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ABSTRACT

“A Comparative Study between Secularism and Political Islam and the
Downfall of Secularism during Khatami’s Presidency”

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Fighting against pro-secular groups and parties is a policy to which both the Second Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic regime adhered. Although either of the regimes considered different reasons for such restrictions, this policy has affected the above groups with grave consequences: consequences which trapped those politicians who pioneered the practice of this policy. In a sense, one of the major causes of the Islamic regime’s emergence and the decadence of Pahlavi regime is currently known as the political gap caused by the absence of secular political parties during the post-Mosaddegh period. The gap which was never filled even after designating Bakhtiar, the last prime minister of the Second Pahlavi regime. Based on accepted definitions in political philosophy, free secular parties have either never existed in Iran’s political history, or have never achieved political legitimacy. This presentation examines why secular groups are considered as *secular* in Iran’s political convention. The following five parts will be highlighted in this paper to study the downfall of former president Khatami’s government from 1997-2005 (a period deemed as the final period for secular groups by rulers in power). (1) Restricting these groups’ activities by closing down related newspapers and media outlets; (2) Studying Khatami’s contradictory slogans regarding the granting of further political freedom; (3) Studying the gradual process to exclude these secular groups from Iran’s political profile; (4) Accusing these groups of anti-Islamic actions, and pointing out the importance of unity among various groups within the regime; and (5) Exposing how secular groups repeated the same historical fallacy in accepting silence and giving up their endeavor to fight which ultimately legitimated their political loss among the people. Finally, this paper will explain why secularism is a political term that requires adherence by free political parties. It will also examine the regime’s policies against secular groups and their reaction toward the regime’s actions. Due to the lack of academic resources regarding this period, field research, writers’ observations (from the post-revolutionary generation) and cultural studies (based on the public’s reaction toward these groups) will be used.