

## Post-1979 Iranian Revolution's Reign of Terror and State Violence: Kurdistan as a Centerpiece

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**Abstract:** Following the violent transition in power from an authoritarian monarchy to a theocratic despotism, the 1979 Iranian Revolution did not fulfil any of its promises of freedom and equality. Since the inception of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in 1979, state-sanctioned violence has consistently targeted all of Iran's numerous national and religious communities, including the Kurdish people, resulting in a decade of massive violence and terrorisation of civilians. Showcasing this decade's reign of terror in Kurdistan, this article argues that the Islamic regime's extensive use of violence and collective punishment was not an accidental occurrence of post-revolutionary chaos. But it was a deliberate choice of measure in line with its worldview and ambitions of redefining and reforging the nation-state identity and ideology in Iran. The process is referred to as 'the incomplete task of nation-state building' and took place during the decade following the revolution. In this regard, the regime imposed multifaceted measures and strategies on the Kurdish people, including conducting a civil war and imposing economic sanctions. This article will elaborate on the 1980s state-Kurdish conflict in Iran and the way the Kurdish movement challenged the then-newly established regime from various angles, particularly its numerous redlines.

**Keywords:** Iran, Kurdistan, state violence, recasting nation-state, ethnic conflict, revolution

Following the violent transition of power from an authoritarian monarchy to a theocratic despotism, the 1979 Iranian Revolution (hereafter 'the Revolution') failed to fulfil its promises of freedom and equality. Since the inception of the IRI in 1979, state-sanctioned violence has consistently targeted all of Iran's diverse national and religious communities. Without underestimating the extent and significance of violent clashes and confrontations between the regime and its opponents in the *center* or the vehement internal exclusions within the ranks of the regime in post-revolutionary Iran amid power consolidations, and these events' importance to the 1980s' region of terror, this article argues that regions and provinces, such as Kurdistan, Baluchistan and Turkmen Sahra, with ethnoreligious differences from the ruling elite of the IRI, suffered the most from violence and state terrorism in the 1980s (Keddie, 2010, pp. 245–246). In this article, the term Kurdistan refers to Iranian/Eastern Kurdistan (Rojhelat), encompassing the five provinces of Kermashan, Lorestan, Ilam, Kurdistan, and Western

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Azerbaijan. Western Azerbaijan is a province characterised by ethnic diversity, with a predominantly Kurdish and Azeri population. Ethnic conflicts and confrontations significantly affected this province throughout the post-revolutionary era.

This article contends that Kurdistan was a centerpiece of the IRI's post-revolutionary violence and reign of terror, subjecting the Kurdish people to various violent measures and strategies. These included military invasions and civil war, economic sanctions, massacres, and mass executions as forms of collective punishment (Hassaniyan & Stansfield, 2025). This article examines the 1980s state-Kurdish conflict in Iran and how the Kurdish movement challenged the newly established regime from multiple angles, particularly through its numerous redlines (Makaremi, 2015). Furthermore, this article aims to elucidate and analyse the escalation of state violence and the advent of a 'post-revolutionary state of terror in Iran' after the formation of the country's Islamic regime. It will focus on Kurdistan as a case study, examining various facets of this phenomenon from a peripheral perspective, particularly the use of violence by nation-states to impose mononationalism, *Velayat-e Motlaqaye Faqih* (the absolute authority of Islamist jurists), and hegemonic ideologies and identities. This article is divided into six main sections that delve into the following areas: 1. Historical Context, 2. Nation-State Transition Defined by Conflict and Confrontation, 3. Method and Data, 4. The conceptualisation and rationale of state-sanctioned violence, 5. The Kurdish demands for autonomy, and 6. Kurdistan as the epicenter of state-sanctioned violence and terror. These sections determine the structure of this article, and the article aims to answer the following research questions:

- What defines state violence, and what are the reasons for its implementation?
- What forms of state violence did the Islamic Republic of Iran use as collective punishment against the Kurdish people after 1979?
- What factors led to Kurdistan becoming the centerpiece of state violence?

## Historical Context

With the downfall of the Pahlavi regime (1925–1979) and the emergence of the Revolution, Iran entered a critical era accompanied by strict theocratic rule and a new age of state terror and violence, continuing in the current days. The violent clash between the Khomeinists<sup>1</sup> and various forces, including leftist and nationalist groups, in the post-revolutionary period over state control accounts (partly) for the emergence of this post-revolutionary 'state of terror' (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2016, p. 8). However, the violence perpetrated by the newly established ruling regime extended beyond the center, manifesting prominently in the country's peripheral regions, including Khuzestan, Kurdistan, Turkmen Sahra and Baluchistan, all of which have distinct ethnoreligious compositions compared with the ruling regime in Tehran (Elling, 2013; Rashidvash, 2013; Saleh, 2013).

The post-revolutionary state violence and terrorism across different parts of the country shaped the state-society relationships of the following decades in Iran. Although the newly established regime's violent and brutal rule of exclusion and marginalization affected the entire country, the intensity, extent, intent, measures, and duration of this policy varied from one region to another. The IRI's policy of systematic repression targeted women, minority religious groups, and non-Persian national communities who desired autonomy to practice their religion, identity, culture, and language (Mofidi & Aghapouri, 2023; Mohammadpour & Soleimani, 2021). These groups included the Baha'is, Arabs, Azeris, Baluchis, Kurds, and Turkmen. Excluding women from the sociopolitical landscape, terror, physical elimination of opposition groups, and imposing strict Islamic rules, including the undemocratic implementation of the sociopolitical, cultural, and educational restructuring of the country under the banner of the *Cultural Revolution*, were a few instances of general elements of state violence in the post-

revolutionary era in Iran.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the extensive opposition to the radical and exclusionary ideology of the IRI, as articulated by Khomeini's concept of *Velayat-e Motlaqaye Faqih* (Akbar, 2023), necessitated the deployment of substantial coercive force for its implementation. Nevertheless, most of these policies, such as criminalisation, the marginalization of opposition organisations, and mesogenic policies, persist today.

A prominent feature of Iran's political landscape is the existence of a distinctly defined *center-periphery* dynamic. The boundaries of this center-peripheral mapping have been shaped by the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural exclusion imposed on non-Persian national communities in Iran by successive ruling regimes, particularly since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the formation of the modern Iranian nation-state in 1925. Contemplating the evolution of contemporary nation-states through a center-periphery lens, it can be asserted that the primary characteristic of this development is the escalating asymmetrical power dynamics that favour the sovereign at the center and perpetuate the marginalization of individuals and communities in the periphery. In addition to the overarching authoritarianism of the Pahlavi regime, the brutal assimilation and mononationalist policies during the two Pahlavi eras (1925-1941 and 1941-1979) led non-Persian national communities in peripheral regions and provinces to perceive the Revolution as a golden opportunity to assert their rights to equal citizenship and sociopolitical and cultural autonomy. However, their assertions and aspirations for autonomy encountered the severe violence of the Islamic regime, leading to further exclusion and disenfranchisement (Elling, 2013).

The Revolution signified the conclusion of the Pahlavi regime; however, it did not terminate the system of exclusion, oppression, and state violence in Iran. For instance, SAVAMA (the intelligence ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran) succeeded SAVAK (the Bureau of Intelligence and Security of the State), the notorious Pahlavi intelligence organisation. Following the Revolution, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) reinstated many of the previous torturers of the SAVAK, resulting in the resurgence of a period characterised by terror and violence (Mousavi, 2023).

Consequently, more than any other section of the Iranian society, the IRI employed terror and state violence (Makaremi, 2015) against non-Persian and non-Shia communities in the post-revolutionary decades to consolidate power, suppress autonomist movements, uphold and augment the state's mononationalist policy, and redefine Iranian identity through Persian culture, history, language, and Shi'ism (Elling, 2013; Mohammadpour & Soleimani, 2021, 2023). Peripheral mobilisation in response to such IRI denials led to extensive military campaigns and clashes in several regions of Iran, including Kurdistan. The IRI labelled autonomist and anti-regime mobilisations in Kurdistan as separatists to justify its excessive violence and reliance on the radical religious edicts of *Jihad* (an Islamic call for holy war) to rally all coercive resources and the general population in the center against developments in Kurdistan (Hassaniyan, 2021, 2019; Soleimani & Mohammadpour, 2020). The IRI's extensive and multifaceted use of repression and collective punishment in Kurdistan transformed this region into a significant epicenter of peripheral autonomist movements, a stronghold for anti-regime activities, and a testing ground for post-revolutionary state violence.

## Method and Data

This article uses a 'qualitative historical analysis' approach to interpret past events by examining primary and secondary sources, such as documents, diaries, (auto)biographies, and photographs related to the human rights violations committed by the IRI in Rojhelat (Thies, 2002). The primary data comprises various types of information from sources such as human rights documents, images, newspaper clippings, and testimonies. These sources provide

significant details that expose the brutal conduct of the IRI and its blatant disregard for human rights, leading to widespread atrocities in Rojhelat. Qualitative historical analysis emphasises detailed, context-rich, and subjective interpretations of primary sources to grasp meaning, motivation, and causal relationships. By combining conceptual discussions of state terrorism with extensive empirical material, including human rights documentation, historical accounts, and Kurdish testimonies, this article demonstrates that violence in Kurdistan was neither incidental nor reactive, but rather deliberate, ideologically grounded, and structurally embedded in the post-revolutionary state-building project.

Among other sources, human rights documents are important primary data, as they play a significant role in characterising the post-1979 revolutionary state violence in Rojhelat, a role that cannot be overstated. Human rights documents have been essential in recording and preserving the historical account of the post-1979 revolutionary period of violence in Kurdistan. After the Revolution, the IRI aimed to strengthen its control, while Kurdish political parties demanded autonomy, and the Kurdish civilian population faced severe military repression. In this context, where independent media access was restricted and the state narrative dominated, reports by organisations such as the International Federation of Human Rights (IFDH), Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch became vital sources of evidence. These documents recorded and documented extrajudicial executions, mass arrests, and village destructions, often based on eyewitness testimonies and survivor accounts. By systematically collecting evidence, they challenged official denials and drew international attention to abuses that might otherwise have remained hidden. Moreover, they offered a framework grounded in international law that transformed local grievances into recognised human rights violations. In this way, the human rights report not only preserved collective memory but also bolstered advocacy, accountability efforts, and the broader struggle for justice and recognition among Kurdish communities.

Furthermore, archival sources such as Behzad Khoshhali's personal archival collection, 'Kurdistan in the Days of Crisis', are valuable for documenting Kurdish–Iranian relations in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The collection compiles events, news reports, photographs, and official documents related to clashes between Kurds and the IRI (Khoshhali, 2009). Safeguarding primary sources such as eyewitness accounts and contemporary reports provides detailed evidence of political tensions and state responses. The archive helps fill gaps in official records and serves as a dependable resource for scholars investigating ethnic conflict, revolutionary movements, and modern Kurdish history.

### **Nation-State Transition Defined by Conflict and Confrontation**

Analysing the 1980s reign of state terrorism in Kurdistan, this article contends that the IRI's widespread use of violence and collective punishment was not merely an accidental result of post-revolutionary chaos. Instead, it was a deliberate choice aligned with the IRI's goal to recast the Iranian nation-state. I argue that the IRI's pursuit of 'the incomplete task of nation-state building' during the decade following the Revolution can effectively explain this process. The phrase 'incomplete task of nation-state building' describes a situation where the state exists institutionally, but the nation – pertaining to shared identity, legitimacy, and cohesion – is not fully united. This condition is characterised by two separate but related projects: one involving state-building, including the development of institutions, a monopoly on force, taxation, and a functioning bureaucracy; and the other involving nation-building, which entails shared identity, loyalty, and solidarity (Gülhan, 2023; Tilly, 1985). Furthermore, 'incomplete nation-state building' occurs when the state apparatus exists but lacks legitimacy; citizens (or parts of the population) do not identify with the state-defined national identity; and ethnonational or sectarian identities override this form of national identity. Post-colonial states, or non-

democratic states with multinational composition (such as Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq), are among those characterised as incomplete nation-states, in a constant search for homogenisation (Saeed, 2017). This condition can often arise when peripheral regions resist central authority, explaining why a state may exist formally while the nation remains incomplete (Levene, 2000, pp. 22–26).

Charles Tilly argues that states emerge as by-products of warfare, and because of the organisational complexities of the wielders of coercion (Jüde, 2022, pp. 210–211). According to Tilly, under the broad category of ‘organised violence’, the agents of states typically engage in four distinct activities: 1. War making: Eliminating or neutralising their own rivals outside the territories where they hold clear and ongoing dominance as wielders of force, 2. State-making: Eliminating or neutralising their rivals within those territories, 3. Protection: Eliminating or neutralising the enemies of their clients, and 4. Extraction: Acquiring the resources necessary to carry out the first three activities — war making, state making, and protection (Tilly, 1985, p. 181; Topal, 2023). Taking Tilly’s framework into account, one can argue that the Iranian state’s behaviour towards Kurds since 1979 can be understood and analysed within the second category, which concerns the process of [nation]-state-making through the elimination or neutralisation of rivals within those territories.

Tilly’s famous aphorism, ‘war made the state and the state made war’, presents two main ideas. One concerns territorial control and violent conquest; the other concerns the organisation of the state, driven by the organisational needs of war and its preparation. In the first sense – “men who controlled concentrated means of coercion ordinarily tried to use them to extend the range of populations and resources over which they wielded power” – the bellicist theory proposes a route of territorial consolidation through conquest, explaining the formation of certain borders (Jüde, 2022, pp. 215–215; Omoniyi, 2025).

Nevertheless, as Anthony W. Pereira notes, violence and coercion have always been central to human affairs, but their specific forms and the meanings assigned to them have continually evolved and continue to change. In particular, societies have always debated the difference between ‘legitimate’, state-sanctioned violence and coercion and their ‘illegitimate’ counterparts, between war and peace, war-making and policing, military and civilian roles, insurrection or political violence and crime, and between legal and illegal violence, defining the boundaries between these categories differently at various times. Furthermore, Pereira argues that “in making sense of all these distinctions, it might seem at first that little of general value can be said, except that coercion and violence form part of the interactive networks that hold large-scale societies together, as well as drive them apart (sometimes irrevocably), and that the capacity to assemble and deploy armed forces is an essential attribute of the state, without which it disappears” (Pereira, 2003, p. 387). Nonetheless, drawing from Tilly, arguably the post-1979 revolutionary state’s excessive use of violence transformed Kurdistan into “the place of organised means of violence in the growth and change of those peculiar forms of government we call national states” (Tilly, 1985, p. 170).

### **Conceptualising the rationale for state-sanctioned violence and terror**

The literature on state-sanctioned violence and terrorism provides diverse, sometimes broad definitions of these terms. J D van der Vyver argues that “Defining terrorism is in itself no easy task. In broad outline, terrorism thus entails (a) acts of aggression (b) often aimed at civilian targets (c) promoting a preconceived objective (d) employing and intimidating the target of such aggression (e) submitting to the demands of the perpetrators (f) out of fear emanating from the threat or actual abhorrence of the act” (Van Der Vyver, 1988, pp. 59–60). For an act to be classified as ‘state terrorism’, its fundamental components must align with

those of non-state terrorism (Blakeley, 2009, p. 13). Paul Wilkinson defines terrorism in a general way as an act with five main characteristics:

It is premeditated and aims to create a climate of extreme fear or terror; it is directed at a wider audience or target than the immediate victims of the violence; it inherently involves attacks on random and symbolic targets, including civilians; the acts of violence committed are seen by the society in which they occur as extra-normal, in the literal sense that they breach the social norms, thus causing a sense of outrage; and terrorism is used to try to influence political behaviour in some way (Blakeley, 2009, pp. 13–14).

Mitchell et al. characterise state terrorism as actions that entail intentional coercion and violence aimed at a victim, intending to induce profound fear in specific viewers who empathise with that victim and view themselves as prospective future victims. This compels people to contemplate changing their behaviour to conform to the perpetrator's desires (Mitchell et al., 1985, p. 5). Moreover, state terrorism can be defined by the degree to which government authority encourages oppressive actions, including terrorist activities committed by a government against its citizens. Such acts of violence often occur "when a government systematically engages in terror to maintain its political control or intimidate its opposition – as 'official terrorism'" (Van Der Vyver, 1988, pp. 60–61).

Bowyer Bell identified three types of state terrorism: *endemic terror*, signified by a collapse of the state into a condition of barbarism; *authorised terror*, constituted by the institutionalisation of political power for coercive purposes; and *vigilante terrorism*, which manifests itself through the acts of private citizens engaged in curbing or eliminating dissent (Bell, 1981, pp. 13–15). The second term in Bell's categorisation of state terrorism, 'authorised terror', which is characterised by the institutionalisation of political authority for coercive ends, applies to the understanding and elucidation of the IRI's violence in post-revolutionary Iran and Kurdistan. Makaremi defines post-revolutionary state terrorism in IRI as a systematic organisation of death, where "State violence targeted those with more or less clearly established links with political organizations opposing the Islamic Republic. [...] The suppression of dissidents was administered through a juridical and ideological apparatus organized around revolutionary tribunals" (Makaremi, 2015, pp. 187–88). The IRI violence and terror were also a punishment to those crossing this regime's defined redlines and attempting to "recast state institutions and consolidate power everywhere; mainly because there was opposition to the newly established regime" (Makaremi, 2015, p. 188).

During the 1980s, amidst widespread state brutality and terrorism in Iran, Kurdistan endured various forms of oppression. Kurdish leader Dr Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou launched international awareness campaigns and delivered speeches to highlight these issues to the global community. In reference to the IRI's infringement of human rights in Kurdistan, as well as the global subjugation of other marginalized communities to similar state violence, Ghassemlou defined state terrorism, explicitly addressing the IRI's acts of violence and intimidation against the Kurdish people by asking:

Is not a state that disrupts its citizens' lives and violates their rights in the name of national security considered a terrorist entity? Are the Kurdish people who have armed themselves and engaged in a legitimate struggle to defend their national identity viewed as terrorists, or is it Khomeini who systematically destroyed the villages and towns of Kurdistan over the past seven years? Suppose we define terrorism as the assault on the liberties of innocent individuals. In that case, we should label every individual or entity, regardless of their affiliation with an organisation or a government, as a terrorist.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, despite Ghassemlou's consciousness of the IRI's brutality, he fell victim to this regime's violence on July 13, 1989, when the so-called Iranian 'diplomats' brutally murdered Ghassemlou and his fellow Kurdish negotiators in Vienna while they attempted to negotiate a peaceful resolution to Kurdistan's struggle for freedom and democracy.

The 1980s can be characterised as a decade of terror and state violence in Kurdistan; nonetheless, from the viewpoint of the new state-builders in Tehran, this was justified as a necessity. The Kurdish movement's assertion for Khodmokhari (autonomy), together with the Kurdish boycott of the Referendum of the Islamic Republic on 30-31 March 1979, were regarded by the regime as provocative actions that transgressed IRI's redlines. Particularly because Kurdistan was the only region in Iran where the Islamic Republic referendum was unanimously boycotted, thereby posing a significant challenge to the legitimacy and authority of the new regime (Cabi, 2024). Consequently, the IRI regarded the post-revolutionary reign of terror as an essential stage in the evolution of power centralisation, and the civil wars that transpired under such reigns are frequently of considerable significance. The IRI's contentious relationship with the Kurds led to a civil war, which Khomeini perceived as divine grace, culminating in widespread mobilisation at the center. The regime used the conflict with Kurdistan as a unifying catalyst, viewing Kurds as a threat to national cohesion and integrity, and the need to consolidate power aimed at its perceived recasting of the Iranian nation-state (Hassaniyan, 2021). Therefore, O'Kane asserts that civil war plays a crucial role in post-revolutionary state-building, with policy choices shaping both the aims and the means of the conflict. Examining the violence also reveals the importance of developing and centralising new state coercive forces, which are the essential basis of permanent state construction (O'Kane, 2000, p. 971).

According to Brinton, "reigns of terror are 'extemporized dictatorships' consisting of committees hurriedly brought together", representing 'rough-and-ready centralization' with 'extraordinary courts' and revolutionary tribunals and, not least, a special revolutionary police", like the Cheka in Russia and the Committee of General Security and the revolutionary committees in France (Brinton, 1965, pp. 171-73). A reign of terror begins with the establishment of extraordinary revolutionary organisations, the introduction of comprehensive laws on counter-revolution, and the construction of the machinery of revolutionary terror, such as the courts, trial procedures, police and secret police systems, and makeshift prisons. Intensifying over time as the organisations grow and the implementation of summary justice spreads, terrors are most easily identified by their peaks when the toll of victims and the level of suffering reach their most shocking proportions (O'Kane, 2000, p. 972). These institutions and organisations are associated with IRI's reign of terror in Kurdistan and throughout Iran. The IRGC, the Revolutionary Committees (*Komitehay-e Enqelab*), the infamous *hākem-e shar'*, an Islamic ecclesiastical judge, Khomeini's Revolutionary Islamic Council, and numerous other institutions were rapidly established to execute state violence and terror throughout various regions of Iran (O'Kane, 2000, p. 974).

### **The Kurdish demands for autonomy**

After the Revolution, the Kurdish movement's leadership framed its demands for a future Kurdistan within a new Iranian political system, emphasising khodmokhtari for Kurdistan and a democratic political system that takes into account Iran's diverse national and religious composition as a guarantee of peace, equality, and coexistence. Nonetheless, the IRI's outright rejection of the Kurdish demand led to the rapid escalation of the Kurdish-regime conflict. During the Revolution, Khomeini emerged as a pivotal figure for various Iranian revolutionary factions (leftist, secular, nationalist, and Islamist) in Tehran and other regions of

Iran; however, support for him and his ideological perspective, which advocated governance through Velayat-e Motlaqaye Faqih, was lacking in Kurdistan.

Despite Khomeini's uplifting promises (Abrahamian, 1994, p. 32), his populist discourse failed to capture the Kurdish people's attention. Instead, in this period, the Kurdish movement's demand for *khodmokhtari* became the core element of the disputed Kurdish-Tehran relationship (Entessar, 1984). This demand challenged Khomeini's ambition to establish a strong, centralised theocratic regime. As emphasised by the Kurdish movement, Khomeini's aim to build a new political system lacked values such as democracy, pluralism, secularism, equal rights, and respect for universal human rights. During the Revolution, Kurds articulated and underscored their desire for self-governance through democratic and secular discourses rather than religious principles. After enduring over fifty years of oppressive and exclusionary rule under the Pahlavi regime, the Kurds enthusiastically participated in the Revolution, but they did not endorse an Islamic substitute for the monarchy. Intersectional exclusion meant that, for Kurds, national, gender and class issues were the main motivations for joining the Revolution. However, Khomeini and his religious-nationalist fundamentalist group were aware of the tension with the Kurdish movement and its value system and, therefore, saw it as a serious threat to their power. As a result, they used extreme violence to suppress the Kurdish demands of *khodmokhtari* and democracy (Hassaniyan, 2021, p. 99).

In response to such a Kurdish claim of political and cultural autonomy, the regime declared the Kurdish movement a counterrevolutionary conspiracy sponsored by foreign powers such as the USA and Israel. As a result, the IRI violently attacked Kurdistan. The regime's response to the Kurdish demands was extremely violent (Shams, 2006, pp. 158–60). Khomeini, under the guise of protecting Iran's territorial integrity, deployed the Iranian Regular Army (*Artesh*) and IRGC to invade Kurdistan and attack the Kurdish movement. The Islamic regime's leaders pursued a strict power policy of violence from the early stage of the Kurdish-Tehran conflict. The regime outright rejected Kurdish demands, confronting the Kurdish movement with a massive military reaction (Khoshhali, 2009).

Aside from the ideological incompatibility between the IRI and the Kurdish liberation movement, additional profound divides existed. The rapid mobilisation of violent forces against the Kurdish people, occurring before the establishment and proclamation of the IRI amidst the ongoing evolution of the Revolution in Iran, suggests that while a Revolution transpired in Tehran, an anti-Kurdish carnage unfolded in Kurdistan. The conflicting relations between Kurds and the newly established ruling elite in Tehran transformed Kurdistan into a battlefield, where "victory in this conflict became a priority for the newly established Islamic Republic with its ambition of enforcing centralisation and absolute rule of religion" (Hassaniyan, 2021, p. 95).

### **Kurdistan as the centerpiece of state terrorism**

The IRI subjected the post-revolutionary Kurdistan to extensive authorised terrorism. Upon reflection of the events and incidents in Kurdistan, it becomes clear that multifaceted state-sanctioned violence marked every corner of this region, both urban and rural, and transformed it into a focal point of state terrorism in Iran. Kurdistan and its population became the subject of the Iranian war machinery. The political and human rights situation of post-revolutionary Kurdistan is characterised by a series of tragic incidents and events that resulted from state-sanctioned violence, involving multifaceted and grave abuses of human rights, including the devastation of villages and towns, massacres, forced displacement and exiles, firing squads, and mass executions (Hassaniyan & Stansfield, 2025). The IRI's execution of extensive measures using state brutality resulted in profound suffering and oppression for the Kurdish people during the 1980s, imposing collective punishment on the entire Kurdish nation.

In pursuit of its policy of collective punishment against the Kurdish demand for autonomy and the boycott of the Islamic Republic's referendum (Romano, 2006), the IRI adopted a strategy marked by widespread and systematic executions and massacres, besieging Kurdish cities and towns while obstructing access to essential life-sustaining materials. Intense bombardments from air and land caused extensive damage to the already fragile infrastructures and communities in Kurdistan, resulting in significant loss of life and the displacement of residents. These actions were primarily intended to eradicate the Kurdish national movement in Iran, which re-emerged assertively following the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime. A coalition of violent forces comprising the IRGC, Artesh, and a pro-regime Azeri militia force known as the Mujahedin<sup>4</sup> carried out massive crimes and violations of Human rights. According to Nima:

In April, Kurds and Azeri-speaking Turks clashed in West Azerbaijan, and government troops sent to the area sided with the Turks, stirring deep resentment against the new regime. In August, fighting broke out between Kurdish guerrillas and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards and, earlier, regional Arab minorities had staged demonstrations. These incidents were put down by force and led directly to the expansion of the Revolutionary Guard. In March 1980, fighting again broke out in Kurdistan when, in an attempt to defeat the Kurdish guerrillas (the Peshmergas), an estimated 45,000 Iranian soldiers and some 40,000 revolutionary guards were sent against the Kurds (O'Kane, 2000, p. 979).

In the tumultuous aftermath of the revolution, while the Kurdish movement was gaining momentum, the regime coordinated and backed acts of severe violence and terror in Kurdistan to achieve various goals. Along with other forms of violence, these actions included implementing ethnic cleansing, initiating a controlled and limited ethnic conflict between Kurds and Azeris in areas with diverse ethnic populations, such as the province of West Azerbaijan, and destroying the rural stronghold of the Peshmerga and the Kurdish movement. Through these measures, the IRI aimed to weaken the confidence and support of the Kurdish people for Kurdish political parties by instigating a campaign of terror. This led to significant displacement and ongoing suffering, with the IRI's violations of Kurdish human rights characterising the subsequent events (Hassaniyan & Stansfield, 2025). The main reason for these acts of violence was that Kurdistan served as a stronghold of the opposition to the IRI, and the Kurdish account of transformation and change presented a progressive and subaltern narrative (Chowdhury, 2011) that directly challenged the regime's authority and its ideological foundation.

In the months and years following the Revolution, the IRI carried out multiple massacres in Kurdistan and other parts of Iran. Various international human rights organisations, including the International Federation of Human Rights (IFDH), documented the severe state violence. The IFDH was among a few international human rights organisations that recorded the terror and violence of the 1980s regime in Kurdistan by sending a delegation to this region. Nevertheless, due to the IRI's refusal to issue visas to human rights organisations, the IFDH delegation entered Iran by traversing Kurdish-controlled areas and receiving assistance from the KDPI (Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran). Given the potential dangers and limited opportunities, the IFDH fact-finding mission primarily focused on Kurdistan, particularly Mahabad and its surroundings. The team gathered various pieces of evidence, interviewed residents, and documented cases of human rights abuses, which ultimately resulted in a detailed report on the situation in the region (IFDH, 1983, pp. 20-21).

The IFDH delegation, headed by Christian Rostoker (a French lawyer and the assistant general secretary of IFDH), investigated human rights violations in Rojhelat from August 9<sup>th</sup> to September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1983. The IFDH fact-finding process involved gathering testimonies from both survivors of massacres and relatives of executed victims. The fact-finding report stated that the IRI executed over 1800 civilians and imprisoned political activists in Kurdistan between December 1982 and September 1983 (IFDH, 1983, p. 16). However, unofficial sources suggest figures that are considerably higher than those presented in the IFDH report. The report prompted inquiries into the underlying reasons and motivations behind the IRI's severe mistreatment of the Kurdish people, particularly questioning how such a large number of individuals, including men, boys, and girls aged 14–18, can be executed with apparent ease, and “Is there a term other than the IRI's terrorism against a minority to describe this situation, or has the Shia Islamic Republic initiated a holy war against this Sunni community? However, it appears that simply being a Kurd in the Islamic Republic of Iran is sufficient reason to warrant such extreme violence.” (IFDH, 1983, pp. 17–18).

The IFDH report reveals that in Mahabad and its surrounding areas, 450 individuals, including men, women, youth, and teenage boys and girls, were executed. Shockingly, in most cases, the authorities did not return the bodies to their families, instead burying them in mass graves outside of Kurdistan, sometimes in cities like Tabriz. The IFDH report stated that due to the high prisoner concentration in Kurdistan, the IRGC resorted to converting mosques, schools, and other public buildings into a combination of military command centers and prisons. The death penalties were swiftly declared, with durations that ranged from two to twenty minutes, during brief hearings overseen by a *ḥākem-e shar'*, an Islamic ecclesiastical judge (IFDH, 1983, pp. 19–23). The victims sustained serious gunshot injuries, resulting in severe physical harm that rendered them unidentifiable to their families. The IRGC's wounded personnel received the blood of the victims before their execution. Another cruel component of these executions was the regime's systematic intimidation and psychological coercion to demoralise the victims' families and the broader Kurdish community (Iran HRDC, 2011). Hence, to comprehend the severity of the IRI's brutality, it is crucial to consider Semelin's analysis, which highlights that the objective of a massacre goes beyond simple acts of ethnic cleansing or bodily harm but also serves a psychological purpose (Sémelin, 2002, p. 436). However, against the backdrop of state brutality following the revolution, this situation transformed Kurdistan into a testing ground for state violence (Iran Rights, 2023).

Upon asserting control in Kurdistan, the IRI frequently used military assaults, encirclement of Kurdish urban centers and rural areas, arbitrary arrests, and mass executions as instruments of collective punishment. As demonstrated by the multitude of occurrences, no region or province in Kurdistan was exempt from the regime's brutality (Iran HRDC, 2011; Iran Rights, 2023). Accounts from parents, family members, and other relatives of victims of massacres and mass executions in Kurdistan provide insights into the regime's brutality in the region. According to a study on the 1980s massacres and mass executions in Rojhelat, the IRI massacred the populations of numerous villages and subjected several thousand Kurds to mass executions in late 1979 and the early 1980s (Hassaniyan & Stansfield, 2025). Personal accounts and testimonials show that the regime often detained Kurdish prisoners in remote facilities and provinces far from Kurdistan, where they suffered severe torment and extreme starvation (IFDH, 1983).

The regime's brutal treatment of civilians in Kurdistan is exemplified by the mass executions of eleven Kurds, including injured prisoners, at Sanandaj's airport on 27 August 1979; 47 Kurdish men and women on 2 September 1979 in Sanandaj; 59 youths on 2 June 1983 in Mahabad, with the order signed by Hamidreza Jalaipour, Governor of Mahabad; and many others in Saghez, including two sisters, Shahla and Nasrin Cabi, both nurses, among the civilians executed without trial. The first wave of Khalkhali's executions of Kurds took place

in August 1979, following Khomeini's decree of Jihad to attack Kurdistan, issued on 18 August 1979, which resulted in a widespread military invasion at Paweh. Khalkhali forced many doctors, nurses, and other employees of the health and education systems in Kurdistan into exile across various parts of Iran. He also used the deportation and exile of Kurdish families and individuals to different regions of Iran as another form of collective punishment (Iran Rights, 2023).

The regime compelled many Kurdish families to exile and internal displacement during the 1980s, relocating them to distant towns and provinces in central Iran, including Rafsanjan, Semnan, Fuladshahr, and Yazd. These locations were approximately 1,000–1,200 km from Kurdistan. Families with children involved in the Kurdish movement or imprisoned for political activities endured collective punishment. Even the slightest suspicion of being a member of or having any connection to the KDPI or Komala (Society of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan) was enough to justify the displacement of Kurdish families, forcing them to leave their homes and go into exile. In 1983, the authorities forced between 1,300 and 1,500 Kurdish families into (internal)exile (IFDH, 1983, pp. 20–21). It is important to note that this figure pertains only to a specific area of Kurdistan in which the IFDH fact-finding team conducted its investigation. Marouf Cabi recounts the exile of himself, his family, and 26 other families from Saghez to the Shahid Bahonar Camp in Fuladshahr, Isfahan, during the winter of 1982:<sup>5</sup>

On the night of 16 February 1982, IRGC forces, commanded by Reza Teyari from Isfahan, abruptly and violently gathered 27 families at the City Hall (Salon-e Shir u Khorshid) in Saghez, forcing them onto buses for exile to Isfahan. These families arrived near Isfahan after a two-day journey. They were separated into males and females and housed in large, steamy tents without basic amenities. Teyari violently informed them the next day that their punishment was according to Islamic law. He warned the families, 'We will remove parts of your body depending on the number of your children within the ranks of Peshmerga. We will cut off one body part from everyone with a child in the Peshmerga and remove two body parts from those with two family members in the ranks. You can bring your children back to Islam upon my return here'. Several of these Kurdish families remained in exile for four years. On 28 April 1982, Reza Teyari, approximately two months after expelling these families and threatening to mutilate them following his invasion of villages in Saghez and subsequent clashes with the Peshmerga, himself fell victim to the violent and belligerent policies of the Islamic regime (Babae, 2022, pp. 36–37).

Ahmad Niloufari, a well-reputed medical doctor from Saghez, is another Kurdish citizen who, due to his refusal to collaborate with the regime, was arrested and exiled (Iran HRDC, 2011). As the title of the government-promoted article's news agency, Habiliaan, indicates, according to Khalkhali, "Dr Niloufari was involved in the killing of several Islamic Revolutionary Guards in Saghez" (Habiliaan, 2025). This was a baseless accusation that Khalkhali frequently used to impose harsh charges and punishments on civilians before their imprisonment, exile, or execution. Nevertheless, the IRGC and its intelligence division, *Iteela'ate Sepah*, issued the orders for the exiles without any legal proceedings or prior notification. Families and individuals affected by these exiles endured significant hardship and calamity for an extended period (Iran Rights, 2023).

The IFDH provides more information about other instances of forced exile. It reports that they forced nine households to be relocated from Saghez to Fuladshahr in March 1983

(IFDH, 1983, pp. 20-12). On June 14, 1983, authorities forced 43 families from Mahabad to relocate to Rafsanjan, Danojan, Yazd, and Semnan. The human rights organisation, Iran Rights, asserts that the forced expulsion of Kurdish families in 1983, carried out on a large scale, exemplifies the persistent issue of the Iranian state mistreating minority national groups. Furthermore, it highlighted that in Iran, collective punishment, as well as the deportations in 1983, occurred during periods of substantial political instability when the regime saw a threat from opposition parties (Iran Rights, 2023).

In this turbulent post-revolutionary period, several areas of Kurdistan experienced instances of ethnic and sectarian conflict and acts of violence (CIA, 1979). Cities such as Naqhadah and Urmia, known for their diverse ethnic makeup mainly involving Kurds and Azeris, have served as centers for the IRI's plots to implement divide-and-rule strategies. Ayatollah Gholamreza Hassani, also called Molla Hassani, an extremist Shia cleric who acted as Khomeini's representative in Urmia, led Azeri militia groups, including the Mujahedin, in cooperation with Artesh and the IRGC, to carry out massacres of Kurdish people across West Azerbaijan province (Hassaniyan & Stansfield, 2025). Artesh's involvement in atrocities in Sanandaj, Naqhadah, Paweh, Qarna, and Qalatan clearly demonstrates the harmful impact of the self-proclaimed national army in Kurdistan (Khoshhali, 2009). Following the revolution, the escalating clashes between Kurdish revolutionary groups, the IRGC, and Artesh resulted in the destruction of many villages. The regime sought to instil fear and employed strategies such as encouraging sectarianism, especially in areas with diverse populations of Kurds and Azeris, or regions of Kurdistan close to Azeri communities (Hassaniyan, 2021; Hassaniyan & Stansfield, 2025).

Molla Hassani coordinated the deployment of many militias that specifically targeted the civilian population in Kurdistan. The IRI constantly used a strategic combination of methods to establish dominance in Kurdistan, intending to create disorder, conflict, and instability. Both Artesh and the IRGC strategically utilised sectarian tactics in regions with significant Kurdish and Azeri populations. Different factions within the state endorsed the tense situations in Naqhadah and Urmia, as well as the massacres in villages such as Qarna and Qalatan in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution. On 20 April 1979, the KDPI organised a political assembly in Naqhadah, which led to an episode of ethnic conflict. However, violent clashes marred the event, resulting in numerous injuries and the forced displacement of Kurds in the area. This incident sparked debate and divided opinions within the Kurdish and Azeri communities. Together, over fifty villages experienced massacres of their populations, with thousands of residents losing their lives. The regime exclusively entrusted its commitment to murder and brutality in Kurdistan to the so-called national armed forces, specifically Artesh and the IRGC, following Khomeini's declaration of Jihad against the Kurdish people. Subsequently, those in positions of authority were instrumental in planning massacres of Kurdish residents and executing widespread mass killings across Kurdistan (Hassaniyan & Stansfield, 2025). Khomeini's fatwa on Jihad, which was a direct mandate to annihilate civilians to achieve the strategic goal of establishing the IRI's dominance over Kurdistan:

Urged the Artesh, IRGC, and other regime-sponsored militias to freely exercise their brutal authority to bolster the regime's hegemony in Kurdistan. However, the massacres and mass executions that have occurred throughout this period are now unforgettable components of the Kurdish collective memory in Eastern Kurdistan. Therefore, these also play a crucial role in shaping the relationship between the Kurdish people and the state in Iran, impacting any current sociopolitical and social developments in this part of Kurdistan (Hassaniyan & Stansfield, 2025, p. 8).

Following the fatwa, government forces launched a brutal campaign, encircling towns with artillery and tanks, and conducting air strikes. By the start of September, they seized control of the major towns, and the Kurdish peshmerga had retreated into the mountains, where they continued to wage a guerrilla campaign (Iran HRDC, 2011, p. 1). The fatwa horrified the Kurdish people. A Kurdish resident of Mariwan recalls: “Khomeini did not issue a fatwa for Jihad (Holy War) against the monarchist government. Nor did he issue one during the eight long years his regime fought Saddam’s Ba’athist regime. But he issued a fatwa for Jihad against his own Kurdish, Muslim countrymen” (Iran HRDC, 2011, p. 9). The military, under the command of General Valiollah Falahi, together with the Pasdaran, quickly encircled the town of Paweh in Kermashan province and launched an attack with heavy artillery, fighter jets, and helicopters. They regained control of the town on Sunday, 19 August. Hundreds of people were killed, and the victorious troops systematically seized houses and arrested individuals. Khomeini banned the KDPI and declared that the Kurdish leaders Dr Ghassemloo and Sheikh Ezzedin Hosseini were corrupters on earth (Iran HRDC, 2011, p. 10).

The Kurdish movement’s demand for autonomy and the IRI’s zero-tolerance policy quickly led to a conflictual relationship between them. Kurdistan became a subject of the IRI’s full-fledged violent attacks, exemplified in major brutal incidents such as the Bloody Newroz of Sanandaj (*Newroz-i Khwenawi Sna*), 18-30 March 1979, and the Three-Month Battle (*Shari Se Mange*), August-December 1979 (Cabi, 2020; Moradbeigi, 2004, p. 143). The initial regime assault on the Kurds laid the foundation for future Kurdish-IRI relationships. This assault revealed two truths at once: firstly, the brute nature of the Iranian regime’s elite, and secondly, the regime’s attitude and reaction to the people’s demand for self-determination. Khomeini was determined to crush all opposition and dissenting views, and upon his arrival, he ordered the army to turn Iran into a ‘graveyard’ for his opponents.

Nevertheless, initiatives and strategies for rallying Kurdish civil society after the Revolution transformed Kurdistan into a bastion of resistance and democratisation in post-revolutionary Iran (Hassaniyan, 2019). The first innovative initiative of Kurdish civil society was the establishment of *Shoray Gerak u Shar* (Neighbourhood and City Council). The high level of cooperation among members with diverse ideologies and worldviews ensured the council’s status as a unique model of the municipality and self-governance. The acts of the Kurdish civil society caught the attention of the Iranian intellectual and politician Shokrollah Paknejad to a degree that during a speech to ‘the Union for Protecting Freedom and Revolution’, he stated that “I feel that the heart of the Iranian Revolution is beating in Kurdistan, because Kurdistan has become the stronghold and gateway of democracy in Iran” (Mostafa-Soltani, 2006, p. 241). The Kurdish determination to uphold their goals and the Kurdish movement’s significant mass mobilisation positioned the Kurds as serious contenders of the regime. Though from the regime’s perspective, this condition necessitated the use of force to assert control over the Kurdish territory.

This period’s evolution shows that the regime used a mix of psychological warfare, chaos, violence, and terror to maintain control. This was evident not only in its dealings with the Kurdish movement but also in its repression of the wider Iranian population and opposition groups resisting the new political order. The IRI employed military measures and other forms of violence to subjugate and assimilate Kurds into the dominant narrative (Cabi, 2020, pp. 346–348). For example, Mostafa Chamran, the regime’s defence minister and a staunchly conservative figure, addressed the Kurdish movement solely from a military perspective. Chamran consistently asserted that the deployment of the military would be the sole effective measure to ensure the regime’s dominance in Kurdistan, and that the regime in Kurdistan was resolute in its deployment of military forces to enforce order (Iran HRDC, 2011). Consequently, Kurdistan was subjected to heavy military attacks by the IRGC and Artesh, and

Khalkhali was dispatched to Kurdistan to suppress Kurdish demands and seek retribution against the Kurdish people. Like many other fanatical elites of the IRI, Khalkhali believed that deploying military forces was the only way to resolve the conflict in Kurdistan. Khalkhali's brutality earned him the nickname *Qesab-e Kordestan* (the Butcher of Kurdistan) among the Kurds. In a series of hurried trials lacking any fundamental elements of judicial fairness, he ordered the execution of hundreds of Kurdish civilians and political activists (Hassaniyan, 2021, p. 111).

Although Kalkahli's repressive approach and his random killings and massacres of civilians were among the earliest examples of the regime's attitude towards Kurds, the entire IRI's use of violence in suppressing dissent can be understood through the concept of 'firing at will' (*atesh be ikhtiyar*). According to Soleimani and Mohammadpour, a specific policy of 'firing at will' has been a key element of the IRI's policy in Kurdistan since 1979, when Khomeini declared jihad against Kurds. Khomeini used Islamic language in his statements and called for violence against 'those nonbelievers in Kurdistan', warning that if the state forces do not act violently, he will use violence against those forces. Soleimani and Mohammadpour argue that:

Khomeini regarded Kurdish dissent as a sign of Kurds' religious infidelity and compared it with Meccan pagans' reaction to the message of the Muslim prophet. Therefore, he ordered the *fath-e* (conquest) of Kurdistan, harkening to the *fath-e* of Mecca. Since then, the ruling ethno-religious class has supported or remained silent about the IRI's arbitrary policies against Kurds (Soleimani & Mohammadpour, 2023, p. 232).

As the Kurdish-IRI conflict escalated, the methods of resistance employed by the Kurdish movement became more varied. The thriving Kurdish civil society and its many activities posed a significant threat to the regime's assertion of authority and consolidation of power in Kurdistan (Hassaniyan, 2019; Mostafa-Soltani, 2006, p. 181). A politicised Kurdish society led to the formation of various civil society organisations during the Revolution. Among many others, the Democratic Organisations of Kurdistan (an umbrella organisation), the Women's Committee in Mariwan, the Union of Students, the Union of Unemployed Labourers, and the Society of Militant Women of Saghez are some examples of unions and organisations that collaborated to address different issues within Kurdish society (Moradbeigi, 2004, pp. 210–38). For example, the aim of the Militant Women of Saghez was to eliminate gender inequality and the exploitation of women by men. This organisation aimed to provide Kurdish women with 'gender-specific' benefits. Among other things, it focused on improving the welfare benefits and working conditions of employed Kurdish women (Entessar, 1984, p. 931).

Mariwan and many other cities in Kurdistan experienced various events. For instance, the residents of Mariwan actively participated in the Revolution, turning it into a center for several political parties and civil society organisations. The *Kochi Mejoyi Mariwan* (the Historical Exodus of Mariwan, hereafter 'the Exodus') is a notable historical exodus and one of the most frequently cited events in this city during the turbulent post-revolutionary period. This event has profoundly shaped the city's identity. The Exodus was a civilian protest and response to the IRI's violent policies in Mariwan, exemplifying the Kurdish people's resilience in asserting their demands through peaceful collective actions (Cabi, 2020). Recognised for their tradition of peaceful civic engagement, the residents of Mariwan carried out a similar action to the 1979 exodus in 1973/4 to oppose the Shah's land policy. The city council of Mariwan organised the Exodus, a significant socio-political event of that era (Hassaniyan, 2019). The Exodus garnered the backing of the entire city, mobilised civil society, and secured the solidarity of key factions within Kurdistan. After Mariwan's city council announced, the Exodus commenced on July 23, 1979, and lasted 14 days. The Kurdish sense

of deprivation and discontent with governmental policy was evident in the Exodus, which commenced in 1979 as a protest against several harmful IRI policies in Kurdistan, particularly in Mariwan and its adjacent regions (Mostafa-Soltani & Watandust, 2015, p. 24).

The Exodus is regarded as a crucial moment in the city's political history during the post-revolutionary period, acting both as a peaceful collective protest, a form of civil disobedience, and a strategy to prevent any potential slaughter of civilians if the regime were to launch an attack on Mariwan. During the Exodus, about half of Mariwan's population (around seven to eight thousand individuals) departed and established tents in Kanimaran, a region outside the city. Many remaining inhabitants sought refuge with family and relatives in communities near Mariwan. The departure left the city desolate. People from various parts of Kurdistan demonstrated unified support for the Exodus by engaging in different initiatives, including providing food and essential supplies to the civilian camp in Kanimaran and organising protests and rallies (Cabi, 2020; Hassaniyan, 2019).

Significant demonstrations occurred in various cities across Kurdistan, including Sanandaj, Kamyaran, Saghez, Bane, and Bukan, as acts of solidarity with the Exodus. The supporters marched to Mariwan and reached the camp (Kanimaran) after several days. The Exodus inspired other cities in Kurdistan. For example, in a similar action, the residents of Kamyaran threatened the military with a large-scale evacuation if the army did not cease infringing on the city's security. In a speech to the people in Kanimaran, the charismatic Kurdish leader, organiser of the Exodus and a co-founder of the Komala, Fouad Mostafa-Soltani (known by Kurds as Kak Fouad) stated, "that the Exodus has united the people. Mariwan has emerged as the bastion of liberation, and we shall transform all of Iran into Mariwan" (Mostafa-Soltani & Watandust, 2015, p. 381).

## Conclusion

This article discussed and analysed how state-sanctioned violence significantly influenced the post-revolutionary state-society in Iran. In the Kurdish context, understanding regime violence requires recognising the historical relationship between the Kurdish people and the Iranian state, their deep-seated grievances, and the Iranian state's focus on maintaining control and suppressing dissent. Historically, analyses of the reasons for states' use of violence indicate that violent conflicts – such as struggles for independence, civil wars, revolutions, and attempts to assimilate or eliminate others – have shaped many modern nation-states. State violence can suppress political opposition and rebellion, thereby enforcing a homogenised national identity (Gunter & Saeed, 2025; Mofidi & Aghapouri, 2023). In the context of nation-state building, state violence is a double-edged sword. Although it can help consolidate state power, enforce national identity, and control resources, it also risks causing ongoing instability, human rights abuses, and the delegitimisation of the state.

An examination of the century-long interaction between the Kurdish people and the Iranian state reveals that the interplay between state aggression and nation-state formation is intricate and varied, encompassing historical, political, sociological, and economic aspects. Despite Iran's century-long existence as a nation-state, establishing an inclusive national identity encompassing all ethnonational groups within its territorial boundaries remains incomplete. It is, in fact, in its worst shape ever. The violent attempts of successive Iranian regimes to establish a mononational and homogeneous nation-state have been unsuccessful, yet the ruling elite's persistent devotion to pursuing this objective, although through violent means, has led to substantial violations of the rights of non-Persian national communities.

The violent stance of the Iranian nation-state system towards Kurds in Iran has created a prolonged state of exception in Kurdistan, characterised by discrimination, injustice, and the

use of repressive and violent force. The state of exception in Kurdistan, particularly since the 1979 Revolution, has neither been temporary nor restricted in scope. Soon after his arrival, Khomeini singled out Kurds as those who deserved ‘the Muslims’ wrath’, and then the IRI began its fath (conquest) of Kurdistan, which transformed the state of exception into a norm. Nevertheless:

Over the years, such a view about Kurdistan was only exacerbated, as the state of exception must remain as a norm until the Kurds are fully assimilated, as, in the words of IIRCG Commander Mohammad Boroujerdi, ‘Kurdistan’s conquest will remain incomplete while the Kurds’ hearts and minds remain unconquered’ (Soleimani & Mohammadpour, 2023, p. 245)

One could argue that the Iranian nation-state has existed for a century, and since the late 1980s, the Islamic regime has exerted complete control over Kurdistan. However, the truth is that even if the regime has achieved territorial dominance and suppressed the armed struggle of the Kurdish movement, it has consistently failed to gain the loyalty and support of the Kurdish people from its inception. The successive Iranian regimes’ severe violence and human rights violations in Kurdistan highlight their ongoing struggle with the incomplete process of nation-state building, demonstrating unsuccessful efforts to consolidate power, reconfigure, and reconstitute the Iranian nation-state.

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## Notes on Contributor

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## Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Khomeinists* carries significant weight, referring to those who aligned with Ayatollah Rohullah Khomeini's (the founder of Iran's Islamic Republic) extremist theocratic ideology, as detailed in Brooker's work (Brooker, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> The *Cultural Revolution* (1980–1983) refers to a period after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. During this period, educational institutions in Iran underwent a process of eliminating Western and non-Islamic inspirations, including traditionalist, unpolitical Islamic beliefs. The goal was to align these institutions with revolutionary and political Islam principles. This period was defined by violence against scholars, university staff, and students. Hardcore Islamist militants occupied educational institutions, including universities. This was due to the significant presence of secularist and leftist groups in Iran's higher education system, which resisted Ayatollah Khomeini's establishment of an Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic officially named this violence the 'Cultural Revolution'. Whilst the universities experienced the first waves of 'Cultural Revolution' and Islamisation from 1980 to 1983 under the leadership of Khomeini, Mahmud Ahmadinejad's era (2005-2013) is known as the president who initiated Iran's 'Second Cultural Revolution', starting with the massive structural change at Tehran University. For example, in pursuit of his ideological strategy, he appointed a clergyman, Ayatollah Abbas Ali Amid Zanjani, as chancellor; (Hassaniyan, 2021, p. 187; Naji, 2008, p. 240)

<sup>3</sup> An excerpt from Dr Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou's essay 'Terrorism in Kurdistan'. Ghassemlou served as the Secretary General of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI). This essay was read in Paris at the International Conference on 'Terror and Human Rights' on September 16, 1986. Due to Ghassemlou's absence from the conference, his essay was read by Bernard Kouchner, the former Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France from 2007 to 2010. (Babae, 2022, pp. 127–33)

<sup>4</sup> This is not a reference to the Mojahedin-e Khala. The label Mojadehin was initially applied to the Pasdaran, today's Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Couros/IRGC), and smaller militia groups collaborating with them.

<sup>5</sup> Marouf Cabi is a Kurdish-British educator, historian and political activist. During the years of state terrorism in Kurdistan, two of Cabi's sisters, Shahla and Nasrin Cabi, both nurses and civilians, were executed without undergoing a trial on August 27, 1980, in Sanandaj and with the order of Khalkhali.