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Religion and Politics: An Analytical Inquiry of Contemporary Reform Movements in Iran

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Abstract
The revolution of Iran has changed the political system of the country from monarchy to theocracy. The new structure has been under criticism regarding the compatibility of such a political ideology in the modern world. Today, there are three intellectual discourses in the Iranian socio-political structure, each with its own arguments and counter arguments. This paper examines the ideologies of the discourses, in the light of both their approaches and applications into the Iranian society. It will also provide an in-depth analysis of each discourse, and their present and future directions in the country.

Keywords
Ayatollah, Iran, Islam, politics, movement, reform, secularism, traditionalism.

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Introduction

The 1979 revolution in Iran changed the political system of the country from absolute monarchy to Shiʿite theocracy in the form of parliamentarian republic. Power lies in the hands of the clergy class, and an Ayatollah (Shiʿite cleric) as Supreme Leader is the head of state. The *Majlis* (Assembly) has become subject to the *Ithnā ʿAsharī Shiʿite* law, whose main duty is to prepare the country and its people for the reappearance of the Hidden *Imām*. The country continues to survive through the authority of the Ayatollahs, who in turn derive their power and divine authority through the 12 *Imām*s. According to the Shiʿite religio-political doctrine, sovereignty belongs to God, and the law of the state is the divine Decree, namely the Qurʾān, Prophetic traditions, and the *Imām*s.

The late Ayatollah R. Khumainī, who was the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, had promised the Iranians an Islamic role model society with an Islamic global agenda. He was quoted as saying that:

> The Islamic Republic intends to implement the ordinances of the Qurʾan and those of the messenger of God in all countries. Iran is the starting point. It intends to demonstrate to all countries that Islam is based on equality, brotherhood and unity.[1]

The Ayatollah appeared highly optimistic about Iran's ideology and structure of governance, and convinced that the ruling style would be able to attract many other societies to follow. For this reason, the Ayatollah urged his followers to apply the ideas on the Iranian society: "The best advice that can implement the revolution in Iran and export it into other places is sound advertising. Do not exaggerate anything. We have such a commodity that it requires no exaggeration."[2]

1. Farhang Rajaee, *Islamic Values and World View: Khumaini on Man, the State and International Politics* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1983), 83.
2. Ibid., 83.

Khumainī's colleagues were also determined to pursue the goals and objectives of their leader. The then Iranian Prime Minister, Hussain Mūsavī, addressed the United Nations General Assembly in October 1981 that, "We are determined to build a new world on the basis of the sublime teaching of Islam for the salvation of mankind and to offer humanity that thirst for justice in a new framework of human values."[3]

Nonetheless, after more than three decades, the Iranian society still seems to be distant from such ideals as promised by the founder of the Islamic Republic. Hundreds of political and human rights activists, intellectuals, journalists, Sunnis, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Bahāī leaders and followers are behind bars or have been executed, with stereotype charges such as *Muḥārabah* (waging war against God), *Mufsid Fil Arḍ* (committing corruption on the earth), and others.[4] Once a fast-growing and stable country, Iran was ranked 35th after Rwanda in the "2011 Most Failed State Index."[5] Economically, the country has been retreating since the Islamic revolution;[6] while socially, it suffers from various problems such as high rates of drug addictions,[7] and other moral issues.[8]

3. Robin W. Carlsen, *The Imam and His Islamic Revolution* (British Colombia, Victoria: The Snow Man Press, 1980), 119.
4. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN (2013), available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A-HRC-1966_en.pdf (accessed 26 February 2013).
5. "2011 Most Failed States Index," *Fund For Peace*, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/17/2011_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings (accessed 11 March 2013).
6. "BTI 2012: Iran Country Report," Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI*, available at http://www.btiproject.de/fileadmin/Inhalte/reports/2012/pdf/BTI%202012%20Iran.pdf (accessed 10 March 2013).
7. "Addicted to Death: Execution for Drug Offences in Iran," *Amnesty International*, available at http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/090/2011/en/0564f064-e965-4fad-b062-6de232a08162/mde130902011en.pdf (accessed 12 March 2013).
8. Kayvān Buzurgmihr, "Head of Sociology Association of Iran Announces: Drop in Prostitution Age in Iran," available at http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/drop-in-prostitution-age-in-iran.html (accessed 13 March 2013).

The theocratic political system of Iran is under criticism by many Iranians, particularly secularist intellectuals and political activists, with regard to both the compatibility of such a system in the modern world as well as its three decades of social, political and economic performance. Some of the questions that arise are the kind of responses Islam can provide for various socio-politico-economic issues in Iran; if the many social values that Islam enjoins in the human society are put to practice in Iran's current political system, and more importantly, what Iranians wish for and the direction they are headed.

In such an unpredictable scenario, different intellectual discourses emerge in the Iranian worldview in relation to their future path and quest for development. The present study aims to examine the discourses and their influences on contemporary Iranian society. In the first part, the prevalent reformist and renewal approaches in the Muslim society are discussed. In the second, the factor of "religion" in the course of socio-political reforms in Muslim societies including Iran is analysed with reference to western concepts of secularism and modernity. In the third, the three major ongoing discourses in Iran in the light of their three decades of performance are discussed; and the final part is devoted to the strength analysis of each discourse in present day Iran.

Analytical considerations

Muslim societies have witnessed different attempts for reforms and renewals in different ways and contexts. While all attempts have aimed at answering the challenges of the modern age, the lack of consensus over the methods employed prevails. Such attempts can be classified into three broad categories: (1) Reformists who champion an Islamic renewal of internal reforms, and believe that Muslims should purify Islam by returning to the original principles of the religion. Among them are well-known thinkers such as Rashīd Riḍā, Muḥammad

Iqbal, Syed Jamāluddīn Afghānī, Muhammad ʿAbduh, and Abū al-Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī; (2) Thinkers such as Muhammad Charfī in Tunisia believe that Islam as a religion should be respected, and that Muslims should embrace new ideas as they are. Being highly influenced by secularist thoughts, this category does not recognise any role for religion in the social, political and economic life; (3) Scholars with a hermeneutic approach to Islam such as Abdul Karim Surūsh in Iran believe in the active role religion should play in the social, political and economic segments, at the same time, welcome western concepts and ideas.[9]

The common factor among the above three categories is their demand for changes, but, while the first group makes no connection with current rules such as modernity, modernisation and secularism, and emphasises inward or self-reform, the second group is highly engaged with modern concepts, and the third category seeks mutual reforms both in modern and Islamic concepts, thus championing a happy marriage between them.[10] Moreover, the central debate in all three approaches, particularly between the second and the third revolves around the concepts of "secularism"[11] and "modernity,"[12] although perceived differently in every society,

9. Tahā Jābir Al-Alwani, "Toward an Islamic Alternative in Thought and Knowledge," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Science* 6, no. 1 (1989): 1–2; see also Francis Robinson, "Islamic Reform and Modernity in South Asia," Modern Asian Studies 42, no. 2–3 (2008): 259–60.
10. Robinson, "Islamic Reform and Modernity in South Asia," 260–1.
11. The term "Secularism" refers to this-worldly orientation and critical attitude toward religion especially clerical authority, without necessarily rejecting the religion. See Peter H. Van Ness, ed., *Spirituality and the Secular Quest* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), especially its Introduction. However, the Religious-conservatives have considered it equal with irreligiosity, godlessness and atheism. See Caron Nathalie, "Laicite and Secular Attitudes in France," in *Secularism and Secularity, Contemporary International Perspective*, ed. Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar (Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture (ISSSC), 2007), 113.
12. "Modernity" is a complex term circled by conflicting methods of analysis, value judgments, and sentiments. But, the intellectual tradition is to define modernity in terms of transformations in the human

based on ground realities. For instance, in India, hardly any struggle exists between the religious institutions and the state and civil structures. Given the two major beliefs, Islam and Hinduism in India as well as a number of other religions and sects, secularism in the Indian context is understood in terms of tolerance towards other religions.[13] On the other hand, given the high role of the Church in medieval Europe, secularism is understood in terms of: (1) separation of religion from this-worldly affairs; (2) rational handling of social issues; and (3) individualist approach to religion.[14]

Against this background, the present study tries to analyse different intellectual streams regarding the socio-political reform in Iran. It specifically examines three discourses and their influences on the contemporary Iranian society. They are divided into three categories: (1) Religious-Conservative (traditionalist); (2) Religious-Reformist; and (3) Secular-Modernist. However, before embarking on the main discussion, the religion factor as key element in the course of socio-political reform in the Muslim societies needs to be evaluated.

Religious reforms in Muslim societies

Religion constitutes the core of tradition, culture and the integrative value system of the society. At the beginning of the

psyche empowering him/her to be active rather than remaining passive. See Farzin Vahdat, "Iran and the two forces of modernity," *Frontline*, available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehran-bureau/2010/08/iran-and-the-two-faces-of modernity.html (accessed 16 March 2013).

13. Asghar Ali Engineer, "Secularism in India," in *Secularism and Secularity, Contemporary International Perspective*, ed. Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar (Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture (ISSSC), 2007), 152.
14. Dencik Lars, "The Paradox of Secularism in Denmark: From Emancipation to Ethnocentrism?," in *Secularism and Secularity, Contemporary International Perspective*, ed. Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar (Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture (ISSSC), 2007), 127.

19th century, a wide range of independent Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Catholic kingdoms shared the basic notion of the sacral nature of government. In these traditional religio-political systems, the ruler was either a "God" or an agent of God, and the ideological basis of the state was provided entirely by religious ideas. Religion, which in the traditional pattern, had been strongly supported and regulated by royal authority, suddenly enthrusted upon them an autonomy for which they were ill prepared. As a result, states, which in the traditional form had been legitimised by religious ideas, were suddenly confronted with a crisis of legitimacy. Under Western rule, the colonial areas were held together by vastly superior military, technological, economic, and administrative powers but with its demise, the new states of the Third World are faced with legitimacy crisis.

Specifically, the Western notion of representative government was an important part of the external attack on Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Catholic traditional religio-political systems in the early 19th century; yet, this notion was more effective in discrediting indigenous tradition than in creating a legitimising force of its own among the people of developing societies. As a result, while independence was achieved in the 1940's and 1950's, people were still divided into considerably secularised elites and largely traditional masses. The question that arose was: could an elite maintain its political leadership solely on the basis of secular ideals which were still foreign to the masses? Consequently, religion, as a key factor in social, economic and political structures, once again presented itself as an answer to the situation.

Religious interest groups, religious political parties, and religious communal movements become prominent actors in politics. Individual religious leaders and groups utilised sacred symbols to mobilise the masses for national struggles, internal revolt, such as the recent "Arab Spring" (2012–2013) election campaigns, or even riots aimed at other religious minorities. Even when the Islamic states and Islamic laws undergo

secularisation, the *ʿUlamāʾ* (religious leaders) lead national level movements, Islamic political parties present significant challenges to their secular opponents, and a mobilised hard-line Muslim minority carves out a separate area for itself. The best example in this regard is *Tiḥrīk e Tālibān e Pakistan* (TTP), which has its own controlled area in Pakistani's tribal region where its version of sharīʿah laws are being implemented.

As far as the conception of certain social values such as secularism and modernity in Iran is concerned, Iranian intellectuals have their own perceptions of such terms. According to Abdul Karim Surūsh, the Iranian conservative class regarded "secularism" as anti-religion, "modernity" as "westoxication," and "modernisation" as "cultural onslaught of technology and the decline of religion."[15] Surūsh further argues:

> Whether 'the West' is the Western world, its culture, or certain condemned parts of it! Is the West a particular set of ideas, a way of being human, a method of administration and organization, the embodiment of egotism, a form of history being realized, the onslaught of technology and decline of tradition, U.S. foreign policy, or various other things?[16]

Indeed, Surūsh's proposal is hardly easy to be generalised on the entire Iranian history as four generations of intellectuals have existed in contemporary Iran. The first generation emerged in the 1800's, immediately prior to the constitutional monarchy which was fully influenced by the Ottoman Empire (Usmanī Sultanate) and Russia, of which Iranian self-seekers and notables were impressed with. The second generation was associated with the establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty, which was responsible for reinforcing the political philosophy of

15. Afshin Matin, "Abdolkarim Sorush and the Secularization of Islamic Thought in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 30, no. 1–2 (1997): 108.
16. Ibid.

authoritarianism in Iran. This generation had conceptualised modernity in terms of the economic and industrial development initiated by the late Riḍā Shāh Pahlavī. The third was a revolutionary and radical generation, which played a significant role in bringing the 1978/1979 uprising into power. The fourth generation consists of critics of the three previous generations. The latter, in fact, emphasises the deconstruction of previous discourses and in the process, offers the construction of a fundamentally modernist discourse as an alternative.[17] While the first and second generations discovered the West and recognised its superiority, the third generation loathed it, and the fourth generation presently pushes for learning from the Western philosophy,[18] despite internal division on how to do so to develop the Iranian society in the modern age. Accordingly, the present intellectual reforms and renewal debates, which will be explained in the next section, are in fact, an internal affair, with the fourth generation.

Triangle of reform, renewal, secularism

Indeed, the fourth intellectual generation of Iran is divided over the direction of reforms and renewal. Such a division is evident among the three principal identities rooted in: (1) traditionalist conception of Islam; (2) Islamic reformism; and (3) secular modernity.

To understand the traditionalist conception of Islam, championed by the "religious-conservative" requires an overview of the theoretical background of the Shiʿite religion. Shiʿism is essentially a political religion with its roots in the historical controversy over the succession of the Prophet Muhammad. The Shiʿite doctrine asserts that after the demise of the Prophet, ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib was the divinely appointed *Imām* to the Ummah, who was succeeded by 11 *Imām*s from

17. Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 46–53.
18. Ibid., 59.

his descendants, with the 12th having disappeared, but will reappear before Resurrection Day. The Shiʿite doctrine recognises all the *Imām*s as infallible leaders and the only source of religious instruction and guidance. While the Sunnites looked upon the Caliph as the religio-temporal head of all the Muslim community chosen by consensus, the Shiʿite considered the *Imām* as both the temporal and spiritual head, with the authority derived directly from God rather than the consent of the people. Upon the mysterious disappearance of the 12th *Imām*, the collective body of the Shiʿite *ʿUlamāʾ* began to exercise the prerogatives of the office pending his expected return.

Retrospectively, the Shiʿite religious scholars have been divided into two factions: *Uṣūlīyyūn* (rationalists) and *Akhbārīyyūn* (traditionalists). While the former favours interpretation and legal reasoning, the latter rejects such tools for their confidence in the reappearance of the Hidden *Imām* to bring justice to the entire world. The *Akhbārīyyūn* school was dominant till the closing years of the Ṣafavīd Era (1501–1736) in Iran. Following the fall of the Ṣafavīd dynasty, the *Uṣūlīyyūn* School started growing with Aqā Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbahānī (d. 1792) as its pioneer. The school provided the Shiʿite clergies with jurisprudence as a tool to actively intervene in socio-politico-economic issues. As a result, a powerful class known as *Marājiʿ Taqlīd* (sources of emulation) with defined hierarchical structure emerged, which included the *Ḥujjat al-Islām*, *Āyatullāh*, and Grand *Āyatullāh*, all bearing the title *Nāyib-e Imām-e Zamān* (Deputy of the [Hidden Twelfth] *Imām*), and declared that the common Shiʿite should follow one *Marjaʿ*.[19]

With such theoretical and institutional developments, the Shiʿite clergies remained prudential to claim any given political responsibility until the outbreak of the 1979 revolution; and the appearance of Khumainī in the Iranian

19. Moojan Momen, "Usūlī, Akhbāri, Shaykhī, Bābī: The Tribulations of a Qazvīnī Family," *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2003): 317.

political horizon whose supporters "called *Imām*, that is, one who had a message from God, a claim unheard (of sic) since the time of the holy Prophet."[20] Given Khumainī's charismatic personality, the situation was relatively quite stable without much theoretical sophistication; but with his death in 1989, efforts were required to legitimise further the role of clergies in power. Since then, the main technical and theoretical debate in traditionalist discourse has revolved around the two concepts of Shiʿite religion on which present-day theocratic system is laid upon, namely *Marjaʿe-Taqlīd* (Source of Emulation) and *Vilāyat al-Faqīh* (Rule of Jurist-Consultant) in the light of another concept called *Ijtihād* (independent reasoning).[21]

According to the concept of *Vilāyat al-Faqīh*, "during the period of the Mahdi's occultation, the highest and most learned jurist in a Muslim country could legitimately administer (the sic) government and implement the provisions of the Shariʿah."[22] This doctrine, which in fact, has close resemblance with Christian millenarianism,[23] radicalised the role of the clergy class from a passive waiting-group into an active facilitator with divinely given authority, to take care of every aspect of the society till the reappearance of *Imām Mahdī*.[24] Such is the reason for the reservation of the adherents and leaders of the traditionalist discourse about the theoretical and doctrinal discourse. Instead of trying to play with their religious notion card, known as Shiʿite *Fiqh*

20. Paul Lewis, "An Ayatullāh Acts to Quell Fear of an Islamic Republic," *The New York Times*, 10 February 1979, sec. A, col. 1, 6.
21. Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual*, 70–80.
22. Bernd Kaussler, "Is the End Nigh for the Islamic Republic?," *Current Trends in Islamic Ideology* 13 (2012): 70.
23. Millenarianism (also millenarism) is the belief in a coming major transformation of society, after which all things will be changed, based on a one-thousand-year cycle. The term is more generically used to refer to any belief centred around 1000-year intervals. Millennialism is a specific type of millenarianism as it applies to Christianity. See J. P. Kirsch, "Millennium and Millenarianism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1911), available at http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10307a.htm (accessed 11 March 2013).
24. Kaussler, "Is the End Nigh," 70–1.

(jurisprudence), members of the discourse emphasised areas which can strengthen the hold of the clergy in power. Modern concepts such as globalisation, pluralism, human rights, etc. in the discourse were hardly given any consideration.[25]

The traditionalist discourse also claimed all credits of the revolution, at the entire expense of the contribution of other groups. Many social classes struggled for power during the revolution, whether pronouncing themselves as Islamic or otherwise, even though the West viewed the struggle as fundamentally one between the secular-monarchism and religious factions. In fact, several of the factions had contended within socialist, liberal-democratic and conservative circles. Nevertheless, most of them accepted Islam in the sense that explained a national identity for freedom and independence. Furthermore, some groups had ethnic orientation struggles for their own rights. They were neither concerned with religion nor Iran. For instance, Shaikh Izzaddīn, one of the Iranian Kurdish leaders, stated in an interview with *The New York Times*:

> We fought in the revolution not out of religious conviction but political goals. We want autonomy, our own parliament, our own language, our own culture. The revolution has destroyed despotism, but it has not ended discrimination against minorities. The revolution must go on until all major minority groups, the Kurds here (in Iran), the Turk in Azerbaijan, the Baluchs in the East [Baluchistan], win a measure of autonomy.[26]

The Islamic revolution, in fact, culminated over years of struggle by the various religious and non-religious groups, with the former emerging triumphant in the post-revolution quest for power. However, it appears that the traditionalist

25. Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual*, 81–6.
26. Nicholas Gage, "Iranian Kurds Return to Own Struggle," *The New York Times*, 1 March 1979, sec. A, col. 2, 3.

camp for the time being is powerful in its excessive access to the corridors of power in Iran, and is not ready to share the revolution's heritage with any other; yet is challenged by the Religious-Reformist camp, which demands for a reformulated version of Islam to make it compatible with the modern age since the Constitutional Revolution.[27] In fact, it was the Religious-Reformist discourse, rather than the Traditionalist's, which provided the clergy class with 98.2 percent of support votes in the 1979 referendum to establish a theocratic government. Notedly, the most organised political party in the 1940's–50's was the Tūdih Communist Party.[28] However, it encountered challenges by people like Kasravī during the 1940's, members of the *Mujahedin-e Khalq* in the mid-1960's, and Sharīʿati[29] during the 1970's.[30]

Later, people like Mehdi Bāzirgān,[31] for example, started restructuring Islamic thought to make it more compatible with the modern age. During the 1960's–70's, the religious reformist camp were divided into two main Islamic ideological projects:

27. Nastaran Moosavi, "Secularism in Iran: A Hidden Agenda?," in *Secularism and Secularity, Contemporary International Perspective*, ed. Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar (Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture (ISSSC), 2007), 140.
28. The Tūdih Party of Iran is an Iranian communist party. Formed in 1941, with Sulaymān Muḥsin Iskandarī as Head, it had considerable influence in its early years and played an important role during Mohammad Muṣaddiq's campaign to nationalise the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. In the early years after the Islamic Revolution, the Party supported Khumanī's government arguing that it was anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and anti-capitalists. However, leaders of Tūdih acknowledged that it had some problems with Shiʿite fundamentalists, at times tried to win them over by distinguishing between primary contradictions and the so-called secondary contradictions. Tūdih's ideological mentors in Moscow also recognised the new Islamic regime.
29. Ali Sharīʿatī (1933–1975) was a sociologist, with focus on the Sociology of Religion. He is held as one of the most influential Iranian intellectuals of the 20th century and has been called the "ideologue of the Iranian Revolution."
30. Moossavi, "Secularism in Iran," 141.
31. Mahdī Bāzirgān (1907–1995) was head of Iran's interim government, making him Iran's first prime minister after the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

one aimed at expanding the boundaries of engagement with modernity without breaking the tradition, while the other, the *Mujahedin*, championed the transfer of religious authority from clergies to revolutionary intellectuals, thus enabling them to guide the oppressed masses to a "Unitarian" (*Tawḥīd*) classless society.[32] But in their internal rivalry, the first project succeeded in attaining power, while the latter systematically and steadily turned against the Islamic Republic, initiating an armed struggle against the Khumainī regime in June 1981. For the time being, however, its exact ideological orientation and contents of its political programme were unclear. During the Shah's regime, SAVAK[33] characterised it as "Islamic Marxist," whereas in the post-1979 revolution, Khumainī branded it as "*Munāfiqīn*" or literally, "hypocrites," denoting the Shiʿite term for those who betrayed the Prophet during the early Islamic era. On the other hand, Khumainī was regarded unfavourably by some. For examples, the *Mujahedin* described Khumainī as one who was "worse than Hitler" and when compared to the Shah, *Rajavī* considered the latter to be "a noble and innocent man."[34]

In present-day Iran, the Religious-Reformists are generally identified with Muḥammad Khātamī (former reformist president of Iran), and its discourse is articulated in the context of opposition to absolute authority of the Supreme Leader, at times, maintaining strong religious inclination. Thus, these revolutionaries-turned-reformers do not identify themselves with the liberal ideas of Bāzirgān's National Front Party, instead passionately believe in Khumainī's revolutionary vision, and theoretically find themselves close to Ayatollah Muntaẓirī, the clergy, who was next to Khumainī in the early

32. Matin, "Abdolkarim Sorush," 97–8.
33. *Sāzimān-e Ittilāʿāt va Amnīyat-e Kishvar* (Organization of Intelligence and National Security) was the secret police, domestic security and intelligence service established by Iran's Mohammad Reza Shah with the help of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).
34. Sepehr Zabih, *Iran since the Revolution* (Maryland, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 108.

years of the revolution, but was later disgraced due to his disagreement with the founder of the Islamic republic on some major issues.[35] Overall, the Religious-Reformist discourse discloses that despite its roots in tradition, it advocates modernity; despite its religious nature, it advocates secularism; and it does not seek to maintain the politico-ideological status quo, however, favours radical change of the present structure.[36]

Nonetheless, on the ground, the Religious-Reformists exist in two organically linked levels: one popularly available to the urban middle class that are Religious-Nationalists; and the other, operating in academic circles known as the Religious-New-Thinker.[37] The latter is formed by a group of intellectuals known as Religious-Nationalists, who are influenced by the hermeneutical study of religion. Despite the division, all gave consensus on three main issues: first, they believed that Iran's national interests are inseparable from the Islamic identity and heritage; second, the route to progress is through reforms, thus, rejecting any revolutionary strategy; and third, despite regarding reforms as method, democracy is their goal.[38]

Their main mission is to break the monopoly of the clergy class over religious interpretation, and their arguments are guided by two important assumptions: first, the larger nature and function of the religion, and second, the religion's relationship with politics. In this regard, Ishkivarī can be quoted as one who maintains that although religion should play a major role in the life of the society, Islam does not mandate a specific form of government,[39] or Surūsh,[40] who divides the phenomenon of political rule into two distinct aspects: first,

35. Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual*, 122–3.
36. Ibid., 129.
37. Ibid., 121.
38. Ibid., 129.
39. Ibid., 132–3.
40. In the early years of Islamic revolution, Surūsh was a member of High Council of the Cultural Revolution, an organ formed to purge educational institutions from non-Islamic faculty and students, as well as to revise academic curricula. During this time, all higher institutions were shut down for two consecutive years.

administrative and managerial that is thoroughly unconcerned with religion; and second, ethical and normative in which religion can play a pivotal role,[41] thus drawing a demarcation between "political secularity" versus "philosophical secularity," and the "highly learned man" versus the "clergy."[42] Another famous thinker of this line is Muḥsin Kadīwar, who has come with his idea of *Fiqh-ul Muṣāliḥa* (Expedient Jurisprudence).[43]

Generally, the three aforementioned intellectuals believe that religion should be separated from governmental and managerial functions, yet remain in politics. Nevertheless, their method of achieving such functions is unclear particularly in adjusting with the concept of *Vilāyat al-Faqīh*, which according to the Iranian constitution, mediates between God and the people.[44] Thus far, the current concept has failed to give a clear-cut workable plan to show in what way its interpretation of Islam guarantees freedom of expression and how women and non-Muslims are to be treated. Besides this failure, both the Religion-Conservative and Religious-Reformist discourses are under challenge from the Secular-Modernist discourse.

Perhaps, the Secular-Modernist camp is the most underprivileged in the Iranian intellectual history particularly, during three decades of theocratic rule of Iran. A mass grave, known as the Khāvarān cemetery, exists in Iran where bodies of those sentenced to death were buried for giving honest testaments to questions amongst which were: "Are you a Muslim?"; "Is the Holy Qurʾān the word of God?"; "Do you

41. Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual*, 134.
42. Matin, "Abdolkarim Sorush," 110.
43. Matsunaga Yasuyuki, "Mohsen Kadivar, an Advocate of Post-revivalist Islam in Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 3 (2007): 325.
44. Article 5 of the Iranian constitution clearly states that, "During the Occultation of the *Walī al-Aṣr* (may God hasten his reappearance), the *wilāyah* and leadership of the *Ummah* devolve upon the just [*ʿadil*] and pious [*muttaqī faqīh*], 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." Also see Moossavi, "Secularism in Iran," 143.

pray?"; "When you were growing up, did your father pray?"[45] Remarkably, such brutalities have been matters of pride for the clergy. Alī Qulī Qaraʿī, in a letter to the author of *The Imam and His Islamic Revolution* wrote,

> As far as I am concerned I think most of the execution and death penalties did by the Islamic Revolutionary Courts have been the 'best' of execution anytime anywhere (if one were allowed to use the world in this context). I agreed these executions to be the highest form of 'mercy killing' that has taken place in the interest of human society.[46]

Despite such suppressions, the secularists still took the risk to speak in favour of secularism and the separation between Tehran and Qom.[47] In fact, the desire for secularism was evident during the early years of the revolution, too. For instance, Keddie writes, "… to be sure, there are far more people who wish to change the government than there are those who are willing to follow the dictators of the *Ulamās*."[48]

Essentially, the Secular-Modernist discourse is also not a new ideology to the Iranian intellectual discourse. It is an unfinished agenda, which takes its roots from the 1906 movement known as the "Constitutional Revolution." One of the articles of the Supplement to the Constitution Acts asserted that the parliament would choose five clergies whose

45. Ibid., 139. See also "Iran: Violations of human rights 1987–1990," *Amnesty International*, section. 1.2.1, available at http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/021/1990/en/5c32759d-ee5e-11dd-9381-bdd29f83d3a8/mde130211990en.html (accessed 11 March 2013).
46. Robinson, "Islamic Reform and Modernity," 188.
47. Ahmad Shahid, Report by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (2012, March 6). (Re. No. A/HRC/19/66, presented to the UN General Assembly, United Nations, New York), available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A-HRC-19-66_en.pdf (accessed 3 September 2012).
48. Nikki Keddie, *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society* (New Jersey: Frank Press, 1980), 177.

responsibility would be to monitor the conformity of the laws being passed by the parliament with the sharīʿah. Such an article caused steep opposition in the enlightened circles, which saw the revolution institutionalising the role of the clergy class in politics instead of lessening its influence.[49] Nonetheless, the core concept of secularism has undergone a significant change over the phases of Iranian intellectual history. For instance, during the Constitutional Revolution, the demand for the separation of religion from the government was along side with the recognition of the rights of supervision by the clerical institution over legislation. At present, the situation seems to be significantly changed as Iranians have been experiencing a full-fledged presence of religion over every aspect of their lives.[50] Such is the reason present-day Iranian secularists do not seem to accept any role for religion in their worldly affairs.

Proponents of the discourse have also a revolutionary background close to the establishment in its early years, which remained unknown until the 1997 victory by Khatami when massive publications made it possible for them to establish their independent identity. Despite losing their entity, each member of the circle defines modern terms according to the discipline received for his or her postgraduate training such as history, sociology, political science, law and others.[51] For instance, the term "modernity" to Mardīha, a political scientist, does not mean a normative endorsement of western culture as its main elements such as individualism, human rights and democracy, are not exclusive to it but one which would eventually comes to be embraced by all societies, either close or open through education.[52] Sarī-ul Qalam, an international relations specialist, argues that "modernity" comes to Iran once it embraces some specific characteristics including a non-rentier economy, a strong sense of nationalism and commitment to the idea of

49. Moossavi, "Secularism in Iran," 140.
50. Ibid., 140–1.
51. Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual*, 174–8.
52. Ibid., 192.

development, in-depth understanding of internal and global conditions, technological, scientific and managerial contacts with the west, and economic, political and social culture that facilitates development as understood internationally.[53] Mūsā Ghanī Nijād, an economist, defines "modernity" in terms of industrial advancement and modernisation. For him, democracy and capitalism have symbiotic relationship; also, Mihr Angīz Kār, a prominent Iranian human rights lawyer, gives an interpretation based on her legal training, in that, the essence of "modernity" revolves around the extent to which the civil and political liberties are protected and observed.[54]

Apart from the diversity of opinions, "modernity" and "secularism" are two faces of a single coin for all of them.[55] All hold the consensus on the reasons for the absence of "modernity" from the Iranian society, and the imperative for the Iranian society to embrace it. They unanimously argue that one can be a democrat and a faithful believer simultaneously, yet, by the same token, a religious government cannot be democratic. Furthermore, it is evident that the notion of secularism is central to both the Secular-Modernist and the Religious-Reformist discourses and that their main bone of contention is whether or not democracy without secularism is possible for them.[56]

The future of socio-religious movements

Given the above situation and the nature of the issue, predicting the discourse that will ultimately triumph in the aforementioned contestation is hardly easy. As Milton noted, "it is difficult to distinguish between a situation in which religion reinforces a stable social order and one in which religion is used by those who possess political power to their advantage in

53. Ibid., 195.
54. Ibid., 198–9.
55. Ibid., 173.
56. Ibid., 206–7.

violation of the norms of that order."[57] Nonetheless, the overall strength analysis of the above three discourses and their three decades of performance projects a reasonable scenario of the future trend of this debate.

As noted, the Religious-Conservative camp is dominant on the Iranian power structure, however, theoretically, it appears to confront serious disadvantages, which will likely lead to its isolation. In this regard, its inflexibility to the principle of *Vilāyat al-Faqīh* turns out to be its Achilles heel, given the fast spread of global values related to democracy and modernity.[58] Furthermore, it mostly relies on force rather than positive debates and scholastic productions. To further explain it, Religious-Conservatives, on the basis of their main tendencies, are internally divided into "extremist radical rightists," "rightist traditionalist clerics," "the Islamic councils," and finally, "neo-conservative thinkers." Among these, only "rightist traditionalist clergies" and "neo-conservative thinkers" are engaged in the serious production of ideology, while the remaining two operate as pressure groups engaged to disrupt gatherings, where secular or religious reformist thoughts are discussed.[59] The brutal crackdown of intellectuals, students, activists, and journalists validates Amīr Firdus's argument in 1981 that, "the continuation of the system is coming to depend increasingly on brute force and random terrorism exceeding the atrocities of the Shah."[60]

Obviously, the traditionalist discourse has also impacted Iran's foreign policy. The traditionalists' uncompromising stand over other international issues, have also put Iran into isolation. In fact, the stalemates seen between the international community and Iran were predicted long ago by observers. It was in 1982 when Millward wrote that,

57. Milton J. Yigner, *Religion, Society and Individual* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 253.
58. Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual*, 216.
59. Ibid., 82–5.
60. Nimrod Novik and Starr Joyce, eds., *Challenges in the Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 35.

> Imam Khumainī and those who follow his 'line', all other systems are, in comparison in the some sense defective and are responsible ultimately for the crisis of the confidence and conscience in international affairs generally today, and for the failure of international bodies like the United Nations.[61]

Besides, the traditionalists' emphasis on their leader's vision has been echoing in the Iranian foreign affairs atmosphere since the beginning of the Islamic Republic. Its founder was quoted as follows, "We will export our revolution to the four corners of the world because our revolution is Islamic and the struggle will continue until the cry of Lā ilāhaIlla Allāh (There is no deity but Allāh);"[62] and also that,

> We want the government of God (*Hukūmat-e Allah*) in our country and God willing to dominate in other countries…. We have in reality then, not choice but to destroy those systems of government that are corrupt in themselves, and also entails the corruption of others. This is the duty that all Muslims must fulfill, in every one of the Muslim countries, in order to achieve the triumphant political revolution of Islam.[63]

However, the traditionalists reject any physical move as this, and maintain that, "when we say we want to export our evolution we mean (we sic) would like to export this spirituality which dominates Iran…. we have not (no sic.) intention to attack anyone with sword or other arms."[64] But such statements have

61. William Millward, "The Principles of Foreign Policy and the Vision of World Order Expounded by Imam Khomeini and the Islamic Republic," ed. Nikki R. Keddie and Eric Hoogland (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1985), 192.
62. Ayatullāh Khumainī, "Islamic Government," Eng. trans. Hamid Algar, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khumaini* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 196.
63. Rajaee, *Islamic Values and World View*, 84.
64. Ibid., 83.

not allayed the concerns of its neighbouring Muslim countries although being fellow Muslims, in principle, they should not be worried with the export of the revolution, as Islamic juridical theory does not permit holy wars waged against a Muslim brethren. Holy war by definition is to be waged against infidels. Nonetheless, it has always been possible to get round the inconvenient restrictions by denying the status of Muslims to fellow Muslims that one wished to attack. In other words, one pronounced them to be infidels, a process known as *takfīr*. This is precisely what had happened in the case of Iraq. Once Khumainī pronounced Iraq to be a surrogate of the United States, Iraqis were declared infidels. Such explanations are only possible in the context of traditionalist discourses, even though to date, since Khumainī's time, the traditionalist's attitude has been coloured by existing political realities than ideological convictions. For instance, Khumainī's prime slogan during the revolution was, "Neither Soviet Union nor America, but Islam and Muslims."[65] However, the Russian recognition of Khumainī's regime soon after, and the Soviet-backed Tūdih Communist Party approval of Khumainī's step subsequently softened his position against the Soviets. Such could be the reason why Khumainī came to conclude that anyone who opposed the Islamic Republic must inevitably be the ally of Americans. Given his belief, Khumainī should have been more at odds with the atheist Soviet than God-fearing America.[66] Despite his stand that, "the United States and Israel were (sic. the) biggest enemies of (the sic) Qur'ān and Islam,"[67] Khumainī accepted weapons from Israel to be used against Muslims in the Iran-Iraq war.[68]

Nevertheless, as the ruling camp with its failure to develop the country, and its confrontational and isolationist foreign

65. Ibid., 76.
66. Ibid.
67. "Khomeini's Message to Pilgrims in Mecca for *Eid-ul Adhā*," *Kayhān International* (Weekly Edition, Tehran), 2 September 1984, p. 1.
68. Stephen R. Grummon, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Washington D.C: Praeger, 1982), 52.

policy approach, it has sent dismay beyond the "outsiders"—apostates, and secularists. As noted by Moosavi, the heart of Traditionalists has been attacked by its own children from within as they know the limitations of Traditionalists better than their intellectual and political rivals outside the governing circles.[69] Thus, the religion of the Religious Reformists has stood up against the religion of the Traditionalists more effectively as compared to the non-religious groups. However, the latter had also been sorely disappointed although it obtained the chance once to get into the power-corridor under the leadership of the reformist president, Muhammad Khatami. This failure can be made more lucid in the context of their eight years in power. According to Kamrava, the institutional nature of the Islamic republic was the primary reason. In this regard, he quotes a prominent reformist, Jalāīpūr, that, "The principal problem that the reform movement faced was that its opposition accepted neither its methodology nor its mode of operation."[70]

More specifically, the causes attributed to the failures of the reformists can be listed as follows: first, the reformist movement was fundamentally elitist; second, it suffered from theoretical and philosophical poverty, as it lacked a clear cut plan for the socio-politico-economic problems of the country; third, it lacked effective organisational structure and leadership; and fourth, it found it advantageous to advocate mostly mere cosmetic reforms from the beginning. In addition, the reformists had failed to broaden their coalition and to include within them groups which generally shared their vision, but had hitherto been excluded from the political process. Indeed, an innate elitism had characterised the whole reformist project. In fact, being hard core revolutionaries, the reformists had owed their unwavering allegiance to the revolutionary system, with only their methods and strategies changed. For them, the reform system did not mean refutation or dismantling of the *Vilāyat al-Faqīh*, which remains as the

69. Moossavi, "Secularism in Iran," 141–2.
70. Ibid., 33.

most undemocratic emblem of the theocratic system. Last but not least, Khatamiite reformists, who were themselves beneficiaries of the system's marginal openness, did not want things too radically altered for fear of losing what they had gained. Evidently, surprise victory did not give them time to prepare philosophically and strategically.[71]

In light of the two religious discourses, the Secular-Modernist discourse is best viewed in the context of historical experience of the secular modern societies. In other words, present-day secular modern societies, to a large extent, are based on their previous experience of the rule of Church over this-worldly affairs. In fact, their previous historical experiences dictate them how to regulate their daily affairs in the present.[72] More explicitly, politics is the arena of contest between the powerful; as soon as a player got exhausted, he/she would be automatically removed from the field, and replaced by another. As noted by Surūsh's "secularism," one neither comes on the advice of someone nor leaves by the order from someone. It is the natural result of the ability or inability of players in the arena of power. Hence, it was a destiny which perforce came to Christianity.[73] In the same light, Iran is arguably passing through an experience similar to Europe which came under the control of the popes several centuries ago.

Perhaps during the reform period, any little hope harboured for the theocratic system to perform in socio-politico-economic aspect through self-reform almost died out

71. Ibid., 33–8.

72. Research shows that Jews of non-European descent in Israel are more religious than those with European background due to the lack of heavy influence of religious institutions in their society. See Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, "The Secular Israeli (Jewish) Identity: An Impossible Dream?," in *Secularism and Secularity, Contemporary International Perspective*, ed. Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar (Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture (ISSSC), 2007), 158–9.

73. Abdul Karim Surūsh, "Dīndardurān-e mudirnītih bih kujā mīrawad" [Where does religion go in the era of modernity?] (Persian), available athttp://www.drsoroush.com/Persian/By_DrSoroush/P-CMB-13850525-HoseiniehErshad.html (accessed 10 March 2013).

as the present trend indicates. Additionally, the middle class has developed democratic values through the experience of the rule of religion for three long decades.[74] Notedly, during the reformist government, the middle class was mostly apathetic towards the debate over secularism and the important role of the clergy class in politics, despite their sympathies with the government. But with the controversy surrounding the 2009 presidential election, the class has become highly active, participating in anti-government protests manifesting in a full radicalisation;[75] i.e., during the reforms, it demanded some rights without touching the status of *Vilāyat al-Faqīh* or the nature of the system, but during the on-going Green Movement,[76] the slogans are directly targeted against the Supreme Leader and the theocratic system.

Despite its high potential, the Secular-Modernist camp is practically the most disadvantaged. Its weakness lies in the intellectual trend being largely and purely an academic exercise with neither an active role in policy making nor active political groups.[77] Furthermore, it is highly vulnerable for its lack of any considerable institutional structure. Nonetheless, the Secular-Modernist camp is the most understandable discourse for urban middle class Iranians, and has found a significant audience in Iran consisting of students, journalists, and professionals.[78] Also, the failure and disillusionment of former revolutionaries help to energise it to a large extent. A significant number of Iranian intellectuals have come to conclude that secularism is the only way to have a democratic system. For instance, following the victory of *al-Nahḍah* Party in Tunisia's general elections, Ibrahim Yazdī, the first foreign

74. Vahdat, "Iran and the two forces."
75. Ibid.
76. The Green Movement refers to a series of riots in Iran following the 2009 Iranian presidential election. The rioters demanded for the removal of Maḥmūd Aḥmadīnijād, claiming that their candidate, Mir Hussain Mūsavī, was the real winner.
77. Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual*, 212–3.
78. Ibid., 218–20.

minister of Iran preceding the 1979 revolution, forewarned the Tunisian leader, Rashīd al-Ghanūshī, in a letter dated 26 October 2011 that, "I seek from the Almighty to save you from repeating the mistakes we did in Iran." Yazdī further advised al-Ghanūshī three points should he want to avoid the same mistakes: "First, respect pluralism; second, tolerate different thoughts and religions, and third, institutionalize democracy through convergence of political actors across the society."[79]

Meanwhile, the other seven high profile political activists wrote a letter to al-Ghanūshī of Tunisia, Abdul Jalīl of Libya, and the Interim Ruling Council of Egypt.[80] It reads:

> In this letter those are talking with you who have been active in the arena of religious thoughts.… Each one has gained experience from three decades of the life of the Islamic republic … the statement attributed to our brother Abdul Jalīl on the occasion of the declaration of freedom of Libya saying that the new constitution of Libya would be based on sharia, caused serious concern among your Muslim democrat friends and freedom activists including the signatories of this letter.… They decided to write this letter and sincerely share their experience with you, so that other oppressed nations do not repeat the same mistakes.… The Muslim nation of Iran on the bases of promises of their religious leaders during the revolution, sought all its desires in a religious state. But thirty years of bitter and disgusting experience showed that as soon as religion, state and

79. "Letter of Ibrahīm Yazdī to Rashīd al-Ghanūshī," *Kaleme*, 29 October 2011, available athttp://www.kaleme.com/1390/08/07/klm-78642 (accessed 24 May 2013).

80. The letter was written by the following persons: Abdul Alī Bāzirgān (specialist in Qurʿanic studies, and political activist); Aḥmad Ṣadrī, (Professor of Sociology, USA); Maḥmūd Ṣadri (Professor of Sociology, USA); Shīrīn Ibādī (human rights activist and Nobel laureate); Rizā Alī Jānī (Journalist and political activist, France); Siddīqah Wasmaqī Dānish (Professor of Islamic Jurisprudence and Sharīʿah, Germany); Hassan Yūsufī Ishkiwarī (Religious and Islamic history scholar, Germany).

> power got mixed, perforce religion would become an instrument in the hands of owners of the power.… Because based on historical experience, 'religious state' will quickly convert into 'statist religion', and this conversion consequently means doom of religion, state and ordinary life of the people.… We sincerely advise you to separate the destinies of the religions and the state from the very beginning.[81]

Interestingly, among the signatories are prominent Islamic scholars with religious background. They even argue in favour of secularism as it protects the sanctity of religion by safeguarding it from misuse by politicians for their own political ends.[82] Amongst the camp members are conservative clergies, one of whom is Ayatullāh Burūjirdī, who is serving his prison term. This clearly reflects that except for some beneficiaries, the secular mind-set is significantly present, both among the intellectuals as well as ordinary Iranians. Hence, the events in Iran over the last three decades, arguably, are the process of modernity, which would lead to the victory of the secular mindset.[83] Based on observation, Iranians generally believe that their country could regain their previous status in economic development, if they were to embrace modernity. For Iranian secularism, modernity and other related concepts are matters of a three-decade long personal experience rather than the philosophical and scholastic complex debates.

Yet, as Kamrava notes, the relationship between the three ongoing discourses and the urban middle classes is the key to further articulation, as well their future development; and the direction of Iran's political system is instrumental in

81. "Nāmih-e haft fa'āl-e siyāsī bih rahbarān-e kishwar'hāy-e tāzih inqilāb kardi harabī" [Letter of Seven Iranian political activists to the leaders of the Arab spring-striken countries] (Persian), *Gooya*, 5 November 2011, available athttp://news.gooya.eu/politics/archives/2011/11/130753.php (accessed 24 May 2013).
82. Matin, "Abdolkarim Sorush," 107.
83. Vahdat, "Iran and the two forces."

the success or failure of each.[84] A fact to be borne in mind is that in the present Islamic state of Iran, Shiʿism, for all practical purposes, is the religion of the majority in the country. It is embedded into the Iranian culture and identity. In turn, Shiʿism is undoubtedly influenced by the divine right monarchy concepts of pre-Islamic Persian. Therefore, in Shiʿite Iran, no regime can survive peacefully without compromising with the religious establishment. The Shiʿite does not tend to grant legitimacy to any form of government unless it is in total conformity with the *Ithnā ʿAsharī* doctrines of statehood and authority. This means that even other sects within Shiʿism are also ineligible to decide in this regard. Interestingly, such a point is fully reflected in Iran's external behaviour, too. As noted by Naveed S. Sheikh, although Iran claims to be working for the Muslim unity, it is very conscious to retain the right of leadership for the Shiʿite sect of Islam. Analysing the Iranian-led Organization of Islamic Conference (1997–2000), Shaikh argues that Iran had an "Orwellian" approach, according to which Muslims were equal but some were more equal.[85] While Shiʿism is not ready to accept the leadership of non-Shiʿite Islam in a non-Shiʿite Muslim majority world, it would definitely not give up this right in the Shiʿite majority Iran. At present, the Iranian regime may be facing various problems, but the challenges for secular forces still lie ahead.

Conclusion

Apart from the intention of the traditionalist discourse and its preferred way of governance, the historical facts over the last three decades of the Islamic Republic of Iran show that Islam, under traditionalist discourse, has been the expression of a power and ideology that has consistently defied all the persuasive power of reasonableness, moderation, modernism

84. Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual*, 215.
85. Naveed S. Sheikh, *The New Politics of Islam: Pan-Islamic Foreign Policy in a World of States* (London: Routledge, 2003), 76.

and tolerance. It seems difficult for the traditionalist discourse to move towards a pattern that will fit into the modern way of governance.

However, should a proper republic does come to being in Islam, it will be one which administers justice and provides security and protection for all citizens, regardless of colour, race or creed. Such a society can truly become a place, which promotes peace, happiness, development, and prosperity, besides the worship of God. Thus far, Khumainī's version of an Islamic governance does not represent such features. Surprisingly, Khumainī's death has proved even more of a challenge for Iran's political viability than during his lifetime, in the same way his insistence on creating a monolithic Shi'ite Theocracy has proved the undoing of the Islamic Republic. On the other hand, the religious-reformist discourses within the paradigm of the Islamic Republic have failed in the Iranian case, despite its chance of a good opportunity to introduce an Islamic role model political system to the modern world.

The disillusionment of intellectuals and the public caused by wrong socio-politico-economic policies of a particular set-up will always play a vital role in the search for an alternative by those concerned. Three decades of clergy class rule has given them almost the same experience as the Europeans during the active role of the Church. As a result of this, modernity, secularism and other related concepts have strong adherents in all segments of the Iranian society even within the clergy class, which regard such concepts related to the development of their country.

Considering the Iranian progression and course of events, the Religious-Reformist discourse has emerged from the Religious-Conservative discourse similar to that of the Secularist-Modernist discourse from the Religious-Reformist. While both the Religious-Conservative and Religious-Reformist have already taken their practical exams over the last three decades, the Secular-Modernist discourse possesses the potential to emerge as the next alternative for

the Iranians. Nonetheless, besides the various challenges, the Shiʿite political ideology, in particular, the main issue for the Secularists is how to materialise their idea of secular Iran in a peaceful way. The intensive use of violence for the establishment and sustenance of the Islamic Republic by the clergy class over the last three decades, in particular during the first, suggests that transforming the present religious system would be accompanied with even more violence.