

Shiva Tabari February 2020

The Long month of January: intensification of conflicts between different projects in Iran and the Rise of the Global Confederation of Iranian Students (GCIS)

There are moments in history, due to a myriad of events, shifts in the (e)motion of people, and simultaneity of social movements, that participants have a strange feeling of intensification of time. Any day endures as much as a week, every week appears as a month or so. It is unbelievable for people that this amount of change and events have happened only during a week or so. This amount of conflict and clash of ideas, bodies, projects should happen in several years or maybe more. Hence, if people in (so-called) Western countries like Australia, which have a relatively stable country, want to understand the everyday life of Iranians in January 2020 and learn from our experience, they have, first of all, to imagine themselves in a situation that all of the sad news they hear during some years, all of anger they feel due to misbehavior of their ruling class, all of their nightmares about another world war and losing their normal life, all their hopes and hopelessness, and also all of the social/political activities which they do during many years (demonstration, strike, signing a petition etc.), have been compacted and concentrated in a single month. I call it *intensification of history*. Possibly, an element of a revolutionary situation. I am sure that Iranian people had the same feeling during the **September of 1941** when both the Allies and the Soviet Union invaded Iran, occupied Tehran and forcibly abdicated Reza Pahlavi and assigned his son (Mohammadreza), a puppet, as the King. There are many other moments in our history which people have experienced such intensifications. The **August of 1953**, when our democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh was arrested in an American/British led coup by King Mohammadreza Pahlavi. It is also true of the **February of 1979** in which Iranians succeeded in overthrowing the Pahlavi Dynasty and, subsequently, occupying the American embassy. What comes out of the current intensified situation? what is the embryonic form of people's perspective of the alternative? is it going to be a progressive alternative? or is it going to degenerate into another form of dictatorship, due to internal conflicts and foreign manipulation, reproducing the vicious cycle of 'Caesarism' in Iran?

The 'Global Confederation of Iranian Students' (GCIS), Leaders of National Interests

Before talking about the important aspects of 'long month of January', it is important to summarize what I have said about Iran, in order to have a clear vision of the current political map of Iran. I have talked about the class project of the poor middle class, the project of the poor workers (autonomous subaltern people) and of the ruling class. I have explained the internal conflict between different sections of the ruling class. I briefly mentioned that it appears that different class projects are in a critical situation in which they cannot realize their demands (goals) separately; *there is no effective collaboration between different class projects, and at the same time, each project cannot eliminate other class projects*. This dynamic between class projects has created a critical situation which has the potential to transform into another brutal

clash between different class projects and a revival of 'Caesarism'. In fact, our history has experienced many instances of 'Caesarism' which need to be elucidated. In our understanding of the dilemma of 'Caesarism' in Iran, it is important to not only grasp the internal dynamic of Iran's society, but also to understand it within the greater dynamic of the world-system by considering our role as a mediating country in inter-imperialist rivalry of great powers. With this analytical framework, I hope that it would be possible to fully grasp the essential social relations of Iran.

Temporarily abstracting from the major conflict between Iran and USA during the long month of January (all the incidents; assassination of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, Missile response of Iran and etc.) the most important event was the fall of Ukrainian airplane, full of Iranian students and consequent student protests at major universities. It was a great development in the activity of Iranian students and a revival of the project of the Global Confederation of Iranian Students. In order to understand this important development, it is necessary to briefly describe the history of Iranian student activism and the *Bildungsroman* of GCIS. The journey of student activism from its first steps until its influence on national interest in January 2020 has many up and downs. Although there are different projects which have been launched by student activists, I argue that project of GCIS is *the* project that can contribute in overcoming the current impasse between class projects of Iran.

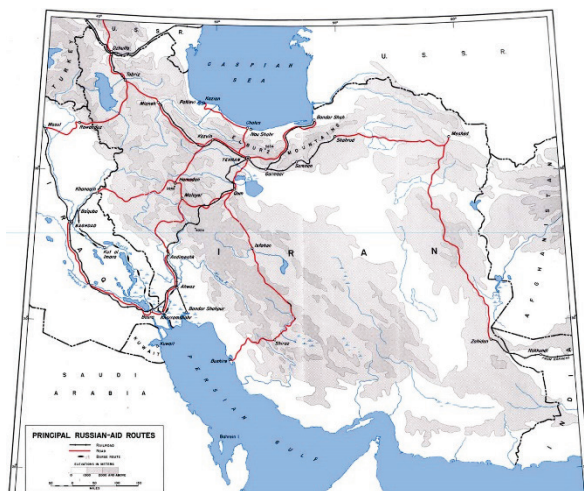
Birth of 'Iranian Student Activism'

The seed of Iranian Student Activism was created and planted by an effective collaboration between different political projects of Iran. In January 1933, Ali-Asghar Hekmat, the minister of education and an important member of the *Radical Party* (which was the home for secular liberals) stated that it is a great deficiency that our capital, Tehran, has no university. Abdolhossein Teymourtash, minister of court, member of Party of Moderates (home for reformist politicians related to landlords, merchant capitalists and nobles), sent a letter to Isa Sedigh, who was at that time a PhD student in Columbia University and a member of the *Socialist Party*, and asked him to create a plan for creating a university in Tehran. After returning to Iran, Reza Shah commanded him to found the university. Collaboration between radical liberals, Reformists and Socialists ended up as **Tehran University**, headquarter of upcoming progressive political projects. The University became one of the first places that not only noble and rich people, but also people from lower sections of society could come together and learn science. Women were also allowed to enter the university. More importantly, it became possible for the 'class project of the intelligentsia' (an older class project of progressive nobles and merchant capitalists that led the 1905-1911 constitutional revolution) to recruit new members from other sections of society.

concession in the south (Britain) and the north (USSR) of Iran. On 16th of September, Iran's army was in complete chaos and the Red Army was ready to occupy Tehran. The British sent a clear message to Reza Shah: "*Would His Highness kindly abdicate in favor of his son, the heir to the throne? We have a high opinion of him and will ensure his position. **But His Highness should not think there is any other solution.***"

University students, at that time were critical of Reza Shah's authoritarian regime. However, it became clear for them that it is not possible to fight internal repression, without fighting imperialist/foreign interference, too. Tehran University became the main base for campaigns against the presence of British and Soviet troops in Iran. It also became clear to the Student activists that Iran had been split into three parts and foreigners were stealing their oil.

This historical event had great impact on the future of political projects launched by university students. Two of these projects are worth noticing: The Global Confederation of Iranian Students (GCIS) and the Islamic Association of Students (IAS). Although IAS is older than GCIS (IAS has been created in 1941, right after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran), it had less effect on the 1979 Revolution and became more important only after the repression of GCIS by Islamic forces. In this article, my intention is to give an account of *Bildungsroman* of GCIS which has the ability of solving the current impasse, not IAS which is a major contributor to creation of Islamic Dictatorship.



Persian Corridor



Oil concession by British and Russians

Reaction of Student Activists to American coup: 1953

The Nationalist movement of Iran, led by Mohammad Mossadegh, was a reaction to foreign interference and occupation of Iran. In 1949, different political projects, Nationalists, liberals, socialists (Tudeh Party of Iran), Islamic parties, successfully founded the *Nationalist front*, and started a campaign for nationalization of oil industry. Many of the young members of different political parties were university students. In universities, they also, following the spirit of Nationalist front, created effective collaboration with each other. Although they had different

political ideologies, it was their main goal to enhance solidarity between each other. For example, it was common for students to become members of the student branch of different political projects. Hence, the university became the home for young members of different political projects. University made it possible for them to act like a symbolic umbrella organization, reflecting the national interest of Iran.

In 1951, the nationalist front formed the government. In 1953, Mossadegh tried to limit the control of British company AIOC over Iranian oil reserves. Upon the refusal of the AIOC to cooperate with the Iranian government, the parliament voted to nationalize Iran's oil industry and to expel foreign corporate representatives from the country. After this vote, Britain and USA started their operations to start a coup in Iran.

Operation Ajax was one of the covert actions of the United States to overthrow a foreign government during peacetime. The destiny of operation Ajax (1953-1979) is similar to Ajax himself. 'Operation Ajax' was sent to our country in order to save the dead body of Mohammadreza Shah and claim the magical oil industry, forged on 'Mount Capitalus' but failed in its mission (1979 Revolution). This mission, turned out to be the suicide mission of America in Iran, just like the way Ajax conquered and died of sorrow for his defeat.

After the coup, and the revival of Mohammadreza Shah, Tehran was under martial law, tanks and troops stationed all around the city. On 7th of December, two days before the visit of Richard Nixon, vice-president to Eisenhower, student activists started a demonstration against the coup and following the resumption of relations with Britain. Students in Tehran University began a demonstration in front of the University campus. Soon the demonstration became big and consequently, army commandos were ordered to 'shoot to kill'. Three students (one from the nationalist front, two from the Tudeh Party) were killed on that day. In the memory of the students who were killed, this day has become 'student day'. For Iranian student activism, fighting against Mohammadreza Shah was fighting against an authoritarian puppet. Hence, they were fighting against twofold/two-faced enemy: **foreign/external interference** and **internal dictatorship**.

Emigration of many student activist from Iran and birth of "Global Confederation of Iranian Students"

After the 1953 coup and the repression of all progressive projects, it was lethal for students to continue their activities within Iran. Many Iranian students emigrated to European countries. In 1960, with the coalition of Iranian students' associations in England, France and Germany, the Global Confederation of Iranian Students (GCIS) was founded in Heidelberg. Most of the early members of GCIS were socialist. Many of them were supporters of Khalil Maleki, Iranian Socialist politician and founder of League of Iranian Socialists. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, Iranian students in America and Canada had a more nationalist tendency. Once again, student activists formed an umbrella organization, creating effective collaboration between different political projects. 10 years after Operation Ajax and the coup against the nationalist government of Iran, once again, students created an embryonic model of another national coalition. It is not strange that most of leaders of the upcoming 1979 Revolution were members

of GCIS: Abolhassan Banisadr (1st president of Iran), Sadegh Ghotbzadeh (1st Head of Radio and Television, Foreign minister), Ebrahim Yazdi (Foreign Minister), Mostafa Chamran (1st minister of Defense) and others.

GCIS maintained effective collaboration with other European student movements, supporting progressive, revolutionary movements in other countries like Algeria and Cuba. One of the monumental actions of GCIS was their demonstration against presence of Mohammadreza Shah in West Germany, in collaboration with Germany's student movement. On 2nd of June, 1967, during a demonstration, Benno Ohnesorg, a German student activist was killed by police. As Nikolas Kulish wrote in New York Times (May 26, 2009): *"The killing in 1967 of an unarmed demonstrator by a police officer in West Berlin set off a left-wing protest movement and put conservative West Germany on course to evolve into the progressive country it has become today."*

It is not possible to fully explore the long history of a significant moment in life-cycle of GCIS (1960-1979). However, I am confident that GCIS was acting as a miniature version of Iran's civil society, revealing the internal conflicts of Iran's pre-revolution attempts to find a way to collaborate effectively in order to defeat the Shah.

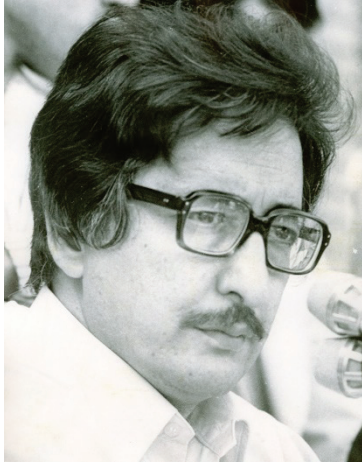


Khalil Maleki, Socialist Politician



با ابراهیم یزدی در پاریس

Sadegh Ghotbzadeh (left) with Ebrahim Yazdi (Right)



Abolhassan Banisadr (1st president of Iran)



Mostafa Chamran (right) (1st minister of Defence)

The 1979 Revolution: GCIS vs OSU



It is 8th of September, 1978. Jaleh Square. Second day of demonstrations against martial law. In the south of Tehran, workers have formed barricades and are militantly fighting the army. In Jaleh Square, more than 5000 people, most of them students, sat down in the street, silently protesting. The army began to shoot students. We know that at least 88 people were killed on this

scene that you see in the photo. Michel Foucault, the French social theorist, had estimated that the number of victims was more than thousand. On this day, by the massacre of students in Jaleh Square, it became clear for Iranians that **there is no room for reconciliation with Pahlavi Dynasty**.

During the next 6 months, class projects, in collaboration, realized their common goal of overthrowing the Shah. GCIS came home to a situation in which secular, leftist ideas were hegemonic among students and political parties. The interim government was a combination of secular nationalists and socialists. In reaction to the influence of GCIS among students and its power to **unite** different secular groups, Islamic forces, led by Mohammad Beheshti, started to form an Islamic coalition in order to counter the secular forces. thus, they created **Islamic Republic Party** and **Office for Strengthening Unity (OSU)** as the organization of Islamist students. Islamist students, called themselves, **Muslim Student followers of Imam[Khomeini]'s line**.

Now the new conflict was between secular and Islamist groups. The first, and maybe the most important, action of OSU was the seizure of the United states embassy (4th of November, 1979), triggering the hostage crisis between Iran and America. Two days later, the prime minister and all members of his cabinet, resigned en masse. In a letter to Khomeini, our secular prime minister stated that: *"...repeated interferences, inconveniences, objections and disputes have made my colleagues and me unable to continue [meeting] our duties ..."*. This was not only the dissolution of a secular government, but also the beginning of the dissolution of all the progressive political projects in the next 5 years.

Latter, OSU played an important role in the reformist movement of 1998 and election of president Khatami. OSU is still an active project repressing other progressive political projects that are launched by students.

1980-2020: period of interregnum of GCIS

During the 40 years of the Islamic Republic, the project of the OSU was the dominant project among students. However, GCIS continued its life in the shadows, in a defensive war of position. Right now, it is hard to precisely pinpoint the presence of GCIS in various historical events of the last 40 years. But I, as one of the participants of GCIS who has no relation with OSU, am confident that GCIS never died in these years. GCIS, whose main object is to be an umbrella organization for secular, progressive political projects, fighting foreign interference and internal dictatorship, is alive. Events of the long month of January was not only a proof for this, but also revealed that GCIS is coming out of the shadows and is trying to conduct a more significant role in the coming years. Now I can describe the events of January 2020.

We have to be careful not to confuse GCIS with the Trojan horse project of CIS created by American authorities in 2009, in order to masquerade as the student opposition of Iran. It is also important to clerly distinguish the recently-founded network of Royalist students (Farashgard/Iran Revival 2017) who have the aim of fighting Islamists and Leftist groups and have no intention of making collaboration with other progressive groups.

Ukrainian plane crash protests (11th – 16th January, 2020)



On 8th of January, 2020, the Islamic Republic shut down the Ukrainian plane with two missiles. 176 people were killed. 82 of them were Iranian students and academics associated with Canadian universities. Once again, Iran's dictatorship shot the 'silent protest of students' (their immigration to Canada). Once again, it has become clear for Iranians that **there is no room for reconciliation, not only with Pahlavi Dynasty but also with Islamic republic.**



On 11th of January, students in more than 30 universities started their demonstrations. In Amir Kabir University in Tehran, students shouting “death to the oppressor, whether it be Shah or Mullahs”. In a situation where almost all classes in Iran were shocked and mourning for the loss of 82 Iranians (most of them students), the ghost of GCIS uncovered itself, came out of shadows and called for solidarity between different political projects. Students shouted “Workers, Nurses, Teachers, Students, Unite! Unite!”, “No Referendum, No Reform, Strike and Revolution!”. GCIS still has its agenda of being a role model of effective collaboration between progressives.

In a situation where people have lost their hope in any existing section of the Islamic Republic and, at the same time, do not trust corrupted opposition groups (like the Monarchists), they are listening to their sons and daughters, who are trying hard in the universities for the better of the country. University students have also found out that their role in the current situation is to become the spokesmen of national interest, by creating effective, uniting slogans.

Next week, the so-called parliamentary election is going to happen. Today (2/16/20), 40 days after the loss of 82 Iranians, university students started a demonstration, chanting out “no vote, no vote, ban the election!”.

Will GCIS rise again and create the next generation of Iran’s Revolution? Wait and See!