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Is the Iranian regime a totalitarian one?

A conceptual-theoretical study of an Islamic State

Bachelor Thesis in Political Science

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Sammanfattning

Denna studie syftar till att besvara frågan huruvida kännetecknen i en "totalitär diktatur" á la Carl Friedrich och Zbigniew Brzezinski överrensstämmer med den politiska strukturen i den post-revolutionära regimen i Iran.

Den islamiska republiken Iran är tvetydig i sin natur. Med kombinerade element från Sovjet styret, liberala Europaparlamentet och en teokrati, är landet unikt och komplicerat att definiera. Världen fokus på Iran har ökat som följd av attentatdåden den 11:e september, det förvärrade Palestina-Israel kriget och alltsedan landet inlett kärnkraftsprogram vilket har väckt anklagelser mot dess dolda planer på att framkalla kärnvapen. Slutsatsen är att den islamiska regimen upprätthåller officiösa val i syfte att ge ett intryck av en demokratisk stat, vilket ligger i linje med en partiell -diktatur. Trots att alla egenskaper från Friedrich & Brzezinskis totalitära diktatur påträffas i viss utsträckning inom regimen, saknas tillräckligt med belägg inom samtliga aspekter för att nå en fastställande kategoriseringen av Iran som en totalitär diktatur. Således, baserat på det faktum att det parallellt med despotism och förtryck, faktiskt inträffar val med motkandidater samt andra demokratiska kännetecken, kan den iranska regimen betecknas ”partiell-diktatorisk”.

Nyckelord: Islamiska Republiken Iran, Islam, totalitär diktatur, ideologi, statligt monopol

Abstract

This thesis aims to answer the main question whether the features of a “totalitarian dictatorship” ‘a la Carl Friedrich & Zbigniew Brzezinski fit the political structure of the post-revolutionary Iranian regime.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is ambiguous in its nature. With combined elements from Soviet rule, liberal European parliamentary and a theocracy, it is quite unique and complicated to reach. The world focus on Iran has increased as an aftermath of 9/11, the deteriorated Palestine-Israel war and since its initiated nuclear program and the allegations against the country’s plan to create nuclear weapons. The conclusion is that the Islamic regime employs semi-competitive elections to give an appearance of democracy, as is in line with a semi-dictatorship. While all traits by Friedrich & Brzezinski are to be found *to some extent* within the regime, there lacks sufficient support in all aspects to reach a conclusive categorisation of Iran as totalitarian dictatorship. Thus based on the fact that it alongside with despotism and oppression, actually are to be found partially competitive elections and other democratic traits, the Iranian regime might be called a semi-dictatorship.

Keywords: The Islamic Republic of Iran, Islam, totalitarian dictatorship, ideology, state monopoly

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1 Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Iran has for long been a debated and puzzling topic due to its sealed agenda and dual nature. Media, and foremost the Bush-administration labels the Iranian regime as one of the “axis of evil”. The groups in power will stop at nothing to maintain the current political system—and due to the government’s closed structure and the lack of public oversight mechanisms, there can be no valid review and monitoring of government actions. It is its unique and veiled nature, which makes it an interesting country to examine for further understanding and for attempting to answer the question whether the Iranian regime accurately can be labelled a *totalitarian dictatorship*. As the country is preparing for its 30th anniversary since the overthrow of the Shah, it is highly suited to see what the Iranian regime has developed into.

Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski’s have in their work *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, suggested six basic traits recognised to be common to totalitarian dictatorships. The collection of traits signifying a totalitarian dictatorship is mainly based on parallels from Nazi-Germany, Fascist-Italy and Communist-Soviet Union. These six traits have been used model on the Iranian regime in order to find any similarities.

1.1 Problem

The 1979-Islamic Revolution in Iran is the first modern attempt of Islam to adapt a traditional and religious governance form to the organisation arrangement of a modern society. The revolution resulted in the substitution of the two and half millennia Persian monarchy under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi by an Islamic government under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution and founder of the Islamic Republic. It has been called "the third great revolution in history," following the French and Bolshevik revolutions. With the twelfth imam, Islam’s Messiah vanished; Ayatollah Khomeini with support from every secular and religious group joined forces and took on the role as the “momentarily” leader of Islam until the return of the Imam.¹ Today Iran is managed under a theocratic structure based on sacred Islamic Law (*Shari’a*). In order to revive Islamic values in Iran the revolution was followed by a cultural and ideological revolution implementing fundamental changes to various spheres of the Iranian life. Consistently reports of coercion and abuse against the Iranian people are published. The country is listed as one of the least free countries in the

¹ Shia Islam is the largest minority denomination (10-20%) based on the Islamic faith after Sunni Islam. Twelver Shi’as believes that Muhammad, the ultimate saviour of mankind, has been hidden by Allah to later emerge to fulfil his mission.

world on the issues of its economy, governmental transparency, media, and public and civil rights, ranking 6.0.² “Devious traditionalists and supporters of the authoritarian approach have obscured the benefits of democracy by keeping the public in the dark, in order to maintain power.”³

Subsequent to the revolution, Islamic government policy was directed against the use of coercion and moral and intellectual guidance as to establish an Islamic territory. Through historical advantage as moral and religious leaders, the Iranian religious elite formed ideological alliances and applied coercive methods to eliminate opposition groups and maintain its domination.

The application of law and the transcendent position of Shari’a in Islamic political theory as well as enculturation of religion provide the ground for totalitarianism. Religion as culture subsequently results in the religious relevance of the routine law, e.g. an illegal action is regarded religiously forbidden *haram*. Now with its thirtieth anniversary, the Islamic Republic of Iran calls for a closer study to see whether one can reach any understanding of its achievement and its nature today.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to compare Iran’s governing against the six characters of a totalitarian dictatorship as written by Friedrich and Brzezinski’s, in order to conclude if the Iranian regime can be categorised a totalitarian dictatorship. The scope of this paper signifies the post-revolutionary Iran until present time.

In order to achieve the aim, explicitly to reach a conclusion on whether the sources and facts adequately support a categorising of Iran as a “totalitarian dictatorship”, the following research questions will be addressed;

- How is the Iranian government structured?
- How is the country led?
- What is the existence of coercion and censorship?
- Are any traits of monopoly over the country’s media and weaponry institutes to be found?
- How is the economy governed and controlled?

² Countries are ranked on a scale from 1.0 (most free) to 7.0 (least free). *Source; www.freedomhouse.org*

³ Arjmand, 2008

1.3 Method

The six traits by Friedrich and Brzezinski form a cluster of traits, entwined and jointly supporting each other, as is usual in “organic” systems. Thus, they should not be looked at separately or be made the central point of comparison. The theory to be applied on Iran as a comparative is based on Friedrich and Brzezinski’s totalitarian dictatorship. It pinpoints six distinct features. The descriptions conclude that a totalitarian dictatorship possesses...

- ✓ ...an elaborate **ideology** consisting of “an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of man’s existence to which everyone living in that society is supposed to adhere, at least passively; this ideology is characteristically focused and projected toward a perfect final state of mankind –containing a chiliastic claim, based upon a radical rejection of the existing society with conquest for the world for the new one.”⁴
- ✓ ... “a **single mass party**, led by one man, the “dictator”, and consisting of a relatively small percentage of the total population, a hard core of them passionately and unquestioningly dedicated to the ideology, prepared to assist in every way in promoting its general acceptance, such a party being hierarchically, oligarchically organised, typically superior to, or completely intertwined with the government.”
- ✓ ...“a **system of terror** whether physical or psychic, effected through party and secret-police control, supporting but also supervising the party for its leaders, and characteristically directed not only against demonstrable “enemies” of the regime but against more or less arbitrarily selected classes of the population; the terror whether of the secret police or of party-directed social pressure systematically exploits modern science, and more especially scientific psychology.”
- ✓ ...“a technologically conditioned, near-complete **monopoly** of control in the hands of the party, and the government, of all means of effective **mass communication**, such as the press, radio, and motion pictures.”
- ✓ ...“a technologically conditioned, near-complete **monopoly** of the effective use of all **weapons** of armed combat.”
- ✓ ...“a **central control** and direction of the entire **economy** through the bureaucratic coordination of formally independent corporate entities, typically including most other associations and group activities.

⁴ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:22

1.4 Disposition

Friedrich and Brzezinski's features 1, 2 & 6 are given separate chapters, while features 3-5, being somewhat interrelated, are incorporated into one section, chapter 4. Each feature has been summarised in "theoretical background" chapters and one by one compared to Iran's regime on the related topic in the "analyse" sections. Thus each chapter begins with a theoretical background on the discussed trait, followed by an analyse over Iran's standpoint. The conclusion states the final result and similarities with an assessment of how the purpose is reached in relation to the theory as well as a chapter presenting alternative forms of governance.

The main features from Friedrich and Brzezinski along with those found to be similar in the Iranian regime are throughout the paper marked in *italics* for clear assessment of any similarities.

1.5 Sources

The reason for selecting Friedrich and Brzezinski's model from the 1960's as a comparative governance form is due to its extreme nature. All traits indicating a totalitarian dictatorship are mainly based on studies of Nazi-Germany, Fascist-Italy and Communist-Soviet Union and thus not primarily intended for assessment on a non-Western government of religious character such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nevertheless, since the authors provide six elements of such distinct and extreme nature, many which at a quick glance are to be found in the exceptional and unresolved debate on Iran's structure, their features will function as analytical tools whether one can go as far as fitting Iran into that categorisation. One clarification found in Friedrich and Brzezinski's features which makes the resemblance between their totalitarian dictatorship and the Iranian regime in specific concerns the observation that all totalitarian movements are religious movements in some ways.

2 Ideology

2.1 Theoretical Background

Friedrich and Brzezinski consider ideology to function as a weapon in the hands of those in quest of power or those exercising it. Totalitarian leaders use ideology as a tool in order to implement their values on its people. Its purpose is preferably functioned in combination with fanatical and extreme beliefs for its truth. Indications explain the pragmatic use in events where ideology has facilitated in shaping the behaviour of the totalitarian rulers as well as the mass following it.

A totalitarian dictatorship possesses an elaborate ideology consisting of “an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of man’s existence to which everyone living in that society is supposed to adhere, at least passively; this ideology is characteristically focused and projected toward a perfect final state of mankind -- that is to say, in contains a chiliastic claim, based upon a radical rejection of the existing society with conquest for the world for the new one.”⁵

Issues concerning totalitarian ideology ought to be seen as a special case of the role of ideology within the political community. Essentially, in the context of Friedrich and Brzezinski an ideology is an action-related ‘system’ of ideas containing an operational program and a strategy for its realisation. Its main purpose is to unite and integrate organisations built around them. Thus, an ideology is “a set of *literate ideas*- a reasonably coherent body of ideas concerning practical means of how to change and reform a society, based upon a more or less elaborate criticisms of what is wrong with the existing or antecedent society.”⁶ Further a *totalitarian ideology* would be one that is concerned with “total destruction and total reconstruction” involving typically an ideological “acceptance of violence” as the only mean for such destruction.

This total change and reconstruction in its very nature constitutes a “utopia”, hence totalitarian ideologies are typically *utopian in nature*. While totalitarian ideologies (in this perspective) are radical forms of development, which are typically modern; they must not be confused with traditional notions, such as beliefs and customs prevalent on established societies. A significant aspect of such ideologies is their *symbolism*, invented for the purpose of effectively *competing* with the symbols of the *rival* ideologies. In the case of totalitarian

⁵ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:22

⁶ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:88

ideologies, their symbols are typically invented to undermine the symbolism of the political order to be overthrown. The authors illustrate this with the familiar symbols of totalitarian movements- for instance that of Adolf Hitler's Nazism and its usage of the swastika and fasces. These are well-known to many lacking any clear conception of the movements for which they stand. Such symbols embody an element of its ideology that holds central importance, and is significant to the totalitarian order derives' consideration. "An additional important symbol for all the totalitarian regimes is negative; the *stereotype image of the enemy*. In these negative symbols, the ideological basis of all such symbolism is even more evident. It is also found to some extent in the competitive politics of constitutional regimes."⁷

Totalitarian parties are an extreme example of the general trend of a totalitarian dictatorship. By their *elimination of all rivals*, they *monopolise* and *convert* their group *ideology into a governmental one*. But the process of adaption of the population to the general "reality" still takes place, despite persistent efforts in order to maintain the myth that ideology is intact and that concessions are temporary. It is at this point that ideologies are to some extent *transformed into myths*. Although myths are not only found in totalitarian dictatorships, totalitarian myths hold a special quality of being pseudo-scientific.⁸

The important and very real place the myth has in totalitarian dictatorships as in all political societies are numerous. They are the results of a spontaneous response of men who "posses power and seek authority and who wish others subject to that power to accept it as legitimate." Consistently it is observed that all totalitarian movements are *religious movements* in ways, since they make their youthful members ready to sacrifice all.⁹

Finally it can be stated that the ideology constitutes an *operative force* in totalitarian political orders, as it does in non-totalitarian ones that its symbolism and its myths are among the significant elements of the contemporary political scene. There are types of totalitarian ideology to be distinguished which significantly affect the pattern and the operations. Two primary typologies of totalitarian ideology have appeared, one distinguished by the degree of rationality, the other by the factor *universalism*. No doubt other typologies could be elaborated. But what should be avoided is the adoption of typologies derived from totalitarian's own ideological premises, such as, calling one revolutionary, the other reactionary, or one progressive, the other conservative. Such classifications have themselves a

⁷ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:89

⁸ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:91

⁹ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:93

propagandistic effect, and imply an acceptance of the directional premises of the particular ideology. Both of the types suggested are explicitly related to the *doctrinal aspect of these ideologies*.

2.2 Analysis

The upbringing and inspiration behind today's Iran will be presented here since the notions from the 1979-revolution still stand and function as the foundation for today's Iranian regime. Further, the Iranian constitution will be examined in order to see whether or not it includes the implementation of Friedrich and Brzezinski's ideological appliance above. Words written in *italics* are those found to be analogous with the traits of a "totalitarian dictatorship".

2.2.1 Sharia as State Ideology

With the twelfth imam, Islam's "Messiah" vanished; a power vacuum was formed as the question on who was to hold the right to exercise power until the return of the imam was raised. The solution was found in the idea of creating a state within the state that guaranteed the Clergy power monopoly over the people. As Sharia is open for new interpretations of Allah's word, the task fell into the hands of the priests. Consequently, the society was divided into two fractions. One educated elite consisting of theologians and clergies with a task to interpret the Quran, God's Law and tradition as to find solutions to various religious issues¹⁰. The second group, consisting of the Iranian public, was obliged to surrender to the clergies' doctrines. This came to provide the grand-ayatollah vast power.¹¹

As the public must comply with the edicts of the ayatollahs, they also depend on the religious elite, which guarantees the priesthood a position of power that goes before any political authority. In view of the fact that the religious law is in need of constant reinterpretation as to be up-to-date, the Clergy, with their *exclusive right* and *knowledge* to do so, may influence all areas of society, from law to technology.¹²

The issue of the Iranian state ideology is a problematic and a complicated one. It can, on one hand, be concentrated in Shia Islam in itself considering that over the years and until today there exists competing schools, partly on account of Shiite Islam's acceptance even

¹⁰ Najadmehr 2003:12

¹¹ Jönsson, 2008-12-17

¹² Najadmehr 2003:12

encouragement of jihad, e.g. new *interpretations* of the Koran. Somewhat simplified, there are today two main schools concerning the Government and the Clergy (*Mullahcracy*)¹³;

1. The Clergy should provide governance for the dilettante, at least as long as they do not misbehave too much. It is subject to many ayatollahs in Iran and was the predominant view among priests up until the Khomeini revolution.
2. The Clergy led by the supreme jurist, “velayate-faqih” (the rule of the Islamic Jurist) should govern the state directly, albeit with the help of secular politicians and experts. This was then Khomeini's position functions still as the Iranian regime's basic ideology.

One should remember that the *Khomeini doctrine* is primarily a political and not a religious doctrine with great space for the new interpretations when suited. For instance Khomeini declared that the most important thing for the Islamic Republic of Iran was to safeguard the "state interests" (*maslahat*), which if it was needed was to be taken out over the traditional Islamic practices and principles.¹⁴

The revolutionary function of the *Islamic ideology* received its incentive as well as its driving force from hidden widespread *mythologies* deeply rooted in the Iranian peoples' memory.¹⁵ This ideology was constructed (by a range of dedicated architects) out of materials holy to the Iranian Shi'i belief. The nature of this ideological formation was such that it connected the political concerns most in need of attention and concerns to the subjective formation of the Iranian mentality. Arguably the single most imperative theme in the gathering rhetoric of the *Islamic ideology* was its insistence on the divided battle between *justice* on the side of revolutionaries led by Khomeini, and the *injustice*, on the part of the established regime under the rule of the Shah. “Zolm”, Persian and Arabic for “injustice” functioned as the primary accusation rose by the religious revolutionaries against Shah Pahlavi and his “*tyrannical rule*”. Millions of Iranians allegedly suffered while the “King of all kings” enjoyed an extravagant lifestyle.¹⁶ Morally charged with a *disapproval of its political opponents*, the ideological foundation for the Islamic Revolution was deeply moved and vigorously animated by a rejection of “The West” -the sole dominating force of “*universal evil*”. *Mythologised* into an immense entity, “The West” became the archetype of moral corruption, of ethical bankruptcy, of illegitimate domination of the world, and of plundering the prosperity and the

¹³ Jönsson, 2008-12-17

¹⁴ Abrahamian 1993

¹⁵ Dabashi, 1992:504

¹⁶ Dabashi, 1992:506

dignity of other self-governing nations.¹⁷ The revolutionary leaders *unified* behind these *slogans* and notions as a *tool* to gather the people behind the revolution. In this victorious theory of the Islamic Revolution, the moral charge of "the Islamic Ideology" is seen as the single most important symptom of "Islam and the West", whether separate or taken together.¹⁸

From the words of Ayatollah Khomeini, the charismatic leader of the Revolution, transmitted to Iran through cassette tapes, to graffiti, slogans, and murals on walls and bridge columns, to revolutionary posters and banners, to songs, poems, declarations, and oratorical devices, to the creation of vivid and *compelling mental images* (see p.14) from the shared sacred history, and avalanche of public sentiments were mobilized by the leading figures of the revolutionary movement.¹⁹

Popular belief and rituals were transformed into banknotes, stamps, and chewing-gum wrappers, and directed towards mass mobilisation for revolution and war. To *oppose the established authority* of the state, this persistent revival of the shared *sacred history* was directed to illegitimate the status quo.²⁰

¹⁷ Dabashi, 1992:507

¹⁸ Dabashi, 1992:509

¹⁹ Chelkowski & Dabashi, 1999

²⁰ Ibid.

Propaganda images used by the Islamic Republic of Iran in their endeavour of undermining rivals



Picture 1 Khomeini plays the role of the agent of God, like Moses, and is about to lead the nation out of the Shah's slavery. Even the traditional dragon which often appears in Persian miniatures is spewing flames on the Shah.

(Source: *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*)



Picture 2 The bodies of eight demonstrators wrapped in their white shrouds. One of the first revolutionary posters aside from the Ayatollah's portraits produced soon after the Black Friday Massacre in Zhaleh Square on September 8, 1978 where the Shah's troops fired on 20.000 opponents.

(Source: *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*)

2.2.2 Khomeini –Leader of the Revolution

Khomeini revolutionized Islam and mainly the Shiite's orientation of the twelfth imam.²¹ He abandoned the notion of dual governance where the Clergy held the true power and imams the formal. Alternatively *an ideology* with the Clergy possessing both political and spiritual power in society was created. Khomeini decided to pursue a revolution to seize power and impose a reign, "velayate faqih", which would bring the nation "closer to God", and with that, *justify a political revolution*.

2.2.3 The Constitution

Religion is very evident throughout the Constitution as it is based on Islam with Quran verses used as a source for articles. The foundation of social order legitimacy derives from the Islamic Law and not the will of the people,²² thus the basis for the State is not the people's sovereignty but rather *Allah's rule* and the divine law as the only guiding principle. The Islamic Republic of Iran does not make any distinction between State and religion. This integration has gone as far as making its religious law, *Sharia*, a *state ideology*. A concept the regime even has sought to *export* to its Islamic neighbours.²³

The ideological State of Iran is assumed to be an example for *the rest of the world*. The Constitution states:

It now intends to establish an ideal and model society on the basis of Islamic norms. The Mission of the Constitution is to realize the ideological objectives of the movement and to create conditions conducive to the development of man in accordance with the noble and *universal* values of Islam.²⁴

The Islamic content of the 1979-revolution, the Constitution provides the necessary basis for ensuring the continuation of the Revolution at home and abroad. In particular, in the development of international relations, the Constitution will strive with other Islamic and popular movements to prepare the way for the formation of a *single world community*, as Islam is believed to conquer and *reach universal reign*.

A wave of Islamic revival has swept through the Islamic world, and Muslim nations are expressing a strong desire to return to Islam and practice this lofty religion. This awakening has stemmed from the great Islamic revolution of

²¹ See *Background*

²² Jönsson, 2008-12-17

²³ Sadjapour 2008:7

²⁴ The Islamic Constitution; 'The Form of Government in Islam'

the Iranian people under the leadership of our late *magnanimous Imam*.... The enemies told us not to export our Islamic revolution! We said that revolution could not be exported, since it is not a commodity! However, our Islamic revolution, like the scent of spring flowers that is carried by the breeze, reached every corner of the Islamic world and brought about an Islamic revival in Muslim nations.²⁵

This passage elucidates the Iranian regime's conviction of its *ideology as universal*. In line with Iran's ambitions as a nation, it is notable on Khamenei's official website that he is referred to not as the "Supreme Leader of Iran" but as the "*Supreme Leader of Muslims*."

While Iranian policy has evolved since the early days of the revolution, its ideological structure remains built upon the central pillars "the mandatory veil (*hejab*) for women and opposition to the enemies, the United States and Israel. Changing these policies would call into serious question the *raison d'être* of the Islamic system, blurring the lines between regime ideology and regime interests."²⁶

2.3 Review

Conclusively it is noted that the Iranian regimes' belief in Sharia as the ideal guideline for the own nation as well as for those neighbouring illustrates the regimes' vision of their ideology as universally right. With the appliance of myths, propaganda and symbols Khomeini violently paved way for the ushering of a revolution, creating an ideology into a governmental one. This applies, in specific, to the stereotyping of the Shah and the US as the symbols for all evil. Propaganda which was combined with promises of reaching a new and improved world. These many strategical methods of utilizing ideology in favour of the regime correspond to the totalitarian model's ideological traits.

²⁵ Sadjapour 2008:21

²⁶ Sadjapour 2008:14

3 Party and Leadership

3.1 Theoretical Background

On the next totalitarian trait the authors conclude the existence of “a single mass party, led by one man, the dictator”, which consists of a relatively small percentage of the total population (up to 10 percent). Majority of them are passionately and unquestioningly dedicated to the ideology and are prepared to assist in every way in the promotion of its general acceptance, such a party being “hierarchically, oligarchically organised and typically either superior to, or completely intertwined with, the governmental bureaucracy.”²⁷

The idea of a totalitarian dictatorship suggests that a dictator who possesses “*absolute power*” is placed at the head. Unlike military dictators in the past, but like certain types of primitive chieftains, the totalitarian dictator is both *ruler* and *high priest*. He *interprets authoritatively the doctrine upon which the movement rests*. It also embodies the dictator’s ascendancy over his lieutenants. In a tight grip totalitarian set-up, the dictator and his subordinates are united in ideological stance. “The continuance of ideological unity in the party is an unmistakable sign of the maintenance of personal dictatorship, or the dictatorship over a *small number of oligarchs* who temporarily work together or maintain a balance of power.”²⁸

By fashioning a movement’s ideology, the leader provides it with support of its cohesion. It is in keeping with the “laws of politics” that leaders become dictators, once the government is seized. Having thus achieved *absolute control* over the state they then proceed to consolidate their power –a process in which they are aided by their immediate entourage, who expect to derive considerable benefits for themselves from the situation. Under totalitarianism there are no alternatives; as the movement’s ideological commitment is *absolute*, and its *utopian thrust* calls for the overall organising of all available power resources. Hence, the “structure of government” has *no real significant* because the *power of decision* is completely concentrated in *a single leader*. Any constitution is merely a disguise by which a “democratic” framework is being suggested, a *facade* for the totalitarian reality.²⁹ Similarly *the judiciary machinery, devoid of independence*, is actually part of the administrative and bureaucratic hierarchy. These lieutenants wield the levers of control that hold the totalitarian dictatorship together and are *instrumental* on *maintaining* the dictator in power. Secondly, there leadership is characterised by *feudalism*. This leadership is labelled as *oligarchic*. Final, growing out of the

²⁷ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:22

²⁸ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:23

²⁹ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:34

revolutionary totalitarianism is the *militancy of the leadership*. In short, the lieutenants have of the function of providing the dictator with effective links to the vast apparatus of party and government. They also share in *manipulating patronage* and thereby in controlling political and administrative advancement. The resulting clienteles are likely to play a significant part in intraparty power struggles. But, the problem of what kind of leadership characterises totalitarian dictatorship is left unanswered.

“Totalitarian leadership is built upon meta-rational and *emotional appeals* that are cast in strongly rational terms”. Analysis of ideology indicates that this leadership is believed to be an *executor of history*. It is the “consequent *sense of mission* that has led to the interpretation of this leadership as *charismatic*.”³⁰ Such a view entirely overlooks that this “appeal” is reinforced by factors that are totally absent in the case of genuine and even practised charisma, more especially the *control of mass-communications, propaganda* and the *terror apparatus*. Both these features advance further only in the course of the effective seizure of total power, but they are present from the start. Since the controls remain all-permitting and the dictator continues to have the last word, it remains a *system of total power*, even though the techniques are changed.

The characteristic features of the leadership of the totalitarian can be termed the “traditional”, the “rational-legal,” and the “charismatic”. Considering “the pseudo-religious emotionalism” of these regimes, they are chosen to this kind of totalitarian leadership as “pseudo-charismatic.” Further resemblances are to be found to another distinct type as it may be argued that the totalitarian leader is a kind of *revolutionary leader*.

The inner dynamic of totalitarian movements are of specific nature, as they do not freely recruit their membership. Rather they institute the sort of tests that are characteristics of clubs, orders, and similar *exclusive “brotherhoods.”* In order to work effectively and make it honourable to strive for to belong to it becoming an honour striving for, the party, representing only a small percentage of the total population, must be restricted in size. *Within* the totalitarian *party*, there is moreover *no “democracy”*. The party does not even decide if it votes or elects the leadership; it is subject to autocratic direction in matters of policy and to hierarchical control in matters of leadership.³¹

³⁰ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:35

³¹ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:46

In the established totalitarian society, the role of the party is a distinctive one with a function to provide a following for the dictator with which he can identify. The party may be pictured as the *elite* of the totalitarian society. Authority and decision-making are usually *highly centralised* in totalitarian regimes.³² The party and the special cadres within it are highly *selective* and *elitist* in a totalitarian dictatorship. This tendency toward elitism reinforces the strictly *hierarchical* structuring of these totalitarian parties. The rigid hierarchy and centralised power are the result of an evolutionary process; everywhere there is at first considerable impact from below; later the party following becomes more and more subdued, until finally its influence is negligible. This is part of the maturing process of totalitarian regimes. But *without the party's support*, a dictator would be *inconceivable*; his unquestioned leadership gives the party its peculiar dynamic, indeed *fanatical, devotion* to the dictatorship, and the spineless attitude of subjection of its members toward the man at the top is merely the psychological counterpart to the party's ruthless assertion of the will and determination rule and to shape the society in its image.³³

Due to the totalitarian dictatorship's sense of mission its fundamental focus concerns the spread of its power and ideological program to the *younger generation*. The organised efforts to *indoctrinate youth* are begun at a very early age and are used for the discovering of political talent among children. It is upon the young that the hopes of the dictatorship are focused, and the totalitarian regime never tires of asserting that the future belongs to the youth.³⁴

Since the main dynamic point of totalitarian dictatorship is "the leader-party interdependence, the party would provide the key to the succession problem, not as a democratic and cooperative group of more or less equal individuals, but as a bureaucratic apparatus with a hierarchical structure whose decisions are reinforced by a ritual of acclamation."³⁵

3.2 Analysis

For the reader to sense the tone of the Iranian ideology, present since the 1979-revolution until today, a brief background to Iran's complex nature of beliefs is essential and is therefore summarised following an overview on the country's political system. Words marked in *italics* are those found to be comparable to Friedrich & Brzezinski's defined traits within a totalitarian dictatorship.

³² *ibid*

³³ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:59

³⁴ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:60

³⁵ *ibid*

3.2.1 The Islamic Republic's Political Scheme

The Shi'ite doctrine holds that only the Imams have been granted the power to know Allah's Essence. In his 1930-published "Misbah al-Hidaya", Khomeini proposed, "anyone, who has the quality of Perfect Man [...] is a caliph in this world", thereby suggesting that even a mortal-if extraordinary- individual could achieve divine transcendence. Given the young Khomeini's passionate embrace for active asceticism, along with his elaboration in the holy city of Qom, already by the early thirties, Khomeini felt himself possessed by a holy *ruh* that *merited the respect and loyalty* of those around him.³⁶ These factors contributing to the creating of Khomeini's charismatic bond to his *devoted followers* where his enlightenment of a "this-worldly" path of action promising "spiritual wholeness to those suffering" from the alienating effects of modernisation, and his way of cohering this "mystical activism" in terms that resonated with the covert charisma of Persian and Shi'ite culture. Via this symbolic element, Khomeini opened up for an answer to moral deterioration and culture alienation that accorded with a broadly *shared symbolic system*. In view of Shi'ism's most traditional form, which opposed to political activism, Khomeini's *charismatic symbol foundation* implies something of a paradox.³⁷

During the nineteenth century proponents of *Usuli* (true) Shi'ism advanced the idea that Shiites should decide on a prominent scholar, or "marja'-e-taqlid" (source of emulation), after whom the dimensions of their moral and legal lives could be guided. This practice could lead to the emergence of one leading "marja'-e-motlaq" (absolute pearl) whose *interpretation* of the law could be *superior* to that of other "marjas". The authority of the latter was primarily traditional, in the sense that it derived from the knowledge of law.³⁸ The notion, that the "Hidden Imam" will eventually reappear and restore justice to the world, absorbs a fundamental place in the collective principles in Iranian society.³⁹ From his seat in Qom's Feyziyeh Seminary, Khomeini articulated the need for a *new reality*, one in which everything was to be *whole and complete*. His pragmatic philosophy envisioned *Islam* as a useful *tool* for political *unification* of Muslims.

3.2.2 Ayatollah Khamenei's commence

"There is perhaps no leader in the world more important to current world affairs but less known and understood than Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran. Neither a

³⁶ Brumberg, 2001:48

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Brumberg, 2001:54

dictator nor a democrat—but with traits of both—Khamenei is the single most powerful individual in a highly factionalized, autocratic regime.”⁴⁰ While Khamenei is not the single decision-maker, there are *no major decisions*, which are to be *taken without his consent*. Iran has been led by agreement with the Clergy rather than decree, even though the Leader’s top priorities has concerned his continued existence and the theocratic system.

The underlying means and reasons for Khamenei positioning as *Supreme Leader* (Vali-e Faqih) are of use for the comprehension of his leadership approach. Prior to his death, the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini had the constitution *revised*, requiring the leader to *only* be an expert on Islamic jurisprudence and possess “the appropriate political and managerial skills.”⁴¹ Short after Khomeini’s death in June 1989, the Assembly of Experts—the clerical body, which has the constitutional authority to anoint and remove the Supreme Leader—approved of Khamenei’s succession to *Ayatollah* (i.e., sign of God)

While Khamenei’s religious qualifications were inferior, and the pronouncement raised the indignation of the clerical elites of Qom, the Islamic Republic’s political elites united behind the new Ayatollah. After Khomeini there has been a series of *new interpretations*, in order to *save and sustain* the ultimate power with Ayatollah Khamenei and his group of ayatollahs. At the same time, civil society and the secular politics have gained significant influence. Khamenei began cultivating the immense network of “clerical commissars” *strategically posted* around the important state ministries and institutions, e.g. the *clerical establishment and military*. Today these representatives, who constitute the most powerful governmental functionaries with their all-embracing *authority* to intervene in *all state matters*, form a miscellaneous, nationwide, and international association *dedicated* to enforce Khamenei’s authority.

There are several employed components to be listed as Khamenei’s strategies to assert regional hegemony for *furthering Iran’s influence*. One is to project the notion that Iran and the Muslim world share the *same interests and enemies* (The West). In order to allay Arab concerns about Iran’s nuclear ambitions Ayatollah Khamenei frequently notes that Iran’s nuclear achievements belong to “the entire Muslim world”. At the same time the Ayatollah subtly warns the Arabs against conspiring with the United States against Iran claiming “Any success that is achieved by the Iranian nation will reflect honour and credit on the whole

⁴⁰ Sadjapour 2008:2

⁴¹ Sadjapour 2008:6

“ummah” (Muslim community). Likewise, any harm that is inflicted by the enemies on our Islamic system will harm the interests of the whole Islamic world.”⁴² Khamenei credits Iran for being the medium of the “Islamist awakening” confident that Iran’s “soft power”—its *ideology* and *vision* for the Middle East —is shared by the vast majority of the Arab and Muslims. In this regard the defiance of the United States and Israel is certainly useful. One further Khamenei strategy concerns “a combination of political and cultural influence with unconventional military means (i.e., militias) in order to give Iran considerable sway over the region’s most pressing political and security concerns. From Khamenei’s perspective none of the critical issues facing the Middle East and Muslim world—Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Persian Gulf security, and Arab–Israeli peace—can be properly addressed or resolved without Iran’s input.”⁴³

The Iranian government system is a *religious one controlled by religious leaders*, with consideration for its ideology as *divine* and its role as the religious law implementer. Khamenei prefers to project the *image of a magnanimous grandfather*, selflessly staying above the fray to *guide the country in a virtuous direction*:

The main task of the Leader is to safeguard the Islamic system and revolution. Administering the affairs of the country has been entrusted to government executives, but it is the responsibility of the Leader to supervise the performance of different government organs and make sure that they function in line with Islamic tenets and principles of the revolution.⁴⁴

While Islam presents the foundation for justice, Khamenei believes that religiosity is best promoted by a correlation with justice. In a telling lecture to a group of Christian priests visiting Iran from Europe, he offered insight into how the Islamic Republic *recruits young supporters*:

Youngsters have a natural inclination for religion and spirituality, but we should also try to create more attractions for them. I, as a clergyman, have learned by experience that there are ways to make religion more *attractive to the youth*, and I will share this experience with you. I believe that if religion defends the oppressed and advocates *justice*, it will become more attractive to

⁴² Sadjapour 2008:6

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ Speech entitled “Reforms, Strategies, and Challenges.”

youngsters, since youth everywhere in the world support movements that are aimed at administering justice. In fact, justice is part of all religions, and the most prominent heroes in the history of mankind who made strenuous efforts to administer justice were religious personalities. Your Prophet [Jesus] struggled for justice during his entire life, and our Prophet also spent his whole life trying to administer justice.... If Christian and Muslim clergymen raise the issue of justice today, this will certainly create attraction.⁴⁵

3.2.3 The Constitutional Power of the Supreme Leader

As Supreme Leader, Khamenei's *constitutional* authority is *supreme*. He controls the main forces of state—the *courts, military, and media*—by appointing the heads of the judiciary, state radio and television, the regular armed forces, and the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guards.⁴⁶ He also holds *effective control* over Iran's second most powerful institution, the Guardian Council, Pasdaran (discussed in section 4.2) a twelve-member body (all of whom are directly or indirectly appointed by Khamenei) that has the authority to vet electoral candidates and veto parliamentary decisions. In addition his power derives to a great extent from the complex but vast *state-controlled economic resources* at his disposal. The Iranian economy is *largely state controlled*, and Khamenei has more say than anyone in how the country's oil revenue is spent.⁴⁷ He has jurisdiction over the country's "bonyads"—charitable foundations with billions of dollars in assets.

Khamenei, unlike Khomeini, has limited *religious authority* – an unexpected deficiency for the chief of a theocracy. Internally, the Leader's power has been consolidated by a number of dynamic factors, such as a vast network of *strategically stationed* commissars throughout government bureaucracies, *fanatical* to enforce his authority, the weak, conservative-dominated parliament, headed by Khamenei partisan Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel, the swiftly expanding political and economic *influence of the submissive Revolutionary Guard*, whose top leaders are directly *appointed by Khamenei*, the political disengagement of the youthful population, pressed by the discontented hope of the reformist era and most significant, the presidential election of 2005, seeing hardliner Ahmadinejad defeat Khamenei's head rival Hashemi Rafsanjani.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Sadjapour 2008:22

⁴⁶ Sadjapour 2008:7

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ *Ibid*

There is *no mass party* in Iran, hardly a party at all according to democratic standards.⁴⁹ During the Khomeini era, starting with the revolution until his death in 1989, there existed a ruling Islamist party, but it split up in various factions allowing Khomeini to still receive trap casting vote in several questions. Still, a number of undefined *groups of various ideological and interest-related nuances do exist*, although playing a rather small role in the actual policy exercise of parliament or government. In the 2005-election five major political coalitions were running to gain mandate in Majlis. Despite the voting procedures vast restrictions, and possibly many other manoeuvring obstacles, roughly 60 percent of the voting participation *bypassed* the ruling Ayatollah regime.⁵⁰

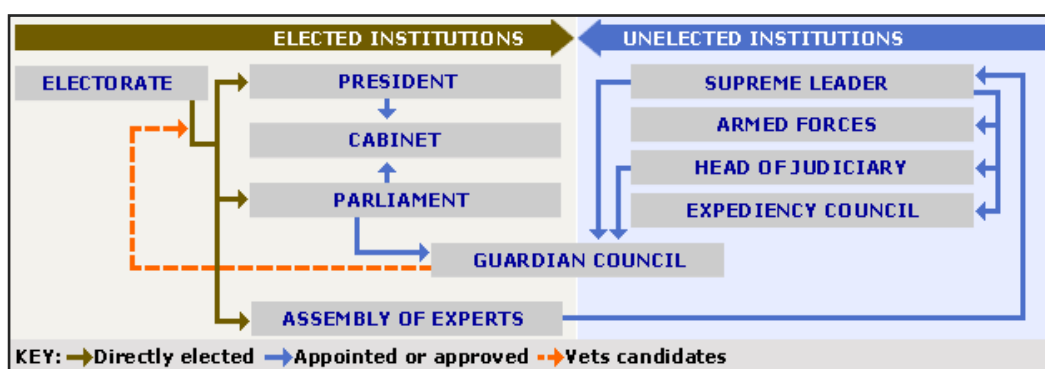


Figure 1 The Islamic Republic of Iran's Political Scheme. A display of the different branches and instances within the Iranian governmental structure.

(Source: petropars.com Dec. 2008)

3.2.4 The Guardian Council

The Guardian Council constitutes the *most influential body* in Iran and is currently controlled by conservatives. It consists of six theologians *appointed by the Supreme Leader* and six jurists nominated by the judiciary and approved by parliament.⁵¹ Its members are elected for a six-year period on a phased basis, changing half of the membership with every three years. All bills passed by parliament must be approved by the council, which in addition holds a *veto right* on bills considered *inconsistent with the constitution and Sharia*. The council can also *block candidates* from entering elections to parliament, the presidency and the Assembly of Experts.

3.2.5 The President

Every presidential candidate is evaluated by the Guardian Council, which in the 2005 elections prohibited hundreds from partaking. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president in

⁴⁹ Jönsson, 2008-12-17

⁵⁰ Jönsson, 2008/4

⁵¹ www.Country-Data.com 2008-12-12

2005 after defeating former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in a second round run-off. Ahmadinejad is Iran's first non-clerical president since 1981. The constitution ranks him as the *second-highest ranking official* in the country. He is *head of the executive* branch of power and is responsible for ensuring the constitution is implemented. In practice, however, *presidential powers are circumscribed by the Clergy* and conservatives in Iran's power structure, and by the *authority of the Supreme Leader*. It is the *Supreme Leader*, not the president, who *controls the armed forces* and *makes decisions on security, defence and major foreign policy issues*.

3.2.6 The Expediency Council

The Supreme Leader appoints the members of the Council, generally consisting of prominent religious, social and political figures. The Council is an *advisory body* for the Leader with an ultimate mediatory power in disputes over legislation between the parliament and the Guardian Council. As of October 2005, the Expediency Council attained "supervisory" powers over *all branches* of government, as a result of the Supreme leader's decision, thus, strengthening the position and influence of its present chairman, former President Hashemi Rafsanjani.

3.2.7 The Assembly of Experts

The Supreme Leader is *assigned, supervised* and even *removed*- if needed, by the Assembly of Experts. Direct elections for the 86 members of the current assembly are held every eight years and are next due in 2014. Members are elected for an eight year term. Only clerics can join the assembly and candidates for election are vetted by the Guardian Council.

3.2.8 The Cabinet

Members of the cabinet, or "Council of Ministers", are decided on by the president, while the parliament, apart from their approval task, is entitled to impeach ministers. The Supreme Leader is closely involved in *defence, security* and *foreign policy*; hence he holds authority in *decision-making*.

3.2.9 The Parliament (*Majlis*)

The 290 members of Majlis are elected by popular vote every four years. The parliament has the power to initiate and pass laws, as well as to summon and impeach the president or ministers. However, all Majlis bills need approval from the conservative Guardian Council.⁵²

⁵² www.petropars.com 2008-11-18

3.2.10 Armed Forces

Apart from the regular forces, the armed forces also comprise the “Revolutionary Guard”. The two bodies are under a common command. The Supreme Leader *appoints* the entire group of leading army and Revolutionary Guard commanders. The Revolutionary Guard was assembled after the revolution for the defence of the new leaders and institutions and to fight the resistance. The Revolutionary Guard has a powerful presence in other institutions, and controls volunteer militias with branches in every town; nonetheless they are *accountable to the Supreme Leader*.

3.2.11 Head of Judiciary

The Iranian judiciary has never been *free from political influence*. Until last century it was controlled by the Clergy. Later the system became secularised, but following the Islamic Revolution the Supreme Court revoked previous laws that were deemed “un-Islamic”. Alternatively, Sharia based laws –“sacred” Islamic text and teaching derived laws – came to be implemented. The judiciary undertakes the task to ensure enforcements of Islamic laws and defines legal policy. It further nominates the six lay members of the Guardian Council. The head of the judiciary, currently Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahrudi, is *appointed by*, and reports to, the Supreme Leader. In recent time, the hardliners have used the judicial system as to undermine reform by imprisoning reformists and journalists and closing down reformist papers.⁵³

3.3 Review

Those similarities which are found do more resemble the Khomeini era rather than today’s Khamenei. All these state institutions and the many voices that have some input in the Iranian policy shaping minimises the role of Ayatollah Khamenei as the single leader. Although he has the last say in all aspects, he holds not the sort of power that Friedrich and Zbigniew assert. Neither is the “exclusive brotherhood” of a limited range at present. However, the Iranian regimes is very much disguising its true agenda much alike the mentioned “democratic framework”. Likewise they convey a sense of feudalism with the rewarding scheme towards their many institutions along with the judiciary machinery’s lack of any independence.

⁵³ www.petropars.com 2008-11-18

4 Propaganda and Terror

4.1 Theoretical Background

In the words of Friedrich and Brzezinski, there is a system of terror to be found within the totalitarian dictatorship, whether physical or phisic. Produced through *party* and *secret-police control*, their main functions are to *support* and *supervise* the party for its leaders, and oppose not only demonstrable “enemies” of the regime but arbitrarily selected classes of the population. Further a near-complete monopoly over the country’s means of effective mass communication and use of all weapons of armed combat is most likely the case of a totalitarian dictatorship. The nearly complete *monopoly of communication* is agreed to be one of the most striking characteristics of totalitarian dictatorship. In this system of governance, all these means of communication (media, the press, radio and television) are *centrally controlled* by the government, whether they are governmentally owned or “privately” owned.

Propaganda as such is not a peculiarity of totalitarian dictatorship. It has become increasingly recognised as an integral part of all organisational activity in a highly literate society. Within a totalitarian dictatorship, virtually all propaganda is directed ultimately to the *maintenance in power* of the party controlling it. The maintenance of a totalitarian dictatorship lends to these struggles a fierceness and violence that is rarely seen in freer societies.⁵⁴ This issue of the rival component elements in the totalitarian society poses very difficult problems for the overall direction of propaganda. The chief propagandist often has to opt between such rival groups. The nearly complete control of all means of mass-communication gives the totalitarian dictatorship the very great advantage of being able to shift its general line of propaganda rather radically over short periods of time. This is in particular helpful in the field of foreign affairs.

The fact of monopolistic control gradually causes in the general public a profound distrust of all news and other kinds of information. Since people do not have any other sources of information, there develops a vast amount of rumour mongering as well as general disillusionment. And since a man can not think without valid information upon which to focus thought, the *general public* tends to become *indifferent*. This in turn leads to a phenomenon we may call the “vacuum” (the failure of communicating effectively within the

⁵⁴Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:135

hierarchy and with the rest of the world) which increasingly surrounds the leadership.⁵⁵

The problem of checking-up becomes under the conditions of a totalitarian dictatorship exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. Slow *disintegration* affect all human relations, with social relationships corroded by the terror, propaganda, spying, and the denouncing and betray until the social organisation threatens to fall apart. As the totalitarian regime maintains its internal coercion and indoctrination, the degree of apparent consensus eventually increases and makes it more difficult for the *secret-police* to carry out its work.

A central feature of totalitarian *propaganda* is its *universalism*, the direct result of the propaganda monopoly. Not only the members of the party and the indifferent masses, but even the determined *enemies* of the regime fall victim to its persistent terror. A general pattern of thought, almost a style of thinking, proves increasingly irresistible as the regime continues in power. This remarkable success of totalitarian propaganda derives from *constant repetition*. “All in all, the system of *propaganda*, *mass-communication* and *terror* developed in the totalitarian systems is of fundamental meaning for the *preservation of the regime*. If manipulative controls are carried beyond a certain point, the system becomes self-defeating.”⁵⁶

4.1.1 Education

In the nature of this case, almost *no criticism is possible*. Teachers, like students, are continually exposed to the pressures stemming from the totalitarian party and its associated mass organisations. In the course of the dictatorship’s development, as teachers progressively are absorbed into the movement, often by formal recruitment into the party itself, the *distinction* between *education* and *propaganda* becomes increasingly *distorted*, as far as broadly moral and social fields of study are concerned. *Like ideology, education becomes an instrument in the hands of the regime that takes upon itself the definition of the truth.*

The administration of the educational system is *highly centralised*. Textbooks, educational programs, and the ideological line originate from the centre, and the intellectual activity of scholars is closely *supervised*. The profession of educating is profoundly different under these totalitarian dictatorships. The teacher becomes the long-range indoctrinator, the instiller of an

⁵⁵ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:135

⁵⁶ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:144

ideology that is intended to subjugate the students intellectually and to commit them to a doctrinal orthodoxy.⁵⁷ It is evident that the totalitarians and their approach to teaching and education have returned to what has been the pre-dominant tendency of the past. They emphasize that these ideological doctrines are “scientific” rather than inspired by religious experience.

4.1.2 Unanimity

Totalitarianism is a system of revolution. It is a revolt that seeks to *destroy the existing political order in order to subsequently be revolutionised economically, socially, and culturally*. Having seized power the totalitarian movements seeks to *extend* this power to every corner and gap of society. Thus change becomes the order of the day. The present is never good enough -the totalitarian movement is always concerned with the future. This *futuristic orientation* is based firmly on the totalitarian ideology. The continuous rejection of the present for the sake of pretentious schemes of social reconstruction and human remoulding thus provides the basis for the total expansion of totalitarian power to all fragments of society.

It is this purpose to accomplish overall change that begets the terror. In a totalitarian society *opposition is banned* from developing by the organisation of total terror, which eventually surrounds everyone. Change remains a utopian goal. The history of totalitarian systems demonstrates how typically a step-by-step program, with considerable oscillations in the *use of violence*, is adopted. Yet violence that leads to terror is practically inevitable within this context. Totalitarian terror broadly understood is, the vital nerve of the totalitarian system. The totalitarian is right, and motivated by the desire to achieve a minimum of consensus, it expects all others to *agree* with him. This passion for unanimity makes the totalitarians insist on the consent of the entire population to the regime’s outlooks and activities. The totalitarian regimes insist that *enthusiastic unanimity* characterise the political behaviour of the population. With the overwhelming support the totalitarian leadership may feel *justified* in committing the most extreme *crimes*. Another explanation for the passion for unanimity is the totalitarian believe in the big lie as a *propaganda system*.

The passion for unanimity seems to spring the pseudo religious commitment of the totalitarian ideology. We can see clearly why totalitarian terror and

⁵⁷ Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965:144

unanimity are thus *interdependent*. The passion for unanimity, characteristic of a mass movement, demands tools to enforce it. And according to totalitarian ideology, all “normal” members of society will naturally be a part of that unanimity. The terror makes certain that the masses are not infected, while the social misfits are liquidated. In this way, all the brutal, pre mediated violence of the terror becomes rationally justified to the totalitarian. One can of course be active in a totalitarian society only *on behalf of the regime*.⁵⁸

The pervasive and sustained character of totalitarian terror reaches the most concealed areas of the regimes. The created *atmosphere of fear* simply *exaggerates* the strength of the regime and aids it to achieve and *maintain its facade* of unanimity. Spread *opponents* of the regime, if still undetected, becomes isolated and cast out of society. *Unanimity*, even if coerced, is a *source of strength* for the regime. The modern totalitarian regimes have perfected the “process of terror” with its technology. Where there lack of organised confrontational groups terror is at work.⁵⁹

4.1.3 System of Terror

The ruler of a totalitarian dictatorship is convinced either that the masses are with him or that they ought to be. In both cases, they have to be defended from “the enemy” who makes every effort to hamper the process of indoctrination to teach people to perceive the totalitarian “truth” and even to overthrow the totalitarian system. This constant *struggle against enemies* often grows in intensity as the totalitarian regimes become more stable. The regime can then afford greater violence, and initial endurance and expediency paves way for *unconcealed terror*. Each totalitarian dictatorship has its own *special major enemy* and a whole cast of additional foes that appear and disappear from the scene. Totalitarian regimes do not proclaim the total destruction of all their enemies. In all totalitarian regimes there arises vast proliferation of criminal (penal) laws and its *secret police* is given a *free hand* in political cases.⁶⁰ Apart from the foreign policy of the regime, there are various activities, which the terroristic apparatus of the totalitarian regime engages in to cope with enemies. First, there are the individual enemies of the regime and their criminal activities, which a totalitarian regime seeks to remove through *murder* or *abduction*. A second, more dangerous method is that of *organising revolutionary groups* assisting in the *underground* removal process of opponents.

⁵⁸ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965:169

⁵⁹ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965:171

⁶⁰ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965:174

The *purge*, referring to the totalitarian dictatorship's eliminating process of its "enemies", has been shaped by the totalitarian terror into a special instrument and might become quite *violent* and *far-reaching*.⁶¹ The purge appears to be predominant to some forms of *modern* totalitarian dictatorship. Simultaneously the purge is developed to *avert* the stabilisation of political forces around the totalitarian leadership and to *prevent* the growth of local authorities, which could weaken the central control of the autocrat. This allows for *no potential alternatives to the leadership* to mature, while "the institutionalised competition in loyalty ensures the perpetuation of unchallenged supremacy of the leadership, thus the purge forms an important and unique instrument of totalitarian government."⁶² The general problem of *confession* in the totalitarian public trial concerns that not all of the political prisoners are actually brought to *trial*, as many are *executed* under the hands of the terror apparatus. The mass character of modern totalitarianism explains its policy on the basis of *mass slogans* and *simple explanations*. The *concentration camp* is another significant and familiar feature of totalitarian terror. It can be regarded as one of the tests of the totalitarian "character" of a regime, depending on the absence or presence of concentration camps designed to accommodate those social elements allegedly incapable or *unwilling to adjust* themselves to the totalitarian society.

"Purges, confessions and camps are thus part of the equipment of a developed totalitarian system. Camps represent the great and fearful unknown. For the totalitarian system, the purge provides the mechanism of elimination and stimulation within the movement, the confessions are useful to vilify the opposition and to underline the infallibility of the leadership; the camps provide cheap labour and a tool for the liquidation of the "enemies of the people". All three make their contribution to the terror by which the totalitarian regime reinforces the propaganda that in time produced the consensus any government requires in the long run, whether it be democratic or autocratic, constitutional or totalitarian. These three are the tools of coercion by which the uncontrollable are brought into line and made to acknowledge the claims of the regime."⁶³

⁶¹ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965:183

⁶² Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965:189

⁶³ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965:201ff

4.2 Analysis

These various sectors in which governmental terror forces has been implemented are in this analysis sector of Iran divided correspondingly to the previous section of Friedrich and Brzezinski's totalitarian dictatorship. It provides the exercise of coercion through the Islamic Revolutionary Guards within the educational system, public freedom and the world of media. Words written in *italics* are features which are found to be comparable to Friedrich & Brzezinski's defined traits within a totalitarian dictatorship.

4.2.1 Pasdaran; Guardians of the Revolution

Former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini formed *Sepah-e Pasdaran* –the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. It was originally created as a “people’s army” with its commanders reporting directly to the Supreme Leader. The president appoints military guard leaders, with a modest control over day-to-day operations. Current forces consist of naval, air, and ground components.⁶⁴

At the initiation of the Revolution, there were concerns for the un-reliance of the Shah’s army against the newly established Islamic Republic. Subsequently, the Khomeini supporters started the IRGC to function as the “protectors” of the revolution. That was the *original idea* for their existence, but over time they have *grown* in *stature* as well as in *authorization*. By creating political incentives and commercial activities through corrupting influence on Iran’s *army, police, media, industries, judiciary* and *government*, analysts have come to compare it to the “old Bolshevik Red Army.”⁶⁵

The IRGC’ primary role concerns domestic security yet experts state the force assists the country’s regular army of 350,000 soldiers, with external resistance. Reports of annual world military evaluations asserts the control of Iran’s “Basij Resistance Force”, an all-volunteer paramilitary wing of nearly one million recruited guards, to lay under the rule of the Revolutionary Guards.⁶⁶

4.2.1.1 The Expansion of Pasdaran

The “Quds Force”, a paramilitary division of the IRGC, with less than a thousand people, emerged as the de facto external-affairs branch during the intensification acquiring mandate to conduct foreign-policy operations.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Sazegara 2007

⁶⁵ *ibid*

⁶⁶ International Institute for Strategic Studies

⁶⁷ International Institute for Strategic Studies

“The Revolutionary Guards are the spine of the current political structure [in Iran] and a major player in the Iranian economy.”⁶⁸ The alleged spread of the IRGC’s international reach coincided with a domestic influence growth. Despite Iranian law outlawing dictatorial rule, Supreme Leader Khamenei has used his control of the guard to *expand his own influence*—both politically and economically.⁶⁹ Khamenei appointed former IRGC commanders to top political posts, (including President Ahmadinejad and Ali Larijani), secretary of the Supreme National Security Council. Due to his lacking of a very strong popular base, President Ahmadinejad has to cater to the IRGC in order to project his own power.⁷⁰

The IRGC have in recent years grown into a chief financial organisation.⁷¹ Years of political and military change have transformed the unit into a “massive money machine. The nature of the formation resembles “the Soviet’s Communist Party, the KGB, a business complex, and the mafia.”⁷² “There is a small, but very powerful clique within Iran, among the political elite, who actually have entrenched political and financial interests in retaining Iran’s isolation.”⁷³

Within the Revolutionary Guard there exist *despotic* elements. With their financial interests, they have reached enormous financial assets, as they maintain a kind of a private mafia.

(...) it is difficult to describe (the Revolutionary Guards) as a group of 150,000 hardliners because in 2001 three-quarters of them voted for the liberal Mohammed Khatami’s re-election as president. In some ways, the Revolutionary Guards are more reflective of the Iranian society than we think. They also want change and reform to take place. But again, when I talked about this powerful clique with entrenched political and financial interest, I do not think that they are large in number. I think they represent a minority, a small minority of Iran’s political elite. But they do an outstanding job of consistently playing the spoiler.⁷⁴

Perhaps there exist another, somewhat contradicting side to the nature of the IRGC. Despite the portrayed image as a coercive terror organisation, some buoyant elements are alleged to subsist within this mafia like police, proving the weakness and *discontent* for the regime.

⁶⁸ Khalaji, 2007

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹,Sazegara 2007

⁷² Sazegara, 2007

⁷³ Sadjapour, 2007

⁷⁴ Sadjapour, 2007

4.2.2 Islamic Education

The theocratic state of Iran uses religion along with a range of coercion means to sustain the already established hegemony. Its religious ruling group have in both state and civil society effectively employed various controlling apparatuses (such as educational institutions, etc.) and authoritarian means (coercion and subjugation) to shape a *normality based on religion*.⁷⁵ The aim is to create a *Homo-Islamicus* (ideologically committed Muslims) serving the interests of the ruling elite. The *centralised education* system along with the "textbook based instruction" inherited from the traditional Islamic education and encouraged by the Iranian religious elite have *eradicated the critical thinking* and have created a "mechanical thoughtlessness" which in turn have enhanced the process of authority. Hence, "the project of creation of the "religiously committed intellectuals" which the Iranian theocratic system has been pursuing has been successful."⁷⁶ For centuries, this has been attained in part through the possibility of the elite to *interpret* the sacred scripture and the dogma of the religion. School, in the Islamic context, is the institution for "talim" (schooling) and "tarbiyat" (upbringing), two inseparable components of the education in Islam.⁷⁷

4.2.3 Public Freedom versus the Iranian Regime

On the issue concerning the country's censorship and lack of freedom, there are countless reports and evident supportive to the image of Iran an oppressive regime. Since the 1979-constitution, there has been prohibits against any activities "*violating the principles of Islam*". A *vague* provision used to justify spreading of assembly and criticism.⁷⁸ Hard-line paramilitary organisations that are officially or unofficially endorsed by the conservative establishment most notably the "Basij militia" and "Ansar-i Hezbollah" play a major role in *silencing* these voices.⁷⁹

Under the facade of "countering immoral behaviour" the Iranian government has disrupted private gatherings. Throughout 2007 the Basij militia only carried out thousands of home raids detaining over 150,000 individuals and forcing them to sign "commitment letters" promising to observe official dress codes and adhere to moral standard. Separately, six Basij members were acquitted after admitting to the killing of five people accused of being "morally corrupt".⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Arjmand, 2008

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ *ibid*

⁷⁸ *Freedom in the World 2008 - Iran*, 2 July 2008. Online. UNHCR Refworld, (08-11-30)

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

⁸⁰ *Freedom in the World 2008 - Iran*, Online. UNHCR Refworld, (08-11-30)

While arbitrary arrest and detention are stated in the Iranian constitution as illegitimate, such abuses have gradually become *standard*. Dissidents are frequently placed in *solitary confinement centres* run by a *security apparatus* consisting of the intelligence services, the police, the IRGC, and judicial officials.⁸¹ Allegations of *torture* are common in these bases and in the notorious Evin prison. *Political prisoners* are held under atrocious conditions, and supporters *protesting* their arrest or *defending* their cause are also prosecuted. Prison conditions in general are notoriously poor, and there are regular allegations of *abuse and death in custody*.⁸² *Critic against the Leader* is one of the few remaining redlines in Iranian politics, almost a guarantee of a prison sentence.

The *judicial system is not independent*, as the *Supreme Leader directly appoints* the head of the judiciary, who in turn appoints the senior judges. In theory it is alleged that the General Courts protect and uphold the rights of defendants, however in practice suspects are frequently tried in *closed sessions without* any access to *legal advocate*. Political and other sensitive cases the regime wishes to keep quiet are tried before Revolutionary Courts, where appropriate process protections are routinely overlooked and trials are seldom adequately summoned.⁸³

Establishment and pre-conditions for *political parties*, professional association and other civic organisations are in accordance with the Constitution:

The formation of parties, groups, and political and professional associations... is free, provided they do not harm the principles of freedom, sovereignty, national unity, Islamic standards and the foundation of the Islamic republic.⁸⁴

Hence those favourable towards the regime are allowed. In a state with barely a newspaper capable of criticising the regime's act, little is left for political establishments to gain any voice without being "removed".

4.2.4 Media Climate of Iran

The present government has further *tightened restrictions on media* and announced plans to impose additional rigid controls. Today human rights are infringed with increasing arrest,

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *Amnesty International Country Report 2008*

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Owen 2008:95

torture, and execution reports.⁸⁵ The *main dominant* figure within the government, the chief of state, broadcast *media*, the commander of the *IRGC*, Supreme Leader Khamenei, holds *de facto control* over appointments to the ministries of Defence, the Interior, and Intelligence.

Freedom of expression is severely *limited*. The government *directly controls* all television and radio broadcasting. The government began in 2007 bringing down unauthorized telecommunications lines, by cutting them as to prevent “illegal international contacts.” All foreign as well as local book publications require the Ministry of Culture’s *approval* and *inspection* prior to domestic distribution. The Press Court has extensive procedural and jurisdictional *power* to *prosecute* journalists, editors, and publishers for *indistinctly* worded offenses such as “*insulting Islam*”, being “*enemies of God*” and “*damaging the foundations of the Islamic Republic*.” The government has also recently clamped down on popular book clubs or book cafés, where scholars gather for discussion. Numerous of filmmakers “attempting to spread propaganda” have been jailed and later faced a secret trial.⁸⁶

The authorities frequently issue ad hoc restrain orders *banning media coverage* on topics and events sensitive to scrutiny. *Threats and arrests* of Iranian journalists have *increased* in recent years. Many journalists are banned from leaving Iran. Since the installation of President Ahmadinejad in 2005, 570 publications have been shut down. A report issued by the “Association of Iranian Journalists” in 2007 stated “the profession had suffered in quality and investment due to the government’s clearout of independent newspapers.”⁸⁷

The Ahmadinejad administration holds that the duty of the media is to report and *support* government actions, *not comment* on them. Concerns for the current nuclear issue in Iran and abroad has led to greater government restraints on news reporting. Any usages of “suspicious sources” or sources that criticize the government are forbidden. The government systematically censors Internet content by forcing ISPs (internet-service providers) to obstruct access to an increasing list of “corrupt and immoral” or politically sensitive sites. Back in 2006, Iran’s “Communication and Information Technology Ministry” announced the establishment of a central *filtering* facility that would *identify* Internet users, *block access* to unauthorized websites, and *keep a record* of visited sites. As of January 2007, Iranian bloggers were required to register with the Guidance Ministry.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Owen 2008:95

⁸⁶ *Freedom in the World 2008 - Iran*, Online. UNHCR Refworld, (08-11-30)

⁸⁷ *Ibid*

⁸⁸ *Freedom in the World 2008 - Iran*, Online. UNHCR Refworld, (08-11-30)

In spite of the presence of human rights organisations in Iran, the secret defence services regularly *arrest* and *harass* secular activists as part of a wider effort to *control* the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Although there are no regulation requirements for consent, the Ministry of the Interior has been imposing various establishments “not considered qualified” to shut down.⁸⁹

Nonetheless, despite these comprehensive restrictions, “the familiar attempts of the Islamic regime to crush freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, the internet and its blogosphere have amplified the voices of individuals, granting each Iranian the opportunity to have his or her own newspaper. While satellite television and radio have delivered perspectives from abroad for years, the internet allows communication to flow both ways across Iran’s borders.”⁹⁰

4.3 Review

In this chapter we find the majority of similarities between features characteristically for a totalitarian dictatorship and the Iranian regime. One concerns the intolerance for criticism and opposition against the state of Iran; offences which are violently punished with severe sentences. Further the centralised educational system and its strictly supervised administration fits into the description. The regime expects complete consensus or at least silenced opposition. All resistance is silenced or removed through the vast terror apparatus –Pasdaran which holds a financial interest in maintaining Iran blocked. Finally the “special enemy” in the case of Iran is represented by the West, in specific the US. Despite these restrictions and a biased reality, the public has managed to find ways of expressing themselves and attaining neutral information beyond the national borders.

⁸⁹ *Freedom in the World 2008 - Iran*, Online. UNHCR Refworld, (08-11-30)

⁹⁰ Rezania, 2007

5 Economy

5.1 Theoretical Background

A central control and direction of the entire economy through the bureaucratic coordination of formally independent corporate entities, typically including most other associations and group activities is the definition by Friedrich and Brzezinski on totalitarian dictatorship governance and control of its economy.

The totalitarian dictatorships developed a centrally directed economy as the sixth feature in their set of traits. This economy calls for a growing number of public officials to attend to all the various functions.⁹¹ Centralisation of management and supervision yields to a clash between the government and bureaucracies of party centralisation is superseded by local autocrats and *party loyalty replaces professional qualification* for office, since from the totalitarian regimes' standpoint such ideological dedication constitutes a type of qualification for bureau.⁹²

Whether in the name of the state, the party, the nation, or the proletariat, the totalitarian dictatorship *steadily expands* the role of bureaucracy. What is characteristic for this type of governance, apart from the lack of any institutional pattern of responsibility, is the sharp *dualism* of governmental and party bureaucracy. Hence, influential expansion creates serious problems of conflicting bureaucrats struggling for supremacy. The expansion in size is bought at the price of *quality deterioration*, at least temporarily.⁹³

In order to implement this central direction and control, a plan is necessitated. Characteristically, the autocratic leader determines the vital decisions and purpose of the organisation. A bureaucracy that has the full backing of its terrorist and propaganda apparatus carries the plan forward. "Totalitarian planning is formulated on the basis of *ideologically determined goals*: that its scope, in the final analysis, is *total*."⁹⁴

The modern totalitarian regimes are basically alike in recognising the vitality of the industrial process and in considering in the key to political success, internal as external. Consequently they have made the "battle for production" a central theme of their action programs, and to achieve it they have *subordinated* the industrial machine to the regimes' necessity. "Such

⁹¹ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965:205

⁹² Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965:206

⁹³ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965:218

⁹⁴ *ibid*

questions as who holds formal *title to property*, how rewards are determined, and whether former owners and the decision-makers continue to hold positions, provided they conform to the regime's comments are of relatively minor significance. What is decisive is the overpowering reality of totalitarian central control by the dictator and his party."⁹⁵

5.2 Analysis

The economical institutions of Iran are in these section presented for an assessment over the similarities that are to be comparable to Friedrich & Brzezinski's defined traits within a totalitarian dictatorship and are thus made clear in *italic*.

5.2.1 Economy sector in Iran

The vibrant imperative private sector of Iran was quenched as a result of the 1979-revolution. During Ayatollah Khomeini's lead the private sector companies, all large-scale industries, mines, banks, insurance companies, power generating stations, dams, postal services, telephone and telegraph service, shipping, aviation, roads and railroads, were *taken over by state* and quasi-state institutions and foreign participation came to be banned.⁹⁶ Wealth from the private sector was confiscated and in turn relocated to the clerically dominated Islamic state. Substantially while the private sector was reduced the public sector and its state-supported, Clergy controlled foundations, "bonyads", grew prosperous as it was put to *run* the country's *main businesses*.⁹⁷

Representatives from a broad assortment of divergent ideologies, ranging from hard-line Islamic Marxists to conservative religious Shi'i Clergy, drafted the 175 articles of the Constitution.⁹⁸ The Shi'i Clergy applied *Sharia-based principle* to *wealth* and *property* that had been acquired during the reign of Shah Reza Pahlavi, and steadily a three-sector economy arose as the Constitution of the Islamic Republic recognized *public, private* and *cooperative sectors* as state branches. The Islamic Constitution stated that all property that had been acquired through "un-Islamic" means were to be labelled illegal and entitled for *confiscation by the Islamic state*. Official resentment towards capitalism grew along with the hampering of free enterprises development. Consequently *amateur* Khomeini-supporters and the bonyads came to *replace state-officials*, leading to major losses and deteriorations.

⁹⁵ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965:244

⁹⁶ Karbassian, 2000

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

“Free competition and market economy operations were replaced by state intervention. The new constitution encouraged greater involvement of the state in the economy, at the expense of curtailing the free market. When the mass confiscation of private property was nearly completed, the management of a significant portion of this newly appropriated wealth was turned over to Clergy held state-supported charity organizations.”⁹⁹ The public sector, which comprised the government and the “bonyads”, served the function of the *Bait ol-Mal*, the early Islam fiscal department described in Islamic text.¹⁰⁰

A majority of these revolutionary institutions still operates under the supervision of the Supreme Leader and are free from tax payment. At present, entire private enterprises are present in agriculture, trade, small-scale manufacturing, and mining, but play a minimal role in large-scale economic activity.¹⁰¹

The charitable organisations “bonyads” make up 30 percent of the economy, unaccountable to government oversight and exempt from taxes. Though bonyads are supposed to aid revolutionary martyrs and the poor, they have become essentially private enterprises that crowd out small businesses and hinder competition. “The government's bureaucratic operations serve as patronage networks, creating market inefficiencies and promoting corrupt officials who are needed for their specialized knowledge.”¹⁰²

In an effort toward more private sector development, Iran began a major privatization initiative in July 2006. Iran is working to privatise state-run oil and gas companies. Its private sector competes with the businesses operated by the “bonyads” and the IRGC. Iranian officials have encouraged foreign companies to enter into the Iranian market. However, quasi-state actors, such as the bonyads and commercial entities of the IRGC, manage many business contracts.¹⁰³ This continued strong involvement by the Iranian governments on its economy is under high criticism. Gradually the *Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps* (IRGC) is becoming an important actor in the Iranian economic field. The IRGC’s initial economic involvement has shifted focus from post-war reconstruction activities, mainly infrastructure projects to a high degree of involvement in commercial activities in the construction, oil, gas, and telecommunications sectors.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Karbassian, 2000

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Fang, 2007

¹⁰² CRS Report for Congress; *Iran's Economy*

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Afshari, 2008

Due to the IRGC's influential links, the organisation frequently acquires business contracts for new projects at the expense and dissatisfaction of private sector businesses. The Iranian economic isolation is believed to be beneficial the Revolutionary Guard as it render possible for them monopolistic market terms with foreign businesses unwilling or unable to enter.¹⁰⁵

An unofficial estimate put the Iranian state in charge of *80-85 percent* of national resources. At the expense of destroying a burgeoning economy, the Islamic state had now become one of the richest, and possibly the strongest, state-owned and controlled economies in the world.¹⁰⁶ The Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Mines mainly represent the "bazaari" interests, which have always supported the Islamic State. In terms of administration, the government of Iran has been divided into *three main parts*. One part includes the 24 government ministries and the hundreds of related government organisations, state agencies, and units functioning under the ministries. The ministries are generally involved in the exercise of political authority. A larger part of the administration includes some 2,000 state-owned enterprises, banks, and insurance companies, all operated by state managers. Many of these companies are outright *monopolies*, exercising economic authority in the name of the Islamic state. Finally there are the para-state foundations that continuously receive profound foreign exchange *subsidies* and *privileges* from the state. For the purposes of accountability they are considered independent units, active in the private sector. Many of the charity foundations, such as the famous "Bonyad-e Mostazafan vajanbazan" (Foundation of the Deprived and War Veterans), and "Bonyade-e Shahid" (Foundation of Martyrs), as well as municipal authorities, fall under this section. Overlapping and duplication of functions is common among the three parts that make up the public sector.¹⁰⁷

5.3 Review

On this topic, one major similarity to Friedrich and Brzezinski's totalitarian dictatorship involves the deteriorating quality within many state institutions as a consequence of the expansion of the bureaucracies' role ever since the revolutionaries replaced of Shah bureaucrats with Khomeini followers. Much of the industry has been taken under state control; mainly the bonyads play a self-interested manoeuvring role in the Iranian economy. However, there are too many forces interplaying on the Iranian economical arena, thus this trait fails to correspond with Friedrich & Brzezinski's model.

¹⁰⁵ Afshari, 2008

¹⁰⁶ Karbassian, 2000

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

6 Summary

Islam is the fastest growing religion and the religion to develop into a state ideology. With Islamic fundamentalism, religion is today not only shaping the spiritual part of people's lives, but also their practical everyday life. The Islamic fundamentalism has evolved into the liberal democracy's greatest challenge after Communism. The Islamic Revolution in Iran has been one of those remarkable occasions in history when the power of words and *images* has successfully challenged the military strength of an established state.¹⁰⁸ The Khomeini revolution in Iran was and is still today the first and only example where a religion has taken over power in a state, making Iran the world's only theocracy. This has led to a situation in Iran where the religion has been forced to *secularise* in order to suit the *modern state needs*. Ancient beliefs and values have been *reinterpreted* as to fit a modern state. Interpretations, which undeniably have led to conflict with democratic human rights values.

The role and status of the Leader remains one of the two unsolved core problems in Iran, the other being social and political freedoms. Is the Leader empowered by a popular mandate or by Allah? Many traditional clerics argue that the divine right to govern –implicit in the *velayate faqih* doctrine –makes public accountability unnecessary. However, this interpretation conflicts with the amended 1989 Constitution, and in specific Article 107 stating that the “the Leader is equal with the rest of the people of the country in the eyes of the law.” Nor is it in line with the practices of the Assembly of Experts: it appoints a committee to judge whether or not the Leader’s performance is within the constitutional limits, and whether it is generally “satisfactory”.¹⁰⁹

The Islamic Republic of Iran’s constitution contains both constitutional/democratic principles, as well as religious ones. Ayatollah Khomeini and his revolutionary followers did not undertake a pure Islamic constitution entirely based on Sharia. Instead elements from Western democracies were implemented. Thus, on most levels of power and control there exist dual-governance institutions –secular and religiously defined. In theory the Iranian regime illustrate a strange system of public dual power, while in reality the religious governing institutes consistently have had last say.¹¹⁰ Other important factors are the *ideologically-driven political forces* in Iran. Their focus is maintaining their place at the top of the hierarchy within the current system –one that eliminates a well-built civil society and *rejects pluralism*.

¹⁰⁸ Chelkowski & Dabashi 1999

¹⁰⁹ Hiro, 2005:149

¹¹⁰ Jönsson, 2008:29

Still, despite intense effort by the regime to evaporate its enemies, Iranians have been creative in their work to circumvent this blockade. Thus, reports have leaked out and raised much criticism against the regimes' despotism.

The reformists were excluded from sharing power as the establishment's totalitarian faction resorted to the management powers of the Council of Guardians and the absolute authority exercised by the Supreme Leader. Bearing in mind their *divine rights*, religious leaders have institutionalised *privileges* within the framework of the *Velayat-e Faqih* through the drafting of the Constitution in dictatorial manner by a self-appointed assembly.

From the viewpoint of the Clergy institution, the implementation of the Islamic Republic and the adoption of the Constitution in 1979-80 gave *eternal* democratic legitimacy to Iran's current political system. The legitimacy of this structure is *irrevocable* and no undemocratic act of the decisive body, or even the change or violation of the ideology of the Constitution, can affect its hold on authority. The belief of justice and divine aura as the major features of the Velayate Faqih can by no means be confirmed or measured practically, which seats the Grand-Ayatollah Khamenei beyond the law, accountability, impeachment, supervision, people's election, and temporary office terms.

The Islamic regime of Iran can perhaps be categorised a *theocracy* as it makes no distinction between state and religion. For the mullahs, Sharia has a sacred origin and the acceptance or denial of it by citizens cannot influence its authority. But clergies, who allow for Sharia a holy status, seek to institute its principles as the country's laws. Basically, the attachment of religion to state transforms the Sharia's teachings into eternal laws in a system that the representatives of people have *little* power to change or revoke.

Religious values, beliefs, and teachings stand intrinsically resistant to the free circulation of information. The religious regime of Iran is based on *Fiqh* (jurisdiction), and obtains substance through the incapacity of individuals to various constraints and restrictions, and hence it *cannot* have an *existence separately* from its censorship apparatus and restrictions on the publication and distribution of books, journals, and newspapers as Friedrich and Brzezinski suggests.

Not Khatami's governmental appointees, but rather the attack and imprisonment of the press and web-bloggers by hard-line judiciary and para-legal forces have continued. "Reporters without Borders" lists Iran as one of the world's *least free* countries, though many Iranians

point out that much serious discussion and criticism is found in the press. *Arrests and jailing* of journalists and some bloggers occur in part because some journalists and bloggers dare to *criticize* those in power to a degree unparalleled in many dictatorial or authoritarian countries. The Iranian system remains a unique mixture of authoritarianism and divided power centres, along with certain freedom and voting rights.”¹¹¹

Iran’s large oil income has helped keep *control* of much of the economy in the hands of the *government*, with money regularly sieving by various, often extralegal means to men in or near the government and to the leading Clergy. In Iran, as previously noted, money and economic enterprises are also concentrated in the hands of the “bonyads”, large foundations close to the government and answerable only to the leader, if at all.¹¹²

While the Iranian government demands and strives for an idealistic Islamic nation, their goals are *not* always implemented and carried out in practice due to the strong opposition forces. Thus, while the numerous laws, attempts, and forces are there to keep Iran under the control and repression of those in command, it is not always carried out in practice evidence has shown.

Still, the question remains, does the use of authoritarian apparatuses by the state result in totalitarianism dictatorship as demonstrated by Friedrich and Zbigniew? The polemic remains as to the true nature of the Iranian regime. Regimes in some dictatorships have so ingeniously disguised the authoritarian features that it is difficult to clearly identify the authoritarian.¹¹³ Thus, alternative forms of governances are presented for comparison as to perhaps reach a better suited model for evaluation and classification of the Islamic Regime of Iran.

7 Alternative categorisations of the Iranian regime

“The presence of personal rule is usually viewed as being only a secondary or supplementary feature of a regime, not as a basis for classifying it as a personal type of non-democratic regime.”¹¹⁴ A tough headship does not indispensable suggest that one single person commands state matters.

The typology "semi" indicates not those regimes using limited authoritarian force, but rather regimes issuing ‘half’-free elections as a means to increase the legitimacy unlike the total

¹¹¹ Keddie 2006:325

¹¹² Keddie 2006:341

¹¹³ Brooker, 2000:33

¹¹⁴ Brooker, 2000:37

absence of elections, which traditionally have marked authoritarian states. The choice is only semi-free in the sense that these parties do not have any actual chance of winning since the *regime prevents* this through arrests and harassment of party opponents.

7.1 **One-party regime**

The 1979 revolution was in fact neither entirely religious nor ideologically motivated. The revolution was the work of a massive popular assault, from all classes of society but with diverse political and ideological values driven by a fundamental *dissatisfaction* with governance of the Shah. Here, ideology is similar to religion, but differs in that the ideology is more focused on the ideas, objectives and principles. Religion, however, concerns for mainly the spiritual. Religion's role in politics is evident from the Iranian constitution as it roles as a very specific ideology.

However, the Clergy establishment is far from a unified homogeneous group that amounts to approximately 200,000 individuals, in which many different views are represented.

7.2 **Person -controlled regime**

On the issue whether the Iranian regime is person-driven one could conclude that during the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini clear elements of a person legalistic features were found. The trends that has taken place thereafter steer more toward a *collectivistic leadership* consisted by the Clergy elite.¹¹⁵

7.3 **Prophetic Governance**

The prophet seeks to transform society by his own *vision* or *ideology*. Due to the prophet's ideals, he is not confined with just staying in power once attained. To comply with his philosophy, for what he visions is a better society, is the single way in which the regime can be legitimate. Ideology can not be separated from the prophetic government but in reality it is often the leader's charisma, which maintains regime.¹¹⁶ A type of governance better fitting that of the former “charismatic” leader Khomeini rather than current Ayatollah Khamenei.

7.4 **Tyrannical Governance**

The tyrannical rule characterised by the absent of both legal and moral limits. Those who find themselves in a tyranny live by uncertainty, fear and *instability*. Governance of the state is entirely dependent upon the leader’s arbitrary, whom controls by means of terror and *reward*

¹¹⁵ Owen 2000:244

¹¹⁶ Jackson & Rosberg, 1982:79

those in accompany as to keep them dependent upon him in a complex system.¹¹⁷ Considering the presence of a number of demonstrations and critic raised by Iran's public through different systems, the atmosphere of terror attempted to uphold by the regime has not been entirely utilised as desired.

7.5 Autocratic Governance

The autocrat does not share power with other leaders, while the bureaucracy and its bodies are entirely at his disposal. He controls the state as his private possession whereas political parties and the government serve him. The limitation of power lies in the inherent institutional weaknesses and lack of available resources. His strength depend largely his ability to dominate and limiting the political process along with preventing other strong leaders to emerge.

7.6 Military Regime

The military dictatorship is the most common form of dictatorship in modern time and the most ephemeral one.¹¹⁸ This is mainly due to the many violent attempts to overthrow its governing regime. This military regime indicates that the clergy, bureaucrats, university students, unions and so forth are action-oriented, resulting in riots, strikes, and coups.

In Iran the military has traditionally enjoyed a strong role as it still constitutes one of the three players of society. The revolutionary regime exploited the power vacuum that the military's immobilisation has left to install their own violence mechanism in the form of Revolution Guard. This was a paramilitary force, fanatically loyal and religiously faithful. These appeared in a capacity of ideological guardians, put to train the troops and ensure that no other alternative ways of thinking developed. However, despite its importance in both the Persian and Iranian state, the military has been ever -overshadowed by the two other players of society, the Clergy and Bazaar. Its high status has its limited political influence. Only through this brief overview of the military relation towards the regime in Iran, one can conclude that the armed forces do not have control to the extent that one can argue Iran of being ruled by a military regime.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Brooker 2000:59

¹¹⁹ Owen 2000:214

7.7 Sultanism

Sultanism is an authoritarian form of governance characterised by an extreme personal presence of the ruler in every element of governance. The ruler may or may not be present in economic or social life, and thus there may be pluralism in these areas, but this is never true of political power. Under sultanism, the bureaucracy is tainted with corruption and command economy.

"... [T]he essential reality in a sultanistic regime is that all individuals, groups and institutions are permanently subject to the unpredictable and despotic intervention of the sultan, and thus all pluralism is precarious."¹²⁰ In sultanism, the sultan may adopt a ruling ideology but is never bound by any rules or given ideology. The sultan may also use any possible force to exercise his personal will, such as paramilitary. Minor distinction is made between the public and private, institutions are weak. There is little rational ideology other than admiration for the ruler. Mobilisation is frowned upon except to provide demonstrations of support for the ruler. Family and close associates have privileged access and often accede to power. Some given examples of clear sultanisms are Iran under the Shah, Romania under Ceausescu, and North Korea under Kim Il Sung.¹²¹

8 Conclusion

With the “Khomeini revolution” in 1979, Islamic fundamentalism turned Islam into a state ideology, as religion was transformed from being merely a private matter into becoming a *tool* to run and *control* an entire country. The Islamic government in Iran revitalised and opened up for a new chapter of hegemony through Ahmadinejad’s government with further control over the private and public sphere. In the example of the Islamic regime, the dominating state tends to eliminate the distinction of public and private spheres, through purge of the distinction between state and society and its emphasis on the role of its leader, hence it becomes similar to Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski’s totalitarian state which uses various means of control and surveillance in order to expand its range of authority from economy and politics to attitudes, beliefs and values.¹²²

The role of Supreme Leader Khamenei is based on the constitution schemes of Ayatollah Khomeini, who placed the leader at the peak of Iran's political power structure. Khamenei in

¹²⁰ Linz & Stepan 1996

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Arjmand, 2008

turn made further adjustments, allowing him to take over a great deal of the powers of the presidency with him and turning the office of the Supreme Leader into the supreme overseer of Iran's political scene.¹²³ Today, bureaucrats around him manage the interplay among the country's bickering centres of power: the parliament, the presidency, the judiciary, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the military, the intelligence services, the police agencies, the clerical elite, the Friday prayer leaders and to a great extent the media, not to mention a assemblage of both formal as informal foundations, councils, business associations, organisations, and seminaries.

“That all makes him an unusual sort of dictator. He has a down-to-earth image and calm demeanour that sit uneasily with the praise he often heaps upon Iran's militants. His austere lifestyle stands in jarring contrast to the corruption and ostentatious wealth of many other Iranian leaders.”¹²⁴ What is suggested by ‘religious government’ is a system controlled by religious leaders. Such a government regards its ideology as *divine* and takes on the task of actualising religious laws.¹²⁵ Like Friedrich and Brzezinski suggests as an attribute in a totalitarian dictatorship the Supreme Leader in Iran execute both *leading* and *priestly* activities. The religious groups having already attained the moral and intellectual leadership over the masses, and created and established the hegemonic apparatus dominating state and civil society, are now trying to maintain its supremacy.

In many aspects, the post-revolutionary regime of Iran indicates totalitarian dictatorship conditions on several instances. Religionists cannot tolerate egalitarianism among citizens. From their point of view, whoever is “closer to God” deserves more merit for the guidance over the public and involvement in law-making, policy-making, and decision-making. Numerous candidates for bureau are disqualified for lacking ideological and religious orthodoxy. Likewise at universities and government institutions these restrictions exist as students or employees are selected on the basis of religious and ideological merit. The dynamic relationship between Khamenei and the IRGC is increasingly symbiotic, politically practical for the Leader and economically expedient for the guards. He is their commander in chief and appoints their senior commanders, who, in turn, are publicly deferential to him and increasingly benefit by comprising an active role in political decision-making and economic activity.¹²⁶ The subjective politics of the Iranian security forces, not only upholding

¹²³ Nasr, 2007

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Mohammadi, 2008

¹²⁶ Sadjapour 2008:8

differences among opposition groups, but also deepening disputes in a subtle and persistent method, have been intended to *sustain* their power *monopoly*. Threat and betrayal are still the main *weapons* used to prevent unification of political groups. The country's security system has devoted much in procedures of *personal terror*. Its eliminating approach, adopted from the KGB and the CIA, attempts to illustrate dissidents as enemies to their country and as ambitious profiteers who are involved with foreign elements.¹²⁷

Economic opponents are arrested or threatened, and with rivals out of the picture, a commercial monopoly has been established. The armed economic unit (in an effort to boost its easy profits) uses terror to enter into a number of illegitimate activities, as alcohol and drug smuggling and prostitution. Due to coercion, few dare challenging or criticising their actions. Those who do, pay a high price.

To summarise, those elements which are analogous to those mentioned in Friedrich and Brzezinski's totalitarian dictatorship concerns the Islamic Republic of Iran's notions of Islam as an unifying *tool* and *ideological universalism*, waiting to be exported as to prevail as world religion, the *portraying of a common stereotypical enemy*, in the case of modern Iran mainly in the form of the US, and Israel, and the underground *elimination of rivals* and opponents are all features which strongly resemble that of Friedrich and Brzezinski's totalitarian dictatorships. The strongest resemblances are thus found in the many *terror* features of Iran with its attempt to maintain a *unified facade* and justify its coercion via simple *explanations*.

What contrasts their totalitarian dictatorship is the lack of *absolute* power with the leader Khamenei. While no major decisions are taken without his consent, too many influential opinions shape those decisions allowing for *some* degree of democracy within the "party". The regime does display a form of elitism and feudalism through the concessional relation between the Clergy and Pasdaran towards the Supreme Leader, even if not to the exclusive size as mentioned by Friedrich and Brzezinski.

While much focus has been turn towards indoctrination of Iran's youth with the educational institutes resolutely centralised and moulded after the Clergy-decided values and lack of space for expression, the public, mainly students, have found ways for alternative sources of information attainment and expressing themselves. Thus Iran not quite fitting Friedrich and Brzezinski's trait concerning communication monopoly as the regime is said to "overlook" many rebellious actions. Not to suggest that the public is free considering the countless abuses

¹²⁷ Afshari 2008:31

towards regime-opposing journalists, reporters and writers that do take place.

Post-revolutionary Iran is a case of an authoritarian state. The former Ayatollah Khomeini's achievement to *unify* behind *slogans* of the "common enemy" came at the right point in time and paved way for the regime to seize the power. The scope and authority of the contemporary Iranian regime over its people and all its institutes are implemented in ways that are far from democratic. Although the regime structure in today's Iran does not point by point result in a totalitarian dictatorship type á la Friedrich and Brzezinski, the scheme of the Iranian regime reveals *despotism* and *oppression*. The cohesively *silenced* opposition, the regimes' *biased* politics, the *oligarchy* features found in the majority of its institutions, the *elitism* and its attempts to *facade* the factual situation are all evidence of this.

Alongside with these features, Iran interestingly holds several traits typical for a democracy, e.g. its high number of voters and its majoring middle-class. Considering its dictatorial patterns the country displays a paradox with its relatively large faction of fanatical supporters for the ruler along with its high education level. Additional features which make the paradox Iran a fascinating matter to study.

Analysts separate the power of Iran in the groups of the elite (*khawass*) versus the mass (*awamm*) where the elite are extensive and multifaceted to a degree which does not even allow for a categorisation even as an oligarchy. It would be inaccurate to assume the Clergy with its representation of roughly 200.000 voices and opinions to constitute a *homogenous* assembly. Instead there is a series of competing power centres within the elite; none single-handedly is capable of achieving rule over the entire system. "The specific Iranian regime is not a democracy, not a totalitarian regime, not a communist system and not a royal government. It is a mixture of all the above."¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Afshari 2008:32

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Appendix

Glossary of Foreign Words and Shia Islam

Akbar:	great
Al/el/ol/ul:	the
Ayatollah:	sign or token of Allah
Bazaar:	merchant middle class of Iran, markets in Iran
Bonyad:	<i>(lit.)</i> foundation, root; <i>(fig.)</i> controversial charitable trusts in Iran that dominate Iran's non-petroleum economy, controlling an estimated 20% of Iran's GDP
-e:	of
Fiqh:	<i>(lit.)</i> knowledge; <i>(fig.)</i> Islamic jurisprudence
Hidden Imam:	The Twelfth Shia Imam who went into occultation in 873 AD
Hijab:	cover or screen
Hizbollah:	party of Allah
Imam:	<i>(lit.)</i> one who leads prayers in a mosque; <i>(fig.)</i> religious leader, spelled as “Imam”
Islam:	state or act of submission (to the will of Allah)
Jame:	association
Quran:	recitation or discourse from the holy Islamic script
Majlis:	assembly. Majlis is the popular term used for the Iranian parliament since its inception during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-07.
Marja’	pearl
Maslehat:	expediency
Mujahedin	<i>(sing. Mujahed):</i> those who conduct jihad
Mullah:	cleric or preacher
Ruh	spirit
Shah:	King

Sharia:	<i>(lit.) partisan or follower; (fig.)</i> follower of Imam Ali. Shia/Shiat means Shia/Shiat Ali, cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad (570-632 AD). According to Sunnis, Ali was the forth caliph (successor) after Prophet Muhammad, his antecedents being Abu Bakr, Omar ibn Khattab, and Othman ibn Affan. But Shias do not regard them as legitimate caliphs to the prophet ass they did not belong to the Prophet´s family. Shias also differ from Sunnis in doctrine, ritual, law, theology, and religious organization.
Shiite:	<i>see</i> Shia
Sunna:	tradition or beaten path (of Prophet Muhammad)
Twelver Shias:	The twelve Imams of the Twelver Shias are; Ali, Hussein, Hassan, Zain al Abidin, Muhammad al Baqir, Jaafar al Sadiq, Mousa al Kazem, Ali al Reza/Rida, Muhammad al Taqi Javad, Ali al Naqi, Hassan al Askari, and Mohammad al Qasim
Umma:	Islamic Community
Usuli	Righteous, true
Velayate faqih:	rule of the religious jurispudent. This Islamic doctrine, developed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, specifies that an Islamic ruler who is thoroughly conversant with the Sharia and is just in its application.

(Source: Dilip Hiro (2005) *The Iranian Labyrinth; Journeys through Theocratic Iran and its Furies*)