

A Missing Dialogue among Advocates and Opponents of 19th Century Short-Term Reforms in Iran

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ABSTRACT

This article applies rational choice theory to analysis three reformative periods in 19th century Iran: the reforms of AmirKabir, Naser-ed-Din Shah and Sepahsalar. It analyses the arguments of the advocates and opponents of reforms, as well as the reasons and counterarguments of reformers. Using the method of agreement and the method of concomitant variation, it examines the triangular rational interaction of opponents, reformers, and advocates of reforms. Based on a nominal comparison of the arguments of opponents, the reasons they offer in all three reformative periods include: “endangerment of Shah’s household”, “homeland security disturbance”, “the danger of losing territorial integrity of Iran”, “political dependency of the reformer and/or his advocates on foreign countries”, “neglecting people’s rights”, “neglecting the opponents’ position and threatening their class benefits”, and “personal manner of the reformer and/or his advocates”. Based on an ordinal comparison, the most repetitive arguments offered by distinct groups of opponents include: “endangerment of Shah’s household”, “neglecting the opponents’ position and threatening their class benefits”, “neglecting traditions by the reformer and/or his advocates”, and “personal manner of the reformer and/or his advocates”. Analysing the triangular interaction of the reformer, advocates, and opponents of reforms indicates

that the reform of Sepahsalar is the only one that demonstrates an interaction among reformer, advocates, and opponents. Further, it is the only period in which the reformer and the advocates react to the most repetitive arguments of opponents.

Keywords: Advocates of reform, AmirKabir, Naser-ed-Din Shah, opponents of reforms, Qajar dynasty, rational choice theory, Sepahsalar

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INTRODUCTION

The historical yet ongoing process of modernisation and reforms in Iran, along with its achievements and failures, has been affected the current socio-political path of the Iranian society. Duality of Modernity and Tradition in the past two centuries, the impact of their relationship, and its implications on the current social, cultural, political, and economic situation of Iran are what have been addressed by many Iranian scholars. This scrutiny can be found in the works of historians and political scientists like Abbas Amanat (2004); Abbas Milani (2001); Ali MirSepassi (2005); Hairi (1988); Mohammad Tohidi (2008). Yet, a sociological analysis of the early attempts to overcome the ‘boundaries’ of tradition and reform various aspects of Iranians life is missing.

Focusing on the early reforms conducted in the 19th century, during Nasser al-Din Shah Era, this article will analyse the arguments offered by the opponents and advocates of the reforms. Going beyond the common-sensical pictures which drew the opponents of reforms as the traditionalist reactionaries, this article specifically concentrates on their own arguments that resulted in the failure of the reforms. Consequently, this article will answer the question “how the opponents and advocates of the reforms in Naseri Era offered and presented their arguments for or against the reforms”. Besides, it comparatively analyses the impact of these arguments and the reactions of the reformers in each of the three reform periods in Nasser

al-Din Shah Era on the execution of reforms and its achievements.

To give a background on the events occurred in these three reformative periods, in the following article, first a short account on the reforms in these three reformative periods will be offered. Moving forward, the article briefly introduces Rational Choice theory as theoretical framework and elaborates on method of agreement and method of concomitant variations as methodology to approach the questions. This setting provides the context to analyse the arguments offered by the opponents of the reforms as well as its advocates and the reformers.

Historical Background

The shocking defeat of Iran in the war against Russia in the beginning of the 19th century, which resulted in the loss of some of Iran’s most important territories in the North, brought about self-consciousness among Iranian elites and alarmed them on the West’s increasing developments. As a result, Abbas Mirza (1803–1828), the crown prince at the time, and his followers in Tabriz initiated the first reformative attempt. By his death, however, this early attempt for reforms ended. To fulfil the goal of Abbas Mirza, there were three short-term reforms in the Naser-ed-Din Shah era (1848-1896). Naser-ed-Din Shah was the descendant of Abbas Mirza and one of the most important kings of the Qajar Dynasty (1785-1925). These three eras of reform were headed by Mirza Taqi Khan AmirKabir (Prime

Minister, 1848-1851), Naser-ed-Din Shah (the king himself 1858–1861), and Mirza Hussein Khan Sepahsalar (Prime Minister, 1871-1873). However, all these attempts at reform failed due to the extreme oppositions by clergymen, courtiers, government officials, and women of the royal harem.

Mirza Taqi Khan AmirKabir, started the first “comprehensive” reforms in Iran as the first Prime Minister of Naser-ed-Din Shah, which included stabilising internal security, introducing an accurate and fair tax system, empowering Iran’s military, establishing legal justice courts, prohibiting bribery, and building the first Iranian college.

However, the first reformative period in the Naseri era ended in 1851 due to the wide opposition of courtiers, officials, clergymen, women of the harem, and foreign embassies. A worsening of Iran’s internal and global situation in the following seven years under Prime Minister Mirza Agha Khan Noori resulted in Naser-ed-Din Shah’s decision to take the leading role in the upcoming reforms in 1858 and to establish the Council of the State, the Assembly of the House of Consultation, and the government judicial bureau. In this period, an enlightening informal reformative trend, led by Mirza Malkum Khan, complemented formal reforms. But just like AmirKabir’s reform, the reforms in this period faced extensive opposition and were finally halted in 1853 by the arrest, exile, and murder of the advocates of the informal reform.

Nine years after the defeat of the second reformative period in the Naseri Era, Naser-ed-Din Shah appointed Iran’s ambassador in

the Ottoman Empire, Mirza Hussein Khan Sepahsalar, as the new Prime Minister. Sepahsalar immediately emerged as the leader of the third reformative period by empowering the Iranian army and the industrial apparatus, implementing financial reforms, and focusing on cultural policies like civil rights and providing public education in *Dar ul-funun*. Yet Sepahsalar’s reforms were confronted with extreme opposition, probably most severe in the Naseri era. Because of these oppositions, Sepahsalar was forced to resign after his return to Iran from a triumphant trip to Europe with the Shah himself. Unlike the other periods of reforms in this era, Sepahsalar was not murdered or arrested, and he returned to power shortly after his resignation. However, his resignation ended the last attempts of reform in the Naser-ed-Din Shah era.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Theoretical Frame

Using historical sociology, this article analyses the arguments of reformers, opponents, and advocates of reforms by applying what James Mahoney (2004) calls “general theory” in his article “Revising General Theory in Historical Sociology”. Introducing functionalist, rational choice, power, neo-Darwinian, and cultural theories as “general theories” in historical sociology, Mahoney emphasises that the core of these theories is demonstrated by specific “causal agents (i.e., basic units of analysis)” and special “causal mechanisms (i.e., abstract properties of causal agents that produce

outcomes and associations)” (Mahoney 2004, p. 460).

According to Ian Craib (2006, p. 92), “one of the simplest way to describe rational choice theory is analysing it by attempts of constructing models of individuals’ behaviour when they are acting rational in a special circumstance”. In rational choice theory, the rational individuals (agents) are those whose actions are “instrumental” and rely on rationality. This theory is not seeking to show that a given individual in a “special circumstance” will do a specific action, but it seeks to analyse “social outcomes”. In other words, according to this theory, even if the agent is acting rational, the social outcomes still might be irrational and undesirable (Hatcher & Kanazawa, 1997, p. 192; Javadi Yeganeh, 2008).

Although the rational choice approach has various attitudes toward social actions that are examined by different scholars, it is mainly trying to explain an individual action in terms of rationality of actors. In Norkus’ words, “the individual actions are explained as the consequences of acts of rational choices” (Norkus 2000, p. 260). It is worth noting that rational choice theory, especially in more recent approaches, is aware of the boundaries of this general theory; however, stating these boundaries does not negate the rationality of individuals’ actions. Yet, acknowledging these boundaries and limitations in examining the rationality of individuals, sociologists came up with notions like bounded rationality.

Rational choice theory, following individualistic methodology of Max Weber,

focuses on the social phenomena in terms of the rational choice of the social actors. There are two forms of rationality in Rational Choice Theory, namely forward-looking rationality and backward-looking rationality. In forward-looking rationality “actors choose alternatives by predicting the social outcome of their choices. [...] they are assumed to try to choose the alternatives that produce the best outcome for them. Game theory assumes this forward-looking rationality” (Sato, 2010). In the backward-looking rationality, the actor learns from his past and the positive or negative outcomes of the alternative outcomes. Yet, it is worth noting that rational choice theory, especially in more recent approaches, is aware of the “boundaries” of this general theory; however, stating these boundaries does not negate the rationality of individuals’ actions.

Although some recent research has applied rational choice theory (Congleton, 2006; McLean, 2001; Milner, 2002; Murshed, 2010), these authors are mainly focused on political science and events occurring in the late twentieth century as opposed to earlier historical incidents. There are two notable exceptions, however, in *The Logic of Evil, the Social Origin of Nazi Party 1925-1933*, William Bernstein explains the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany based on rational choice theory (Mahoney, 2004), and Eskandari Qajar’s (2010) article, “Between Scylla and Charybdis; Policy-making under conditions of constraint in early Qajar Persia,” explains the decision of the first kings of Qajar Dynasty for protecting Iran in the wars against Russia.

According to Ian Craib (2006, p. 92), “one of the simplest way to describe rational choice theory is analyzing it by attempts of constructing models of individuals’ behavior when they are acting rational in a special circumstance”. Rational Choice theory doesn’t neglect the irrational acts of the players but assumes them as rational actors and begins with a rational analysis of the social phenomena.

Therefore, in the following article, rational choice theory is applied to investigate the arguments of the opponents and supporters of reforms in these three reformative periods during the era known as the Naseri era. Rational choice theory has been used to examine historical data. Most of the conceptual and historical analyses focus on the backwardness of oppositions in the Qajar era, seeing them as passive reactioners who follow their own financial and even sexual desires. In the absence of alternative approaches in other research reforms in Iran, this article argues that rational choice theory—which assumes rationality of the individuals and analyses the reason of these actions and decisions—opens a new window unto this realm. In other words, this theory enables the authors to focus on the “rational” context of the choices of these opponents and understand the irrational, unwanted outcomes of these protests.

METHODS

Investigating the rationality of the agents of reform (reformers, advocates of reforms, and opponents of reforms) in each period

of reform in the Naseri Era, this article focuses on the arguments as expressed by opponents and advocates of reforms. In other words, for analysing the rationality of their arguments in supporting or opposing the reformers, the arguments of opponents of reforms (divided in four groups: clergymen, courtiers, governmental officials, and the women of the royal harem) will be discussed, and the responses of the reformer and his advocates to opponents’ critics will be assessed. Reviewing the archives and documents of Nasserri Era regarding the arguments of rational actors of the reforms – opponents and advocates- four categorises has been recognized. Therefore, using rational choice theory, applying the comparative perspective of the arguments proposed by opponents and advocates, studying the letters, pamphlets, and books written by these opponents, advocates, and reformers themselves, and considering the arguments offered by them to defend or criticize reforms, the categorised arguments emerge as follows:

- Religious arguments: the opposition of reformative actions with Islam, neglect of Islam by the individual reformer and/or his advocates;
- Financial arguments: the financial performance of the reformer and/or his advocates, financial corruption of reformer and/or his advocates, and the erosion of the financial benefits of elites by them;
- Political arguments: the endangerment of the kingdom of Naser-ed-Din Shah, attempts to abolish the Qajar dynasty,

attempts to change the monarch system, dereliction of the power of the heir by exercising ultra-monarchical power by reformer and/or his advocates, homeland security disturbance, the absolute power of the reformer, the interventions of aliens in Iran, the danger of losing territorial integrity of Iran, the danger of the colonisation of Iran, the political dependency of the reformer and/or his advocates in foreign countries;

- Social arguments: neglecting the opponents' position and threatening their class benefits, neglecting the people's rights, low social origins of the reformer and/or his advocates, negligence of traditions by the reformer and/or his advocates, cultural westernisation of Iran;
- The personal manner of the reformer and/or his advocates.

For analysing the arguments of the advocates, this article uses the common arguments of the opponents to assess the pro-reform reasonings in four ways by pointing out the same criticisms of opponents, criticising opponents for such arguments, denying the accusations of opponents, and emphasising the importance of the reformative actions. It is worth noting that the advocates of reforms—except for Mirza Malkum Khan—were not eager to defend reforms or offer reasoning to support it, unless pressured by the opponents who did not hesitate to attack the reforms.

Inspired by John Stuart Mill's direct method of agreement and method of concomitant variations and applying the nominal and ordinal comparisons explained by James Mahoney, this article then analyses the arguments of reformers, advocates, and opponent of reforms. According to Mahoney, nominal comparison "involves the use of categories that are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive" (Mahoney 1999, p. 1157). In the direct method of agreement, which is one of the simplest methods offered by Mill (2009), "omitting" is crucial and the researcher should try to discover the "firm, common, or non-changeable patterns among the cases". Unlike the nominal comparison, in an ordinal comparison, which weights the causes, the potential causes cannot be omitted easily (Taleban 2009, p. 65) As Mahoney states: Ordinal comparison entails the rank ordering of cases into three or more categories based on the degree to which a given phenomenon is present (Mahoney 1999, p. 1160).

Therefore, in this article, in the nominal level and based on Mill's direct method of agreement, non-common arguments of distinct groups of opponents in the three reformative groups in the Naseri era will be omitted. In the ordinal level, based on Mill's method of concomitant variations, the most and least common arguments among advocates, opponents, and reformers will be ranked. With nominal comparison, using the thin methods of rational choice theory, this article focus on the rationality of the choices of the opponents of reforms.

By so doing, it reveals the arguments that demonstrate which groups were influential in the failure of reforms. Concentrating on the arguments of the opponents in these three reformative trends, their arguments in an order of twenty-one arguments will be categorized. Additionally, the ordinal comparison of these twenty-one arguments will be offered. Subsequently, the arguments of the advocates of reforms and the reformers will be analysed based on these twenty-one categorised arguments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Short-Term Reforms in 19th Century Iran

1. AmirKabir's Reform

The first round of reforms headed by AmirKabir emerged in 1847, the exact year Naser-ed-Din Shah ascended to power. In his three years as Prime Minister (1848 – 1851), AmirKabir conducted widespread reforms empowering the army as well as financial, social, and political developments. Some of his many attempts to modernise Iran include stabilising internal security, establishing an accurate and fair tax system, empowering Iran's military by hiring military experts from Italy and Austria, opening weapon factories, controlling and limiting religious justice courts (Mahakem-e Shara') and establishing legal justice courts instead, prohibiting bribery, performing nation-wide smallpox vaccination, building the first public hospital, building the first Iranian college (Darul-funun), promoting translation and publication, hiring technicians from

Prussia and England for establishing new factories, and establishing Iran's first daily paper -Vaghaye' Etefaghyeh- (Adamiyat, 1983; Haj Sayyah, 1980; Khormoji, 1984; Lesan al-Molk Sepehr, 1958; Mahbobi Ardakani, 1975; Makki, 1987; Martin, 2010; Mohit Tabatabaei, 1975; Rezvani, 1975; Shamim, 1996).

Yet, his reformative actions faced harsh criticism and immense opposition from both Iranian and foreigner opponents (Amanat, 2004; Hedayat, 1983; Raadi Azarakhshi, 1975; Tohidi Chaffi, 2008). Inside Iran, there were four major groups opposing the performance of AmirKabir: the clergy, courtiers, officials, and the women of the royal harem.

1.1. The Opponents of AmirKabir's Reform

AmirKabir reduced the power of the clergy to almost nothing, an act which was not common in Iran at that time, and caused serious oppositions by clergymen who were among the most important political actors in Qajar Iran. The strict manner of AmirKabir toward clergymen (such as removing one of them due to a case of bribery), replacing the religious courts by legal courts, nullifying the law of taking refuge in a sanctuary (which was very common in Iran),¹ and

¹It is worth mentioning that due to the humbleness attached to taking refuge in a sanctuary as an act of commoners, other places were replaced such as foreign embassies and even the Shah's stables. The determination of this law limited maneuvering power in Iran of foreign embassies and courtesies as well as clergymen.

indulgency of religious minorities ignited the anger of clergymen and their countless followers. However, considering the lack of official historical data in AmirKabir's era, there is no written opposition argumentation by clergymen against the Prime Minister.

Courtiers, who were one of the most important and influential groups in Qajar Iran, were another group that opposed the reforms of AmirKabir. One of the main and yet basic reasons the courtiers opposed AmirKabir was because of his humble background. Unaccustomed to this in Iran in the 19th century, the courtiers found it offensive that a person with a low social status could reach the second highest position in the country. AmirKabir's irritating approaches gave them even more reason to oppose. For example, the Prime Minister reduced the governmental budgets dramatically and remained himself the only one who had unlimited access to the Shah, a privilege that bothered all the groups in power—especially the courtiers. Moreover, AmirKabir was negligent to the status of courtiers as the 'royal family' and refused to consider their royal blood a special social or financial privilege for them (Amanat, 2004; Lesan al-Molk Sepehr, 1958; Makki, 1987). Like the clergymen, there is no written documentation regarding courtiers' opposition toward reforms; however, formal historical books, such as *Nasekh-ol-tavarikh* written by Lesan al-Molk Sepehr (1958) in the Naser-ed-Din Shah era, provide some of the courtiers' arguments.

Along with courtiers, the officials were the most important internal players

in Iranian policies in the Qajar Dynasty. The officials—mostly from the non-royal prominent families in Iran—oversaw running the government. They were a well-educated and well-established group who had essentially inherited their jobs from their ancestors. From the beginning of Naser-ed-Din Shah's kingship, officials who preferred the Prime Minister to be one of their own started to oppose AmirKabir's campaign. However, it was not until after the dismissal and murder of AmirKabir that they became vocal about their oppositions. The authority of AmirKabir, his charisma, and his absolute power prevented them from confronting directly and, as a result, they tried to express their opposition to the Shahs² (AleDavood, 2000; Amanat, 2004; Eetemad al-Saltaneh, 1978a; Eetemad al-Saltaneh, 1978b; Eghbal Ashtian, 1961; Mahboobi Ardakani, 1975; Makki, 1987; Sasani, 2003).

Finally, there were the women of the royal harem—the veiled and hidden power of Iran's Qajar court—who were in some cases among the most effective powers in the country who stood against AmirKabir. Although the women of the royal harem were mostly considered "playthings" to the powerful men in 19th century Iran, they had

²For the letter of Mirza Agha Khan Noori to Naser-ed-Din Shah see Aledavood 2000: 220.

For the government announcement regarding AmirKabir's dismissal see Makki 1987: 490.

For the letter of Mirza Agha Khan Noori to Russian Ambassador to Iran see Aledavood 2000: 213.

For the letter of Mirza Agha Khan Noori to Iran Ambassador to Russia see Aledavood 2000: 213.

For critics of Eetemad-ol-Saltaneh regarding AmirKabir's reform see Eetemad-ol-Saltaneh 1978a: 75-83.

an exciting potential to influence those in power in practice, since they had unrivalled access to the Shah—who no other man was allowed. During AmirKabir’s reformative period, these women (in particular Naser-ed-Din Shah’s mother, Mahd-e Olia) were some of the few vocal opponents of the reforms (Amanat, 2004; Makki, 1987; Sasani, 2003; Tohidi Chaffi, 2008).³

As mentioned earlier, there has remained no argument from clergymen during this period, either due to the poor formal historical narrations in the first decade of Naser-ed-Din Shah’s era, the lack of informal history writing, clergymen’s unwillingness to document their personal lives, the unsuitable maintenance of historical data, or simply because the clergymen did not offer arguments (although that seems unlikely). Most of the oppositions against AmirKabir’s reform came from officials. The arguments of opposition are mainly focused on political reasoning and followed by social ones. Notably, the only distinguished opposition to AmirKabir’s performance was suggested by women of the royal harem focusing on systematic “financial corruption”, “the inappropriate actions of army soldiers”, and “people’s irritation by soldiers”. Interestingly, unlike the other reformative periods in the Naseri era, the opposition does not indicate any

religious argument against AmirKabir and his reforms.

In nominal comparison, “neglecting the opposition’s status and threatening their class benefits” and “depriving the heir of power from power” are two arguments that the three dissenting groups share and, therefore, are the most frequent opposition arguments.⁴ The other arguments are omitted in the nominal comparison because they do not occur in at least one of the arguing groups. In ordinal comparison, besides the two arguments of nominal comparison that are the most frequent, “the personal manner of the reformer and/or his advocates”, “the absolute power of the reformer”, and “homeland security disturbance” are suggested by two out of three opposition groups and, therefore, have moderate importance. The remaining arguments are suggested by only one of the opposition groups and, therefore, have the least importance.

In this reformative period, the opposition arguments merely focused on class benefits and group interests. In the nominal comparison, there were no national interests in the arguments of the opposition, while in the two other periods of reform in Naser-ed-Din Shah’s era, there were shifts in the level of arguments from the group and class arguments to national and religious ones.

³For the letter of Mahde olia to Shah see Amanat 2004: 205.

For the letter of Mahde olia to Shah see Aledavood 2000: 208.

⁴They are the most frequent arguments based on groups who suggest the arguments.

1.2. The Advocates of AmirKabir's Reform

In this reformative period, because of the shortage of historical data on the one hand, and the absent of advocates of reforms and reformer's consultants on the other, there are no arguments from the supporters of reforms. Regarding the absence of arguments by the advocates of reforms in AmirKabir's era, it is essential to focus on some facts:

1. As with AmirKabir's opponents, his advocates were his subordinates. It does not seem that they had been consulted, and, apparently, they were obeying the Prime Minister's orders instead of supporting his ideas or bringing new reformative ideas.
2. AmirKabir's reforms were the first to be carried out across the country that were not exclusively focused on strengthening the army (while the previous reforms were). Thus, unlike the reformative periods to follow, the reformist and his advocates did not perceive the importance of arguing and reasoning to prove and advocate the reformative campaign in the society.⁵

In fact, it seems that the experience of AmirKabir's reforms brought a condition in the following reforms in which the reformer, advocates, and opponents were ready to

protect the reformative trend or to oppose it.

As for the reformer, AmirKabir was considered a laconic pragmatist who spent his time carrying out the reform rather than arguing with the opponents. Furthermore, the opponents were mostly AmirKabir's subordinates. Therefore, being authoritarian in character, AmirKabir did not feel it necessary to defend himself. He simply gave an "order" to change the opposition's attitude (Adammiat, 2006; Amanat, 2004; Sepehr Makki, 1987). Yet, from the letters written by AmirKabir after his dismissal and before going under arrest, these were the arguments he offered to defend his performance and answer the opponents' critics: personal manner of the reformer and/or his advocates, the absolute power of the reformer, and endangerment of Naser-ed-Din Shah's kingship. Notably, none of these arguments address the most repetitive arguments of the opponents, which included depriving the heir of power by the reformer and/or his advocates, neglecting the opponents' position, threatening their class benefits, and neglecting the people's rights.⁶

⁵For the performance report of AmirKabir to Naser-ed-Din Shah see Amanat 2004: 200-201.

For the letter of AmirKabir to Naser-ed-Din Shah before his dismissal see Aledavood 2000: 81.

For the letter of AmirKabir to Naser-ed-Din Shah after his dismissal see Aledavood 2000: 78.

For the letter of AmirKabir to Naser-ed-Din Shah see Aledavood 2000: 87-89.

For the letter of AmirKabir to Naser-ed-Din Shah see Aledavood 2000: 83.

For the letter of AmirKabir to Naser-ed-Din Shah see Aledavood 2000: 85-86.

For AmirKabir's pledge see Eghbal Ashtiani 1961: 315-317

For the last letter of AmirKabir to Naser-ed-Din Shah see Sasani 2003: 35.

⁶Interestingly, even most of the opponents' arguments are shaped in conversations with foreign countries (Britain and Russia) that were objecting the death of AmirKabir.

2. Naser-ed-Din Shah's Reforms

The assassination of AmirKabir in 1851—owing to the widespread opposition of courtiers, officials, clergymen, and women of the harem to AmirKabir's reforms, and his replacement by Mirza Agha Khan Noori—was the end of the first reformative period in the Naseri era. Seven years later, however, and due to Iran's increasingly worsening internal and global situation because of the inferior performance of the new Prime Minister, Naser-ed-Din Shah decided to take on his role in reforming the infrastructure of the country as well as its cultural and social policies. Therefore, he restructured his governmental apparatus starting with dismissing Noori and abolishing the position of Prime Minister. Restructuring some governmental parts resulted in a new reformative period from 1859 to 1862. Among the most important reforms and achievements of this period are establishing the Council of the State; establishing the Assembly of the House of Consultation, *Majles-e Maslahat-Khaneh* (the earliest form of parliament in Iran, in which the members had been elected by Shah); establishing a governmental judicial bureau called *divan-khana*; personally overseeing people's complaints by the Shah; sending students to Europe to study; and founding the telegraph (Adammat, 2006; Amanat, 2004; Katiraei, 1976; Khormoji, 1984; Martin, 2010; Mostofi, 1998; Ravandi, 1999; Schnaider, 2005; Schneider, 2004; Tohidi Chaffi, 2008; ZibaKalam, 2003).

This reformative period was a peculiar one in which there was an informal and

unofficial reform running alongside the formal and official one. In the formal reform, the idea and the performance of the reform was led by Naser-ed-Din Shah himself. In fact, although the Shah gave decision-making power in most "prominent issues of the country" to the *Maslahat-Khaneh*, and gave pursuing reforms to the ministers in the Council of State, he kept the right to interfere and make final decisions himself. Considering his permanent "Royal" rights and the fact that he had been repeatedly changing the governmental decisions based on his personal opinions, this decision of the Shah might be a sign of his personal interest and his attempt to play a role as the key reformer, rather than his effort to exercise his royal authority.

Yet, one of the most notable events in this period was the emergence of an unofficial, non-governmental reformative camp. In fact, besides the official, governmental, royal reforms that were operating by the Shah, there were some reformative actions in which Naser-ed-Din Shah did not play the key role (Elgar, 1990). The two main non-governmental reformative actions in this period were translating the social and political ideas outpouring from the West and establishing a missionary society called *Faramosh-Khaneh*. Mirza Malkum Khan's establishment of *Faramosh-Khaneh* was a major part of the non-governmental reform in this phase of reforms. Mirza Malkum Khan also had a significant role in the emergence of formal reforms by composing some reformative pamphlets. According to Malkum, Naser-ed-Din Shah

was informed about the emergence of these unofficial reforms (particularly establishing of Faramosh-Khaneh) and he approved (or at least was not opposed to) them. The letter of the Foreign Affairs Minister of Iran to his ambassador in Ottoman approves this claim of Malkum (for more information about Faramosh-Khaneh see: Adammiat, 2006; Amanat, 2004; Elgar, 1990; Katiraei, 1976; Kermani, 1983; Raeen, 1978; Shamim, 1996). However, as the previous reformative period, these reforms faced great oppositions and extreme reactions by clergymen, courtiers, and officials, which resulted in torture, arrest, and murder of the reformists.⁷

2.1. The Opponents of Naser-ed-Din Shah's Reforms

The focus of clergymen, as one of the opposition groups of the 1859-1862 reforms, was on Faramosh-Khaneh, which they considered as a centre for promoting anti-religious ideas. Haj Molla Ali Kani, the prominent clergyman in the Naseri era, was among the fierce opponents of Faramosh-Khaneh (Adamiyat, 2006; Amanat, 2004; PourAmini, 2000). The most important document remaining from the clergy in this period was an anonymous letter to the Shah (Raeen, 1978; Katiraei, 1976), believed by some scholars to have been written by Kani (Rajabi Davani, 2011),⁸ who also wrote a

letter in 1862 to the Shah to express his concerns and to object to the beliefs and rituals of Faramosh-Khaneh.

Regarding courtiers, the other opposition group in this reformative period, there is no first-hand documentation. In fact, some of the courtiers had joined Faramosh-Khaneh and the meetings were held in the house of one of the courtiers, Jalal ed-Din Mirza, the ceremonial chief of Faramosh-Khaneh (Amanat, 2004; Bamdad, 1992). Yet, the arguments of the courtier opponents of reform can be found in *Ebrat al-Nazerin va Ebrat al-Hazerin*, a book written in the Naseri era by a hawkish opponent of reform, Agha Ebrahim Novab Badaie' Negar (Adamiyat, 2006; Sasani, 2003). This book is the sum of the most radical arguments against reforms.⁹

In this reformative period, there is no confrontation with the formal reforms that were headed by the Shah or by officials, although there were some officials who tried to sabotage the reforms (Adammiat, 2006; Amanat, 2004; Benjamin, 1984; Elgar, 1990).¹⁰ In this period, the officials, as well as two other groups, mainly focus on Faramosh-Khaneh's instructions, and argue against the reforms. The most important first-hand document of officials who opposed the reform is an anonymous pamphlet, believed to have been written by Ali Monshi Tabrizi.

⁷In the second period of reforms in the Naseri era, unlike the first, there was no serious opposition against reforms by the women of royal harem. Or at the very least, there exists no historical evidence on this.

⁸For the FaramoshKhaneh Report see Katiraei 1976: 177-193.

⁹For Mirza Ebrahim Khan badaie' Negar's critics see Sasani 2003: 169-170.

¹⁰Mirza Yusuf Mustawfi al-Mamalik and Mirza Saeid Khan are among those who tried to sabotage the reforms (Adammiat 2006; Amanat 2004; Elgar 1990; Benjamin 1984).

This pamphlet was written in response to Malkum's "Ketabche-ye Faramosh-Khaneh" (handbook of Faramosh-Khaneh).¹¹

"Endangerment of Naser-ed-Din Shah's household" and "neglecting traditions by the reformer and his advocates" are the common arguments among the groups of opponents (clergymen, courtiers, and officials) in this reformative period. Two religious arguments, "opposition of reformative actions with Islam" and "negligence toward Islam by the reformer and/or his advocates" as well as other arguments such as "attempts to change the monarchy system", "homeland security disturbance", "neglecting the opponents' position and threatening their class benefits", "culture of westernisation in Iran", and "the personal manner of the reformer and his advocates" are offered by two groups of opponents. The rest of the arguments are merely suggested by one group of opponents.

As is clear, most of the arguments against the reform are political, followed by social and religious arguments. Most of the arguments in this period have been offered by clergymen and followed by courtiers. It is worth mentioning that since the reforms in this period mostly focused on the structure of the power (formal reforms) and the idea of modernity and the intellectual aspects of reforms (informal reforms), there are few financial arguments in this period and the opponents do not focus on their own class interests. Notably, depriving the heir

of power from power, one of the main arguments found in the informal reform, is absent from the formal reforms, since the reformer is the Shah himself.

2.2. The Advocates of Naser-ed-Din Shah's Reforms

As of the advocates of reforms, members of Faramosh-Khaneh, including some of the prominent figures among clergymen, courtiers, and officials, were the most significant advocates of reforms from 1859-1862. Hassan Ali Khan Garosi, Iran's ambassador to France is another advocate of reforms in this period, who had elaborated on Iran's achievement and the importance of reform in a letter to the Napoleon III.¹² Yet, the legendary reformist and the most significant advocate of reforms in this period was Mirza Malkum Khan, who wrote six pamphlets in defence of reforms from 1859-1862. Malkom had been influencing the Shah and his formal reform with his ideas stated in his book *Ketabcheye Ghaybi*, on the one hand, and leading the informal reforms on the other (Adamiyat, 2006; Amanat, 2004; Bamdad, 1992; Elgar, 1990; Elgar, 1977; Katiraei, 1976; Kermani, 1983; Malkom, 2002; Mostofi, 1998; Sasani, 2003; Sayex, 2001).

Most of the arguments by advocates in this period are political in nature. However,

¹¹For the text of this pamphlet see Raeen 1978: 556-560.

¹²For Hassan Ali Khan Garosi's letter to Napoleon III see Aledavood 2000: 297-299.

For Mirza Malkom Khan and Welford Scolen Belant see Elgar 1990: 12-14

For Malkom's defense of reform see: Malkom Khan, 2002.

for countering opponents' arguments, the advocates of reforms emphasised religious and social issues as well. Notably, the emphasis on Islam for defending the reform highlights the importance of religious discussion in opponents' counterarguments and its significant effect in conducting public opinion.

In the second reformative period in Naser-ed-Din Shah's era, ten out of fourteen arguments offered by the opponents were the opposition of reformative actions with Islam, financial corruption of the reformer and/or his advocates, homeland security disturbance, the danger of losing territorial integrity, neglecting the opponents' position and threatening their class benefits, neglecting people's rights, neglecting traditions, cultural westernisation of Iran, and the personal manner of the reformer and/or his advocates. The advocates did evoke the other four arguments, which included endangerment of Naser-ed-Din Shah's household, negligence toward Islam by the reformer and/or his advocates, colonisation of Iran, and the political dependency of the reformer and/or his advocates on foreign countries. However, the advocates were not successful in responding to one of the two crucial arguments of the opponents against the informal reform, namely the "endangerment of Naser-ed-Din Shah's household."

In this reformative period, just like during AmirKabir's, there is a lack of triple interactions among opponents, reformers, and advocates. Unlike the previous period of reforms, in which the advocates did not

counterargue against the opponents—and therefore the reformer himself had to defend his reforms—in this period, it was the reformer, Naser-ed-Din Shah himself, who did not offer any response to the critics of opponents. In fact, given the type of the oppositions that were focused on informal reforms, Malkum, as the most significant figures of reform, defended the reform.

Interestingly, in three reformative periods in the Naseri era, only in the informal reforms of 1858-1861 is there a dialogue between advocates and opponents. Although in this dialogue, just like the other cases, the first opponent (the writer of the report, Faramosh-Khaneh) writes a letter to the Shah and Malkum, as an advocate of reforms, and answers him, however indirectly. In the end, an official answered back to Malkum. In fact, it is only during this period that the whole attention did not focus on the Shah—instead of trying to just convince the Shah, both sides tried to answer each other. Choosing the audience of this informal dialogue is interesting as well: while the first one—the clergyman—chose the court and the Shah (indirectly) as his audience, Malkum wrote his letter for an unknown—*Jenab Agha* ("His Excellency", most likely Seyed Sadegh Tabatabaei, a famous clergyman who had been approved the establishment of Faramosh-Khaneh). The third one—the official—wrote his letter to the people. Yet, the failure of formal reformative attempts of the Shah as well as the informal reforms from 1859-1862 resulted in the arrest, torture, and murder of the reformists.

The Shah, as the reformer of the formal reforms in this period, pointed out in some of his letters that the performance and the attitude of the opponents focused on profit-oriented actions of courtiers and officials, their ignorance toward country's situation, and the false promises of courtiers and officials. The Shah addressed the political arguments (impracticality of courtiers) as well as the financial arguments (profit-oriented actions of opponents). Yet, in the informal reforms, the Shah had no role other than an informed advocator; therefore, he did not offer any arguments protecting the unofficial reforms (if any). Besides, the Shah as the highest position in the pyramid of power did not need any explanation for his wishes and it was expected from all individuals to "obey" his "majestic rules".¹³

3. Sepahsalar's Reforms

Nine years later, Naser-ed-Din Shah appointed Sepahsalar as the new Prime Minister of Iran.¹⁴ Sepahsalar, the third reformer in the Naseri era, had pursued plenty of reform movements in the period, such as establishing the board of state, empowering the army, determining a specific time and location for governmental affairs, empowering the industrial apparatus,

and financial reforms. He also focused on some cultural policies, like civil rights, empowering the *Dar ul-funun* (the first Iranian college), advocating public education in Dar ul-funun, and establishing new daily papers, which were unique in his time (Abbasi, 1993; Adamiyat, 2006; Bayani, 1978; Ceronin, 2010; Eetemad-ol-Saltaneh, 2000; Hedayat, 1996; Keddi, 2008; Mostofi, 1998; Saeidi Sirjani, 1983; Sasani, 2003; Sasani, 1975; Sedigh ol-Mamalek, 1987). However, Sepahsalar's reforms were not exempt from the extreme opposition that eventually forced him to resign due to the widespread protests of the courtiers, elites, clergymen, the women of the royal harem,¹⁵ the foreign embassies (particularly Russia), and at times, the public.

3.1. The Opponents of Sepahsalar's Reforms

The clergymen, who viewed this reform as an attempt for westernising Iran, were undoubtedly one of the most influential opponents of Sepahsalar's reforms. Regulating the judiciary system, reducing the appointment of clergymen as judges, and prohibiting physical punishment were among Sepahsalar's programs that directly and indirectly reduced the power of the clergy and put them on the list of opponents.

¹³For Naser-ed-Din Shah's letter to Malkom see Teymori 1978: 15

For Naser-ed-Din Shah's letter regarding reforms see Teymori 1978: 2-5

¹⁴Four years prior to this time, the title and status of Prime Minister was brought back to Iran's political system.

¹⁵Although Anis-od-Doleh, the wife of the Shah, is known as one of the most influential opponents of Sepahsalar, due to lack of written arguments against the reform by her, the women of harem are not rostered among the opponents of reform in this reformative period.

Further igniting their opposition was Sepahsalar's attempt to manage the Shah's travel to Europe, his focus on freedom, and the Reuter concession¹⁶ (Benjamin, 1984; Curzon, 2001; Elgar, 1977; Kermani, 1983; Serena, 1983; Teymori, 1978). Although the clergy considered Sepahsalar and his consultant team anti-Islamic, their opposition was not merely concentrated on religious arguments. They offered other arguments, including the focus on national financial interests and the endangerment of Iran's territorial integrity. Molla Ali Kani, the prominent cleric and the prayer Imam of Tehran, can be considered as the most influential opponents of Sepahsalar who expressed opposition to his reforms in a letter to the Shah, right after Sepahsalar's involuntary resignation.¹⁷

As of the courtier opponents, Farhad Mirza Moatamed od-Doleh (the Shah's uncle) and Masoud Mirza Zel ol-Soltan (the Shah's son) are among those who offered arguments against Sepahsalar and his reforms (Adamiyat, 2006; AleDavood, 1992; Bamdad, 1992). Unlike Farhad Mirza, however, Zel-ol-Soltan's (1983) arguments were presented years later in his personal journals.¹⁸

Regarding the officials, many of them opposed Sepahsalar. Mohammad Hasan Khan Eetemad ol-Saltaneh wrote one of

the most important (of the few) written arguments by the officials against Sepahsalar (Eetemad-ol-Saltaneh, 1978a; Eetemad-ol-Saltaneh, 2000; Sasani, 2003). The Reuter Concession and the railways contract were among the main reasons given by Eetemad al-Saltaneh for his opposition against reforms. In a letter attributed to Eetemad-ol-Saltaneh, written right after Molla Ali Kani's letter to the Shah, he highlighted every aspect of the contract he considered a catastrophe for Iran. Further, in his personal journal, Eetemad ol-Saltaneh enumerated his differences with Sepahsalar, at times harshly criticising him (Eetemad ol-Saltaneh, 2000).¹⁹

Most of the arguments of opponents in this period were political and financial in character and concern the Reuter concession as one of the most important causes of opposition against Sepahsalar. The social and religious arguments are not highlighted in this period despite the presence of Molla Ali Kani, the most powerful clergyman, and an active and vocal opponent.²⁰ "Financial performance of the reformer and/or his advocates", "endangerment of Naser-ed-Din Shah's household", and "neglecting the opponents' position and threatening

¹⁶Mirza Agha Saleh Arab and Haj Molla Ali Kani are among the most important figures who opposed the prime minister's reforms.

¹⁷For Molla Ali Kani's letter to the Shah see: Teymori: 1978: 124-126

¹⁸For Farhad Mirza's letter to the Shah see: Teymori: 1978: 129.

¹⁹For critics of Eetemad-ol-Saltaneh regarding Sepahsalar's reform see Eetemad-ol-Saltaneh 1978a: 97-111.

For Eetemad-ol-Saltaneh's letter to the Shah regarding the Reuter concession see: Teymori: 1978: 126-129.

²⁰Although Anis-od-Doleh, the wife of the Shah, is known as one of the most influential opponents of Sepahsalar, due to lack of written arguments against the reform by her, the women of the harem are not rostered among the opponents of reform in this reformative period.

their class benefits” are the arguments offered by all the opposition groups during this reformative period and are the most important in ordinal comparison. The next important arguments, which were offered by two opposition groups, are “the opposition of reformative actions with Islam”, “financial corruption of the reformer and/or his advocates”, “depriving the heir of power”, “the intervention of aliens in Iran”, “the danger of losing territorial integrity of Iran”, “colonisation of Iran”, “neglecting the traditions by the reformer and/or his advocates”, and “cultural westernisation of Iran”. Finally, “reformer’s attempts to abolish the Qajar dynasty”, “reformer’s attempts to change the monarch system”, “homeland security disturbance”, “political dependency of the reformer and/or his advocates on foreign countries”, and “neglecting the people’s rights” are the arguments offered by just one of the opposition groups.

Regardless of the performance of the reformer in these three periods, the arguments of opponents in the 1871-1873 reformative period compared to the preceding two periods of reform in the Naser-ed-Din Shah era are the most calculated. In this period, opponents offer different political, social, financial, and religious arguments against the reformer and, at the same time, had the foresight not to act on their own class and group interests—unlike the opponents in AmirKabir’s era, for example. In the reformative period of Sepahsalar, “financial performance of the reformer and/or his

advocates” and “endangerment of Naser-ed-Din Shah’s household” are two arguments that the reformer and his advocates argued against. Notably, these two arguments, along with “neglecting the opponents’ position” and “threatening their class benefits” are the most important arguments in ordinal comparison of oppositions’ groups in this period.

3.2. The Advocates of Sepahsalar’s Reform

As Flour (1987) states, the influence of reformists like Malkum Khan, Yousef Khan, and Akhondzade in Sepahsalar’s reforms is obvious. These reformers, along with Majd ol-molk, in their books, pamphlets, and letters emphasised the importance and necessity of reforms; yet, these emphases do not necessarily indicate that these reformists supported Sepahsalar’s reforms. However, although the Prime Minister had some advocates and subordinates, when he faced the serious accusations of critics, his advocates had no power or voice to defend him. Some, such as Naser-ol-Molk, left him to join the opponents, while others, including his own brother (Yahya Khan Moatamed-ol-Molk), remained silent and did not defend the reforms (Bamdad, 1992). At some point, the line between Sepahsalar’s advocates and opponents was vague: some who were recognised by their defence of reformative actions retracted their support later (Bamdad, 1992; Malekara, 1976).

The advocates of reform in this reformative period responded to four

criticisms among nineteen arguments of opponents. Although the quantity of the reformer's (and his advocates) responses are not significant in number, they address three of the most important critiques given by opponents: "financial performance of the reformer", "endangerment of Naser-ed-Din Shah's household", and "neglecting the opponents' position and threatening their class benefits". However, the reformer and his advocates failed to answer the second most important criticism of opponents; that is, "homeland security disturbance", "attempts to change the monarch system", "attempts to abolish the Qajar dynasty", "the opposition of reformative actions with Islam", "the absolute power of the reformer", "the intervention of aliens in Iran", and "colonisation of Iran". The failure to address these criticisms led to the dismissal of Sepahsalar after his return to Iran from significant travel with the Shah. In fact, it seems that the emphasis of opponents on religious arguments (the opposition of reformative actions with Islam) and the governmental arguments (reformer's attempts to change the monarch system and to abolish Qajar dynasty) disarmed the Shah in defending his Prime Minister and resulted in the failure of the third reformative period in the Naser-ed-Din Shah era.

As discussed above, during the reforms from 1871 to 1873, the arguments of the advocates focused on the necessity of the reform and did not offer any arguments against opponents' performances and attitudes. These arguments were generally political and there was no religious reasoning

among oppositions' arguments.²¹ One of the most significant points regarding the advocates is Malkum's silence during this period, given that in the previous reformative period (1858-1861), he supported the reforms by writing pamphlets in addition to detracting the opposition by writing letters. During Sepahsalar's reformative period, however, Malkum (the formal consultant of Sepahsalar) withheld his opinion and did not write any pamphlets in his defence.

As for the reformer, Sepahsalar tended to answer the critiques of his opponents, either as the Prime Minister or when he was the War or Foreign Minister. In his many letters to the Shah, he responded to his critics by offering reasons for conducting reforms, by refusing the accusations, or by highlighting the same critiques in the opposition's own behaviour. Although Sepahsalar responded to ten critiques of his opponents, he remained silent on the other nine. Still, compared to other reformers in the Naser-ed-Din Shah's era, Sepahsalar is somewhat more successful in stating the importance of the reforms, in addition to conducting them. He addressed the three most frequent critiques given by opponent groups and defended his reforms, including

²¹For Garosi's letter to Malkom see Adamiyat 2006: 157-158.

For the letter of officials and courtiers' council for approving Reuter concession see Teymori 1978: 105. For Malkom's letter to the Foreign Ministry of Iran see Sasani 2003: 163-164.

For the letter of a group of officials to the Shah regarding the great famine of 1870-1871 see Abbasi 1993: 30

“financial performance of the reformer and/or his advocates”, “endangerment of Naser-ed-Din Shah’s household”, and “neglecting the opponents’ position and threatening their class benefits”. Further, Sepahsalar alluded to the financial benefits of the opposition elites and the endangerment of these benefits in his term as the Prime Minister.²²

CONCLUSIONS

Comparative Analysis of Reformers, Advocates, and Opponents of Reforms

This article adopts rational choice theory as its framework in the analysis of the process of reforms in 19th century Iran. By using rational choice theory, this article was enabled to go beyond the mainstream narratives of Iran scholars who claim that opponents of these reforms were merely reactionaries. Therefore, focusing on the arguments of opponents and advocates of these reforms and assuming them as rational actors, this article has shown their progressive and backward rational choices. For analysing the arguments of the opponents of reform in these three reformative periods—AmirKabir’s reforms (1848-1851), Naser-ed-Din Shah’s reforms (1858-1861), and Sepahsalar’s reforms

(1871-1873) — this article focuses on a combination of opponents’ arguments.²³ In nominal comparison, the existence/absence of arguments in the three periods is analysed to understand the arguments that were most influential. This analysis continues by assessing the similar arguments offered by at least one of the opponent groups in each period of reforms in the Naseri era.

The most common arguments which were seen in all the periods of reform include endangerment of Naser-ed-Din Shah’s household, homeland security disturbance, the danger of losing territorial integrity of Iran, the reformer’s political dependency on foreign countries, neglecting the opponents’ position and threatening their class benefits, neglecting the people’s rights, neglecting traditions by reformer and/or his advocates, and personal manner of the reformer and/or his advocates. The other arguments are omitted in this analysis due to their absence in at least one of the reformative periods.

As mentioned before, most of the existing analytical and historical analyses focus on the backwardness of the opponents and consider them to be passive reactioners who chase their own financial and even sexual desires. Interestingly, the only reactionary arguments offered by the

²²For Sepahsalar’s letter to the Shah see the following: Abbasi: 128; Abbasi: 53; Abbasi 1993: 37; Abbasi 1993: 53-54; Abbasi 1993: 86-87; Abbasi 1993: 87; Abbasi 1993: 44-45; Abbasi 1993: 68; Abbasi 1993: 79; Abbasi 1993: 91-93; Teymori 1978: 41; Teymori 1978: 43-46; Teymori 1978: 47-48; Abbasi 1993: 84; Abbasi 1993: 99-100. For Sepahsalar’s letter to Malkom see Sasani 2003: 110-114

²³Despite the absence of three groups of opponents in the list of opponent groups/reforms, since the purpose is the assessment of a collection of arguments in a general group as opponents, this absence does not disturb analyzing the arguments. In fact, in these three reformative periods, the arguments of one group affects the arguments of other opponent groups and forms the trend of opposing the reform in general.

opponents are “neglecting the opponents’ position and threatening their class benefits” and “neglecting traditions by the reformer and/or his advocates”. In fact, the opponents of reforms, consciously, offered many well-reasoned arguments against reforms, and often tried to argue that reforms were a threat to Iran politically, financially, and culturally.

Assessing the repetition of opposition arguments in these reforms results in an ordinal comparison. Based on the number of groups that had mentioned one specific argument in these three reforms, these are the most repetitive arguments:²⁴ “endangerment of Naser-ed-Din Shah’s household”, “neglecting the opponents’ position and threatening their class benefits”, “neglecting traditions by the reformer and/or his advocates”, and “personal manner of the reformer and/or his advocates”. Next to these arguments in importance are those that were repeated by at least four groups in these three periods: “the opposition of reformative actions with Islam”, “financial performance of the reformer and/or his advocates”, “depriving the heir of power”, “homeland security disturbance”, “the

absolute power of the reformer”, “the danger of losing territorial integrity of Iran”, “neglecting the people’s rights”, and “cultural westernisation of Iran.” Finally, the least common arguments are: “the negligence toward Islam by the reformer and/or his advocates”, “financial corruption of the reformer and/or his advocates”, “neglecting the financial benefits of elites”, “attempts to abolish the Qajar dynasty”, “the intervention of aliens in Iran”, “attempts to change the monarch system”, “colonisation of Iran”, “political dependency of the reformer and/or his advocates on foreign countries”, and “the humble social status of the reformer and/or his advocates”. Although at least one group of opponents in one of the three reforms in Naser-ed-Din Shah’s era focused on these arguments, the other groups of opponents were reluctant to mention them.

The arguments “the opposition of the reformative actions with Islam”, “financial performance of the reformer and/or his advocates”, “depriving the heir of power”, “absolute power of the reformer”, and “cultural westernisation of Iran” has been eliminated from the nominal comparison due to their absence in one of the reformative periods. They remain in the ordinal comparison, however, because of the repetition of these arguments in other reformative periods.

In analysing the arguments of advocates of reforms, there were no arguments from the advocates of AmirKabir’s reform. Therefore, the comparison of advocates of reforms in these three reform periods

²⁴If all the opponent groups in these three reformative periods offered one specific argument, that argument in the ordinal comparison would have received nine (three opponent groups in each of the three reformative periods). However, it is crucial to notice that the numbers offered here are not real and do not demonstrate the repetition of arguments in “each” of opponent groups. But they merely reveal that a specific argument has been offered by the number of opposing groups, including clergymen, courtiers, officials, and women of the harem.

is not possible. However, comparing the arguments of advocates in the other two reform periods (the Shah's and Sepahsalar's) shows that the arguments of advocates in Sepahsalar's era are more concentrated on the repetitive arguments of the opponents. However, these arguments are fewer in number compared to the arguments of advocates of the Shah's reforms. The convincing arguments of Sepahsalar's reform advocates are one of the most important reasons that Sepahsalar came back to power as the Minister of Foreign Affairs fifty days after his dismissal—unlike the other two reform periods in the Naseri era, in which the failure of the reforms resulted in the death or imprisonment of the reformer and/or his advocates.²⁵ Besides, compared to AmirKabir and Naser-ed-Din Shah, Sepahsalar offered more accurate arguments in defence of his reforms, responding to the critiques, and criticising them back. However, there was no common argument among reforms in the Naseri era and, as a result, analysing the common arguments is not possible.

Thus, assessing the triple relation of the reformers, opponents, and advocates of reforms, in two of three periods of reforms in the Naseri era (reforms of AmirKabir and reforms of Naser-ed-Din Shah), there

was no mutual counterargument among advocates and reformers to retreat the oppositions. It was only during Sepahsalar's period that both the reformer and advocates of reforms responded to the arguments of opponents. Therefore, although all of these short-term reforms failed, considering the results of the first reform (which led to the exile and murder of the reformer) and the second reform (which ended in the exile, imprisonment, and murder of some of the advocates), the return of Sepahsalar to power highlights the importance of the ability of the reformer and his advocates to respond to the opposition. In fact, the integration of the reformer and advocates in response to powerful opponents gave power to the Shah to stand against the pressure of the opponents (by insuring his own status).

Therefore, in the three reformative periods during the Naser-ed-Din Shah era, whenever the reformer and advocates both were successful in offering arguments and responding to at least a part of the arguments, the chance of the continuance of reformative ideas persisted, such as when Sepahsalar followed some of his reformative efforts as the Minister of State.²⁶

²⁵In some of the arguments offered by opponents and advocates of reforms, the transposition time has not been considered. But since these arguments are not the only ones discussed, and since they are merely some of the many arguments, this non-linear narrative has no effect on analyzing the arguments of reforms in these three reformative periods.

²⁶It is not merely the accountability that saves the life of the reformer and his advocates—there are other factors involved in this process including protection from foreign embassies. Further, the accountability of the reformer had, perhaps, been facilitated by the social condition in which the advocates of reforms and the reformer found the courage to support the reforms and to emphasize their achievements. However, this article is focused on the arguments offered by the opponents and advocates of reforms in these three reformative periods, and consciously ignores the other elements.

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