



Conflict between Groups of Power in Iran (from 1989 to 2010) as an Indicator of Stability in the Iranian Political System

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Abstract

The suggested presentation will be dedicated to the analysis of the political system of contemporary Iran since 1989. A new methodology was set up in order to conduct the research. It combines game theory, resource-actor approach, system analysis (analysis of open unbalanced systems) and a scale developed by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research. Four coalitions are distinguished in the Iranian political system and their interaction is investigated. The paper attempts to analyze the structure and evolution of major decision-making centers in the political system of the IRI. These coalitions could be described in such terms as «right coalition», «left coalition», «center» and «the leader of the country». From 1992 until the present, «the right coalition» has been leading the country, but from 1997 to 2005 «the left coalition» had an opportunity to resume control of the two political institutions such as presidential post and parliament. The conclusions are as follows:

–the ideological trends within Iran are vague and the political groups of the contemporary Iran are more oriented to the leaders than to the ideological goals;

–the coalitions' activities remain unstable;

–«the Islam politicization» process is ceaseless;

–the meaning of «the legitimacy of authority» concept had been gradually reinterpreted over the last 21 years;

–the main political process in the Iran remains within the framework of the Islamic legislative basis.

As a whole, the political system of Iran is stable in spite of internal contradictions and external problems.

Key words: Iran, Stability, Conflict, Political System, Groups of Power, Coalitions

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Introduction

The main feature of the work is application of the methodology of political science in the modern Iranian political reality. Four groups of actors in the Iranian political arena have been defined and their interaction examined. These are the coalitions of political power that formulate the government's main foreign and domestic policies, and it is their collaboration and clashes with one another inside the political system of contemporary Iran affect the political stability of the regime (among other factors, such as the price of oil, also examined in this paper). These coalitions consist of political leaders, groups and parties and can be generally described by the terms *right coalition*, *left coalition*, *center* and *the Leader of the country*. Investigation of conflict between these coalitions in Iran required the development of criteria of the elite conflicts intensity in Iran and their correlation with quantitative estimates on a five-point scale.

Methodology

The main methodological paradigm is the methodology developed in the framework of the synergetic concept, which is also called «open and non-equilibrium theory of political systems». In accordance with this concept, the system is regarded as a kind of analytical abstraction actually existing society and is defined as the set of processes and institutions that develop in different directions with different and variable speeds. Almost all political and social systems that exist in the modern society can be attributed to this kind of system.

On this approach, the open character of the system means its exchange of energy, information and other resources with the surrounding systems. The system is never in stable condition, for it always a subject to change. Although its instability is often insignificant. In this case, the system is balanced. This condition can be defined as the system's ability to maintain and reproduce its basic structure and accomplish changes in the legal institutional limits. To destroy the balance of such system, one needs an extremely intensive event, which has a large «energy» and «weight». If the system is unbalanced, any minor event can lead to unpredictable consequences (Matveev 2002). This research paradigm requires a large amount of information and a high level of systematization of the material.

During the investigation of elite conflict a methodology, developed by the Institute of Heidelberg (Heidelberg Institute on International Conflict Research [HIK]) will be used partly (Conflict barometer 2010). It distinguishes violent and non-violent conflicts. Non-violent conflict includes *latent conflict* (hidden contradictions, not updated in a specific action) and *manifest conflict* (stocks, that sometimes precede the use of force, including verbal pressure, threats of violence or economic sanctions).

Violent conflicts are *crisis*, *severe crisis* and *war*. In the terminology of the Heidelberg Institute, crisis is a tense situation in which one part uses military force during spontaneous incidents. *Severe crisis* – the stage of the conflict in which violence is used permanently and in an organized form. *War* – the type of violent conflict in which armed violence is used for an extended period of time in an organized and systematic manner.

The transition from the non-violent conflict phase to the violent may be clarified on the presence of aggressive acts (slaughter, clashes, arrests), and the use of military force.

However such scale is not enough for the analysis of conflict between groups of power in Iran. This is due to the fact that the methodology of the Heidelberg Institute involves a transformation of one phase of conflict into another without taking into consideration the development within each of the phases. For example, sometimes, it takes a period of time to escalate the situation from *manifest conflict* to *crisis*, and often (but not always) a degree of confrontation may increase gradually. Thereby, a situation, in which conflict is no longer in the *manifest* stage, but has not moved in the *crisis* yet, may take place. This possibility is not taken into account by the Heidelberg methodology.



Therefore, in this research we divided every phase of conflict into two different substages. As a result, there will be four new phases of confrontation: *pre-manifest conflict*, *pre-crisis*, *pre-severe crises* and *pre-war*. Latent conflict will be divided into a *latent* stage (the contradiction is not actualized in concrete actions) and a *pre-manifest* stage (increasing of criticism of opponents without mutual threats). Manifest conflict will be divided into a *manifest* stage (contradictions are expressed in numerous speeches of the opponents, but without any explicit threats against each other) and a *pre-crisis* stage (threats of sanctions and violence).

The *crisis* will be composed from a *crisis* stage (transition of threats into action, consisting in the arrests and trials of opponents) and a *pre-severe* stage (adding the use of armed force and an increase of repression against opponents in a spontaneous incident). *Severe crisis* will include *severe* stage (non-permanent use of military violence in an organized form) and *pre-war* stage (permanent and organized armed violence). Definition of the *war* stage remains unchanged and involves using military violence during a long period of time in an organized and systematic manner. Phases of the conflict are indicated by the letter «C» in this article.

As a result, the elite point scale confrontation within the Iranian political system can be represented as follows (see Table 1):

Table 1. Conflict Intensities.

Points	Phase of the conflict	Definition
<i>Non-violent conflicts</i>		
1	Latent Conflict	A positional difference over definable values of national meaning is considered to be a latent conflict if respective demands are articulated by one of the parties and perceived by the other as such.
1,5	Pre-manifest Conflict	
2	Manifest (Declarative) Conflict	A manifest conflict includes the use of measures that are located in the preliminary stage to violent force. This includes for example verbal pressure, threatening explicitly with violence, or the imposition of economic sanctions.
2,5	Pre-crisis	
<i>Violent conflicts</i>		
3	Crisis	A crisis is a tense situation in which at least one of the parties uses violent force in sporadic incidents.
3,5	Pre-severe Crisis	
4	Severe Crisis	A conflict is considered to be a severe crisis if violent force is repeatedly used in an organized way
4,5	Pre-war	
5	War	A war is a type of violent conflict in which violent force is used with a certain continuity in an organized and systematic way. The conflict parties exercise extensive measures, depending on the situation. The extent of destruction is massive and of long duration.

The coalitions of political power in Iran

There are only Islamic parties and groups of Shia clerics in Iran that exist on a legal basis. Political groups or parties that discard Islam and the principle of «Velayat-e Faghih» are forbidden. Currently, there are nearly 250 political parties public organizations, political and religious movements and trade unions in Iran, but most of them has not any organizational structure, fixed membership and do not have public support.

The whole existence of political parties is manifested only during elections. Many movements and parties are created especially for elections, and they do not play any role in political life. However, there is a number of coalitions that have a real impact on the internal political situation and the results of the elections. In many respects, they exist because of the authority of their leaders.



They can be defined as: a *left coalition*, a *right coalition* (since 2006 the *right coalition* is divided into a «conservative» group and a «radical» group), a *center*. Of course, this division is rather relative one, for it is impossible to analyze all the relationships within the Iranian political system, but precisely this division is supported by many of Iranian scholars (Shadlu 2000, Zarifnia 1999, Mortaja 1999). In our opinion, we need to add a «coalition of the country's leader», Ali Khamenei, to these coalitions, as he plays a key role in the politics of the country.

Ideological criterion such as left and right in Iran differs from the one generally accepted in the European tradition. Iranian political scientists qualify the «left» as the clergy group, which advocates for reform of the Iranian political system. The opponents of such reforms are considered the «right». This designation is rather conditional, because all the groups can change their views sometimes according to a political conjecture.

The main part of the *left coalition* is the «Association of Combatant Clerics (majma'e rowhaniyun-e mobarez) (ACC)». A member and one of the leaders is the former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami. This coalition has less political resource in contrast with its political opponents in the main government offices and security agencies of the country.

The main strategy of the *left coalition* since 1997 lies in the progressive reform of Iranian political and economical system (Keddie 2003).

The main part of the *right coalition* is «The Combatant Clergy Association (jame'e-ye rowhaniyat-e mobarez) (CCA)». Reza Mahdavi Kani is the General Secretary. CCA gradually won all the important positions in the state after the elections to the Majles in 1992, as noted by an Iranian analyst Abbas Shadlu (Shadlu 2000). The main strategy of the CCA is to keep the status quo in all spheres of life in Iran.

Since 2006 it becomes obvious that the *right coalition* splits into the «conservative» group and the «radical» group. The leader of the «radical» group is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the current president of Iran.

The main part of the *center* is «The Executives of Construction Party (Hezb-e Kargozaran-e Sazandegi) (ECP)». Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani is the informal leader. He was a president of Iran from 1989 to 1997. The social basis of the *center* is a broad strata of intellectuals, cultural figures and the progressive clergy. Its main characteristic is a pragmatic approach to many political issues (Shadlu 2000).

The fourth major player on the political scene of Iran is the Leader of the Islamic Republic (Supreme Leader) Ali Khamenei. He plays an independent and significant role in the Iranian political process. The main political strategy of the Supreme Leader can be described as acting as an arbiter between the various groups of power within Iran, although he especially supports the *right coalition*.

It is worth mentioning that in the end of the eighties of the XX century ideological views of the coalitions differed from the contemporary ones. For example, leftists were referred as radicals and advocated for the further Islamization of the Iranian society and for minimization of contacts with the western countries. On the contrary, the *right coalition* was considered to be a devotee of a more liberal development model in Iran. In the middle of the ninetieth of the XX century political views of the coalitions changed and people who predominated in them were those who had formed a basis of their movements in the past. The leftists became known as reformers and the representatives of the right – as conservatives. The leader of the centrist coalition, Hashemi-Rafsanjani, changed his views in the same way, from radical to liberal ones.

Level of conflict from 1989 to 1992

In this article an elite mutual relations in the period 1989-2010 are analyzed. Intermediate conclusions will be made according to the four-year periods of the Majles of 3-8 convocations (except the periods of the 7th and the 8th Majleses, which are analyzed together), for elections in this institute define all spectrum of forces in the Iranian governmental system.

Iran after the war with Iraq faced such problems as necessity of overcoming an economic crisis by revival of exchange relations, rejection of the dictates of the state and giving more freedom to



private entrepreneurs. The *central coalition* headed by Hashemi-Rafsanjani and the right-wingers supported the exchange relations, which were partly supposed by the president and also, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the new Leader of the country Ali Khamenei (Wilfried 2000). The leftists were opponents of reforms.

An approximate structure of the distribution of powers in 1989 provided that the leftists supervised the Majles and their representatives were in the other state authorities. The *right coalition* was represented in the state authorities as well. It entered into an alliance with the centrists who predominated in the government and were supported by the new Leader of the country.

Such support had an impact on that in fact the representatives of the right wing during three years after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini dismissed the left-winged politicians from the political scene and almost deprived them of power positions in the political system of Iran (Wilfried 2000).

The period of time between the decease of Imam Khomeini and elections in the new Majles 1992 (the situation changed after the elections) is characterized by weakening of the left wing that gradually lost all the main public posts during three years, consolidation of the *right coalition* that mostly acted in the union with the group of Rafsanjani and strengthening of his own positions, when, having acquired the president post, he began to pursue a new economic policies. Ali Khamenei, the Leader of the country, inclined toward the right wing and Rafsanjani. A conflict between the main players did not go beyond non-violent actions.

As the researchers mention, the policy of the Iranian government in that period lacked indoctrination that resulted in predomination of reasonable economic and political decisions over the revolutionary ardor (Ehteshami 1995). After the end of the Iran-Iraq war there was no longer a need to mobilize the masses although there was a need for effective governing that became one more reason for the dismissal of nearly all leftists who used to be more idealists than pragmatics (Gheissari, Nasr 2004).

On the whole the situation 1989 during the first three months was in the *pre-crisis* phase (C-2,5) owing to circumstances of Ayatollah Montazeri, then it was reduced to the *declarative* one (C-2). The situation of 1990 did not go beyond the non-violent actions. A rather strong contradictions between different groups and their severe debates about various aspects of domestic and foreign affairs of the country indicate maintenance of the *declarative* stage till September 1990 (C-2). An intentional expulsion of many leftists from the electoral list to the Assembly of Experts make it possible to say that inter-factional conflict controversy became stronger (C-2,5). However, in November, after the elections in the Assembly of Experts it went down again to the situation of the first half of the year (C-2). The year 1991 was characterized by a low political activity of different groups in comparison with the previous years. Among the important events one may distinguish a few attempts made by Majles to submit a vote of no confidence to the ministers of Hashemi-Rafsanjani government and also an extended criticism of the domestic and foreign policy followed by the government. In general, one may speak about reducing the level of conflict from the *declarative* to the *pre-manifest* one (C-1,5). In 1992 the situation in the country was still a little tense. Even after the defeat of the *left coalition*, that was the critic of the government, and the attacks on the Cabinet continued, however by representatives of the *right coalition*, the former allies of Hashemi-Rafsanjani. That's why the level of conflict doesn't fall below the declarative phase (C-2). In March and April the confrontation rose to the pre-crisis level (C-2,5), because the Guardian Council prohibited many leftists from participating in elections.

Level of conflict from 1992 to 1996

During the four-year period after the elections to the Majlis in 1992 there were significant changes in the political situation. After the defeat of the *left coalition*, the coalition between the right and the centrists disintegrated. As a result, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and ECP began to support the *left coalition*. The Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei strengthened his political weight. Formally, he tried to stay above the struggle of various political fractions, but he gave more support to the *right coalition*.



The *left coalition* had recovered from the defeat only by the elections in 1996, but it had changed its political and economic views. As Buchta Wilfried wrote: «finding themselves at the edge of the political system of Iran, the “Leftists” decided to act as ordinary politicians, though a solid social base was in their hands, such as links to the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution and some Islamic funds. As a result, they partially reconsidered their position and began to support the President Rafsanjani on his internal economic liberalization and changing foreign policy» (Wilfried 2000).

Rafsanjani was compelled to change his political preferences, because of the decision of the members of the *right coalition* to carry out policies and to participate in the election campaign to the Majlis on their own, without the supporters of the president. The members of the *right coalition* thought that they could have an overwhelming victory over rivals. But instead of this they brought the *left coalition* which entered into an alliance with Hashemi-Rafsanjani back to the political space (Downes 2002).

In general, the political situation in Iran in 1993 was in the *declarative* stage of non-violent conflict. The direct confrontation between the government and the parliament indicates it (C-2). In 1994-1995 the tensions between the elite groups were at the same level (C-2). In 1996, except a few months, the political conflict was still in the *declarative* phase. It was raised only in the period from February till April, when the election campaign was hold (C-2,5), which is proved by refusal of many leftists to run to Majles because they were afraid that the Guardian Council prohibited their participation in the election campaign.

Level of conflict from 1996 to 2000

In the period from 1996 to 2000 there had been a significant trend toward democratization of the political life. There was a mitigation of bans in the cultural and domestic life. A lot of political parties appeared and the political system became polarized (Wells 1999).

The leftists completely took the initiative over the *right coalition* in the sphere of foreign policy. At least, international visits of the president Mohammed Khatami and his doctrine of Dialogue among civilizations enhanced the credibility of Iran on the international arena and the popularity of the *left coalition* within the country, especially among young people, who make up a large part of the country's electorate.

Commitment to reforms and position of Ali Khamenei, the Leader of the country, made it possible for the *left coalition* to get a majority in local councils and in the Majles of the sixth convocation.

Despite ECP (Kargozaran) accession to the *left coalition* and the party's participation in the work of the ministry in 1997 after the election victory of Khatami when the party received a few seats and support of the *left coalition* during the elections in the Majles in 2000, the relations between the centrists and the leftists became worse. It was the result of the position of Rafsanjani who was not satisfied with his role in the political system of Iran (Downes 2002).

The role of the *left coalition* became stronger in that period and the roles of the centrist and *right coalitions* became weaker. Concerning the Leader of the country, Ayatollah Khamenei partly supported Khatami, guided by the principles of the state pragmatism. Despite the popularity of the leftists in Iranian society and gaining several important posts in the Iranian political system, the post of the president, Majles, the fraction of the Expediency Discernment Council of the System (together with the *centrist coalition* 12 from 31 [Wilfried 2000]), the main leverages remained in the hands of the *right coalition* and the Leader of the country, that could exert pressure on their rivals, using a framed-up Islamic law.

Some researchers believe that at the bottom of the relative victory of the reformers were two factors. The first factor was the crisis of the governance when the elites were unable to come to an agreement about further development of the country (the conflict between Hashemi-Rafsanjani and CCA) which caused decrease in confidence. The second factor was increasing migration to cities and urbanization of the minds of Iranian people (Ehsani 1999).



The other experts stress that the *right coalition* had not any coherent politics and sought to increase its strength, paying no attention to realization of peoples interests (Mohammadi 2003).

It is important that the elite conflict in that period turned into violent phase from non-violent one but remained on its lowest violent level. The conflict did not increase mainly due to the fact that it would have impugned the whole political system, and, supposedly, it was not the objective of the major players.

In general, in 1997, before the presidential elections in May, the level of elite conflict was in the *declarative* phase (C-2) and then it went down to the *pre-declarative* phase (C-1,5). It was promoted by the confusion of the *right coalition* on the account of its failure in the presidential elections, so that it had recovered itself only by the end of the year. The parties were in the declarative stage of conflict until September 1998 (C-2), but it was risen to the pre-crisis phase (C-2,5) by the actions of the NC in September-October before the elections in the Assembly of Experts. The assassinations of the Iranian intellectuals are the evidence of the crisis in the end of 1998 (C-3). On the whole, the year 1999 is characterized by the increasing antagonism of different groups. It can be proved by the trial of many prominent leftists, banning many reformist papers, incessant mutual criticism of different fractions, coming even to a bloodshed, and refusal of some leftists to abide by the decision of their withdrawal from pre-election campaign in the local offices. The situation was in the *pre-crisis* stage (C-2,5) till July, but student disorders removed it to the *crisis* (C-3). The subsequent trials against members of the *left coalition* left the elite conflict unchanged. However, the elite compromise and continuing performance of Khatami government give no grounds for a higher conflict level. The political situation in 2000 remained in the *crisis* stage (C-3).

Level of conflict from 2000 to 2004

The period from 2000 to 2004 is characterized by gradual removal of the political initiative in direction of the *right coalition*. Although the coalition of Khatami in the beginning of the 2000s managed to score a success in the economic sphere.

Despite the majority of leftists in the Majles and the government, there was not any noticeable change in the balance of power in favor of the *left coalition*. Every try to take control, even financial, of the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution or Islamic funds was blocked by the Guardian Council and the Expediency Discernment Council of the System.

The *left coalition* was considerably weakened because of maintaining status-quo within political powers and absence of noticeable results of liberalization. The main political result was that the *left coalition* lost its offensive potential. Dissatisfaction with the supporters of Khatami rose appreciably in the society, for they were unable to change the situation in their favor (Gheissari, Nasr 2004).

Certainly, we cannot ignore a complexity of the situation in Iran due to a deploy of American troops in almost all countries that are contiguous with Iran and also a threat from USA against Iran because of its nuclear program. This fact began to consolidate the Iranian society around the *right coalition* which constantly focused attention on it and held anti-American demonstrations all over the country.

And also the rightists succeed in ideology when they abandoned Islamic radicalism and declared a policy of tolerance in relation to the Iranian society (Sazhin 2004), which influenced a decrease of elite conflict from *crisis* in 2001 to *declarative stage* in 2003.

As a result, this period shows a revanche of the *right coalition*, which brought the Majles under control. The leftists despite of all their attempts failed to take a part of administrative resources away from the rightists, and they lost peoples support. Hashemi-Rafsanjani in this period was more inclined to the *right coalition*. The Leader of the country Ali Khamenei despite of his conciliatory initiative did not give up his support of the *right coalition*.

In general, the situation in 2001 was not much different from two previous years. The continuing repression of prominent reformates and serious conflicts between branches of power showed that the political struggle was still in the *crisis* stage (C-3). On the whole, in comparison with



previous years, the level of confrontation decreased from crisis to the *pre-crisis* phase (C-2,5). It can be proved by reducing of political conflicts, related with repressions of rivals, but the threat of such actions from Iranian government agencies remained, according to the statements of their representatives. Generally, there were not any significant events in the Iranian political system in 2003. They were not numerous and rather peaceful that proves the decrease in the conflict level to the *declarative* phase (C-2). With the exception of the first three months 2004, when election campaign and elections to the Majles were hold, and the elite conflict was in the *pre-crisis* stage (C-2,5), the situation was in the *pre-declarative* phase (C-1,5). It can be proved by absence of severe political debates and mutual threats between the opponents. A relative political activity began only in November at congresses of the two fractions on the occasion of next year's presidential elections (C-2).

Level of conflict from 2004 to 2010

The period from 2004 to 2008 was characterized by a full *revanche* of the *right coalition*. However, along with that, a crisis tendencies within the *right coalition* were revealed, that resulted in conflict between its spokesmen during the elections at the end of 2006 as well as at the last elections in Majles. The positions of reformates, who suffered an utter defeat at the elections in Majles 2008 almost did not change. In 2006-2007 positions of Hashemi-Rafsanjani strengthened. In addition to his stunning victory at the elections in the Assembly of Experts, he was chosen to be the chairman after the death of Ayatollah Meshkini in summer 2007 (he lost this post in 2011). The Leader of the country supported different groups from the right wing, although his power remained rather stable.

It should be mentioned that from 2005 we cannot speak of the *left coalition* as the full member of the elite political struggle in Iran for it lost its positions in all government offices. Beginning from this year its actions can be associated with those of students and liberal opposition that did not influence much the Iranian political system. Nowadays leftists are outside active politics.

In general, the conflict situation between the major political groups in 2005 was as follows: from January to May the conflict was in the *declarative* stage (C-2), in May and June it increased to a *pre-crisis* (C-2,5), which was related with the election campaign and elections, then the level of conflict decreased to the *pre-declarative* (C-1,5), which was influenced by removal of the whole *left coalition* from political arena.

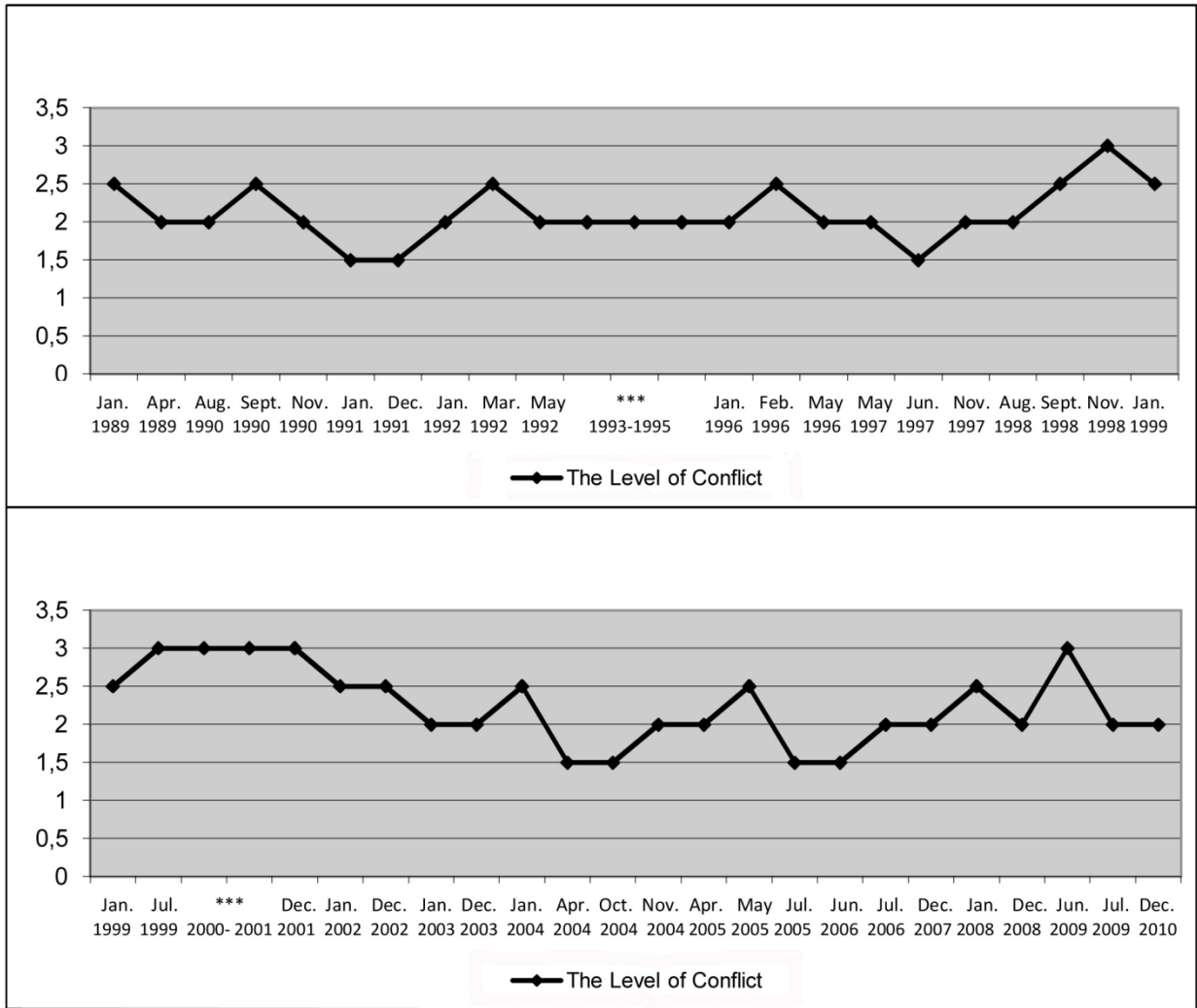
Basing on the fact that the most powerful candidates during the election campaign in 2006 did not positioned themselves as representatives of the one political force, trying to join different political coalitions, and that different coalitions supported candidates with various political views without direct criticism of each other, we can conclude that the elite conflict was not strong (Filin 2007). Therefore, the degree of political conflict in December 2006 increased only to the *declarative* stage (C-2). In 2007, the conflict was also in the *declarative* stage (C-2). During the elections to the Majles in March 2008, the elite conflict reached the *pre-crisis* stage (C-2,5) and gradually returned to the *declarative* stage at the end of 2008.

During the period from 2008 to 2010 the situation in Iran reached the *crisis* stage only once. It happened after the presidential election in 2009, about a month, a massive opposition protest took place in Iran. However, a month later, the elite conflict returned to the *declarative* stage.

The main trends of conflict between coalitions of political power in Iran

The *diagram 1* shows that the level of the elite conflict in the period under review, we can assert that it did not exceed the limits of medium intensity or *crisis* stage.

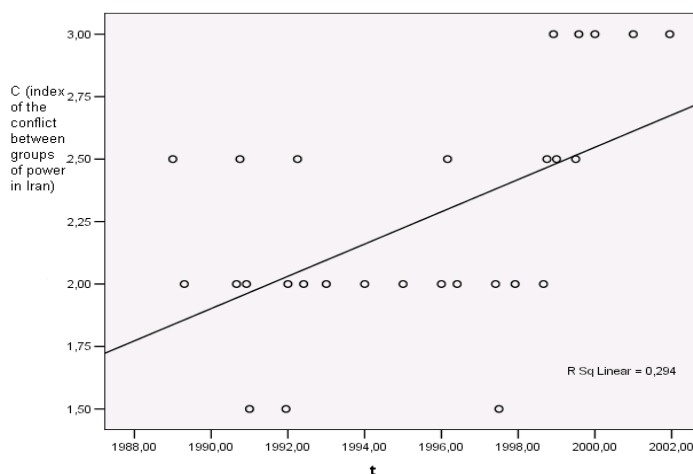
Diagram 1. Level of conflict between groups of power in Iran from 1989 to 2010.



As for the tendencies of elite conflict, we obtain the following information. In this case correlation between the level (index) of elite conflict (C) and periods of time (t) is shown.

In the period January 1989 – December 2001 there was a strong ($\rho = 0,55$) and statistically significant ($\alpha = 0,002$) tendency of elite conflict growth (see Diagram 2).

Diagram 2. Dynamics of conflict between groups of power in Iran, January 1989 to December 2001 (Scatter diagram with regression line).

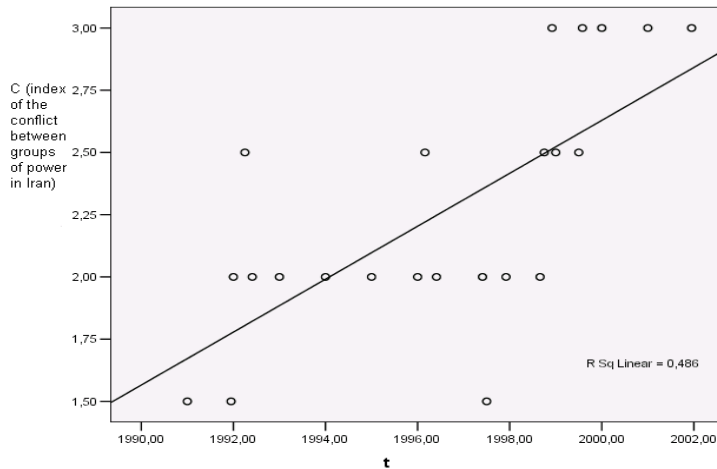


$\rho = 0,55; \alpha = 0,002$



This trend is stronger and more statistically significant ($\rho = 0,75$; $\alpha = 0,00004$) in the period from January 1991 to December 2001 (see Diagram 3).

Diagram 3. Dynamics of conflict between groups of power in Iran, January 1991 to December 2001 (Scatter diagram with regression line).

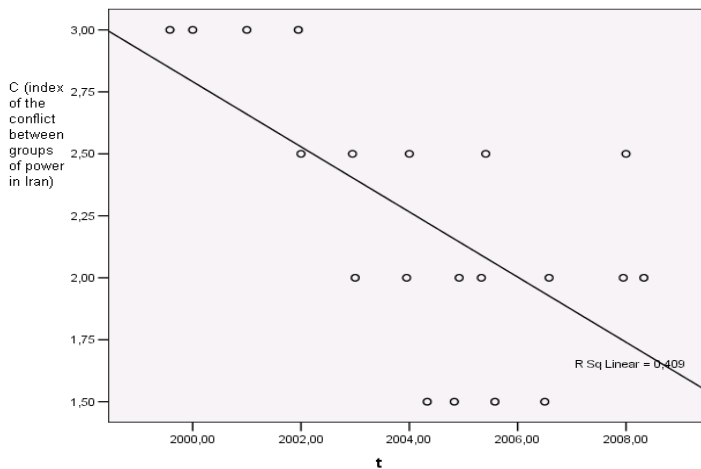


$$\rho = 0,75; \alpha = 0,00004$$

On the other hand, in the period from July 1999 to December 2010 there is also a strong and statistically significant ($\rho = -0,61$; $\alpha = 0,005$) tendency of elite conflict decrease (see Diagram 4).

In the period from 1999 to the end of 2001 there is a consistently high level of elite conflict without big tendency to growth or decrease.

Diagram 4. Dynamics of conflict between groups of power in Iran, July 1999 to December 2010 (Scatter diagram with regression line).



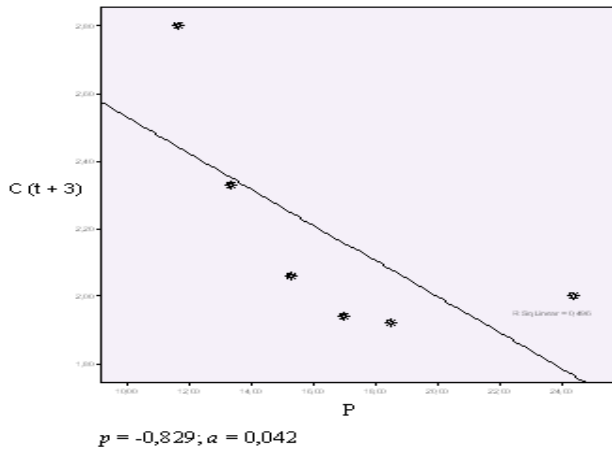
$$\rho = -0,61; \alpha = 0,005.$$

When we analyze the relationship between oil prices (oil revenues being the main source of the Iran's budget) and decreasing or escalating conflict levels between the major groups of the powerful elite in the Iranian political system, it appears that the correlation is not statistically significant ($\rho = -0,268$; $\alpha = 0,79$). This is the case when the relationship between oil prices and the level of conflict during the same year is analyzed.

However, the correlation becomes very strong ($\rho = -0,829$) and statistically significant ($\alpha = 0,042$), when we take into account a possible time lag between falling oil prices and an escalation in the level of internal conflict. The average price of oil in a given three-year period is a very strong factor for influencing the level of conflict intensity between groups of power in Iran over the following three years (see Diagram 5).



Diagram 5. Correlation between oil prices in a given three-year period and the dynamics of conflict between groups of power in Iran in the following three years (from 1989 to 2010) (Scatter diagram with regression line).



$C(t+3)$ – Average level of conflict between groups of power in Iran in the three-year period
 P – Average oil price in the three-year period t

While analyzing dynamics of elite conflict in Iran from 1989 to 2010, we can see one more important regularity. It is related with increasing a conflict level in periods of all-Iranian elections (presidential, parliamentary, to the Assembly of Experts). The *table 2* shows that in the years when elections were not held the elite conflict index remained at the low level (a conflict index that did not exceed 2,0 [Manifest conflict] was equivalent to 73% such cases). In the years when the elections were held conflict index reached the level of 2.5 [Pre-crisis] (53.8%) or 3.0 [Crisis] (15.4%). It is evident that elections act as catalyzer of elite conflict level growth (see Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation between index of the elite conflict and years of national elections in Iran.

		Elections		Total	
		0 = were held	1 = were not held		
C (index of conflict between groups of power in Iran)	1,5	Count % Within Elections	7 23,3%	0 0%	7 16,3%
	2,0	Count % Within Elections	15 50,0%	4 30,8%	19 44,2%
	2,5	Count % Within Elections	5 16,7%	7 53,8%	12 27,9%
	3,0	Count % Within Elections	3 10,0%	2 15,4%	5 11,6%
Total	Count % Within Elections	30 100,0%	13 100,0%	43 100,0%	

Conclusions

If we take a look at the degree of conflict between groups of power in Iran in that period, we can definitely say that it does not reach a level of average intensity or *crisis* stage. The main danger to the existing system was in the period from mid 1999 until the end of 2001, and then again in June 2009 (the reaction of the opposition to the results of presidential elections). Also, it can be clearly seen that the bursts of conflict activity occurred during election campaigns, as was the case in 1990, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2004, 2005, 2008 and 2009.

From 1989 to the end of 2001 the level of elite conflict in Iran increased. It may be related with low oil prices, for oil sales is the main source of income of the Iranian budget. The analysis of



correlations between oil prices and level of elite conflict shows that such connection do exist, however it takes place only after three years (see Diagram 5).

From July 1999 to December 2010 the conflict level decreased. Besides a rise in oil prices, there were another two factors that contributes to it. The first factor was that the conservative wing ceased exposing repressions of the members of the *left coalition* (Sazhin 2004). Secondly, after the defeat on the elections (2004, 2005) they lost all power leverages that led to the dominance of the conservative forces in the political system of Iran.

The periods from June to November 1997 and from July 2005 to July 2006 showed low conflict activity. The most evident reason being that the «opposition» simply did not expect its total failure in the presidential elections (i.e., the *right coalition* in 1997, and the *left coalition* in 2005), while the candidates who won were not expected to succeed. This underscores the unpredictable character of political developments in Iran.

The other conclusions are as follows:

- the ideological trends within Iran are vague and the political groups of the contemporary Iran are more oriented to the leaders than to the ideological goals;
- the coalitions' activities remain relatively unstable, as the most powerful politicians (for example, during the election campaigns) often did not position themselves as representatives of the one political force, trying to join different political coalitions, and that different coalitions supported candidates with various political views;
- «the Islam politicization» process is ceaseless;
- the meaning of «the legitimacy of authority» concept had been gradually reinterpreted over the last 21 years;
- the main political process in the Iran remains within the framework of the Islamic legislative basis.

In general, despite these energetic internal clashes between groups of power in Iran, this analysis shows that the Iranian political system is still relatively stable.

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