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## Oil Issue and Discursive Shifts in Iranian Politics (1942-1952)\*

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### Abstract

Following the invasion of the allied forces in September 1941, chaos and crisis characterized the Iranian socio-political life for more than a decade. The “issue of oil” emerged in such an environment. First a round of negotiation began in order to “regain the right of the people to Southern oil”. The initial demand of the Iranian government was to acquire more benefits; at the same time, however, outside the government, another approach was being formed, in which a political understanding of the oil issue was predominant with a less materialist understanding of the stakes. As a result, the oil issue could be seen as either economic or political; two discourses, though both were more or less inspired by anti-colonialist discourses of the time, emerged and each sought hegemony. This article seeks to reveal the way in which discursive struggle emerged and the way in which a shift to the political discourse made significant political changes possible. Its main argument is that the discursive conflict in a society, where national identity was a matter of contest, led to a fundamental change in the representation of the issue and, in the course of time, even the identities of the political actors evolved. It was when this discursive conflict led to the hegemony of the political understanding of the oil issue that Razmara’s administration became delegitimized and the national movement for oil nationalization acquired legitimacy.

**Keywords:** Anti-Colonialism, Discursive Shift, Iran, Iranian Oil Nationalization, Iran’s Contemporary History

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## 1. Introduction

The invasion of Iran by the allied forces in 1941 resulted in the opening of the political space. The following years witnessed unstable politics marked by short-lived cabinets. Political factions and parties emerged and political debates increasingly entered into the public sphere. One of the main issues was that of oil, which witnessed a discursive shift within a few years. In other words, its meaning and significance and, as a result, what could (or could not) and should (or should not) be done about it changed.

Reza Shah's Iran was characterized by attempts aiming at modernizing Iran. State-building and nation-building measures, together with infrastructure projects to realize them required financial resources. The dominant political discourse was a new nationalism inspired by the modernist ideas of the Constitution Revolution of 1906 as well as traditional ideas of Iranian kingdom with some despotic connotations (Rezaeepanah & Izadi, 1392 [2013 A. D.]; Khanlarkhani, 1402 [2023 A.D.]). Its modernist aspects were more of a superficial nature, referred to as pseudo-modernism (Katouzian, 1981). Within this general framework, what can be called the "discourse of national interest", with elitist connotations and a low view of the people and little consideration for their participation in political life, emerged (Khanlarkhani 1402 [2023 A.D.]). The negotiations with the then Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC, later to become Anglo-Iranian) within this context meant acquiring more material gains in order to fund state projects. Although there was a desire to regain honor and restore Iranian rights from the southern oil, Reza Shah and his government's understanding of the significance of the oil and their primary goal, is evident in Teymourtash's correspondence with Jacks, the Anglo-Iranian company representative in Tehran: "The

money for Iran is a matter of life or death. The government has initiated a series of financial programs. If they fail, it would have disastrous consequences for Iran” (see Khanlarkhani 1402 [2023 A.D.]).

The initial demands were ambitious, yet the result, in the form of the 1933 Deal, was far from favorable (Khanlarkhani, 1402 [2023 A.D.]). Following the 1941 invasion, eight years after the 1933 Deal, this materialist discourse of national interest was still dominant. As the government faced much budget deficit, oil was seen as the main source of revenue: “This is our oil. They (the Oil Company) should give us the money; we need it as people cannot afford paying more taxes” (Eskandari, 1327b [1948b A.D.]). The financial considerations seemed to be absolutely plausible if one takes into account the drastic post-occupation conditions in Iran.<sup>1</sup>

This dire situation itself could not be adequately described within the conventional discourse with its emphasis on Iran as an “Aryan nation” that was supposed to join the “caravan of civilization” under the auspicious leadership of a wise king-father (Reza Shah) to revive its past glorious days (Ghods, 1991). The humiliating military defeat by the allied forces and the deteriorating politico-economic conditions of the country resulted in a disruption in the hegemonic discourse. In practice, the issue of oil became a focal point, around which a discursive struggle could be shaped and evolved.

Under these circumstances, in 1947, a law was passed by the

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1. The consequences of this occupation were so severe that it was called an armed robbery against a desperately weak and poor nation (Katouzian, 1981). Insecurity, pandemics, famine, and poverty were all around (Zoghi, 1372 [1993 A.D.]). The crisis led to fragile administrations and skyrocketing inflation. This situation was described as “chaotic” (Hadayat, 1344 [1965 A.D.]).

parliament to “regain the right of the people to Southern oil” (National Assembly Negotiations, 1326 [1947 A.D.]). This meant it formally became a part of the agenda of the government and the oil issue was formed in this context. At the same time, however, outside the government, another approach to the oil issue was being produced. This new approach criticized the economist view of the government that limited the possibility for “regaining the right of the people” to material gains: “The issue is not just a matter of tax, loyalty, or customs duties ... there are other matters of concern that the rights of the nation include. These are not of a financial nature” (Makki, 1329a [1950a A.D.]).

This approach gave a new meaning to the issue of oil and gradually led to the emergence of a discursive struggle. The discursive shift to the new understanding meant the politicization of oil; it not only made some actions possible/legitimate and others impossible/illegitimate, but also gave new identities to the various actors involved.

The existence of conflict/struggle is recognized in the literature covering this period in contemporary Iran. Class conflict (Abrahamian, 2008), clash between Islamist and nationalist ideologies (Khalilian, 1372, [1993 A.D.]), the opposition between conservatism and liberal progressivism (Katouzian, 1990), the opposition of anti-colonialism to neo-colonialism or “colonialism in shadow” (Samiei, 1397 [2018 A.D.]), the idea of negative balancing against the traditional position of positive balancing (i.e., looking for Iranian progress and modernization through band wagoning with a great power), and the conflict between a “resurgent nationalism” and an “old-fashioned imperialism” (Abrahamian, 2008) have been underlined by various analysts. What is missing in the literature is the discursive context within

which this struggle evolved and the nationalization of oil industry became possible. This article seeks to give a better understanding of the developments in this period by showing how the nationalization of oil became possible through a fundamental change in the dominant discourse.

In what follows, we first discuss our theoretical and methodological framework. The second section begins with a discussion on the emergence of the crisis within which the oil negotiations were formed, and then it shows how Iranians looked for material gains through various formulations for the division of profits and how, as the failures of these attempts were proved, the oil issue entered into the public sphere as a matter of debate. The third section deals with the politicized discourse of oil that sought hegemony. In the fourth section, the re-articulation of the discourse of national interest is discussed. Then the last struggles leading to the hegemony of the political discourse will be examined. The article ends with some concluding remarks.

## 2. Theory and Method

In discourse theory, what we call social or political “reality” is “constituted” in language and “represented” through discourse. Therefore, discourses give meaning to the world and different discourses, through specific relations they establish among various concepts/signifiers, interpret the world differently. According to Laclau and Mouffe (2001), discourse is a structured totality of articulatory practices, where meanings and identities are constituted by differences: something is what it is only through its differential relations to something else. As discourses are where objects are constituted, “*all* objects are objects of discourse”. In this sense,

Laclau and Mouffe overcome the common distinction between discursive and non-discursive realms and postulate that all aspects of social reality become what they are through discourses (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

Discourses fix the meanings, but they are all of a contingent nature. Nevertheless, sometimes they are consolidated in a way that their contingent nature is forgotten and thus become “objective” (Laclau, 1990). When a dominant discourse with a hegemonic status cannot explain, represent, or “domesticate” events, it would face “dislocation” (Torfing, 2005), a situation where meanings are challenged and social actors/subjects become indecisive as there is no fixed meaning on which one can rely. Such a situation is called a “crisis”. It emerges when, in a historical momentum, the “objective” or established meaning turns into a “political” one. Thus it becomes a site of struggle. A hegemonic struggle emerges as a result of this situation, when there is a proliferation of floating signifiers. This situation leads to or exacerbates what Lacan refers to as the “split subject”.<sup>1</sup> As human beings seek a stable center in order to decrease their anxiety (Derrida, 1978), they look for more

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1. Lacan's theory posits that subjectivity is marked by a fundamental “lack” or incompleteness. This lack stems from the separation or alienation that occurs when the subject enters the symbolic order, which is the realm of language, social norms, and culture. This separation from a unified sense of self gives rise to a sense of incompleteness or a “hole” within the subject. As the subject encounters this lack, the desire to fill this perceived void is shaped. However, desire operates in a more elusive manner. It is the process of desiring and the pursuit of attaining a sense of wholeness or completeness, which drives the subject. The notion of the split subject refers to the fragmented nature of subjectivity that emerges from encountering lack in the pursuit of desire. It is shaped by the subjects' attempts to negotiate and reconcile their desires with the social and symbolic order. The perceived totality of hegemonic discourse can alleviate this void, strengthen the sense of subjectivity, and reduce feelings of anxiety and ambivalence. Therefore, in situations where the discourse is dislocated and a struggle for hegemony takes place, the attempt to fill the void experienced by the split subject can be exacerbated. For more details, see Bracher et al., 1994.

stable routines to make actions and events meaningful. The search for meaning and the desire to make the world more comfortable and predictable shape a struggle to create meaning through its fixation, which in turn leads to hegemonic struggles (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). These struggles involve competing narratives and discourses that aim to define, frame, and/or legitimize certain social issues or identities. As a result, conflicting interpretations of reality and divisions and antagonisms within the society emerge. Discursive struggles are integral to the construction of social identities and relations. When a discursive shift occurs, new understandings of self and others unfold, which contribute to social antagonism.

Hegemony establishes and institutionalizes a prevailing “horizon of intelligibility,” which shapes agency and necessitates a certain level of predictability as an essential element for action. In short, a hegemonic discourse becomes ‘common sense’ and coterminous with reality.

In sum, within discourse theory, socio-political struggles are the focus of analysis and politics itself is defined as a struggle over what is included in or excluded from the discourse (Torfing, 2005). In the course of time, through new discourses, new meanings are shaped, and “we” and “others” are defined; thus, hegemonic struggle emerges between rival discourses (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). When two discourses exclude each other, social antagonism emerges (Torfing, 2005) and stereotypical images of the “self” and the “other” are produced. Hence political action and excluding others through applying concepts such as “enemy”, “traitor”, and the like, become possible. In such a condition, hegemonic interventions repress other interpretations of the world and create a “natural objective” view on the basis of which events in the past,

present, and the future are “read” and, when people understand and accept these new readings, we may say that a discourse has gained a hegemonic position (Laclau, 1996).

In what follows, on the basis of this conceptual framework, the method of predication, i.e., looking for attributions, qualities, and characteristics used to describe the “self” and the “other” on the basis of similarities and differences, is applied. Predication as a linguistic process is pivotal in constructing meanings, identities, and power dynamics within discourses. It is suitable for the study of language practices in texts such as diplomatic documents, theory articles and transcripts of interviews as the main research materials for political and historical analysts (Milliken, 1999). What is important here is the way in which language constructs attributions within texts, speeches, or media representations. Predications involve statements that ascribe properties or actions to subjects and objects. Thus predication involves attributing characteristics, qualities, or actions to entities (Nabers, 2015).

Predications are not merely descriptive, but are also deeply entwined with power dynamics. Language is used to position certain subjects hierarchically, reinforcing or challenging existing power structures and social norms. Accordingly, it plays a significant role in shaping social reality. By attributing specific characteristics or actions, discourses influence the ways in which individuals and groups are perceived, categorized, and positioned within society. The “space of objects”, as a conceptual area within discourse, is consequently molded by these attributions and interactions. This process gives rise to particular interpretive dispositions that create certain “possibilities” while excluding others (Doty, 1993). In this sense, through predication, the subjectivity is “articulated” via the relationship between self and



other. This process is often called “subject positioning,” where key relationships such as opposition, identity, similarity, and complementarity play significant roles in positioning subjects (Doty, 1993). Our primary focus here is on exploring the dynamics of “opposition” within this context.

Here we explore language practices involving predication — specifically the verbs, adverbs and adjectives that attach to nouns and describe the subject, world and “other” (Milliken, 1999). Clarifying the boundaries of the self brings coherence to the world, alleviates the deteriorating condition of the “split subject”, and paves the way for establishing hegemony. Following this perspective, we look for the processes of predication and articulation of self via other. This kind of inclusion and exclusion leads to legitimization and de-legitimization in the discursive struggle that characterized the oil politics in Iran from the early 1940s to the early 1950s.

### **3. From the Emergence of Domestic Crisis to Public Debates over the Oil Issue**

When in 1941 the allied forces, despite Iran’s neutrality in the war, occupied the country, a period of chaos and crisis overwhelmed Iran. Economic consequences of the occupation were devastating (Amrayee, 1395 [2016 A.D.]) and the lower classes were the main victims (Katouzian, 1981). Insecurity, endemics, starvation, and poverty overwhelmed the country (Dehghan Nejad & Lotfi, 1389 [2010 A.D.]) and most poets, public intellectuals, and social leaders regarded all of this as the result of foreigners’ presence in Iran (Sotoodeh, 1392 [2013 A.D.]).

Monetary policies imposed by the occupying powers together with the scarcity of basic commodities and raw material led to serious economic problems, including the depreciation of national currency and hyperinflation (prices seven folded in the four-year period between 1940 and 1944) (Amrayee, 1395 [2016 A.D.]). Furthermore, the expansion of bureaucracy meant that what could have been allocated to development had to be spent on government routine expenditure (Jalalpour & Mohammadi, 1390 [2011 A.D.]). Mostly due to financial problems, cabinets fell one after another - within four years, ten cabinets were formed (Tabaraean, 1371 [1992 A. D]). In the words of Mehdigholi Hedayat:

The whole universe is in chaos... on the one side, Russian army, on the other, British army, and US army in between; there is so much anxiety that even love is forgotten... the number of the British and Americans increases daily, [and] food supply decreases...(Hedayat, 1344 [1965 A.D.])

The occupation of Iran and people's suffering from famine, poverty, and humiliation could not be easily explained within the discourse of national interest. Iran, the "Aryan nation", under the leadership of Reza Shah had intended to return to the community of the "civilized" and revive its splendid past (Ghods, 1991). The previously dominant discourse could not make the conditions meaningful, as the humiliating quick defeat of the armed forces and the terrible conditions following the occupation were against its very foundations. Thus, the old order was past and the society looked for a new order and assuring routines in order to give a new meaning to itself and the new conditions.

The issue of oil was again raised in these turbulent circumstances. American oil companies began looking for oil concession. The Soviets followed suit. The Saed administration,

however, declared that any negotiation over oil concessions would begin only when the occupying forces leave the country (Fateh, 1335 [1956 A.D.]). The parliament (*majles*) supported this decision by a legislation that prohibited concessions to foreigners (Movahhed, 1384 [2005 A.D.]). The Ghavam administration, however, entered into negotiations with Russians that led to the so-called Ghavam-Sadchikov agreement; yet the *majles* declared it as illegal and obliged the government to enter into negotiations with the AIOC in order to “regain the right of the people to Southern oil”.

At this stage, the main objective was to reduce financial problems through more revenues. A *majles* deputy (MP) thus declared: “They have given us as little as you can imagine; but if they pay us [an appropriate] share, we may lessen the sufferings of this poor people, decrease some taxes, and develop our country” (Eskandari, 1327a [1948a A.D.]). Thus a round of negotiations commenced with Iranians seeking to increase Iran’s share of revenues and the AIOC trying to concede as little as possible. Initially, Iran insisted on the observance of the 1933 Deal and some modification in its provisions. The negotiations were secretly followed in order to solve the issue without publicizing it. Yet, even opposition to this secrecy was still within an economic frame:

I did not believe in the secrecy of the negotiations. Always people should be informed about [such] negotiations so that the [negotiators] would have the support of public opinion. This is specifically true when the issue is not of a military or political nature, but an economic one and [therefore] Iranian nation should have been informed [so that] they would not be anxious (Amirtaymour Kalali, 1328 [1949 A.D.]).

The following round of negotiations began when the regime of equal sharing of oil revenues, supported by Americans (Vilz Ghaemmaghami, 1379 [2000 A.D.]), was more commonly practiced in other countries. Thus the Saed administration declared that the 1933 Deal could not secure Iran's "material gains" and proposed a new agreement based on equal profit share. This was the ultimate request of all parties including the nationalists. Hossein Makki, one of the leading nationalists, addressed the Minister of Finance:

How could you dispense with the principle of equal share? How could Mr. Gass convince you to relinquish a principle that is now the common practice in most parts of the world? (Makki, 1328 [1949 A.D.]

The AIOC rejected any type of revision to the 1933 Deal altogether and regarded the principle of equal share as impractical. The company followed the same objective they had in Reza Shah's era, that is, granting as little share of profits to Iran as possible. According to Golshaeen (1328 [1949 A.D.]), the Iranian chief negotiator:

In the first meeting, Mr. Gass told me he had come to Iran in order to modify certain provisions [of the 1933 Deal]. I told him we did not want modification; our duty is to revise [it]. He answered no revision was on the agenda of these negotiations. "So I would return to London," he added.

As a materialist reasoning guided both the supporters and critiques of the negotiated deal, their debates were more about appropriate formulations for more material gains. However, as post-war British economy was in a bad shape and taxes were rather high, the Company resisted even the smallest changes in its share of profits (Movahhed, 1384 [2005 A.D.]). Ultimately, the final

proposal offered by the Company, with insignificant modifications, was reluctantly accepted by the Iranian negotiators and sent to the parliament as a supplement to the 1933 Deal (hereafter referred to as the “Supplementary Agreement”- *layehe-ye elhaghi*). The Finance Minister himself believed that what the Company had proposed “could not be accepted” as it could not provide for what the legislation meant by “regaining the rights” of the Iranian nation (Elm, 1992).

Thus what Iran could have gained, as in the Reza Shah’s era, was limited to some modification. Yet, the foundations of elitism and “enlightened despotism” had already been questioned by the invasion of the allied forces and its concrete manifestation had been ruined with the departure of Reza Shah. The issue was beginning to be raised in the public realm and this, as it is shown below, was consequential. The elitist nature of negotiations, as an important feature of the national interest discourse, was now under attack in public debates. Thus not only was the discourse losing much of its effectiveness, the flexibility resulting from a materialist rationality was also weakened.

It was Iran’s communist party, *Tudeh*, that initially raised the issue in public<sup>1</sup>. The party, which had been harshly suppressed during Reza Shah’s era, was revived after his departure and, when the US and the Soviets began to discuss the northern oil, it opposed any concessions to American companies. Yet, it organized demonstrations supporting the concession to the Soviets. The contradictory position of the party led to objections by other political groups. Confrontations in the streets began and continued until the legislation forbidding all types of concessions was ratified

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1. It is worth mentioning here that the main objective of the Party was to make the northern oil concession to the Soviets possible.

in December 1944 (Fateh, 1335 [1956 A.D.]). Then the Party began attacking the southern oil concession. Pischevari, then a communist MP, thus addressed the nationalist leader, Mohammad Mosaddeq, “If you are truly nationalist and actually want to devote yourself [to your cause], here is where you should start from: nullify the D’Arcy Concession” (Pischevari, 1323 [1944 A.D.]). As the original oil concession to the British businessman, D’Arcy, during the Qajar era was deemed as a symbol of sacrificing national independence, such historical reminders could easily raise public sensation. Thus such criticisms increasingly made the issue of oil a part of debates in intellectual circles, newspapers, and public discussions.

The Soviets seemed to use their military presence as a leverage to acquire northern oil concession as a group of Azerbaijani communists, whose movement was linked to the Soviets, advocated separatism. Now the territorial integrity of the country was jeopardized and this was linked to the oil issue. This juxtaposition meant that a part of the country was going to be separated because of oil. At the same time, there were rumors about an agreement among great powers that reminded the Iranians of the anti-Iranian settlements among the great powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries compromising Iran’s sovereignty. The British proposal about the formation of a commission comprising of the representatives of the US, the UK, and the USSR, which was offered to the Moscow Conference in 1945 increased Iranians’ suspicion and anger. This commission was to scrutinize the conditions in Iran and specifically in Azerbaijan (Nejati, 1378 [1999 A.D.]). Historical analogies were made between what was going on and the 1907 agreement between Russia and Britain that had led to the division of Iran into three parts, the northern part recognized as the Russian sphere of influence, the southern part as

that of Britain, and the central part as the neutral part under the sovereignty of Iran - another instance of great powers' plans against Iran's independence (Mosaddeq, 1324 [1945 A.D.]).<sup>1</sup> The MPs attacked such arrangements: "What would happen when legislation in the country becomes under the influence and authority of the three powers? Who ... can think of such a state as an independent one? ... No country is in a position to intervene in [our] affairs [and] to disrupt the political life and independence of the country" (Mosaddeq, 1324 [1945 A.D.]).

Although, during Reza Shah's era, Iran's parliament had been weakened and its role had been reduced to a symbolic one, the post-invasion elections had been more meaningful, and influential nationalist figures had been elected. This was at a time when a new educated urban middle class had been formed, who was interested in following public issues. At first, it was the Ghavam-Sadchikov deal that created a harsh reaction by a group of MPs<sup>2</sup> leading to increasing public attention to the oil issue. As they had a generally critical stance against the AIOC and its unfair approach, a sense of "trauma" resulting from experiencing a national "humiliation" was created:

When you look at this map... you find the blue part as what the two powers allotted to themselves on the basis of the disastrous evil Treaty of 1907. The red line along the Persian Gulf is the British sphere of influence... This map is that of the oil deal ... [As if] we have given the sovereignty over that part of the country to the British. Iranians cannot tolerate seeing a part of

1. For more on 1907 agreement, see Mahdavi 1364 [1985 A. D].

2. Among the most important of these MPs were: Mozafar Baghayee, Ebrahim Amirteymour, Abolhassan Haerizadeh, Abdoullah Moazemi, Abdoulghader Azad, Hosein Makki. These MPs used filibuster procedure to prevent adaptation of the Supplementary agreement.

their country against its rights and borders as a concession to foreign nationals let alone to another state. This is impossible. (Eskandari, 1327b [1948b A.D.])

Therefore, oil became a signifier in the discursive space of the Iranian society, over which debates and contestations were formed. It was no longer only the concern of the political elite, but an issue of concern for the public; social feelings were emerging to later make the issue a political one. The materialist approach was contested by a populist one and this led to a revision of the national interest discourse and the emergence of a politicized approach that linked the issue to national sovereignty.

#### **4. Politicization of Oil: The Emergence of Hegemonic Conflict**

As the economic approach towards oil failed in achieving the goals and realizing the expectations, criticism became harsher and more vehement. Initially the objective was to reach a 50-50 deal: "... Britain may take the oil and we would not give the southern oil to others; but at what price? It should at least pay as much as America pays to Saudi Arabia [or] the American aggressors pay the Sheikh of Bahrain" (Eskandari, 1327a [1948a A.D.]). Yet in the course of time, oil became a matter of sovereignty, delegitimizing the economic approach. The public debate over oil made the political approach to it possible; it was not an economic and elitist issue anymore: "If the extension of the deal implies a 20 percent loss for us, politically the loss is 80 percent" (Eskandari, 1326 [1947 A.D.]). On the basis of the articulations made, new ideas were formed and new meanings were constructed. This process also affected the language and argumentation strategies of the advocates of the materialist approach in the Razmara administration. Thus the



elements within the discourse of national interest (discourse of materialistic development) were rearticulated within the frame of “best interest” or *maslahat*, as one of the most important concepts in Iran’s cultural “toolkit”. Now we turn to the new meanings that were given to the past events.

#### 4. 1. The 1933 Deal as an Act of Submission

The de-legitimization of the 1933 Deal would have meant weakening the economic approach and national interest discourse. From the very beginning, it was clear that this deal could not meet Iran’s demands<sup>1</sup> and it also extended the timespan of the previous deal already reluctantly accepted by Iran (Makki, 1328 [1949 A.D.]). Nevertheless, it was not completely denounced: “The agreement with D’Arcy which had been torn by the late Reza Shah in 1933 was like a chain over all the wealth and resources of the country. The chain was torn when the agreement was nullified and the new agreement [at least] gave the issue an international credibility” (Massoudi, 1326 [1947 A.D.]). Within the national-interest discourse, the positive aspects of the 1933 Deal compared to the D’Arcy Agreement were emphasized:

The revocation of the D’Arcy Agreement put an end to the monopolization of pipelines in Iran by the Oil Company... How could the Iranian nation exploit its resources if the pipelines were monopolized? Furthermore, there are some tangible changes in the new deal as far as financial issues are concerned (Razmara, cited in Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 83).

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1. This dissatisfaction was due to the very limited nature of modifications; Iran still could not participate in the oil industry and its financial objectives were not met either.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, with the gradual politicization of the oil issue, the 1933 Deal was more represented as an “imposition”:

Gentlemen, you are aware that there had been pressures. The international condition forced the Iranian government and, at the end, Reza Shah himself [to enter into this agreement], but I am certain that none of them signed it voluntarily and with a clear conscience” (Makki, 1328 [1949 A.D.]).

The other face of imposition was submission; the deal meant submitting to the demands of the Oil Company:

We all know that the 1933 Deal was in fact the submission of a weak nation to a powerful state that had been disguised and sent a usurping company ahead to enter into negotiations with the incumbent administration, sometimes more conciliatory and sometimes more wrathful. (Razavi, 1329 [1950 A.D.])

The unfavorable conditions imposed by an unfair pact was then interpreted as extortion, abuse, and fraud:

The British government has opened two accounts... Why ? So that it would not pay... our share... Our right has been violated. The Iranian nation has been defrauded... We are the owners of the oil and do not have any tax revenues therefrom. They take our oil and we are taxed. If you [addressing the AIOC] do not want to defraud, why do you insist to reiterate [that the deal cannot be nullified]? (Eskandari, 1327b [1948b A.D.])

News about the 15 million Pound revenues of the British government from the tax that the Company paid (compared to Iran’s oil revenue, which was limited to 7 million Pounds) as well as underpayments by the British Navy to the Company made it more plausible that the 1933 Deal was a fraud: “Is it not ironic that

the Oil Company is allowed to sell millions of tons of oil to the British Navy underpriced and sell 800,000 tons of oil to the poor people of Iran at the price of the oil sold at the Gulf of Mexico?" (Makki, 1328 [1949 A.D.]). This made the Deal intolerable in two ways:

- 1) It could be seen as a reason for Iran's underdevelopment. It was argued that if the real revenues were realized, a bright future could be depicted: "If the oil that is now sold to the British Navy almost for nothing (*saman-e bakhs*) ... were sold at real rates, Iran revenues could have been over 100 million" (Makki, 1328 [1949 A.D.]) [compared to 7 million referred to above].
- 2) It mirrored the humiliation of Iran through a hierarchical relationship: "Upon what ground should the price of oil for us be as high as that of the Gulf of Mexico minus 10 percent but approximately free for the British Navy? These are indeed regrettable for honest patriots who wish to serve [their country] ... Why should our military forces pay the price of the Gulf of Mexico but the British Navy should not? Are they *noblemen* and are we slaves?" (Makki, 1329b [1950b A.D.], [emphasis added])

Furthermore the past began to be reinterpreted: the price of oil had been manipulated by the British in a way that the 1933 Deal would be completely in their favor (Makki, 1329c [1950c A.D.]) and the deal had been the result of Reza Shah's mistake imposed on the country due to his despotism<sup>1</sup>. These made the deal not a normal economic one, but a product of foreign influence: "it is not a deal but a dictate... a mandate imposed upon an oppressed nation"

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1. Taghizadeh argued that he never personally advocated the extension of the deal neither did others. He somehow argued that if there were shortcomings or a mistake, they were not theirs but those of Reza Shah's "who unfortunately made a mistake and could not retreat from it". See Taghizadeh, 1327 [1948 A.D.].

(Shayegan, 1329a [1950a A.D.]). All the problems of the country were described as the consequences of that deal: “All our present miseries are due to that wretched deal of 1933” (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 245). It was then argued that those who signed the deal as well as its supporters were infamous cowards and traitors (Baghaee, 1329a [1950a A.D.]). The economic approach had even failed to realize the interest of the country within the framework of the deal: “According to this deal, our revenue should have been around 14-15 million pounds, but the governments failed to realize it... unfortunately our government [and] our Ministry of Foreign Affairs failed to do anything...” (Eskandari, 1327a [1948a A.D.]).

#### **4. 2. The Supplementary Agreement as a New Form of Imposition**

The Supplementary Agreement was the achievement of the economic approach, but its terms and conditions were unfavorable when compared to 50-50 deals. The Company refrained from granting any new concession (Vilz Ghaemmaghami, 1379 [2000a A.D.]). The post-World War conditions in Britain and the independence of India could have been reasons for this inflexibility (Falle, 1996), yet the British also had a contemptuous view of Iranians: “... Just wait until the beggars need the money badly enough-- that will bring them to their knees” (Grady, 1952, p. 57). Or “If you give the Iranians an inch, they'll take a mile” (Navvabi, 1998, p. 176.).

The orientalist mindset of the British meant that they saw Iranians as irrational emotional people who could not be taken seriously and their “unreasonable” demands could not be met. Iranians felt the humiliation implied in this hierarchical view and this reinforced the political and emotional aspects of the oil issue.

Nevertheless, the arguments were still about more financial gains for Iran;<sup>1</sup> therefore, the problem could have been solved if the 50-50 principle had been accepted: “If the Company had accepted the 50-50 principle during the 15<sup>th</sup> *majles*, ... there would be no dispute... but it insisted upon its stand” (Mosaddeq, 1330 [1951 A.D.]). Hasibi later pointed to this materialistic position of the *majles*:

They did not find the deal adequate. This word, “*adequate*”, is significant. I do not say they rejected it, but stated that it was *inadequate, cannot be accepted, and more should be given*. When we saw that the Company refused and did not listen to the rightful demands of the Iranian nation... the nation [‘s representatives] ... found a new hope and it was the nationalization of the oil industry (Hasibi, 1331 [1952 A.D.])[emphasis added].

Thus failing to offer financial rewards reinforced the logic of the critical approach. Critiques emphasized that the Supplementary Agreement was imposed on Iran; since the Iranian negotiator himself was not satisfied with the terms and conditions of the Supplementary Agreement,<sup>2</sup> it could easily be interpreted as being imposed. This made the analogy with the 1933 Deal plausible. Then the argument became a different one: “[Do you think] you give us a few more pounds and we confirm and celebrate this criminal act of the despotic era? I personally see this as an inexcusable crime and will keep on resisting and struggling as long

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1. Of course at this time, 1948, Abbas Eskandari raised the issue of nationalization of oil industry at the parliament. Yet, as this had not acquired a discursive location did not seem to be rational or applicable.

2. Golsha'ian is thus being quoted: “I did my best about the Supplementary Bill and explicitly said in the *majles* and wrote in my correspondence in this regard that I was not content and would not see the deal as adequate”. See Movehhd, 1384 [2005 A.D.].

as I am alive” (Haerizadeh, 1329b [1950b A.D.]). The link between the two deals was made through the concept of “confirmation” (*tanfiz*): “All that is going on and the Supplementary Agreement are ... for the confirmation of the 1933 Deal” (Baghaee, 1329b [1950b A.D.]). This linkage could make the logic of economic approach illegitimate.

The political closure following the assassination attempt against Mohammad Reza Shah<sup>1</sup> made the link with the 1933 Deal more acceptable: “The representatives of the Company chose to enter into negotiation at a time when there was martial law and most of the press were banned or stopped publishing, so that it would not be discussed” (Amirtaymour Kalali, 1328 [1949 A.D.]). Hossein Makki thus argued: “you have to ratify and then people will be suppressed ... so that they would not demonstrate against it” (Makki, 1328 [1949 A.D.]). The 1933 Deal was the result of the influence of foreigners through the 1921 coup and Reza Shah’s dictatorship in the following years; the new deal too was to be ratified in a politically closed space:

The Iranian nation was under pressure when the [1933] deal was formed... international politics did not allow us ... to make the world aware of what was going on in Iran and show them that we were being annihilated by oppression [and that] they were imposing a deal on us. [Now] in similar conditions, the *majles* ratifies this only to leave a disgraceful memorial in the history of Iran (Makki, 1328 [1949 A.D.])

The difference, however, was that the MPs were not necessarily

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1. The Communist Party became illegal; a new act that imposed more limitation on the press was ratified; martial law was imposed in many cities; Ayatollah Kashani was sent to exile; and the constitution was changed to give more power to the Shah (see Fateh, 1335 [1956 A.D.]).

forced to ratify it. Thus if they wanted to avoid dishonor, they should resist against it (Azad, 1328 [1949 A.D.]). Mosaddeq too criticized the conditions under which the Supplementary Agreement was being proposed:

We should not hastily and under various threats, [such as] the dissolution of *majles*, martial law, imprisonment of the newspapers' editors, interferences in elections and depriving people of their right to elect the members of parliament, ratify a bill that is totally a loss, and thus make the people enslaved for another fifty years (Mosaddeq, 1329a [1950a A.D.]).

When analogies were made, accepting the Bill could become an act of "treachery": "I believe in the present time, as far as national obligation and the duties of MPs are concerned, silence is a criminal act and treachery" (Mosaddeq, 1329a [1950a A.D.]). Those who would ratify the Bill were thus depicted as "traitors": "...whoever votes for the deal commits treason" (Mosaddeq, 1329b [1950b A.D.]) and proves that he wishes to enchain Iran: "Those who are in this country in order to defraud and loot ... ask us to confirm and accept this chain of enslavement, which was imposed upon Iran at a time when the Iranian constitution was practically abandoned" (Haerizadeh, 1329b [1950b A.D.]). This implied that the opposition to the Bill would show "patriotism" and those who were true nationalists and loved their homeland would be against it (Makki, 1328 [1949 A.D.]).

Such argumentations were to marginalize the logic of economic benefits and the national interest discourse: "entering into negotiation with the Company that began during the late [prime minister], Hajir, is against the very intentions of the Iranian people; as we are against the deal in principle, we cannot enter into negotiations to modify it" (Haerizadeh 1329a [1950a A.D.]).

Instead, the political logic was appealed to: “This is not a concession but an order of the Oil Company to its agents to consolidate its power ... and to offer all the possessions of Iranians as well as their independence, integrity, and national identity wholeheartedly to the residents of the Thames River Basin” (Haerizadeh, 1329b [1950b A.D.]).

#### 4. 3. The Razmara Administration as Treacherous<sup>1</sup>

While the Supplementary Agreement was being discussed at the parliament, General Razmara became the prime minister. This, too reinforced the basic logic of the political approach. Again an analogy was involved: Razmara was a military man, as was Reza Khan; he too had authoritarian inclinations, seemed to be submissive to foreign powers, and was prepared to compromise Iranian people’s interest.<sup>2</sup> It was argued that dictators in Iran were to meet the demands of foreign powers:

Reza Shah had no problem with me, neither I with him [so there was nothing personal]. But most of what happened was related to foreign policy. Foreigners had interests in Iran that could not be realized unless there was a dictatorship. If there were a national *majles* and if the people had the freedom [to express their ideas], such interests could not be realized. That is now exactly happening again. Again the foreigners have interests that cannot be realized through the National Consultative Assembly (*majles shoraye melli*) and the people will not capitulate. In order to guarantee their interest, a dictator should be there to arrest [dissidents], shut down [the press], exert all

1. In Persian: (dolat-e xā'en-e sar-seporde)

2. In the 1940s Reza Shah was more depicted as a despotic ruler: “a bullish dictator who ruled arbitrarily and denied all the rights of people...” See Khatami 1377 [1998 A.D.].



types of torture and suffering to further those interests. The result is this government that is going to safeguard the interests of the alien [powers] (Mosaddeq, 1329a [1950a A.D.]).

Military dictatorship became the buzzword in the linguistic space of the Iranian society as it was much used by the nationalist *majles* deputies affiliated with the National Front.<sup>1</sup> The analogy found some other ground: Razmara could be depicted as having gained power through a “coup-like” attempt as had Reza Khan: “The National Front gives warning and deems it necessary to inform the world public opinion about the causes that led to the formation of the new cabinet. The Deputies affiliated with the Front as well as our publications have had information about the formation of a government (a coup-like attempt) for two or three weeks and have disclosed them without hiding any part of these definite facts” (Makki, 1328 [1949 A.D])<sup>2</sup>.

Within this analogical framework, Razmara’s conduct was compared to that of Reza Shah when he wanted to change the Iranian ruling system to a republic: “The Prime Minister wants to be at the service of the Oil Company so that if one day in the future he wishes to pave the way for establishing a republic, there is a

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1. According to Mossadegh, the formation of the National Front was the result of a public appeal on October 14, 1949, urging resistance against government interference during the 16<sup>th</sup> term of parliamentary elections. This call prompted the public to gather for a demonstration in front of the Marble Palace. A crowd, estimated to be around 10,000, gathered and Mossadegh, as the leader, asked the chief of the palace guard for permission to have a sit-in on the site of the palace. Eventually, representatives from the crowd were selected and collectively became the founding members of the National Front as an umbrella organization for nationalist parties and associations. See: Mosaddeq, 1370 [1991].
  2. After the Reza Shah era, the Shah designated the prime minister only after the *majles* declared its primary approval (*ray-e tamayol* or vote of inclination). Yet following the assassination attempt against Mohammad Reza Shah, in some cases, he declined to follow this rule.

favorable condition and his masters would assist him” (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.]). Along the same line, a narrative was shaped about foreign influences that sought to interfere in Iranian affairs and violate the rights of people through imposing a new dictatorship on Iran: “The day has arrived when foreigners seek to tread on the political rights, abolish the Constitution, transgress our national independence and sovereignty by deploying their honest servants” (Mosaddeq, 1329b [1950b A.D.]).

Thus, through a comparison between the present and the past, a “valid” interpretation of what was going on could be produced:

The British government has done a study and stated that if the propensity of the Iranian people and a National Consultation Assembly representing that propensity would be referred to, certainly this oil deal would not be accepted. Therefore, they have always had this in mind that if they form a dictatorial system and a fake *majles* obeying their orders, this oil deal can be ratified as they wish in the same way that they did in 1933 (Azad, 1329 [1950 A.D.]).

On the other hand, secretive negotiations and secret diplomacy followed by the Razmara administration was compared to the same elitist style of Reza Shah when he was conducting oil negotiations. This could make the historical analogy even more plausible. Razmara was said to “have been taken into the scene to put Saed-Gass deal into effect” (Mosaddeq, 1329b [1950b A.D.]). The similarities were so striking that when earlier there was some discussion about his becoming prime minister, Ali Mansour, then the prime minister, told the British, “if such a [military] government makes such a suggestion, ... the people will say ‘military force again’” (Raeen, 1358 [1979 A.D.], p. 158).

The articulations led to conceptualizations such as “treacherous

government committed to foreigners” (*dolat-e khaen-e sar-sepordeh*). This discursive construct signified a government raised to power by alien forces or through their interference and influence in order to further their interest against that of Iran and Iranian people even by suppressive measures. Its main characteristic would have been *submission* to the demands of foreign powers. Submission is somehow the result of fear, together with a cost-benefit calculation. Thus if a government views the issue of oil from a pure cost-benefit aspect, it is “treacherous and committed to foreigners” the ideal type of which could be Reza Shah’s and then Razmara’s<sup>1</sup>. He was taken to be the “servant” of the British who wanted “to assure his masters that he was going to safeguard D’Arcy’s legacy even to death and thus would prove that he deserved their support” (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 296).

This concept could make analogies even more attractive when supporters of the economic approach, such as Hajir and Razmara, were compared to historically hated figures such as Vosoogholdoleh (who had negotiated the 1919 Deal): “we had such personalities in the past. The people like Vosoogholdoleh and now Hajir and Razmara” (Sanjabi, 1331 [1952 A.D.]). Historical traumas were thus what the Razmara administration was trying to repeat: “You Razmara ... are even worse than Vosoogholdoleh” (Shahed, 1329 [1950] A.D.). Therefore, Razmara and his cabinet were represented as agents of foreigners that acted against the people: “The Prime Minister under the directions from Britain has prepared these responses by the help of some people in this country who find their characters dependent upon the desk they sit behind

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1. The US Ambassador, Grady, later renounced this understanding of Razmara and portrayed him as “simply trying to serve his country’s best interests”(Grady, 1952, p. 58)

and while pretend to serve the people, they are [actually] severely violating the rights of the people and disguising the truth”<sup>1</sup>. If the government were treacherous, the people would become the “oppressed,” whose rights and interests were systematically denied by the government:

Razmara frantically lashed a dispossessed hungry enchained people by [the authority that] had been given to him by foreigners. He sought to impose aliens’ political and economic dominance on Iran for another period of fifty years... whoever obeyed the policy he advocated knew that the oil genius’ mission was to make the Supplementary Agreement ratify (Safari, 1370 [1991 A.D.], p. 87).

Being “oppressed” could provide an identity for a society looking for a definition of itself and it was repeatedly appealed to: “Alas the noble Iranian nation is weak and suffers from ignorance, diseases, and a corrupt government. Rules and regulations devised for the captivation of the people do not let it even have scanty food to keep on living” (Haerizadeh, 1329a [1950a A.D.]).

Recalling past traumas further reinforced the sense of having been oppressed. It made the fluid turbulent chaotic world meaningful. Dichotomies such as good/bad, right/wrong, oppressed/oppressor, patriot/traitor, friend/enemy could draw the line between ‘we’ and “others” and hence identifications became possible. Being oppressed meant that the world was precarious and others were untrustworthy enemies (Kinnvall, 2013). Thus forces could be mobilized to combat the “evil” in a “holy struggle” (*jihad*): “Friends from the National Front in the *majles* and patriotic

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1. If one looks from the outside of the discourse at what Razmara was doing, she would find it reasonable. Grady argues “To describe Razmara as a British agent was of course preposterous... (Grady, 1952, p. 58)

authors of the newspapers were in a holy struggle against his [Razmara's] counter-independence thoughts when almost all [other] effective forces in the country had complied with them" (Safari, 1370 [1991 A.D.], p. 89). Oppressed-ness of the self could make the Razmara administration illegitimate, as it was represented as an instrument of the evil aiming at the exploitation of the Iranian people: "If we actually had a government seeking the rights of Iran and were not itself an agent of the Company, we would not have faced such miseries" (Haerizadeh, 1329a [1950a A.D.]).

The assassination attempts against people such as Hajir and in particular Razmara can be understood when the anger resulting from this social identity is taken into consideration. When in an interview following the assassination of Razmara, Ayatollah Kashani [a religious leader of the Oil Nationalization Movement] was asked: "Is it true that [the militant Islamist group] *fadaiyan Islam* assassinated Razmara?" He replied: "Today in a sense all Iranians are devoted to Islam and follow the traitors to punish them".<sup>1</sup>

So far even if the issue of oil was becoming politicized, the solutions were still mostly of an economic nature, i.e., gaining more benefits; yet the perspective was gradually changing. Makki, in retrospect thus argued: "I found out that the British were prepared to give us up to 50 percent of the profit. If in the past they had been fair enough, nationalization may not have been thought of. But ... the Company's stubbornness led to the idea of cancellation of the concession and later the idea of nationalization" (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 259).

In general, as the economic approach was losing its legitimacy

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1. *Etelaat*, 14 Khordad 1330 [1951 A.D.]. Iran' National Library and Archives of Iran

and its advocates sought to justify it for the public, new articulations were formed, the result of which was the emergence of the concept of expediency or *maslahat*.

### 5. The Re-Articulation of the National Interest Discourse

As the national interest discourse was losing its legitimacy, oil was represented as an invaluable possession and this generated rising expectation about its material benefits: “this invaluable jewel, this motor of world civilization has been taken away from Iranian nation’s hands” (Haerizadeh, 1329b [1950b A.D.]). Through an analogy, oil became comparable with blood and thus the critical approach could make the control of oil as equivalent to the survival of Iran: “Our nation will display resistance and perseverance in preserving its blood;”<sup>1</sup> and its concession to foreigners became equivalent with long-term loss, i.e.,: “making the nation devoid of its blood is against the interest of the next generations” (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 256). This was portrayed as the mission of the agents of the treacherous government: “They seek oil, that is, the blood of this nation. They are missioned for that and this is their excuse, as they are supposed to grant Iranians’ blood to their masters” (Baghaee, 1329b [1950b A.D.]). This made the Company’s new suggestions worthless: “They assume the Iranian nation is a child and they can steal its gold necklace by offering a few pieces of marshmallow. The Company, however, does not even give that marshmallow to Iran...” (Shayegan, 1329a [1950a A.D.]).

Thus defending the Supplementary Agreement was not possible, as it would have meant treachery and violation of the rights of the

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1. See: *Bakhtar-e Emrooz*, 30 Khordad 1329 [1950 A.D.], National Library and Archives of Iran

nation: “If you accept the Saed-Gass agreement, you will be dishonored and can never undo it” (Rouhani, 1352 [1973 A.D.], p. 85). The modification of the 1933 Deal was not followed anymore, as the main theme of discussions was its rejection and nullification: “We are against that Deal altogether so we cannot enter into discussion about it” (Haerizadeh, 1329a [1950a A.D.]). This view was winning the minds and hearts of the public.

Thus the concept of “*maslahat*” was taken out of the political cultural “toolkit” to rearticulate the national interest discourse. Again, an elitist economic view became dominant, as it was argued that oil is a technical issue (not a public one), and that when one cannot get the ideal financial benefits, it is to one’s best interest to get what is attainable. As Iran does not have the technical expertise in oil industry, its interest is to go on with the present conditions: “If the result is the blockage of oil wells in the south, is it in the interest of the Iranian Nation?” (Forouhar, 1329 [1950 A.D.]). Thus, through certain linguistic strategies, the political approach could be marginalized within the national interest discourse to which we refer below:

### 5. 1. Reason/Emotion Dichotomy

When the issue of oil became a matter of public debate, the political approach was reinforced and the elitist perspective became weakened. The governments were aware that their survival depended on the settlement of the issue and this settlement was in turn dependent on preventing it from being publicized<sup>1</sup>. When the issue became public, the dichotomy of reason-emotion became a

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1. Hajir’s government, for example, concealed the list of Company’s violations of its commitments.

part of the national interest discourse. This could justify the elitist approach and marginalize the political approach: “In issues related to national life, one should not follow personal feelings and emotions. In such conditions technical experts should be asked to explain and clarify everything ...” (Rouhani, 1352 [1973 A.D.], p. 94). Thus in order to make the *majles* irrelevant, the Mansur administration proposed the formation of a specialized Commission for the oil issue in order to make the debates less observable (Navvabi, 1998). Mansur argued in the National Assembly: “I cannot talk about it in the *majles* as oil is a technical issue which, as it was mentioned, needs to be discussed [by professionals]. It cannot be clarified in one or two sessions: when it is sent to the Commission, as it was argued, the members of the Commission as well as knowledgeable people can discuss the Bill” (Mansour, 1329 [1950 A.D.]).

The same approach was taken to the Commission as its advocates attempted to make the issue less public and less “emotional”: “As we have not studied [the subject] yet, we cannot make a hasty judgment. Experts were supposed to be present here and we could use them [to get the relevant information]” (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 92).

As the issue was technical, making it public must be avoided. The masses (*avam ol nas*) were described as emotional and irrational and the elites as reasonable and prudent (enlightened despotism was thus revived). Therefore, decision making was taken to be the elite’s job and the engagement of the public in politics would lead to chaos and disorder, as it was experienced during the Constitutional Revolution and afterwards.

In this counter-discursive attack, emotionally driven statements neglecting the lack of technical, logistic, and financial facilities in



Iran were represented as the greatest treachery (Mirfotros, 1386 [2007 A.D.]) that would eventually lead to anarchy and misery:

Today the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of people depends on their employment in oil-related institutions. If carelessness leads to a serious interruption in the exploitation and export of oil, who will take the responsibility for the resultant tensions and damages? In the present situation, one cannot play with the destiny of a large number of people through a few statements. Accordingly, as the oil issue and any decision about it are very crucial and consequential, it is definitely necessary that making any decision or taking any position will be based on a prior inquiry into the experts' opinion ... especially from technical, financial, and economic points of view (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 271)

From this perspective, the only way to avoid predicament was to rely on technical knowledge possessed by a few experts who could give the best solutions for the problem.

## 5. 2. Prejudice/Flexibility Dichotomy

The Razmara administration, as the main agent of the discourse of expediency, tried to convince the nation that nationalization was not in Iran's best interest (Milani, 2011). Yet, as the Supplementary Agreement was delegitimized, such a position would have been "dishonoring": "Is signing such a deal a treachery (MP Baghaee: "yes") and the one who signs it a traitor and foreigners' agent?" (Forouhar, 1329 [1950 A.D.]). The dichotomy of flexibility/prejudice could justify the deal, de-legitimize "others", and make the "self" legitimate/respectable. If today is not an appropriate time for gaining more, the reason dictates flexibility until one acquires sufficient power and capabilities: "... politics requires flexibility. If

you are flexible, you can get [what you look for] from anyone... If you are inflexible, you cannot get anything from anyone” (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 216). The real treachery was ignoring one’s limitations and not following a conciliatory policy dictated by reason.

Razmara, unlike his predecessors, openly defended the Supplementary Agreement when he felt himself under pressure to disclose his position. He thus announced that its ratification was in Iran’s best interest:

There is no reason for anyone to take a step against the interest of his country. If we could gain more, the better [yet we cannot] ... If you do not ratify this Supplementary Agreement, you will be back to the 1933 Deal ... The government should nullify something only if it can replace it with something better. (Razmara, cited in Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 215)

His support for the Supplementary Agreement meant putting an end to the material or economic interest-based approach to the issue of oil. As far as the Supplementary Agreement was concerned, a sort of commonsense had been shaped, which made any support for it a political suicide: “what can one expect from a government in which there is no one to defend Iran’s interest” (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 238). This was coincided with the conclusion of the ARAMCO 50-50 deal to further delegitimize Razmara’s approach (Safaei, 1371 [1992 A.D.]). The Iranian public asked if the ARAMCO could do it, why could the AIOC not (Sutton, 1955)?

### 5. 3. Ideal/Reality Dichotomy

The third linguistic strategy adopted in the national interest discourse was that of ideal/ reality dichotomization to de-legitimize

the political discourse. Then realistic evaluations of national capacities became significant and hence idealistic aspirations were delegitimized:

In my opinion seeking any national aspirations should be consistent with expediency and possibilities; otherwise it could backfire and we would face unintended consequences ... All suggestions should be considered and we should not solely rely on ideals. I think the Commission should not make a hasty decision and should wait until we explain what we can gain on the basis of possibilities and expediency. Possibilities and expediency should not be overlooked by the gentlemen. If you do not allow us [to explain these] the best interests and expediency may be lost. (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 245)

Accordingly, as Iran did not have oil exploitation facilities, idealist solutions (oil nationalization) would have meant missing opportunities and the devastation of the country. The nationalization of oil industry *is* the ultimate goal; yet it would be postponed until the necessary funds and facilities are provided (Rouhani, 1352 [1973 A.D.], p. 98): “we earn 50 million pound per year from the southern oil. All of our foreign currency is from the southern oil. There are three countries in the world that can manage oil industry, the UK, the US, and the USSR. Oil market is in their control; the pipes are under their control. The assets of the Company are hundreds of millions ...” (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 245).

Nationalization, therefore, cannot be realized if its requirements are missing: “Otherwise, transfer of control of the oil industry to Iran will cause the misery of the people and next generations will scorn and curse [the decision makers]” (Rouhani, 1352 [1973 A.D.], p. 175). Razmara thus addressed the Oil Commission: “the management of oil industry and oil exploitation is not possible unless subsidiary companies are established in other countries,

transportation facilities are provided and so on and so forth. Whether such arrangements are feasible and economically justifiable should be decided by experts” (Rouhani, 1352 [1973 A.D.], p. 176). Rational argument suffices: “... National aspiration should be adapted to the possibilities and expediency. It is not appropriate for me to talk anymore” (Razamara, cited in Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.], p. 265). In his last sentence, Razmara implies that if the MPs are rational, they would easily be convinced by his rational argument and if they are not persuaded, it means that they are irrational and idealist.

Thus although material interest was still the central focus of the discourse, it was rearticulated by reference to expediency and possibilities. These made flexibility and compromise a necessity, which could at the same time lead to maximum feasible gains.

## **6. Towards the End of Hegemonic Conflict**

In the fall and winter of 1950-1951, as the nationalization of oil industry had gained much support, negotiations to reach a new agreement became more illegitimate. As the political discourse with its central theme of humiliation was becoming hegemonic, the solutions framed in reference to expediency, such as returning to D’Arcy Deal or ventures with foreign companies in Iran’s oil with a share of 10 percent (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.]) were not acceptable anymore. These were taken as signs of humiliation and Razmara was deemed responsible for it. The government tried to respond to critiques:

Gentlemen, if we investigate and scrutinize the important affairs in the country with this attitude, the result will be nothing but absolute impotence... such non-factual statements would

question our multi-thousand years of independence ... In my opinion, if a nation seeks to regain its rights, it is not right for it to portray itself as so miserable and wretched and its system as corrupt and those who serve it as disgraceful and dishonest (Forouhar, 1329 [1950 A.D.]).

Furthermore, they had to resist the representation of the AIOC as an absolute evil, so that negotiations with it that could lead to new terms and conditions could be justified:

In his speech, one of the respectable gentlemen talked in a way as if the whole affairs of the country are conducted according to the will and wishes of the Oil Company. ... Even lacking a system of water pipe in Tehran has been attributed to the Company's disagreement. ... Gentlemen in their speeches represent the Company as the omnipotent power higher than all powers. I would just express my regret for the statements made in this way (Forouhar, 1329 [1950 A.D.]).

At the same time, the discourse of national interest delegitimized the logic of political discourse and its emphasis on humiliation by reducing it to psychological symptoms of a few nationalist *majles* deputies: "Such statements are not only against the reputation and dignity of the ancient Iranian nation, they are rooted in personal feelings of inferiority" (Forouhar, 1329 [1950 A.D.]). The nationalists, in turn, represented such arguments as treacherous for denying the reality of foreigners' influence in Iran: "Mr. Baghaee ... proved that the issue of purchasing locomotives has been the result of foreigners' intervention ... but they [the government] ask not to talk about it and that it has not been so and no one intervenes. All this is nonsense" (Shayegan, 1329a [1950a A.D.]). They argued that the government seeks to humiliate the nation in order to perpetuate the presence of foreigners in the country:

One should claim against those who said so that they themselves suffer from inferiority [complex]. Mr. Prime Minister who is supposed to save a nation, in private meetings, says “You cannot even manage a cement production facility, you cannot even produce an ewer.” Who is really suffering from inferiority? (Shayegan, 1329b [1950b A.D.]

The rival discourse, in turn, attempted to divert the public focus from the oil issue to domestic reforms and struggle against corruption (Milani, 2011), while in the other discourse, these were given meaning through their relationship with humiliation. For example, the project that was oriented towards decentralization through the formation of local councils (*anjomanhaye eyalati va velayati*), was interpreted as a step towards the demolition of Iran’s territorial integrity and cohesiveness: “The recent appeals for replacing existing centralism is nothing but making the country disintegrated. Gentlemen, I explicitly declare that this clause is a foundation for the disintegration of Iran as a country” (Baghaee, 1329a [1950a A.D.]).

Such projects were taken to be prepared by foreign forces to be implemented by their Iranian agents: “Gentlemen, as I mentioned in the private meeting, this has been a British policy for a long time. They have brought it up several times yet in different guises” (Baghaee, 1329b [1950b A.D.]).

All these last struggles further delegitimized the Razmara government. In the words of US Ambassador, Grady (1951), “we have reached the conclusion that his government is gradually but continuously moving towards fall”. It was with his assassination, however, that the national interest discourse dramatically lost its niche within the political space in Iran and a discourse that looked for release from national humiliation, attaining independence, and

reviving national dignity became hegemonic. It was at this moment that nationalization of oil industry became possible or even inevitable.

## 7. Conclusion

The sudden fall of Reza Shah and the dramatic disintegration of the military establishment, which was long boasted of, revived the historical traumas of disregard for Iran's independence, around which a new type of nationalism emerged with a focus on national humiliation. Within this new nationalist discourse, "oil" became a concept around which a new identity could emerge and consolidate itself in the course of time. Oil, which used to be regarded as a material/financial resource for the realization of a modern state, became an issue of conflict among various political factions. In the course of time, the older nationalist discourse continued to treat oil from a simple materialist/economic point of view, seeking legitimacy through more financial gain. Even the critiques located their arguments within the same framework, with higher bars. In the course of time, however, when the debates became a matter of public discussion, a new nationalist discourse was formed and became more and more politicized. Within this discourse, even material gain gradually lost its significance and the issue of oil acquired a moral meaning when it was articulated with independence and freedom: "I believe in the nationalization of oil industry and I believe more in its ethical dimension more than its economic aspect" (Makki, 1363 [1984 A.D.]). This, at the end became the hegemonic discourse that led to the nationalization of oil in Iran.

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