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## **The radicalization of the left in Turkey and Iran in the 1970s and a comparative analysis of activist women's experiences**

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### **3. Turkish and Iranian Political Regimes**

In this chapter, I briefly describe the general features of the political regimes in Turkey and Iran from their foundations early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century on with a particular focus on the ways in which they were seen and interpreted by the leftist activists of the period in order to better explain the reasons for the emergence, mobilization, radicalization and diffusion of the left-wing contention in the 1960s and 1970s in the following chapters. In addition to the analyses of formation of political actors, identities and institutions, I explain the historical relationship between the state, other relevant political actors and institutions, as well as challengers to make a better sense of the political regimes and initial conditions in which the armed struggle became a viable option for a number of dissidents in the two countries. Then, the following chapter will account for the emergence of contentious sites in detail.

#### **3.1. Turkish Political Regime: An Authoritarian Republic**

The Turkish Republic, which was established as a nation state in 1923 under the charismatic leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, had been ruled by a single party, the Republican People's Party (RPP– *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), until after the World War II, and only in 1945 adopted multiparty politics. With the adoption of multiparty system based on free elections, politics in Turkey began to be characterized by the competition and conflict between right-wing parties of the time and the RPP for the decades to come; resulting mostly in victory of the former. Smaller parties could also play significant roles entering into coalitions with major parties during the 1960s and 1970s. The other most and ever influential political actor in Turkey has been the army, which had played a constitutive role since the republic's foundation. However, its role has taken a new form with the consecutive interventions into the politics from 1960 on each time when an opposition movement grew enough to challenge and destabilize the regime in part due to the conflict between the main political parties. From the 1950s on, but especially in the 1960s and 1970s, other political actors as well began to occupy an important place in Turkish politics mostly as challengers to the regime; namely the trade unions, leftist intellectuals and the youth.

Until the 1950s, in other words, before an industrial bourgeoisie consolidated its position, Turkey can be defined as a peasant society in its majority, with its economy based on agricultural production and population concentrated in rural areas. State-led industrialization of the 1930s had been ended by the WWII; and with the Democrat Party's laissez-faire economic policies based on private enterprise and liberal foreign trade, Turkey experienced a temporary economic boom until 1954. However, economic crises followed as "the economy was crippled by foreign exchange shortages, economic growth and per capita income declined, inflation increased, and trade deficits surged", as a result of which political opposition and repressive response to it became commonplace in Turkey's politics<sup>173</sup>. The 1960 military intervention has changed not only the political character of the Republic but also its economic orientation to import-substitution industrialization; letting the period between 1960-1980 to be called as "second republic".<sup>174</sup>

Despite interruptions by military interventions and short-lived coalition governments, the right-wing parties governed Turkey in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The single ruling party throughout the 1950s was the Democrat Party (DP), which was established soon after the transition to multi-party system by dissidents from the RPP. It was supported by a set of groups from very different backgrounds: large landowners, peasants, the emerging commercial and industrial elite, conservative and religious circles. After years of hardship due to massive economic and social reform projects of the new republic and the World War II, electorate in Turkey overwhelmingly supported the DP in the elections throughout 1950s. The DP not only undertook an alternative economic development model to the *étatisme* of the RPP; it also proposed an opposing, more religious and conservative, socio-cultural image for the society against the secular and modernist version of RPP.

<sup>173</sup> Fikret Ceyhun, "The Politics of Industrialization in Turkey," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 18, no. 3 (January 1, 1988), 334.

<sup>174</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

The consecutive electoral victories by the DP vis-à-vis the RPP paved the way for Adnan Menderes, the DP leader and prime minister from 1950 until 1960 to become over-confident and arrogant. The DP owed its economic and consecutively political success in part to the US's financial aid, which it used to fund ambitious agricultural development project, and in part to growing industry as a result of new roads and increasing hydroelectric power<sup>175</sup>. He gradually turned into an authoritarian and oppressive political leader in the face of deteriorating socio-economic situation, his party's decreasing popularity and growing popular opposition towards the end of 1950s. The authoritarian, repressive and combatant approach of the DP regime eventually led to the military intervention on May 27, 1960.

The RPP, also known popularly as Atatürk's party, consisted of various groups from different social and political backgrounds with sometimes conflicting economic and political interests. İnönü, who was Atatürk's longtime ally and friend, was elected as the President of the RPP after Atatürk's death in 1938 and stayed in post until 1972. Ever since the 1950 elections, Turkey's first free general elections, the RPP has never been able to form a majority government or gain parliamentary majority. Except the one in 1961, it lost all elections in the 1950s and 1960s to its right-wing rivals. Despite coming first in the elections during the 1970s by winning for example 33 per cent of the vote in 1973 and 41 in 1977, mostly thanks to social democratic, populist discourse of Bülent Ecevit, who succeeded İnönü in 1972 and defined the Party's identity as the center of the left, the RPP had to form coalition governments with right-wing parties whose combined vote added up to more than 60 per cent. In the meantime, however, especially Demirel's Justice Party (JP) and Türkeş's Nationalist Action Party (NAP) did everything possible to delegitimize Ecevit's RPP, such as blaming the RPP for repressive policies under one-party rule, the execution of Adnan Menderes after 1960 military coup, and the raise of the political violence in the 1970s. What is especially noteworthy is that the collusion between the right-wingers in the parliament

<sup>175</sup> Jacob M Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East, v. 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 3.

during the 1970s, materialized as the first and second Nationalist Front coalition governments, did not only inhibit Ecevit to form a government despite its majority in the parliament, something he had guaranteed after his successful intervention in Cyprus, but also encouraged right-wing militants in the streets who were responsible for majority of violence in this period.

The Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, –JP) was established in 1961 and implicitly acted as the successor of the DP by reestablishing the local organizations of the DP, enjoying the support of the same circles that had supported the DP, including ex-DP members into its cadres, sometimes even in prominent positions, and most importantly adopting a similar political ideology to that of the DP.<sup>176</sup> Just like the DP, “[t]he JP was a coalition of industrialist, small traders and artisans, peasants and large landowners, religious reactionaries and Western-oriented liberals. It had very little ideological coherence”.<sup>177</sup> Following the footsteps of the DP, the JP was eventually able to get an absolute majority in the Parliament by 1965; also implemented similar economic policies; however not so cleverly made similar mistakes; thereby, in a sense contributing to another military intervention just 10 years later from the previous one. The economic policies of the JP, like those of the DP, caused rising inflation, growing unemployment, rapid urbanization and other sorts of socio-economic problems associated with these developments. It was especially the rapid growth of shanty-towns put up by immigrants from villages around the big cities which brought about a host of social and cultural tensions and played an important role in the contentious mobilization in the following periods. Anti-communist and Islamist discourse of the party was followed by repressive policies against the left: the intellectuals, writers and artists with leftist leanings were targeted and prosecuted<sup>178</sup>.

<sup>176</sup> Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, 16.

<sup>177</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*.

<sup>178</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish Experiment in Democracy, 1950-1975* (Boulder Colo.: Westview Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs London, 1977),197.

From the 1971 coup to 1980, Turkey had ten coalition governments. While there were two major political parties in the parliament—center-right JP and center-left RPP—neither of them could achieve a majority position. The other two small right-wing parties—Islamist National Salvation Party (NSP) and far-right Nationalist Action Party (NAP-*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*)—could play an important role in politics during the decade. Especially, the youth organization of the NAP, the ‘Idealist Hearths’ (*Ülkü Ocakları*) or as the members called themselves Grey Wolves (*Bozkurtlar*) or Idealists (*Ülkücüler*), acted as a counter-movement against the leftist movement after 1968 as a part of the suppression tactics of the state.

Couple of other smaller parties have also been established and operated during the 1960s, namely the New Turkey Party, the Nation Party, the Reliance Party, the Unity Party and the Turkish Labor Party (TLP—*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, popularly known as *TİP*). The most important of them was the TLP which will be analyzed in detail below for its role as the most important political actor as well as a broker for the emergence of leftist opposition in the period. Even though the 1960s was marked by the rivalry between the RPP and the JP, the TLP played a crucial and a bigger role for a party of its size. Despite it could never get more than %3 of the votes, the TLP was supported by all strands of the Turkish left until the end of 1960s, after which the left split up into numerous factions. What makes the TLP a significant political actor was also related to its open leftist ideological stance which pushed other parties as well to define their positions vis-a-vis the growing labor and student movements.

Last but not least is the Communist Party of Turkey (CPT—*Türkiye Komünist Partisi*). Founded in 1920, the CPT had never been a legal party in Turkey, and its activities were practically halted until the 1970s with the imprisonment of its members in 1951. From 1973 on, with the change of its leadership, the CPT increased its propaganda activities especially in the labor unions. The activities and ideas promoted by the CPT played a significant role on the emergence, development, and radicalization of the left during the 1960s and 1970s. The presence of the left-wing currents of various sorts in Turkey dates back to the late Ottoman

Empire. However, since its inception, the relationship between the Turkish Republic and the left-wing movements has been characterized by a repressive and intolerant approach by the former. A widespread assumption in Turkey has been that the anti-imperialist rhetoric of Kemalism had a heavy influence on the leftist thinking in Turkey in the following periods; however, the opposite should also be true that it had been the socialist and communist ideas and movements flourishing worldwide after World War I which played an important role in the establishment and consolidation of new Turkish Republic and its ideological currents. What was obvious, however, that Atatürk had pursued a pragmatic approach to counter the communist tendencies from very early on in his political career. Once even established a nominal Communist Party to ensure his domination in this brand of political activity too, Atatürk successfully co-opted growing communist movement in the 1930s by incorporating the members of *Kadro* Movement<sup>179</sup> into the RPP<sup>180</sup>. As a result of his repressive one-party regime he was able to suppress any legal opposition, including communists, throughout his lifetime. After he closed down the Turkish Worker and Peasant Party in 1925, the Turkish communists had to continue their activities clandestinely under the banner of Moscow-oriented CPT. Due to these successful repressive policies of Turkish state, communism could never attract a mass following, but gained a genuine support among some intellectuals; the most popular of whom was internationally well-known Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet. As an ardent communist, Hikmet had a major influence on numerous young Turks in later periods and his passionate poems eased their way into the leftist activism.

Despite the small numbers it could mobilize, the CPT's influence on the intellectuals was immense and perpetuated through the reformulation of its ideology by various strands of the left. The CPT reached this level of influence thanks to its 1945 program, in which through 26

<sup>179</sup>Kadro was a monthly journal published between 1932 and 1934, and well-known for its leftist ideas and non-capitalist policy suggestions for the newly establish Turkish Republic. See for example: Mustafa Türkeş, "A Patriotic Leftist Development-Strategy Proposal in Turkey in the 1930s: The Case of the Kadro (Cadre) Movement," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 1 (2001): 91–114.

<sup>180</sup>İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Bir cumhuriyet öyküsü: Kadrocuları ve Kadro'yu anlamak (A Story of the Republic: Understanding Kadro and Kadro People)* (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 2003), 424.

points the Party addressed all the pressing issues in political, economic, social and cultural areas in Turkey from land reform, economic regulations, education, freedom of press, to the rights of women, minorities and workers. In addition to 26 points, the program mentions 9 qualities under the title: “What kind of a Turkey are we fighting for?”: independent, democratic, progressive, just, secure, peace-loving, powerful, revolutionary, popular and prosperous<sup>181</sup>. The nationalist undertone of the program with references to Atatürk’s reforms seem to be picked up by the left of the following periods but not so much its focus on the rights and freedoms.

The CPT began to be influential in the popular politics in Turkey from the end of 1960s onwards as a result of increased influence and popularity of its members, like Mihri Belli and Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, and the idea of ‘national democratic revolution’, among the leftists and the youth. Almost all the radical leftist organizations established in the 1970s originated in the lines of ‘national democratic revolution’. The CPT was also active through legal organizations such as Progressive Women’s Association and Progressive Youth Association, as well as its dominant position in the ranks of influential Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey, (*Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu - DİSK*) from the mid-1970s on.

Last but not least, as another influential actor in Turkey’s politics, the army deserves a special mention especially for its role from 1960 until 1980. Even though played a constitutive role in the establishment of the Republic, the Turkish military was barred from politics through consciously enforced rules and regulations by Atatürk and his successor İnönü. The army officers had to resign from the army to be able to enter into politics and the soldiers was precluded from voting. Under the DP rule, “the civil and military bureaucrats suffered material and psychic losses because their salaries failed to keep up with rapidly rising costs. Thus, the military felt they had lost access, not only to the pinnacle of power,

<sup>181</sup> Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, 101–3.

but to social status and prestige as well”.<sup>182</sup> Ironically though, it was Adnan Mederes and his DP who “drew the military towards politics” by trying to use it against its political rivals; for example, he ordered the army, not the police, to disperse ever growing student demonstrations against the government in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir; thereby, in a sense starting an irreversible process in Turkish politics.<sup>183</sup>

The ever-increasing influence of the army in the Turkish politics from the 1960 intervention on cannot be easily exaggerated as the recurring interventions in 1971 and 1980, as well as several other intermittent threats and warnings on political issues clearly demonstrated. Even though the political stances of the officers carrying out each intervention varied, as well as their objectives and outcomes, the military in general was seen as the guardian of the regime by the Turkish public and even attributed a progressive revolutionary role by some left leaning intellectuals and the oppositional youth during the 1960s. What contributed to this perception, in addition to victorious role of the military in so-called the ‘War of Independence’ of Turkey after the WWI, was the character of the 1960 intervention and the new constitution it brought about, which will be detailed below. The positive outlook of the military at least in the eyes of some of the revolutionaries was soon to be destroyed with the 1971 coup but not the capacity and eagerness of the military to insert its influence into politics for decades to come after 1960 intervention.

Welcomed by everybody who was discontent with the DP rule, May 27, 1960 coup was carried out by the thirty-eight military officials. It was made by lower rank military officers, unlike the 1971 and 1980 coups, which were the work of the High Command of armed forces. They immediately formed a National Unity Committee in order to achieve a speedy transition back to civilian rule. In the next fifteen months more than four hundred DP leaders were tried and sentenced severely, and three former members of the DP cabinets—Adnan

<sup>182</sup> Frank Tachau and Metin Heper, “The State, Politics, and the Military in Turkey,” *Comparative Politics* 16, no. 1 (1983): 21.

<sup>183</sup> Landau, *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey*, 7.

Menderes, Hasan Polatkan and Fatin Rüştü Zorlu—were executed. Meanwhile, the committee also undertook some reformative actions such as relieving the censorship on press, controlling food prices and decreeing an eight-hour work day.<sup>184</sup>

The 1961 constitution has created an institution, the National Security Council (NSC), to work with the cabinet, especially on issues related to national security. But the definition of national security was so broad that it enabled the army to intervene into politics regularly. The Council was actually established by the High Command and aimed also to inhibit the lower rank army officials from attempting a similar intervention, in which they have been successful.<sup>185</sup>

In addition to its secured place in politics thanks to the NSC, the Army has also claimed its share in the economy of the country, especially with the creation of the Army Mutual Assistance Association (*Ordu Yardımlaşma Kurumu - OYAK*) in 1961. By 1972, OYAK's assets were estimated at 300 million dollars, earning the army the title of “the ‘third sector’ of the economy along with the state and private sectors”.<sup>186</sup> Its influence in the economy and politics of the country continued until decades after the 1980 coup.

The features and the consequences of the following two interventions of the military in 1971 and 1980 differ immensely from the first one and each other; each deserve ample space and time to be properly analyzed which this study cannot afford within the limits of its purposes.<sup>187</sup> Suffice it to say, though, that the 1980 coup represents the end of the contentious leftist politics, in other words its demobilization, through a severe crackdown on the activists. It is also the end of the contentious episode which is under scrutiny. The 1971 coup is, however, more symbolic and less consequential as it will be mentioned in detail below.

<sup>184</sup> Landau, 9.

<sup>185</sup> Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 130.

<sup>186</sup> Ahmad, 131.

<sup>187</sup> See Feroz Ahmad, “Military Intervention and the Crisis in Turkey,” *Merip Reports*, no. 93 (1981): 5–32.; Tachau and Heper, “The State, Politics, and the Military in Turkey.”; Özgür Ulus, *The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey : Military Coups, Socialist Revolution and Kemalism* (London ;;New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

Therefore, it is safe to say that the period between the two coups in 1960 and 1980 marks a unique episode in the Turkish politics, in which the first one created the conditions for an opening in the regime to outside actors and challengers, the last one sealed it for a long time afterwards. The general attitude of the military towards the left in this period was inimical rather than neutral. From the late 1960s onwards, in parallel with the political authorities, the military blamed the leftist movements for ever-growing contention and disorder, and viewed communism as the most important internal threat. A book titled *Means of Combatting Communism* was ordered to be read throughout the military<sup>188</sup>. Therefore, both during the 1971 and 1980 interventions, it deliberately targeted, arrested and imprisoned mostly, if not only, the leftists; thereby, encouraged the far-right groups who were in fact responsible for the most of the political violence and killings.

### **3.2. Iranian Political Regime: An Authoritarian Monarchy**

Conventionally, the history of Iran in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is broken down to several politically distinct periods shaped by a number of national and international historical events, namely the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1909), the First World War, authoritarian modernization under Reza Shah (1921-1941), the rise of nationalist movement (1941-53), and finally the consolidation of Mohammed Reza Shah's power between 1953-1963 and the rapid and uneven development until 1978. This study focuses on the last two periods, which witnessed ambitious socio-economic reform projects, a fast development of state capitalism, drastic socio-structural transformations, an overwhelming growth of the gap between the poor and the rich, a brutal repression of opposition of all kinds, and consequently a rise of oppositional groups from among various strata of the society. Almost each of these periods was marked by either a popular uprising, a repressive state reaction or an external intervention. It is fair to say that modern history of Iran is mostly characterized by popular politics and state's repressive responses. The interaction between various oppositional movements and the state both influenced and was

<sup>188</sup> Clement Henry Dodd, *Democracy and Development in Turkey* (N. Humberside England: Eothen Press, 1979),138.

influenced by the form and character of the regime. In addition to popular politics, it is also fair to say that foreign interventions played a definitive role in the political, economic and social transformation of Iran throughout the last century.<sup>189</sup> The political regime and the actors in the 1960s and 1970s began to form in the post-war era; however, what determined the nature and character of not only the political regime but also the opposition in this period was the rise and fall of the nationalist movement as a result of a coup in 1953. One can hardly exaggerate the significance and influence of this intervention in the political developments in the following periods as well as in the collective memory of the Iranians.

The First World War brought about two nation states in the Middle East: Iran and Turkey. While Atatürk led the foundation and formation of the modern Turkish nation state, Reza Khan tried to follow suit. Despite Turkey and Iran had several features in common and resembled each other at the first sight; and while Reza Shah was aspiring to establish a similar modern state looking up to Atatürk, Iran differed from Turkey for a number of reasons from socio-economic to historical and geopolitical ones. The socio-political structure of Iran was different from Turkey with its decentralized political formation dominated by the tribal landlords and aristocracy. Moreover, regular interventions of the great powers into politics of Iran, first the Great Britain and Russia, then the US, had a peculiar influence on the way the political regime took shape in the later periods. Yet, it would be wrong to emphasize only on the structural reasons for the diverging paths of these two early modernizers. Even though both Atatürk and Reza Shah adopted an authoritarian trajectory of modernization, the latter's inclination to establish a dynasty rather than a republic was the definitive factor at the end of the day.

After securing the support of the outside as well as many others from democrats to socialists inside advocating for strong central state after WWI in Iran, Reza Khan crowned himself the Shah of the new dynasty which he called Pahlavi in 1925. In fact, he had first attempted to

<sup>189</sup> For a general history of modern Iran see Fred Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), Keddie, *Modern Iran*, Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*.

establish a republic, but the reactions from the conservative and clerical circles proved it to be a more difficult goal to achieve. From 1921 until his abdication by the allied forces in 1941, he launched and executed hitherto the most extensive modernization project in Iranian history that transformed Iran in a short period of time from a decentralized, agriculture-based, backward country to a more or less centralized modern state based on an extensive bureaucracy and a powerful military. Of course, his modernization was from above as those of many of his contemporaries in the global south; however, in order to establish a modern economy which was of utmost importance for Iran to survive independently in the new century was not an easy task to achieve through democratic means<sup>190</sup>.

The regime that Reza Shah established was predominantly based on a patronage system instead of a parliamentary democracy; the parliament (*Majles*) was a rubber-stamp institution. Also, some of his reforms were either done half-heartedly or resulted in a backlash and opposite of what was actually intended. For example, the new civil law kept most of the patriarchal and Sharia-based customs making women subordinate to men, even the one allowing a husband to kill an adulterous wife with impunity.<sup>191</sup> On the other hand, to present a modern look, women were asked and when required forced to take off their *chador*, the veil from head to toe, in public places. This caused a popular outcry which made Reza Shah's social reforms unpopular among the masses.<sup>192</sup> The Dress Law was actually one of the many reform ideas Reza Shah copied from Turkey, with the exception of a few, however, most of these reforms were genuinely needed. His reforms were widely criticized for strengthening the landlords, not benefitting the poor at all, not doing enough agrarian reforms and finally favoring himself and his entourage. Despite all, Reza Shah left behind a reformed judiciary, new tax system, centralized bureaucracy and a strong Army. The economic development and reforms brought about, directly or indirectly, certain

<sup>190</sup> See Touraj Atabaki and Zürcher, Erik Jan, *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization Under Atatürk and Reza Shah* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) for further discussions on the modernizations efforts of authoritarian leaders.

<sup>191</sup> Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 92.

<sup>192</sup> Houchang E. Chehabi, "Staging the Emperor's New Clothes: Dress Codes and Nation-Building under Reza Shah," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3/4 (1993): 209–29.

positive results such as the growth of industry, transportation, education and women's public presentation and participation.

During the WWII, just like during the WWI, Iran lost its sovereignty; both the British and the Russians invaded the country. They first ousted pro-German Reza Shah, re-defined their sphere of influence in which they continued to support different political and interest groups.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Iran had experienced three foreign powers interfering into its domestic affairs and playing decisive roles in its political and economic transformation of the country. Russia, the northern neighbor, interfered mainly through advocating the movements of Azeri and Kurdish minorities as well as supporting socialist and communist groups. Whereas Britain was mostly active in the south supporting and mobilizing the conservative aristocrats and tribal leaders when needed. For example, the National Will Party (1941-1951) of Sayyed Zia ad-Din was backed by the British and domestically had the support of ulama, merchants, landlords, and tribes. The British had two main objectives intervening in Iran's domestic politics in the first half of the century: securing its geopolitical interests and oil concessions. During the Cold War, however, as in other parts of the Middle East, the United States took over the position of Britain and became the most influential foreign power in Iran. Just like the British, the US supported the Shah, the conservative clergy and landlords against the nationalist and leftist movements which were usually supported by the Soviets.<sup>193</sup>

The Period from 1941 until 1953 is considered the second constitutional era<sup>194</sup> in Iranian history due to the active political environment, relatively free press, and flourishing intellectual diversity. Iran entered the post-war era with a new Shah: Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the son of Reza Shah. The new Shah did not play a significant role until after 1953, instead several new political actors emerged in this period as a result of deteriorating economic and social conditions due to the war, as well as the liberated political environment in which socialist, nationalist and

<sup>193</sup> Afshin Matin-Asgari, "The Pahlavi Era Iranian Modernity in Global Context," *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, February 16, 2012.

<sup>194</sup> Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*, 73.

aristocratic or ‘feudal’<sup>195</sup> political groups and parties could emerge and organize freely after the collapse of the Reza Shah’s dictatorship. This relatively democratic political environment continued until the new Shah got his grip on power in 1953, thanks to a CIA-staged coup toppling the Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, who was elected by the parliament and led the popular nationalization of oil movement with success in the beginning of the 1950s. In the aftermath of the 1953 coup, the Shah repressed the National Front and the Tudeh Party; further analyses of these two significant oppositional movements of the period is below.

The intricate relationship between foreign powers and the state constituted one of the significant dynamics of Iranian political environment during the last century. While the Shahs of Iran tried to pursue good relations with first the British then the US, and these powers had vested interests mostly related to Iranian oil reserves and strategic position; nationalists and leftists opposition opposed their imperialist policies and accused the regime of enabling or conniving with them. On the other hand, the members of the opposition were regularly accused by the Shah and conservative politicians of colluding with the Soviets and jeopardizing national interests. For example, the Soviet’s demands for oil concession right after the WWII, and the Tudeh’s legitimizing discourse on the demands discredited the Tudeh’s cause as well as popularity. In the same vein, the opposition to Mohammed Mosaddegh and his oil nationalization campaign was mostly premised on the argument that he was a Tudeh supporter and serving to the interests of the Soviets. The presence and influence of the US over the regime increased gradually after the 1953 coup and reached to an extent that it was considered the most influential political actor in Iranian politics and therefore targeted by the oppositional groups throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, there is no need to explain the details of the relationship between the US and Iran to prove the support of the US to the Shah’s regime.<sup>196</sup> It is suffice it to note that the influence of the US and presence of the US military and technical personnel was one of the

<sup>195</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 107. He calls the rule of the notables in this period “feudal democracy”.

<sup>196</sup> This is detailed in various studies, for example see Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, Keddie, *Modern Iran*, and Said A Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

main characteristics of the Shah's regime and constituted one of the main pillars of criticism by the opposition.

The Shah set out to consolidate his power in the country after 1953 and eventually formed a monarchist dictatorship particularly by suppressing opposition of all sorts. Since then, his main line of policy was the destruction of what was left of democratic institutions and annihilation of the legal organized opposition. For this purpose, he established what was going to be maybe the most notorious intelligence agency, *Sazeman Amniat va Ettelaat Keshvar (SAVAK)*, in 1957 with the help of FBI and Mossad. "SAVAK has agents in the lobby of every hotel, in every government department, and in every university classroom. In the provinces, SAVAK runs a political intelligence gathering service, and abroad it keeps a check on every Iranian student ... Educated Iranians cannot trust anyone beyond a close circle of friends, and for them the effect is the same as if everyone else belonged."<sup>197</sup> The Shah also established an intelligence unit in the Army for internal and external security; it was called Second Bureau or G-2.<sup>198</sup> Both SAVAK and the Second Bureau used brutal means to suppress resistance, which they sometimes exaggerated to legitimize and increase their role and presence.<sup>199</sup> Consequently, many people were executed on false charges. The military became one of the main pillars of the Shah's rule and he closely supervised everything related to it. The budget for the military raised from \$60 million in 1954 to \$7.2 billion in 1977<sup>200</sup> making it the fifth biggest army in the world by 1975.

After having turned into a rentier state thanks to ever increasing oil revenues from the 1960s on, not only the capitalist development but also the domestic politics in Iran was heavily influenced by the international politics, particularly by the relations with the US. During the 1950s in the post-coup period, the shah could rule with an iron fist, repressing all the

<sup>197</sup> Quoted in Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 126.

<sup>198</sup> Parvin Merat Amini, "A Single Party State in Iran, 1975-78: The Rastakhiz Party: The Final Attempt by the Shah to Consolidate His Political Base," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2002): 147.

<sup>199</sup> Amini, "A Single Party State in Iran, 1975-78."

<sup>200</sup> Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "What Is Radicalism? Power and Resistance in Iran," *Middle East Critique* 21, no. 3 (2012), 281.

dissident leftist and nationalist groups from intellectuals to students without needing to implement any social or economic reforms thanks to unfailing support of the US to the regime. Meanwhile, the US could increase its economic and military presence in Iran. It was only with a Democratic Party president's coming to power in the US and new foreign policy principles that the internal dynamics of the Iranian regime began to change once more in the beginning of the 1960s. Of course, the US did not singlehandedly determine the political developments in Iran; however, its position and policies immensely influenced the domestic actors' perception of opportunity or threat. This was the case, for example, not only when the US-backed Prime Minister, Amini initiated the long due land reform with confidence after 1960, but also when the democratic circles in and outside of the twentieth *Majles* dared to demand and protest for fair elections. In short, the US played a significant role in the formation of political opportunity structure for the opposition to the Shah.

Therefore, the 1960s brought about various problems for the Shah's regime as a result of the new US administration under newly elected Democrat John Kennedy, who emphasized the significance of democracy and human rights in the allied countries. The decade started with the controversial elections for the twentieth *Majles* which allowed independent candidates to run as a result of pressure coming from the Kennedy administration. On the election day, on 21 July 1960, three political parties which were affiliated with the National Front issued a declaration demanding free elections. The demonstrations continued and gained speed after the elections among the National Front leaders and supporters who claimed that the elections were rigged. After series of demonstrations by the National Front for free elections some of which resulted in a number of arrests and casualties, the Shah had to give in and issue the re-elections in January 1961. The demand for free elections gathered support from other parts of the society, especially from Tehran University students, as well as teachers who went on strike on 2 May 1961, and turned into a wholesale protests against the government policies. Finally, all culminated and convinced the Shah to ask Ali Amini, who was supported by the U.S, to form the government on 6 May 1961. Amini was ambitious and started implementing

reforms in various areas of economy and politics in Iran, such as the revision of electoral laws and the distribution of the agricultural land; he also invested in development plans. However, his close ties to the US and insistence to rule by decree sidelining the parliament costed him the support of the National Front, the only viable opposition which could have support him in the face of the Shah's attacks.

Extremely bothered by the support that Amini received from the US and his confidence and success, the Shah forced Amini to resign at the first opportunity on 16 July 1962; however, it set off a range of events that culminated into one of the biggest uprisings in Iranian history. It was led by Khomeini and the university students, bazaar merchants and many unemployed supported Khomeini. In civil war like conditions the security forces and the army killed hundreds of protestors, and finally Khomeini was arrested. Meanwhile major strikes took place; political turmoil compounded with the religious discontent paved the way for the 1963 riots. Even though the opposition leaders of the Muharram upheavals of June 1963 did not demand radical changes but moderate reforms, Abrahamian considers the events "a dress rehearsal" for the Islamic revolution.<sup>201</sup>

In the midst of the political turmoil, in January 1963, the Shah put his reform program to a national referendum and like many of its counterparts received 99 percent favorable vote. The pressure of Kennedy Administration for social and economic reforms also played a significant role in the Shah's decision for a reform program because it was also meant to present a reformist image for the Shah to the Western world, which to a great extent became successful on that ground. It consisted of an agrarian reform law, "vote for women, profit-sharing for factory workers, nationalization of forests, literacy corps, and sale of public sector factories to pay compensation to landlords affected by land distribution."<sup>202</sup> Officially referred as the White Revolution or the Shah and People Revolution, the Shah's reform program was

<sup>201</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 426.

<sup>202</sup> Val Moghadam, "One Revolution or Two? The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic," *Socialist Register* 25, no. 25 (1989): 77, <http://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/5560>.

actually composed of the bids and pieces of both Amini's reform program and what had been already demanded by the opposition before, especially by the Tudeh Party first and then the National Front. However, in the way it was implemented by the Shah, the land reform did not only destroy the landowning class but also gave way to a mass migration from the rural areas to the big cities.

Eventually, the 1963 uprisings too were put down in the most brutal way. Yet, structural changes in the Iranian society due to industrialization, land reform, urbanization, modernizing reforms and expansion of educational opportunities continued to give way to the emergence or mobilization of new as well as old groups such as the intellectuals, students, workers, women, and ulama who perceived a stake for themselves in politics. In short, as Abrahamian puts it, the period between 1963 and 1977 can be defined as one of neither underdevelopment nor overdevelopments but *uneven development*.<sup>203</sup> Accordingly, the rapid socio-economic development carried out in this period, mostly thanks to the increasing oil revenues, was not balanced by the necessary political democratization. Furthermore, the development policies of the state served only the interests of certain sectors in society rather than the general public. "In industry, agriculture, and commerce, the government's development strategies consistently favored the upper class over the working classes, urban over rural, and large modern enterprises over small traditional ones."<sup>204</sup> Eventually, "the deterioration of the country's agriculture, widespread peasant migrations, and urban housing shortages"<sup>205</sup> created a sweeping discontent on every level of the society that needed to be addressed democratically. Instead, the Shah increased the regime's repression on all classes and groups in society through state instruments such as a single party rule, SAVAK, the army and a strong bureaucracy. No independent political organization, trade union, and media outlet was allowed to operate. By the 1970s, the level of political repression was unrivaled in any third world country. His own words, uttered after the establishment of a new single party in 1975,

<sup>203</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 419-450.

<sup>204</sup> Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, 63.

<sup>205</sup> Parsa, 63.

which is called the Rastakhiz or National Resurgence Party, summarized the nature of his regime best:

A person who does not enter the new political party and does not believe in the three cardinal principles which I referred to, will have only two choices. He is either an individual who belongs to an illegal organization, or is related to the outlawed Tudeh Party, or in other words a traitor. Such an individual belongs in an Iranian prison, or if he desires he can leave the country tomorrow, without even paying exit fees; he can go anywhere he likes, because he is not an Iranian, he has no nation, and his activities are illegal and punishable according to the law.<sup>206</sup>

Consequently, not only political opposition but also religious groups, the Bazaar businessmen and workers emerged as the discontented groups during that period. This expansion of the political landscape was perceived as a threat to the sovereignty of the state and led the Shah to seek further and continuous surveillance and disciplinary mechanisms to keep these groups under control, thereby creating a vicious cycle of escalation during the 1960s and 1970s. Among the various dissident groups, we will focus on the evolution of the secular leftist opposition and the path to the adoption of guerrilla struggle among some of the leftist organizations.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

As we have seen, Iran and Turkey followed a very similar trajectory of authoritarian modernization in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which also determined the political culture as a result of formation of strong central national states in the two countries in the following periods. Therefore, the difference in the political systems, Turkey being a republic whereas Iran a monarchy, did not set the two apart to a significant extent. They have also stood out in the Middle East for not having been colonized by the Western powers; thus, they have always had a different relationship with the West and a unique Western influence than those countries that had been colonized. As we will see in more detail below, until the mid-century, the attitude towards the west and western states was one of respect and admiration among the intellectuals and general public alike. What is also worthwhile to mention is that Turkey and

<sup>206</sup> Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, 47, 48.

Iran have come to share a number of customs and traditions as long-time neighbors of similar size, religious affiliations and socio-cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the two countries fall in the spectrum of comparison into that of similar cases than the different ones.

Along with these resemblances, there were also a number of differences between Turkish and Iranian cases. Turkey as a parliamentary republic have always been committed to democratic and free elections after transition to the multi-party system and the rule of law with the exception of regular military interventions. Despite the continuous majority of conservative right-wing parties in the parliament and the governments; as well as the persisting political pressure, which regularly culminated into violent interventions, on the leftist movements in general, oppositional movements of various sorts and labor movement could always continue to operate legally in Turkey thanks to the democratic and political rights granted by the 1961 Constitution. However, in Iran the parliament had been more of a rubber stamp rather than a real house of representatives with independent executive and legislative powers with the exception of brief intervals during the interwar period and the nationalization of oil campaign. The Shah regime in Iran increased and consolidated its grip on power constantly in the second half of the century as well as its dictatorial tendencies which were particularly felt by the leftist and democratic opposition through censorship, suppression, intervention and prohibitions. Therefore, by the mid-1960s, there had been left no room for legal opposition to the Shah's regime, let alone a parliamentary one. Further implications of diverging political environments for the oppositional movements in the two countries will be the topic of the next chapter.