No sooner had the ancien régime fallen in Iran in 1979, than cracks began to appear in the revolutionary unity that had brought it down. Questions over the ideological content of the new regime and its economic and cultural path, as well as its foreign-policy course, deeply divided factions that had joined forces against the shah under the charismatic leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini. The interregnum between the fall of the shah in February 1979 and June 1981, when the radical clergy overcame internal opposition, was marked by divided government and fierce factionalism. From February to November 1979, the provisional government of Mehdi Bazargan ruled the country alongside the Islamic Revolutionary Council, predominantly under the influence of radical clergy.

The moderates held key positions in the provisional government that was introduced a few days before the downfall of the Pahlavi regime. The principals were mostly members of the Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI). Bazargan’s government represented bourgeois interests and was the major force behind undermining efforts to effect a social revolution. As a class struggle over land reform, workers councils and nationalization of foreign trade was set in motion after the revolution, the provisional government emerged as the main challenge to radicals and their foreign-policy and economic plans. The radical bloc was composed of Islamist factions, most notably the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) and Khat-i seh (Third Line), as well as a constellation of leftist groups that were struggling against the moderates for influence. Two prominent radical clerics were Ayatollah Husayn Ali Montazeri and Ayatollah Mohammad Husayn Beheshti, the founder and secretary general of the IRP. While Beheshti was trying to organize religious forces in the IRP and pursue revolutionary measures through the party, Ayatollah Montazeri remained independent, seeking to carry out his radical visions above the ongoing factionalism. Yet he was considered the de facto leader of Khat-i seh, a loose concentration of radical clergy who were not in the IRP; nor did they support the moderates.

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in the Bazargan and Bani-Sadr governments. Montazeri advocated establishing ties with freedom movements and creating an Islamist International. His high revolutionary credentials and jurisprudential status inside the seminaries made Ayatollah Montazeri the only prominent cleric who backed radical economic reforms and advocated exporting revolution.

In the 1979-81 period, friction between revolutionary organs and the state apparatus was a major manifestation of factional rivalry between moderates and radicals. Moderates in the Bazargan government wanted to act within the existing bureaucracy, while radicals sought to by-pass them by consolidating revolutionary institutions that worked side by side with governmental entities. The struggle over control of the nascent revolutionary institutions and the state apparatus had a lasting impact on the new regime’s foreign policy. Moderates and radicals envisaged contradictory approaches towards international and regional issues and exploited their influence inside state and revolutionary institutions to advance their agendas regarding Syria, Lebanon and other entities. Henceforth struggle over foreign policy was an integral part of the factionalism of the early years of the revolution.

**BAZARGAN’S FOREIGN POLICY**

After the revolution, radicals and moderates fought to control foreign policy. During the 1979-81 reign of moderates, issues such as relations with the United States, the export of the revolution and support for freedom movements were extremely divisive.

While being critical of the shah’s alliance with the United States, Mehdi Bazargan, his nationalist allies such as Karim Sanjabi and figures like Ibrahim Yazdi, Sadeq Qotbzadeh and Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr were never committed anti-Americans. Indeed, these men sought a reasonable relationship with the United States and viewed the Soviet Union as a greater threat to Iran’s security and independence.

Moderates in the Bazargan and Bani-Sadr governments shaped their policy towards the Great Powers based on nonalignment and an emphasis on avoiding problems in state-to-state relations. In contrast, radicals criticized the neutral stance of the provisional government and its effort to thwart their attempts to establish connections with freedom movements and revolutionary forces around the world. They believed that the provisional government, under the influence of the Amal movement in southern Lebanon, was not inclined to support the Palestinian resistance or establish strong ties with revolutionary countries like Libya. “The provisional government, in fact, wanted to rule,” says Ayatollah Husayn Ali Montazeri. “In their minds, they believed that we have to comply and come to terms with all the governments in the world. [They said that] this sort of revolution that you are talking about hinders the consolidation of the government.”

The Bazargan government fell in the wake of the occupation of the U.S. embassy in November 1979, marking the early decline of moderate liberals vis-à-vis their assertive clerical opposition. The capture of the embassy and the subsequent support of Ayatollah Khomeini and radical factions for the student captors not only aimed to eliminate the U.S. presence; it was also a consequence of internal calculations. It was indeed an opportunity for the radical clergy to enervate the moderates and take the initiative vis-à-vis the leftist groups that...
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categorically depicted the clerical factions as reactionary and only ostensibly anti-imperialist.\textsuperscript{13} The seizure of American hostages radicalized the political sphere and transformed the character of Iran’s foreign relations. In the words of Mehdi Bazargan, it altered the Khomeini regime’s stance from “defensive” to “confrontational.”\textsuperscript{14}

LEBANON

From the very beginning, Lebanon was of central importance, not only to the international approach of the “Islamic revolution,” but also to the factional rivalries inside the Islamic Republic. The historical ties between Iran and the Lebanese Shia, as well as the geostrategic importance of Lebanon and its proximity to Israel, made this small Mediterranean country a natural regional platform for the international goals and rhetoric of the Islamic revolution.

The constitution of the revolutionary regime articulates such international rhetoric and slogans through emphasizing “a single world community.” It depicts the Islamic revolution as “a movement aimed at the triumph of all the mustaz a芬 (deprived), over the mustakbarin (arrogant oppressors).”\textsuperscript{15} As Ayatollah Montazeri, the head of the Constitutional Assembly (August-November 1979), describes the general rationale at the time, “Our government was Islamic, and Islam recognizes no border.”\textsuperscript{16} In this vein, Lebanon, with a sizable Shia population and host to the politico-military infrastructure of the PLO, was considered a prime ground for revolutionary aspirations in Iran. Figures that advocated the idea of exporting revolution saw Lebanon as pivotal to their goal. “Syria and Lebanon were the springboard for promulgating the revolution,” says Ali Akbar Muhtashami, who played a key role in founding Hezbollah years later. “If it were not for those activities in Syria and Lebanon, exporting the revolution might have been left unmaterialized as a chimerical aspiration.”\textsuperscript{17}

The Islamic dimension of the 1979 revolution provided a model of resistance for Muslims, in particular the disinherited Shia in Lebanon,\textsuperscript{18} whose ties to Iran extended centuries back to the Safavids’ relations with Shia scholars from Jabal Amil.\textsuperscript{19} After the revolution, in popular speeches on its regional role, this old tie was brought up as a reference point. When Mustafa Chamran returned to Iran, in his public speeches, he pointedly introduced himself as arriving from Jabal Amil “whose people throughout the 1,400-year history of Islam have been under constant suppression.”\textsuperscript{20} In the same vein, Mohammad Montazeri, who led the Iranian volunteers to Syria and Lebanon to take part in battles against Israeli occupation forces, depicted the move as “a traverse to the land of Jabal Amil, where our civilization originates.”\textsuperscript{21}

However, this attitude towards Lebanon did not gain a consensus in Iran and even added fuel to internal disagreements. Revolutionary Iranians watched the Lebanese arena and Amal-Palestinian confrontations through their own pre-revolution experience and background in Lebanon, envisaging contradictory approaches for the new regime’s policy towards Lebanon. Individuals like Jalaleddin Farsi, Mustafa Chamran, Ibrahim Yazdi, Abbas Zamani, Ali Akbar Muhtashami and Mohammad Montazeri, who influenced Iranian policy towards Lebanon, had chosen their allies from different warring factions in Lebanon based on their own ideological background and reading of the internal Lebanese situation. In essence, the dispute in Tehran at that time was over the question of who was eligible to be the main Iranian
Sadr invited Mustafa Chamran to Lebanon to manage the technical school he had established for the Shia in Tyre. During his tenure in the foreign ministry, Yazdi was the target of the sharpest criticism from radicals and the PLO. This animosity deepened, particularly following his decision to assign pro-Amal individuals to the Iranian embassy in Beirut. Another pro-Amal figure in the provisional government was Musa Sadr’s nephew, Sadeq Tabatabai, who became government spokesman in early July. He was a staunch anti-Libyan figure.

Outside the provisional government, Sadeq Qotbzaadeh, the head of the national radio and television, sympathized with Amal. He was a member of LMI and before 1979 worked in association with Chamran and Yazdi in the United States. Because of his close ties with Musa Sadr, Ayatollah Khomeini had assigned him to a follow-up mission to inquire into the fate of the Lebanese Shia leader after his disappearance in August 1978. Following the fall of the Bazargan government, Qotbzaadeh, who had parted ways with Bazargan, was appointed to the foreign ministry, where he remained active in undermining the radical clergy’s efforts to warm relations with Libya and dispatch revolutionary forces to Lebanon. By and large, the pro-Amal tendency of these figures and their approach to relations with Libyans and Palestinians gained them fame as “Amal supporters” (Amalistha) in Iran.

At another level, the warp and woof of ties between the LMI, which controlled the provisional government, and Amal were woven through the ideological affinity of the two groups. Both LMI and Amal had a strong anti-left stance, and both were in essence reformist rather than revolutionary. Amal inherited its reformist tradition from

**OLD TIES WITH AMAL**

LMI members who held key positions inside the provisional government, along with several conservative figures, were in favor of close relations with the Amal movement. They all had significant experience in Lebanon, and their cordial ties with Amal and its founder, Musa Sadr, traced back to the 1960s and ’70s.

The most prominent pro-Amal figure in the provisional government was Mustafa Chamran, Bazargan’s defense minister. Chamran was even a member of Amal, and his residence in Lebanon from 1971 to 1979 afforded him strong ties with the movement’s leaders and a close relationship with Musa Sadr. During the final two days before the collapse of the imperial regime, Chamran organized 500 Amal militants to fly to Tehran via Damascus to take part in street combat against the disheartened forces of the shah. However, he did not return to Iran until February 17, 1979, when he entered with a delegation from the Amal movement and the Lebanese Shia Higher Council to meet with Ayatollah Khomeini in Qom. After the disappearance of Musa Sadr, Chamran held considerable influence inside the movement; his departure came as a disappointment to many of Amal’s rank and file, who saw him as a potential successor to Musa Sadr.

Ibrahim Yazdi, who was deputy prime minister in charge of revolutionary affairs and later foreign minister in the Bazargan government, was also a friend of Musa Sadr and backed Amal’s position. His close ties with the Sadr family, according to Musa Sadr’s sister, gave Yazdi a status as significant as Chamran’s. Based on Yazdi’s advice, in the early 1970s, Musa Sadr invited Mustafa Chamran to Lebanon to manage the technical school he had established for the Shia in Tyre. During his tenure in the foreign ministry, Yazdi was the target of the sharpest criticism from radicals and the PLO. This animosity deepened, particularly following his decision to assign pro-Amal individuals to the Iranian embassy in Beirut. Another pro-Amal figure in the provisional government was Musa Sadr’s nephew, Sadeq Tabatabai, who became government spokesman in early July. He was a staunch anti-Libyan figure.

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Musa Sadr, whose main goal was improving the status of the Lebanese Shia within the sectarian system of Lebanon. Unlike the Lebanese National Movement and leftists groups, which posed as alternatives to the Lebanese state, Amal sought entrenchment in Lebanon’s confessional politics. Contrary to what radicals in Tehran envisaged, the preeminent Lebanese ideology of the Amal movement necessitated a separation between the Lebanese crisis and regional trends. This clearly meshed with the political agenda of moderates in Iran, who were neither desirous of exporting revolution nor supportive of the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon.

PRO-PALESTINIAN REVOLUTIONARIES

Conflict over Amal and the PLO characterized much of the foreign-policy debate between moderates and radicals under Bazargan. The radicals and the PLO saw Bazargan’s government as pro-American and believed that its approach to Lebanon and hostile stance towards the Palestinian resistance were influenced by Amal. Among the pro-Palestinian radicals, Mohammad Montazeri was a principal player. He was an internationalist whose strong personality, self-effacing demeanor and high revolutionary credentials made him popular with both Iranian revolutionaries and Palestinian and Lebanese radicals.

The young cleric began his anti-shah activities when he was still a teenager; he was imprisoned and tortured many times by SAVAK. In the late 1960s, he fled to Pakistan and then to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, where he made connections with Islamist and revolutionary groups including the PLO. In Syria and Lebanon, he set up a network in association with the PLO to recruit Iranian and Afghan activists for military training and to transfer arms to anti-shah groups in Iran and revolutionary forces in the Middle East, as well as to finance and facilitate their operations and movements across the region and even into Europe.

After the 1979 revolution, to maintain and strengthen these ties, Montazeri established the Revolutionary Organization of the Masses of the Islamic Republic, or SATJA, and the Freedom Movements Unit in the Revolutionary Guards (RG). “Mohammad [Montazeri] argued that as the revolutionaries such as the Palestinians supported us [before the Revolution], it falls on us to support them too,” recounts Abbas Zamani, an associate of Montazeri at the time. He sought an Iranian revolutionary presence in Lebanon and made the first bid to dispatch Iranians to southern Lebanon in cooperation with Fatah. Like many other radicals such as Zamani, Muhtashami and Farsi, the young cleric was intimately involved in the Lebanese arena, had strong ties with the PLO, and abhorred Amal’s non-revolutionary and anti-Palestinian vision. Politically, all these figures — except Farsi, who was a member of the IRP — were considered part of Khat-i seh and acted under Ayatollah Montazeri’s tutelage.

Abbas Zamani, also known as Abu Sharif, worked in association with Mohammad Montazeri and other radicals in Lebanon. His sobriquet, Abu Sharif, was inherited from Lebanon, where he resided in Bourj al-Barajneh camp between 1970 and 1979. In the camp, he set up a network to recruit Iranians for arms training in the Palestinian camps. Later, as a founding member of the RG, he kept his close ties with Mohammad Montazeri and Sayyid Mehdi Hashemi at the Freedom Movements office.
Another pro-Palestinian was Jalaleddin Farsi, whose relationship with the PLO, like Abu Sharif’s, originated in Lebanon, where he resided between 1970 and 1972. He was one of the most fiery critics of the anti-Palestinian attitudes of Musa Sadr and Chamran. In a book of memoirs on Lebanon, he flatly accused Sadr and Chamran of being anti-Palestinian.

The pro-Palestinian faction enjoyed the backing of some members of Ayatollah Khomeini’s office, in particular his favored grandson, Sayyid Husayn Khomeini, and Shaykh Mohammad Sadeq Khalkali. They lambasted the foreign policy of Bazargan’s government and the conservative economic approach of moderates, advocating strong ties with the PLO and Qadhafi. A few months after the fall of the shah, during a visit to southern Lebanon, Khalkali claimed that Imam Musa Sadr had been killed in Rome and that efforts had been made to conceal his body. Their stance was extremely annoying to Amal leaders, who held Qadhafi responsible for Sadr’s disappearance. “Mr. Khalkali and Mr. Husayn Khomeini were leading efforts to tarnish relations between Amal and Iran,” explains Rubab Sadr; “They caused much damage to the issue of Imam Musa Sadr and Amal’s relations with Iran.”

MONTAZERI AND THE ISLAMIST INTERNATIONAL

In the early years of revolution, Mohammad Montazeri was the most outspoken critic of the “non-revolutionary” foreign policy of the provisional government and a staunch proponent of exporting the revolution. He argued that if the revolution were not promoted beyond Iran’s borders and strong ties established with revolutionary countries and movements, the revolution would be besieged by enemies. Indeed, within the ranks of the clergy at a time of chaos and turbulence, when they lacked organization and unity, Montazeri was one of the few clergymen with a concrete vision for organizing revolutionary forces. Establishment of the SATJA was one move in this direction. The vast network of ties with leftist and anti-establishment groups in other countries that he built from long years of pre-revolution activities laid the foundation for his quest after the revolution.

SATJA was a hub for organizing Iranian and non-Iranian revolutionary forces and the provenance of the Freedom Movements Unit in the RG. It was also the headquarters for organizing volunteers to be dispatched to the battle front in southern Lebanon. As “an international party,” in the words of Said Montazeri, SATJA was established to embody the concept of an Islamist International, which Mohammad Montazeri had been promoting from the beginning of his anti-shah activities in 1963. Other than Palestinians and Lebanese, Afghan, Eritrean, Irish and Filipino activists, individuals from Latin America and members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Western Sahara’s Polisario frequented the SATJA office.

Mohammad Montazeri, known among Palestinians by his sobriquet, Abu Ahmad, attached great importance — in the eyes of his critics, excessive importance — to Palestinian resistance and the PLO. This was not merely ideological; it also stemmed from operational and practical considerations. The PLO was resourceful and had very well-trained and adroit cadres. Their intelligence apparatus was also strong; Palestinians were always a source of information for Montazeri, who intended to use their experience to establish revolutionary institutions in Iran. “Palest-
tinians had very good knowledge of the region and Arab governments, and [in his eyes] this was one of the values of working with Palestinians,” explains an associate. Indeed, such capabilities, and not exclusively ideological factors, were behind the creation of strong ties between anti-shah radicals and the PLO before 1979.

Radicals chose their allies in the Arab world by embracing a PLO that was responsible, in the eyes of Amal leaders and their Iranian supporters, for creating divisions between the Islamic Republic and the Shia movement. As Musa Sadr’s sister says, “The Palestinians, and in fact al-Fatah, after Imam Musa Sadr’s [disappearance] began propaganda and slander against Amal.” On the other hand, radicals believed that the provisional government under the influence of its ties with Amal had failed to support the Palestinian cause and play a proper role in this regard. “When we invited Palestinians to Iran and asked them to train the Revolutionary Guards, the interim government objected,” says the first commander of the RG. “This stance was a reflection of Musa Sadr in Lebanon.”

THE FIRST BID IN LEBANON

December 1979 was a turning point in the Islamic Republic’s relations with Syria and Lebanon. Iranian volunteers, who were organized by SATJA, arrived in Damascus to take part in resistance operations alongside Palestinian forces in southern Lebanon. This initiative eventually failed to achieve its goal; however, it became a precursor to the Islamic Republic’s involvement in Lebanon and the posting of Revolutionary Guards to the Bekaa Valley two years later.

Dispatching the volunteers brought about a chain reaction in Iran, Lebanon, Syria and the PLO. It was engineered by Mohammad Montazeri and executed through Fatah and pro-Palestinian individuals in Lebanon. While the Lebanese government and the Amal movement were firmly opposed, both the Syrian government and Fatah tried to circumscribe the initiative. Neither Yasser Arafat nor President Hafez al-Assad, who agreed to stationing the volunteers at Fatah bases in Syria, yielded to Iranian pressure to open the Lebanese front to the impassioned volunteers. “Mohammad Montazeri was acting above the predominant equation in Lebanon,” says Inis al-Naqqash, a liaison between Fatah and the volunteers. “Both Assad and Arafat were concerned about whom he was going to side with in Lebanon.”

In Iran, the volunteers initially went through preparation and military training in Bagh-i Aqdasiye, a SATJA base in Tehran. After a few weeks, they flew to Syria in different stages. The mission was carried out in an increasingly radicalized milieu, following the seizure of the American embassy, which was sanctified by Ayatollah Khomeini as the Second Revolution and the fall of provisional government. However, pro-Amal figures like Sadeq Tabatabai, who was in charge of the prime minister’s office, and Qotbzadeh, who replaced Yazdi in the foreign ministry, were still in influential positions to hamper the mission.

The government, emboldened by the ambivalent position of the Revolutionary Council, stopped the first group of 280 volunteers at the airport and did not allow them to board a plane for one week. The ostensible reason, according to the officials, was that the volunteers could not leave until they paid the exit toll. Montazeri, enraged by their decision, argued that most of the volunteers came from poor backgrounds and were not going on a lav-
ish trip. This led to a sit-in inside the airport and in front of the Foreign Ministry, which was headed by the acting foreign minister, Sadeq Qotbzadeh.

Disputes over paying the exit toll went on for days, and Montazeri’s meetings with Qotbzadeh and other officials were futile. Facing the defiant officials, members of SATJA made a statement threatening the government that, if they hindered their trip, they would have “recourse to revolutionary measures” to solve the issue and go to southern Lebanon. Finally, money was obtained from various sources, including donations from people who attended Friday prayers; only after that were volunteers allowed to depart the country. Despite the final acquiescence, Foreign Minister Qotbzadeh contacted the Lebanese ambassador to Tehran, Fuad al-Turk, to inform him that the Iranian government was not a party to the initiative and would not pressure the Lebanese government to admit the volunteers to Lebanese territory.

Against this backdrop, sending forces to Syria was a move to snub the moderates internally and introduce Iran as an avant-garde revolutionary force internationally. Montazeri managed to exploit the backing of some members of the Revolutionary Council, notably Sayyid Ali Khamenei and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and clergy in the office of Ayatollah Khomeini to dispatch the volunteer corps to the Levant. But defying moderates in Tehran was not the end of the story; bigger challenges lay ahead in Syria.

VOLUNTEERS IN SYRIA

Mohammad Montazeri personally led the first group of volunteers to Syria in early December 1979. Before departure, he gave a speech at Mehrabad Airport telling the volunteers that the Revolutionary Council had approved the move, but were remiss in their pledge to fund the trip. He also blamed both the Iranian and Lebanese governments and the failure of the latter to grant them visas.

Once they arrived in Damascus, the Iranian corps, who carried placards reading “The United Global Front of the Down-trodden from the Arab Maghreb to the Philippines,” went directly to Fatah bases in the Yarmuk camp and a village near Damascus called Hamorriya. They were told that they were to receive intensive guerilla training before being dispatched to Lebanon. “There we felt that it smelled fishy,” says one of Montazeri’s assistants, who was surprised that they were taken to Hamorriya instead of Lebanon.

The volunteers did not remain confined to the PLO bases in Syria; they sought to reach ordinary Syrians. The revolutionary zeal of the Iranians was new to Syrians and concerned government officials. “We were going to different cities in Syria, such as Aleppo and Lattakia,” recollects one of the SATJA volunteers. “As we learned from Mohammad Montazeri, we took every opportunity in the bus, in taxis or shops to talk with ordinary people, to explain to them the goals of the revolution and our causes. We were not fluent in Arabic, but we used our basic knowledge of Arabic and Quranic verses to communicate with them.” The fervent members of SATJA who wanted to “take the opportunity of being in Syria to convey the message of the revolution to the Syrian people” made several stands in Zeynabiya, where the Sayyida Zeynab shrine is located, for the purpose of propaganda. There they handed out revolutionary leaflets and Arabic magazines they had brought from Iran. They also distributed leaflets at Damascus University and held debates with students.
and professors about the revolution in Iran. After a while, the volunteers’ presence in Damascus became noticeable. “We were drawing graffiti of Imam [Khomeini] and slogans on the walls everywhere in Damascus,” says one of the volunteers. “One of the slogans was “…the unity of Muslims can destroy the oppressors.”71

During the month of Muharram, when Shia commemorate the martyrdom of their third Imam, the volunteers’ activities took a new turn. They held a march to the Hazrat-e Roqaya shrine in the heart of Damascus. The procession then merged with the Iranian pilgrims, and the large throng made its way towards Damascus University. The organizers intended to go onto the campus to chant slogans and hold a debate. Despite painstaking efforts by the police to cordon off the procession, they managed to get into the university.72 Such activities caused sporadic confrontations with Syrian security forces and led to the detention and finally the expulsion of some volunteers.73 “One time we were drawing graffiti of Imam [Khomeini] on Jisr al-Thura and the police arrested us,” remembers a member of SATJA who was in the volunteers corps. “However, they never treated us in a seriously bad way and even expressed sympathy with what we were doing. They were apprehensive about the members of the Muslim Brotherhood.”74

Iran, Assad argued, was a natural counterweight to Egypt; Israel had gained Egypt through the peace treaty, but lost Iran to the revolution.

The Syrian Baath regime at the time was in a serious confrontation with its own Islamic movement. Since 1977, Islamic militants had mounted a sustained and violent challenge to President Assad,75 who was in a life-and-death struggle with the Muslim Brotherhood. Assad watched the religious regime in Iran and its anti-Israeli rhetoric with cautious hope. Naturally, the Islamic connotation of the propaganda of the volunteers in Syria raised fear among Syrian officials, who wondered if the bearded men with their Islamic slogans had any connection with the Muslim Brotherhood.76 The volunteers were sympathetic to the Islamic Movement in Syria and saw the Syrian government’s heavy-handed measures as cruel. They felt, as one of them explains, a responsibility to break “the deadly silence” among the students and people who were daunted by the severity of Assad’s regime and the killing of Muslim Brotherhood members in Aleppo.77 The Syrian authorities were not the only party to be apprehensive and perplexed by the passionate Iranians.

Fatah was no less worried about the repercussions of the activities in Damascus for its own relations with Syrian officials. The Syrians’ increasing complaints to Fatah finally made Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), the Palestinian liaison between Iran and Syria, call a meeting with the volunteer corps to demand that they stop holding demonstrations and confine their activities to the camps.78 His effort was, in the end, fruitless; the implacable volunteers saw such concerns and diplomatic observation as reactionary and an obstacle to expanding the influence of the revolution.

SYRIA’S STANCE AMID DIVISIONS IN TEHRAN

From the very beginning, President Assad welcomed the 1979 revolution and
the earnest Iranian offers of support to the Arab anti-Israeli camp. Assad was quick to sense the coming change that the fall of the shah was to make in the regional balance of power. He was able to discern the revolution’s potential for his own regime, which had had to reshuffle all of its regional cards in the wake of the Egyptian-Israeli rapprochement. For Assad, in the words of his vice president, Abdul Halim Khaddam, “Iran adopted the Palestinian cause and this was impossible to overlook.”

Iran, Assad argued, was a natural counterweight to Egypt; Israel had gained Egypt through the peace treaty, but lost Iran to the revolution. But embracing the Islamic Republic never meant full or, in the words of Vice President Khaddam, “blind” support for Iranian regional aims. President Assad had his own unique approach to the revolutionary regime, a way to both circumscribe and harness the vast revolutionary energy in Iran. This approach was evident in Syria’s handling of the first Iranian bid to post forces in Lebanon.

It was evident that dispatching revolutionary volunteers benefited Syria; it was an unprecedented show of Iranian solidarity with the steadfastness front against Israel. However, Syrians liked neither the scope of this initiative — to post the corps in Lebanon — nor the revolutionary faction that was behind the plan. But Assad was astute enough not to reject the initiative outright. Syrians acceded to stationing the volunteers in Syria; however, President Assad remained altogether inflexible regarding the notion of any Iranian military presence in Lebanon.

The Baath regime was obviously apprehensive about the repercussions of sending Iranians to southern Lebanon and drawing Damascus into a new war with Israel. “They knew very well our disposition,” says one of the corp’s field commanders; they “knew that we would go there [to Lebanon] and do things on our own which would trouble Palestinians and Syrains and Lebanese and entangle them with Israel.”

The Syrian government even had initially assured the Lebanese that the Iranian plane would not be allowed to land in Damascus. However, President Assad did not want to turn down the effort openly and appear an obstacle to a revolutionary move aimed at supporting the Palestinian cause. Any open rejection could have put relations with the revolutionaries in Iran at risk. Instead, the Syrian government decided to send its newly appointed ambassador in Tehran, Ibrahim Yunes, to Ayatollah Montazeri in order to clarify the Syrian stance and persuade him to modify the initiative.

During the long meeting, Yunes explained to Montazeri that dispatching all the volunteers to southern Lebanon was tantamount to posting an army and could incur an Israeli retaliation on Syria and Lebanon. He went on to propose that instead of sending all the Iranians at once, Syria would dispatch them in different stages and in small numbers. This request did not yield Ayatollah Montazeri’s consent; he argued that Israel had been attacking Lebanon with or without pretext, and posting the volunteers would pave the way for sending millions of Arab and non-Arab forces to liberate Jerusalem. The meeting was not successful; neither side could convince the other.

In fact, the Syrians’ ambivalence originally stemmed from their reading of the divided political scene in Tehran. Posting the volunteers, as former President Bani-Sadr says, had the support of neither the Revolutionary Council nor the provisional government. No wonder the
ajaran embassy in Damascus remained distant from the initiative and only heard news of the volunteers’ arrival via radio. More significantly, Ayatollah Khomeini refrained from supporting the mission publicly. In essence, unlike posting the RG forces in 1982, the mission lacked the official coordination between the Iranian and Syrian governments that could have made Damascus more cooperative.

The Revolutionary Council, mostly under the control of radicals, remained divided over dispatching volunteers and failed to provide funds for the mission. However, Rafsanjani and Khamenei, both IRP leaders and members in the council, favored the initiative. According to Salman Safavi, who was in charge of the volunteer corps in Syria, “The equipment needed for the forces was provided by Mr. Sayyid Ali Khamenei.” A mere month before the first presidential election in Iran, radical clergy saw dispatching the volunteers as an opportunity to boost the radicals’ status. Last but not least, in the wake of the occupation of the American embassy in Tehran, which intensified radicalism, the Revolutionary Council was not able to openly defy the revolutionary move and thereby incur public obloquy for forestalling it.

At another key level, Ayatollah Khomeini did not publicly bless the dispatch of the volunteers. His word was respected by both moderates and radicals; had he backed the move openly, the official apparatus in both Iran and Syria would have shown more cooperation with Montazeri’s initiative. His stance is better understood in the wider context of his approach to several critical foreign-policy and economic issues. Despite the fact that Ayatollah Khomeini’s political inclination was towards the radical camp and that he generally supported their agenda, he always maintained a vague policy regarding a number of issues, including the export of the revolution and support for freedom movements.

The ayatollah not only showed reservations regarding Montazeri’s solicitude; he also opposed posting the Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon two years later, in 1982. Abu Hisham, the founder of the Islamic Amal in the wake of stationing the RG in the Bekaa, explains the similarity of Ayatollah Khomeini’s stance in both cases:

If his [Montazeri’s] attempt [in sending the volunteers] was to be successful, he would have had to receive Imam Khomeini’s support. Imam Khomeini, from the very first day, said that the Iranian presence in Lebanon was not intended for the battlefield, that the [Lebanese] nation could take on this duty and that we would support them.

Khomeini’s reticence, however, was balanced by the active support of some influential clergy in his office. His grandson, Sayyid Husayn Khomeini, as well as Shaykh Sadeq Khalkali, who enjoyed considerable influence in the office, were pushing for the plan. “Husayn [Khomeini] assured us that Imam [Khomeini] approved the dispatching of volunteers,” says an associate of Montazeri, “We used his influence to advance our work.” He also arranged a meeting for Montazeri with the revolution’s leader in Qom, where he obtained Ayatollah Khomeini’s approval for the mission. Finally, Rafsanjani met with the Syrian ambassador and asked for Syrian cooperation. Following that, Syria issued a collective entrance visa for the volunteers. Yet, since Damascus had earlier made a pledge to the Lebanese government regarding allowing the volunteers on Syrian territory, they sought to put off the volunteers’ arrival till the last minute.
Divisions and ambiguities concerning the extent of official support for the mission were not the only factor behind Syrian reluctance. Syrians were also deeply skeptical about the goals of this initiative, which was planned by radicals who had ties with two major enemies of President Assad, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and Yasser Arafat. The clerics, under the auspices of Ayatollah Montazeri’s office, did not view Assad’s Baathist regime and its heavy-handed internal policies positively, nor did they necessarily intend to act within the traditional Syrian framework. Their tense relations with Syria’s main ally in Lebanon, Amal, and their sympathy with anti-Syrian forces such as the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) only added to the mutual distrust between the clergy affiliated with Ayatollah Montazeri and Damascus.

MONTAZERI’S ANTI-SYRIAN TENDENCIES

“Dismayed and angered” is how one of the anti-shah activists describes the predominant mood towards Assad among his Iranian peers in the wake of the 1976 Syrian intervention in Lebanon. For radicals like Mohammad Montazeri and Abbas Zamani, Hafez Assad was never a “revolutionary.” His policy of “equilibrium of power” in Lebanon, in their eyes, was a mere facade for Syrian clandestine coordination with the United States and Israel. They scorned Assad’s approach to the Lebanese progressive front and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and shared the view of their Lebanese-Palestinian counterparts that the Syrian military intervention in Lebanon was intended to dominate its neighbor and domesticate the Palestinians. When, in August 1976, Tal al-Zaatar camp fell to the Phalange and Camille Shamun’s militia, who massacred hundreds of Palestinians, their bitterness against Assad deepened even more. Iranian radicals and Palestinians alike saw Damascus and Amal in connivance in the tragedy. “In this event, the stance of many became clear,” says a disciple of Montazeri who resided in a Fatah base for guerrilla training. “Syria, and those who were in agreement with Assad, backstabbed the Palestinian revolution.”

In the aftermath of the Tal al-Zaatar massacre, Syrians closed down PLO training camps in Syria, displacing Iranians who were based there for guerrilla training. “We were in an al-Fatah base in Duma, Syria, which was under the supervision of Abu Jihad. Besides me, Abu Sharif and Abu Hanif resided in this camp,” recounts Ahmad Movaḥedi, who was part of a network of anti-shah dissidents in Syria. “This base was active until Syria attacked Tal al-Zaatar. Afterward it was closed down and we had to move to the Zahrani base near Sidon, in Lebanon.” The behavior of the Syrian security apparatus with pro-Arafat elements and Assad’s alignment with “the Lebanese rightist camp” left a lasting effect on the Iranian dissidents, who were themselves subjected to sporadic harassment and detention by Syrian security forces. They began, like their Palestinian comrades, calling President Assad, in the words of Abbas Zamani, “a lion in Lebanon, a mouse in Golan.” [This is a play on Assad’s name, which means lion.]

This sentiment towards the Assad regime was always in the back of their minds, reflecting the radicals’ approach to Damascus in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution. In his speeches, Montazeri, who had ties with both the LNM and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, did not conceal his disapproval of the Baathist regime’s policies and openly sympathized with the
Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Mohammad Montazeri was not on good terms with Syrians before the revolution and he was even jailed a couple of times there,” Muhtashami recounts. “The reason was that he had very strong ties and intimate relations with the PLO, and he diverged with Syria over the issue of backing the Palestinians.”

The Syrian government looked at this sympathy towards the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the PLO with great apprehension. They indeed saw disturbing signs within the Iranian revolutionary ranks that raised questions in Damascus as to what the real position of the new Iranian regime was towards the Baathist regime. In particular, radical elements around Ayatollah Husayn Ali Montazeri were a source of misgivings. In the early years of the revolution, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and its leader opened a channel to the Islamic Republic through Mohammad Montazeri and the Freedom Movements Unit. The leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood who visited Tehran and Qom clearly sought to bring Iranians to their side of the struggle against President Assad. According to a member of Ayatollah Khomeini’s office, they “strove to ingratiate the movement with the Islamic Republic by traducing the Baathist regime among Iranian leaders.” Mohammad Montazeri’s connections with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood caused much apprehension in Damascus. Henceforth, Syrian security services closely tracked and analyzed his statements and activities. The concern was so grave that Syrian officials canvassed the opinion of Iranian officials, like Muhtashami, regarding Mohammad Montazeri’s stance and whether it reflected the official Iranian line:

Whenever they [Syrian Muslim Brotherhood’s leaders] visited Iran, I, as the ambassador, was summoned to the Syrian foreign ministry to answer and clarify. Of course I had a persuasive response to their [Syrian officials’] concern. I asked them what monafeqin [hypocrites, the Islamic Republic’s designation for MKO] were doing in Syria or what Jebhe-i al-Ahwaziya were doing in Damascus. This was something mutual. If you can ban their presence in Syria, then we can also do the same and stop them [the Muslim Brotherhood’s activities in Iran]. Our official channels are the foreign ministry and other state organs. But our freedom movements are like your freedom movements.

At that time, the Islamic opposition within Syria, buoyed by the revolution in Iran, initiated a new phase of uprising. While mass pro-Muslim Brotherhood demonstrations flooded the streets of Syrian cities, a campaign of attacks on government installations in Aleppo escalated into guerrilla warfare.

In such grave circumstances, much to the dismay of Syrians, the RG’s Freedom Movements Unit invited top leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Vanguards (al-Talai al-Islamiyya) to Tehran to attend the conference of the freedom movements. Simultaneously, the Iranian foreign ministry had also invited a governmental delegation from Syria made up of Mufti Ahmad Kaftaru and governmental ministers to the same event. Apparently by accident, the two delegations were lodged on the same floor of the Esteqal Hotel in Tehran. One morning, the official Syrian delegation, who had just left their room, encountered the Muslim Brotherhood leaders. They remonstrated to the
Iranian officials, as they were completely perplexed at how the Islamic Republic had decided to invite one delegation from the government and one from its opposition.\textsuperscript{114}

Disturbed by Mohammad Montazeri’s ties with its Islamic opposition movement and Fatah, the Baathist regime remained, throughout the 1980s, vigilant regarding the activities of Ayatollah Montazeri’s office and the Office of Freedom Movements,\textsuperscript{115} which was handed to Sayyid Mehdi Hashemi after the death of Mohammad Montazeri in June 1981.

Another point of concern for the Syrian regime was the cordial relationship between the PLO and the faction close to Ayatollah Montazeri. In fact, since the 1979 revolution, the Baathist regime had kept an eye on the extent of Iranian relations with Yasser Arafat, a challenger to President Assad’s initiative in both Lebanon and the Arab-Israeli front.

With the advent of the 1979 revolution, Assad carefully watched the PLO’s courting of Khomeini’s Iran. “We were greatly delighted,” says former Syrian Vice President Khaddam, “that Iran adopted the Palestinian cause. […] Especially because the shah had strong ties with Israel.”\textsuperscript{116} But this was not the whole story for Damascus. Syrians “were eager,” according to an Iranian diplomat, “to make the new regime in Iran adopt its Palestinian vision and ensure that the Islamic Republic did not go too far with Arafat.”\textsuperscript{117} “There was no deep relation between Arafat and Iran,” emphasizes Khaddam. “We knew that the Iranian leadership would very soon discover Mr. Arafat’s path.”\textsuperscript{118} However, things at the time were not that clear. Pro-Palestinian factions were influential within the ranks of revolutionary forces, and their power had been growing ever since the establishment of the new regime.

For radicals, the raison d’être of posting the volunteers in south Lebanon was to support the Palestinian organizations that had joined forces with the LNM against Amal. But “cooperation with Abu Ammar in southern Lebanon, who was fighting with the Syrian ally Amal,” says an Iranian diplomat, “was a red line for Assad.”\textsuperscript{119} When Mohammad Montazeri came to Beirut to discuss the entrance of the volunteer corps with the PLO, he attended a Palestinian military parade marking the anniversary of the Palestinian revolution, to publicly announce the imminent arrival of the Iranian forces. Addressing the Palestinians, he praised the LNM and its leader, Kamal Jumblatt, and reminded the “Arab brothers” of what Yasser Arafat had proclaimed a few months earlier in Tehran: the Iranian and Palestinian revolutions are one revolution.\textsuperscript{120}

From the perspective of President Assad, the transformation of an emerging Iranian-PLO alliance into an independent axis in Lebanon threatened to undermine his Lebanese grand strategy, which was contingent on eliminating Fatah autonomy and Arafat’s state-within-a-state, the “Fakhani Republic” in his backyard.\textsuperscript{121} “Syrians never wanted Iran to support Arafat in Lebanon,” says the Iranian former ambassador in Jordan; “Therefore, we did not have much margin for a strong official relationship with Arafat.”\textsuperscript{122}

THE PLO’S STANCE

As the conflict in Lebanon progressed, the Shia increasingly became the communal victims of the Palestinian-Israeli war in the south. Fatah, which held exclusive sway in parts of the country, faced mounting pressure from Shia leaders to limit its operations.\textsuperscript{123} At such a juncture, Iran’s revolution came as an opening for Fatah leaders to seek, through alliance with Iran,
a new power alignment in the region that could keep open the military option.\textsuperscript{124}

Whereas the Syrian ally, Amal, stayed aloof from the initiative of dispatching forces to Lebanon, Fatah leaders saw posting the Iranian volunteers as a chance to prop up Arafat’s position vis-à-vis the movement. However, this never meant that they were ready to embrace the volunteers in the south. Just a few days before the arrival of Iranian forces in Syria, the PLO spokesman in Lebanon, Abu Maizer, hinted that the entrance of a large number of volunteers to the south could pose a problem for the PLO, and that “before combatants, we are in need of financial and political support.”\textsuperscript{125}

In early January, while dozens of volunteers were stationed in Damascus and many more were waiting in Tehran to join them, Mohammad Montazeri illegally entered Lebanon over land and tried to hold a press conference at the Hotel Bristol in Beirut. The Lebanese government, which had already been on alert to prevent the volunteers’ entrance, ordered the security forces to cordon off the hotel to stop the press conference.

Yasser Arafat, who was not aware of Montazeri’s arrival in Beirut, did not receive him and shunned requests by his entourage to hold the press conference in one of the Fatah offices. “Finally Mohammad [Montazeri] said that I need neither the hotel nor Arafat’s office. I will go to the mosque and announce our plan there,” recounts Inis al-Naqqash, who liaised between the volunteers and Arafat. “He eventually went to al-Jamaa al-Arabiya’s mosque and held a press conference there to announce the plan.”\textsuperscript{126} He quoted Ayatollah Khomeini, “Today Iran and tomorrow Palestine,” and announced that the volunteers were financially supported by the Iranian masses and would come to Lebanon conveying the revolution’s message to the deprived.\textsuperscript{127}

A few days after the entrance of volunteers in Syria, their field commander met with Abu Jihad in Beirut to discuss the details of coordination between Palestinian and Iranian forces. “The outcome of our meeting was the establishment of a joint war-operation room, which was led by Abu Jihad and myself,” says Salman Safavi.\textsuperscript{128} Afterward, Fatah leaders refrained from taking any further steps to facilitate transferring the volunteers to Lebanon.

Facing Iranian persistence, Abu Jihad, who was Fatah’s liaison with the volunteer corps, eventually informed them of the Fatah leadership’s abnegation, asserting that posting the corps was impossible: “Assad and the Lebanese government do not support it, southern Lebanon’s front is silent, and we are not able to handle another war.”\textsuperscript{129} Mohammad Montazeri wanted the revolutionary plan to reshuffle all the cards inside the Lebanese scene,\textsuperscript{130} while some Fatah leaders did not wish to see a second party involved in their operations in the south.\textsuperscript{131}

Fatah remained obdurate to any posting of volunteers collectively in “Fatah Land,” their autonomous territory in southern Lebanon. Ultimately, it proposed a very modified version of what the Iranian side wanted: that volunteers could enter two-by-two and incorporate into a separate guerrilla cell in southern Lebanon. This fell short of the minimum of 15 members that the Iranian commanders requested in order to join the Palestinian guerilla units. “We did not want to enter into [the Palestinian] groups one by one. This could have enervated our forces and affected our personnel’s ideology, [as] most Palestinians were secular. Therefore, we decided to
leave the choice to the volunteers; whoever wishes can go to Lebanon on his own and whoever wants can go back to Iran.”

CONCLUSION

Divergence over the revolution’s approach to Lebanon and its relations with the PLO in 1979-81 was to a great extent a reflection of pre-revolutionary controversies and disagreements among Iranians who had resided in Lebanon. Amidst factional controversy over alliance with Amal and the PLO and in an increasingly radicalized milieu, the most significant development in Iranian-Syrian-Lebanese relations came as radicals endeavored to dispatch forces to southern Lebanon.

Despite succeeding in overcoming the objections of moderates in Iran, none of the major players on the Lebanese scene—neither Damascus, Amal nor the PLO, which controlled the southern front—were inclined to back the mission. In fact, after a short while, it became clear that Yasser Arafat was standing on the same side as President Assad, Amal leaders and moderates in Tehran, who were positioned to thwart the first revolutionary efforts by the radicals to dispatch forces to Lebanon.

Unlike posting Pasdarans in the Bekaa in 1982, which faced similar resistance by Damascus and its Lebanese allies, the mission did not culminate in creating a pro-Islamic Republic voice inside the Lebanese Shia community. As one of Hezbollah’s leaders in the Bekaa describes it:

What Mohammad Montazeri did was not successful; however, it left a notable impression on some of our brothers here that the Palestinian cause is a priority for the revolution in Iran. It also left an emotional impression on people that the Iranians came here and broke an air of submissiveness [in the face of Israel], which was prevalent in our areas.

While there was essentially no official coordination between the Syrian and Iranian governments to dispatch the volunteers, Assad’s Palestinian policy and Lebanese calculations were ignored by Mohammad Montazeri and his radical associates. This was a chief factor in the failure of revolutionary Iran’s first bid to dispatch forces to Lebanon. Assad’s policy was understandable in light of the developments in Iranian-Syrian relations after the Israeli invasion in 1982. Indeed, the same defiant stance was taken by Assad in 1982 towards the Iranian proposition to dispatch Pasdarans to Lebanon when he discovered that, contrary to what he had initially believed, it was not mere Iranian propaganda and that hundreds of Pasdarans had already landed at Damascus airport.

The Islamic Republic, in the post-1982 period, began to realize the limits of revolutionary maneuver and the merit of cooperation with Hafez al-Assad in Lebanon. As the former Iranian ambassador in Jordan puts it, the revolutionary regime learned that “any cooperation in southern Lebanon with Yasser Arafat, who was fighting with the Syrian ally, Amal, was a red line for Assad.... Any initiative in Lebanon needs to be defined under Syrian consent to become effective.” Over time, Tehran’s official line steadily converged with Assad’s “Palestinian vision,” which indeed became a factor in eroding the once-hoped-for Iran-Arafat partnership.
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4 It is important to note that the IRP had a strong Bazari-conservative wing in that time. However, under Ayatollah Beheshti, it was subdued to the radical wing. See Maziar Behrooz, “Factionalism in Iran under Khomeini,” Middle Eastern Studies 27 (1991): 600-601; and Mehdi Moslem, Factional Politics in Post-Khomaini Iran (Syracuse University Press, 2002), 68.

5 Ayatollah Husayn Ali Montazeri, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, July 24, 2007.

6 Prominent figures in this faction were some members of Ayatollah Khomeini’s office, including his son Ahmad, Sayyid Mohammad Musavi Khu’ina, Serajeddin Musavi, members of Ayatollah Montazeri’s office such as Sayyid Hadi Hashemi, Sayyid Mehdi Hashemi, Shawk Hassan Ibrahimii, Hadi Najafabadi, Isfahan’s Friday prayer leader, Ayatollah Jalaledin Taheri, Abdullah Nu’ri, Shawk Abbas Ali Ruhani and Ali Akbar Muhtashami. Sayyid Hadi Hashemi, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, May 14, 2005; also see Anonymous, Vag‘eyatha va Qezavatha (Facts and Judgments) (N.p, 1377/1998), 80.

7 Sayyid Hadi Hashemi, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, May 14, 2005; Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr, author’s interview, Paris, France, May 22, 2010.


10 Shireen Hunter, Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade (Indiana University Press, 1990), 81.

11 Ayatollah Montazeri, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, July 24, 2007.


16 Ayatollah Montazeri, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, August 11, 2007.

17 Ali Akbar Muhtashami, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, July 18, 2007.


19 See Albert Hourani, “From Jabal Amil to Persia,” in Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500

20 Mustafa Chamran, Lubnan (Bunyad-I Shahid Chamran, 1378/1999), 7.


22 Ayatollah Hassan Qomi and Ayatollah Sayyid Kazem Shariʿatmadari had close ties with Musa Sadr, See Keyhan, 1358/2/22-1979/05/12.

23 According to Chamran, before they were able to fulfill the task, the street combats ended and the revolution had materialized. See Mustafa Chamran, Lubnan (Bunyad-I Shahid Chamran, 1378/1999), 16.


28 Anonymous, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, August 31, 2007 (a member of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s office who requested anonymity).

29 See Omid-e Iran, 1358/05/01/-1979/07/23, no. 25 and 1358/05/15/- 1979/08/06, no. 27.


31 Amal is not a Shi῾ movement devoid of nationality. Amal defines itself, in its Mithaq Ḥaraka-t Amal, as a harakat wataniyya (national movement), “that strongly believes in the preeminence of the nation, in the unity of the nation [al-watan], and in maintaining [the nation’s] sovereignty intact.” See Norton, Amal and the Shi῾a, 74; and al-Madini, Amal wa Hizbullah (Amal and Hizbullah), 87.


33 When Yasir Arafat met with an Iranian delegation, headed by Mohammad Montazeri, in Libya, he expressed his disappointment with the provisional government by saying that “Imam [Khomeini] is anti American, but they are negotiating with the United States and moving in the opposite direction,” Hassan Ata῾i, author’s interview, Beirut, Lebanon, October 3, 2009.

34 Talal Salman, author’s interview, Beirut, Lebanon, August 19, 2009.

35 The Shah’s Secret Police.

36 Anonymous, Faq eyatha va Qezavatha, 69–79.

37 Abbas Zamani, author’s interview, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, November 5, 2008.

38 Ibid.

39 During a telephone interview with Jalaleddin Farsi (Tehran, January 18, 2010), he told the author that Mustafa Chamran was not only against PLO, but also against Palestinians and their cause. He proclaimed that he heard Chamran attack the Palestinians and their cause in a public speech.


41 See Sayyid Husayn Khomeini’s speech against Ayatollah Azari Qomi, Keyhan, 1358/07/22-1979/10/14.

42 As-Safir, April 8, 1980.


44 Hassan Ata῾i, author’s interview, Karaj, Iran, July 30, 2008; and Mahmud Dordkeshan, author’s interview, Isfahan, Iran, August 13, 2008.

45 Sazman-e Inqilab-yi Tudeha-yi Jumhuri-yi islami. He also established an educational center in Zafar Street in Tehran for training cadres for the revolution’s diplomacy. Mahmud Dordkeshan, author’s interview, Isfahan, Iran, August 13, 2008.

46 Sa῾id Montazeri, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, August 23, 2008. He is the youngest son of Ayatollah Montazeri.


48 Sa῾id Montazeri, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, August 23, 2008; and Asghar Salehi, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, April 21, 2008.
Ayatollah Montazeri says when Arafat visited Iran as the first foreign leader after the revolution and met with him, “he kept talking about Abu Ahmad. I told him who is Abu Ahmad? Arafat said we call Mohammad [Montazeri] Abu Ahmad.” Ayatollah Montazeri, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, July 24, 2007.

Hassan Atai, author’s interview, Karaj, Iran, July 30, 2008.


Anonymous, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, August 31, 2007.

Abbas Zamani, author’s interview, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, November 5, 2008.

At a press conference after arriving in Beirut, Mohammad Montazeri proclaimed, “We are coming here not only to battle, but also to contribute in restoring this country, rebuilding the cities, hospitals and schools.” See As-Safir, January 3, 1980. The plan was to recruit 1,080 eligible volunteers and take them to southern Lebanon in order to take part in restoration of the war-stricken areas and engage in battle alongside with Palestinians against Israel. As-Safir, December 10, 1979.

Inis al-Naqqash, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, April 8, 2008.

Etele’at, 1358/09/27-1979/10/19, 1358/10/03-1979/12/24.

See Etele’at, 1358/09/20-1979/12/11.

Husayn Mahdavi, author’s interview, Najafabad, Iran, August 9, 2008.


A number of women were among the volunteers. This was a matter of dispute among the organizers as some of them did not deem it expedient and necessary. Mohammad Montazeri believed that at least it would have a symbolic effect that some women participate. Asghar Salehi, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, April 21, 2008. Later conservatives in Iran and members of Amal vituperated Montazeri for dispatching women and exposing them to an impious milieu and sinful members of al-Fatah.

The Lebanese government that had been notified by Qotbzadeh that dispatching the volunteers is not supported by the Iranian government, instructed its embassy in Tehran not to grant visas to Montazeri and the volunteers, and the Beirut airport officials not to allow landing any Iranian airliner there. See An-Nahar, December 8, 1979 and December 19, 1979; and As-Safir, December 10, 1979.


Husayn Mahdavi, author’s interview, Najafabad, Iran, August 9, 2008 and Asghar Salehi, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, April 21, 2008.

Mohamad Sadeq al-Husayni, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, July 1, 2009.

Asghar Salehi, author’s interview, Najafabad, Iran, August 9, 2008.

Asghar Salehi, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, April 21, 2008.

Husayn Mahdavi, author’s interview, Najafabad, Iran, August 9, 2008; and Asghar Salehi, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, April 21, 2008.

Asghar Salehi, who was a member of SATJA and later the Freedom Movement Office, was one of the ardently active volunteers in Syria. He was arrested three times, before finally being expelled from Syria. He recounts one time when he got arrested by Syrian security forces: “during the interrogation in the intelligence headquarters, I was told that Syria would support and give you whatever you need if only you draw the graffiti of Hafez al-Assad next to the one from Imam [Khomeini]. The interrogator even said that they would provide us with one stencil of Assad. I said it is impossible; because we do not know who Hafez al-Assad is! In fact, we wanted to materialize exporting the revolution.” Asghar Salehi, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, April 21, 2008.

Husayn Mahdavi, author’s interview, Najafabad, Iran, August 9, 2008.

See Raymond A. Hinnebusch, Syria: Revolution from Above (Routledge, 2001), 93-103.

Asghar Salehi, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, April 21, 2008.

Ibid.

Asghar Salehi’s, author’s interview, Najafabad, Iran, August 9, 2008.

Husayn Mahdavi, author’s interview, Najafabad, Iran, August 9, 2008.
81 Salman Safavi, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, July 17, 2010.
82 *As-Safir*, November 12, 1979.
83 The meeting was also attended by Mohammad Montazeri and a top Syrian intelligence official in the embassy, Iyad Salim al-Mahmud, who was in charge of gathering information on anti-Syrian activities in Iran. See *As-Safir*, October 5, 1986.
88 Author’s interview, Salman Safavi, Tehran, Iran, July 17, 2010.
89 For instance, Ayatollah Khomaini initially backed a plan, Band-i jim, proposed by radicals in 1980 for confiscating large lands and distributing them among poor peasants. However, facing the angry objection of conservative clergy and some ‘ulama’ in Qom and Mashhad, he was made to ask radicals to temporarily suspend the plan and afterwards remained silent about the plan. See Willem M. Floor, “The Revolutionary Character of the Iranian ‘ulama’: Wishful Thinking or Reality,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980): 520; and Mansoor Vothuqi, *Jameʿh Shenasi Rustaei* (Rural Sociology) (Enteshart Keyhan, 1375/1996), 232-233.
91 Anonymous, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, August 21, 2007, and Hadi Najafabadi, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, January 18, 2010. Ayatollah Montazeri, who was Ayatollah Khomeini’s heir designate from 1985 till 1989, believes that Ayatollah Khomeini was never keen on supporting the issue of freedom movements and did not have a high opinion of the Freedom Movement Office. Ayatollah Montazeri, author’s interview, Qom, Iran, July 23, 2007.
93 Sayyid Husayn Khomeini in the first two years after the revolution was considered one of the most influential figures around Ayatollah Khomeini. He fell out of favor after a while and left politics to live in seclusion in Qom. Ayatollah Khomeini’s son, Ahmad, replaced Husayn Khomeini in influence as he became the most influential figure in the office of Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1980s.
94 Mohammad Sadeq al-Husayni, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, July 1, 2009.
95 *An-Nahar*, December 18, 1979.
98 See *As-Safir*, July 13, 1979.
99 Tawazun al-quwa. The most dramatic example of Syria’s application of the principles was the 1976 intervention, which came only after months of secret contacts with the Christian Maronite leadership. See Charles Waterman, “Syria’s Shifting Alliances in Lebanon,” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, April 1987, 6-7.
103 Ahmad Movahedi, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, July 4, 2010.
104 One such cases of detention was Mohammad Salih al-Husayni, who, according to his brother, was jailed a number of times in Syria over his ties with Palestinians, Mohammad Sadeq al-Husayni, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, July 1, 2009.
105 Abbas Zamani, author’s interview, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, November 5, 2008.
106 Anonymous, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, August 31, 2007.
107 Ali Akbar Muhtashami, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, July 17, 2010.
108 Anonymous, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, August 31, 2007.
109 Document x, Tehran.
110 A pan-Arab separatist movement that advocated the separation of Khūzestān Province from Iran.
111 Ali Akbar Muhtashami, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, July 18, 2010.
113 The Islamic Vanguards was a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.
114 Anonymous, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, August 31, 2007.
115 Maktab al-harakat al-taharroriya in Arabic. This office originated from the Freedom Movements Unit (1979-1983) of the RG.
117 Mohammad Irani, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, January 23, 2010.
119 Mohammad Irani, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, January 23, 2010.
120 See *As-Safir*, December 10, 1979; *An-Nahar*, January 14, 1980.
122 Mohammad Irani, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, January 23, 2010.
125 *Etelaʿat*, 1358/09/25-1979/12/16.
126 Inis al-Naqqash, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, April 8, 2008, and Beirut May 5, 2010.
127 *As-Safir*, January 3, 1980.
128 Salman Safavi, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, July 17, 2010.
130 Inis al-Naqqash, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, April 8, 2008.
132 Except a few who remained in Syria or went to Lebanon, almost all the volunteers returned to Iran within a few months. Husayn Mahdavi, author’s interview, Najafabad, Iran, August 9, 2008.
134 Document x, Tehran.
135 Mohammad Irani, author’s interview, Tehran, Iran, January 23, 2010.