estimated at 15,000 troops. The Quds Force was created during the Iran-Iraq war as a special unit from the broader IRGC forces. Recently it is believed that the Quds Force is helping Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria in latter’s fight to quell rebellion against the government. The Quds Force is also helping the Iraqi government in its fight against Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) terrorists, who have occupied the large areas of north-western Iraq as well as northern parts of Syria and declared a so-called independent state naming it the Islamic State (IS) under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. IS is an equal threat to Iran and its allies Syria and Iraq thus the Quds Force is helping both the countries.

The IRGC has in recent years acquired all the trappings of ‘a state within a state’, accountable only to the Leader, Ayatullah Khamenai and increasingly present or even dominant in many facets of society.

The degree to which Khamenai controls the IRGC’s foreign and domestic activities remains unclear. One can rightly point to the fact that Khamenai is commander-in-chief and has the power to appoint and dismiss the IRGC’s leadership.

The relationship between Khamenai and the IRGC is increasingly symbiotic, politically expedient for the Leader and economically expedient for the IRGC. It is most likely that Khamenai provides overall guidance to the IRGC and that IRGC commanders interpret that guidance in implementing operations and day-to-day activities. As he does with the activities of other institutions in Iran, Khamenai maintains oversight of these IRGC activities through his special representatives and
other informal networks. His oversight apparatus enables him to order course corrections if they are needed. The IRGC are publicly deferential to the Supreme Leader, and it is unlikely that the IRGC would undertake activities expressly against Khamenai’s wishes.83

It is clear that the IRGC’s political and economic role is likely to increase due to the uniquely intimate relationship between the Iranian political elites and the IRGC, and its close relationship with the Supreme Leader, Khamenai. There is no doubt the IRGC has developed into a major power center; however, its leadership and rank-and-file members have remained dependant on its loyalty towards the Supreme Leader.84

The study of Ayatullah Khamenai’s period clearly shows that although he lacked the credentials of his predecessor, he has played an astute role in the politics of Iran and has survived for the last 25 years. This shows that the Islamic Republic’s stability is not contingent upon having a popular, charismatic leader. The predictions frequently made during the Khomeini era—that Leader’s death would bring the regime’s demise— are no longer made with regards to Khamenai
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CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION
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Iran, formerly known as Persia, officially the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979, is located in the region of West Asia, bordering the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf in the south and the Caspian Sea in the north. It shares borders with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan in the north, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the south, Iraq in the west and Turkey in the northwest. Iran has a significant geo-political importance due to its location at the crossroads of Central Asia, West Asia and South Asia. Today Iran draws global attention over its controversial nuclear programme which continues to haunt its relations with the US and the Western world.

Iran’s uniqueness lies in the fact that it is the world first modern Constitutional theocracy. The Islamic Republic of Iran was formed in 1979 after a revolution inspired by a fusion of conservative and radical ideas led and guided by Ayatullah Ruhullah Khomeini. The revolution owed its success as much to the convergence of secular and religious opponents of the Shah as to the leadership provided by Ayatullah Khomeini. The Islamic Revolution of Iran under the leadership of Khomeini was one of the most momentous events in the 20th century. It is considered to be the first mass movement led by a religious personality. It not only overthrew the US backed monarch Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was in power since 1941 but also abolished the 2500 years old institution of monarchy in Iran. It also replaced secular laws with Islamic codes of law.
The Constitution of the Islamic Republic adopted on October 24, 1979 and enforced on December 3, 1979 institutionalized the theory of Velayat-e-Faqih (Governance of the religious jurist) advanced by Khomeini. The Constitution has been called ‘a hybrid of theocratic and democratic elements.’ It heralded a new era in the Iranian politics by establishing an Islamic Republic based on Shi’ite faith. Iran has a very complex and unique political system. It is outside of conventional left-right political spectrum. It is based on a hierarchy of religious-political institutions headed by the Office of Vali-e-Faqih or the Leader. The office of the Leader is a novel institution in the sense that it is above the office of the President which is the highest popularly elected office. The Leader is the highest religious and political authority in the state based on his mastery of Islamic laws.

The Islamic Republic particularly, the Office of the Vali-e-Faqih is based on the Shi’ite beliefs. Iran adopted Shi’ite Islam as an official religion in the year 1501 under the Safavid dynasty. As compared to Sunni Islam, in Shiism clergy enjoy a special status and are not subservient to the temporal rulers, that is why the clergy historically have played a dominant role in the politics of Iran.

Under the Safavid dynasty the clergy were a formal part of the state executive. They were the court ministers apart from being in charge of the judicial system. The Safavid monarchs also granted several favours to the clergy so that they never posed any significant challenge to their rule. The clergy also acted as an alternative authority which enabled them to redress the grievances of the general masses.

During the rule of the Qajars the pre-eminent role of the Shia clergy continued to determine the relation between them and the monarchy. The clergy were entrusted with the collection of Islamic taxes (Zakat and khums) and were also authorized to impose penalties in case of violation of Islamic laws. However after 1850, the
relation between the clergy and the Qajar rulers began to sour particularly due to latter’s modernization programmes under which secular courts and modern schools were established and the modernization of the army took place. The relations got worse during the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11.

The Constitutional Revolution was the first such revolution in this part of the world. It was a collective effort by the religious class, secularists and the bazaaris to challenge the arbitrariness of the Qajar rulers. The major demand of the Constitutional Movement was to establish a constitutional monarchy in Iran. Its main focus was on limiting the absolute and arbitrary powers of the monarch by establishing a parliament and an independent judiciary.

The then Qajar King Muzaffar ud Din Shah ultimately capitulated to the demands, of the constitutionalists. A constituent assembly was elected which drafted a Constitution modelled after western liberal Constitutions. By the decree of Muzaffar Ud din Shah, the Constitution came into force on 30th December 1906. The Constitutional Revolution was a significant event in the Iranian history. For the first time in the history of Iran, a constitutional monarchy was established, which lasted until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. However, Iran was a constitutional monarchy in theory only, in practice it functioned as a royal dictatorship.

The divisions between the constitutionalists and the anti-constitutionalists on the one hand and between the clergy and the secularists on the other hand, weakened the Constitutional Revolution which ultimately ended in 1911. The end of the Constitutional Revolution paved the way for the rise of Reza Khan, who served as a Prime Minister under the last Qajar King Ahmad Shah. In 1925 with the deposition of King Ahmad Shah by the Majlis (Parliament), the rule of Qajar dynasty came to an end and Reza Khan ascended to the throne as Reza Shah Pahlavi. The Pahlavi
Dynasty was the last dynasty to rule Iran. Reza Shah considered Kamal Ataturk of Turkey as his role model, inspired by his modernization plans he initiated a series of reforms in the field of education, judiciary and religion. The numbers of secular schools for both boys and girls were increased, the custom of women wearing veils was banned, the clergy were forbidden to preach in public and the mosque activities were heavily restricted and regulated. These reform measures antagonized the clergy, therefore when Reza Shah abdicated in favour of his son Muhammad Reza Shah in 1941, the move was appreciated by the clergy.

The clergy, in the initial years of the rule of Muhammad Reza Shah, stood by him. During his confrontation with the then Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadeq in 1953 over the issue of nationalization of oil industry by the latter and subsequent deposition of Mossadeq from his post in the US backed coup, the clergy supported the Shah. The clergy was against Mossadeq’s growing secularist and leftist tendencies. During this period Shah in order to please Ulema paid visits to shrine cities of Mashhad and Qom and donated generously to the theological centres located in those cities.

However, the period of goodwill between the Shah and the clergy came to an end when the former introduced his modernization programmes under a series of reforms collectively called the White Revolution (1963). The reform proposals particularly the land reforms and the women suffrage, antagonized the clergy. The death of the then most senior Ulema of Iran, Ayatullah Burojerdi in 1961 gave rise to those Ulema who were not supportive of Burojardi’s conciliatory and cooperative policies. The most prominent among them was Ayatullah Khomeini, who rejected a quietist conception of Islam and considered Political engagement a ‘sacred responsibility’.
Khomeini became the most vocal critic of the Shah’s policies. He opposed the White Revolution and the granting of capitulating rights to the US advisors and military personnel and their dependents in Iran. Shah accused Khomeini of leading rebellion against his regime and called him an agent of Egypt, which eventually added to his growing popularity among the ordinary Iranians. In the end when the Shah was unable to stop Khomeini’s anti-Shah statements and ability to mobilize people against him, he sent Khomeini to exile in 1965 to Turkey. Later Khomeini moved to Iraq where he spent 13 years in exile.

In the decade prior to 1978 the Shah ruled absolutely with the help of the non-political institutions, he ignored the Constitution, crushed his opponents and suppressed political dissent. The widespread discontent—political, economic, social—caused by an unresponsive and corrupt political system led to protests in 1977. In the beginning the westernized urban professionals and students from the secular universities came out to protest. Later they were joined by bazaar merchants and the students from the theological seminaries. A mention may be made of Ali Shariati, who made significant contribution to the protest movements of 1977.

Dr Ali Shariati, French educated social scientist, who used to lecture at the Hussain-e-Ershad Institute in Tehran, emerged as another critic of Shah. He was not a Marxit but said ‘to have recast Shia Islam into a revolutionary mould’. Shariati’s use of Shia beliefs with the Marxist theories of oppression and exploitation attracted many in Iran. According to Shariati the essence of Shi’ism is to fight all kinds of oppression and injustice. His interpretation of Shia beliefs of Ashura and waiting for the twelfth Imam in fighting tyranny and creation of a classless society became very popular among university students. His growing
popularity annoyed the Shah and Shariati was arrested on several occasions before being allowed to go to England where he died in 1977.

The clergy were divided on the issue. It was one section of clergy led by Ayatullah Khomeini which demanded fundamental changes by calling for the overthrow of the monarchy and the creation of an Islamic state led by the ulema. Khomeini favoured radical Islam, rejected quietism and emphasized on activism. He very cleverly used people’s discontent against the Shah. Mohammad Reza Shah’s extravagant lifestyle, his over emphasis on the pre-Islamic Iranian civilization, sane regards for Shia Islamic beliefs and culture, his proximity with the United States-were all manipulated by Khomeini against the Shah. Khomeini’s success lies in the fact that he maintained an uncompromising stance and skillfully drew all opposition forces to his side. The year 1978 marked the transformation of the protest movement to a popular Islamic revolution, supported by urban masses.

Upon the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Iran was declared an Islamic Republic and the elections were held for the constituent assembly to draft the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. As the newly elected constituent assembly was dominated by Khomeini’s loyalists, it successfully incorporated the Office of the Vali-e-Faqih based upon Khomeini’s version of the Velayat-e-Faqih, which he had developed during his exile in Iraq and which was later also published as a book entitled ‘Hokumat-e-Islami’. Khomeini became the first Vali-e-Faqih under the Constitution which came into force in December, 1979.

The term Velayat-e-Faqih means ‘guardianship or governance of the Jurist.’ According to Shia Islamic beliefs the Velayat (governance) originally is attributed to the God, His Prophet and the Twelve Holy Imams. The Prophet Mohammad on the commands of God not only appointed Imam Ali as his successor but also named
all the succeeding eleven Imams. The twelfth and the last Imam al-Mahdi is alive and went into occultation in 874 A.D. and upon his return, he will prevail justice and equality in the world.

The twelfth Imam Occultation period is divided into two parts, the lesser occultation (ghybat-e-sughra) and the greater occultation (ghybat-e-kubra). During the period of lesser occultation Imam used to appoint his deputies. The lesser occultation came to an end with the demise of the last appointed deputy in 941 A.D. After that greater occultation began which continues to exist till date and will come to an end with the reappearance of the twelfth Imam.

In the absence of the twelfth Imam, the clergy had taken over the responsibility to interpret and apply Sharia on a provisional basis. This was Velayat or guardianship or deputyship.

The earliest Shia jurists Sheikh Mufid, Sharif Murtuza and Sheikh Tusi deliberated upon the importance of the doctrine of Velayat-e-Faqih or the guardianship of a learned jurist. They were of the opinion that the jurists should undertake the wider role beyond their already well established role as the interpreter of the Quranic revelations, in their capacity as the general deputy of the twelfth Imam. The new role of the jurist was carefully worked out in all its details under the auspicious of Velayat-e-Fqih in the subsequent eras.

During the reign of Safavid rulers, clergy not only justified the authority of a religious jurist but extended it to the execution of the Sharia laws as they were considered ‘ulo al amr’ (those who posses authority) according to the verse of the Quran (4:59).
During the Qajar rule, the victory of *Usuli* school of thought over the *Akhbaris* paved the way for the institutionalization of the doctrine of *Velayat-e-Faqih* in the form of *Marja-e-Taqlid* or the source of emulation, the highest ranking cleric. The *Akhbaris* maintained that there was little scope of *ijtihad* (The process of reinterpretation of Sharia laws), as each individual Muslim had in Quran and in *hadith* (traditions), all he needed for guidance. They based Shia jurisprudence on ‘*akhbar*’ or tradition of the Prophet and the Imams and not on rational principles of the ‘*usul of fiqh*’ (jurisprudence) that are used in ‘*ijtihad*’, thus rejecting rational principle upon which ‘*ijtihad*’ and ‘*fiqh*’ were based, while the *Usulis* considered *ijtihad* necessary to reinterpret religious laws in the light of new understanding. This led to the emergence of *Mujtahid* or one qualified jurist to perform *ijtihad*. One or two clerics who stood out from among the *Mujtahids* were called *Marja-e-Taqlid*. This is how the authority of the clergy began to be seen as an alternative which could replace the corrupt rulers and fulfill the functions of the just ruler.

However, it was Ayatullah Khomeini who categorically spoke in favour of an absolute guardianship of the jurist and argued that it was the necessity of time to establish the rule of a learned *Faqih*. Khomeini cited a number of traditions where the jurists were described as the ‘fortresses of Islam’ and ‘the heirs to the Prophets’. As a jurist himself, Khomeini considered it vital to demonstrate the validity of his interpretation of *Velayat-e-Faqih* by reference to the scriptures. The most important tradition to which Khomeini referred to support his version of *Velayat-e-Faqih* was the ‘*Maqbulah*’ (accepted) tradition involving interrogatory between the Sixth Imam Jafar al-Sadiq and his disciple Umar bin Hanzalah, in which Imam Sadiq asserted that in case of disagreement among believers they ought to visit learned jurist rather than visit any temporal authority. Khomeini maintained that the tradition was directly attributed to the Sixth Imam and was the legal warrant for jurists not only
to be the arbiters of disputes but to exercise executive power i.e. to rule over society.

Based on Khomeini’s interpretation of *Velayat-e-Faqih*, the office of the *Vali-e-Faqih* under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the highest office. All religious and political powers are vested in the office of the *Vali-e-Faqih* hence the powers of the Leader are far beyond those of any contemporary Head of the State. Iranian political system is neither the American style presidential system nor the British style parliamentary system.

According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the functions and the authority of *Vali-e-Faqih* or the Leader consists of defining the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, supervision of the proper execution of the general policies of the regime, issuing of decrees for national referenda, supreme command of the armed forces and declaration of war and peace. The Constitution also entrusts the Leader to resolve differences between the three organs of the state (the legislative, the executive and the judiciary) and regulation of their relations. He is also responsible for resolving problems irresolvable by conventional means. The power of making all major appointments and dismissals is vested in the office of the Leader. The *Vali-e-faqih* signs the President’s appointment orders after his election by the people. He appoints the half of the members of the powerful Guardian Council, who not only scrutinize the religious and the constitutional validity of the laws passed by the *Majlis* but also vet candidates for every election including presidential. The Leader or the *Vali-e-Faqih* appoints the members of the Expediency Council who arbitrate between the Guardian Council and the Parliament in case a deadlock occurs between them. The Leader also appoints the Head of the Judiciary as well as the top officials of the armed forces in his capacity.
as the Supreme Commander of the armed forces. He also appoints the Head of the radio and the television network of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Constitution also places the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), under the direct control of the Leader or the Vali-e-Faqih.

The Office of the Leader or Vali-e-Faqih is not directly elected by the Iranian people but it controls the entire governmental machinery. There is a separation of power between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary but the Supreme Leader stands above these organs of the government.

Iran is the only country in the world where the President does not control or command the armed forces and it is controlled by the religious jurist or the Supreme Leader. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is loyal to the Leader and the power of IRGC has risen immensely over the years benefiting the Leader.

Ayatullah Khomeini as the first Vali-e-Faqih of the Islamic Republic of Iran played the role of a supreme guide and a final authority over all decision makings during the period from 1979 until his death in 1989. The period of Khomeini was characterized by some unprecedented events which even threatened the very existence of the Islamic Republic. He played an astute role in various crisis be it the American embassy hostage crisis (1980), Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), internal power struggle between the first President Abul Hasan Bani-Sadr and the first Prime Minster Muhammad Ali Rajai, of the Islamic Republic or the mayhem created by the terrorist organization Mujahiddin-e-Khalq (MEK). Khomeini’s dominant role as powerful Vali-e-Faqih helped defuse this crisis.

Khomeini also played a decisive role in framing the post-revolutionary cultural, economic and foreign policy. The cultural policy that was put forward after the
victory of the Islamic Revolution was termed as the Cultural Revolution. Ayatullah Khomeini was the architect of this Cultural Revolution of the Islamic Republic which focused on the Islamic rather than pre-Islamic cultural identity of the Iranian people. The newly established Supreme Cultural Revolution Council initially closed universities for three years (1980-1983) and after reopening banned many books and purged thousands of students and lecturers out of the universities. The Cultural Revolution sometimes involved violence in taking over the university campuses. Higher education in Iran had many leftist forces who were opposed to Khomeini’s doctrine of Velayat-e-Faqih. The resistance to the regime’s control at many universities was largely unsuccessful. Under Cultural Revolution compulsory veiling upon women was imposed as well as musical programmes on television and in films was prohibited.

The economic policy of the Islamic Republic under Khomeini was committed to the Islamic ideals of social justice and the formation of an egalitarian society. It was based on his views expressed in his book entitled ‘Hokumat-e-Islami’, where he had criticized an ‘unjust’ economic order created by the western world that divided people into two groups: oppressors (mostakbarin) and oppressed (mostazafin). However he was also a staunch defender of property rights and the role of the private sector which reinforced his alliance with the bazaar. Khomeini played an important role in arbitrating over disputes between the Islamist socialists in the Parliament and the traditional conservatives in the Guardian Council on the economic issues.

In the realm of foreign policy he popularised two slogans - The ‘Export of Revolution’ (sodor-e-Enqelab) and ‘Neither East nor West’ (nah sharq van a gharb). He wanted to export the Islamic Revolution to the regional countries so that
the Muslim masses, irrespective of their sectarian identity, could rise against the ruling monarchs. ‘Neither east nor west’ meant that Iran would pursue an independent foreign policy and would not be a camp follower of either USSR or US, the two superpowers of those times. Iran during that period also cultivated proxy allies in the form of Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hafiz al-Asad regime in Syria and Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine, in order to enhance its strategic interest in the region. These proxy allies continue to serve Iran’s strategic interests in the region.

The last days of Khomeini were marred by the issue of his successor. Earlier Khomeini had named Ayatullah Ali Montazari as his successor but later changed his mind and removed Montazari, over his criticism of many of Khomeini’s policies. Khomeini before his death on 4th June, 1989 nominated the then President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ali Khamenai as his successor.

When Ali Khamenai was named by Khomeini as his successor, he was a mere ‘Hojjatulislam’, not a ‘Mujtahid’ (a high ranking cleric). The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran stipulated that the Vali-e-Faqih or the Leader must be a ‘Mujtahid’. Therefore, the Constitution was amended and the clause which referred that only a ‘Mujtahid’ could become a Vali-e-Faqih was replaced by the clause that there should be a single Faqih, having public support and knowledge of social and political issues as well as Islamic jurisprudence.

Ali Khamenai neither possessed religious credentials nor charisma of his predecessor. In the early years of his leadership he relied on the then President Ali Akbar HashmiRafsanjani, who played an crucial role in elevating Khamenai to the office of the Leader. Rafasnjani was the chairman of the Assembly of Experts which formally elected Khamenai as Vali-e-Faqih.
However, by the end of President Rafsanjani’s second term in 1997, his relations with Khamenai were not as good as that had been during the initial years of Rafsanjani’s first term of Presidency.

Rafsanjani was succeeded by the moderate Mohammad Khatami. His victory on the platform of reform was a result of growing discourse at that time between the conservative and the reformist factions in Iranian politics. The landslide victory of Khatami in 1997 strengthened the reformist forces. They demanded change in the office of Vali-e-Faqih therefore putting pressure on Khamenai to allow reform in the political system of the Islamic Republic. Ayatullah Khamenai did not appreciate Khatami’s reform agenda. He categorically rejected many reform policies of Khatami which could undermine his authority. Khatami led reformists, however, could not succeed in bringing about any change in the office of Vali-e-Faqih or even to posing any real threat to Khamenai as the Vali-e-Faqih.

At the end of the second term of Khatami’s presidency, his failure to implement his reform agenda as well as his unilateral approach towards establishing good relations with the US, which the US snubbed by including Iran into the ‘axis of evil’, emboldened the hardliners. With Khamenai’s backing a hardliner Mahmud Ahmadinejad won the presidential election in 2005.

Ahmadinejad was considered a ‘protégé’ of Khamenai who possessed all the revolutionary fervour of the early years of the Islamic Revolution. Ahmadinejad’s provocative statements on Israel and the U.S. further deteriorated Iran’s relations with the west. Iran’s nuclear issue was also a major bone of contention in its relations with the US and its allies. Khamenai emphasised that the nuclear energy was Iran’s right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Iran would never seek to build an atomic bomb, which he considered to be ‘un-Islamic’. But
Ahmadinejad’s defiant and audacious stand on the nuclear crisis complicated the efforts for the resolution of the nuclear crisis.

Ahmadinejad’s re-election in 2009 was marred by the controversies of electoral fraud, mismanagement. The Supporters of his nearest rival, the former Prime Minister Mir Husain Moussavi accused Vali-e-Faqih Khamenai of manipulating the election in order to secure victory for Ahmadinejad. There were massive protests on the streets of Tehran and some other cities. The protest movement acquired the name of Moussavi’s election campaign ‘green wave’ or ‘mowj-e-sabz’. It was the first time since Khamenai became the Vali-e-Faqih that slogans were shouted against him by the protestors of the Green Movement. The western media compared these protests to those of 1979 Islamic Revolution. However, with the massive crackdown on the protestors by the regime coupled with some weaknesses of the leadership of the Green Movement, the protests died down. Although the Green Movement failed to topple the Iranian leadership, it inspired many in the Arab world to stand against the totalitarian regimes in the region. The revolutionary wave, the ‘Arab Spring’ which began in 2010 succeeded in removing many autocratic regimes in the region. Khamenai called the ‘Arab Spring’ an ‘Islamic awakening’ which reflects his revolutionary ideals based upon the vision and politics of pan-Islamism and aspiration of the political unity of the world of Islam. Therefore Khamenai has sought to depict the popular uprising as a replay of 1979 Islamic Revolution.

One of the most striking features of the second presidential term of Mahmud Ahmadinejad was his rift with the Vali-e-Faqih. Ayatullah Khamenai opposed Ahmadinejad’s decision to appoint his relative to the post of the Vice-President. Later Khamenai compelled Ahmadinejad to reinstate intelligence minister, Haider
Moleshi, whom Ahmadinejad had removed from the post. Ahmadinejad and his allies were also accused of promoting ‘deviant current’ in the system.

Mahmud Ahmadinejad was succeeded by Hassan Rouhani in 2013. Rouhani is a centrist and has close relations with both Khamenai and the reformists. Khamenai supports Rouhani’s approach toward resolution of Iran’s long standing nuclear issue with the western countries. When Iran and the Permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany (P5+1) signed an interim nuclear deal on 24th November 2013, Khamenai lauded Rouhani’s efforts and hoped that the Rouhani government would solve Iran’s nuclear issue.

It may be pointed out that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) or Sepah has played a very significant role in enhancing the power and status of Ayatullah Khamenai. The IRGC is a constitutional body formally established on May 5 1979, with the aim of defending the Islamic Revolution and the Velayat-e-Faqih. With Khamenai’s blessings the IRGC now also plays a crucial role in Iran’s economic sector, oil sector, manufacturing and engineering sector. IRGC’s external wing the Quds Force is fighting Islamic State (IS) militants in Iraq and supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Asad in his fight against the Islamic State’s militants.

Khamenai has been leading Iran since 1989. He is now 75 years of age and recently has undergone a prostate surgery which has given rise to the speculation that his health is not in a good condition. Thus there is a speculation in the political circles that who would be his possible successor Many propose the name of former President Rafsanjani as a potential successor to Khamenai. Rafsanjani is believed to be the second most powerful man in Iran and currently chairs the Expediency Council. But he is five years older than Khamenai and does not enjoy credibility
among the hardliners of Iranian political establishment. Besides his reputation as Iran’s richest man makes him a source of popular resentment.

Another choice for the possible successor to Khamenai is Ayatullah Shahroudi, a moderate conservative and the former Head of the Iranian Judiciary. Shahroudi has good political acumem and his religious credentials are also respectable. But the fact that he was born and raised in Iraq could adversely affect his acceptability among Iran’s highly nationalistic population.

It is believed that in case of no obvious successor to Khamenai, the Office of the Leader may be replaced by a Shura (Consultative Council). However, the Iranian Constitution calls for the Leader to be a single Faqih thus substituting the Office of the Leader with the Shura would require an amendment in the Constitution. Earlier in 1989 amendment in the qualification for the office of the Leadership was made in order to elavate Khamenai to the office of the Leader. Hence a Constitutional amendment can bring out the necessary changes.

It may be concluded that Iran has a very unique and complex political system as it combines the elements of a modern constitutional Islamic theocracy with those of democracy. Although Iran may not be a genuine democracy in western sense yet it does have many democratic features like right to vote, right to contest election, right to form political groupings, regular periodic elections and elected religio-political institutions. One may point out that even the office of the Vali-e-Faqih is an elected office although not popularly elected.

Inspite of possessing unprecedented powers, the possibility of Vali-e-Faqih becoming a dictator seems to be remote. According to the Article 107 of the Iranian Constitution, the Vali-e-Faqih or the Leader is equal with rest of the people of the
country in the eyes of the law. There is an Assembly of Experts which monitors the activities of the Leader and if he performs any function which is contrary to the principles of the Constitution and the Sharia, he will stand removed from the office. He has been thus, made responsible and accountable for his acts of commission and omission.

It is true that the Leader wields extra-ordinary powers and has a final say in decision making but it is also true that he does not interfere in day to day functioning of the government. He intervenes only when the fundamental of the system is questioned. Largely the Leader plays the role of a guide, facilitator, mediator, arbiter and he is above the factional politics. However after the June 2009 controversial reelection of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, the Leader was accused by the western media of being openly siding with the conservative faction of Iranian politics. But this accusation seems to be biased for two reasons one, soonafter the June 2009 election, rift developed between Ahmadinejad and the Leader khamenai and two, election of a centrist candidate, Hassan Rouhani to the office of the President in 2013. Thus it clearly brings out the fact that the Leader stands for the Iranian political system and not for the individuals, he serves as the true custodian of the Constitution and the guide of the people.

It was feared that the Iranian political system, particularly the institution of Velayat-e-faqih would collapse after the demise of Khomeini however it has not only survived but become stronger in the post-Khomeini Iran.
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