



## Reza Shah and the National Assembly: A Re-examination of Despotism in the Structure of Laws from the Sixth to Twelfth Sessions

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present study aims to examine how Reza Shah's despotism influenced the Iranian legislative system in the contemporary era. This is primarily done through an analysis of the National Assembly's performance during its sixth to twelfth sessions. The study also aims to explain the mechanisms used to strengthen authoritarianism by intervening in the legislative process.

**Method:** This paper utilizes the theoretical framework of patrimonialism and employs a documentary method with descriptive analysis. Historical sources, official documents, and legislative texts form the basis for data collection and analysis.

**Results:** The research findings indicate that Reza Shah successfully manipulated the legislative environment to consolidate his personal power. He achieved this by undermining the Assembly's independence, interfering in the composition of its representatives, eliminating political opponents, and leveraging authoritarian legitimacy. These interventions not only impacted the selection process of representatives but also significantly influenced the content of the laws passed.

**Conclusions:** The study concludes that Reza Shah's despotism, by dominating the legislative body, played a crucial role in weakening political institutions and reducing the transparency of the legislative process in Iran. By offering a clear depiction of the interplay between authoritarianism and legislation, this study contributes to a more profound understanding of institution- building in contemporary Iranian history

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## Introduction

Eight days after Ahmad Shah's coronation, World War I began. The young and inexperienced Shah, despite declaring neutrality at the outset of the war, could not prevent the warring states from entering the country's territory. The occupation of parts of the country, alongside numerous internal problems such as famine, poverty, contagious diseases, the failure of the constitution, a crisis of identity, and social and moral disarray, had plunged the country into a chaotic state. The emergence of various movements in different parts of the country made the situation difficult for the young Shah; these movements eventually stood against the central government and declared independence. Among them were Colonel Pesian's movement in Khorasan, Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani's movement in Azerbaijan, Mirza Kuchak Khan's in Gilan, Simitqo's in Kurdistan, Shaykh Khazal's in Khuzestan, the Na'ibians' in Kashan, and the Punishment Committee in Tehran, all of which began to seek independence from the central government, causing numerous problems for it. The Constitutional Revolution, although formed with the aim of eliminating despotism and establishing the rule of law based on justice, failed in practice to replace the despotic government with democratic institutions. Instead, "it altered the two factors of relative stability in society, namely the monarchy and Sharia." (Amanat, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 579)

On February 22, 1921, a coup led by Sayyid Zia'uddin Tabataba'i and Reza Khan Mirpanj, orchestrated by the British General Ironside, paved the way for the end of the Qajar monarchy. After the occupation of Tehran, Ahmad Shah was forced to appoint Sayyid Zia as prime minister, but he was ousted with the cooperation of Reza Khan, and Reza Khan became prime minister in November 1923. He then proposed a republican plan, which faced serious opposition from clerics (like Modarres) and intellectuals and was defeated. Finally, on October 31, 1925, the National Assembly deposed Ahmad Shah and made Reza Khan the monarch. Bureaucracy and a regular army formed the foundations of Reza Shah's monarchy. With the slogan of nationalism, establishing order, and suppressing rebellions, he garnered the support of some intellectuals like Taqizadeh, Foroughi, Kasravi, and Davar, who considered Westernization and authoritarianism as the path to progress. These individuals supported Reza Shah's actions, such as unveiling and opposing the clergy, but after the consolidation of his power, they themselves became victims of his despotism. Many intellectuals of the first Pahlavi era considered Iranian society to be lacking in literacy and social awareness. Reza

Shah, with the same view, although he did not believe in holding elections, was forced to do so to maintain a modernist facade. These were elections in which people were effectively deprived of the right to choose, and the Shah himself played a direct role in selecting the representatives. During this period, only men (ostensibly) had the right to vote, and women were deprived of this right. From the sixth National Assembly onwards, Reza Shah, by engineering the elections, formed a monolithic National Assembly supportive of the monarchy, with over 84% of its members being aristocrats, landowners, khans, government employees, and merchants affiliated with the court. This rubber-stamp National Assembly was tasked with securing the Shah's interests. This article examines how Reza Shah interfered in the elections of the sixth to twelfth sessions of the National Assembly to clarify the dimensions and consequences of this process.

### **1. Theoretical Foundations**

Patrimony is derived from the word "Pater," meaning father, and refers to personal property or property inherited by a son from his father. Based on this, Max Weber, the German sociologist, who is essentially a sociologist of domination, in his analysis of various political systems and types of domination, believes that there are three types of domination: traditional domination, charismatic domination, and rational-legal domination. In his view, traditional domination has various forms: patriarchy, gerontocracy, and patrimonialism (Sultani). He also used the term "Patrimonialism" to analyze pre-modern political systems that existed in feudal governments in East Asia. According to Weber, in a patrimonial government, the military apparatus is the most important tool available to the ruler for administering affairs. And in fact, the military forces are more loyal to the ruler than to the nation and serve to implement his wishes. Therefore, based on this, in this type of domination, there is no boundary between the private and public spheres; because all power emanates entirely from the person of the ruler. In Weber's theory, the characteristics of patrimonialism include the influence of the ruler's relatives and kin in governmental apparatuses, the disorder of the state system, and extra-legal actions. Furthermore, Max Weber considers the main characteristic of a patrimonial system to be "The existence of an administrative and military apparatus dependent on the person of the ruler." (Weber, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 364) In contrast to modern bureaucracy, which is a symbol of rationality and impersonal interactions, patrimonial

bureaucracy is defined by distinctive features such as dependence on the person of the ruler, the dominance of patron-client relationships, and the placement of the royal court at the center of the state (Weber, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 417-418).

Patrimonialism has also been translated as "Hereditary patrimonial rule." According to Weber, the origin and model of patrimonialism is "Patriarchy," and it lies at its core (Weber, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 419). This is because the patriarch derives his legitimacy and domination from ideas rooted in the accepted traditions of the people. Therefore, patriarchal domination can be considered as the natural background and precursor to patrimonial government.

Bashiriyeh, referring to the existence of three types of political culture – subject, parochial, and participant – believes that the patrimonial system, in fact, indicates a subject culture, because the Shah is at the head of power and the people are considered his subjects, having no participation in the process of advancing societal developments (Bashiriyeh, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 661-671).

While the Shah's decree is tantamount to law, he selects army and bureaucracy employees from among individuals loyal to him. Also, in this type of political system, pessimism and distrust towards the political system and the effort to get close to the ruler to protect one's property and life are very prominent. Another characteristic of the patrimonial system is that it requires an ideological backbone for its continuation and survival. Accordingly, having a connection to the origin of existence or having nationalistic and patriotic ideas are characteristics of patriarchal systems. Of course, in countries where rulers have inherited the government from their fathers, they may not call themselves kings nor claim kingship, but this does not change the essence of the matter, and they are considered examples of patrimonial governments. For example, the governments of Bashar al-Assad in Syria or Ilham Aliyev in Azerbaijan, who inherited power from their fathers, are examples of patrimonial governments. Although elections are held in these countries, kingship, in reality, continues under this guise so that they are not accused of establishing a monarchy and violating popular sovereignty and democracy; also, "Weber considers sultanism as the extreme form of patrimonialism." (Nemati, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 21)

Houshang Shahabi considers the nature of the Iranian state during the historical period of 1312-1320, i.e., the last eight years of Reza Shah's regime, as patrimonial. In these periods, the concentration of power and autocracy are accompanied by the personalization of power. Reza Shah, like rulers of patrimonial systems, removed those who helped him attain kingship

(who typically had significant scholarly and familial backing) from the political process through threats, rewards, encouragement, or banishment (the only exception in Reza Shah's case, where he did not kill his opponent, was Mohammad Ali Foroughi, whom he placed under house arrest). Another characteristic of this era, as described, was that the system turned to nationalistic ideas for its survival and endurance. Nationalism and patriotism were prominent features of Reza Shah's era, which had, of course, led to the support of the elite community for him. This set of processes (personalization of power, elimination of elites, and inclination towards nationalism) in practice led to the consolidation of a patrimonial structure during the period under discussion, which can be identified through the following characteristics (Shahabi and Linze, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 53). Therefore, the characteristics of patrimonialism can be summarized as follows:

1. Political and administrative bureaucracy is completely a private tool in the monopoly of the Shah, and the ruler is at the top of the political-economic pyramid;
2. The unilateral political sovereignty of the Shah under a patrimonial regime provides the ground for the growth of a deficient, comprador capitalist system. Therefore, a patrimonial regime, unlike feudalism, has no commitment to maintaining borders and social activities. Patrimonialism is present on the social scene without rivals;
3. The boundaries between the public and private spheres in patrimonialism are unclear and ambiguous.

It should also be noted that in Weber's thought, patrimonialism in modern conditions transforms into neopatrimonialism (new patrimonialism). Juan Linz, in defining neopatrimonialism, states: If superficial modernization occurs in a patrimonial state, then this type of government approaches a sultanistic aspect. And in the sultanistic state, the source of obedience to the ruler is neither tradition, nor an ideology, nor being a representative of God, but rather what causes obedience is a combination of fear and hope, prohibition and bestowal (Linz, cited in Shahabi, 1990). Goodwin and Skochpol also state: "In a neo-patrimonial regime, political power is concentrated in the hands of a dictatorial commander who does not allow the consolidation of any stable political group in the political sphere." (Goodwin and Skochpol, 1989)

Samuel Huntington presents different characteristics of neopatrimonialism. In his view, patronage and bestowal, nepotism, cronyism, and corruption are the four main features of neopatrimonialism (Huntington, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 91). He also notes that another

characteristic of new patrimonialism is the concentration of power in the hands of the ruler, and the exercise of power by subordinates depends on their proximity and expression of devotion to the ruler.

Neopatrimonialism systems also suffer from widespread administrative corruption and in the implementation of laws. This is because neopatrimonialism governments, to ensure their survival and endurance, resort to largesse and favors based on friendly and entirely self-serving relationships, without considering merit, which itself fuels widespread and structural corruption. In this type of regime (unlike patrimonial regimes), the private and public spheres are ostensibly separated, but in reality, there is no distinction or separation between these two domains. Dismissals and appointments, and the method of wealth distribution in these systems, depend on the personal opinion of the ruler and structures play little role. However, unlike patrimonial systems, structures are not without influence, and a minimal role can be attributed to them due to superficial modernization in these regimes.

## **2. Characteristics of the Neo-patrimonial System**

The characteristics of the patrimonial system, whose indicators can be seen in the Pahlavi government, are as follows:

### **2.1. Personalization of Power**

The individualization of politics was an important feature of the Pahlavi government, and people were excluded from the scene in this type of political system. Opposition groups were tolerated and superficially involved in politics only to the extent that they did not undermine the ruler's personal power. In a neo-patrimonial system, political power is monopolized by the sultan, and personal power does not tolerate any public oversight. In Reza Shah's era, the personalization of power, despite the existence of a bureaucratic apparatus and a modern legal system, ultimately led to the implementation of the Shah's decrees. Reza Shah's military background turned the army into the most important neo-patrimonial institution of the government. Thus, preserving the monarchy and the continuity of the Shah's personal power replaced the provision of national interests (Sardarabadi, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 330).

## **2.2. Patronage**

Another characteristic of neo-patrimonial states is the existence of patron-client relationships, or clientelism. As mentioned earlier, in neo-patrimonial regimes, the granting of public administrative positions and privileges is a favor bestowed upon cronies to ensure their loyalty and allegiance to the ruler. This characteristic is common to both regimes. The only difference is that in a patrimonial regime, the relationship between supporters and the ruler is direct and unmediated, based on achieving personal interests and benefits for individuals. In neopatrimonialism, the relationship is mediated and established based on achieving goals beyond personal gain.

## **2.3. Legal Hypocrisy**

According to Shahabi and Linze, neo-patrimonial systems ostensibly respect democratic mechanisms and constitutions, but their form and function are purely superficial. In such systems, political competition ostensibly takes place among elites, and democratic institutions like elections and political parties exist for their competition, but the prerequisites and conditions for them are missing. These regimes tolerate the political space only to the extent that it does not lead to a change in the political system (Ottaway, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 7).

## **2.4. Distorted Capitalism**

One of the characteristics that Shahabi and Linz mention for neo-patrimonial systems is unbalanced economic development. These systems always experience periods of economic growth, but ultimately, the corruption of the political system affects their economic development and prevents their balanced growth and development (Shahabi and Linze, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 53).

## **2.5. Ambiguity in the Structure-Agent Relationship**

As mentioned earlier, in this type of system, dismissals, appointments, and the assignment of positions to individuals are based on the personal whim of the ruler, his taste, and the degree of subordinates' closeness to him. Therefore, political and formal structures no longer play a specific role; although, unlike patrimonial regimes, they are not entirely without effect, and a minimal role can be attributed to them.

In conclusion, it can be acknowledged that, generally, neopatrimonialism can be called a dual-faceted phenomenon, as it is an incongruous combination of dual concepts such as despotism/democracy, tradition/modernism, and rule of law/nepotism.

### **3. Research Background**

Few studies have comprehensively and research-oriented examined the impact of Reza Shah's despotism and the patrimonial structure of his government on the results of National Assembly elections, particularly in the sixth to twelfth sessions. Although numerous works have been published on the despotic characteristics of Reza Shah and patrimonial rule, most of them have been in the form of dialogues, interviews, or historiography, and scientific and complete research in this area is very limited. The book "Index of Documents of the Library of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Volume Five): Documents of the National Assembly Elections, Sixth to Thirteenth Sessions (1926 - 1941 AD/1305-1320 SH) (Second Volume)," written by Zahra Gholamhoseinpour, Ali Tatari, and Maryam Nilqaz, provides a complete list of election documents from the first Pahlavi era (Reza Shah). The authors have presented significant documents on topics such as elections, constituencies, observers, invalid ballots, vote counts, candidates, qualified individuals, voter turnout, election fraud, and influential figures in organizing elections, to demonstrate why elections during this period deviated from democracy and became ceremonial.

The book "The National Assembly and the Consolidation of Reza Shah's Dictatorship" by Gholamreza Molaei Tavani, by examining the position of the National Assembly in the constitutional system and the obstacles to the realization of parliamentarism in Iran, analyzes Reza Khan's interaction with the Fourth and Fifth National Assembly. The author shows that the decisions and approvals of these two National Assemblies played an important role in the consolidation and continuation of Reza Shah's dictatorship.

Other books that can be mentioned in this context are the collection of books "Documents of the Clergy and the National Assembly." These books, by presenting documents, have addressed the role and presence of clerics in the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth National Assembly. The book "Documents of the Clergy" by Farinaz Motasharrei and Neda Shahmari contains documents of the clergy, commission documents, and elections of clerical representatives in the seventh, eighth, and ninth sessions. In another book, "Documents of the

Clergy and the National Assembly" by Abdolhossein Haeri and Mansoureh Tadayyonpour, documents of clerics in the sixth legislative session of the National Assembly and "Credentials of Clerics in the Sixth Legislative Session of the National Assembly" are discussed, as well as the opposition of leading clerics in Tehran and the country, including Ayatollah Modarres, to the decisions and dictatorship of Reza Shah. Although these works are very thought-provoking and valuable, and refer to some of the events, decisions, and laws of the National Assembly sessions, and certainly display Reza Shah's despotism and dictatorship, they do not directly and explicitly address the subject of our investigation. Houchang Shahabi and Juan Linz, in their book "Sultanistic Regimes," have explained the characteristics of neo-patrimonial systems and have sought to examine these types of systems based on the personalism of rulers, their legal hypocrisy, as well as attention to their social base and political economy. They state that these characteristics correspond to the neo-patrimonial Pahlavi name, and they also consider other features of these types of systems, such as reliance on foreign forces and the high vulnerability of these systems. In the article "Theories of the State in the First Pahlavi Era," by Mohammad Salar Kasraei, the author, using a meta-study method, has sought to evaluate and meticulously analyze the various and numerous theories and attributes used for the first Pahlavi state and tries, by stating the conceptual differences and contradictions, as well as criticizing and reviewing the presented views, to find an alternative for the title of the state in this period of history.

#### **4. Reza Shah's Authoritarian Approach**

The political system in Iran during Reza Shah's time was traditional, hierarchical, and authoritarian, lacking flexibility (Azghandi, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 114). During this period, although Reza Shah tried to take measures to quasi-modernize Iran, these measures were purely in the economic and social spheres and did not extend to the political sphere. For this reason, during this period, Reza Shah not only eliminated his opponents but also did not hesitate to sideline even his former supporters and allies. After coming to power based on the army, bureaucracy, and the court, Reza Shah strengthened his power by quintupling the defense budget and enacting conscription laws, thereby increasing the armed forces. He also, by strengthening the new state bureaucracy, increasing ministries and government employees, and changing the country's divisions, created a central government for the first time that had

access to provinces, counties, and even some large villages. In addition, by expanding the court and directly confiscating lands and properties, he transformed the court into a wealthy landowning military complex (Abrahamian, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 169-171). With the help of the two pillars of the army and bureaucracy, he held absolute power.

Reza Shah, with the transformations he created in the educational, administrative, financial, and military spheres, changed the form and content of social life and social relations, but this society lacked political and democratic institutions. In other words, during Reza Shah's era, institutions such as the National Assembly, parties, and political currents by no means returned to the freedom of the constitutional era, and although their outward form existed, in practice they were considered to lack any valuable role. Soraya Esfandiary, Mohammad Reza Shah's second wife, writes in her memoirs about Reza Shah's characteristics: "Reza Shah considered Iran his absolute property, and all matters and affairs of the country ended with him. He was apprehensive about delegating power to others, even his close friends. The combination of conceit and suspicion was one of his prominent characteristics." Reza Shah, during his 16 years of rule, instead of using the clash of modernist ideas with the traditional thoughts of society to help create an open political atmosphere and making the most of the emergence of new classes of bureaucrats and educated individuals resulting from the establishment and expansion of the administrative and educational system for political and social transformations, placed them in severe conflict and opposition with traditional forces. The result of this policy was nothing but the concentration of power in the hands of the Shah himself (Azghandi, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 115-116). Therefore, in practice, the authority of the National Assembly as the main legislative and supervisory body over the performance of ministers was severely weakened. With the weakening of the National Assembly by the Shah, legal participatory institutions became dysfunctional, and the opposition lost its presence in the political arena. Thus, representatives became tools for approving and ratifying plans and bills and were completely at the disposal of the executive branch. In fact, Reza Shah's conception was that the foundation of a modern state and economic and social modernization were achievable only through the suppression of democratic institutions, including the National Assembly. He was oblivious to the fact that using force as the primary method of relating to the people and society to compel others to obey would have irreparable political consequences (ibid: 132).

### 5. The Relationship between Reza Shah and the Sixth to Twelfth National Assemblies

During the first to fifth National Assemblies, representatives in cities were elected through independent competition, and in villages, through the influence of powerful individuals. However, from the sixth National Assembly onwards, this precedent completely changed, and Reza Shah personally determined the election results and the composition of National Assembly members. From the sixth session of the National Assembly onwards, according to the constitution, five months before the end of each term, an election decree was issued, and three months before the end of each term, elections began throughout the country. Elections across the country were almost completed before the end of the National Assembly session (Morvar, 2013 AD/1392 SH). Reza Shah, in cooperation with the chief of police, prepared a list of candidates for the Minister of Interior. The Minister of Interior then sent the names to the provincial governors, and the governor, in turn, sent the list to the election supervisory council, which was appointed by the Ministry of Interior. Therefore, the National Assembly became a useless institution, transformed into an ornate garment covering the naked body of the military government (Abrahamian, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 171-172). In reality, Reza Shah needed the superficial appearance of the National Assembly in his efforts to quasi-modernize Iran and transform it into a Western-style nation. However, due to his despotic and authoritarian personality, he did not allow the genuine emergence of the National Assembly and only used it to fill the void of the legislative branch, or in other words, to approve the plans and bills he desired. Therefore, there was no need for free, independent, and potentially oppositional individuals. Reza Shah, as a patriarch and, in a sense, a benevolent dictator, had arranged everything according to his own will. Thus, the handpicked representatives approved the necessary laws, and the handpicked government implemented them fully. In fact, the legal hypocrisy of neopatrimonialism required maintaining the outward appearance of a legislative institution, but one that was devoid of any real influence from within. The Shah transformed the National Assembly into a ceremonial institution through which he could handpick his desired ministers. Whereas previous monarchs formed their cabinets after extensive consultations with prominent politicians, Reza Shah established a new method. According to this method, he would first select the prime minister and all other ministers and then send them to the National Assembly to obtain a vote of confidence, which was a necessary but

insignificant step. All executives and officials of this period received a vote of confidence from the National Assembly, and all of them remained in office until they lost not the confidence of the National Assembly, but the confidence of the Shah (ibid.: 172).

## **6. Reza Shah's Performance in Dealing with the Sixth to Twelfth National Assemblies**

### **1. Sixth Session**

The sixth session of the National Assembly was inaugurated in July 1926 and concluded in August 1928. The speakers of the National Assembly during this period were Sayyid Mohammad Tadayyon and Mirza Hossein Khan Pirniya (Mo'tamen al-Molk). Although Reza Shah had issued a decree for free elections for this session, this freedom existed only relatively in Tehran, and government interference was clearly evident. Yahya Dowlatabadi believes in this regard: "The elections for the Sixth National Assembly began. Government officials tried to get their desired individuals into the National Assembly. In Tehran, a supervisory committee was formed where if someone tried to cast a vote for a name contrary to their wishes, the ballot was taken from their hand, read, and the owner was prosecuted. However, due to the protests that took place, the chairmanship of the committee changed, and the government's view was not secured in Tehran, and several people were elected from outside the list that the court had given to the police." (Farhadnia, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 489-490)

With the change in the central committee and the intervention of nationalists, a number of opponents of Reza Shah made their way into the National Assembly, the most important of who were Sayyid Hassan Modarres and Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh. This group, numbering about eight or nine individuals, by deeming the elections militarized and being aware of press censorship, opposing Vosough al-Dawlah and Foroughi, opposing the railway bill, etc., tried to moderate Reza Shah's policies, but Reza Shah tolerated no opposition.

Regarding the construction of the railway, the opposing representatives in the Sixth National Assembly, including Mohammad Mosaddegh, Reza Shariatzadeh Gilani (Haj Reza Rafi'), Sayyid Reza Firouzabadi, and Sayyid Hassan Modarres, believed that the railway was a military line serving British interests and not a commercial line for the benefit of the people and Iran. Mahdi Qoli Hedayat writes in "Memoirs and Perils" that in March 1927, he brought

the railway construction plan to the National Assembly but faced opposition from Mohammad Mosaddegh, who considered the railway to lack direct material benefits and proposed the establishment of a sugar factory instead. Hedayat, in response, emphasized that the purpose of the railway was to connect the east and west of the country and create an economic route from Bandar Anzali to Tabriz (Hedayat, 1965 AD/1344 SH: 322). Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh first spoke about the Iranian railway on February 9, 1926, and then in sessions of the Sixth National Assembly, including on February 21, 1927, April 18, 1927, April 29, 1927, and April 17, 1928. While respecting the designers of the railway, he opposed the timing of its implementation and its southern route (Bandar Jaz - Mohammerah), considering it irrational from economic and strategic perspectives. He proposed an alternative route from the northwest to the east of the country, which he believed had greater economic justification (Minutes of the Sixth National Assembly, pp. 240-241). Mosaddegh himself notes in his book "Memoirs and Sufferings": "There was no reason to build the railway on this line except that they wanted to use it for strategic military purposes, and the British government also wanted to sell a large amount of iron to Iran every year and thereby bring the money that the government earned from oil mines into Britain." (Afshar, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 351)

Hossein Makki believes in this regard: "Mosaddegh also declared the north-south route completely futile and emphasized that considering transit issues and the international use of the Iranian railway, the west-east route that connects Europe and Asia is the only correct route, and the north-south route has no transit benefit. In this regard, he addressed the representatives and told them that voting for the construction of the trans-Iranian railway on the north-south route is treason and contrary to the interests of the country." (Makki, 1979 AD/1358 SH: 123-155) During Reza Shah's era, party activity almost ceased, and the National Assembly, under the influence of Teymourtash, became a legal tool for defending the regime. The four existing parties, all of which supported the Shah, were dissolved by his order to prevent the gathering of opponents. In the Seventh National Assembly, even the entry of a few independent figures faced the Shah's opposition. The conversation between Yahya Dawlatabadi and Taqizadeh with Reza Shah shows that Reza Shah's neo-patrimonial system, although eliminating opponents, maintained some supporters to preserve appearances (Jamshidian and Parvaneh, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 55-56).

## 2. Seventh National Assembly

One of the most important approvals of the Seventh National Assembly was the law authorizing the sale of one thousand seven hundred square meters of Dazdab (Zahedan) lands to the Imperial Bank of Persia, approved on November 29, 1928. One of the main opponents of this approval was Mohammad Farrokhi Yazdi, whose most severe speeches in the Seventh National Assembly were delivered in rejection of this bill, which allowed the British Imperial Bank to buy land and property in Iran. Farrokhi likened this bill to the entry of the East India Company into India and said that this bill was a prelude to colonizing Iran. Despite this opposition, since there was no other opposing voice in the legislature, the National Assembly approved this law on November 29, 1928 (The Legislature during the Pahlavi Era; Case Study: The Seventh Session of the National Assembly, Historical Documents Review Center website, published 2024/11/03, accessed 2025/04/21). The Uniform Dress Code Law of December 27, 1928, was another approval of the National Assembly, which, despite much opposition outside the National Assembly, did not provoke much opposition within it. According to Article 1 of the Uniform Dress Code Law, all Iranian nationals without official occupational attire were required to wear a uniform dress, and government employees were also required to wear official judicial or administrative attire at work and uniform dress at other times. This law, in addition to its cultural and social consequences, also had economic consequences. Petitions sent to the National Assembly show that this law disrupted the livelihood of some professions. Because part of the clothing, including hats and clothes, was imported from abroad, it harmed domestic production. As a result, some domestic businesses were destroyed, and some people became unemployed. For example, a group of Yazdi weavers, in a letter to the National Assembly, criticized the decrease in purchases and the halt in exports of their fabrics, considering the approval of this law as a factor in weakening national production and increasing imports. This trend led to the stagnation of the textile industry and the migration of some Iranian weavers to countries like India (ibid., accessed 2025/04/21).

From the seventh session onwards, the National Assembly representatives were not independent and popular representatives and had no will to oppose government bills.

In this regard, Fakhreddin Azimi writes: "Many of the representatives were obedient and weak-willed men who were easily influenced and succumbed to various temptations. Most of

them were incurable opportunists who had an insufficient understanding of their civic responsibilities and the meaning of parliamentarism. They could not distinguish national interests and often considered their private and local interests as national interests. Many of them were poorly educated individuals who neither knew their rights and duties nor understood the complexities of the economy or socio-economic problems. Like other ruling elites, before undertaking any action, they calculated whether that action would be to their immediate and future benefit, as well as that of their relatives, friends, supporters, and allies... the majority of them were steadfast opportunists whose words did not match their deeds." (Azimi, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 47)

### **3. Eighth National Assembly**

The Eighth National Assembly was inaugurated on December 15, 1930, and concluded on January 14, 1933. This National Assembly was entirely supportive of Reza Shah, and no dissenting voice was heard from it. The repression was so severe that the Shah did not even allow a single opponent to enter the National Assembly. Its inauguration date also coincided with the anniversary of Reza Shah's ascension to the throne. Continuing Reza Shah's actions to weaken the meager authority of the National Assembly from the seventh session onwards, Reza Shah revoked the parliamentary immunity of representatives. Since Reza Shah did not tolerate even minor opponents, the entry of two opposing representatives in the seventh session led to the revocation of parliamentary immunity for representatives. In the midst of Reza Shah's reign, despite all government measures, activities contrary to the Shah's opinion sometimes took place in the National Assembly, and in fact, revoking the immunity of representatives was the government's last resort to confront and immediately suppress opponents (Molaei Tavani, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 373). Although the parliamentary immunity of representatives was stipulated in the Constitutional Law, and the law absolutely protected representatives from any assault, in this period, revoking immunity became a political tradition and was implemented many times, especially from the Eighth National Assembly onwards. The Constitutional Law states regarding parliamentary immunity: "Under no circumstances and under no pretext does anyone have the right to interfere with its members without the knowledge and approval of the National Assembly. If, by chance, one of the members openly commits a misdemeanor or a felony and is arrested while committing the

crime, the execution of policy regarding him must still be with the knowledge of the National Assembly." Nevertheless, in order to further assert the sovereignty's control over the National Assembly representatives, the revocation of immunity from representatives became a political tradition from the mid-Reza Shah era. The National Assembly approved the bill to revoke immunity from representation on August 30, 1932. Therefore, if a representative engaged in critical discussions in the National Assembly, their immunity was quickly revoked. This caused National Assembly debates on bills and proposals to be confined to "it is correct" and "I agree," and representatives, fearing the revocation of immunity, imprisonment, murder, etc., vied with each other in flattering Reza Shah. (The Legislature during the Pahlavi Era; Case Study: The Eighth Session of the National Assembly, Historical Documents Review Center website, published 2025/02/12, accessed 2025/04/21).

Some of the most important laws of the Eighth National Assembly include the following, all of which were approved unanimously and without opposition: Law for five million two hundred and fifty thousand Tomans credit for the expenses of completing the southern railway and related expenses for the northern railway in 1310 SH (1931 AD) – approved April 20, 1931; Law authorizing the employment of three American specialists for service on the southern railway – approved April 25, 1931; Law authorizing the employment of Belgian employees to manage customs for a period of three years – approved May 20, 1931; Law authorizing the employment of four Belgians for the Ministry of Finance for a period of three years – approved May 20, 1931, and Law authorizing the payment of one million five hundred thousand pounds for the shortfall in credit for procuring military ammunition – approved March 16, 1932 (Wikisource, accessed 2025/04/21).

#### **4. Ninth National Assembly**

The chain of revoking immunity from opposing representatives continued in the ninth session. On May 21, 1933, Haj Sayyid Habibollah Amin (Amin al-Tojjar), representative of Isfahan, was stripped of immunity. In the 53rd session on Sunday, December 10, 1933, Mohammad Taqi As'ad Bakhtiar (War Head), representative of Dezful, and in the session of December 10, 1933, also Amir Hossein Khan Ilkhani (Ilkhan Zafar Bakhtiar), representative of Najafabad, were stripped of immunity (Molaei Tavani, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 375). The most important example of revocation of immunity was related to Teymourtash; an individual who, after

Reza Shah came to power, became the second most powerful figure in the country as Minister of Court. He was the representative of Neyshabur from the fifth to the eighth sessions, although he did not attend National Assembly sessions. However, at the beginning of the Ninth National Assembly, due to falling out of favor with Reza Shah and a judicial conviction, his credentials were rejected. The head of the third branch announced that due to his conviction to solitary confinement and deprivation of social rights, he was not qualified for representation, and the National Assembly agreed with this opinion. Teymourtash, who had previously controlled political institutions, was ultimately killed in prison by Dr. Ahmadi. Another example of the revocation of immunity relates to Esmail Khan Qashqai and his son. Although the Qashqai tribe had initially supported Reza Shah, the Shah treated them with caution and sent some tribal leaders to Tehran as representatives to keep them away from the tribe and under surveillance. In 1929, a rebellion occurred among the Bakhtiari and Qashqai tribes, accompanied by arms smuggling and British dissatisfaction with the policy of disarming the tribes. After the clashes, the government, by transferring the properties of the dissidents and accusing Sardar Ashayer and his son of participating in the rebellion, proceeded to revoke their immunity and arrest them. Sardar Ashayer died in prison, and Naser Khan remained imprisoned until the fall of Reza Shah (ibid: 376-378).

Another case is Hossein Dadgar (Adl al-Molk), a political figure from the Qajar period and a representative in the third to ninth sessions of the National Assembly. During Reza Shah's era, he first became the head of the Tehran election committee and then the representative of Babol and Speaker of the National Assembly. In the ninth session, he was also elected from Tehran with the highest number of votes and again became Speaker of the National Assembly, but he faced Reza Shah's dissatisfaction. Before the inauguration of the Ninth National Assembly, he faced political and legal accusations and was given the choice between leaving the country and surrendering to the court. In June 1935, his credentials were rejected, and he left Iran for Belgium.

However, the most important resolution of the Ninth National Assembly concerned the abrogation of the D'Arcy Concession on December 1, 1932, which led to a strong reaction from the British government and the threat of referring the matter to the International Court of Arbitration in The Hague. The result of renewed negotiations was the signing of a new oil agreement, which effectively renewed the terms of the D'Arcy Concession for another three decades. Dowlatatabadi writes about this: "One of the demands of the British government from

the Pahlavi Shah's government was to add thirty years to the duration of the D'Arcy Concession. A concession that had not yet passed our National Assembly and according to law is not official, and of course, its entirety is in favor of the concessionaire and to the detriment of Iran, and in recent years, the Iranian government has always been in dispute with the company regarding its rights. Finally, the Pahlavi Shah canceled the said concession, with the condition that the company's representative go to Tehran and renew it with better terms. Soon, the company's representative went to Tehran, and by adding a sum to Iran's share, which is considered nothing compared to what it takes, and by adding the 30 years that they had previously requested, the matter was concluded." (Dowlatabadi, 1982 AD/1361 SH: 427-428) The 1933 Agreement (1312 SH), approved by the Ninth National Assembly, was far more unjust than the D'Arcy Concession and trampled upon the interests of the Iranian nation. According to Hossein Makki, people soon realized that behind the scenes of the abrogation of the D'Arcy Concession, a more disgraceful and detrimental agreement would be concluded such that people would have to search for the D'Arcy Concession with a lamp! (The Legislature during the Pahlavi Era; Case Study: The Ninth Session of the National Assembly, Historical Documents Review Center website, published 2025/03/14, accessed 2025/04/21).

### **5. Tenth National Assembly**

The Tenth National Assembly was in session from June 1935 to June 1937, during which the approval of granting an oil concession to an American company was among its most important resolutions. Accordingly, for a period of 60 years, the "Non-exclusive right to inspect, explore, search, and prospect for oil" in the eastern and northeastern regions of Iran was granted to the American company, Delaware. This concession bill was approved unanimously by the National Assembly in the same session, without any debate or argument, and without the slightest opposition. During this period, Reza Shah suppressed the Mashhad people's uprising in the Goharshad Mosque with coercion and bloodshed, and shortly thereafter, he implemented the compulsory unveiling law. Nevertheless, the National Assembly, whose main function was to stand against dictatorship and strive to limit the Sultan's power, instead of supporting the people, remained silent in the face of the Shah's oppression and thus became complicit in Reza Shah's betrayal of the Iranian people (The

Legislature during the Pahlavi Era; Case Study: The Tenth Session of the National Assembly, Historical Documents Review Center website, published 2024/09/01, accessed 2025/04/21).

## **6. Eleventh National Assembly**

The procedure of the Eleventh National Assembly continued like the previous ones. The most important legal issue in this period was Reza Shah's desire for the Crown Prince to marry Princess Fawzia, which was not possible according to the Constitutional Law of the Constitution. The thirty-seventh article of the supplement to the Iranian Constitution (approved December 29, 1906) stipulated that the Crown Prince's mother must be of Iranian descent: "The heir apparent will be the eldest son of the king whose mother is of Iranian origin. If the king has no male offspring, the appointment of the heir apparent will be made according to the Shah's proposal and the approval of the National Assembly." Thus, under Reza Shah's compulsion, the National Assembly provided the following interpretation of the above law: "Interpretation of Article 37 of the supplement to the Constitution; The meaning of an Iranian-born mother mentioned in Article 37 of the supplement to the Constitution includes a mother who, according to the second clause of Article 976 of the Civil Code, has Iranian lineage, or a mother who, before marriage to the king or crown prince of Iran, due to the supreme interests of the country, upon the proposal of the government and the approval of the National Assembly, has been granted Iranian nationality by decree of the reigning monarch." (Detailed Minutes of the National Assembly - Eleventh Session, 62nd Meeting, November 5, 1938)

Reza Shah dominated the political scene to such an extent that he not only eliminated opposing representatives but also effectively deprived the National Assembly of its supervisory role in foreign policy. A prime example is the Sa'dabad Pact, signed in July 1938 between Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Afghanistan at the Sa'dabad Palace. This pact conceived with prior British planning and in line with that country's interests, although ostensibly considering the interests of the four countries, was detrimental to Iran in various aspects. According to Abdolreza Houchang Mahdavi, the idea for this defense pact took shape among British statesmen after World War I to prevent Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf and on oil resources by creating a regional alliance (Houchang Mahdavi, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 390). The Sa'dabad Pact aimed for the unity of these four countries in the region and their mutual

support in case of danger. The signatory governments of this pact pledged to refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs, respect common borders, abstain from any aggression towards each other, and prevent the formation of associations and factions with the aim of disrupting peace among neighboring and allied countries. Through this treaty, the member states, while committing to confronting the danger of communism and also committing to non-interference in each other's internal affairs, stipulated that they would consult on all international disputes related to their interests and would not carry out aggressive operations against each other (Amini, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 27).

The Sa'dabad Pact was detrimental to the Iranian government both materially and politically, and beneficial to Turkey, Afghanistan, and Iraq, because part of the Ararat highlands, which had an important strategic position, was ceded to Turkey. In determining the Iran-Iraq border line, Reza Shah also ceded the oil resources of western Iran and half of the Shatt al-Arab, which according to international principles and regulations is the Thalweg line, to Iraq, so that Iran would pay substantial sums to the British-protected Iraqi government for the passage of oil tankers from Abadan (Amini, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 30). Afghanistan also, by signing this pact, was spared from the possible efforts of an Iranian nationalist movement to reclaim the Tajik-populated areas of this country. Ultimately, the old colonial power was the real absent winner in this pact, which, with the signing of this agreement, achieved its goal of creating a barrier against communism (Contemporary History Research Institute, 2016 AD/1395 SH). This pact went to the National Assembly for approval eight months later, in March 1938.

The detailed minutes of the National Assembly discussions on this matter state: "Chairman - The second reading of the Foreign Affairs Committee's report regarding the Sa'dabad Pact is under consideration. The Committee's report is read: The Foreign Affairs Committee considered Government Bill No. 29847 regarding the Sa'dabad Pact in the presence of the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs for the second reading. Since no objections were received during the first reading, the Committee confirmed its initial report, which was based on agreement with the single article proposed by the government, and its report is submitted for approval. Chairman - The exact single article proposed by the government is read: Single Article - The National Assembly approves the Non-Aggression Pact between the Imperial Government of Iran and the Royal Government of Afghanistan, the Republic of Turkey, and the Royal Government of Iraq, which consists of ten articles and was signed on July 8, 1937, corresponding to the 17th of Tir, 1316, at Sa'dabad Palace. Chairman - No objections have

been received regarding articles one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten. No objections have been received in the second general discussion either. Those in favor of the single article proposed by the government, please rise (All representatives rose) Chairman - Approved." (Library, Museum, and Archives of the Islamic Consultative Assembly)

The approval of the Sa'dabad Pact showed that the separation of the Ararat and Arvand Rud regions was of no importance to the National Assembly representatives, and no opposition was seen from official institutions or social currents. Baqer Kazemi, the then Foreign Minister, recounts in his memoirs that Reza Shah, in response to the request of Nuri Said, the Iraqi Minister, for the cession of Arvand Rud, accepted without serious opposition (Ettihadieh, Kazemi, 2014 AD/1393 SH). Consequently, even if there were objections, they were silenced in the face of Reza Shah's will. Thus, in the complete silence of the National Assembly, a pact led to the separation of parts of Iran, without any representative expressing opposition. This issue illustrates the personalization of power and the disregard of the newly established patrimonial system for the national and territorial interests of the country.

## **7. Twelfth National Assembly**

The Twelfth National Assembly, which was in session from 1939 to 1941, witnessed the resignation and abdication of Reza Shah Pahlavi and the proclamation of the monarchy of his crown prince, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, during the turmoil of the country's occupation. The National Assembly ratified this on September 16, 1941, and on September 17, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, as the Shah of Iran, read and signed his oath in the National Assembly. Within five days, on September 21, 1941, another law was passed by the National Assembly, which involved the transfer of Reza Shah's properties and assets to his son, Mohammad Reza. In the text read by Majid Ahi, the then Minister of Justice, in the National Assembly, Reza Shah had written: "In the name of God Almighty, since the beginning of the establishment and formation of my monarchy, I have constantly thought about the development and prosperity of the country and have placed this matter at the forefront of my country's reform program. I have always intended that this development approach should serve as a general model for all landowners and property owners so that in due time I can make all the inhabitants and subjects of my country benefit from the fruits of these properties. This opportunity has arisen now that my dear esteemed son, His Majesty Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, has taken over

the affairs of the country. Therefore, I have reconciled all my movable and immovable properties and assets (including factories, etc.) of whatever kind to him for the settlement price of ten grams of rock candy, so that according to the interests of the country, they may be spent on charitable, cultural, and other purposes in any way he deems appropriate; thus, the National Assembly also quickly and without delay approved this law." (Text of the transfer deed of properties and assets of His Majesty Reza Shah Pahlavi on Wiki source, accessed 2025/04/21)

## Conclusion

The present study was written with the aim of examining the impact of Reza Shah's despotism on the sixth to twelfth National Assemblies and how he influenced the composition of members and the method of legislation. Reza Shah, within the framework of a patrimonial approach as an authoritarian ruler throughout his reign, used legal institutions such as the National Assembly merely as approvers of government bills and in no way tolerated criticism or opposing views. This is demonstrated by not allowing opposing representatives to enter the Seventh National Assembly and by ordering the exile and elimination of opposing representatives in the Sixth National Assembly. Individuals like Teymourtash and Dadgar, who headed the court and the National Assembly respectively, were also not immune to royal wrath and were ultimately eliminated. Reza Shah's absolute dictatorship, even in cases like the Sa'dabad Pact where Iran's interests were at stake, did not allow for opposition. He presented this pact, which ceded regions of Iran primarily for British interests and then for the interests of Turkey, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as a desirable agreement and a kind of victory, saying: "Because the general situation of the world required that we too strive more than ever to consolidate the foundations of peace. After resolving the border disputes with Iraq, we concluded the agreement, the draft of which had previously been agreed upon, with our friendly and neighboring countries Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iraq, under the name of the Sa'dabad Pact. This pact was unprecedented in the East, and at this time when world affairs are in turmoil, it will be a great help to the preservation of peace."

Reza Shah's authoritarian approach in eliminating the clergy and establishing secularism affected the composition of clerical representatives within the National Assembly. The clergy held 24 percent of the National Assembly seats in the first term, which decreased to less than eleven percent in subsequent terms. In other words, the number of representatives decreased

from seventeen in the Sixth National Assembly to two in the Thirteenth National Assembly. Merchants, despite their active participation in the Constitutional Revolution, were marginalized by the ruling classes during the institution-building and consolidation phase of this movement. Apart from the First National Assembly where they constituted 41 percent of the representatives, they held 9 percent in the Second National Assembly and 7 percent in the Third National Assembly, and this downward trend continued until the end of Reza Khan's era, although this percentage increased in later periods.

Finally, it is worth noting that with the establishment of Reza Shah's rule, a new chapter opened in Iran's contemporary history, possessing unprecedented characteristics. At this juncture, the National Assembly rapidly lost its function as the guardian of national interests, the foundation of the constitutional system, and the most popular pillar of the political structure. It distanced itself from its former position. Through widespread interference and fraud in elections, changing the composition of National Assembly representatives at his discretion, and eliminating his opponents from the political scene, the National Assembly was placed at Reza Shah's service. Its task became the immediate and unquestioning approval of laws and bills desired by the Shah, and the institutionalization of his decisions as a powerful tool, in fact, aimed at creating legal and lawful obstacles to civil liberties and political participation and competition. The abolition of political immunity for National Assembly representatives and ministers, the cancellation of the activities of free parties and press, and similar actions were among Reza Shah's measures.

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