

Falsafi, Kashani, and the Baha'is

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Falsafi, Kashani, and the Bahá'ís

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Subject: RE; FALSAFI, KASHANI, AND THE BAHA'IS

From: abbas65@aol.com (A.W. Samii)

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Subject: FALSAFI & THE BAHAI'S OF IRAN

On 11 Jan 1996, some information about Falsafi was posted. So I did some research and came up with this stuff:

The clergy had played a significant role in the Oil Crisis and the Shah's subsequent return to power. Aya. Kashani's role bears elaboration. Kashani was a vocal proponent of nationalization and the elimination of foreign influence in Iranian affairs. While he advocated a return to Islamic government for Iran, it is generally agreed that this stemmed more from his political motives than any real religious motivation.¹ During the 30 Tir (18 July 1952) incident Kashani helped organize crowds in Musaddiq's favor, prompting the Shah to ask Musaddiq to resume the role of Prime Minister, which he had symbolically resigned.

Later, however, both Kashani and Aya. Sayyid Mohammad Behbehani were approached by CIA contract officers to encourage them to split with the National Front.² It was later stated that they did take the money, leading to stories of 'Behbehani dollars' in the bazaar, and a report of a post-coup meeting between the Shah, Zahedi, and Kashani, in which Kashani was thanked for his efforts.³ Musaddiq's extra-legal efforts to concentrate power in his own hands had a greater effect in losing him his early supporters, despite what some apologists may say, than did foreign money.⁴

After the coup Kashani gradually slipped from public life, because many came to believe that he was a British agent, and Tehran's press and radio ignored his efforts to attract attention.⁵ This did not signify a diminution in the importance of the clergy in Iranian affairs, and it has been suggested that the clergy's importance increased after August 1953.⁶ The government's position towards the religious community did not involve the use of repression and coercion, in contrast to its dealings with Communists and Nationalists. In fact, the ulama were generally quiet after the coup, following the example of the Marja al-Taqlid (source of imitation) Aya. Mohammad Hossein Borujerdi in Qum.

There was one major exception to this general quiet. During the Ramadan period in 1955 the popular preacher Falsafi spoke out against the rising power of the Bahais in Iran and accused them of being traitors and foreign agents.⁷ The military government called on the Bahais to stop spreading propaganda that would provoke the public, and the government radio station replayed Falsafi's sermons. Borujerdi then praised Falsafi publicly, and the Majlis voted to outlaw the Bahai faith.⁸

On 9 May 1955 the press carried reports of the destruction of the dome of the Bahai Center in Tehran (Hazhir'e al-Qods) and its occupation by troops, and on 17 May it was announced that the Bahai Center in Shiraz had been closed and occupied by the military.⁹ The Chief of Staff (Batmanghelidj) and the Military Governor of Tehran (Bakhtiar) led the attackers.¹⁰ Behbehani congratulated the Shah for these acts. At the same time, the Shah's personal physician, Abdol Karim Ayadi, a Bahai, was told to leave the country for a while. For this reason he went to Italy for about nine months. The Bahais fought back by withdrawing their cash from the bazaar, a move which led to the collapse of several businesses.¹¹

In purely religious terms, Bahai refusal to accept Mohammad as the final prophet was the ulama's major concern. More practical reasons, such as an attempt to counter the Bahais' increasing political and economic influence and reform-orientation, and an effort by the ulama to regain its influence, probably carried more weight. More conservative elements resented the Bahai pressure for reforms, too.¹² Also, the ulama felt threatened by the number of conversions of Moslems to the Bahai faith.¹³

In 1955, 70 military officers were retired on the grounds of being Bahais, yet among this group were some of the very officers who were most helpful in terms of remodeling the armed forces. So, while the Shah had to permit these moves to appease the religious establishment, to which he undoubtedly felt an obligation for its support and a need for its continued support, he also recognized that he could not allow the campaign to go too far.¹⁴ Minister of the Interior Assadollah Alam had Falsafi muzzled until order was restored.¹⁵

Over time, Bahais regained their influence, and although the ones mentioned below exceeded the limits of mutual help, it is important to

cite them as examples of people's irritants. Ayadi was given exclusive rights for Persian Gulf shrimp fishing, was a shareholder in numerous companies, and used his position to help other Bahais.¹⁶ Another example is that of Hojabr Yazdani, who had started out as little more than a shepherd in Sangsar. Allegedly through the use of coercion and protection from high in the government, he achieved immense wealth and power. Allegedly, when he was investigated by the Imperial Inspectorate Organization (IIO), its head, Gen. Hossein Fardust, was told by Ayadi that he had intervened with the Shah and Fardust should drop the issue.¹⁷

Resenting the end of the anti-Bahai campaign, the ulama rose up when efforts to enforce women's Constitutional rights arose. By mid-1959, however, the clergy fully supported the Shah, even making anti-Soviet speeches during the Muharram processions, and in general, the ulama was supportive of the Shah during the post-coup period. The Fada'iyan-i Islam is an exception to this view, but as stated earlier, the group's importance was exaggerated. Clergy-government relations became strained with the introduction of the Shah's Land Reforms in the 1960s.¹⁸

Notes

See M. Yazdi, 'Patterns of Clerical Political Behavior in Postwar Iran, 1941-53,' *Middle Eastern Studies* v. 26, n. 3 (July 1990). On Kashani's early career, see 'Transmitting Biographic Data on Ayatollah Kashani,' *Foreign Service Despatch*, 788.521/9JUN50.

Based on interviews with seven former CIA officials in Iran at the time, in M.J. Gasiorowski, 'The 1953 Coup D'Etat in Iran,' *IJMES* 19 (1987) pp. 268-69. This financial approach was part of an operation, codenamed BEDAMN, intended to thwart Tudeh and Soviet influence. Funded at \$1 million a year, BEDAMN utilized propaganda, 'black operations' (such as infiltration of the Tudeh, 'paying religious figures to denounce the Tudeh as anti-Islamic, and organizing attacks on mosques and public figures in the name of the Tudeh'), and 'direct attacks on Soviet allies.'

1983 and 1984 interviews with the CIA officials who delivered \$10,000 to a Kashani representative, Ahmad Aramesh; in Gasiorowski, 'The 1953 Coup D'Etat in Iran,' p. 274; and 'Account of Conversation,' 1SEP53, FO/371/104571, in *ibid.*, p. 285.

This apologetic tendency has been noted in a review of J.A. Bill and W.R. Louis, ed.'s, *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil*, by C. Arjani, *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin*, v. 16, n. 2 (1989), pp. 207-12.

'National Front Leaders: Whereabouts and Potentialities,' *Foreign Service Despatch*, 788.521/17APR54, RG-59, Box 4119; and 'The Government and Kashani's Publicity Campaign,' *Foreign Service Despatch* 788.00/26FEB54, RG-59, Box 4112.

A. Tabari, 'The Role of the Clergy in Modern Iranian Politics,' in N.R.

Keddie, ed., *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution*, (New Haven, 1983).

Falsafi had a history of rabble-rousing. In June 1951 he was identified as 'one of Iran's most influential younger mullahs' whose lectures against the UK, US, and USSR led to riots. In May 1952, he was involved in disorders in the Tehran bazaar. Also, he was sponsored by a CIA operation called BEDAMN as an alternative to Kashani during the oil crisis. (State Department telegram 3453, 788.00/27JUN51, RG-59, Box 4107; Mashad Consulate telegrams 2 & 4, 788.00/2AUG51, *ibid.*; S. Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran* Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period, [Albany, 1980], p. 64; Gasiorowski, *US Foreign Policy and the Shah*, p. 70). On Falsafi's relations with the government, see W.M. Floor, "The Revolutionary Character of the Ulama: Wishful Thinking or Reality?", in Keddie, *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution*, p. 76.

State Department telegram 2225, 788.00/8MAY55. Falsafi was a member of an anti-Bahai group which eventually became the Hojjatieh Society, and the leading ulama approved of the group's work; see 'The Hojjatieh Society - Its History, Advocates, and Opponents,' *Iran Press Digest*, (28SEP82), p. 20, and *ibid.*, (5OCT82), p. 15.

Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran*, p. 77, 80.

Oney, CIA Research Study; in Asnad, v. 7, p. 33.

State Department Office of Intelligence Research, 'Political Significance of the Campaign Against the Bahai Sect in Iran,' *Intelligence Report* 6964, (16JUN55), p. 5.

Ibid., pp. 1-2, 6.

'Murderers of Bahais Convicted - Analysis of Present Position of Bahai Community,' *Foreign Service Despatch* 27, 788.00/12JUL56, RG-59, Box 3810.

'Political Significance of the Campaign Against the Bahai Sect in Iran,' p. 7. Tragically, Islamic aggression against the Bahais was revived during the Revolution.

In 1963, Falsafi spoke out against the Shah's Reforms, so Alam, who had become Prime Minister, had him imprisoned; see A. Alam, (A. Alikhani, ed.), *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1969-1977*, [London, 1991], p. 48) .

Alam, *The Shah and I*, p. 386; Asnad, v. 17, p. 66.

Fardust, *Khatirat*, p. 375. Yazdani was jailed by the Shah in August 1978 for fraud and illegal use of government land; see Department of State telegram, (28NOV78); in Asnad, v. 37, pp. 4-5.

'Women's Rights Become Current Political Issue,' *Foreign Service*

Despatch 479, 788.00/15JAN59, RG-59, Box 3812; US Army WEEKA (weekly update), 788.00 (W)/23JUL59, RG-59, Box 3814.

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