

2 | *The Birth of a Revolutionary*

Though Montazeri had painted a grim picture of the Iranian state's harsh treatment of the clerics, neither he nor the majority of clerics engaged in acts of political opposition during his student years.¹ It was only in the 1960's that an influential segment of the clergy, which then included a middle-aged Montazeri, rose up and challenged the Pahlavi regime. In the course of his unrelenting political activities, Montazeri experienced banishment and exile, as well as incarceration and torture. The resolve and endurance that he demonstrated during these hard times leaves us with the question of why, after so many years in the seminary, he waited until his early forties to engage in national politics.

The National Political Context of the 1950's: The Role of the Clergy

From 1949 to 1953, under the leadership of Mohammad Mossadeq (1882–1967), Iran experienced four years of vibrant yet erratic political liberalization when multiple new groups and organizations – leftist, rightist, nationalist, communist, democratic, liberal, and conservative – entered the public sphere. The most important of these were the nationalist and mostly liberal National Front, which followed Mossadeq's lead, and the communist Tudeh Party, which took an ambivalent view of him. But this period came to an abrupt end in August 1953 with a British- and American-assisted coup d'état that toppled the Mossadeq administration. Under the leadership of the Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Hossein Borujerdi, the *howzeh* instructors, including Khomeini and Montazeri, neither participated in nor supported the popular movement. In fact, the clerical establishment breathed a sigh of relief when Mossadeq fell and the Shah was reinstated on his throne. The attitude of the clerical establishment toward the nationalist movement was partially the result of its distaste for the communist and Soviet-reliant Tudeh Party, a well-organized force with an

inconsistent approach to the nationalist movement. Sporadic as it was, the support of the Tudeh Party for Mossadeq provided the enemies of his administration with an opportunity to portray the communists as the real holders of power. The fear of a possible Tudeh Party takeover and the perceived indifference of the secular Mossadeq to religious concerns contributed to the distrust that the clergy felt toward the nationalist movement.

There were two major exceptions to the clergy's overall political passivity: one a force headed by Ayatollah Abolqasem Kashani (1882–1962), the other an organization founded by Navvab Safavi (1923–55), a Qom seminary student.² But neither convinced Montazeri or high-ranking clergy to defy Borujerdi and join forces with them. In the early days of the nationalist movement, Kashani lent his support to Mossadeq, and he and his followers became part of the National Front. But soon religious and personal differences between the two men put a strain on the alliance.³ Eventually, the unhappy alliance ended in a total break up and Kashani mobilized opposition to the embattled prime minister from supporters in the urban lower and lower-middle classes and in some quarters of the Bazaar. His forces played a crucial role in overthrowing Mossadeq's administration.

The site of Kashani's political activities was Tehran rather than Qom, and his relationship with the director of the *howzeh* was restrained. Despite the tension between his principal mentor and Kashani, Montazeri liked Kashani and found in him a kindred spirit, a plain-speaking man with unpretentious manners. But in the end, when he had to choose between the quietist Borujerdi and the activist Kashani, he, along with most others in the Qom seminaries, remained loyal to the director of the *howzeh*.⁴

The other politically active force that challenged Borujerdi's authority was led by a young cleric named Mojtaba Navvab Safavi (1923–56), the founder of the *Fada'iyan-e Eslam* (the Devotees of Islam) organization.⁵ The *Fada'iyan-e Eslam* consisted of a number of radical and mostly young Qom seminary students and some of Tehran's lower classes. The main goal of Navvab Safavi and his followers was to reverse what they saw as an increasing secularization of the state by any means, including assassination of their political and ideological opponents. Not surprisingly, Borujerdi had no patience for such radical methods, and his relationship with Navvab Safavi was even more tense than with Kashani. On his part, Navvab Safavi publicly

questioned the quietist leadership of the *howzeh* and incited some of the younger religious students to do the same.⁶ But his radical approach and his organization's attempt to destabilize the establishment of the *howzeh* isolated him and his followers from the majority of the clerical establishment. According to Montazeri, even Khomeini, who had sympathies for the ideals of the group, was dismayed by their tactics and their efforts to disturb the order of the *howzeh*.⁷ At the end, neither Kashani nor Navvab Safavi proved to be a match for the quietist Borujerdi. During the turbulent years of the early 1950's the religious establishment remained politically aloof.

The Post-coup Period and State–Society Relations: Early 1950's to Early 1960's

After the coup, the Pahlavi regime quickly suppressed the Tudeh Party and neutralized the supporters of Mossadeq, and seemed to have consolidated its power. But the calm did not last long, as a series of socio-economic and political problems challenged the stability of Pahlavi regime by the end of 1950's. Exacerbating the internal crisis was the pressure on the Shah from outside, primarily from the United States.⁸

Feeling the heat from both internal and external forces, the Shah tried to respond. He first fiddled with the idea of creating a two-party system from the top down in 1958, hoping to satisfy the US and silence political criticism at home. But the 1960 rigged parliamentary elections in favor of the two state-sponsored parties, which virtually excluded all other candidates, backfired and led to a popular protest. The state retreated and declared the elections void, but popular dissatisfaction with the government did not subside. The Shah then chose Ali Amini, a favorite of the United States, as his prime minister, and allowed him to form an administration with plans to initiate reforms, including an extensive land redistribution.

The internal crisis and the external pressure also provided an opportunity for hitherto suppressed political forces to resurface. After almost a decade of inactivity, the leaders of the National Front, this time without Mossadeq, who was under house arrest, revived the umbrella organization. The Bazaar, the Organization of University Students, and other professional associations were also activated. Iran seemed to be on the cusp of another major sociopolitical change, and all these groups looked to the secular and liberal National Front for leadership.⁹ For

the most part, the influential leaders within the National Front opted for legal and gradual opening of the system, a strategy that did not succeed in extracting concessions from the state and instead led to the disillusionment of many politically conscious Iranians.¹⁰ The people in turn started to look in another direction for new strategy and leadership. It is with this background that the politicization of the *howzeh* and of Montazeri can be understood.

Khomeini's Leadership and Montazeri's Political Awakening

The death of the Grand Ayatollah Borujerdi in 1961 was a harbinger of change in the *howzeh*. His absence opened the door for those clergy who believed in an active role for religion in politics. Khomeini was the leader of this group, and Montazeri followed him. Until this point, Montazeri, loyal to Borujerdi, had held back from activities against the state. Accordingly, his minimal contact with state officials took place within the established rules. For instance, when Montazeri wanted to lobby against the confiscation of a religious building in Najafabad by the education ministry, he, as Borujerdi's representative, met with Prime Minister Manouchehr Eqbal (1957–60), who was on his official trip to Najafabad. His audience with Eqbal was successful and the confiscation was halted.¹¹ The only episode of confrontation between Montazeri and the state occurred in 1955, when he was summoned by the governor of Isfahan Province and questioned about anti-Baha'i activities.¹² Otherwise, there is no evidence of entanglement between Montazeri and the state.

Two reasons account for Montazeri's lack of political activism. One was his personal loyalty to Borujerdi, who was not only his source of emulation and his primary mentor but also his authority in political matters. Personal attachment, though, tells only part of the story. After all, Montazeri was temperamentally capable of standing his ground and speaking to power when he truly believed in a cause. The other reason was the attitude of the clerical community, a community with which Montazeri deeply identified. From the early 1940's to the early 1960's, the clerical establishment, which was predominantly concerned with the perceived power of the Baha'is, and later with that of the Tudeh Party, did not see the Pahlavi regime as the primary enemy. The lack of interest of the *howzeh* in state politics in the first few years of Mohammad Reza Shah's rule was welcomed by the Shah, and he in

turn did not intrude in the affairs of the *howzeh* the way his father had done. In fact, the Shah and the religious establishment found allies in one another in opposing the Tudeh Party, and the Shah was willing, on occasion, to go along with the clergy's attempt to attack the Baha'i temples.¹³

The state's policies in the 1960's and the passing of Borujerdi set the stage for a different relationship between the Pahlavi regime and the *howzeh*. After Borujerdi, there was no consensus in the Shii establishment about who should become the Supreme or General Source of Emulation. In Najaf, two ayatollahs, Sayyed Mohsin Hakim and Abolqasem Khoei, were the most likely candidates, while the contenders in Iran included several others: Mohammad Kazem Shari'atmadari, Mohammad Reza Golpaygani, and Shahabeddin Mar'ashi Najafi. The fifty-nine-year-old Khomeini was not only junior to all the contenders, but he had yet to publish a practical treatise (*resale 'amaliyeh*), which was a precondition for becoming a *marja'*.¹⁴ Still, he had a great appeal for many younger clergy and students, such as Montazeri, as a result of both his religious knowledge and his ideas for the reform of the seminary.¹⁵ These young clergymen were also attracted to Khomeini's assertiveness, a quality that set him apart from Borujerdi in his approach to the state. It was these same supporters, most significantly Montazeri, who worked to get Khomeini's practical treatise published and therefore helped him to reach the status of a source of emulation.

In addition to Khomeini's personal influence, another major factor that contributed to clerical political activism was the state's intended policies, which were easily construed as provocations to the religious establishment. Mohammad Reza Shah's first confrontation with the clergy was indirect, however. In October 1962, the cabinet of the newly appointed and loyal prime minister, Asadollah Alam, presented a bill to the parliament regarding local council elections that contained articles bound to provoke the clergy. Two aspects were especially disconcerting: one was the extension of voting rights to women; the other was the provision that the elected candidates could take their oath of office on *any* holy book rather than exclusively on the Quran. Even though the clergy as a whole protested the bill, it was Khomeini who took the most assertive line in opposing it. After two months of agitation in Qom's *howzeh*, which spread to many parts of the country thanks to the mobilizational ability of Khomeini and his close followers, including Montazeri, the bill was repealed.¹⁶ The success of this campaign

substantially increased Khomeini's political influence, not only in the *howzeh*, but also among the conservative Bazaar merchants. They started to channel their *sahm-e emam* to him, thus smoothing his way to eventually becoming a serious candidate for the position of the Supreme Source of Emulation. Now the *howzeh* had a leader who was able to challenge an increasingly assertive Shah.

In March of the following year, the Shah himself introduced a more ambitious six-point plan, first referred to as the "White Revolution" and later as the "Shah's and People's Revolution." He intended to gain legitimacy for the plan, which included articles on women's right to vote and a land-reform provision, through a popular referendum. Even though the clergy found the plan distasteful, they disagreed among themselves as to how they should challenge it. Some focused their objection directly on the substance of the program, particularly the articles on land reform and women's suffrage, while others, including Khomeini, directed their opposition more toward procedure.

According to Montazeri, Khomeini believed that with the exception of voting rights for women, the articles of the proposed six points of the White Revolution, including land reform, eradication of illiteracy, and provision of medical care for poor villagers, were in harmony with Islamic justice, and therefore opposing them would not be the appropriate method for challenging the state.¹⁷ He attacked instead the use of a referendum as a tactic to short-circuit the appropriate parliamentary process, calling it a *bed'at* (an arbitrary revision of established and authoritative readings of laws). Khomeini further argued that the use of an unlawful referendum could provide a precedent for carrying out sinister goals such as eradicating religion from public life and establishing monarchical absolutism.¹⁸ He therefore boycotted the referendum and asked his followers to do the same.

Khomeini's clear and direct stand against the regime landed him first in jail and then in exile in Turkey and, eventually, Iraq. His first incarceration on June 3, 1963 sparked a nationwide protest that was brutally suppressed by the state across three days. Khomeini was kept in jail for two months, and then under house arrest in Tehran until April 1964. Once back in Qom, he gave one of his most fiery speeches condemning the parliament's approval of a capitulatory bill that gave US military advisers immunity from Iranian laws.¹⁹ In the same speech, he called for action and criticized the quietist clergy. In less than ten days, Khomeini was arrested and sent into exile in Turkey.

After the bloody suppression of the uprising in 1963, the public space for debate and demonstrations became critically narrow due to the state's increasing power and its ability to control civil society. Economic growth, the result of the impressive increase of oil revenue, and the regime's increasing intolerance for even mild political resistance coopted many and forced others to withdraw from politics altogether. The few who did not withdraw reached the conclusion that guerilla warfare was the only effective way to challenge the regime. Mostly young activists, they formed several guerilla organizations, two of which became especially prominent: *Sazman Cherikha-ye Fada'i Khalq-e Iran* (Organization of Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas, or OIPFG), a Marxist-Leninist organization; and *Sazman Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran* (People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran), a religious organization with leftist programs. There were also other religious organizations with a militant outlook, such as *Jam'iyat Mo'talefeh*, which represented the *Bazaaris* and supported Khomeini. *Jam'iyat Mo'talefeh* came to the conclusion that working within the system with reformist intent was useless, and consequently added a military branch for the purpose of assassinating the state's "anti-Islamic" officials.²⁰

A different strategy was taken in the *howzeh* by men such as Montazeri. Even though they believed that the time for reform was over and that nothing more could be expected from the Pahlavi regime, they were still not convinced that violence or guerilla tactics, at least by religious teachers, would be an effective means to bring about the desired change. In his memoirs, in answer to a question about whether he endorsed the method of armed struggle during the revolution, Montazeri responded that he did, but only in special circumstances. He also disapproved of what he considered rash actions by some of the guerrillas.²¹ For Montazeri, cultural and educational work had to precede revolutionary moves. Once people's minds were awakened to the power of Islam, they would be ready to throw themselves, body and soul, into the revolutionary praxis.

In the early 1960's, there was not yet any hint that the activist clergy intended to topple the secular regime and turn Iran into a religious state. At that time, Khomeini, Montazeri, and most other clergymen called for preservation of the traditional social authority of the clergy, and spoke against the expansion of state control in areas that concerned them. However, as the Iranian state became increasingly powerful and oppressive, shrinking the space for negotiation, Montazeri

and other supporters of Khomeini began to formulate, first privately and later publicly, a new language for dismantling the Pahlavi state.

Montazeri and Political Resistance

The imprisonment and exile of his mentor shook Montazeri profoundly. To him, the state's treatment of Khomeini was not only an attack on a beloved and admired teacher, but an attempt to undermine the sanctity of religious offices and sources of emulation, and he could no longer remain silent. From then on, Montazeri became a consummate political actor as well as a political broker. His first move after he heard about Khomeini's arrest and incarceration was to organize a sit-in at Najafabad's Bazaar Mosque, in which both local sources of emulation and merchants from the Bazaar participated. According to Montazeri, he ended the sit-in only after Ayatollah Shari'atmadari informed him of an ongoing delicate negotiation with the regime and a possible deal for releasing Khomeini. In the meantime, the fear that Khomeini might be executed mobilized the clergy to do what they could to prevent it. They hoped that a constitutional law intended to grant immunity from prosecution to the recognized sources of emulation would pertain to Khomeini. Thus, Khomeini needed to be acknowledged by the highest sources of emulation as one of them. Four major sources of emulation, including Shari'atmadari, made public proclamations in which they referred to Khomeini as a grand ayatollah, and those proclamations saved Khomeini from a possible death sentence.

As a junior clergyman, Montazeri did his part to mobilize the seminarians for the campaign to get Khomeini released. He traveled from Najafabad to Qom and then on to Tehran, gathering as many signatures for recognition of Khomeini as a source of emulation as he could. And this was not the only time that he contributed to Khomeini's rise in his religious position. Years later, it was again him who played an enthusiastic role in elevating Khomeini, this time to the position of the Supreme Source of Emulation.²²

In 1965, Khomeini had been allowed to move from Turkey to Iraq, from where he sent a letter to Montazeri, appointing him as his own political deputy, with total authority in Iran. This is what Montazeri tells us in his memoirs, but he destroyed the newly received letter when Savak arrested him and no trace of it remains. Most of Montazeri's detractors now question the existence of such a letter.²³ Another

letter by Khomeini does exist, however, that designates Montazeri as his representative in Iran with total authority over religious matters, especially in the collecting and spending of Khomeini's portion of *sahm-e imam*.²⁴ Despite the claim of Montazeri's later detractors, it is not implausible that Khomeini had indeed chosen Montazeri to lead an oppositional movement in his absence, a responsibility that Montazeri took seriously. Now a resistant leader on his own, Montazeri challenged the state through different means: he organized meetings of oppositional clergy, wrote statements, gathered signatures on petitions, gave sermons, and led Friday Prayers. He was one of the first clergy to use the mosque as a space for political discourse, and through his Friday Prayer sermons put both old and new demands/claims on the state.²⁵

In Sura 62, the Quran commands believers to put business aside and attend communal prayers on Fridays. A practice that dates back to the time of the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina, the communal Friday Prayer requires at least five participants and a leader. Appropriate to the occasion, the sermons are supposed to revolve around matters of communal concerns, making the practice of value for social mobilization. Prior to the revolution, Friday Prayer leaders, particularly in the capital, served the state. But during the revolution, the politically active clergy who understood the potential of the communal prayer for creating a public space began to use the occasion instead to challenge the state. Montazeri was a pioneer among these clergy and led a series of Friday Prayers between 1972 and 1973 that contributed to his troubled relationship with the regime. His unadorned style of oration was popular, particularly in his native town, making Najafabad a troublesome locale.

In these sermons, Montazeri spoke of the responsibility of religious leaders to monitor the government's behavior, criticized the quietist clergy for dereliction of their duty, asserted that political activism was the task not just of the clergy but of every Muslim, and judged the failure to oppose injustice as reprehensible as committing it.²⁶ Through these contentions, he not only warned the state but put demands on both religious leaders and ordinary Muslims. He asked the state to follow the practical and ethical rules of Islam in all its policies, whether economic, social, political, or cultural. He also demanded of ordinary people and their religious leaders that they act in the service of the Islamic community, even if it required risking their private interests.

Even though he did not overtly ask for a revolutionary overthrow of the Pahlavi state, it was not difficult to read such a demand as the logical conclusion of his position.²⁷

The *Shahid-e Javid* Controversy

Obviously, Montazeri's activities were not tolerated by the state. He was watched, arrested, interrogated, incarcerated, and banished several times by the secret police. The charges that the state leveled against him, either in public trials or in secret documents made available after the revolution, were: (1) attempts to incite people by giving sermons, writing proclamations, and organizing politicized Friday Prayers to challenge the state; (2) holding unwavering and "zealous" support for Khomeini both as the Supreme Source of Emulation and as the leader of the Islamic political movement; and (3) attempts to help families of political prisoners, thereby supporting the opposition.²⁸

In addition to overt punishment, Savak spread rumors about Montazeri to damage his reputation among the revolutionary clergy.²⁹ Yet none of these tactics discouraged him, just as imprisonment and banishment did not stop his continuing opposition toward the state.³⁰ There was one particular occasion when Savak managed to exploit a growing public rift among the clergy in order to weaken the revolutionary potential of the activist clergy, including Montazeri. The publication of a highly controversial book titled *Shahid-e Javid* (The Eternal Martyr), written in 1970 by Ne'matollah Salehi Najafabadi (1923–2006), a seminarian, provided the opportunity. The controversy surrounding the book was in its depiction of Imam Hossein, the third Shii Imam, and his reason for waging his last battle in Karbala against the forces of Mo'avieh, the founder of the Ummayed dynasty.³¹ Besides the Prophet Mohammad and Ali, the first Infallible Imam, Hossein is the most revered Shii saint. Each year during the tenth and eleventh days of Mohharam, the first month of the Islamic calendar, Shii sites witness the most intense outpouring of emotions by millions in commemoration of Hossein's martyrdom. The traditional Shii interpretation of the battle of Karbala, where Hossein, his followers, and many members of his family were killed, is that Imam Hossein had foreknowledge of the outcome and that his purpose in engaging in a losing battle was only to expose the injustice of Mo'avieh and not to establish a just Islamic state. According to the Shiis, Mo'avieh had usurped

the position of successor to the Prophet Mohammad from his rightful heir, his grandson, and therefore he and his successors were illegitimate rulers.

Salehi Najafabadi argued in *Shahid-e Javid* that when Imam Hossein embarked on his journey to challenge the rule of Mo'avieh, he in fact did not *know* that he would be killed in Karbala. Salehi did not deny Hossein's foreknowledge of his martyrdom but contended that his knowledge was general rather specific. This meant, Salehi argued, that Imam Hossein had the following priorities when he waged his battle against the usurpers: first, to achieve a military victory over Mo'avieh's army; second, to reach a temporary truce if unable to prevail in the battle; and third, to achieve martyrdom only if neither victory nor truce were possible.³²

This revisionist interpretation was a tremendous boost for a revolutionary religious discourse, positioning Imam Hossein as a role model for toppling the Pahlavi regime, and was therefore welcomed by the activist clergy. The political message of Najafabadi's book was that Hossein's actions should be emulated by anyone who lives under a similar illegitimate and unjust ruler. Montazeri and Ali Meshkini, another religious teacher, wrote forewords to the book and praised it for its revolutionary message and for its scholarship.³³

But not everyone was happy with these revisionist ideas. The standard interpretation considered the events in Karbala and Hossein's martyrdom to be a unique historical occurrence, which could not be reproduced by ordinary people and consequently could not be taken as a precedent for contemporary uprisings. The conservative clergy therefore vehemently opposed the new interpretation in their sermons, essays, and books, and condemned Salehi Najafabadi and his approach. One of the most extensive challenges appeared in *Shahid-e Agah* (The Aware Martyr), authored by Ayatollah Lotfollah Golpaygani. He criticized Salehi for denying Imam Hossein his foreknowledge, and thus for questioning a major principle of Shii faith and the basis of Shii identity.³⁴ He also contended that such an interpretation would help colonialists and their local agents take advantage of the confusion among Muslims. He feared the consequences would include the straying away of Muslim youth from religion and the weakening of Islamic societies; he also forbade (declared it as *haram*) his followers to read the book.

Golpaygani was right in at least one sense: Savak did its best to increase dissension among the clergy drawing away some religious

students from political activism by keeping the controversy alive. Savak hoped to exploit a dilemma inherent in Salehi's book. If one were to deny Hossein's foreknowledge of his martyrdom and therefore regard him as a man with a temporal political goal, would that result in a heretical questioning of his sacred nature?³⁵ Indeed, some began to doubt their revolutionary activities, fearing that by modeling Imam Hossein as a warrior with temporal goals, they would do harm to religion, and therefore withdrew from political opposition to the state.³⁶

A separate matter that added still more fuel to this controversy was the disagreement among clergy about who should replace Ayatollah Hakim (d. 1970) as the Supreme Source of Emulation. The choice for some, particularly for the traditional *howzeh* clergy, was the politically quietist Ayatollah Abolqasm Khoei (1899–1992). The politically active clergy, and particularly Montazeri, on the other hand, were strongly committed to the revolutionary Ayatollah Khomeini as the candidate for the position. Each group used Salehi's book to strengthen the position of their favorite candidate. The most critical period of controversy occurred when Ayatollah Abolhassan Shamsabadi, Ayatollah Khoei's representative in Isfahan and a fierce critic of Salehi for writing *Shahid-e Javid*, and of Montazeri for endorsing it, was assassinated in 1976 by a group of young men closely associated with Mehdi Hashemi, the younger brother of one of Montazeri's sons-in-law.³⁷ In the early 1970's, Mehdi Hashemi founded a group called "Amr-e be Ma'rouf and Nayi az Monkar," which came to be known as *Hadafiha*. The goal of the group was to purify the society by violent means, including the assassination of "sinners" such as owners of houses of prostitution. The group also had a dim view of conservative clergy, with their focus on rituals of mourning, and thus saw them as a greater enemy than the Pahlavi regime.³⁸ The assassination of Shamsabadi infuriated the traditional clergy and the followers of the murdered ayatollah. Some of them accused Montazeri, who was in prison at the time, of knowing about the murder plot. The Savak fueled this suspicion further.³⁹ But, though Montazeri had no love for Shamsabadi and his conservative colleagues, there was no evidence that he had any prior knowledge of the assassination plot.⁴⁰

Despite some initial and tactical gain by Savak, particularly over the death of Ayatollah Shamsabadi, the secret police failed in ensuring any long-term gain from the controversy over *Shadid Javid*. Soon the number of people joining the ranks of political activists began to rise, and

Savak turned to harsher means to rein in the opposition. Montazeri experienced his own share of the heavy hand of the secret police and was sent to prison and exile several times. His first trial and incarceration were in connection to his membership of an ill-fated organization.

Montazeri and Organizational Attempts

Montazeri was one of the founders of two organizations in the 1960's. The first, *Jame'eh-ye Modarasin-e Howzeh-ye Elmieh-ye Qom* (Society of Qom Seminary Scholars or SQSS), was formed by a few junior and like-minded seminary instructors in 1961. According to Montazeri, the original idea of the founders of SQSS was to provide opportunities to discuss *howzeh* matters as a group and to have a systematic channel of communication with the high clergy. The goals consisted of six educational, cultural, and political objectives, among them reforming the seminary's curriculum, providing more opportunities for research in Islamic fields, and combating "oppressors by defending the rights of the oppressed."⁴¹ Except for this last point, there seemed to be nothing in the six-point program that suggested any hint of oppositional activities. But during the events surrounding the controversial bill on local council elections in 1962, the SQSS became a valuable tool for the combative clergy to use to spread their messages around the country and to mobilize support for political action. The members of the SQSS, particularly Montazeri, threw themselves into their new but unofficial charge to oppose the bill. The clerics' success in defeating the local council bill boosted their confidence and prepared them for an even more aggressive campaign against the upcoming referendum on the White Revolution. Montazeri was one of the members of SQSS who traveled from Qom to Isfahan and Najafabad in an attempt to garner support for the boycott of the referendum.

The SQSS, however, was a public organization, and its activities were visible. As the relationship between the state and the seminary became more tense and confrontational, Montazeri and others realized that if they wished to continue, they had to come up with another type of organization, a secret one. In the fall of 1963, Montazeri and ten other *howzeh* instructors (including many future leaders of the Islamic Republic, such as Ali Khamenei, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi) established a clandestine group, "the Assembly of Eleven," for the purpose of organizing and drafting a

program of action.⁴² Excited by the prospect of serious and secret activities, these relatively young men got to work: they met, discussed strategies, and wrote a constitution. But fate was not on their side.

In 1966, security forces raided the bookstore of Ahmad Azari Qomi, one of the founders of the Assembly of Eleven, and came across a handwritten copy of the organization's constitution. Among the articles of the constitution were provisions for creating secret cells, aliases for the members to protect their identities, and the means to challenge the legal system of the state in case any of its members got arrested. The discovery of the constitution led to one of the several times that Montazeri was arrested and put in jail. It also ended Montazeri's attempt at building oppositional organizations. For the rest of his period as a revolutionary activist, Montazeri challenged the state without having organizational support.

Montazeri in Prison

In addition to a short detention in 1963, Montazeri was arrested and imprisoned four times. The first of his incarcerations, and probably the most difficult psychologically, happened on March 21, 1966, the day Iranians celebrate the beginning of a new Persian year. On the same day, and before Montazeri's arrest, his son Mohammad was taken to jail. Mohammad had become politicized in the early 1960's, as had many young and religiously oriented Iranians. But he was a distinct activist: he was strict, puritanical, single-minded, and relentless in his pursuit of mobilizing the *howzeh* against the Pahlavi regime. Montazeri recalled his son's fierce and determined efforts in gathering signatures for various petitions as Mohammad compelled or sometimes intimidated even the most reluctant clergy into signing.⁴³ It was on one such occasion that Mohammad got arrested in Qom in 1966. The secret police then went to Montazeri's house, questioned him about his son's activities, and took him, too, as a prisoner, later charging and trying him for his membership in the "Assembly of Eleven."

Father and son were soon transferred to Qezel Qal'eh prison, a fortress-like building in Tehran. Qezel Qal'eh, originally built as a weapons depot, was turned into a prison by Taymour Bakhtiar, the first head of the Savak, in order to detain the opponents of the Pahlavi regime following the 1953 coup. Like many other prisons, Qezel Qal'eh consisted of different wards and cells for solitary and common

confinement. Montazeri and his son were put in separate cells, and even though Montazeri was not treated lightly, the harshness of his experience paled in comparison to what his son went through. Mohammad was severely tortured day after day, and though Montazeri did not personally witness the most brutal treatment, he heard about all of it. On one occasion, through a door left ajar, he had a glimpse of his son's torment. Mohammad himself, in a letter of defense addressed to the military tribunal in charge of his trial, detailed the torture he endured for sixteen consecutive days. He was repeatedly beaten and slapped on his eardrum, he was deprived of sleep, and he received frequent lashes with a plastic-covered metal cable, among other things. One of the most vivid and horrifying methods of torture involved placing his naked buttocks against a hot metal heater, which caused multiple burns and blisters.⁴⁴ In his memoirs, Montazeri remembered his son's reaction to his treatment at the hands of his torturers when they made him sit on the hot furnace: "[my son] shouted the name of the 'Imam of Time' while his tormentor cursed the 'Imam of Time.' Mohammad told me that he then recited a verse of the Quran which made him feel less pain."⁴⁵ Eventually, Mohammad was put on trial and sentenced to three years in jail.

Charged for his involvement in the activities of the "Assembly of Eleven," Montazeri himself underwent a trial and was sentenced to an eighteen-month prison term. Rumors of torture inflicted on him and his prison-mate and political colleague, Abdol-Rahim Rabbani Shirazi, mobilized the *howzeh* to come to their rescue. The seminarians wrote letters, made public proclamations, and held private meetings with officials of the state. Even Grand Ayatollah Hakim in Najaf became involved: in a meeting with the Iranian ambassador to Iraq, he expressed his dismay and urged a speedy release of the two men.⁴⁶ From within the prison, Montazeri and Rabbani also wrote open letters about their own harsh treatment and that of Montazeri's son, addressed to the military prosecutors and copied not only to high clergy but also to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. All these activities eventually led to the early release of Montazeri and his friend; Montazeri's son however, stayed in jail and suffered further brutality. The treatment of Mohammad had an indelible impact on Montazeri; it shaped his views on the treatment of political prisoners and on the practice of incarcerating people for political reasons.⁴⁷

This prison experience was followed by three more. In 1967, following a secret trip to Najaf to consult with Khomeini about the future of the religious resistance movement, Montazeri was arrested at the border as he was trying to sneak back into Iran. He was sent to Qezel Qal'eh prison, this time for five months. Soon after his release, he was once again arrested and put on trial in a military court for "antis-tate activities." Charged with inciting disorder and conspiracy against the Pahlavi regime, Montazeri was initially sentenced to a three-year term, which was subsequently reduced to a year and a half. He was sent to Qasr, another prison, this one built during the Reza Shah's reign.⁴⁸

Montazeri's fourth and longest experience with jail was in July 1975, when he was arrested apparently as a result of confessions made by Ahmad Mohadess, a junior clergyman. According to Montazeri, Mohadess, probably under duress, had told the authorities that Montazeri wanted to introduce him to armed guerrilla groups. At that time, Montazeri was in internal exile in Saqez, a small town in the Kurdish and Sunni areas of Iran. The Savak agents stormed into his residence in the middle of the night and took him to Tehran. Despite the official charge, this arrest was probably more a result of a protest by religious students in Qom commemorating the 1963 rebellion. Savak used the occasion to round up many activist clergymen, including Montazeri, from around the country. He was sentenced to ten years, taken to the Evin prison, and kept in solitary confinement for about six months before being transferred to the common ward. Unlike the others, which were all located in the southern part of Tehran, this new prison was situated in the north of the city, not far from some of the most manicured spaces of the capital. It was a heavily secured prison with separate wards for solitary and common confinement. Throughout the 1970's, the Evin prison was under the control of Savak and was crowded with political dissidents.

If the incarceration and torture of his son made Montazeri's first imprisonment the most wrenching psychologically, the abuse during his last prison term, especially in its first six months, was the most difficult to endure physically. During the interrogation sessions he was beaten on the soles of his feet with a metal lash and slapped on the face, once so hard that his ear became infected and his hearing was permanently impaired.⁴⁹ He also developed a palsy-like condition that remained with him throughout the rest of his life. Apart

from being maltreated, Montazeri was required to do various chores, as were all prisoners. Inmates took turns cooking and cleaning dishes, washing floors, cleaning bathrooms, and washing clothes.⁵⁰ In a sense, Montazeri and prisoners like him had to perform functions that outside the prison were done ordinarily by their wives, daughters, or maids. It was a strange and difficult time for political prisoners, but for Montazeri life in captivity was a mixed experience.

Life in Prison

What Montazeri recounted of his experiences with his interrogators and fellow inmates was not a picture of an unmitigated horror, as one usually encounters in prison memoirs, such as the one by Ashraf Dehqani, a female member of the communist guerrilla group *Cherikha-ye Fada'i-ye Khalq-e Iran*.⁵¹ A prisoner in the Pahlavi era, Dehqani told stories of relentless torture, humiliation, and occasional rape. While Montazeri did recount the cruelty that his captors inflicted on him and other prisoners, he also remembered some of the people who incarcerated him, including Savak agents, as having some traces of humanity. For example, he spoke of one of his prison wardens as a relatively mellow man who agreed to transfer him from his assigned ward to the one he requested so that he could be close to his son.⁵² He also humanized some of his oppressors as he told of a funny, rather ironic episode related to one of his arrests:

They [Savak agents] arrested me and Mr. Rabbani – in those days whenever something happened they would come for the two of us – Anyhow, that time in the middle of the night they arrested us and took us to Qezel Qal'eh. Actually they first took us to the Evin prison. But at that time Evin was not yet well equipped so its administrators told the agents to transfer us to Qezel Qal'eh. Somewhere half way to our destination and in the middle of the night an interesting thing happened. The Savak agents who were driving us spotted a screaming girl being pulled by some men in the street. The agents stopped the car and got out to find out what all the commotion was about. They soon discovered that on her way to her grandmother's house the girl had been grabbed by these thugs. So, the agents saved the girl, put her into a taxi, and sent her home while forcing the thugs to give them their names and addresses so that they would be arrested later and put on trial. These Savakis were very happy that they had rescued a victim from a potentially devastating fate and were saying that it was God's will that they should pass through the town and save the girl.⁵³

With some of his fellow prisoners, particularly from the rank of clerics, Montazeri developed a sustaining camaraderie. A number of clerics with whom he shared prison experiences became prominent figures in the Islamic Republic: Mahmud Taleqani (1911–79), Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani (1931–2014), Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1934–2017), and Mohammad Baqer Mohiyeddin Anvari (1926–2012). All of these clerics were active in the opposition, and all were arrested for reasons similar to the ones that jailed Montazeri. After a period in solitary confinement, Montazeri was put in the same ward with his clerical peers. They had all been tortured or abused – some were limping, some couldn't sit, and some had visible signs of maltreatment – but the opportunity to be together eased their pain. In fact, Montazeri recalled some very joyous times with his prison-mates. In reminiscing about those occasions, he said, “We were very happy when we saw each other, we felt as though we were set free. I can't tell you how much fun we had that [first] evening. We all shared stories; Mr. Anvari was especially funny, he made us laugh so hard that our stomachs hurt.”⁵⁴

There were other occasions that Montazeri remembered fondly: “One time we decided that we should each choose a poem and recite it as if we were singers. We had made singing mandatory for everyone and expected to have some fun. Mr. Taleqani sang very badly, I, too was very mediocre, but it was Mr. Hashemi who would win the award for the worst singer.”⁵⁵

No doubt having like-minded friends in prison helped all these men cope with the hardships. Montazeri's ability to make light of his difficulties is not just manifested in his own memoirs but also attested to by other people. For example, Ali Motahhari, the son of Morteza Motahhari, Montazeri's closest friend in the *howzeh*, recalled that “whenever Ayatollah Montazeri was released from prison he came directly to our house, cheerful and smiling and without any mention of his hardship in prison. He then usually greeted us, the children, in English and asked us how much English we had learned.”⁵⁶

But lighthearted moments were not all that these prisoners experienced together. As soon as there were several clergy together, Montazeri and Taleqani turned their ward into a classroom and organized two different high-level religious lessons. Montazeri was also adamant in his decision to lead Friday Prayers for the purpose of addressing political issues. Worried about the risks associated with

communal political expression in jail, some advised him against it. But Montazeri, who, according to Rafsanjani, stubbornly insisted, got his way in setting up these prayer sessions. As predicted by his friends, the warden soon put a stop to the practice.⁵⁷

Contrary to what one might expect, Montazeri, a man of limited exposure to the world, found his prison experience mentally invigorating, because so many of the prisoners belonged to the intellectual class. By his own admission, the students of the *howzeh* had little access to sources of knowledge beyond traditional religious writings. Montazeri himself was a product of that limiting educational system, but once imprisoned he found himself in conversation with men who opened his mind to new intellectual perspectives. During his time in Qezel Qal'eh, he met and conversed with political prisoners of different ideological persuasions, such as the secular nationalist Dariush Foruhar (1928–98), the communist Ali Khavari (1928–), and the religious layman and National Front activist Habibollah Payman (1935–).

In jail, he also read books that were not available to him at the *howzeh* and started to learn English from Payman, his fellow prisoner. Despite all these encounters, one should not conclude that prison profoundly changed Montazeri's intellectual outlook. His discussions with people from outside the *howzeh* circles were too brief and sporadic to have any profound impact; he remained loyal to his traditional training in some fundamental ways. Still, these encounters, particularly with the younger leftists, caused Montazeri to start thinking of a language that would engage the younger generation in a dialogue on religion and would hopefully convince them of its "truth." *Az Aqaz ta Anjam: Monazereh Do Daneshjoo* (From Beginning to End: Debate between Two University Students), which tells of a conversation between two university students, one a believer and the other an atheist, was a book that Montazeri conceived in prison. Written in a clear manner, it tells a story that ends with the atheist acknowledging the truth of God. His hope was that such a book would engage leftist youths.

Prison brought Montazeri in contact with the members of guerrilla groups. Some of these encounters were tense and unpleasant, for reasons that were both theological and personal. In his last period of incarceration in Evin, Montazeri met members of the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* and learned about the Marxist *Cherikha-ye Fada'i Khalq*. The *Mojahedin-e Khalq* was one of two main Iranian groups formed after the defeat of the reformist forces in the early 1960's. Three of its six

original founders were former members of the Liberation Movement, an organization affiliated with the reformist National Front, but with distinct religious tendencies. These three men came to the conclusion that the methods of reformist organizations had run their course and that armed struggle was the only reliable way to confront an oppressive regime.⁵⁸ The proliferation of groups committed to armed struggle in Latin America, Palestine, and Algeria had influenced young Iranians, particularly university students, to form these guerrilla organizations.⁵⁹ But the emphasis on guerrilla warfare was alien and distasteful to the reformists, and the relationship between them and the guerrilla organizations was an uneasy one. For Montazeri and his fellow clerics, it was not the dispute over methods of struggle but that over ideology that caused the most tension with the *Mojahedin-e Khalq*. Even though *Mojahedin-e Khalq* shared with the politically active clergy a belief in Islam and a dedication to opposing the Pahlavi regime, they parted ways on some major issues.

Mojahedin-e Khalq was an anticlerical organization, even though its attitude toward the clergy was not clearly hostile until the early 1980's.⁶⁰ Like followers of Christian Liberation Theology in Latin America, the members of *Mojahedin-e Khalq* were partial to a Marxist approach in analyzing socioeconomic factors, especially the problems of poverty and discrimination. But as religious believers, they needed to reconcile their faith with this materialist approach to the problems of their society. That they did by calling for a "*jam'eh-ye bi tabaqeh-e tohidi*" (monotheistic classless society) through a new interpretation of the sacred texts. The interpretation that they were seeking would be scientific, contemporary, revolutionary, and able to mobilize support to overthrow the forces of oppression.⁶¹

By calling for a new hermeneutic, these young men challenged what they considered the outdated educational system of the *howzeh* and its related hierarchy. In their demand for change, they went far beyond the reforms suggested by seminarians such as Motahhari and Montazeri. Theirs were not suggestions for reform but demands for a revolution of the Islamic education.

The radical approach of the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* made both the conservative and reformist clergy uneasy. The seminarians were also concerned about the organization's turn to Marxism, fearing that, even if it were only used to analyze temporal socioeconomic issues, it would endanger faith in Islam, particularly among young people. Their fear

was not without foundation. In 1975, a group within the organization rejected religion and declared themselves Marxist-Leninists, creating a schism that split the organization into two separate bodies.⁶² The new formation followed Marx in his opinion that religion served as an opiate for the masses and not as a useful tool in the struggle for liberation.⁶³ Even though many members of the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* remained loyal to their religious beliefs, in the eyes of men like Montazeri this schism made even these members suspect because of the lingering tension in their ideology between faith in God and attraction to Marxism.

The split within the organization took place when Montazeri was imprisoned in Evin. One learns from Montazeri's memoirs that during this time he had no contact with the Marxist wing but had irritating encounters with members who were still faithful to Islam. He found them arrogant, condescending, disrespectful of the authority of the sources of emulations, and susceptible to falling astray of Islam. He particularly took offense at their "cavalier attitude" toward rituals of purification, which were so important to clerics in general and Montazeri in particular.⁶⁴

According to traditional Muslims, individuals who do not believe in God are impure not only in their thoughts but also in their bodies, due to their different cleaning practices.⁶⁵ Therefore, there were and are strict rules to avoid contamination caused by sharing the same utensils, cleaning oneself in the same water, and buying food made by the "infidels," among other things.⁶⁶ In prison, Montazeri and his peers complained about the lax attitude (or the indifference) of the members of *Mojahedin-e Khalq* in observing rules of purity as they continued to socialize with the Marxists. Apparently to annoy Montazeri and other clerics, some of these members made deliberate public display of the violation of the purification codes, and even on occasion sabotaged the efforts of the clergy to keep their tools and food separate. Unable to persuade them to stay away from the Marxists, in late spring of 1976, from within the walls of the prison Montazeri and other clergy, including Taleqani, Mahdavi Kani, and Rafsanjani, reached a "public decision," or according to some made an oral religious decree, asking the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* to separate themselves from the Marxists, not only ideologically but physically.⁶⁷ Predictably, these young men did not receive the directive kindly, and their relationship with the clergy deteriorated.

Despite his irritation, Montazeri's attitude toward the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* was tolerant and civil. In his memoirs, Ahmad Ahmad, one of the former members of the organization who was in the same ward as Montazeri in the Evin prison, recalls him with these words:

Mr. Montazeri had a down to earth and honest character and that was why sometimes people wanted to talk to him to feel good. He spoke with them with his sweet Najafabadi accent. He was very hard on himself but was very tolerant toward others. He would always respond to questions even to the irrelevant ones with patience and good humor . . . Even though he was physically tired and weak he would never allow others to take care of his chores . . . he was obsessed with cleanliness. He would wash his own cloths and spread them on a rope in the prison cell. Once I asked him about why he rewashd his wet cloths when they brushed against the wall? He gave me a very good response. He said "do you want to know what Islam has to say about this or what Montazeri's reasoning is?" I told him that I wished to know the answer to both. He then said: "Islam does not require you to do this, [what I do] then is my own problem. So don't use me as a model."⁶⁸

Montazeri's portrayal of the members of the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* was neither flattering nor hostile. He criticized them for their weaknesses but acknowledged the role they played in the revolutionary process. He also protected the families of imprisoned *Mojahedin-e Khalq* by distributing funds among them – this was one of the Savak charges against him. Moreover, it was Montazeri who in the early 1970's pleaded with the exiled Khomeini to lend his voice in preventing the planned executions of many members of the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* by the Pahlavi regime.⁶⁹

Prison taught Montazeri many things, about his peers, other prisoners, and wardens, and about himself. He reflected on his years in prison this way:

In my view, during the Shah's period, prison was similar to a classroom. Anyone who wished to become skilled and more mature should go to prison where one has the opportunity to see and to converse with many people, an opportunity which for many does not exist outside the prison walls. In jail one can exchange ideas, can argue, and has the opportunity to encounter people with different temperaments. Also, in prison one can know one's essence. There are some people who after a couple of threats or lashes would confess to everything, and, then there are those who [due to these threats or abuses] develop resistance like fortified steel. Prison takes fear away from a human being.⁷⁰

Years of Exile

In addition to imprisonment, the state sentenced Montazeri to several internal exiles in order to further curb his political activities. His first exile followed his release from his second prison term. Considered a security threat in the politically volatile city of Qom during the upcoming coronation of Mohammad Reza Shah in 1967, Montazeri, with no credible charge brought against him, was sentenced to three months of banishment to Masjid Soleyman, a semi-arid town in Khuzestan province. Masjid Soleyman, the first oil-producing town in Iran, had two parts. One consisted of residences belonging to the people associated with the oil industry. This segment of the city was architecturally modern, with buildings equipped with up-to-date amenities. The other part of the city was older, traditional, and basically neglected. When Montazeri arrived in Masjid Soleyman, it had already lost its prominence and its prosperous section was on a path of decline. But he was respectfully received by the governor of the town, and was taken to the house of a prominent member of the clergy, who was the religious figure for the oil industry employees and who resided in the oil-related section of the town. Montazeri's comments on his first exile were very much in keeping with his recollections of his jail times: he gave a fair share to both good and bad, in regard to both people he encountered and things that happened to him. An amusing exchange with two military policemen, who were escorting him on the train from Qom to Masjid Soleyman, sheds light on how some of these young men, themselves of peasant origins, were socialized in the military, as well as on Montazeri's propensity to speak his mind:

During the trip the military policemen treated me very harshly. I tried to convince them to let me out of the train during the prayer time, but I did not succeed. So I had to perform my ablution in the train's bathroom. Even there they did not leave me alone and stood guard with their guns by the bathroom door. During the trip we sometimes quarreled. One of them once said: "Sir, you use the soil and water of this country so why don't you pray for the Imperial Majesty?" I replied: "Are the soil and water of this country the property of the Imperial Majesty?" and he said: "Yes, they are." And then I said: "Well if you tell me that security [the stability of his regime] is his business, that I can comprehend, but owning its water and soil?"⁷¹

After his release from his first exile, Montazeri ignored the ban on his travel to Qom and went to the city, only to be escorted out by security

forces and sent to his hometown of Najafabad, where he arrived in January 1968. During his stay in Najafabad, Montazeri made a secret trip to Karbala and Najaf to see Khomeini. That trip cost him another jail period. Soon after his release from his third incarceration, he was sent to Najafabad at the end of spring 1970 and forbidden to leave. This banishment was due to his having signed a letter of protest against the American investment in Iran, and also to his effort to secure Khomeini the position of the Supreme Source of Emulation after the death of Ayatollah Hakim.

During his exile, or forced residence, in Najafabad, Montazeri led an active life – he taught, wrote, and gave sermons. And it was during this period that he gave the previously mentioned famous set of Friday Prayers and that the controversy over the book *Shahid-e Javid* reached its peak. Historically, the quietist strand in Shii Islam has been nourished by the story of the occultation of Mahdi and his eventual second coming. Shiis believe that Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam and the last male descendent of the Prophet Mohammad through the line of his daughter Fatima and his son-in-law and cousin Ali, had gone into occultation at a young age but would return to deliver the world from injustice at some point in the future. For many, the implication of this story is that no one can construct a just government prior to the second coming of the Mahdi, and therefore one should endure life under the control of unjust rulers. Like most committed revolutionaries, Montazeri was trying to deconstruct this narrative and shift the emphasis from the story of Mahdi to the story of the martyrdom of Imam Hossein in Karbala and his brave war against an unjust power, all for the sake of bringing a just order. Montazeri's goal was to use the battle of Karbala and its potent emotional impact as a mobilizing tool for revolutionary action during his Friday sermons.

Montazeri was removed from Najafabad to yet another location in 1973. The excuse for this exile was his alleged involvement with the activities of a religious group, called Abuzar, centered in the city of Nahavand in the province of Hamadan. The Abuzar group consisted mostly of young religious laymen who had decided that the best way to fight the regime was through guerrilla activities. They were soon discovered by the Savak; many of them were arrested, and the group itself was disbanded by the end of 1972. Their connection with Qom's *howzeh* was through not Montazeri but Ayatollah Rabbani Shirazi, Montazeri's close political associate. So, in his letter of protest against

his exile sentence, Montazeri implied that the real reason for his sentence lay elsewhere. He defended himself by declaring that all his activities were legal under the provisions of the Iranian constitution.

Predictably, he did not succeed in having his sentence overturned – a fate he shared with two dozen other clergymen who were rounded up at the same time and sentenced to exile in different parts of the country. He was sent to Tabas, a desert town in the eastern province of Khorasan. The arid and hot town was chosen to keep Montazeri away from the center of activities, but the authorities failed to isolate him entirely. According to official documents, during his stay in Tabas he was visited by many who traveled from faraway places to see him. He also remained abreast of events in the *howzeh*, particularly the still-raging controversy over Salehi Najafabadi's book, as well as the hostility of a group of seminarians called *velayati* against Ali Shari'ati. A religious but lay Sorbonne-educated political activist, Shari'ati's oratory and writing skills had captured the imagination of thousands of religious university students. His criticism of the traditional approach to Shii doctrines led some – mostly a group called *velayati* – to accuse him of spreading Wahhabism. Here, Savak found another opportunity, similar to the one provided by the controversy over the *Shahid-e Javid*, to exploit a religious rift. Savak imprisoned Shari'ati in September 1973, then published the transcript of parts of his interrogation in which he spoke of his anticlerical activities.⁷² Many clergy rejoiced at the imprisonment of the famous orator, but Montazeri was not among them. Four days after Shari'ati's detention, Montazeri wrote a letter addressed to the high clergy in Qom attacking the *velayati* group for spreading lies and baseless accusations, which he asserted would only benefit their mutual enemies.⁷³ At the end, he called upon the high clergy to interfere and provide opportunities for scientific debate when confronted with a controversial thesis, lest feuds and factionalism destroy the religious community. The letter was disseminated by one of Montazeri's students: Ali Khamenei, the future Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic.⁷⁴

As a matter of practice, authorities did not keep exiled individuals in any one area for long, fearing that they might forge ties with the locals. In the case of Montazeri, they were frustrated with his quickly rising popularity among the townspeople, particularly the downtrodden, who were attracted to his message of justice, and therefore decided

to move him at the end of summer 1974 from Tabas to yet another peripheral town: Khalkhal.⁷⁵

The topography and climate of Khalkhal, a mountainous and cold area in Eastern Azarbaijan province, could not have been more different than the flat, dry, desert climate of Tabas, but the two were equally forbidding. This time, the state authorities had better success in confining Montazeri. Azarbaijan was the province where the politically cautious and non-confrontational Ayatollah Kazem Shari'atmadari enjoyed strong support among the local clergy, who might otherwise have been Montazeri's conduit to the ordinary people. Moreover, Montazeri's unfamiliarity with Azari, the language of the province, further limited his effort to communicate. He tried in vain to mobilize the population, but the odds were against him.

After only five months in Khalkhal, upon the urging of the local authorities, who did not wish to be bothered by his presence, Montazeri was moved once more, this time to Saqez, a Kurdish town with a Sunni majority population. Saqez was probably chosen because the officers at the headquarters of Savak believed that the Shii cleric would not be able to get along with the Sunni population and would therefore be ineffective. Still, the local Savak feared his influence on the people and requested that headquarters restrict the number of his visitors from outside the province.⁷⁶ Life was tough for Montazeri during this last period of exile. He was tired of the inconstancies of his life; he had no roots and no place to cling to. The cold weather, the lack of clean water, and his general isolation from most of his family and from the center of political activities made Montazeri's experience a challenging one. He remembered his time in Saqez with very little of his characteristic cheerfulness. Nonetheless, he at times did engage the Sunni clergy, sometimes arguing about their different interpretations of Islam's history.

Montazeri's exiles took him to remote and unfamiliar areas of the country. During these trying times, he did what he could to mobilize the locals, but his success was modest at best. He was moved from one place to another before he could forge lasting relations, and he was sent to places where he either did not speak the local language or did not share the local religious views. Unlike in his periods in prison, and despite the fact that he was not physically abused, he often felt lonely and depressed.

His last period of exile ended in 1975, when the Savak rounded up a score of clergy from around the country and sent them to jail on the occasion of the commemoration of the June 1963 uprising and its bloody suppression.⁷⁷ These commemorations went beyond the walls of the seminary and took on the character of public protest. The reasons for the intensity of this year's events in comparison to previous ones lie in a series of state decisions, including the changing of the calendar from Islamic to pre-Islamic, the creation of a one-party system, and the more rigorous observance of a 1967 Family Protection Act, which the clergy saw as an affront to their own Islamic family laws. From Najaf, Khomeini wrote a number of proclamations against the regime's policies, particularly the one-party system and the demand for universal party membership.⁷⁸ Frightened by the intensity of the protest against these policies, the Savak was moved to act.

The Revolutionary Period: 1977–79

Montazeri was freed in November 1978, three years into his ten-year sentence. He was not the only one: Taleqani was also freed, while many of their other prison companions had been already sent home. Once out, Montazeri found himself in the midst of a political environment embroiled in a major revolution. The years between 1963 and 1975 had been a good period for the Pahlavi regime. The security apparatus of the state had been successful in crushing the major guerrilla organizations. Thanks to a huge increase in the price of oil, Iran had experienced a few years of very rapid economic growth. Oppositional actions were sporadic, and mass mobilization still lay in the future. Mohammad Reza Shah was feeling confident about his control of the home front and his ability to project his influence outside Iran's borders. By the mid-1970's, Iran had one of the largest armies in the region and was considered the keeper of regional stability by the Nixon administration.

But by 1975, there were signs of potentially critical problems confronting the state.⁷⁹ Corruption and nepotism had profoundly infected the state, and rapid growth and ambitious planning had created economic bottlenecks and uneven development. In addition, a global recession and the subsequent fall of oil prices had put a damper on the economy. In the United States, Jimmy Carter, the Democratic Party nominee, who had made the promotion of human rights an

important part of his foreign policy platform, was elected president in 1976. The Shah, a supporter of the candidacy of the incumbent Republican Gerald Ford, was worried how Carter's declared policies might affect the Pahlavi regime, with its abysmal record on human rights. Despite his veneer of strength, the Shah never felt completely secure in his power, particularly in his relationship with the United States. The memory of his return to Iran after the coup of 1953 and the role of the United States in that period led to his exaggerated view of the influence of foreign powers on Iranian politics. He was also sick with cancer and wished a smooth transition of power to his son once he was gone. The combination of these factors led him to decide on a liberalization policy after years of holding a harsh grip over the political landscape.

The first phase of a two-year revolutionary period began in May 1977. It continued well into the fall, with a series of open letters written primarily by secular intellectuals, most of whom were adherents of Mossadeq's liberal vision for Iran. Their reformist demands included a return to the constitution, elimination of all repressive and arbitrary tools and institutions, and protection of freedom of expression.⁸⁰ The letter-writing campaign led to the revival of reform-oriented old political organizations and the creation of some new ones. For most of this reformist phase, the political activities were confined to indoor sites, but toward its end it spilled out into the street and gave start to a second phase. The state was not ready for street demonstrations and suppressed them by the use of force. Yet the decision not to torture those arrested or to send them to military courts emboldened the protest movement.

During the first phase of the protests until January 1978, most of the leaders of the opposition were secular intellectuals, and their demands on the state did not exceed what might be achieved through reforms. Montazeri and many other political activists associated with the *howzeh* were in prison at this time and consequently unable to play a part in these events. But Khomeini, in exile abroad, was not so constricted, and in September 1977 he sent a message to his religious followers, urging them to do their part, to start writing letters, and to "declare the crimes of the Shah to the world."⁸¹

In January 1978, an insulting article, written about Khomeini by a pseudonymous author, appeared in *Ettela'at*, one of two major daily papers in Iran. It attacked Khomeini personally, as well as

his family background, and accused him of being an agent of “old colonialism,” meaning that of Britain. The article infuriated the clerical community, and a number of grand ayatollahs, including Shari’atmaderi, demanded a retraction and called for a peaceful protest in Qom. The police interfered, and more than a dozen protesters were killed. From then on, calls for reform were overwhelmed by radical and revolutionary voices. Khomeini – with his uncompromising stands and his demand for the overthrow of the regime – emerged as the distinct leader of the movement. Inevitably, Khomeini’s leadership brought with it an emphasis on Islam and Islamic political discourse. The regime’s policy toward this development was inconsistent, vacillating between suppression and concession.

The combination of carrot and stick proved to be an ineffective approach; one part emboldened the opposition and the other fueled its anger. Meanwhile, unresolved economic problems contributed to the revolutionary fervor. By the time Montazeri was freed, there was already a dramatic shift in the balance of power from the state to the revolutionary forces led by Khomeini. Huge street demonstrations were now part of the daily life of Iranian cities, and strikes by workers in key industries, including the oil industry, put additional pressure on the state. After a period of vacillation, the Shah, in a last desperate attempt to save his throne, entered into a negotiation with some of the National Front leaders. But no one among the National Front leaders except Shapur Bakhtiar was willing to take his offer of the prime ministership.⁸² Bakhtiar accepted on the condition that the Shah would depart from Iran; he did not, however, ask for the abdication of the embattled monarch. He put in place a series of reforms, dissolved Savak, released political prisoners, and began a review of foreign contracts. But from the point of view of the revolutionaries, all of this was too little, too late. On January 12, less than a week into Bakhtiar’s prime ministership, Khomeini declared the establishment of a body, the Revolutionary Council, to run the affairs of the revolution. One of the most important tasks of the Revolutionary Council was to prepare the ground for the creation of a provisional government. For their safety, the names of the council members (which included Morteza Motahari, Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani, Ali Khamenei, Mahmud Taleqani, Mohammad Besheshti, and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsnajani) were kept secret. Most of these men were already members of the non-secretive organization *Jame’eh-ye Rohaniyat-e Mobaraz* (Society

of Combatant Clergy, SCC), which was founded in Tehran in 1977 to organize and sponsor the religious opposition.

The Shah departed Iran in January, and Khomeini, despite the initial but unsuccessful effort of Bakhtiar to block his return, triumphantly entered Iran on February 1, 1979. Within a few days, Khomeini declared publicly the formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, headed by Mehdi Bazargan, one of the leaders of the Liberation Movement. With this declaration, Iran entered into a brief phase of dual sovereignty and witnessed the revolutionary forces and the government of Bakhtiar competing to secure the loyalty of different branches of the military, a crucial factor in this contest. The last phase of the revolution involved intense clashes between the revolutionary forces (including guerrilla groups) and troops loyal to the Shah's appointed government, which ended in victory on the part of the revolutionaries. On February 11, 1979, the Pahlavi state fell.

Montazeri and the Triumph of the Revolution

One of Montazeri's first acts after his release from prison was to visit Khomeini, who was living in Paris following his expulsion from Najaf by the Iraqi government in October 1978.⁸³ Over a decade since his last visit with Khomeini, the reunion was an emotional boost for Montazeri, who found himself once again in the presence of his mentor. The circumstances were different and unfamiliar, however. When Montazeri arrived in Paris, he found his teacher surrounded by non-clerics. Ebrahim Yazdi, a member of the Liberation Movement and Khomeini's translator and chief of staff, seemed to be his closest confidant and advisor. Along with Yazdi, the public face of Khomeini's entourage included Hassan Bani Sadr, the future president of the Islamic Republic, and Sadeq Qotbzadeh, the future foreign minister and head of the national radio and television system of the Islamic Republic. According to Montazeri, the major preoccupation of Khomeini and his advisers at that time was the creation of a parallel government to compete with the one currently in place. The appointment of Mehdi Bazargan as the head of the Provisional Government was already agreed upon, and it seemed that members of his cabinet had also been chosen and that all had given their consent. There was one exception, however, and that was Karim Sanjabi, a prominent

member of the National Front, who had yet to agree to fill the post of the minister of foreign affairs. According to Montazeri, Khomeini asked him to help secure the consent of Sanjabi in joining Bazargan's administration.

Once back in Iran, Montazeri's time was filled with many different activities. Every day he had meetings with a large number of people who had come to Qom either to pay their respects or to request his help. As one of Khomeini's major representatives in Iran, Montazeri received and distributed a significant part of the funds that came from Khomeini's religious and political followers. In addition, he spent some of his time giving interviews and delivering sermons to the public. On special occasions, he would travel to Tehran to be part of the bigger and more rapidly unfolding revolutionary play. One of his final acts prior to the collapse of the old regime was to write a long and emotional open letter to the members of the armed forces. In that letter, he appealed to their sense of nationalism and religiosity, and wrote of his hope for a civilian/military unity that could bring about a just government under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.

When Khomeini had returned and the eyes of the world were focused on Iran, Montazeri was in a peculiar place. He was not a member of the powerful Revolutionary Council. He contended that he did not wish to become a member because all of the council's business was conducted in Tehran, and commuting to the capital on a regular basis was hard on him, still frail from prison. Whether Montazeri was included in the Welcome Committee organized for Khomeini's return to Iran is not certain.⁸⁴ In any case, he was not the one who accompanied Motahari when the latter entered the plane to greet Khomeini at the highly symbolic moment of his arrival in Tehran. At this time, the most visible personalities among the revolutionaries were clergymen such as Ayatollahs Taleqani, Motahari, and Beheshti and laymen such as Hassan Bani-Sadr, Sadeq Qotbzadeh, and Ebrahim Yazdi.⁸⁵ Most of these men, with the exception of Taleqani, had not been as involved in the process of revolution for as long or as intensely as Montazeri had been. Motahari, for example, started his earnest participation only in 1977.⁸⁶ The same can be said about Beheshti. Why then should Montazeri's public visibility, particularly outside Iran, have appeared dimmer than that of others at this time?

Men such as Qotbzadeh, Yazdi, and Bani Sadr were in Paris with Khomeini and were his connection to the rest of the world, particularly to the progressive segments of the West. It was important to

present the revolutionary movement to the people outside Iran as a just struggle against an unjust rule, and these men, with their linguistic ability, were fit for the job. What explains the visibility of clergymen such as Motahhari and Beheshti is their active engagement with the revolutionary process in its crucial last year. Ironically, Montazeri, whose revolutionary record eclipsed that of Beheshti or even Motahhari, had been in prison for prolonged periods of time and had missed a great deal of the preparations for the revolution during its final year.

Another factor that sheds some light on this question is Montazeri's absence from the vibrant religious intellectual circles of Tehran. For at least a decade before the revolution, several lay and clerical teachers and professionals, including Motahhari, had created circles of intellectual gatherings and organized lecture series engaging the younger generation of Iranians – particularly the university students. The involvement of Ali Shari'ati added dynamism to this process and invited others to engage more seriously with the modern Western intellectual tradition. These circles not only presented men such as Motahhari as the intellectual leaders to religiously oriented, educated Iranians but also created a political affinity among these clerical leaders, who naturally sought one another's advice about revolutionary strategies.⁸⁷ Montazeri was not a part of this Tehrani circle. He belonged to the traditional *howzeh*, and as soon as he was freed from jail, he left Tehran for Qom and abandoned most of the activities in the capital to these men.

Montazeri's personality and appearance must be mentioned as factors that contributed to this neglect. His strong Najafabadi rural accent, his short stature, his down-to-earth manners, his unrestrained passion and impatience, some of which will appear more vividly in the later chapters, led to a portrayal of Montazeri as a man not of the same caliber as the serious and dignified Khomeini, Taleqani, or Beheshti. His tolerance, combined with his unadorned manners, gave many the liberty not only to be comfortable with him but to laugh at his expense. For example, in his memoirs about his prison experience, Rafsanjani recounts a story about a comedic play based on one of Montazeri's prison Friday Prayer sermons, designed and performed by Hassan Lahouti. Rafsanjani recalls that even though the comic aspect of the play was included at Montazeri's expense, the latter took it with good humor.⁸⁸ In the eyes of many in a revolutionary situation, that aspect of his character made him less than a model of a revolutionary leader.

All these factors together may have contributed to the inattention to his role as a revolutionary actor or religious thinker in the early (and some not-so-early) studies of the revolution. This scant attention is particularly noteworthy in the academic works where religion and religious actors were a primary focus of study.⁸⁹

Despite all these issues, Montazeri was indeed an influential revolutionary actor. For many of the revolutionary clerics, and in the absence of Khomeini, he was their protector and their leader.⁹⁰ In fact, on occasion his influence superseded that of the other powerful men who surrounded Khomeini. An example of this involves Bakhtiar, the sitting prime minister. Soon after the Shah's departure from Iran, Bakhtiar offered to go to Paris and meet with Khomeini. Mottahari and Beheshti, among others, were in favor of the visit. But Montazeri convinced Khomeini not to meet with Bakhtiar before the latter resigned from his post, arguing that the balance of power was already in favor of the revolutionaries and that any conciliatory gesture toward the officials of the dying Pahlavi regime would only help the latter. Khomeini was convinced and the meeting was cancelled.⁹¹ Also, together with Motahhari, Montazeri was the one who made decisions about Khomeini's place of residence and his security apparatus during the days before the old regime had collapsed.

How then should we judge Montazeri's importance as a revolutionary? No one disputes that between 1963 and 1978 Montazeri dedicated his life to the revolution. Where there is disagreement it is in the judgment about his significance for the revolution. In contemporary Iran, there are two contradictory narratives about Montazeri's role, one presented by his later detractors and one by his supporters and defenders. Detractors, such as Asadollah Badamchian, argue that the naïve Montazeri was neither an important player nor a serious confidant of Khomeini.⁹² These critics conclude that Montazeri played no more than a peripheral role compared to the key players, such as the intellectually superior Motahhari, the suave and sophisticated Beheshti, and the politically skilled Hashemi Rafsanjani. Of course, this judgment, or at least its public expression, developed only after Montazeri was ousted from his position as Successor to Khomeini in 1989; prior to that, many of the same detractors had praised him for his unique service to Khomeini and to the revolution. In his book, *Faqih-e Aliqadr* (The Exalted Jurist), Mostafa Izadi has collected a series of the accolades showered on Montazeri when he was a favorite son of the

revolution.⁹³ For example, the current Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, once considered Montazeri an essential figure at the center of the revolution, a man whose knowledge and courageous personality made his contributions unique. Mohammad Emami Kashani, a member of the conservative Guardian Council, argued that Montazeri's simplicity in speech and lifestyle veiled his political astuteness and his ability to mobilize people for political action. Azari Qomi, who himself became a thorn in the side of the Islamic Republic in the mid 1990's, mentioned that from the time Khomeini was first sent to exile, the activist clergy considered him the one who would replace Khomeini should anything happen to him. Similar statements were made by other members of the revolutionary elite.

It is true that no one individual can make or break a movement of such magnitude as the Iranian revolution. But there is no doubt, as Savak documents of the time reveal, that Montazeri was second to none in his dedication to an Islamic revolution. He was a man fully engaged with the rapidly changing political environment of the 1960's–70's, a man who made sacrifices for a cause he believed in, all in the hope of establishing a just Islamic system. It was his revolutionary credentials, along with his jurisprudential knowledge, that made him the contender for the highest position in the post-revolutionary order, i.e., the heir to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic.

Notes

- 1 Roy Mottahedeh argues that the reasons for clerical political inactions during this period were two: one the disillusionment of people with the heavy-handed method of some activist mollahs; the other the recognition by a large number of clergymen of the fractious nature of the clerical establishment, which was only revealed when the clergy became active during the Constitutional Revolution. Together these two factors made the clergy politically cautious. Mottahedeh, *The Mantle*, 227–8.
- 2 There were other clergymen, such as Mahmud Taleqani, Mohammad Ali Angaji, and Sayyed Reza Zanjani, who defied Borujerdi and supported Mossadeq, but none of them had the organizational backing enjoyed by Kashani.
- 3 There are several narratives about which of these two men should bear the primary responsibility for the rift. In the post-revolution Iran, starting with Khomeini, and continuing up to the period of this writing, the religious narrative puts the blame squarely on Mossadeq. Thus, Kashani

is considered the real hero of the nationalization era and Mossadeq is seen as an ultimate traitor. For a detailed treatment of the two men in this narrative, see Farhang Rajaei, "Post-Revolutionary Historiography in Iran," in *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil*, James Bill and W. Roger Louis, eds. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1988), 118–40. On the other side, supporters of Mossadeq see in Kashani an unreasonable or ambitious man who put impossible demands on Mossadeq. See, for example, Karim Sanjabi's political memoirs, *Omid ha va na-Omidaha* [Hopes and Despairs] (London: Jebbeh Mellian Iran, 1989), 123–5. The third narrative, the scholarly approach, does not spare Mossadeq from blame, but still, with the possible exception of Yann Richard's judgment in his chapter in Nikki Keddie, ed., *Religion and Politics in Iran* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), considers Kashani to be the man who did the most damage to the relationship and was most instrumental to the success of the coup. See the works of Richard Cottam, Ervand Abrahamian, Sharough Akhavi, Homa Katouzian, and Fakhreddin Azimi.

- 4 Based on some evidence, Borujerdi, due to his concern about the Tudeh Party, ultimately supported the coup.
- 5 For a concise summary of Navvaf Safavi's life and thought, see Sohrab Behdad, "Islamic Utopia in Pre-Revolutionary Iran: Navvab Safavi and the Fada'ian-e Eslami," *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 1 (1997): 40–65.
- 6 This public rebuke was published in a pamphlet, *Rahnama-ye Haqayeq* [The Guide to Truths] ca. 1950. See Ali Rahnama, *Nirouha-ye Mazhabi dar Bastar-e Harekat-e Nehzat-e Melli* [Religious Forces within the Dynamic of the Nationalist Movement] (Tehran: Gam-e No Press, 2005), 57–9.
- 7 Montazeri, *Memoirs*, 62. The post-revolution official historiography is silent about the existence of any such tension between Navvab Safavi and the clerical establishment. And as for Khomeini's position toward Navvab Safavi, several clergy, including Ahmad Khomeini and Sadeq Khalkhali, focus on the affinity between the two on the subject of antiregime activities. For more information on this, see the Islamic Revolution Document Center, at <http://www.irdc.ir/fa/content/8586/default.aspx>.
- 8 For an informed analysis of Iran–US relations during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, see Richard Cottam, *Iran and the United States: A Cold War Case Study* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988). For the specific period of the early 1960's, see 110–31.
- 9 Not all of the organizations within the National Front were secular. Some, such as *Nehzat Azadi-ye Iran* (Liberation Movement of Iran), a religious organization founded by Mehdi Bazargan, Mahmood Taleqani,

- and Yadollah Sahabi in 1961, had religious tendencies. See Houchang Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: Liberation Movement of Iran under Shah and Khomeini* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- 10 See Sussan Siavoshi, *Liberal Nationalism in Iran: The Failure of a Movement* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 87–117.
 - 11 This meeting, which Montazeri recalled in his memoirs (83), was used to cast a negative light on his character as one who was not a dedicated revolutionary until later years, by Abbas Salimi Namin in *Pasdazht-e Haqiqat* [Guarding the Truth] (Tehran: Daftar Motale'at va Tadvin Tarikh Iran, 2000), 40.
 - 12 A subsequent brief but confidential memo from Isfahan's military commander to the Ministry of War mentioned the surveillance of Montazeri's activities in that regard. See Appendix 4 in Montazeri, *Memoirs*, 444.
 - 13 For the role of state security and military organizations in the anti-Baha'i activities, such as the demolition of sections of the Baha'i temple in Tehran, see Erfan Qane'i-Nejad, *Dar Damgah-e Hadeseh: Goftegouyi ba Parviz Sabeti, Modir-e Amniyat Dakheli-ye Savak* [In the Trap of Events: A Conversation with Parviz Sabeti, The Savak Internal Division Director] (Los Angeles, CA: Sherkat Ketab, 2012), 119–20.
 - 14 Moin, *Khomeini*, 70.
 - 15 For a detailed account of the dynamic of choosing the *marja* and the role of Khomeini's followers in attempting to make him the Supreme Source of Emulation, see Abdolvahab Farani, "Marja'iyat Imam Khomeini," at <http://library.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx?pid=102834&ParentID=0&BookID=57298&MetaDataID=13410&Volume=1&PageIndex=0&PersonalID=0&NavigateMode=CommonLibrary&Content=>.
 - 16 For an inside account of the movement, see Ali Davani, *Nehzat-e Do Mahe-ye Ruhanyoun –e Iran* [The Two-Month Movement of the Iranian Clergy], 2nd ed. (Tehran: Markaz Asnad-e Eslami, 1998).
 - 17 Montazeri, *Memoirs*, 103–4.
 - 18 Khomeini, *Sabifeh Imam Khomeini*, 1:135–7.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 415–24.
 - 20 The most well-publicized assassinations by this group was the 1965 fatal shooting of Prime Minister Hassan Ali Mansour. It was the government of Mansour that had presented the bill to parliament to give US advisors legal immunity. This assassination led to the arrest and executions of several of the organization's members.
 - 21 Montazeri, *Memoirs*, 216–17.
 - 22 See Izadi, *Faqih-e Aliqadr*, 49–51. The only person who was unrivaled in his position as Supreme Source of Emulation was Borujerdi.

After his death, there was never a consensus about who was the highest source. However, following the death of Ayatollah Sayyed Mohsen Hakim (1889–1970), who since the passing of Borujerdi had been considered by many to be the Supreme *Marja'*, Montazeri and Abdolrahim Rabbani Shirazi were the first among their peers to write an open letter recommending Khomeini for this highest religious position. Their appeal was based not only on Khomeini's traditional qualification as a bearer of Islamic knowledge but also on his courage and ability to safeguard Islam and Muslims.

- 23 See Badamchian, *Khaterat-e Montazeri*, 298–9. At least one of Montazeri's detractors, who played a crucial role in undermining him, Mohammad Rayshahri, the Minister of Information and General Prosecutor of the Islamic Republic, in a special edition focused on Montazeri in his monthly *Arzeshha*, acknowledged that Montazeri was chosen by Khomeini to be the latter's representative with total authority in Iran while Khomeini was in exile. See Mohammad Rayshahri, "Montazeri: az Owj ta Forud" [Montazeri: The Rise and Fall], *Arzeshha* (January–February 1998): 5.
- 24 See Montazeri, *Memoirs*, app. 18, 454–5.
- 25 For an incisive study of claims in the context of contentious politics, see Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007).
- 26 For transcripts of these sermons, see Izadi, *Faqih-e Aliqadr*, 113–27.
- 27 These sermons were given when Khomeini's position on Islam and politics was published in Najaf in a book on *Islamic Government*. Here, Khomeini advocated the establishment of an Islamic state led by a religious jurist.
- 28 See a copy of the Savak document dated April 5, 1972 in Izadi, *Faqih-e Aliqadr*, 85.
- 29 For relevant copies of such directives, see *ibid.*, 141, 142, and 146. All of these directives occurred during 1970.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 147.
- 31 For a brief but informative description of the meaning and function of Hossein martyrdom see, Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 181–94.
- 32 See Ne'matollah Salehi Najafabadi, *Shahid-e Javid* [The Eternal Martyr], 9th ed. (Qom, 1970), no. D, 158–9.
- 33 Soon after the beginning of the controversy, Ali Meshkini, who according to Montazeri was pressured, wrote an essay where he took back his praise for the book, but Montazeri remained true to his foreword. Salehi was a childhood friend of Montazeri. They met at the elementary school and became fast friends. They also shared for a while a *hojreh* at

- one of the seminaries of Isfahan's *Howzeh*. Their friendship lasted until the death of Salehi in 2006. For more details on their connection, see the following interview with Montazeri: <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/82455/>.
- 34 Lotfollah Golpaygani, *Shahid-e Agah* (1971), digital version, 13–15, <http://toraath.com/index.php?name=Sections&req=viewarticle&artid=168&page=1>.
 - 35 One of the people who wrote a critical piece on the theological aspects of the book was none other than Montazeri's friend, Morteza Motahhari. See his *Hamaseh-ye Hosseini* (The Epic of Hossein).
 - 36 Hojjat-ol Islam Rasoul Ja'afarian, *Jarianha va Sazmanha-ye Siasi-e Iran dar Faseleh Salha-ye 1320–1357* [Iran's Political Movements and Organizations between 1941–1978] (Tehran: Islamic Revolution Document Center, 2006).
 - 37 In the post-revolution official historiography, Shamsabadi is portrayed as a political supporter of Khomeini. See Mohammad Rayshahri, *Memoirs* (Tehran: Islamic Revolution Document Center, 2009), 4:325–7.
 - 38 For a detailed account of Hashemi's activities, see Evan Siegel, "The Case of Mehdi Hashemi," at <http://iran.qlineorientalist.com/Articles/MehdiHashemi/MehdiHashemi.html>.
 - 39 In his memoirs, Mahdavi Kani, who was also at the prison, mentions that after the assassination, some of the prison guards, provoked by Savak, would sarcastically but implicitly accused Montazeri of involvement in the murder plot. Mahdavi Kani, *Memoirs*, 144.
 - 40 Years later, after the fall of Montazeri from his official position as the Designated Successor to Khomeini, one of his detractors, Abbas Salimi Namin, in his review of Montazeri's *Memoirs*, and in reference to one of the passages therein, accused him of knowing the motivation and the goal of Mehdi Hashemi's group and of the methods used to kill Shamsabadi. He stopped short of accusing Montazeri of foreknowledge of the plot. See Salimi Namin, *Pasdasht*, 63–4.
 - 41 See a description of some of the articles of the original constitution at: <http://www.jameehmodarresin.org/aboutmenufa.html>. Later, changes were made to the original version.
 - 42 Hedayatollah Behbudim, *Sharh Esm: Zendeqi-Nameh Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei* [Description of the Name: The Life of Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei] (Tehran: Institution for Political Studies and Research, 2012), 157 and 228.
 - 43 Montazeri, *Memoirs*, 106, 128, and 140
 - 44 See Mohammad's letter at <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13911019000295>.
 - 45 Montazeri, *Memoirs*, 183.

- 46 See a letter from Hakim in Montazeri's *Memoirs*, app. 28, 461.
- 47 For a Laconian analysis of Montazeri post-revolutionary resistance to treatment of prisoners, see Behi, "The 'Real' in Resistance."
- 48 Qasr remained Tehran's main prison until the construction of the Evin prison in the late 1960's.
- 49 Qodratollah Alikhani, one of Montazeri's prison-mates during his last incarceration, remembers Montazeri receiving severe beatings in Evin prison. See a 2014 interview with Alikhani in the daily *Jomhuri Eslami* at <http://noandish.com/fa/news/7478/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%88-%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%85%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%B1%DB%8C>.
- 50 According to Mahdavi Kani, he and other younger imprisoned clergymen, such as Hashemi Rafsanjani, would try to prevent Taleqani and Montazeri, their older inmates, from having to perform these tasks by volunteering to substitute for them. However, Montazeri would insist on doing his share. See Mahdavi Kani, *Memoirs*, 162–3.
- 51 See Ashraf Dehqani's memoirs of prison in *Hamaseh-e Moqavemat* [The Epic of Resistance], 2nd ed. (London: Cherikha-ye Fada'i Khalq-e Iran Publications, 2004).
- 52 Montazeri, *Memoirs*, 197.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 201.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 207. This night, and Anvari's theatrical talents, had a great impact on these men. In addition to Montazeri, Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mahdavi Kani also recall this evening with fondness and nostalgia. See 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Enqelab va Pirouzi* [Revolution and Triumph], ed. Abbas Bashiri (Tehran: Bureau for Propagation of Revolution's Education, 2009), 56–59 and Mahdavi Kani, *Memoirs*, 156–7.
- 55 Montazeri, *Memoirs*, 210–11. In his memoirs, Mahdavi Kani also recalls Hashemi's bad vocal performance, which went beyond just one evening. According to Kani, Hashemi would recite Quran every morning, making himself the butt of a joke among some of his prison-mates. See Mahdavi Kani, *Memoirs*, 161.
- 56 See Ali Motahhari's essay in the daily *Etemad* at <http://fararu.com/fa/news/37120/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A2%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%B1%DB%8C>.

- 57 See Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Enqelab va Pirouzi*, 61.
- 58 Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism*, 210–13.
- 59 See Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 84–7.
- 60 This anticlerical attitude ultimately led to the bloody confrontation between the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* and the clergy soon after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic.
- 61 For a concise elaboration of the organization's ideology, see Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, 92–104.
- 62 Mohammad Taqi Shahrām, *Bayanieh E'lam-e Mavazeh-e Ideologic Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran* [Statement on the Ideological Stands of People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran] at <http://www.peykarandees.org/PeykarArchive/Mojahedin-ML/bayaniyeh-1354.html>. See in particular 35–43.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 According to many of his friends, including Motahhari, Montazeri was concerned to an obsessive degree about these rituals.
- 65 Whether People of the Book are also “impure” has been a matter of debate among the sources of emulation. In the past fifty years, more and more have decided that People of the Book should not be considered impure. Montazeri is among them.
- 66 For a sample of such areas of contamination, see Montazeri, *Estefta'at* (Tehran: Sayeh Publications, 2005), 1:27–8 and 167–9. See also *Estefta'at* (Tehran: Argavan Danesh Publications, 2009), 3:27–31.
- 67 This decision/decreed has been a matter of discussion among both religious and secular revolutionaries. Some have argued that the reason behind it was political, caused by fear over the Marxists' influence on Muslim activists. According to this view, physical separation would reduce the chances of intimate encounters among the two groups and reduce opportunities for such an influence. See the account of Mohammdi Gorgani, a close associate of Talaqani, in *Tarikh-e Irani* at <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/4/bodyView/1289/0/%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA.%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C.%DA%AF%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C.%D8%A7%D8%B2.%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C.%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%B3.%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%86.%DA%A9%D9%85%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7.%D8%AF%D8%B1.%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86.html>. Montazeri, on the other hand, gives a different reason for the decision, informed by his traditional religious view of the ritual of purification. See *Memoirs*, 212–14.

- 68 Ahmad Ahmad, *Memoirs*, ed. Mohsen Kazemi (Tehran: Sureh Mehr Publications, 2005), 436.
- 69 Montazeri, *Memoirs*, app. 30, 464.
- 70 Montazeri, *Memoirs*, 223.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 143–4.
- 72 In his studies of the scant Savak documents related to Shari'ati's interrogations, Ali Rahnama makes the point that Shari'ati himself may have wished to highlight his anticlerical writings in order to obscure his antiregime ones. See Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 330–5.
- 73 Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*, p. 336.
- 74 Izadi, *Faqih-e Aliqadr*, 157–62.
- 75 For a copy of the Savak document on this subject, see *ibid.*, 168.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 182–4.
- 77 See Ali Shirkhani, *Hamase-ye 17 Khordad 1354-e Madrase-yi Fayziyah* [The Epic of Fayziyah Seminary's Uprising of June 7, 1975] (Tehran: Islamic Revolution Document Center, 1998). This book contains interviews with nineteen seminary students who participated in the events.
- 78 Khomeini, *Sabifeh Imam Khomeini*, 3:76.
- 79 For a detailed description and analysis of the factors that led to the revolution, see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*; Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, and Mohsen Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988).
- 80 For an account of the events and activists of this period, see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 496–506.
- 81 See the entire message in Monhandes Mehdi Bazargan, *Enqelab Iran dar Do Harekat* [Iranian Revolution in Two Movements] (Tehran: Nehzat Azadi, 1984), 26.
- 82 As a consequence of his acceptance of the offer from the discredited and weak Shah, Bakhtiar was expelled from the National Front.
- 83 In a meeting between the Iraqi and Iranian ministers of foreign affairs in the United States, Iran (reportedly) requested that Khomeini be expelled from Najaf.
- 84 When he was asked what role he played in the formation of the committee, Montazeri gave a vague answer. See Montazeri, *Memoirs*, 241. Others, such as Mahdavi Kani, do not mention Montazeri's name as one of the leaders of the committee. According to Mahdavi Kani, Ayatollah Motahari was the chair of the committee. See Mahdvai Kani, *Memoirs*, 189–90.
- 85 In the West, scholarly works on revolutions, such as Nikki Keddie's *Roots of Revolution* and Mohsen Milani's *The Making of Iran's Islamic*

Revolution, paid very little attention, if any, to the role of Montazeri prior to and during the revolution.

- 86 After his forty-three-day detention related to his participation in the events of the 1963 uprising, Motahhari had very little overt confrontation with the state and instead concentrated on teaching and writing. Between 1964 and 1976, Motahhari followed a cautious path. See Davari, *The Political Thought*, 35–85 and Mahdavi Kani, *Memoirs*, 171.
- 87 The relationship between Motahhari and Shari'ati, which had an enthusiastic beginning, ended in complete disengagement due to several disagreements. For an informative account of the ups and down of this relationship see Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*.
- 88 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Karnameh va Khaterat of Hashemi Rafsanjani, 1357–58: Enqelab va Pirouzi*, ed. Abbas Bashiri (Tehran: Daftar Nashr Ma'aref Eslami, 2004), 61.
- 89 For example, in Fischer. *Iran* there is only one mention of Montazeri, while there are nine and eighteen of Motahhari and Taleqani, respectively. Again, in Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), Montazeri appears as an independent actor/thinker only once (pp. 167–8). In the few other places where his name is mentioned, it is always in the context of the acts of others. The curious thing is that even in later books, Montazeri has been disregarded as a thinker of the Islamic Republic. For example, in Hamid Dabashi, *The Theology of Discontent* (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), a book devoted to the thinkers whose ideas, in the words of the author, "have shaped the nature and constitution of the Islamic Revolution," the clergymen chosen for inclusion are Motahhari, Taleqani, and – with no surprise – Khomeini. There is no mention of Montazeri even though he not only played a significant role in shaping the constitution of the Islamic Republic but, by the time Dabashi's book was published, had already written the most extensive treatise on Islamic state. One should also mention yet another later book, Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000): Martin includes Motahhari because of his importance as a student of Khomeini, and devotes a whole chapter to his thought, but mentions Montazeri only in passing, in just three sentences.
- 90 See an interview with Rafsanjani at <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/20/bodyView/774/%D9%86%D8%A7%DA%AF%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C.%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%85%DB%8C.%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C.%D8%A7%D8%B2.%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%84.%D8%A2%DB%8C%D8>

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%85%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%B1%DB%8C.html.

- 91 Montazeri's primary role in this regard is corroborated in Khalkhali's memoirs. See Sadeq Khalkhali, *Khaterat-e Ayatollah Khalkhali: Avalin Hakem-e Shar' Dadgaha-ye Enqelab* [The Memoirs of Ayatollah Khalkhali: The First Religious Judge of the Revolutionary Court] (Tehran, Sayeh Press, 2005), 270–1.
- 92 Badamchian, *Khaterat-e Montazeri*, esp. 458–66.
- 93 Izadi, *Faqih-e Aliqadr*, 335–66.