

punishment and recantation. Initially, certain state officials appear to have extended their protection to the Bab—presumably on grounds of rivalry with members of the clergy—but later the government assented to his execution in Tabriz in 1849 in view of an internal rebellion that was engendered by his spreading influence.

Baha'ism followed from Babism as a convert to the Bab's teachings, one Baha'u'llah, declared that he was the manifestation of God on earth. Although he was in exile in Baghdad when he made this declaration (1863), his movement centered in Iran, where it threatened the 'ulama', who stood to be eliminated as a social entity if it were to triumph. Not only that, lot the claims Muslims have made that, as the last revealed religion, Islam is consequently the most perfect—than which there is to be none superior—were called into question by Babism/Baha'ism. There is some record of 'ulama' conversion to Baha'ism in the mid-19th century; but in the main they execrated it. And, in a development presaging

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the 1955 anti-Baha'i campaign, it was they who took the initiative against Baha'ism and tried to force the state to adhere to their position.³⁵

A final element that served to render Baha'ism suspect is the implication in the message it conveys of universal love and understanding. In this sense, the movement appears to be subscribing to a supra-national creed. The clergy has interpreted this as catering to foreign interests and needs, a serious development in their eyes which can only serve those seeking to destroy Shi'i society in the manner of British and Russian efforts of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Yet, although such was the general orientation toward Baha'ism on the part of the clergy, one must still ask why these events broke out in May—June 1955, which that year coincided with the holy month of Ramazan. One hypothesis holds that sonic elements of the 'ulama' were feeling a newly acquired self-confidence and therefore “wanted to make a horse deal between themselves and the Shah.”³⁶ In line with this is the thinking that the government encouraged the campaign to distract attention from more serious problems, including acute economic difficulties.³⁷ Beyond this lay the difficulty the regime faced in harnessing the nationalist movement that had supported Musaddiq. It is not unlikely that the regime hoped that the clergy had become the legatees of the nationalist movement sans Musaddiq and his associates. Then, too, orchestrating a movement against the unpopular Baha'is could serve the useful purpose, from the viewpoint of the regime, of obscuring the fact that the negotiations with the Western Consortium of oil companies over the distribution of revenues of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) were going to lead to disbursements to Iran that would be at an unsatisfactorily low level for the nationalists. Finally, there was the pending question of Iran's entry into the Baghdad Pact (actuated in October 1955). It would not be easy to accomplish this in the face of nationalist agitation; therefore, giving the

'ulama' headway on the Baha'i question seemed an appropriate means to secure their acquiescence, if not support, for a policy of foreign entanglement. Of course, this argument also inhered in the case of the NIOC-Consortium negotiations.

On 9 May 1955 the press carried the text of telegrams from Ayatullah Bihbihani to Ayatullah Burujirdi and the Shah in which he congratulated them both on the destruction of the dome of the Baha'i center in Tehran and its occupation by the military. Bihbihani went as far as to call the Iranian army *artish-i Islam* (the army of Islam). Assuring the Shah that this action would elicit the most fervent support for him on the part of the faithful. Bihbihani urged that henceforth the anniversary of that day be observed as a religious holiday.³⁸

On the same day appeared Ayatullah Burujirdi's letter of thanks to the popular preacher, Abu al-Qasim Falsafi. The gist of the letter was Burujirdi's appreciation of the services Falsafi had rendered to Islam and also to "the independence of the nation and the preservation of the position of the monarchy, the state, the

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army and all the people of the nation...." The Baha'is, complained Burujirdi, had developed good organization and expended vast amounts of money which unknown sources had contributed to them. For the hundred years of their existence, he lamented, the Baha'is had tirelessly propagandized against Islam, "which, of course, is a cause of the unity of [our] nationalism." And now, he charged, they were "secretly working against the monarchy and the state." He also attacked the Baha'is for what he alleged to have been an atrocity committed against an old lady and her children. Noting that the perpetrators of the deed were still at large, Burujirdi drew the conclusion that the Baha'is consequently enjoyed "complete influence in the government." In closing, he expressed the hope that a general purge of Baha'is from all government positions would be implemented.³⁹

Bihbihani's allusions to the Iranian military as the army of Islam and Burujirdi's remarks about the monarchy and Islam as the basis of Iranian nationalism were hardly fortuitous in the context of clergy-state relations. Burujirdi served notice that he meant to equate the weakening of Islam with the enfeeblement of the country's independence and the power of the monarchy in his reply to Bihbihani: Baha'i agitation had as its sole purpose to attack Islam and, therefore, to undermine "the independence of the country and weaken the position of kingship...."⁴⁰

The Shah's reply to Bihbihani affirmed the close bonds that the clergy had suggested existed between Shi'ism and kingship to the extent that he vowed that he would be faithful to his duty to propagate the laws of Islam of the Ja'fari rite in Iran, in accordance with the Constitution. However, the Shah made no reference to his personal feelings about the Baha'is and the current disorders in which they were allegedly implicated by the

'ulama'.41

The next day the Shah met with five 'ulama' who doubtless were representatives of Burujirdi and Bihbihani. These clergymen presented a petition on behalf of their leaders which summarized the grievances already reviewed. At this gathering the monarch, pressed again to make his position public, declared that he had instructed the government to deal with the Baha'i issue in a way that would be satisfactory to both the 'ulama' and the public. In the meanwhile, the representatives of the clergy had also been in touch with the cabinet and submitted its views to the government ministers directly.

Simultaneous to the meeting between the Shah and the five religious leaders, Sayyid Ahmad Safa'i, a ruhani deputy in the Majlis from the town of Qazvin, was submitting a resolution to the parliament. This four article bill declared the illegality of the Baha'i sect and others like it because of their attacks on the security of the state; provided for a two to ten year prison term for those found guilty of membership; stipulated the sequestration of Baha'i property and its transfer to the Ministry of Culture, which would be empowered to disburse it in the construction and establishment of religious schools and Islamic propaganda;

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expressed the commitment of the government to purge all Baha'is from the regime and state administration.⁴²

In Qumm, numerous visitations to Burujirdi's home were reported. To be sure, it was Ramazan, and such contacts always increase at such periods of the year. But the reporters of the newspaper, *Ittila'at*, suggested that the traffic of 'ulama' to the home of the marja' -i mutlaq was unprecedented. The request for an interview with Burujirdi was turned down, but they learned that "the Agha" was urgently pushing for the destruction of Baha'ism and the seizure of their assets, which were to be used for the construction of madrasahs and mosques. His only reservation was that these steps be taken in an orderly way, without the shedding of blood.⁴³

As these events were unfolding the government ministers were meeting behind closed doors to find an appropriate solution to the problem presented by the vehemence of the 'ulama' assertions about the Baha'is. The regime faced the dilemma of requiring clergy support for its internal and foreign policies but not wishing to lose control over events and be castigated by international opinion for its complicity in the anti-Baha'i campaign.

In assessing the government's behavior two points bear stressing: (1) the regime proceeded through administrative decrees, rather than by parliamentary legislation (as embodied in Safa'i's draft bill: (2) it had to call off the anti-Baha'i measures short of the steps the 'ulama' had hoped would be adopted. It did so because of international pressure and certain internal exigencies, to be mentioned below. The advantage of dealing with the

matter administratively was that this provided the government with greater leverage than other means. The adoption of the Safa'i bill as law, on the other hand, would have given the issue an air of finality to it that might have been, at best, inconvenient and, at worst, seriously damaging to the country's prestige. The repeated assertions by the Shah, the Prime Minister and other officials that this matter would have to be handled within the limits of the law⁴⁴ show that there was a concern about the dubious legality of depriving Baha'is of their civil rights (article 1 of Safa'i's draft) and seizing their property.

A fascinating feature of these developments, therefore, was that the clergy was consistently leading the way, and the government was holding back. It is clear that the regime did not want to take a decisive stand and tried throughout not to expose itself. This becomes evident on examination of the parliamentary proceedings of the period. The 'ulama' manifestly created the issue. The regime, presented with it, tried to take advantage of it for its own purposes. But the government constantly tried to minimize its participation in the anti-Baha'i effort. The significance of the 'ulama' assertiveness in the face of government caution for future relations between clergy and state is that the religious elite entered the 1958-1963 confrontation with the regime in possession of a self-confident view of its influence in public policy. Even if they had not won all the

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points in 1955, the religious leaders obviously had managed to rivet the government's attention to their demands in general and gain its respect in the public policy arena.

On the day of the announcement that the Baha'i center in Shiraz had been closed and put under military occupation (17 May 1955) the Minister of Interior met with Majlis deputies in a closed session of the parliament. Although the gathering took place in camera, a summary of the proceedings was published. Asadullah 'Alam, the Interior Minister, reminded the deputies that he had already informed them of the government's view that existing legislation sufficed to deal with the crisis. Therefore, it did not view with favor attempts at writing new law. 'Alam's statement constituted a clear rebuff to Safa'i and, hence, to the Burujirdi-Bihbihani coalition in whose name Safa'i had been agitating. 'Alam vowed that the government had already implemented and would continue to implement the existing laws to keep Baha'i propaganda "tightly" in check. He then read to the gathered deputies the text of a draft decree that he purposed to send to all the country's provincial and city governors in pursuance of the government's decision to put down all anti-religious manifestations and demonstrations.

Faced with the objection that the words Baha'ism and Baha'i failed to appear in his draft and needed to be interposed so that the Ministry of Interior officials would clearly know where their duty lay, 'Alam replied: the deputies should be assured that the governors and military authorities were

well-apprieved of their functions and knew precisely what to do, when and if the orders were given. Then, he elaborated the regime's reservations with regard to the further demands concerning a purge of Baha'is from the machinery of state and the sequestration of their property. On the question of the purge, he noted, its implementation would have to proceed within the limits of the law; yet, he gave his word that the government did intend to move forward on this matter. Respecting sequestration of property, 'Alam cautioned, it would have to proceed in any case with a view to "the laws of the country, international law, and preserving the prestige of the kingdom." Such statements well embody the minimalist position that the government had decided to adopt. In short, by refusing to specify the Baha'is by name, by referring to the need to observe the law, and by invoking the matter of national prestige, 'Alam seemed really to be telling the deputies that the government would not be stampeded into blanket endorsements of 'ulama' demands.

Safa'i, who was present, then protested that he had received a message from Ayatullah Burujirdi to submit legislation to proscribe the Baha'i sect, and this is the reason for his having introduced the four-article bill a few days earlier. At this point, Dr. Shahkar, a French trained lawyer and layman, intervened to declare his satisfaction with regime efforts up to that time. But he proposed an amendment to the 'Alam draft decree which he felt would obviate the government's anxieties over international repercussions and the need to proceed on the basis of legality:

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The formation of sects which, under the guise of religion, spread disorder, and which have adopted the name of Baha'ism in order to implement political objectives is proscribed, inasmuch as their existence is illegal and the cause of the dissolution of order and security; and since they contradict the true religion of Islam. In accordance with the Constitution, minorities of the official[ly recognized] religions of Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism shall have complete freedom within the limits of the law. [emphasis added]

The closed session meeting ended with the decision to approve the Shahkar amendment, whereupon the deputies readied themselves to attend the coming open session of the Majlis. At that session 'Alam made a brief statement of government resolve and intent, but he again omitted mention of the Baha'i sect by name.

The text of the final draft of the 'Alam decree was published on the same day as the press published the proceedings of the closed and open sessions of the parliament. True to the government's determination, specific reference to the Baha'is was missing after all, notwithstanding the formulation in the Shahkar amendment. Now, in the closed session 'Alam had confided to the deputies that he had called for that meeting in order to consult with them; that he purposed to hold their counsel in the highest respect; and that he was prepared to do anything which was for the good of the country. Clearly, then, 'Alam had ultimately chosen to regard the deputies' suggestions as exactly

that: counsel and advice which he could use or reject, according to his own discretion.

Indeed, the final draft of the 'Alam decree not only fell short of the 'ulama's demands, or even of the more moderate Shahkar amendment (moderate insofar as the wording made it appear that the government's campaign was not against the Baha'is qua religious sect but qua political movement that was fomenting public disorder); but, indeed, this final version even contained an implicit warning to the 'ulama' and their followers that they had better not start any incidents. The decree stated:⁴⁵

In conformity with Article 1 of the Constitution, the official religion of Iran is Ja'fari Shi'ism. In keeping with Articles 20 and 21 of the Constitution, anti-religious publications and the formation of societies and associations provoking religious and secular sedition and disorder are prohibited throughout the country. Therefore, in implementing the principles of the Constitution you shall take measures to dissolve those social centers which are causing religious and secular sedition and are the source of attack against security and order. Henceforth, you will take steps in all seriousness to implement this important duty which you are entrusted in conformity with the Constitution and stop any kind of demonstrations or acts on the part of this type of groups, and which acts are prohibited by law.

At the same time, since taking steps in these matters and implementing the laws is the task of government officials, and since the intervention of individuals or groups having no responsibility will cause disorder and insecurity, therefore, it is to be remembered that you are fully empowered to take measures against any person

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who provokes the people to act against the security of the country, under the guise and in the capacity of struggling against deceiving sects, or [any person] who himself commits acts which produce the smallest tremor against public order and security, according to those provisions of the criminal code which anticipate such crimes.

The government's minimalist position proved too much for the clergy. Consequently, Safa'i delivered a parliamentary statement two days later in which he underscored the regime's lack of a clear-cut policy. Since the advent of Husayn 'Ala' to the post of Prime Minister (April 1955), the regime had been propagating the slogan of a war against corruption. Now, Safa'i attempted to link the anti-corruption struggle with the Baha'i issue. The source of corruption in society today is irreligion, he noted. While some say poverty is its cause, and therefore a redistribution of land will go a long way toward its cure, he allowed, experiments of land redistribution to the peasants under the Musaddiq government showed only negative results: a decline in the standard of living. If irreligion is the source of corruption, the Baha'is constitute the fountainhead of corruption, he declared. The 'ulama' and nation are grateful for the steps undertaken to date to

resolve the problems created by them, but the clergy and Iranian people are looking for more decisive acts. “Don’t say Mus... Mus... say Mustafa,” he mused ironically. Then, more ominously: the government must deal with the Baha’is in the same way it has dealt with the Tudah Party. Yet, it would not be possible to proceed in this manner on the basis of the decree of the Interior Minister, which was lamentably “brief and vague.” The Constitution has been invoked as a weapon to put down irreligion, but the regime has failed to implement its provisions against the Baha’is, he asserted.

At this point, Mr. Ja’far Bihbihani, the nephew of the Bihbihani who had taken such a prominent place in the nation’s public life since the overthrow of Musaddiq, intervened. Ja’far Bihbihani was not himself a clergyman, although he obviously had close connections to the ‘ulama’—especially of Tehran. Evidently wanting to restrain Safa’i from taking too extreme a position on behalf of the clergy, and thereby effectively isolating it, Bihbihani responded: “Yes, they have, Sir.” (I.e., the government had successfully implemented provisions of the Constitution against the Baha’is.)

But Safa’i continued. He thanked the Shah for granting the request of Abu al-Qasim Falsafi to shut down the Baha’i center in Tehran; but he insisted that a new law was necessary to destroy Baha’ism as a movement. Ayatullah Burujirdi had been waging a struggle with the Baha’is for many years, said Safa’i, but the regime has constantly made excuses for itself. The politicians used to say, he opined, that they were too busy with the oil question; but oil is no longer at issue. Government declarations could not escape specifically mentioning the Baha’i sect by name.

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At this point, Safa’i was interrupted by another deputy, Mr. Barumand: “My dear friend, they did mention them and implemented [the law] against them.” At this point, Safa’i probably began to be persuaded that he was losing allies by persevering in these kinds of statements, so rather than belie the patent mendacity of Barumand’s rejoinder, he weakly concluded: “At any rate, they [the Baha’is] must be purged from the state apparatus.”⁴⁶

About three weeks later, he made a last attempt to convince the Majlis to pass his bill by introducing it in closed session. It had accumulated more than the 25 signatures necessary to bring it before the chamber, said Safa’i. However, the Speaker of the Majlis, Mr. Sardar Fakhir Hikmat, finessed the issue by stating: “the Majlis should not take the lead in this matter.” Actions against the Baha’is are not the task of the parliament, but of the state; the Majlis must not get involved in the affair. “We must, we shall, remind the government to do its duty in this regard,” noted Hikmat. Parliament’s role consisted of serving as the nation’s conscience and behaving as gadfly should the need arise. The stand of the Speaker of the Majlis proved authoritative, and the matter was dropped.⁴⁷ However, the anti-Baha’i campaign was to spill over into the chamber in a totally

unexpected way five days later. This episode threw into sharp relief the thoroughly explosive nature of that campaign and the passions it aroused.

The statement of Mr. Riza Afshar, an unidentified member of the Majlis, on the need for a government of laws rather than personalized rule (*hukumat-i fardi*) began simply enough. The 'Ala' government had been drawing a large measure of criticism in the parliament, and Afshar's comments were thus not novel. The gist of his speech was that the will of Majlis deputies weakens noticeably toward the end of the session, when the Ministry of the Interior begins the process of calling upon the municipal *anjumans* (organizations) to draw up their election lists. Afshar commended a Burkean model of the role of an MP to his colleagues, noting simultaneously that "re-election fever" predominates when the commonweal ought to be uppermost in the minds of deputies. The consequence is attempts to please the Ministry of the Interior, rather than parliamentary constituencies; working in one's own interests, rather than those of the nation. Every time Majlis deputies commit themselves and their country to Principles and a government of laws, up springs a handful of "weak and immature elements...bearded and ignorant infants who have lost touch with the pulse of our society" All we get from these elements are "auditory injections of such things as the "anti-corruption struggle" [the watchword of the 'Ala' regime], Afshar complained.

The remarkable reference to "bearded infants" was a calculated attack on the clergy, which he also attacked as "lying prophets and hypocrites" allied to certain cabinet associates. If preventing corrupt individuals from hindering the society's development is to have any meaning, then we should expect to see some ministers, senators, representatives and bureaucrats brought before the

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courts, Afshar exclaimed. At this point in his statement, heckling started up among some of the deputies in the chamber.

This seemed to provoke Afshar, who promptly commenced a stinging attack on the government's management of the anti-Baha'i attacks by the 'ulama' and their supporters. The campaign had succeeded in spreading "insecurity, confusion, plunder, killing, attacks". It had "disgraced the peace-seeking peoples of Iran in the view of the outside world." Then, he emotionally delivered himself of a charge that brought down the house:

This cabinet has toyed with the sentiments of the *maraji-yi taqlid* and has dealt insolently with the predilections of the...good people of Iran; and it has even failed to respect international undertakings and agreements...." [chaos in the chamber].

At this juncture, Ja'far Bihbihani pounded his fist on his desk, shouting: "What has this government done? What sin has it committed to warrant these obscenities?" Dr. Jaza'iri: "These statements are not in the country's interests. They are lies and arrant mendacity."

Afshar: “This corrupt government, under the slogan of the anti-corruption campaign, has forcibly expelled groups of innocent people [from their homes] and gotten its license [to do so] from government offices, [deceitfully using] the name of the august person of His Majesty.”

These further remarks of Afshar so infuriated Bihbihani that he stood on his chair to shout, and then, on second thought, he began to rush the speaker’s dais, screaming: “What are these words? What are these meaningless words?” As the tumult mounted, Jaza’iri and Safa’i proceeded to mount their own mini-demonstrations against the speaker. Safa’i became so agitated that his gown fell from his shoulders: “What is the religious institution to you? Who are you that you can mouth such obscenities? It is clear that Your Excellency is a supporter of the Baha’is. It is hideous.” Other frontbench voices joined in the attack against Afshar.

Mr. Qanatabadi, defending Afshar: “What’s going on? What is it to you?”

Dr. Jaza’iri: “The people know all of you, they know the thieves, the land grabbers (zaminkhvaran) and the defenders of corruption.” Safa’i was incensed by the mention of the maraji-yi taqlid and so pursued his attacks in that vein.

Dr. Jaza’iri: “When do you pray? When did you fast? When did you give khums (the Islamic tax on income)? What part of you is Muslim? You have spent all of your life thieving. Are you not ashamed?”

Afshar at that point asked permission to continue, but Bihbihani shouted: “We will not give you permission to say such nonsense in this Majlis,” and again he attempted to rush the speaker but was physically restrained. All the while,

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Afshar’s opponents continued to revile him. Sultan Murad Bakhtiyar: “Corrupt thief!”

Qanatabadi: “They are trying to terrorize the thoughts of the deputies in this Majlis. If a deputy cannot have freedom [of speech] in this Majlis, no one will have it outside.”

Afshar then condemned the immaturity of the Minister of the Interior, whom he faulted for lacking exactly those qualities Persians admire in their leaders: distinction, knowledge, experience, qualification.

Safa’i: “What are these words? What do you mean by bearded infants and beardless ones?” Then, Sardar Hikmat, the Speaker of the Majlis, intervened, warning Afshar that he must not speak of the Minister of the Interior in the way he had. Next, he turned to the deputies in the chamber and admonished them to hear the speaker out. When ‘Abd al-Husayn Hazhir, the late Minister of Court, had come to the Majlis and came under the fire of various deputies exercised by his pro-Baha’ism, he, Hikmat, had defended his right to speak.

Disagreement with the views of the speaker is insufficient reason to muzzle him. He then turned to Afshar and warned him against employing insulting language; to this Afshar retorted that it was the truth, not insults, that hung in the balance that day. Hikmat, for his part, invoked his authority and said that he would decide when a statement was insulting, and no one else; and Afshar had infringed parliamentary tradition.

Afshar: “Since we are determined to inspire our foreign policy with our internal policy we are not going to turn the Ministry [of Interior] into a soccer field for young, unskilled and raw elements who, in protracted fashion, are set to dissolve the Majlis and draw up an election list for the 19th session in order to terrorize and threaten us.”

Hikmat here interrupted Afshar’s statements and condemned them as “all lies and pure fallacies” and “provocative.” Bihbihani chimed in that they constituted an insult against the Majlis itself. However, Afshar would not be deterred from his purpose. While noting that he had nothing personally against the Minister of Interior and was fond of him, he held that the incumbent was “unqualified in every sense of the word.” Since ‘Alam was a graduate of the Agriculture School of Karaj (a town to the West of Tehran), he should therefore have been posted to direct one of the departments of the Ministry of Agriculture in the provinces. He then intoned that Asadullah ‘Alam had no business being Minister of Interior, which is one of the most sensitive positions in the government. We ought to have expected Husayn ‘Ala’ to have understood this, he remarked reprovingly, but somehow the thought escaped him.⁴⁸

The Interior Minister’s dialogue with Majlis deputies resumed a month later when the indefatigable Ahmad Safa’i asked the government to tell the parliament what measures had been adopted against the Baha’is in general and espe-

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cially those against whom prosecution indictments had been handed down. In a hesitant beginning the Minister submitted his understanding that the discussion between government and legislature had been concluded to everyone’s satisfaction and repeated his request of the Majlis not to intervene in the government’s investigation. At this point, Mr. Mir Ashráfi, a landlord who had earlier attacked the ‘Ala’ regime’s “socialist” policies,⁴⁹ intervened: “Answer the question!”

‘Alam: “The government has put a vigorous halt to all propaganda that conflict with the Constitution. Obviously, propaganda by the Baha’is is not exempt from this.” [Deputies: “Hear, hear!”]

Shahrukhshahi: “Then why have they refurbished the house of Sayyid ‘Ali Muhammad, the Bab, in Shiraz?”

‘Alam: “You have been given bad information. I can candidly declare that all propaganda centers that are contrary to the Constitution and the true

religion of Islam have everywhere been identified and closed down.” [“Hear, hear!”]

The Minister of the Interior repeated the government’s insistence that it would deal harshly with any kind of unrest in the society, no matter what the source of stimulation of such unrest. The language and spirit of this position was to make the Baha’is an unexceptional social force in the political system and therefore to remove the salience of Baha’i activities from the public consciousness.

‘Alam: “But I want to say this to the Majlis. Taking steps in any matter, and particularly this one, must, in the first instance, meet the requisites of order and tranquility. [“Hear, hear!”] Therefore, the security forces and other state authorities have been given clear and strict orders vigorously to block any kind of step contravening order and to prevent measures taken under any guise that disrupt public tranquility. [“And a very good thing, too!”]

“And especially have we given orders that oppositional elements [to the government] of whatever stripe be prosecuted and punished.”

Safa’i: “But not to the point of punishing Muslims instead of Baha’is!”

‘Alam: “No, we will never do that. But establishing order and peace throughout the land and securing the people’s tranquility constitutes the primary and most important duty of the state. We cannot show the slightest imperviousness to this. Therefore, I am sure that if the government deems it necessary, in this or any other connection, to take action to preserve order and peace, it will receive the support of the Majlis.”

Mir Ashrafi: “Provided they do not shoot the people in front of the house of Sayyid ‘Ali Muhammad, the Bab!”

Alam: “My dear sir, they have told you the wrong things.”

Mir Ashrafi: “Your Excellency’s comments have not been convincing.”

‘Alam: “They have convinced the majority. You are in the minority. Is that my fault?”

Mir Ashrafi: You have brought embarrassment to this Sayyid [pointing to Ahmad Safa’i].”

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Safa’i: “But you [Mir Ashrafi] have been embarrassed more [Laughter].
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In spite of Safa’i’s attempts to use humor to mask his chagrin, it is clear that the ‘ulama’ were not amused by these events.⁵¹ Still, that they did not manage to influence the government to take stronger measures against the Baha’is should not obscure the fact that they had secured the following tangible gains: (1) the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Military Governor of

Tehran had both participated in the destruction of the dome of the Baha'i center in Tehran, involving the government directly in the affair.⁵² (2) The Minister of Culture declared in late June 1955 that religious instruction would be augmented, beginning in the fall of that year, in the public schools; particular stress was to be given to religious instruction in grades five and six at the primary level.⁵³ (3) The Military Governor of Tehran and the Chief of the National Police had issued proclamations concerning the closing down of movie houses, liquor stores and public music establishments during the first 15 days of Muharram (the first month of the lunar calendar, during which observance of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn takes place). In previous years, such restrictions had not been given such publicity by the regime.⁵⁴ (4) The Shah had initiated ground-breaking ceremonies for the construction of a mosque on the campus of Tehran University.⁵⁵ (5) The regime had issued a constitution for a Religious Studies High School, which it intended as an integral part of the *dabiristan* (secular high school) system that had been developed under Riza Shah, while also serving as a laboratory school for the Faculty of Theology.⁵⁶

The members of the clergy were holding a number of meetings during early June 1955. Two key gatherings took place in Tehran. One session was held at the behest of Ayatullah Ahmad Musavi al-Khvansari of the capital. Ayatullah Bihbihani accepted this invitation, the purpose of which consisted of drawing up a petition to present to the Shah "on behalf of the *hawzah-yi 'ilmivah* of Tehran." Although no details as to what the petition addressed are available, probably the clergy elite saw this as a chance to press their advantage with the government and submitted a list of issues on which they desired action: welfare, education, upkeep and maintenance of facilities, public morality, regularized consultation with them by regime officials, etc.⁵⁷

The second meeting took place at the initiative of a pious philanthropist, a certain Hajj Sayyid Riza Firuzabadi. The importance of this conclave is suggested by the attendance of Ayatullahs Bihbihani and (Muhammad Riza) Gulpaygani; even Ayatullah Kashani put in a rare appearance. Firuzabadi explained that he intended to use the vehicle of such gatherings in the future as a means to convey the views of the 'ulama' to the Shah. He expressed the hope that the Shah would consent to meet with the clergy elite on a periodical basis so as to provide a better channel for the coordination of views between monarch and religious leaders.⁵⁸ The implication is that the Shah had not been paying enough attention to the latter, and it seemed important to the 'ulama' to revert to the

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practice, common in Safavid and Qajar times, of routine and quotidian interaction between Shah and clergy. The practice of using the Minister of Court as intermediary apparently was an unsatisfactory one for the religious leadership, which wanted to broaden their actual contact with the ruler beyond the formal and peremptory salutations ceremonies on anniversaries that more and

more were providing the occasion for meeting with the sovereign.

In neither event of these two meetings did the name of the Imam Jum‘ah of Tehran come up. One might speculate that, insofar as the ruler had relied on that individual to be his clerical link with the ‘ulama’, Firuzabadi’s and Khvansarii’s sessions amounted to an endeavor to consolidate clergy ties to the crown on their own terms. It would be misleading, certainly, to suggest that the ‘ulama’ were approaching the variety of issues which have been surveyed above with a highly coordinated blueprint for action. Given the rather informal nature of the organizational structure of the religious institution, such could not have been the case. Instead, one should see these sorts of meetings as concurrent efforts to enhance the social standing and prestige of the clerical stratum. In this context, many interfaces of cooperation existed between clergy and state, as the discussion above has already brought out. And the trade offs between the two sides need not have been explicit, as is shown in the instance of ‘ulama’ orientation to the oil question after 1953. Their failure to condemn the formula by which the NIOC and the Consortium agreed to divide petroleum revenues as a “reprehensible betrayal” of the nation’s interests was no less valuable to the regime because it was implicit support.

On other occasions, clergy support for the regime seemed to be masked by the fact that ‘ulama’ action was geared to a seemingly innocuous issue not related to the interests of the government and state. Yet, it could be argued that such action nicely dovetailed with such interests and thus provided an instance of clergy-state cooperation after all. A good example of this situation surfaced with the unanticipated fatva issued by the marja’ yi taqlid of Najaf. Ayatullah Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani against mortification of the flesh during the observances of ‘Ashura that year. The fatva declared that no religious foundation existed for the practice of cutting one’s forehead, self-flagellation or other infliction of wounds to the body.⁵⁹ What seems significant about this fatva is its particular timing. The annual observances of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn would nearly coincide that year with the anniversary celebrations sponsored by the regime of the defeat of Muhammad Musaddiq. Also, the Baha’i disturbances were still fresh in people’s memories. The ‘Ala’ government was especially concerned over the outbreak of violence, communal conflict and a generally uncontrollable situation. When Prime Minister ‘Ala’ granted a press conference, he was asked if the regime were, indeed, worried that the ‘Ashura demonstrations would lead to violence. The reporter posing this question noted that ‘Ala’ was very quick to respond, as though he had anticipated it.⁶⁰ And Shahrastani’s fatva appeared

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about two weeks after the press conference, indicating a strong presumption of coordination between the ‘ulama’ and the government. Reinforcing this suspicion was the fact that the military and security authorities announced, that same day, that any individual or individuals engaging in mortification of

their bodies would be arrested. Of additional interest is the part that Shahrastani had played in the days just after the overthrow of the Musaddiq government. It will be recalled that he had fulsome praise for the Shah and the policies of the new regime in the aftermath of the coup of 16-19 August 1953.

Perhaps the final support that must be mentioned that the 'ulama' extended to the government was their attitude toward Iran's participation in the regional defense alliance system involving Turkey and Iraq (later to be called the Baghdad Pact). No public clergy reservations over an alliance linking the country with the hated British seem to have been raised at that time. Any regrets that they may have entertained they kept to themselves. One of the few "ulama" manifestations of attitude was the parliamentary statement by the nephew of Ayatullah Bihbihani, Ja'far Bihbihani, on 19 October 1955. It was inherently a difficult speech to make for this representative of clergy interests. His position skirted perilously close to the suggestion that the Islamic nation of Iran needed "Christian" support to sustain itself.

Bihbihani's argument rested on three points: (1) the alliance was a defensive one, not aimed at commencing hostilities against any state; (2) Iran was a sovereign nation and its government had a right to enter into diplomatic agreements with any other nation-states in the international community; (3) the pact, itself, was justified, indeed foreseen, by the collective security provisions of the United Nations Charter. Bihbihani sounded more like an international legal specialist hired by the government to represent its position than a spokesman for the 'ulama'. Attacking Stalin and the USSR for deceit over the question of Soviet occupation of the country in the Second World War, he noted that the United Nations, the United States and the Iranian army had saved the country from falling victim to the annexationist designs of the Soviet Union.

The reference to the United States seemed motivated by this idea: the 'ulama' need not fear foreigners; after all, they had helped the nation out in a time of stress; therefore, the idea of seeking their help in a military alliance ought not to come as a shock: perhaps if we had had such an alliance in 1945-46, Stalin would never have dared to lift a finger against Iranian Azarbayjan; and so on. In its fullest sense, then, the Bihbihani speech may be seen as an attempt to clear the mind of the most xenophobic of the 'ulama' of the simplistic notion that all foreigners were equally harmful to Islam. If it required a theoretical underpinning from Islamic argument, Bihbihani's line of thinking presumably could have referred to the doctrine of necessity.⁶¹

This chapter has provided an examination of the social influence of the Iranian clergy during a period in which the power of the Shah was weak. It has demon-

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strated that the mutual needs of the 'ulama' and the state authorities brought the two into an alignment within which each side sought to promote its own corporate interests. It will be noted that from 1941-1953 the Shah's

power was so attenuated that clergy-state relations were in fact a matter of clergy-state administration and clergy-cabinet interaction. After 1953 a more confident monarch began to make his own policy.

Although many different issues were at play in this period, those involving clergy participation in politics in the late forties and early fifties, the firm entrenchment of the Burujirdi-Bihbihani axis among the 'ulama' elite, and the anti-Baha'i campaign of 1955 effectively encapsulated the range of clergy-state relations in the seventeen year period under review. The clergy perhaps was taken by surprise at the rapid pace of developments between 1956-1958 which led to growing state power and the Court's growing insistence on noblesse oblige. Agrarian reform had not yet surfaced as an idea officials were taking seriously, but this was a time when the civilian planners of modernization of the calibre of Abu al-Hasan Ibtihaj (Plan Organization) and Hasan Arsanjani (Ministry of Agriculture) were beginning to rise and/or be noticed.

Furthermore, the Shah was beginning his program to establish a secret police apparatus in the late fifties. Thus, although the clergy may not have recognized it at the time, it is the 1956-1958 period to which one must look for the seeds of the development that can be characterized as the bureaucratization of power in the 1960's-1970's.

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