

Program of the colloquium

**Republican Iran after 30 years:
Social Movement and the construction of a Public Sphere**

26-27 June 2008

Sciences Po - Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales

with the support of the Fonds d'Analyse des Sociétés Politiques

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The election of President Ahmadinejad in June 2005 and the embittering of the nuclear issue have once again emphasized that the trajectory of the Islamic Republic of Iran is not linear and does not boil down to a bipolar confrontation between conservatives and reformers. Factional battles are certainly central in the country's political life, given the lack of a party system and truly democratic institutions. But the at least partial representativeness of the latter, given the organization of competitive elections and the collegial nature of the decision-making process, especially in the area of foreign policy, require more rigorous and subtle analyses than the binary interpretations that are more commonly made. To understand the political evolution of Iran, it is more than ever essential to view it in the light of the accelerated social transformations the country is undergoing, if only due to its population's youth, the scale of migratory flows and economic liberalization.

One of the most obvious expressions of this interaction between the political sphere and social change is the rise of nationalism, which in fact was a constitutive dimension of the revolution of 1979 and the formation of the state since at least the late 19th century. But other phenomena warrant examination, such as the institutionalization of the religious sphere, practices of economic accumulation, the differentiation, professionalization and even secularization or in any event the growing rationalization of society. Iran's foreign policy and its reception inside the country as well as among the diaspora, now 4 million ex-pats strong, is also a factor of the reconfiguration of Iranian society, its economy and its institutions.

Two days have been organized, on June 26 and 27, 2008, to examine these social transformations in depth. Our main objective will be the analysis of four movements that in the past 30 years have demonstrated the growing autonomy of the social sphere with regard to the political and religious spheres. Their mobilizations have generally avoided challenging head on the legitimacy of the regime as well as that of the predominance of the clergy. Nevertheless, and at the same time, the tensions or conflicts that have accompanied these processes have provided the framework for negotiations or tradeoffs that have generalized interactions between these spheres and has helped blur their respective contours. Thus, it is important to understand how such more or less conflictual mobilizations have forged autonomous and legitimate social movements, the evolution of which remains dependent on the contexts that spawned them, in particular their relation to religious principles and republican institutions.

To be considered are

- . the women's movement that has put across demands and defended civil rights, enabling the second sex to participate more in the public sphere and economic life, sometimes through religious practices such as pilgrimage;
- . the journalists' movement, which has relentlessly strived to establish and maintain a degree of diversity in the printed press in Tehran as well as in the provinces despite political and judicial pressure and censorship;
- . the workers' rights movement, in the context of unions or through frequent and sometimes long strikes in various sectors;
- . the Shia clergy's differentiation, bureaucratization and professionalization. The clergy has in fact had to meet the challenges of social and political change, the development of secular forms of religious mobilization and organization in Iranian society, and the assertion of a Sunni minority in the border provinces.

