

The Brutal Slashing to Death of Dr Berjis

By Nasser Mohajer Translated by Ahang Rabbani'

Abstract

A wealth of literature has attested to the recrudescence of state- and clerical-sponsored religious intolerance and persecution of the Iranian Baha'i religious minority since the more than three decades of the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979. Persecution during the Pahlavi regime is more sparsely documented. The following is an annotated translation of an article by Nasser Mohajer of the grim circumstances surrounding the brutal killing of Baha'i physician Sulayman Berjis (1897–1950) by a gang of religious fanatics and the uncivil indifference and abortive trial of justice that followed.

Keywords

Sulayman Berjis
Ayatollah Burujirdi
Kashan
'Abdu'l-Karim Turbati
Fada'iyan-i Islam
Navvab Safavi

Translator's foreword

Historical background

Throughout its history, the Baha'i community of Iran has undergone repeated cycles of persecution of varying intensity.² The Baha'is of Iran have never enjoyed full liberty to practise their religion, and have suffered concentrated and widespread economic and social exclusion. Countless Baha'is have been executed, thousands have suffered arbitrary imprisonment, and many smaller Baha'i communities in Iran have experienced pogroms. Another recurring aspect of anti-Baha'i campaigns has been the confiscation and destruction of Baha'i property, including holy sites, cemeteries, personal property, and community institutions. In Shiraz, the house occupied by the Bab, one of the Baha'i community's most sacred religious icons, and a site of obligatory pilgrimage for future Baha'is, has been demolished on several occasions, and was finally erased from existence in 1979 by agents of the country's Islamic Republic. All of these waves of persecution have been carried out with the support of national judicial, administrative, and law enforcement structures.

The Baha'i community has suffered most severely when clerical influence in national affairs has been strongest. The 1950s witnessed organized anti-Baha'i campaigns resulting in mob violence, the destruction of religious sites, and the formation of secretive anti-Baha'i organizations, approved and assisted by the senior clerical leadership of Iran.³ The propaganda used to cultivate and justify social persecution created negative stereotypes that continue to have repercussions to the present day. Many clerics who gained an influential public voice during these campaigns later obtained powerful positions in the post-1979 Islamic Republic.

The Babi-Baha'i community of Kashan

The Babi movement was first brought to Kashan in the summer of 1844 by Mulla Husayn Bushru'i, the first disciple of the Bab. Three years later, the Bab passed through the town on the way to exile in Azerbaijan and stayed for three days, 20–23 March 1847, as the guest of a Babi merchant, Haji Mirza Jani.⁴ Subsequently, a robust Babi community was established in Kashan. When important Babi leaders were living in Baghdad in the 1850s, a number of the Babis of Kashan went there, either for visits or to join Baha'u'llah's growing party.

Moojan Momen notes:

The Baha'i community in the Kashan area grew gradually with a number of conversions from among the people of the town and also in such villages as Naraq, Jushqan, Nushabad, Qamsar and Mazgan during the time of Baha'u'llah and in Aran and Yazdil during the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha. ... A large number of the Jews of Kashan also became Baha'is; among them several notable families, the Mithaqiyih, Rayhani, Yusifiyan and Mutahhidih families ... Mirza 'Abdu'r-Rahim Khan, a Baha'i of Kashan, was Kalantar of Tehran for a time.

Kashan was also an important center [sic] for the diffusion of the Baha'i Faith. It was from Kashan that Aqa Muhammad-Javad and Aqa Muhammad-Baqir moved to Hamadan and thus established the Baha'i community there. In addition, they began the conversions of Jews in Hamadan. It was also in Kashan that the first Zoroastrian to become a Baha'i converted. The first Zoroastrian convert has been variously named as Mihraban Bahman and Kaykhusraw Khudadad. It is agreed however that he became a believer in Kashan. He was instrumental in the conversion of another Zoroastrian, Mulla Bahram, who went on to Yazd and began the large number of conversions that occurred in that town.⁵ (There had also been a conversion of a Zoroastrian in Kashan in the time of the Bab ...).

There were a number of persecutions of the Baha'i community in Kashan. In 1282 AH/1865, Shaykh Abu'l-Qasim Mazgani was executed by the governor. In 1290 AH/1873, there was a general uprising against the Baha'is of Naraq. But in general, some of the leading 'ulama of this area were inclined to protect the Baha'is; in particular, Mulla Muhammad Mujtahid Naraq, who was the uncle of Mirza Kamalu'd-Din Naraq and had met Mulla Husayn Bushru'i. ...⁶

Nasser Mohajer's article

Mohajer is a renowned scholar, researcher and intellectual, and presently lives in Europe (he has no affiliation with the Baha'i community).⁷ His enlightening research article appeared in the journal *Baran*, no. 19 and 20, Spring and Summer 1387 [2008], pp. 10–24, under the title, 'Kard-Ajin Kardan Doctor Berjis', and is offered below in translation with the kind permission of the author. In this article, the erudite author has placed the events surrounding the brutal killing of Dr Berjis in the broader perspective of prevailing anti-Baha'i proclivities in 20th-century Iran.

All endnotes are by the author, unless otherwise noted. Sub-headings and comments in parentheses () are by the author, while clarifying remarks in square brackets [] are by the translator. Most names and Persian

terms have been transliterated in accordance with academic standards, except for some commonly recognized names, such as Ayatollah Khomeini, which have been given in their popular rendering. All dates are in Iranian solar reckoning, and the Gregorian equivalents are provided in the format consistent with the other articles in this edition of *Baha'i Studies Review*.

Translation

Abstract

I had seen the name of Dr Berjis previously and had read that he had been a victim of fanatical Shi'ite orthodoxy in Iran prior to the coup d'état of 28 Mordad 1332 [19 August 1953].⁸ However, I did not know anything about his personal background, or the manner of his killing, or the identity of those who caused the death of this Baha'i physician of Jewish descent. I only knew that Dr Berjis was one of the leading figures of the Baha'i community of Kashan who was killed in the same town.

In reading Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab, the memoirs of Muhammad-Taqi Damghani, who was a member of the board of directors of Iran's bar association prior to the Bahman 1357 [February 1979] revolution,⁹ I came across several pages on this heinous crime, which caused me to become even more curious about this issue. This interest stemmed particularly from the following remark in that book:

Tehran's Criminal Court, which was composed of five high-ranking judges, voted to dismiss charges against the four individuals who had unequivocally confessed to committing the murder [of Dr Berjis] – a confession that was written and signed in their own hand and offered freely and without any pressure.¹⁰

I sensed that this event, which remains most disturbing from every perspective, and which according to the late Damghani marked 'a shameful page in Iran's (modern) judiciary', was a clear and indisputable case of anti-Baha'i tendencies in our land, and an instance of how the Baha'is were denied civil rights, under both the monarchy and the Islamic Republic.¹¹

These thoughts compelled me to start researching this incident and to scrutinize and complete the valuable report of the late Damghani, who at the time of this occurrence was the chief prosecutor in Kashan's judiciary.

What is presented below is the result of this study and research.

Part 1

Sulayman Berjis's ancestry was rooted in Hamadan. His forefather, Hakim ['physician'] Ya'qub, the Shamsu'l-Hukama, was a well-known Jew of that city who had migrated to Kashan, though the date of this move is not known. However, we know that medicine was the ancestral profession of this family and Musa, Yaqub's son and Sulayman's father, was engaged in this occupation as well.¹² We also know that Hakim Ya'qub was 'among the renowned Jewish families of Kashan who became Baha'i and established an affluent and large family'.¹³

The Baha'i faith had developed roots and foundations in Kashan and villages surrounding it, particularly in Aran, Jushqan and Qamsar.¹⁴ This was because Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad the Bab came to this town [Kashan] in 1262 AH [1846] and stayed for two nights in the home of Haji Mirza

Jani Kashi,¹⁵ who later sacrificed his life in the path of the Babi movement and composed the *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, which remains to this day one of the finest sources for learning about the wellspring of this movement. 'Later, divisions and differences appeared among the followers of the Bab. The Baha'i creed selected Kashan and Qamsar as the center of their teaching efforts, and established a school named Vahdat-Bashar.^{16 17} In 1300 [1921], they also established a school named Ma'rafat, exclusively for the Baha'is.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it appears that in that region, particularly in villages, the Baha'i faith gained adherents mostly among the Jews and Zoroastrians.¹⁹

After the passage of the Birth Registration Law (Khurdad 1304 [June 1925]) by the fifth Parliament, requiring each Iranian to have a surname, the family of Hakim Ya'qub adopted the last name Berjis. This family had a role in spreading knowledge of the Baha'i teachings, and Muzaffar Berjis established children's classes in Kashan at which 'he would teach the *Kitab Durusu'l-Diyanih* from memory'.²⁰

Sulayman Berjis was born to this family in 1276 [1897]. In his childhood he was immersed in the Baha'i moral code, and was educated at the Vahdat-Bashar School. Afterwards, he went to Tehran, where he enrolled as a medical student.²¹ His devotion to the Baha'i faith and his efforts to improve the condition of his co-religionists led in 1307 [1928] to him being elected to the Spiritual Assembly of Kashan. He often served as chairman of this local assembly, and it is said that 'in most years he was a delegate from Kashan to the National Convention of the Baha'is of Iran. Among the faithful and wronged believers of that region, none exerted greater efforts in the teaching and promulgation work than he [Dr Berjis].²² To meet the needs of the beneficial teaching work of the Baha'i faith in Iran, he had deeply studied Islamic theology and 'had memorized a number of Traditions and verses of the Qur'an'.²³

Until 16 Dey 1328 [6 January 1950], that is, a month before his death, he worked for the Ministry of Health and was considered 'one of the most competent physicians in Kashan'.²⁴ 'However, due to administrative reasons, he resigned his post on that date and commenced private practice.'²⁵ The 'administrative reasons' could not have been reaching retirement age, since at that time he was only 54 years old. Regarding this, *Ahang Badi'*, the journal of the Baha'i youth of Tehran, has an insightful comment:

Towards the end of his life, his deep devotion to the teaching work seriously interfered with his work and practice; in truth, other than those who sought medical service for free, very few others came to his office.²⁶

Dr Berjis also had a pharmacy at which 'most of the patients who could not afford payment were seen for free, and also their medication was given to them at no cost ... He would even go so far to give money to poor patients, and for this reason he was esteemed and famed throughout that town.'²⁷ Other than the prejudiced Shi'ites, everyone has testified to the abundance of his good deeds and the lustre of his good name, including Muhammad-Taqi Damghani:

Dr Berjis was a distinguished and beloved physician who was universally admired. When he learned that his skills were needed, without regard for

distance he would grab his physician's bag and go visit the patients, and would not ask for payment.²⁸

Therefore, we can picture him on the morning of Friday 14 Bahman 1328 [3 February 1950], 'with his kind smile, loving countenance ... and wearing his white garment',²⁹ he could not refuse the request and the plea of 'Abbas Tavasuli and 'Ali Naqipur, who implored him, 'Doctor, we earnestly entreat you to come and see our sick one. He is very ill. Please trouble yourself and come to see him.'³⁰

'His kind and compassionate heart, with refined emotions that was profoundly grieved by every negative incident, and which would be deeply moved over every suffering human being'³¹ could not decline the plea of these two youths who appeared helpless, and he was compelled to prefer attending to this imaginary patient to seeing the seven, eight or ten patients who were awaiting him in his office.³²

Part 2

At the time of this murder, Muhammad-Taqi Damghani (1304–77 [1925–98]) was on a hunting trip in the fields surrounding Kashan. Forty-five years after this heinous event, he wrote:

I do not remember the exact date of that occurrence ... suffice it to say that it was in the autumn of 1329 [1951]. It was a pleasant and vivifying Friday ... near noon. At some distance, I saw two policemen coming ... and by moving their heads and waving their hands and shouting and screaming they wanted to attract my attention ...

[They said,] 'Your honour judge, they have killed Dr Berjis. There is no inspector or prosecutor in town. His honour the chief of the judiciary has said that in their absence, the only trustworthy judge for adjudicating on this matter is you.'

[I asked,] 'Who are his murderers? Have any of the killers been apprehended?'

[The policemen responded,] 'Yes, indeed your honour judge. The killers belong to the Fada'iyan-i Islam [Devotees of Islam] Society.³³ There are four of them. They have presented themselves and are currently sitting in the police station waiting for you to come and commence the investigation. Dr Berjis's corpse is presently at the location where he was killed. The medical examiner is waiting on your instructions so that the burial certificate can be issued.'

... The distance was short. Within half an hour we reached the police station. The leader of the murderous gang was known as Rasuli. He was a dye and silk salesman in the bazaar, and had a narrow chin and henna-dyed beard. His accomplices were three others who had only recently come of age, and they had a shadow of soft down on their cheeks. They were all sitting quietly in the office of the station chief, murmuring prayers and occasionally uttering a blessing on the Prophet.

The station chief, his deputy, police officers and several officers from the Intelligence [Ministry] were all puzzled and perplexed. Some were visibly shaken and were soundless sitting here and there. The entire police station was enveloped in a state of gloom and despair ...

I commenced the interrogation of the [four] accused ... Without the least hesitation or threat, they readily and openly confessed to the killing. Each of them claimed that he had not inflicted the first cut, but rather the four of them had attacked concurrently, and while uttering 'Allah-u-Akbar' they had meted out blows upon their victim.

It was clear that they were careful to portray this killing as a *lawth*.³⁴ In this regard, they had received detailed instructions ...

I asked them, 'Why did you kill Dr Berjis?' In one voice they said, 'He was an infidel and made efforts to derail Muslims from the straight path.'

I said, 'He was a kind and charitable man. He was a competent physician and protector of the weak.'

They responded, 'He did all of this to cause waywardness in Muslims. He wanted to plant the seeds of hypocrisy and division in Muslim society. He would teach people how to enter the Baha'i sect.' They added, 'In accordance with the *fatwa* [religious ruling] of the most learned 'ulama of this age, we had a religious duty to murder this person, and have only carried out our religious duty.'

However, they would not say specifically who had issued such a religious ruling.³⁵

Two points should be corrected in the testimony/memoirs of the late Muhammad-Taqi Damghani, and two points should be further investigated. First, the killing of Dr Sulayman Berjis took place on 14 Bahman 1328 [3 February 1950], and not on an autumn day in 1329 [1951]. Second, the murderous ringleader, who along with others had been awaiting the arrival of 'Abbas Tavasuli and 'Ali Naqipur so that they could carry out their preconceived plan by murdering Dr Berjis with daggers, was Muhammad Rasulzadih and not Rasuli. The *Kayhan* newspaper of Monday 17 Bahman 1328 [6 February 1950] states that he was 31 years old at the time of this crime and his accomplices were 16 to 20 years old.

Furthermore, the suggestion that Rasulzadih and his accomplices were members of the Fada'iyān-i Islam Society which Damghani inferred on the strength of comments by the police officers in Kashan, is a mistake, although there have been people who have deliberately tried to present this theory as a fact. One such person was 'Ali Davani who, based on a proclamation disseminated shortly after the 1357 [1979] Islamic Republic revolution, wrote:

After Shahrivar 1320,³⁶ when the religious group Fada'iyān-i Islam was formed, a number of brave youth and holy-warrior Muslims joined this society in Tehran and some other cities. A branch of this organization was also formed in the religious and knowledge-nurturing town of Kashan. The members of this group, who were led by Haji Muhammad Rasulzadih, relying on the religious edict of the late Ayatollah Gharavi, killed several members of the wayward Baha'i sect in Kashan on the charge of waging war against God and His Prophet and causing corruption on earth. These Baha'is were the Fifth Column of colonialism and Zionism, and through their open activities were making matters difficult for the Muslims.

Among those killed was the leader of the Baha'is, Sulayman Berjis, a Jew who had become Baha'i. This brave act of the Fada'iyan-i Islam, through the leadership of Ayatollah Gharavi, resulted in a strong response by the government of that time. That is, the instigators of the killing, who had identified themselves and had confessed to their deed as an Islamic revolutionary act, were seized and imprisoned, and Ayatollah Gharavi was banished from Kashan. At first, Ayatollah Gharavi was supposed to be exiled to a remote location in the country, but through the efforts of the late Ayatollah Siyyid Abu'l-Qasim Kashani, Ayatollah Gharavi was sent to Tehran and forced to stay there.³⁷

The untruths and half-truths in this account regarding the murder and the murderers of Dr Berjis are also reflected in a reference in the *Islamic Encyclopedia*, and will be examined later in this study.

Part 3

The four fanatical Shi'ites who had slain Dr Berjis had said to Muhammad-Taqi Damghani, 'In accordance with the *fatwa* [religious ruling] of the most learned 'ulama of this age, we were religiously bound to murder this person (Dr Sulayman Berjis), and have only carried out our religious duty.'

The foremost 'ulama and the object of emulation by the Shi'ites at that time was Ayatollah Haji Aqa Husayn Burujirdi (1254–1340 [1875–1961]), and not Ayatollah Gharavi (1275–1357 [1896–1978]), who did not enjoy an exalted rank in the Shi'ite clerical hierarchy of that time and was living in the desolate town of Kashan.

By contrast, Ayatollah Burujirdi ranked as the chief jurist of the Shi'ite world and was the most eminent religious scholar at the Qum seminary school, which during his tenure became the seat and focal point of the Shi'ite clerical establishment.³⁸

It was he who designated anti-Baha'i activities as one of the ceaseless duties of Shi'ite jurists, and who sent young seminarians to all parts of the nation 'for the purpose of teaching the principles of the religion and Islamic culture and combating the enemies of Islamic beliefs, such as the wayward Baha'i sect'.



One of his students, Ayatollah Husayn-'Ali Montazari has written in this regard:³⁹

The late Ayatollah Burujirdi was extremely anti-Baha'i ... I asked Ayatollah Burujirdi about social associations, trades, commerce and business dealings with Baha'is, and in response, he wrote:

In His Exalted Name. It is incumbent upon all Muslims to end associations, relationships and dealings with this sect [Baha'is]. ...

At that time, I gathered representatives from every class, creed and stratum of Najaf-Abad, and each proclaimed against the Baha'is. For instance, the bakers wrote, 'We will not sell bread to the Baha'is.' The taxi-drivers wrote, 'We will not permit Baha'is in our cabs.' ... In short, our work was so effective that a taxi ride between Najaf-Abad and Isfahan which had previously cost one tuman, could not be had for 50 tumans by a Baha'i no matter how much he pleaded.⁴⁰

In 'combating' the Baha'is, Ayatollah Burujirdi considered killing and spilling their blood as being religiously sanctioned and permissible. Ayatollah Ahmad-'Ali Ahmadi-Shahrudi, who was also one of Burujirdi's students, has openly stated this point:

At that time (the years 1326–29 [1947–50]), the Baha'is had come to have enormous powers in Iran, to the point that they openly taught their religion ... Unlike others who were silent over this situation, Ayatollah Burujirdi was exerting efforts to destroy them ... He appointed me, Aqa (Husayn-'Ali) Montazari, Aqa ('Ali) Mishkini and a few other friends to go to the region of Faridan [and] Khansar⁴¹ and teach against the Baha'is. In this regard, he wrote a separate instruction for each of us ...

Together (with Montazari), we went before Ayatollah Burujirdi, and found Shaykh Mustafa Khansari sitting before Burujirdi. Ayatollah Burujirdi said to us, 'Go and kill them (the Baha'is)! If you can, kill them. Kill them and be assured.'⁴²

Prior to our mission to Faridan, for three years Ahmadi-Shahrudi had 'migrated' to Abadeh (near Shiraz), which is one of the towns in Fars with a Baha'i community. As the representative of Ayatollah Burujirdi in Abadeh, he had launched 'significant and sustained attacks against the wayward and the people of heresy' and it is said that 'he had achieved certain victories in this effort and succeeded in returning many of the wayward to the fold and to the bosom of Islam'.⁴³

He himself describes it thus:

After returning (from Abadeh), his exalted person [Ayatollah Burujirdi] entrusted several more missions to me. On behalf of that source of emulation, I went and lived in such towns as Firuz-Kuh, Chahr-Mahal Bakhtiyari, Faridan and Daran in the province of Isfahan, and Vadghan, one of the villages of Kashan, where the Baha'i leaders had congregated and from where they would teach and diffuse [the Baha'i faith]. In Vadghan, I arranged for a discussion and question and answer meeting.

The result of these efforts was that many repented and returned to the bosom of Islam. Subsequently one of the Baha'i leaders by the name of Dr Berjis was slain by Muslim hands, whereupon that deceived, tiny group was weakened and destroyed.⁴⁴

Vadghan is an ancient village situated 48 kilometres north-west of Kashan. 'Its people were either devoted mosque-goers or were anti-mosque-going. Everyone belonged to a group ... and would exert efforts to strengthen that group.'⁴⁵ Among these groups was the Baha'i community, of whom it was said that they had 'influence' in town as well.⁴⁶

Considering the distance of Vadghan from Kashan, and the difficulties and problems that confronted fanatical Muslims in this non-fanatical village, it is unlikely that Ahmadi-Shahrudi would have had the means to plan the killing of Dr Berjis in such a location, and to organize and execute such a scheme. Moreover, he himself has spoken vaguely about this incident and has referred to this murder as the 'result' and 'subsequent' to a question and answer meeting he conducted to promote anti-Baha'i ideas among 'mosque-going elements' in the village.

The claim of this cleric and his supporters in the Islamic Republic party, especially some 30 years after Dr Berjis's death and during the rule of the Islamic Republic, must be seen as evidence of internal competition among the clerics and in the light of rivalries between various Shi'ite factions. That is, it is part of the post-revolutionary effort by each faction to manufacture and create evidence of bravery and foresight for their chosen leaders, so that their faction would gain in comparison to competing parties.

The true instigator of this heinous crime was 'Abdu'l-Karim Turbati, who was among the 'well-known pulpit preachers' and famed sermon-reciters of Qum. He was among the close companions and trusted friends of Ayatollah Burujirdi, and was the primary 'spokesperson and speaker' for the Shi'ite clerical establishment during that period, which had selected combating communism and giving expression to their deep-rooted hatred of the Baha'is as their two principal social and political goals.⁴⁷

Prior to this bloody incident, Turbati journeyed to Kashan several times. Each time he spoke most abusively and slanderously about the Baha'is during meetings of the Anjuman Tablighat-i Islami.⁴⁸ Moreover, during his talks he fuelled enmity among various factions and incited the religious fanaticism and fervour of his Muslim audience.

He enrolled a number of members of the Anjuman into a new group called Haybat Du'at Islami [The Islamic Missionary Society],⁴⁹ aimed at combating 'wayward and polytheistic persons'.⁵⁰

Part 4

The schemes of Turbati the preacher were not hidden from the worried eyes of the Baha'is of Kashan. They knew him as a 'mischief-making and foul-mouthed akhund' who had a chequered career in 'inciting fires of sedition and enmity' and

... from pulpit-top would openly and explicitly ... provoke and deceive Muslims, and would refer to all the believers [i.e. Baha'is] as morally corrupt people,

whose blood could be shed with impunity. He would speak the most bewildering slanders against these wronged ones [i.e. Baha'is], and raise his cry through several public speakers installed so that his voice would reach far and near ... and he would exert all in his might and power in deceiving and inciting a closed-minded population steeped in ignorance and superstition.

This all stemmed from the people's belief that he had 'repeatedly promoted burning homes in Kashan and caused arson', and had 'provoked and incited some preachers of Kashan, and ... also had prepared the population for important undertakings'. On numerous occasions, the Local Spiritual Assembly [of the Baha'is of Kashan] had written to the police chief and warned of the unchecked and inflammatory activities of Turbati the preacher.⁵¹

Ruhu'llah Mehrabkhani, who was the conduit of 'friendship and cooperation' between the spiritual assembly of this town and Colonel Fatimi, the chief of police, has testified that shortly before that bloody incident,

... for the last time, ... I warned him (meaning, Colonel Fatimi) candidly and explicitly of the dire and severe consequences of such inattention and negligence by describing how such attacks start with words and end with a terrible ending. However, Fatimi's response was the same as always, 'Be assured that nothing will happen.'⁵²

However, something did happen.

Part 5

Thinking that he was going to visit and heal a patient, Dr Berjis joined 'Abbas Tavasuli and 'Ali Naqipur. They said to him that the patient was in the Kulhar district [of Kashan].⁵³ They stopped in front of a house which, according to Ruhu'llah Mehrabkhani, was used as a *rawdih-khani* and did not go further.⁵⁴ Instead of taking Dr Berjis inside the house, Muhammad Rasolzadiah and several others emerged from the house and came into the street.⁵⁵

Again, according to Mehrabkhani, they said to Dr Berjis, 'Either you must wash your hands of the Baha'i faith and recant your belief, or we will cut you into pieces on this very spot.'⁵⁶ Confronted with this most extraordinary situation, Dr Berjis began to turn around to leave. However, it was too late.

From several directions, they set upon him with fists, rocks, sticks, and knives.⁵⁷ Dr Berjis threw himself inside the house. The murderers followed him inside, and in the vestibule they set upon him once more. According to two accounts of this brutal murder that have reached us:

After many severe blows, and cutting off a portion of his scalp and hair, they threw him downstairs, a distance of three metres, where that pure being landed on his back and remained unmoving. However, they were not satisfied with this ... and Muhammad Rasolzadiah came downstairs, cut the victim's arteries on both sides of his neck, then severed the main veins in both arms. With other blows of knives, which the medical examiner reckoned to be in excess of 80 cuts, they thoroughly dismembered that pure being ... and leaving behind the blood-soaked remains, they came out of the house.⁵⁸

Once outside, Rasolzadhi, who had severed the arteries in the doctor's neck, sat and paused on the sidewalk next to the house for a moment and washed the blood off his hands with the snow on the ground.⁵⁹ Thereupon, the entire group, raising the cry of 'There is no god but God,' left the scene.⁶⁰

They proceeded towards the bazaar. Along the way they invited the people to join them on their march. 'People having nothing to do and being curious, joined and followed the procession en masse ... and raising the cry of "Allah-u-Akbar", they traversed the entire length of the bazaar in Kashan.'⁶¹

Pausing at every junction in the bazaar, the murderers cried out, 'We have slain a murderer.'⁶² A number of 'shopkeepers and merchants ... as a sign of support for those who had committed this act,' closed their shops and joined the march.

The congregation soon left the bazaar and proceeded towards the police station.⁶³

When they reached the station, the murderers separated from the accompanying mob and went inside. They confessed to the ranking policeman, 'We have fulfilled our religious duty and have sent the chief of the wayward sect of Baha'is of Kashan to the nether world.'

Thoroughly perplexed and frightened, the officers and policemen stood there staring at the murderers, who were still holding their knives with blood covering their hands and clothes. After a while, they conducted the men to the office of Colonel Fatimi, and he sent several of his officers to the chief of the town's judiciary, while several more were sent to the scene of the crime, where several thousand onlookers had gathered and had made coming and going well nigh impossible.⁶⁴

Part 6

When Muhammad-Taqi Damghani, the town's young prosecutor, arrived at the police station, there were still a number of 'curious men' pacing in front of the building. He immediately commenced to interrogate the accused, and without any hesitation issued the order for the arrest of the four fanatical Shi'ites, 'who were sitting calmly and peacefully in the office of the chief of police, whispering prayers and occasionally offering a salutation for the Prophet.' 'The unambiguous confession of the accused, the assessment of the remains, the report of the medical examiner, and the presence of the blood-soaked knives, left no room for hesitation ... I issued instructions for the four to be arrested.'⁶⁵

When the news of the arrest of the four men was noised about in the city, 'a large multitude gathered around the police station and the prison, resolved to rescue the four imprisoned men ...'⁶⁶ The confrontation between the police officers and the mob supporting the four murderers continued well into the night, but eventually the 'officers in charge of security' were able to disperse the crowd and send them home.⁶⁷

From another direction, the station also sent a number of police officers to the home of Dr Berjis, which was filled to capacity with the friends and relatives of the fallen physician. These officers were charged with assisting the family of Dr Berjis and transporting the remains from Kulhar district to Gulistan Javid, the Baha'i cemetery.

Ruhu'llah Mehrabkhani testifies:

... Several officers, policemen and guardsmen came to the place where the friends had gathered and expressed their deep sympathies and readiness to provide whatever assistance was required. Eventually, at ten at night, when all eyes were filled with slumber and streets were emptied of any coming and going, a number of the Baha'i men went to the scene of the incident, and, with utmost honour, carried the remains to Gulistan Javid [the Baha'i cemetery], which was a relatively distant location, while a large number of officers, policemen and guards surrounded the cemetery. That night, all the friends remained in the cemetery and, at the side of that sacred being, all were overwhelmed with the deepest emotions ...

On Saturday morning, when the esteemed brothers and wonderful children of that esteemed martyr arrived (three daughters and three sons),⁶⁸ the remains were interred in their permanent resting place around noon.⁶⁹

However, about this time news reached us that people had closed the bazaar and were planning an uprising and attack on the police station.⁷⁰

The city had fallen into chaos, and any semblance of order had disappeared.⁷¹ 'People were profoundly worried and unsure about what to do next.'⁷² The fanatical Shi'ites, 'wishing massive public unrest, were forcing people to close and shut their businesses and offices.'⁷³ They talked of a general strike and flooded the streets. The security forces and extra policemen who had been dispatched to Kashan to assist the local police 'fired shots into the air' in the hope of subduing and dispersing the public.⁷⁴

Damghani was sitting in his office in the judiciary staring into the yard when it was reported to him, 'Some people want to attack the judiciary building and frighten the independent-minded prosecutor who has imprisoned these four devoted Muslims who carried out the divine mandate.' However, he was 'brave and not so easily given to fear'. Suddenly he saw the attorney who was the brother-in-law of Ayatollah Gharavi, the town's prominent clerical figure. Damghani remembered him and came out of his office and called him, 'You go and see the illustrious Ayatollah Gharavi and on my behalf say to him, "If the city should become disturbed and the judiciary building is attacked, I will hold you personally responsible, and will arrest you." I am not afraid of that illustrious personage, nor of men greater than him, and not even God. The most that can happen is that they will transfer me from this dim-witted town, this useless town, this unfriendly town ... I am not married, nor have I any children, nor furniture nor any other attachment to this place ... Wherever they transfer me will be better than this miserable town – this place that I am eager to leave behind. However, a week of imprisonment is a high price for the Ayatollah's pride to pay. You go now and convey this message to him.'

That wretched man immediately and obediently left. He returned an hour later ... and brought with him the greetings and prayers of the illustrious Ayatollah as a souvenir, saying that the Ayatollah was in no wise involved with these occurrences, and that Rasuli (Rasulzadih) and his companions were being supported through other means, and that the fatwa for Dr Berjis's killing was issued by someone else. He further conveyed, 'If he

(that is, Muhammad-Taqi Damghami) deems it advisable, I prefer to quit the city for a few days.⁷⁵

Damghami responded positively to this request by the Ayatollah. However, a few hours were needed for this news to come directly from the house of Aqa Gharavi and to be conveyed to the people through religious channels.

Meanwhile, the fanatical Shi'ites had reached the Baha'i cemetery and were seeking a propitious time to carry out their destructive plans. At that time:

... The fear of people attacking the Gulistan Javid [Baha'i cemetery] had entered all hearts, and several officers' admission ... that they could not prevent such an attack had terrified the [Baha'i] women and children. Soon it became known that after the bazaar was shut and a multitude had gathered to free the prisoners, the chief of police had also expressed helplessness and had said, 'I am unable to prevent the mob attack.' However, on hearing this, the esteemed prosecutor had admonished him and had stated his readiness to silence the mob with the help of the security officers.

Eventually, the police officers intervened, and with the aid of other security personnel and police, by firing a few shots were able to disperse the people. The Baha'is also came out of the garden [i.e. Baha'i cemetery] and returned to their homes.⁷⁶

The next day, Ayatollah Gharavi left the city and calm returned to the region. The *Kayhan* newspaper of Monday 17 Bahman [6 February 1950] writes:

... Today news was received that the town's condition has returned to normal and complete security has been re-established. All shops have been opened and merchants have resumed their work.

Part 7

The news of Friday's crime and the unrest on Saturday were reflected in the nation's two major newspapers on Saturday and Sunday, 16 and 17 Bahman 1328 [5 and 6 February 1950]. However, this news did not appear on the front page in large letters, but rather in the back pages under the column for accidents!

Ittila'at reported on the arrest of eight individuals in a 'murder incident', and *Kayhan* remained silent regarding the number of 'arrested murderers'. However, neither of the two newspapers referred to the anti-Baha'i persecution aspect of this killing, and more or less pretended that it was an ordinary crime. *Ittila'at* did not even mention that Dr Berjis was a Baha'i; although it insisted that the murderers belonged to Anjuman Tablighat-i Islami, and that the 'incident had assumed religious dimensions'. Although *Kayhan* did not hide the fact that the 'slain' was the chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Kashan, it offered nothing that would suggest that the murder was based on sectarian animosity and was a religious killing; its report erased every trace of Muslim fanaticism from this murder.⁷⁷

The newspapers and the weeklies of various political parties, whether leftists or nationalists, also glossed over this crime with considerable disinterest. Everyone seemed preoccupied with the election of the 16th Parliament, and so did not deem it advisable to annoy their 'religious brothers' and orthodox Muslims, and deprive themselves of their vote.

Perhaps the fear of the terrorist and murderous tactics of the Fada'iyān-i Islam was also a consideration, particularly since only recently they had committed several political murders involving such figures as the Court Minister 'Abdu'l-Husayn Hazhir⁷⁸ (on 13 Aban 1328 [4 November 1949]) – an assassination that occurred as the consequence of a charge that he was a Baha'i, which of course he was not.⁷⁹

Whatever the reason, not only the politicians but also the nation's intellectuals showed no interest in this murder, which stemmed from Shi'ite Muslims' prejudicial attitudes, sectarian enmities, and religious intolerance.

In much the same way that the murder of Ahmad Kasravi, the 'blasphemer', on 20 Isfand 1324 [11 March 1946] was overlooked,⁸⁰ the killing of Dr Berjis did not cause a reaction in society, and did not provoke a response in those with awakened consciences.

Only two weeklies cared, and stood firmly against this murder and the murderers: *Millat Iran* and *Naysan*, the latter being a Jewish publication in Iran. The essence of both articles is shared below. *Millat Iran* wrote:

The incident of Kashan is indeed a source of much regret. In a country whose people claim three thousand years of civilization, might, understanding, culture, sympathies towards humanity and love for humankind; in a nation where every fibre of its people's lives is intertwined with the firm, explicit and clear laws and order of Islam; in a realm, the great prophetic figure of whose religion, 1300 years ago, invited people to fraternity, equality and equity and launched the mightiest war against terror, killing, murder and pillage, people are found who are willing to soil their hands with the blood of an innocent man.

It is indeed greatly to be regretted that such people do not feel the least shame or humiliation over the deed which they have committed, and exhibit the delusion that their conduct is in accordance with the principles of religion and citizenship.⁸¹

Naysan, however, had a broader and more secularist view:

The occurrence of such an incident, which echoed the brutal conflicts of the medieval period, is deeply troubling and profoundly reprehensible. We live in the world of the 20th century, where the principle of religious liberty and freedom of belief is a recognized and indisputable fact for all the peoples of the planet. Such incidents which result in killing people solely on the grounds of religious convictions find a parallel only in the shameful pages of the barbaric ages or the dark middle ages; and present-day humanity finds such deeds repulsive and abhorrent.

Our countrymen, of whatever persuasion, order or religious background, must recognize the unimpeachable right of other citizens of this nation to hold whatever religious belief they wish, and never consciously take a step against this indisputable principle.

In today's world, precipitating conflicts or causing death over religion in colonized or near-colonized countries only serves to show their inferiority, and will enhance the grip of the colonial powers over them ...

In our view, the central government is responsible for bringing to justice and punishing the instigators of this violent and heinous crime in Kashan,

and to make the nation understand that no one is permitted to murder other citizens based on vain imaginings stemming from religious differences, or to demonstrate personal animosity in such a way ...⁸²

Part 8

When the fanatical Shi'ites learned that by provoking public uproar and causing upheaval they could not force the government to yield and free their 'imprisoned brethren', they started exerting pressure through 'administrative means'. An example of their activities is reported thus:

Today (27/11/28 [16 February, 1950]), at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, Hujjatu'l-Islam Aqa Abu'l-Qasim Muhammadi, the Imam-Jum'ih of Gulpaygan, along with 24 others, came to the telegraph office to cable high-ranking officials in the capital [i.e. Tehran] and the source of emulation in Qum⁸³ requesting that they prevent teaching efforts by the Baha'is and that the prisoners in Kashan be freed. They were contemplating a sit-in.

The situation was immediately conveyed by telephone to the governor, who quickly arrived at the telegraph office and personally assured the gathered gentlemen of the sympathies of the government's highest-ranking officials.

This resulted in the group abandoning their sit-in and leaving the building.⁸⁴

Concurrent with the aforesaid gathering in Gulpaygan, Ayatollah Fayd, the eminent cleric in Qum, telegraphed the Shah, requesting 'from his majesty's blessed threshold ... support for the Muslims'.⁸⁵ Likewise, Ayatollah Burujirdi, Ayatollah Bihbahani and Ayatollah Kashani wrote to Tehran.⁸⁶

Waves of pressure were unleashed and the Interior Ministry was overcome by trepidation and hesitation. This indecisiveness is easily evident in a confidential letter of the Interior Minister Ibrahim Zand to the Prime Minister Muhammad Sa'ed:

Subsequent to the letter of 1929/4, dated 28/11/29 [18 February 1950], details of the murder of Dr Berjis were submitted in [the report of] 17164/11995/m – 28122.

In accordance with reports received from the police national headquarters, sufficient manpower by the police and security have been provided to the local police to reinforce the local forces. The city of Kashan has regained calm, and the accused are being prosecuted by the judiciary.

It is also submitted that each day cables are received from clerical figures and residents of various towns requesting the release of the accused and aversion towards the Baha'i sect. It is humbly requested that your instructions in this regard and the missive of 17163/11995/m be made known to this Ministry.⁸⁷

Three days after receiving this letter, [the prime minister] Sa'ed discussed the issue with the Shah; the next day he provided the following instruction:

Your cable of 28/11/14 [3 February 1950] regarding the murder of Dr Berjis was submitted to the blessed threshold of his Majesty, who concurred that if spilling blood was to gain currency and everyone was to shed other people's blood as they wished, then the thread of order would be severed – and

this would be neither pleasing to the reformists nor would it serve the best interest of the nation and the people. Since investigating the murder incident is confirmed and insisted upon by the luminous religious law, therefore it is necessary that instructions be given consistent with the provisions of the law to adequately investigate and pursue this matter.

It is obvious that after the details became known, final results should be shared with his Majesty.⁸⁸

The attachment of the constitutionalist monarch to the 'luminous religious law' and the sympathy of governmental authorities towards the 'Aqayan',⁸⁹ became more formal with the dismissal of Sa'ed from the premiership and the installation of 'Ali Mansur (the Mansur'l-Mulk) as the prime minister.⁹⁰

Only two days after introducing the members of his cabinet, Mansur wrote to his interior minister, who was the same person who had held the post in the Sa'ed government:

Regarding the murder of Dr Berjis and the attendant uproar and recourse to irregular means that is taking place by certain elements, the following is proclaimed:

No attention should be paid to letters from the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is that have reached governmental offices, and no response to them is necessary. Demonstrations and provocations taking place by such elements, either in the capital or in various towns, must be prevented with utmost seriousness, and instigators must be punished in accordance with the law. In this regard, appropriate instructions should be issued to relevant governors and military commanders.⁹¹

What 'uproar and recourse to irregular means'? Who, where, how? No sign or evidence of any of this can be found. The Baha'i community of Iran has never openly complained about government discrimination or limitations imposed on their civil community, nor has it ever raised the issue in the wider non-Baha'i society, or taken any action to gain rightful legal recognition.

The method employed [by the Baha'i community] has always been limited to writing a letter of grievance and appealing to governmental authorities. At that historic moment and in response to that 'religious persecution', they did not go beyond this limit.⁹²

We can discern the Baha'i 'protest' and the government's response through the pages of *Khatirat-i Haji 'Izu'l-Mamalik Ardilani*, written by the governor of Fars during the premiership of 'Ali Mansur:

In Fars, and especially in Sarvestan, the issue of Baha'is had caused complications. Cables were sent against the Baha'is and copies were given to the 'ulama and newspapers. A Baha'i who was a senior military officer with the rank of brigadier-general had come from Tehran to help the Baha'is, and secretly met with me as well ...

Firstly, I said to that senior officer ... 'I do not heed the words of any Baha'i. I also do not recognize any paper or complaint received in the name of the Baha'is. However, I will prevent individuals from being persecuted or wronged ... But if the person speaks in the name of the Baha'i spiritual

assembly, then I will not recognize it, and I will tear up such a complaint and discard it.’

On the other hand, I counselled and admonished the distinguished ‘ulama and other individuals who complained of the doings of the Baha’is: ‘By your persistence in sending cables and publishing them in newspapers you are bound to give recognition to Baha’is. It is not in the best interest of Islam and our nation to make them appear large, contrary to the truth. If you have something to say or have a complaint, state it using the name and specifics of individuals and do not mention that they are Baha’is. Be assured that I will not let any Baha’i gain fame in this area or in this province, and with utmost seriousness will prevent such an occurrence ...’

With these admonitions, the dispute subsided ... I asked the newspapers to remain silent over the incident ...⁹³

The government policy of showing sympathy to Shi’ite clerics, exerting efforts to remove any doubt that the government was interested in pursuing those who had inflicted harm on an ‘unrecognized religious minority’, blocking efforts by the Baha’i faith to gain official recognition and for its members to enjoy civil rights and the right to live under the protection of the law, was giving much hope to fanatical Shi’ites, and was most satisfactory to them.

Part 9

The late Damghani recalls that ‘the case-file of Rasuli and his accomplices was completed very quickly’.⁹⁴ In those early phases of the investigation, four more individuals were arrested on charges of involvement in the murder. Of these, only one is known by name: Rida Gulsurkhi. He is the one who testified that the ‘instigator’ of himself and the seven other individuals ‘who killed Dr Berjis, and after chanting “There is no god but God”, left the scene ... was mostly the late Turbati, the preacher’.⁹⁵

After completing the initial steps of judicial investigation, these eight men were sent to Tehran. This is because Kashan did not have a criminal court, and those accused of crimes had to be sent to the provincial capital for trial and adjudication.

However, no evidence or record exists of the seven months of incarceration of Gulsurkhi and Rasulzadih, who have left notable footsteps in the formation of the Islamic Republic, nor do we know anything about ‘Abbas Tavasuli, ‘Ali Naqipur, or the other four accused whose identities have never been disclosed. We do not know what comforts and advantages they enjoyed during those days when the prisons were open, or whether any limitation or restriction was imposed on them, or what it could have been like.

Nevertheless, we do know that before the trial had started the principal backers of

... the nation’s Shi’ite clerical establishment arrived at the scene to prevent the execution of these young Muslims, who had committed this act solely for the purpose of fulfilling a divine mandate. The late Ayatollah Burujirdi, the late Ayatollah Kashani, and ... all were mobilized to avert the execution of these brethren. Special boards were assembled in Qum’s seminary school and sent forth to various provinces, so they could brief the local clerics about

the exact nature of the incident. After that, a flood of cables from the various corners of the nation ... proclaiming support for the accused streamed [to Tehran] ...⁹⁶

This method had proven its effectiveness earlier. 'Abdu'r-Rahim Rabbani-Shirazi⁹⁷ (1301–60 [1922–81]), who was a companion of Ayatollah Khomeini, and who was first a member of the Assembly of Experts and later of the Guardianship Council during the Islamic Republic, had been sentenced in his youth to execution (Azar 1327 [November 1948]) for brutally murdering Habibu'llah Hushmand, a Baha'i leader in Sarvestan, Fars province. Not only was he not executed, but he was freed from prison.⁹⁸

There is no doubt that Rasulzadieh and his accomplices were very familiar with this previous incident, and knew the effectiveness and efficacy of such mobilization of clerical elements in providing suitable support for their fanatical and orthodox agenda. Nonetheless, it is known that from prison Muhammad Rasulzadieh wrote a letter to Siyyid Mojtaba Mirlawhi, known as Navvab Safavi⁹⁹ (1303–33 [1924–55]), the leader of the Fada'iyan-i Islam, in which he described his own situation and that of his associates and sought the help of the Siyyid.¹⁰⁰ We also know that the Navvab had sent him a message, stating, 'I will personally attend the court hearing and will prevent the sentence of execution.'¹⁰¹

Part 10

There is room to doubt that prior to being arrested, Rasulzadieh and his accomplices knew and were associated with Navvab Safavi and the Fada'iyan-i Islam. Similarly, there is doubt about the existence of a branch of the Fada'iyan-i Islam in Kashan. This terror-mongering and murderous society not only did not have a widespread organization, it did not even resemble an organized body in the true sense of that word, nor did it have any branch or section at any location.

Fada'iyan-i Islam was a decentralized society formed around the person of Navvab Safavi. Particularly after the assassination of [the court minister] 'Abdu'l-Husayn Hazhir by Siyyid Husayn Imami on 13 Aban 1328 [4 November 1949], this group succeeded in instilling fear in modern Iranian society and emerged as a centre of attraction for young Muslims disillusioned with modernism. The most energetic of these youth 'voluntarily formed the society of the Fada'iyan-i Islam'.¹⁰²

Husayn Imami is the same person who fatally shot the renowned Iranian historian, Ahmad Kasravi (1269–1324 [1890–1945]), and after a 'flood of cables, letters, fatwas and petitions from Najaf and various towns', and the interventions and appeals of Ayatollah Khu'i, Ayatollah Siyyid Javad Tabrizi, and Ayatollah Qummi to the Appellate Court, was acquitted and freed from prison with much pomp and ceremony.¹⁰³

It is noteworthy that in consonance with the wishes of the honoured 'ulama who had requested the prime minister to pardon Imami, Hazhir had said to the prime minister Qavam's-Saltanih in the ministerial cabinet meeting, 'We must consent [to the request of the distinguished 'ulama] and release Imami from prison ... Spilling the blood of this man [Kasravi] was religiously sanctioned and permissible. If they killed him, then they have done a correct thing ...'¹⁰⁴

What is even more noteworthy is that this harmony and accord with Shi'ite clerics had no effect on that closed-minded and hard-hearted fanatical faction. Even after the ill-fated prime minister [Hazhir] prohibited the sales of alcoholic beverages in Qum, Mashhad, and Shahr Ray, initiated diplomatic relations with Saudi [Arabia] and paved the way for pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, the same Shi'ite clerics and their spiritual leader, Ayatollah Kashani, widely circulated the false rumour that Hazhir was a Baha'i and his murder a religious obligation.

Other than that murder, Navvab Safavi also had a hand in the murder of the Baha'i engineer, Shahidzadih – in much the same way that the preacher Turbati instigated the murder of Dr Berjis. It is reported that during the course of a journey to Sari in 1326 [1947] for the purpose of closing a girls' school, which prior to the reign of Reza Shah had been a religious seminary, and converting it to a school for 'seminarians in Mazandaran',¹⁰⁵ he also commenced propaganda against the Baha'is. Soon he had provoked the orthodox, and in an 'attack' that took place, 'a Baha'i was killed'.¹⁰⁶

Once again, Navvab Safavi was lucky to escape punishment for this incident. Through this display of power he was able to further consolidate the influence of the Fada'iyan-i Islam. This charismatic and rabble-rousing seminary was closely associated with Ayatollah Kashani – particularly after this political ayatollah was banished (1327–29 [1948–50]) from the country, and propaganda for his return to Iran was launched. The efforts of Kashani's supporters in presenting themselves as nationalist candidates during the election of the 16th Parliament eventually succeeded, and this was closely followed by the return of Kashani and the nationalists to Iran (20 Khرداد 1329 [10 June 1950]). All of this transformed Navvab Safavi into one of the power brokers on the nation's unsteady political scene.

Rasulzadih's letter to him, and the response of Navvab Safavi, is an occasion for much reflection in the light of this growing influence.

Part 11

On Sunday 5 Shahrivar 1329 [27 August 1950], the *Ittila'at* newspaper reported:

The trial of eight individuals who have been accused of the murder of Dr Berjis in Kashan and are charged by the judiciary will commence tomorrow at Branch 2 of the criminal court. The accused and their 12 lawyers will be present.¹⁰⁷

The *Kayhan* newspaper also wrote:

The trial of those accused of the murder of Dr Berjis will commence tomorrow. They are eight individuals, all residents of Kashan. Dr Berjis was a Jewish physician, who later converted to the Baha'i religion, and last year was killed by a number of men. The accused have selected 12 lawyers, including Mr Arsalan Khal'atbari and Sadiq Sarmad.¹⁰⁸

Arsalan Khal'atbari was among the most distinguished attorneys of that time in Iran. He had shone brilliantly in the long and important trial (Murdad and Shahrivar 1321 [July–August 1942]) of Sarpas Mukhtari, who

was the minister of police during the reign of Reza Shah, and who had gained renown for being on the side of freedom and of the nation.

Sadiq Sarmad (1339–80 [1960–2001])¹⁰⁹ was an able journalist, a gifted poet and the ranking attorney in the judiciary. He was a member of the board of directors of Kanun Vukala-yi Dadgustari [Iran's bar association], and had worked extensively and importantly in establishing that association.¹¹⁰ The presence of these two attorneys among the legal counsellors of the killers indicated the all-inclusive and careful preparations of the intellectual and political factions who were determined to wash the blood off the hands of the killers and cover up the truth.

From yet another perspective, it appears that General Razmara, who had only recently been appointed premier (5 Tir 1329 [26 June 1950]), had successfully compelled the newspapers to withhold reporting about the trial proceedings. And indeed it is amazing that from Monday¹¹¹ 5 Shahrivar [27 August 1950], when the trial commenced, until Wednesday 22 Shahrivar [13 September 1950], when the tribunal proceedings were concluded, we do not see a single word – I repeat, not a single word – about what was said at the trial or what evidence was submitted in any of the newspapers.

The policy of *Kayhan* until the day that the verdict was handed down was complete silence. However, every few days, *Ittila'at* wrote a few words about the trial, which are cited below:

7 Shahrivar [29 August 1950]

Yesterday morning, Branch 2 of the Criminal High Court was formed and presided over by Mr Ahmad Jidi with the participation of [the following associate judges:] Javad Harifurush, Muhammad-Hasan Khatunabadi, 'Abdu'l-Husayn Taliqani and Lutf-'Ali Bigdili. Also in attendance were the prosecutor and the lawyers representing the defendants.

The case of the eight individuals accused of murdering Dr Sulayman Berjis was initiated, and proceedings of the court got underway.

After the identity of the accused men was established, the prosecutor read the charges and a summary of the investigation, which included an outline of the indictment and a summary of the evidence.

At that point, Mr Sarmad, who is one of the defendants' lawyers, asked the court to invite the medical examiner to clearly establish the age of each accused, as it appeared that some of them were under age. On hearing this request by Mr Sarmad, the court right away invited the medical examiner to testify. Immediately, Dr Tabataba'i appeared at the court to establish the age of six of the accused. His testimony was that the age of five of them was more than 18 years of age and one of them was about 18.

Yesterday's proceedings saw the questioning of four of the defendants; the remainder were postponed to the next session, which will be held tomorrow early in the morning.

9 Shahrivar [31 August 1950]

Since in the recent session of Branch 2 of the Criminal High Court, conducted to prosecute the eight individuals accused of the murder of Dr Sulayman Berjis in Kashan, the attorney of the defendants, Mr Asadu'llahi, arrived late at the session, another of the attorneys, Mr Arsalan Khal'atbari, continued the defence. The rest of inquiry was postponed until next Saturday.

17 Shahrivar [8 September 1950]

The session of Branch 2 of the Criminal High Court under the judgeship of Ahmad Jidi was conducted to prosecute the eight individuals accused of the murder of Dr Sulayman Berjis in Kashan. The legal team of the defendants, namely, Arsalan Khal'atbari, Asadu'llahi, Razavi, Girami, Mahdavi, Faqihi-Shirazi, and Du'l-Mujd Tabataba'i presented their defence. Also in today's proceeding, another member of the defence counsel, Mr Shari'atmadar, presented a portion of his defence and the remaining arguments were postponed to tomorrow morning's session.

18 Shahrivar [9 September 1950]

The trial of the eight men accused of the murder of Dr Sulayman Berjis continued today at Branch 2 of the Criminal High Court. In Thursday's session, as well as today's, Mr Shari'atmadar and Mr Rida Maliki presented their defence, and all the legal counsellors concluded their defence presentation on behalf of their clients, who are accused of murdering Dr Berjis in Kashan. The closing arguments for each defendant will commence in tomorrow's session.

However, since Mr Razi, a special litigator collaborating with the prosecution, brought forth certain facts about the killing of Dr Berjis, and Mr Aminpur, the prosecutor's representative, dismissed the defence claim that their clients are innocent, and according to article 175 once more requested the court to render a verdict against the accused, therefore it was decided that in tomorrow's session the defence attorneys will respond to Mr Razi and the prosecutor's charges.

20 Shahrivar [11 September 1950]

The lawyers representing the defendants in the case of the murder of Dr Sulayman Berjis of Kashan presented their arguments regarding previous statements of Mr Aminpur, the prosecutor, Mr Razi, the special litigator, and today's testimony. The final defence of each defendant may commence in tomorrow's session.

21 Shahrivar [12 September 1950]

Today, after 5 hours of deliberation from 11 in the morning until 4 p.m., Branch 2 of the Criminal Court, dismissed the charges against the 8 men accused of the killing of Dr Berjis in Kashan on the basis of insufficient evidence.

On this day [12 September], *Kayhan* also broke its 16-day silence, and under the heading, 'Those accused of the murder of Dr Berjis have been found innocent and freed', wrote:

At 11 this morning, the trial of those accused of the murder of Dr Berjis concluded. This trial, which commenced some time ago, was presided over by Judge Jidi. Thereupon the court undertook its deliberation. After 5 hours of discussion, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the court issued its verdict, announcing the innocence of the accused. Due to lack of evidence, the court did not find that the murder at the hands of the accused was proven as charged.

On Wednesday 22 Shahrivar [13 September], *Kayhan* published a picture of a court session which is most telling. The caption beneath the picture stated, 'Yesterday we reported that Branch 2 of the Criminal Court, under the presidency of Mr Ahmad Jidi, ruled in favour of defendants in the case of Dr Berjis's killing due to lack of sufficient evidence. The top picture shows the reading of the verdict in the court, the middle picture shows the congregation of clerics in attendance; the one at the bottom shows the accused.'

The late Muhammad-Taqi Damghani testifies:

During the trial, the courthouse was always filled with people. The followers of Ayatollah Kashani, who were mostly the bazaar shopkeepers, along with many who opposed Razmara or supported Musaddiq were there to cause constant havoc. Each day a large demonstration by the opponents of Razmara would take place within the courthouse. The trial had been transformed into demonstrations against the British and the oil company ...

After the murder of Kasravi, this was the second blow by the Fada'iyan-i Islam. And dismissing the charges against the accused was a powerful blow by Ayatollah Kashani against Razmara – even though it was said that Razmara had personally asked the justice minister to let the accused go in order to subdue the public outcry.

One must say that this verdict was a stain on Iran's judiciary. Tehran's criminal court, with the participation of five high-level judges and through their ruling ... had freed those who had openly confessed to the murder, and who with their own hands and in complete freedom, had signed this confession.¹¹²

Part 12

There were no protests of any kind among Iranians over the dismissal of charges against the eight fanatical Shi'ites, who on their own and with no hesitation had readily admitted that they had conspired in killing a Baha'i physician. Nor did the decision of Tehran's criminal court, which assessed no penalty against the accused, provoke any objection: not by the liberals, not by intellectuals, not by newspapers or weeklies, and not by progressive or reformist political factions.

It did not even raise a protest within the Iranian Baha'i community, which had always refused to engage in public protests, and had rejected collaboration and association with liberal-minded and democratic entities, and did not pay attention to public opinion.

As far as we know, *Jahan-e Ma* was the only newspaper that displayed an appropriate reaction to this shameful performance of our nation's judiciary, and referred to it as manifest ethnic and religious discrimination, and a violation of the rights of minority citizens:

[We are] committed to the principles of equity and justice, equality and oneness of all people before the law, and the existence of an unprejudiced and consistent judiciary, which is able to win people's confidence and esteem for its judgments while preserving its own independence in the face of inappropriate pressure, by rendering unbiased verdicts. These are attributes of a progressive and free society, which regrettably are utterly missing in our nation ...

A judiciary that convicts the innocent, exonerates the guilty ... [and] fails to carry out its duties ... a judiciary that allows in its courtyard, and in bright daylight, one of the most distinguished of its judges and attorneys to be slashed into pieces, and in response frees the villains who committed this crime ... no wonder that every day a new scandal takes place within such a corrupt and unjust system and a new tale of shame is added to its previous chapters.

The tale of the trial of the killers of Dr Berjis is the latest page written in this book of disgrace. Everyone remembers the tragic story of the slashing to death of one of the citizens of this country – someone who had every right to live in this nation – a story that has been covered in great detail in the newspapers of the governing body. Everyone also has seen or heard about the verdict and demonstrations over the past few days.

Undoubtedly, on hearing what has transpired, every observer in possession of a conscience cannot have any other feeling but disgust for this system of justice. Every man of conscience would discern that only two possibilities could have governed these events:

- (1) One possibility is that we assume the present accused men were innocent, and that therefore the court's verdict was just, in which case the question would be raised: What sort of justice system is this that without cause throws innocent people into prison and subjects them to trial, causing them financial loss and destitution. Even more importantly, the question would be raised: Where are the true perpetrators of this crime, because no one can deny that a physician was murdered by being slashed to death. Is it sufficient to just dismiss the accused, or is the justice system established so that it would bring to justice the real offenders?
- (2) The second possibility is that the justice system has once again, as in so many previous instances, fallen prey to influence, and issued a verdict accordingly, finding innocent those who perpetrated this crime. Particularly when a person takes into account the demonstrations and animal sacrifices¹¹³ of the first days, and continual cow-sacrifices, parades and festivities after the verdict, this possibility gains further strength. This is because one cannot imagine that all these animal sacrifices and demonstrations were merely to celebrate the discovery that the accused were innocent. This is because this justice system has witnessed many innocent defendants who have gone to the gallows; yet in no instance except the present trial and that of the killers of the late [Ahmad] Kasravi, have we observed such demonstrations and festivities.

In addition to the criminal aspect of Dr Berjis's murder, there are two important social issues to be considered. First, this incident is related to the rights of minorities in our nation ... At a time when foremost in the charter of the United Nations is ethnic and religious liberty and equality and protection of the rights of minorities, it is a source of much regret for every honourable Iranian who wishes to see his country exalted among the nations of the world, to instead witness that the lives and rights of minorities are violated in our country in such ways.

When every humanitarian Iranian sees that the Culture Ministry has issued instructions for a list of minority employees to be prepared in order to impose more limitations on them, when he sees that some newspapers have reported

that schools have received instructions to shun accepting minority students, when he sees encouragement and provocation for racial animosity among certain political factions, then he has every right to dread and feel his heart filled with revulsion over the recent reprehensible verdict of this court.

The other issue is related to the spread of superstitious practices. We are under the impression that no honourable Iranian would consent to the spilling and spoliation of the blood of a citizen of this country – whoever he may be or whatever he may believe – and barter this blood for the demonstrations of vulgar mobs, animal sacrifices and self-stabbings.¹¹⁴

If it were the norm that a bunch of hoodlums, under some name or pretext, was allowed to attack and slash to death others; and judicial institutions, either out of fear or because of threats, intervention or playing politics, accepted that that blood had been lawfully spilled, then no one in this country would have safety or protection! Of what possible use then would be this enormous and expensive police and judiciary?

At any rate, this incident is most alarming for all progressive-minded countrymen, and no honourable Iranian should remain silent in the face of such injustice. In particular, the forward-looking publications of this nation should never consent to silence over this fundamental issue.¹¹⁵

Part 13

The backing down of the government and the widespread public silence in face of this heinous crime had serious consequences for the nation. The warm reception that fanatical Shi'ites gave to those who had killed Dr Berjis, in which people came out of Kashan for some 30 kilometres, 'either on foot or by vehicles, and sacrificed hundreds of lambs and cows in the path of the freed men', placed Rasolzadhi and his religious brethren, according to the late Damghani, at 'the same rank as the military commanders of Kashan ...', 'whom everyone regarded with considerable deference'.¹¹⁶

From then on, the aggressive and ferocious proclivities of fanatical Shi'ites were constantly increasing. The first person that the Fada'iyani Islam killed after this victory was Brigadier General Razmara (16 Esfand 1329 [7 March 1951]). The silence – if not tacit approval – of various personalities, publications, and democratic processes in response to this murder led to the dismissal of charges against Khalil Tahmassebi – this time not by a verdict issued by a judge, but by a vote of the people's representatives in the 17th Parliament (16 Mordad 1331 [7 August 1952]).

However, even this goodwill did not reduce the enmity of the fanatical Shi'ites towards the nationalists. From moderates to extremists, when they saw themselves faced with the 'threat of communism', they joined hands with the royal court and its imperialist supporters and precipitated the victory of the 28 Mordad [19 August 1953] *coup d'état* against the government of Dr Musaddiq – a *coup* that completely altered the destiny of Iran. Until the decline of the National Front and destruction of the Tudeh party [Iran's communist party], the *coup d'état* government and religious institutions worked shoulder to shoulder.

With the re-establishment of the throne [in 1953], there was no tangible reason for the Shah and his court to accommodate the rabble-rousing fanatical Shi'ites any longer. However, to honour the Shi'ite clerical leadership and please fanatical Muslims, the Shah instructed Tehran's military

commander, Brigadier General Taymur Bakhtiyar, and the nation's military chief of staff, Major General Nader Batmanghelich, to consent to the wishes of the Shi'ite clerics, and in the company of the leading representative of Ayatollah Burujirdi in Tehran – namely, Hujjatu'l-Islam Nasru'llah Falsafi – to destroy the principal place of worship of Iranian Baha'is, that is, Tehran's Hadiratu'l-Quds, on 16 Urdibihisht 1334 [7 May 1955].

The Baha'is not only continued to be deprived of the rights accorded to religious minority groups, they were forced into a more or less inconsequential existence under the gaze and watchful eyes of a society known as the Hujjatieh, which was charged with channelling the zeal of fanatical Shi'ite youth into anti-Baha'i activities. This was the only society that remained in existence until the end of the Shah's regime; immediately upon the accession of the Islamic Republic, it became the leading element in various branches of Hezbollah in anti-Baha'ism and the slaying of Baha'is.

Part 14

At any rate, the story of the brutal slashing of Dr Berjis and the widespread silence about it is one the causes of the establishment of a republic whose foundation men such as Haji Muhammad Rasulzadih had an undeniable role in laying. This fanatical Shi'ite died on 9 Khurdad 1367 [30 May 1988]. On the occasion 'of the fortieth day of his passing and as means of recalling his bravery and self-sacrifice', the *Kayhan* newspaper provided a biography of him, the essence of which is provided below. It includes lies and truths, woven together in the manner and style of the akhunds reporting in *Kayhan*:

The political life of Rasulzadih commenced in 1320 [1941]. In 1328 [1950], it entered a new phase with the assassination of a Zionist element. Together with seven of his friends, he girded up the loins of endeavour to slay the leader of Zionists in Kashan [Dr Berjis] and the surrounding regions, who as a prominent Zionist, had violated the life and sanctity of Muslims under the cover and mask of a physician (though he had never studied medicine), and who had openly set the Qur'an on fire ...

The child of this slain Zionist, who himself was one of the influential Zionist faces in the nation and the Shah's special physician, commenced his efforts with considerable backing and created a case [against the murderers]. He formed a kangaroo court and issued death sentences for Haji Rasulzadih and his companions, who had been incarcerated for eight months.

The clerics of the nation entered the scene ... At any rate, after a most difficult period, when Haji Rasulzadih and his companions were freed from prison, they were welcomed in Tehran with a tremendous reception ...

When the Fada'iyān-i Islam movement increased its activities, starting in 1332 [1953], the martyr Navvab Safavi ... introduced and installed him [i.e. Rasulzadih] as his personal representative and the leader of the Fada'iyān-i Islam in Kashan.

In 1341 [1962], when the cry of Islamic authority and resistance to infidels of the leader of the Islamic Revolution, the illustrious Imam Khomeini, was raised from the seat of Shi'ite jurists in Qum, Rasulzadih was among the first to wholeheartedly welcome and embrace the call of the illustrious imam. From that beginning he demonstrated his active engagement in all instances ...

After the victory of the Revolution ... he would always admonish the people not to be negligent, even for a moment, in their support of the imam. He was foremost in promoting revolutionary agencies and championing the imam's line ...¹⁷

At the beginning of the section that the late Muhammad-Taqi Damghani has devoted to telling his recollections of the events surrounding the brutal killing of Dr Berjis, there is a section that is well worth pondering:

The hero of this story is someone who was alive until very recently, and was among the activists and leaders of Hezbollah. On the occasion of his death, two entire columns of the newspaper *Kayhan* were devoted to praising his merits. At the time of the occurrence of this murder, hardly anyone in Kashan could have perceived that this incident was connected to a larger and history-making struggle that was taking shape across Iran. Even today, there are not many who understand this incident to be one of the wellsprings that precipitated the mighty river of the Islamic Republic.¹⁸

Nasser Mohajer
Khurdad 1387 [June 2008]

Appendix 1 A brief history of the Fada'iyān-i Islam (Devotees of Islam)

Fada'iyān-i Islam (lit. Devotees of Islam) is an extremist group and perhaps the oldest active pressure faction in Iran. The group was formed in 1945 by Siyyid Mujtaba Mirlawhi, a young Shi'ite seminarian, after he became deeply concerned with secularization programmes undertaken by Reza Shah.

Mirlawhi (1924–55, Tehran) was born into a fanatical Shi'ite family. Like many others in the orthodoxy, he was distressed by the influence of Ahmad Kasravi, a renowned historian and linguist who was writing books and articles that criticized the role of Shi'ism in Iranian history. These concerns grew into a fatwa by senior Shi'ite clerics, who condemned Kasravi to death – it is said that Ruhū'llah Khomeini approved this fatwa. In May 1945, Mirlawhi attempted to assassinate Kasravi, but he was only wounded. Mirlawhi was imprisoned for a short time, and from prison he organized the Fada'iyān-i Islam to fight Shi'ite causes. A year later, in May 1946, the Fada'iyān-i Islam succeeded in assassinating Kasravi. Its agents were acquitted shortly after their capture.

Over the next several years, Mirlawhi developed a close relationship with Ayatollah Abdu'l-Qasim Kashani; he also started the newspaper *Parcham-i Islam* [*Flag of Islam*] and adopted the *nom de guerre* of Navvab Safavi.

In early 1949, the Fada'iyān-i Islam commenced a wide-scale assassination campaign. The first target was the young Shah of Iran, but an attempt on his life at the University of Tehran in February 1949 was unsuccessful. Shortly thereafter, Husayn Imani, a member of the Fada'iyān, was able to assassinate Abdu'l-Husayn Hazhir, a former prime minister, in central Tehran. On 7 March 1951, Prime Minister 'Ali Razmara was assassinated in Tehran's Shah Mosque by the same extremist group. The assassin, Khalil Tahmasbi, however, won an acquittal. After Musaddiq's regime in 1952–53,

the Fada'iyān renewed their terrorist activities. An unsuccessful attempt on the life of Prime Minister Husayn 'Ala in November 1955, however, ended this phase. In retaliation, the government executed Mirlawhi and four of the Fada'iyān's leaders on 18 January 1956.

The loss of Mirlawhi was a serious blow to the organization, but the Fada'iyān continued to function underground. They reappeared in the early 1960s when Khomeini began his public opposition to the Shah. Operating under the name of the Islamic Coalition Association, operatives assassinated Prime Minister Hasan-'Ali Mansur in January 1965. Even after Khomeini's exile, the Fada'iyān continued close contacts with him. They distributed cassettes of Khomeini's sermons and writings, and thus endeared themselves to the future revolutionary figures.

In 1978, the Fada'iyān came out in the open as supporters of Khomeini. Ayatollah Sadiq Khalkhali, a close associate of Khomeini and a member of the group since his seminary days, became head of the Fada'iyān in May 1979. Under his leadership, the Fada'iyān launched a terrorist campaign against Khomeini's enemies. As soon as Khomeini consolidated power in Iran, Khalkhali became chairman of the Revolutionary Courts. However, his brutality earned him such a reputation that he alienated even his supporters, and he was deposed in December 1980. By then, Khomeini had gained complete ascendancy in Iran, and in 1981 the Fada'iyān was formally disbanded.

The group reappeared during the Khatami regime in the late 1990s. President Muhammad Khatami came to power as a moderate with the idea of reform. His initiatives to open dialogue with the West in 1998 caused the defunct Fada'iyān to revitalize. This time the driving force was anti-Americanism. Besides threatening and carrying out attacks on Americans, the leaders of the Fada'iyān turned their attention on moderates. Two victims, husband and wife Darius Furuhar and Parvanih Iskandari, were murdered in Tehran in November 1998. Other murders followed with the Fada'iyān trademark. Evidence exists that Iranian intelligence services had a hand in the resurrection of the Fada'iyān, but the suspected leader of the group, Sa'id Imami, allegedly committed suicide in prison on 19 June 1999. A subsequent investigation uncovered little information, but enough found its way to the media to discredit several of the top intelligence leaders, which led to several key resignations.


Sources: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navvab_Safavi; Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1980); Fereydoun Hoveyda, *The Broken Crescent: The 'Threat' of Militant Islamic Fundamentalism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); Michael Rubin, *Into the Shadows: Radical Vigilantes in Khatami's Iran* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001).

Appendix 2

Original text of selected documents

A number of documents were referenced by the author in this paper. The original texts of the ones available to the translator are presented below.

کیرنده


 شماره کتاب
 وزارت پست و تلگراف و تلفن
 تلگراف ای

از	شماره	تاریخ ارسال	توضیحات	تاریخ وصول	روز	ماه	سال
به	شماره	تاریخ	موضوع	روز	ماه	سال	

۱۳۲۹ خرداد ۱۱ / ۲۸

گزارش ۲۸ / ۱۱ / ۲۹ گلپایگان

ساعت ۱۷ امروز حجت الاسلام آقای ابوالقاسم محمدی امام جمعه - گلپایگان باشتاق ۲۴ نفر به تلگرافخانه آمده و با انتخاب تلگرافاتی که به مقامات عالیه و مراجع تقلید بهرگز و قم تقاضای جلوگیری از تبلیغات بهائی و استخلاص زندانیان کاشان را نموده و خیال تحسن داشتند ضمن مراتب را تلفونا آقای فرماندار اطلاع داده بودند همان ساعت در تلگرافخانه حضور بهم رسانیده و متفقاً آقایان را به مراسم اولیا معظم دولت امید وار نمودیم و با نتیجه از تحسن خان شدند پوزش

دستیار عالی
 امراء و
 ...
 ۱۱ / ۲۸

اندوه ۲۶۵ هزار دمه ۲۰۰ برگی چاپخانه آروس

Document A: Letter from the religious clerics of Gulpaygan to the Shah requesting that the killers be set free. 16 February 1950.

۲۷۳۵
۲۸ / ۱۱ / ۲۹

شب بخت بد
 آرزوی من که در راه بر آن ایستادند بفرستند
 کوفه بچه بزرگ بود من در شهر دست بسین با تو بودم
 بر زبان می‌گفتند: بخت بد که نود و نه ایستادند
 بیایند بر من
 ...
 ۱۶۶۵ / ۲
 ۲۹ / ۱۱ / ۲۹

Document B: Letter from Ayatollah Fayzi to the Shah requesting freedom of the murderers.

تاریخ ۱۳۲۸/۱۱/۱۷ شماره ۱۷۱۵/۱۷
 وزیر کشور
 اداره اطلاعات
 جناب آقای نخست وزیر

کتاب به سر قلمه شماره ۱۱۲۵۶ - ۲۸/۱۱/۲۹ جریان فعلی دکتر بر جیسری
 شماره ۱۱۹۹۵/۱۷۱۶۴ - ۲۸/۱۱/۲۹ امروز گردیده و این گزارش رسیده از -
 را ندانم روی کل کشور در لازم از بار بار را نفاذ روی و نگهبانی برای تقویت نیروی
 شهرتانی در اختیار و خبریانی محل گذاشته شده و از منظر شهرگان نیز برقرار و
 متهمین هم از بار بار در دست تعقیب میباشند - اینک با عرض اینکه ۵۹۰ روز
 تلگرافاتی از روحانیون و اهالی شهرستانها مبنی بر دفاعاتی استخلاص متهمین
 و از بار بار و زفره پهاشیان میرسد مستقی است امروزه در فرمایند مقضیات اراده
 عالی را نسبت به معروفه شماره ۱۱۹۹۵/۱۷۱۶۴ - ابراج فرمایند
 روزی که گذشت

(نمود ۷)



نخست وزیر

تاریخ ۱۳۶۱/۱۱/۱۹ شماره ۱۹۹۷

بعضر میرساند

تسکراف مورخ ۲۸/۱۱/۱۹ راجع بقتله دکتر بر جیسر
 بعضرض پیشگاه مبارک ملوکانه رسید است آن جناب تصد بقی
 دارند که اگر سفتن د ما آزاد ی باید و هر کس بد لخواه خسود
 دست بخون د یکران آلاید رنشته انتظام اموز از هم کمیخته میشود
 را بن نه بر مراد دل اصلاح طلبان است ونه بروفق مصالح کنتسور
 و مرت م چون موضوع رسید کن ^{بعضر} قلمبر هم قتل از لحاظ شرع انور مسورن
 تا شید و تا کید است ضروری بود دستور تحقیقات لازم و شرعی سب
 سوز و بر طبق موازین قانونی دلسه شمسلمت بد بهی است پس از
 روشن شدن مطلب نتیجه با مستحضر خواهد رسید ۱۱۰
 ایام اخاضت مستدام

Documents C & D: The response of the Prime Minister is conclusive and aligned with law, but unfortunately the clerical elements swayed greater influence.

شماره نمودن: ۲۲۵۴
 شماره نمودن: ۲۲۵۴
 خروجی: _____
 ورودی: _____
 تاریخ: _____
 اداره: _____
 نام: _____
 نام خانوادگی: _____
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 نام خانوادگی: _____

وزارت کثرت و عقاید
 کتبه
 تاریخ ثبت: ۱۱ ۱۹۶۵
 تاریخ ثبت: ۱۷ ۱۳۴۲
 تاریخ ثبت: ۲۸ ۱۳۴۲
 وزارت کثرت و عقاید
 کتبه
 تاریخ ثبت: ۱۱ ۱۹۶۵
 تاریخ ثبت: ۱۷ ۱۳۴۲
 تاریخ ثبت: ۲۸ ۱۳۴۲
 وزارت کثرت و عقاید
 کتبه
 تاریخ ثبت: ۱۱ ۱۹۶۵
 تاریخ ثبت: ۱۷ ۱۳۴۲
 تاریخ ثبت: ۲۸ ۱۳۴۲
 وزارت کثرت و عقاید
 کتبه
 تاریخ ثبت: ۱۱ ۱۹۶۵
 تاریخ ثبت: ۱۷ ۱۳۴۲
 تاریخ ثبت: ۲۸ ۱۳۴۲

Document E: The Prime Minister instructs that no response should be given to the letters and appeals by the Baha'is. 20 March 1950.

Suggested citation

Nasser Mohajer, کاردأجین کردن د کتر بر جیس، *The Brutal Slashing to Death of Dr Berjis* [Persian], Baran, No.'s 19-20, Spring & Summer 2008, 10–24; trans. Ahang Rabbani, *The Brutal Slashing to Death of Dr Berjis*, *Baha'i Studies Review*, 17, 2011, 133–167. DOI: 10.1386/bsr.17.133/1.

Contributor details

Dr Ahang Rabbani has published numerous scholarly articles, essays, books, and translations over the course of several decades including regular valued contributions for the *Baha'i Studies Review*. A recent book that he translated, *The Genesis of the Babi-Bahá'í Faiths in Shíráz and Fárs* was published by Brill in 2008.

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Endnotes

1. Phillip Tussing and Sen McGlinn are thanked for reading through the translation and suggesting a number of improvements. (translator)
2. See Mírzá Habíbu'lláh Afnán, *The Genesis of the Babi-Bahá'í Faiths in Shíráz and Fárs*, trans. Ahang Rabbani, Leiden: Brill, 2008. (translator)
3. Bahram Choubine (2009), 'The Suppression of the Baha'is of Iran in 1955', trans. Ahang Rabbani, *Baha'i Studies Review*, 15, 2009, 83–95. (translator)
4. While living in Tehran prior to his martyrdom in 1852, Haji Mirza Jani wrote what is believed to be the first history of the Babi movement, the *Kitab Nuqatatu'l-Kaf*. His brother,

- Muhammad-Isma'il (d. 1881), known as Dhahib, became a follower of Baha'u'llah, while another brother, Mirza Ahmad, followed Yahya Azal. (translator)
5. Many Zoroastrian converts in Yazd left that town and settled in Kashan, which was more hospitable to Baha'is. (translator)
 6. Moojan Momen, 'Kashan and Central Provinces of Iran', posted at <http://www.northill.demon.co.uk/relstud/kashan.htm>. (translator)
 7. Mohajer's scholarly contributions include *The Book of Prison: An Anthology of Prison Life in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2 vols, Berkeley: Noghteh Books, 1377 and 1380/1998 and 2001. (translator)
 8. For details on this *coup d'état* see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_Mosaddeq and sources cited in that article. (translator)
 9. Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran on 11 February 1979, and that date generally marks the beginning of the Islamic Republic of Iran. (translator)
 10. Muhammad-Taqi Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab [Soiled Garment Under the Sun]*, Germany: Alburz Press, 1382/2003, 210.
 11. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 210.
 12. Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, *Bigunahan [The Guiltless]*, unpublished manuscript in private hands, 241, indicates that Sulayman Berjis was a son of Hakim Ya'qub.
 13. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 206–08.
 14. 'Abdu'llah Shahbazi, *Jistarha'i az Tarikh Baha'igari dar Iran [Glimpses of Baha'i History in Iran]*, Tehran, 1382/2003, 19.
 15. Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, Wilmette, 1932, 217, states, 'The night the Bab arrived at Kashan coincided with the eve preceding the third Naw-Ruz, after the declaration of His Mission, which fell on the second day of the month of Rabi'u'th-Thani, in the year 1263 AH [1847].' (translator)
 16. In 1898, Khajih Rabi' (d. 1917) established the Vahdat-Bashar school in Kashan. It received official recognition in 1910. A Baha'i boys' school was also established in the village of Aran and a girls' school was added later. (translator)
 17. Hasan Naraqi, *Tarikh Ijtima'i Kashan [Social History of Kashan]*, Tehran: Mu'assisih Mutali'at va Tahqiqat Ijtima'i, 1342/1963, 263.
 18. Naraqi, *Tarikh Ijtima'i Kashan* 263.
 19. Naraqi, *Tarikh Ijtima'i Kashan* 263.
 20. Siyavash Rastani, *Siyid Hasan Mu'alim va Tarikhchih Dars Akhlaq [Siyid Hasan the Teacher, and the History of Children's Moral Training Classes]*, Germany: Baha'i Verlag, 2000, 80.
 21. Ruhullah Mehrabkhani, 'Shahadat Dr Berjis' ['Martyrdom of Dr Berjis'], *Ahang Badi'*, yr. 4, no. 17, Isfand 1328/March 1950, 20.
 22. Mehrabkhani, *Shahadat Dr Berjis* 6.
 23. Mehrabkhani, *Shahadat Dr Berjis* 7.
 24. *Ittila'at*, Monday 17 Bahman 1328/6 February 1950.
 25. *Firdaws*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950.
 26. Mehrabkhani, *Shahadat Dr Berjis* 7.
 27. *Firdaws*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950.
 28. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 207.
 29. Nahid Subhani (Berjis), *Payam Nur*, 16, 1386/2007.
 30. *Firdaws*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950. A similar report appeared in *The Baha'i World*, vol. 12, 1950–54, 684. (translator)
 31. Mehrabkhani, *Shahadat Dr Berjis* 7.
 32. *Firdaws* gives the number of patients in Dr Berjis's office as 'seven or eight'. However, *The Baha'i World* has given the figure of ten. A similar difference in the time of the visit of

Tavasuli and Taqipur to Dr Berjis's office appears, where the latter source states that they came at 8:30 in the morning, whereas *Ittila'at*, Sunday 16 Bahman 1328/5 February 1950, and also *Firdawsi*, 7 Isfand 1328/28 March 1950 have written that this crime took place at 11 in the morning on Friday. Ruhullah Mehrabkhani, in *Ahang Badi'*, has written that the two murderers came to the office of Dr Berjis 'around 10 in the morning'.

33. For a brief description of the extremist and terrorist organization known as the Fada'iyan-i Islam, see Appendix 1 and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fadayan-e_Islam. (translator)
34. The term *lawth* has acquired different legal meaning in different branches of Islamic jurisprudence. For a detailed discussion see, <http://hoghogh-abadan.persianblog.ir/post/89/> and <http://www.mibosearch.com/search.aspx?page=1&search=%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AB&btnSearch.x=84&btnSearch.y=17>. It essentially means a case where the judge would find it impossible to pronounce judgment, or the judgment involves a group of individuals who committed the crime not for personal reasons. (translator; Mazda Karimi and Moojan Momen are thanked for providing references)
35. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 206 and 208.
36. At the beginning of World War II, Iran remained a neutral country. However, on 23 August 1941 (3 Shahrivar 1320), during the heat of the war, Iranian neutrality was broken and Iran was attacked from the air and the sea: by the British from the south and the Russians from the north. (translator)
37. 'Ali Davani, *Nihzat Ruhaniyun Iran [Iran's Clerical Movement]*, Tehran: Markaz Asnad Inqilab Islami, 2nd printing, 1377/1998, 555–56.
38. For Ayatollah Burujirdi's biography see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seyyed_Husayn_Borujerdi. (translator)
39. For Ayatollah Montazeri's biography see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Ayatollah_Hossein-Ali_Montazeri. (translator)
40. Ayatollah Husayn-'Ali Montazeri, *Matn Khatirat bi Hamrah Payvastha [Complete Text of the Memoirs with Appendices]*, Europe: Ittihad Nashiran dar Urupa, 2nd printing, Dey 1379/December 2000, 94. [The Memoirs of Ayatollah Montazeri is online at <http://www.amontazeri.com/farsi/frame3.asp> and the above-cited passage appears on 132 – translator.]
41. Two towns in north-west of Isfahan. (translator)
42. Ghulam-Rida Karbaschi, *Tarikh Shafahi Inqilab Islami: Tarikh Hawzih 'Ilmiyah Qum [Oral History of the Islamic Revolution: History of Qum's Seminary School]*, Tehran: Markaz Asnad Inqilab Islami, 1st printing, 1380/2001, 161–62.
43. Ayatollah Ahmad-'Ali Ahmadi-Shahrudi, *Paygah Hawzih*, <http://new.hawzah.net/hawzah/>.
44. Ahmadi-Shahrudi, *Paygah Hawzih*.
45. See under Internet search for Vadghan.
46. <http://www.pedia.cloob.com>.
47. *Khatirat Ayatollah Muhammad Yazdi [Memoirs of Ayatollah Muhammad Yazdi]*, Tehran: Intisharat Markaz Asnad Inqilab Islami, 1380/2001, 131. Also, see Misbah-Yazdi, *Khatirih [Reminiscences]*, Tehran: Kanun Danish-Amukhtigan Tarh Valayat, <http://www.tamhid.com/prs/index.php?option=com>.
48. Society for the Promotion of Islam. No adequate history of this anti-Baha'i organization has been written, but see Bahram Choubine, 'Sacrificing the Innocent', *Iranian.com*, <http://www.iranian.com/main/2008/sacrificing-innocent>. (translator)
49. The word *Haybat* appears to be a typographical error in the original Persian. The correct word is probably *hay'at*, meaning society, organization, body or association.
50. *Firdawsi*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950. [The phrase 'wayward and polytheists' is standard language used by orthodox and fanatical Shi'ites to denigrate the Baha'is – translator.]
51. Mehrabkhani, *Shahadat Dr Berjis* 4.
52. Mehrabkhani, *Shahadat Dr Berjis* 4.
53. *Ittila'at*, Sunday 16 Bahman 1328/5 February 1950.
54. Mehrabkhani, *Shahadat Dr Berjis* 4.

55. Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, *Bigunahan* 241 indicates that six others joined the initial two men and attacked Dr Berjis. (translator)
56. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 4.
57. *Ittila'at*, Sunday 16 Bahman 1328/5 February 1950.
58. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 5.
59. *The Baha'i World*, vol. 12, 685. *Firdawsi*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950.
60. Karbaschi, *Tarikh Shafahi Inqilab Islami* 296.
61. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 207.
62. *Firdawsi*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950.
63. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 206–07.
64. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 5.
65. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 206–07.
66. *Ittila'at*, Monday 17 Bahman 1328/6 February 1950.
67. *ibid.*
68. Dr Berjis's three sons were Hushang, Mansur and Nasir, and his three daughters were Rawhaniyh, Victoria and Hikmat. His sons followed the father's example and became healthcare professionals. (translator)
69. Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, *Bigunahan* 244 states that since the resting place of Dr Berjis was often attacked and desecrated by fanatical elements of Kashan, in 1977 Dr Berjis's sons arranged through the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran and Kashan's municipality, to transfer the remains of Dr Berjis and Shaykh Mazgani – a renowned Babi martyr – to the Baha'i cemetery in Mazgan, near Qamsar. Two years later, the Islamic Republic confiscated the Baha'i cemetery in Kashan, destroyed all graves and subdivided the land into many parcels which were sold to the public. (translator)
70. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 5.
71. *Ittila'at*, Monday 17 Bahman 1328/6 February 1950.
72. *ibid.*
73. *ibid*; and *Ittila'at*, Sunday 16 Bahman 1328/5 February 1950.
74. *Ittila'at*, Monday 17 Bahman 1328/6 February 1950.
75. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 209.
76. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 5.
77. *Ittila'at* and *Kayhan*, Sunday and Monday 16 and 17 Bahman/5 and 6 February 1950.
78. Hazhir (1899–1949) served as minister on ten occasions and eventually served as the prime minister from 13 June 1948 to 9 November 1949. He was then appointed as the court minister. (translator)
79. Because of religious provisions, Baha'is are not allowed to accept political offices. (translator).
80. Ahmad Kasravi was a renowned Iranian intellectual and writer whose heterodox views resulted in his murder by Fada'iyani Islam. For a biography see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Kasravi. (translator)
81. *Millat Iran*, 90, Thursday 20 Bahman 1328/9 February 1950, quoted in Suhrab Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* [A Discussion of Anti-Baha'ism], n.p.: Payam Verlag, 1st printing, Khurdad 1385/May 2006.
82. *Naysan*, 20 Bahman 1328/9 February 1950.
83. Most likely a reference to Ayatollah Burujirdi, who was a determined enemy of the Baha'is and a source of emulation for the Shi'ites. (translator)
84. Suhrab Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* 16. [See Appendix 2, Document A – translator.]

85. Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* 17. [See Appendix 2, Document B – translator.]
86. Karbaschi, *Tarikh Shafahi Inqilab Islami* 296.
87. Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* 18. [See Appendix 2, Document C – translator.]
88. Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* 19. [See Appendix 2, Document D – translator.]
89. Literally, the Masters, a reference to the clerical leaders. (translator)
90. For a biography of 'Ali Mansur, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_Mansur. (translator)
91. Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* 21. [See Appendix 2, Document E – translator.]
92. Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, *Bigunahan* 121–24, quotes a letter of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran dated 5 Bahman 1329/25 January 1951 in which the murder of Dr Berjis is raised with the prime minister. (translator)
93. *Khatirat Haji 'Azu'l-Mamalik Ardilani: Zindigi dar duran shish padishah [Memoirs of Haji 'Izu'l-Mamalik of Ardilan: Life During the Reigns of Six Monarchs]*, Khurshid Press, 1372/1993, 315–16.
94. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 209.
95. Karbaschi, *Tarikh Shafahi Inqilab Islami* 296. [In the original Persian, reference is incorrectly given to a publication by Rida Gulsurkhi – translator.]
96. *Kayhan*, 18 Khordad 1367/8 June 1988.
97. Rabbani-Shirazi was a student of Ayatollah Burujirdi and Ayatollah Khomeini. Besides marginal notes and annotations on the *Wasa'il al-Shi'ah*, he also wrote the introduction (in 242 pages) to the new edition of the *Biharu'l-Anvar*, the massive Shi'ite collection of traditions. (translator)
98. Rabbani-Shirazi, *Da'iratu'l-Ma'arif: 'Ulama-yi Mujahid [Encyclopaedia Of Mujahid Clerics]*, <http://www.irdc.ir/personage.asp?id=325>.
99. For his biography, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navvab_Safavi. (translator)
100. Karbaschi, *Tarikh Shafahi Inqilab Islami* 296.
101. *Kayhan*, 18 Khordad 1367/8 June 1988.
102. Ruhullah Husaynian, *Bist Sal Takapui Islam Shi'ite dar Iran [Twenty Years of Islamic Shi'ism's Struggle in Iran]*, Intishrat Markaz Asnad Inqilab Islami, 1381/2002, 292.
103. Husaynian, *Bist Sal Takapui Islam Shi'ite dar Iran* 290–91.
104. Iraj Iskandari, *Khatirat Siyassi [Political Memoirs]*, in collaboration with Babak Amir-Khusravi and Fereydu Azarnur, part 2, Intisharat Democratic Mardum Iran, 1367 Sh/1988, 156.
105. Davud Amini, *Jam'iyat Fadayan-e Islam va Naqsh an dar Tahavulat-i Siyassi-Ijtimat'i Iran [The Society of Fadayan-e Islam and its Role in Social-Political Developments of Iran]*, Intishrat Markaz Asnad Inqilab Islami, 1381 Sh/2002, 138.
106. Taher Ahmadzadeh, *Tarikh Hawzih 'Ilmiiyih Qum*, aforesaid, 341. [Presumably a reference to Ghulam-Rida Karbaschi, *Tarikh Shafahi Inqilab Islami: Tarikh Hawzih 'Ilmiiyih Qum*, Tehran: Markaz Asnad Inqilab Islami, 1380/2001. (translator)]
107. *Ittila'at*, 5 Shahrivar 1329/27 August 1950.
108. *Kayhan*, 5 Shahrivar 1329/27 August 1950.
109. The correct date of birth and death should be 1286–1339/1907–60; <http://www.qoqnoos.com/body/poem/classic-poem/sadegh%20sarmad/bio.htm>. (translator)
110. Baqir 'Aqili, *Sharh Hal Rijal Siyassi va Nizami Mu'asir Iran [Biography of Political and Military Men in Contemporary Iran]*, vol. 2, Tehran: Guftar Press, 1380/2001, 798.
111. Calendars available to the present translator indicate that 5 Shahrivar was a Sunday. (translator)
112. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 209–10.
113. As a form of exhibiting jubilation, Iranians sacrifice lambs or other animals in the path of the victor. (translator)

114. During certain anniversaries, such as the observance of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn ('Ashura), uneducated Shi'ites resort to cutting themselves with daggers or beating themselves senseless. It creates a most disturbing and unpleasant scene. (translator)
115. *Jahan-e Ma*, 26 Shahrivar 1329/17 September 1950.
116. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 210.
117. *Kayhan*, 18 Khرداد 1367/8 June 1988.
118. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 206.