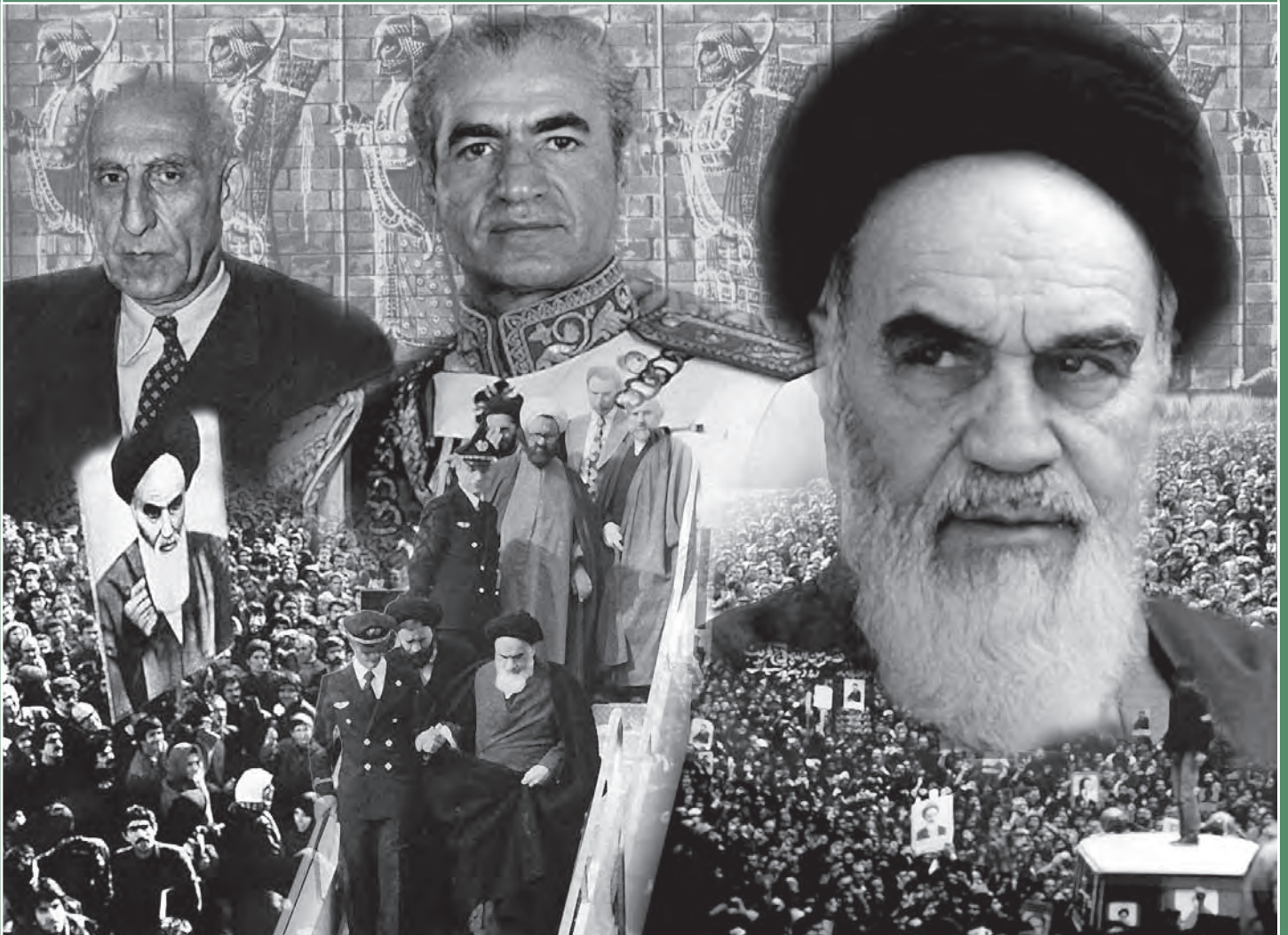


Iran Through the Looking Glass: History, Reform, and Revolution



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The Choices for the 21st Century Education Program develops curricula on current and historical international issues and offers workshops, institutes, and in-service programs for high school teachers. Course materials place special emphasis on the importance of educating students in their participatory role as citizens.

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Iran Today



A Note on Terms

At the urging of scholars we have used Shi'i to refer to one of the branches of Islam in these readings. Shi'a is the plural form that refers to Shi'is collectively.

Introduction: The End of an Era

On January 16 1979, the shah [king] of Iran boarded a plane and left the country that he had ruled for thirty-eight years. The shah claimed he was going on an extended vacation. Iran was in the midst of a revolution and in truth, the shah knew his days as Iran's monarch were over. The fact that he carried a container of Iranian soil in his pocket suggested that he knew he would never return. At the time of his departure, most Iranians saw the shah as a corrupt and repressive leader who was a puppet of the United States.

Iranians were ready to replace the unjust and corrupt monarchy, but just what kind of government Iranians would choose remained unsettled. While most Iranians agreed it was time for the shah to go, his departure marked the beginning of a fierce debate about Iran's future. Many Iranians imagined an Iran with a parliamentary system and laws modeled on Western nations. Others hoped for a government based on Islam. Still others imagined a socialist future for Iran. Although a struggle for the future of Iran was about to begin, anger against the shah's monarchy had, for the moment, unified the Iranian people.

“This great movement was born of the struggle for freedom and its success would mean the freedom of all people. This movement has not been brought about by any single individual, group or ideology.... Our nation is at this critical stage in its history and destiny is not after any ideology. It is fighting for freedom. It is concerned lest it is dealt another blow and another despot comes into power. This is what I am worried about most. I request you unify behind a single goal and a single

slogan. Fight for people's freedom and struggle against imperialism and exploitation.”

—Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani, Leading Shi'i Cleric, January 18, 1979

This unity would not last. The Iranian Revolution would quickly become more than a fight for freedom from the shah. It would become the scene of ideological conflict and uncertainty as Iranians struggled to define the future of Iran.

The Iranian people were no strangers to political uncertainty. In the twentieth century alone, Iranians lived through three revolutions, two coups d'état, and three abdications. Its geographic location and oil resources made it highly desirable to Russia, Great Britain, and the United States, who wished to control and influence its politics.

As you read in the coming days, try to consider the following questions. Why was there so much upheaval and change in Iran? What were the events that led to anger against the shah and eventually to revolution? How did Iranians determine what sort of government they would have? Why is it important to understand the Iranian Revolution today?

In these readings and the activities that accompany them, you will explore the culture and history of Iran. You will examine the role of Islam and legacy of Persian culture, as well as the role other countries played in trying to shape Iran. You will then be asked to recreate the debate among the Iranian people as they pondered their future after the departure of the shah. Finally, at the end of the reading, you will consider how Iran has changed since the Revolution and Iran's role in international politics.

Part I: From Cyrus to Reza Shah

Iran's history and culture played an important role in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The beliefs and values of Iranians helped shape the Revolution. These values have their origins in the Iranian people's understanding of their long history and society.

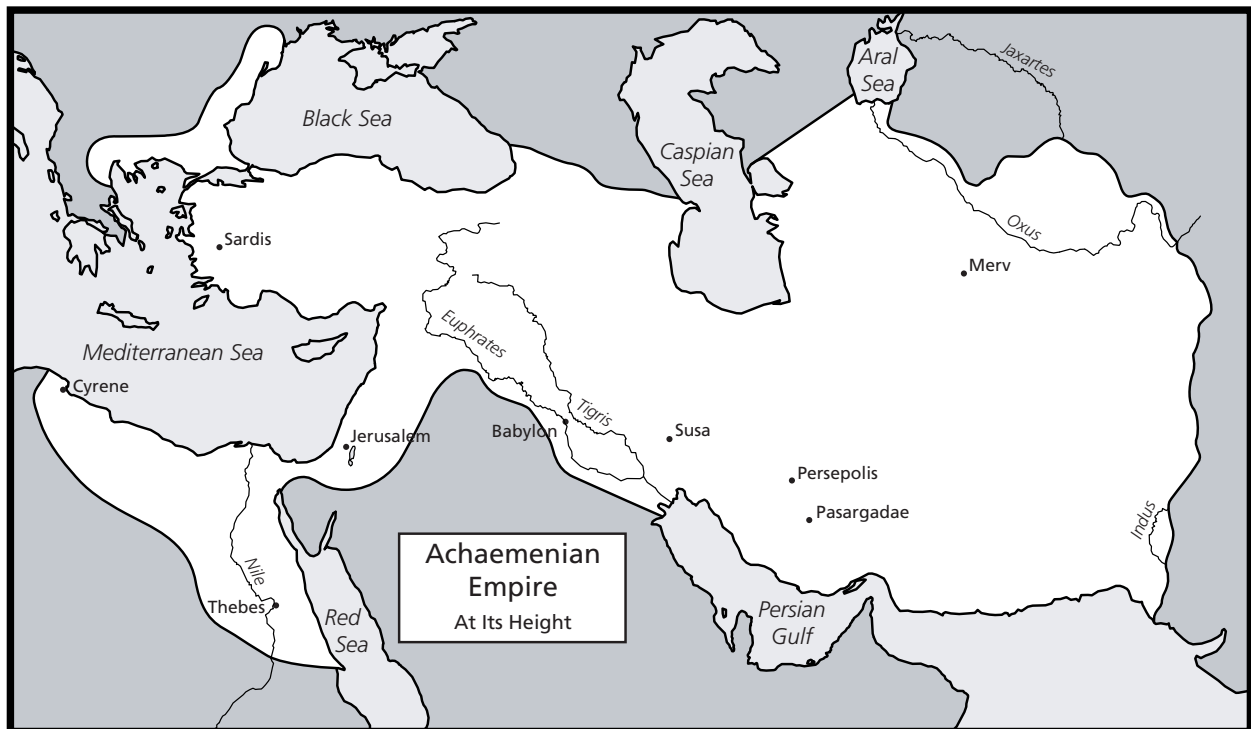
To help you understand what led to the revolution of 1979, Part I of your reading traces several thousand years of Iranian history. You will read about the origins of the values of social and economic justice that shaped Iranian political life. You will see how Shi'i Islam and political life in Iran became entwined. Finally, you will examine how an often ineffective and corrupt monarchy led to exploitation by foreign imperial powers and anger among Iranians, who wanted a better government.

Early Iran

Iran is an arid and mountainous country. The center of Iran is a large desert plateau bordered by high mountains. For many years, the lands of Iran were known as Persia. The

lands were named by the ancient Greeks for a nomadic tribe called the Parsa that moved into the region in about 1000 BCE. In addition to the Parsa, there were other tribes in the region who spoke different languages and who were of different ethnic origins. The tribes, based on extended family ties, were the organizing principle for ordinary Iranians. Tribal affiliations, in fact, were more important to Iranians than national or ethnic affiliations until the late twentieth century. As the many tribes gradually began to settle the region and to rely on agriculture for survival, they learned to adapt to the difficult terrain and the climate.

The scarcity of water forced the Parsa and other tribes to develop ways to distribute this essential resource fairly. This desire for fair and equitable distribution contributed to two developments that would have a lasting influence on the emerging society. The first was the development of a religion that emphasized justice and fairness. The second was the development of an effective government able to implement the rules that governed society.



What was Zoroastrianism?

The challenging geographical conditions contributed to the birth of a religion that would form the cornerstone of Iranian society for one thousand years. Born sometime between the tenth and seventh centuries BCE, the prophet Zoroaster traveled the Iranian plateau teaching about the nature of humanity and the responsibilities of human beings. Zoroaster's teachings helped establish one of the world's first systems of theology, known as Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism emphasized order, social justice, the idea that men and women were on earth to improve the world, and ultimate accountability before a single God. Zoroastrianism influenced all aspects of life in early Iran, including politics and government.

What were the contributions of the Achaemenian Empire?

At about the same time, another important development in Iranian history took place. In an effort to increase their security and wealth by acquiring more land and water, the Parsa and their leader Cyrus began a series of wars that conquered neighboring tribes. Cyrus called himself the King of Persia and was the first in a dynasty called the Achaemenian Empire. The empire became the largest the world had yet seen. It had an absolute monarch (a king or queen with sole governmental control) and centralized rule. Cities and towns grew during this period. The dynasty developed a postal system and built roads that were the most extensive in the region. Cyrus's successor Darius established a legal system, a system of taxation, and a government so efficient that the Romans later used it as a model for their own government.

The Achaemenian Empire ended after approximately two hundred years with the invasion of Alexander the Great in 330 BCE. Alexander, who came from Greece, ransacked and burned the Achaemenian city of Persepolis and used ten thousand horses and five thousand camels to carry away the empire's wealth.

After 130 years of Greek rule, a nomadic



An aerial view of the remnants of Ardeshir's palace.

©Georg Geister/PANOS. Used with permission.

tribe overthrew the Greeks. Much of the population of Iran was made up of nomadic tribes. There were a series of wars among tribes until about 220 CE, when a man named Ardeshir began to reestablish central rule and authority over the tribes. The era was known as the Sassanian Dynasty, and it lasted until 637 CE. (The name Sassanian came from Ardeshir's grandfather.)

What were the important developments of the Sassanian dynasty?

One of the primary goals of the Sassanian dynasty was to unify the empire and to create political stability. Arts, architecture, and other elements of Persian culture flourished during the Sassanian era. Although Zoroastrianism beliefs encouraged the king to rule with a sense of social justice, Sassanian rulers emphasized establishing and maintaining social control and power.

Rigid class structures developed with the king at the top of the hierarchy. Priests and aristocratic landholders, whose positions were hereditary like the king's, also ranked near the top. The Sassanians prohibited intermarriage between classes and did not allow the lower classes to obtain property. The barriers between classes were sharp and insurmountable.

The establishment of these social rules in Iranian society marked the beginning of a political order and hierarchy that many viewed as oppressive and unjust. On the other hand, the people's opposition to this rigid social

hierarchy helped set the stage for the arrival of Islam, which had strong elements of social justice and equality as part of its message.

Islam and the Safavids

The arrival of Islam in the lands of Iran had a profound effect on Iranians and their history. Islam arrived when the Arabs conquered Iran between 637 and 651 CE. The Islamic message of justice and fairness appealed to the many Iranians who resented Sassanian rule. In addition, Islam shared some common ideas with Zoroastrianism, such as monotheism and the idea of good and evil. These similarities made it easier for Islam to take root in Iran. By the tenth century most Iranians had adopted the religion of Islam, but the achievements and culture of the pre-Islamic period continued to influence society. The language of Islam and the Koran was Arabic, but Persian remained the primary language in Iran.

Who was the Prophet Mohammad?

According to the Islamic religion, in 610 CE, a man named Mohammad, who lived in the city of Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula had a revelation from the angel Gabriel. He began to preach a message that had wide appeal extolling the values of generosity, solidarity, and courage. Mohammad saw himself as a successor of all the prophets of the Old and New Testaments, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. He called upon people to accept one eternal God who had created the universe.

Mohammad's teachings extended to social issues. Mohammad said that greed was bad and that the poor had the right to share the wealth of the rich. This idea appealed to the many impoverished people of the era.

By the time of his death in 632 CE, Mohammad had established a religion with clear guidelines for personal conduct and social order. He had also established a state that governed based on religious principles. Following his death, armies of Mohammad's followers set out to conquer and bring others into the faith. In four hundred years, the Arabic language

and Islam had spread from the Arabian peninsula to form a vast region.

About one hundred years after Mohammad's death, a controversy arose about his successor (see box). Islam divided into two branches, Shi'i and Sunni, who disagreed about who the rightful successor should be. One group, called Sunni, believed the election of Abu Bakr, Mohammad's first successor, to be rightful. The other, the Shi'a believed that only Mohammad's descendants, starting with his son-in-law and cousin Ali, were the legitimate successors.

What happened to Iran after the introduction of Islam?

After the Arab conquest, foreigners ruled Iran until about 1500 CE. Invasions from the east and the north brought vast destruction. Although this was a period of political disarray, violence, and rule by foreigners, Persian culture, particularly poetry and art, continued to flourish.

How did the Safavid dynasty begin?

After centuries of political upheaval and foreign rule, a new dynasty emerged. The Safavid Dynasty formed a powerful, highly organized state that endured for more than two hundred years. The dynasty began when a young man named Isma'il convinced many tribes that he was a descendant of Imam Ali. Isma'il and these tribes conquered the lands of Iran. He declared himself the shah [king] and proclaimed Shi'ism to be the mandatory faith of his kingdom.

During the Safavid Dynasty, Shi'i Islam became an integral part of Iranian political life. In turn, the Safavid rulers provided financial and political support that allowed Shi'i Islam to grow and flourish in Iran.

How did the role of Islamic clergy increase in Safavid Iran?

The Safavid shahs sponsored Shi'i clergy and established religious schools for educating theologians. They also recruited Shi'i theologians from neighboring Arab lands. These

theologians were known by the Arabic word *ulama*. The Safavids gave power to the ulama, who played an increasingly important role in Iranian society. Initially they were financially

dependent on the shah, but over time they became more independent as financial contributions and donations of property provided money for the Shi'i clergy and their educa-

Shi'ism

The life and times of the Prophet Mohammad, whose revelations from God became the basis of Islam, are very important to Muslims. After the death of the Prophet, Muslims disagreed about who would be Mohammad's successor. This disagreement led to the creation of the Shi'i sect of Islam. In the coming centuries Shi'ism would become the form of Islam most practiced in Iran.

Following the death of the Prophet in 632, Muslims elected a successor of the Prophet to lead them, called a caliph. The first four caliphs were elected, but only the fourth, Ali, was related by blood to the Prophet Mohammad. When Ali was killed, a man named Mu'awiya from a rival tribe took over as caliph.

According to the Shi'a, Ali was the only legitimate caliph of the first four because he was the only one related to the Prophet, which endowed him with special spiritual qualities that were essential for the leader of Islam to have. The word Shi'a literally means the partisans or followers of Ali. The Shi'a perceive the reign of Ali from 656 to 661 to exemplify a reign of justice and virtue. Stories of Ali's simplicity, his compassion for the poor, and his strength and just rule passed down through generations of Shi'a and provided for many the model of a political leader.

“You must be just, and the serving of the common man must be one of your prime objectives; the gratification of the aristocracy is insignificant and can be ignored in the face of the happiness of the masses.... Look after the deprived and dispossessed who need food and shelter. They deserve your help.... The people will obey their ruler if they are immune from his abuse.”

—Imam Ali, 661 CE

Those who were followers of Ali's leadership regarded Mu'awiya's and his successor's leadership as unjust and tyrannical. They urged Ali's son Hossein to challenge for the position of caliph. Hossein and all of his family, except for an infant son, were killed during that challenge. The Shi'a believe that Hossein's son and his successors were the true leaders of Islam, because they were descendants of the Prophet.

In later years, the Shi'a themselves split into two main groups as a result of another succession conflict. One group is called the Twelvers because they recognize a series of twelve *Imams* (leaders) after Ali. Twelvers believe that the twelfth Imam, Mohammad al-Mahdi, disappeared, but did not die in 871 CE. They believe that he is still alive and present on earth but remains concealed by God. They believe that he will someday reappear as the *Mahdi*, which means “divinely guided one,” before the day of judgement and fill the earth with justice. Another group of the Shi'a is called Seveners or Isma'ilis because they recognize the seventh leader, whose name was Isma'il. Most Iranians today are Twelvers.

The legacies of Imam Ali and his son Hossein remain important symbols for the Shi'a and have affected their understanding of their history and their relationship to the world. The importance that the Shi'a place on the reign of Ali have led them to emphasize equity, social justice, and the dignity of the individual. The death of Hossein has also led the Shi'a to see their history as one of persecution and martyrdom at the hands of outsiders and false leaders.

tional institutions. By the end of the Safavid dynasty in 1722, most Iranians identified with Shi'ism.

What was economic life like during the Safavid Dynasty?

The nomadic tribes, which had helped Shah Isma'il (1502-1524) conquer lands, were also an obstacle to Isma'il's ability to establish a stable, urban-based state. To gain control, Isma'il granted tribal leaders vast tracts of land in return for payments and taxes. To collect taxes, the shah built an organized and effective government.

Villages were the center of rural life, with peasants working the land controlled by landlords in return for a share of the harvest. The tribes raised cattle, sheep, goats, and camels. Trade, crafts, and mining for minerals and precious metals also contributed to the wealth of the shah.

During the Safavid era, trade between Iran and other countries grew. The Safavids built roads, and exported silk and other textiles as well as ceramics to European countries. To encourage trade, Safavid rulers tolerated the religions of foreigners. The most famous Safavid ruler, Shah Abbas (1587-1629) encouraged the construction of Roman Catholic convents, supported Armenian trade networks, and existed peacefully with Jews within the Safavid kingdom.

European nations, anxious about the Ottoman Empire which bordered Iran, established diplomatic relations with the Safavids. By claiming large portions of land as the property of the crown, and systematically encouraging trade and production of crafts, Shah Abbas raised huge amounts of money in trade and taxes. He used the revenues to finance a giant army to protect Iran against the neighboring Ottoman Empire and to establish the capital city of Isfahan. At the time of Abbas's death, the population of Isfahan was approximately 400,000.

At the same time, Abbas ruled with an iron hand and did not hesitate to eliminate those who he thought opposed him, including

members of his own family. The authority of the shah under the Safavids was absolute and largely unchecked.

The shahs who came after Abbas were not as effective. The well-organized government of the Safavid state remained, but the standing army Isma'il and Abbas had built withered. In 1722, a tribal chief named Nadir Shah from what is today Afghanistan conquered Isfahan, bringing the Safavid Dynasty to an end in 1736.

The Qajar Dynasty (1779-1925)

After Nadir Shah's death in 1737, various tribal and regional confederations tried to establish control over Iran. In 1779, Agha Mohammad Khan, a chieftain of the Qajar tribe from northeastern Iran, consolidated power and established the Qajar dynasty.

What role did the clergy have in Qajar Iran?

The Qajars did not have the religious or political prestige of the Safavids. This situation enhanced the autonomy of the clergy, whose influence on Iranians exceeded that of the shah in certain respects. For example, Iranians increasingly attached themselves to a *mujtahid*: a member of the clergy who was recognized by other clergy as especially learned and able to render independent judgment about religion and law. The Shi'i religious establishment's say on the policies of the shahs would become more and more important in Iranian political life.

What role did nomadic tribes play in Qajar Iran?

In the early nineteenth century, nomadic tribes made up between one third and one half of the population of Iran. These various tribes governed themselves and often ruled the villages in their territory, and possessed the most powerful armed groups. The shahs often appointed tribal leaders as regional leaders or governors. The shahs also kept the power of these tribes in check by holding family members of tribal leaders as hostages, and by encouraging rivalries between the tribes.

What was daily life like under the Qajars?

Life in Qajar Iran was hierarchical and corrupt. Peasants and the poorer classes had no protection from exploitation and land seizure. Many poorer Iranians came to resent the shah.

During the Qajar Dynasty, taxes went to providing for a life of luxury for the shah. Little money went to things that might improve the lives of average Iranians, such as building roads or railways, or maintaining an army that would protect Iran. Iran was stuck in a system of patronage, where power and positions could be purchased from the shah. The economy lacked the infrastructure to grow.

Economic stagnation under the Qajars made Iran susceptible to interventions by powerful countries seeking to expand their wealth. During the nineteenth century, Britain and Russia began to play an active role in Iran.

How did Russia and Britain compete over Iran?

During the nineteenth century, both the British and Russian Empires sought to extend their influence into Iran. Russia was anxious to expand southward and obtain warm water ports on the Persian Gulf. Britain saw Russia's ambitions as a threat to the British colony of India. Iran fought two wars with Russia in 1813 and 1828, and lost a great deal of its territory in the north.

After the 1828 war, Russia forced Iran to accept the Treaty of Turkomanchai, which placed the Iranian government in heavy financial debt to Russia. The treaty also gave Russian merchants special privileges and favorable tariff rates in Iran (tariffs are taxes on imported goods).

Alarmed by Russia's expansion into Iranian territory, Britain informed the Russian government that it would not tolerate further Russian expansion in Iran. Neither country wanted to fight a war over Iran, so they agreed to let Iran serve as a buffer state between their empires. Nevertheless, both empires competed for influence in the Iranian government.

Britain negotiated a treaty of its own in 1857, which gave British merchants rights similar to those of the Russians. The powerful European economies began to export raw materials from Iran, while Iran imported manufactured goods from Europe.

What were concessions?

During the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (1848-1896), British and Russian merchants sought to participate directly in Iran's economy. The shah's desire for money to finance his lifestyle as well as Iran's development led him to grant "concessions" to foreign merchants. The concessions gave foreigners the right to develop parts of Iran's economy. In 1863, for instance, the shah allowed a British company

Highlights of Major Iranian Dynasties

Society	Dates	Great Achievements
Achame-nian	530 to 330 BCE	Largest empire world had yet seen, built postal system, roads, legal system, and system of taxation; served as model for Rome
Sassanian	220 CE to 647 CE	Arts and culture flourished, established rigid social hierarchies; fell after Arab conquest
Safavid	1501-1736	Made Shi'i Islam official faith of the kingdom, organized an efficient government that built roads and traded with other countries, built the city of Isfahan
Qajar	1779-1925	Power of shah decreased, shahs used power to collect and dispense wealth, granted concessions to foreigners

to build the telegraph system in Iran. He gave Russian companies other concessions to balance what he had given to the British.

In 1872, the shah awarded a massive concession to a British baron, Julius de Reuter. Reuter was going to build railways, dams, and canals, and develop vast agricultural and mining areas in return for being able to operate them as monopolies. This concession created such a political firestorm within Iran and with the Russian government that the shah was forced to withdraw the concession a year later.

British and Russian squabbles over these concessions slowed the development of infrastructure that Iran needed to modernize its economy. The consequences were significant. For example, by the dawn of the twentieth century, Iran had only twenty miles of railroads.

Foreigners would continue to affect Iran throughout the twentieth century. Their presence and wealth, and the widespread perception that they were plundering Iran led to increased distrust of Europeans and other outsiders. This mistrust played a powerful role in Iranian politics.

Why did the shah's policies anger Iranians?

Although these concessions benefitted the Russians and the British and made the shah wealthy, his economic policies did little to develop the economy of Iran. Economic hardship and suffering, the giving of Iran's resources to foreigners, and pervasive inefficiency and corruption heightened public anger and resentment among Iranians.

Some Iranians who had contact with Europeans or who had studied abroad worried that they had fallen behind Europe, which was changing rapidly because of the Industrial Revolution, colonialism, and the Enlightenment. The states of Europe had developed new systems of law, economics, and education that had led to the growth of powerful nation-states. For these Iranians, the weak and ineffective Qajar government stood in stark contrast.

“The Westerners have conquered the world, not because of their belief in Jesus or Mary, but because of their capacity to build railroads, to create the telegraph system. We have lost, because we have become prisoners of our own superstitions and ignorance.”

—Jamal al-Din Afghani,
Cleric and Reformer

Some Iranians who had a chance to study in Europe, the neighboring Ottoman Empire, or in a few new schools in Iran, viewed Western science and technology as the key to building Iranian national power and wealth. Western liberal political ideas like democracy, representative government, and civil legal codes also influenced Iranian intellectuals. The intellectuals promoted their ideas and tried to initiate reforms. In response, Nasir al-Din Shah resorted to repressive measures.

What was the Tobacco Protest?

In 1890, for the relatively small fee of £15,000 pounds (approximately \$1.7 million in today's dollars) per year, the shah granted a British company the exclusive right to produce, sell, and export tobacco. Tobacco was widely consumed and popular in Iran. Iranians wondered why this right should be taken out of the hands of Iranians and given to foreigners as a monopoly. Iranians from all areas of society were outraged. Men and women participated in widespread protests against the concession and against the shah.

Two important sectors of Iranian society helped organize the protests and a boycott of tobacco. The first were the intellectuals. The second were the ulama, who supported the boycott because they believed that foreign encroachment presented a danger to Shi'i Islam. The cooperation of these two groups to end an injustice created a powerful political alliance, and rallied Iranians to the cause. After twenty-two days, the protests forced the shah to rescind the concession. Leaders of the clergy ruled that Iranians could use tobacco again.

Why was the D'Arcy oil concession important?

In 1901, Mozaffar al-Din Shah, the son of Nasir al-Din, granted another concession which would have a far-reaching effect on Iran. In exchange for 16 percent of the profits, the shah awarded an Englishman named William D'Arcy the right to the oil in most of Iran. When large quantities of oil were discovered in the coming years, the British government stepped in and became the largest shareholder in the company.

The Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911

Dissatisfaction among Iranians increased with the D'Arcy oil concession. Some Iranian intellectuals, merchants, and clergy formed secret societies where they discussed their unhappiness with the shah and with the status of Iran. Some intellectuals imagined an Iran without the absolute and corrupt monarchy of the shah. Members of the merchant class hoped for an economic system that would operate more fairly and efficiently. Some members of the clergy hoped to strengthen the role Shi'i Islam played in Iranian government and society.

While intellectuals brought ideas about political reform back with them from abroad, it was the clergy who mobilized and communicated to the masses. Some clergy remained loyal to the shah. But others believed that the influx of foreigners, the shah's corruption, and economic hardship threatened the well-being of Iranians.

How did protests lead to a parliament and constitution?

In 1905, protests against the shah broke into the open. Aggravated by years of mismanagement and corruption, concessions to foreigners, and a series of droughts and food shortages, resentment boiled over. The public demands for change led to the Constitutional Revolution.

Protestors demanded a constitution and a parliament (the Persian oil word for parliament

is Majlis). The shah, who was mortally ill and hoped to preserve the monarchy, agreed. In 1906, Iran's first elections for the parliament were held. The shah died shortly after the election. One of the first tasks of the Majlis was to write a constitution.

“We have not demanded anything from the government but justice. Our aim is to establish an assembly by which we may find out how much our helpless people suffer from the oppressive provincial government. We want justice, the execution of Islamic laws, and an assembly in which the king and the poor may be treated according to the law.”

—Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Tabatabai

How did the constitution change Iranian politics?

The constitution introduced new legal and political practices and redistributed authority in Iran. The elected Majlis received authority over treaties, loans, budgets, and concessions. It was also given the power to appoint and dismiss cabinet ministers. In addition, the constitution defined the rights of Iranian citizens.

The new constitution changed not only the laws of Iran but also the way that Iranians thought about government. Iranians had become citizens, not just subjects of the monarch. Members of the Majlis debated each other in public and had to answer to their constituents.

The constitution designated Twelver Shi'ism (one of the two main branches of Shi'i Islam) as the official religion of Iran and gave a committee of learned clerics the power to review legislation to ensure that it did not contradict the fundamental principles of Shi'ism. The ulama, which had rallied support for the constitution, ensured that the new Iranian government's most important goal would be to protect and support Shi'i Islamic features of Iranian society.

Although the Constitutional Revolution had unified Iranian society against the au-

thority of the shah, there were disagreements among and within the factions. For example, some members of the ulama did not support freedom of the press or freedom of speech, which they thought could undermine religion. They also argued that non-Muslims should not be treated as the equals of Muslims before the law.

How did Britain’s and Russia’s roles in Iran help the shah weaken the new constitution?

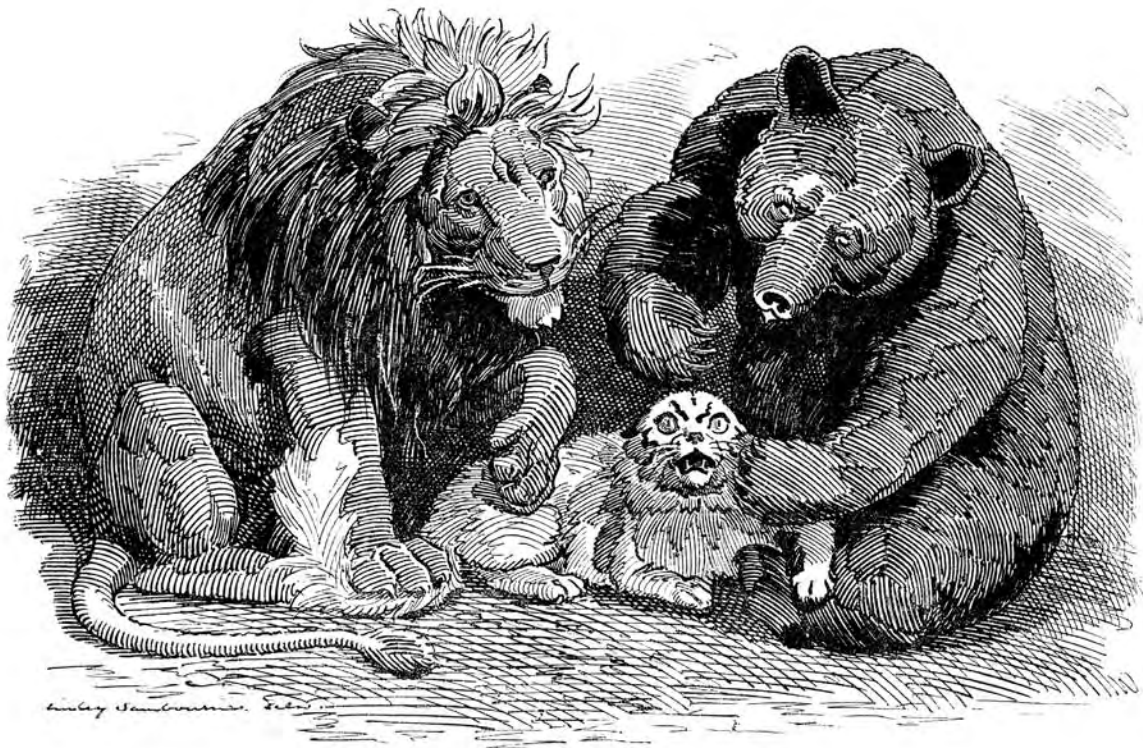
The new shah, Muhammad Ali, was not ready to relinquish all the power of the monarchy so easily. Domestic economic problems and the continuing role of Britain and Russia created public discontent and helped him challenge the new constitutional form of government.

In 1907, Russia and Britain signed a treaty in which they agreed to settle their differences in the region. Consequently, Russia would

claim northern Iran as falling within its sphere of influence and Britain would claim the southeast. They agreed that there would be a neutral zone in the middle.

Muhammad Ali Shah argued that the new constitutional form of government was even less successful than the old government in protecting Iran from foreign interference. High prices and inflation contributed to public dissatisfaction. The Russians encouraged the shah to order the army to attack the Majlis’s building in Tehran. The shah also had the leaders of the constitutional movement arrested and then executed.

The coalition of clergy, intellectuals, and merchants, which had united against the shah in 1906, split over disagreements about the relationship between the state and religion and what kinds of social and political reforms should be prioritized.

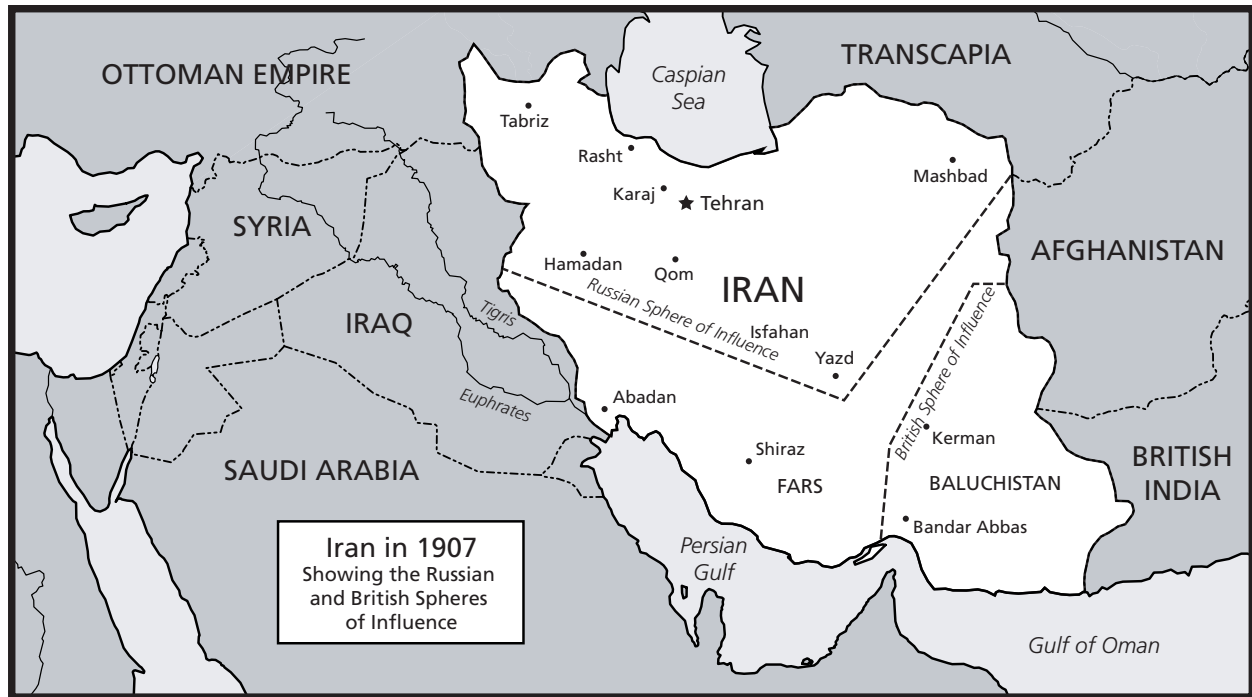


THE HARMLESS NECESSARY CAT.

BRITISH LION (to Russian Bear). "LOOK HERE! YOU CAN PLAY WITH HIS HEAD, AND I CAN PLAY WITH HIS TAIL, AND WE CAN BOTH STROKE THE SMALL OF HIS BACK."

PERSIAN CAT. "I DON'T REMEMBER HAVING BEEN CONSULTED ABOUT THIS!"

Punch Cartoon Library. Used with permission.



Iran in 1907
Showing the Russian and British Spheres of Influence

With Iranian society divided and the central government weakened, fighting broke out and tribal groups again asserted their power. In 1909, pro-constitution tribesmen and militias entered Tehran, deposed the shah, and replaced him with his nine-year-old son.

How did Russia and Britain respond to war in Iran?

In 1911, Britain landed troops in the south to protect the newly discovered oil fields there. Russian troops pushed into the north and threatened to occupy Tehran unless the government dismissed a recently appointed American financial advisor whose actions threatened Russian and British interests. When the Majlis refused, the Iranian cabinet dissolved the Majlis and gave in to Russian and British demands.

Although Iran still had a constitution and a limited monarch, both Britain and Russia controlled their sections of the country and dealt with tribal leaders in these areas, not the central government in Tehran. The occupation heightened resentment of the British and the Russians whom Iranians saw as helping the shah end the Constitutional Revolution. Elec-

tions for the Majlis did not take place again until 1914.

How did World War I affect Iran?

When World War I began in 1914, Iran remained neutral. Nevertheless, the war had a devastating impact on Iran. Iran's economy shrunk by 25 percent. (Germany's decreased by 25 percent and France's by 11 percent.) Parts of Iran were occupied by the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and Great Britain. The presence of these armies severely limited any authority that the shah or the government in Tehran could exert. Iran considered itself an unwilling victim of the war, and petitioned for redress at the Paris Peace Conference at the end of the war. While U.S. President Woodrow Wilson was sympathetic, the British government, with plans of its own for Iran's future, showed no interest.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 led to the withdrawal of Russian troops from the north of Iran. Britain then became the dominant foreign power in Iran. During World War I, Iranian oil had helped fuel the British fleet. After the war, Britain took steps to ensure it would maintain access to oil and that Iran would serve as a

buffer against now-socialist Russia.

“If it should be asked why we should undertake the task at all, and why Persia should not be left to herself and allowed to rot into picturesque decay, the answer is that her geographical position, the magnitude of our interests in the country, and the future safety of our Eastern Empire render it impossible for us now—just as it would have been impossible for us any time in the last fifty years—to disinherit ourselves from what happens in Persia.... if Persia were to be alone, there is every reason to fear that she would be overrun by Bolshevik influence from the north. Lastly, we possess in the southwestern corner of Persia great assets in the shape of oil fields, which are worked for the British navy and which give us a commanding interest in that part of the world.”

—Lord Curzon, British Foreign Secretary, 1919

The Iranian prime minister decided to embrace British involvement in Iran with the hope that it would provide the financial and institutional support that Iran needed to strengthen the central government. He negotiated the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919, which would have made Iran a British protectorate. For the many Iranians who had been angered by the meddling of foreign powers for years and years, this was not a popular position. Unrest and protests ensued. Ultimately, the Majlis refused to ratify the agreement.

Reza Shah (1925-1941) Pahlavi Dynasty

In 1921, an ambitious colonel named Reza Khan, tired of the weak Iranian government, took three thousand soldiers into Tehran, arrested some leading politicians, and asked the shah to appoint a new prime minister. By 1923 Reza Khan had become prime minister

himself, expanded the armed forces, and purchased weapons. With a strengthened military, he reduced the power of the tribes and asserted control over the country. In 1925, the Majlis voted to abolish the Qajar dynasty and appointed him the shah. He announced that his family’s ruling name would be Pahlavi, after the name for the Persian language spoken before the Muslim conquest of Iran.

What did Reza Shah hope to change in Iran?

Reza Shah hoped to build Iran into a modern state and modern economy like the western states of Europe. He worked to strengthen the role of the central government and to concentrate power in his hands. Reza Shah ordered the construction of new roads, railroads, factories, hospitals, and ports. He expanded public education at all levels for boys and for girls.

He sent the army into tribal areas, limited the tribes’ movements, and forced them to disarm. Tribal rebellions were ruthlessly put down. These policies impoverished and weakened the tribes. Thousands died at the hands of the army and from starvation. One of the results of Reza Shah’s policies was that Iranians moved from rural areas into cities.

How did Reza Shah try to reduce the power of the ulama?

Some of the changes Reza Shah mandated brought him into conflict with the ulama. Reza Shah believed that the clergy’s power prevented Iran’s modernization. In fact, many of the policies he enacted were designed to weaken the power of the clergy and make Iran a more secular society. For example, he took funds from the money-generating land endowments that the Shi’i clergy had held since the Safavid era. His expansion of public education also reduced the ulama’s role in education.

A central component of Reza Shah’s reforms included significant changes in the legal system. During the 1920s and 1930s, Iran adopted a legal system similar to that of France. The new legal system wrenched the ultimate authority of Iranian law from the hands of the

clergy. New laws required men to dress in a western style and prohibited *hijab* (veiling) for women, which Reza Shah saw as standing in the way of modernizing Iran. His policy was to unveil women with force.

Although many Iranians embraced Reza Shah's plans for modernization of Iran, his efforts to reduce the role of Islam in public life contributed significantly to his unpopularity with ordinary Iranians. He tolerated no dissent and enforced his policies with violence, terror, and fear. For example, in 1935 when religious leaders organized a protest in a mosque against the forced unveiling of women, he had the army massacre more than one hundred of the protesters. He also ordered newspapers censored. Opposition leaders were killed, arrested, or forced into exile. In addition, Reza Shah suspended elections and hand picked members of the Majlis, who in turn appointed a cabinet and prime minister.

How did the lives of women change during the reign of Reza Shah?

The lives of women changed during the reign of Reza Shah. The Shah encouraged the education of women, though three times as many boys as girls received a formal education. An unintended consequence of the shah's policy of banning hijab was that many families who were religiously observant kept their girls out of school. Although women did not have political, social, or economic equality, women did begin to have more opportunities for work. Women were admitted to the University of Tehran. Most of these changes only affected women in middle and upper classes and did little to change traditional assumptions about the subjugation of women to men.

How did Reza Shah attempt to limit the influence of foreign powers in Iran?

Reza Shah intended to create a strong national identity in Iran. He had marginalized the role of the tribes and oppressed different ethnic groups, including Kurds and Arabs. To build national pride, the shah cited periods of national greatness prior to the arrival of Islam in his speeches. He extolled the achievements of the ancient Persian kings, Cyrus and Darius, and the Safavid Dynasty. Reza Shah also changed the name of the country used in foreign communications from Persia, the name that foreign powers used, to Iran, the name used by Iranians themselves. He even ordered that foreign mail that included the word Persia on it be returned to its sender.

Reza Shah attempted to reduce the role of foreign powers in Iran—particularly Great Britain. The shah prohibited the sale of property to foreigners, refused to take loans from foreign countries to fund his building projects, and ended a concession that had given the British-owned Imperial Bank of Iran the sole right to manage Iranian currency. Nevertheless, Britain retained its monopolistic control of Iranian oil. There were more workers in the British owned oil fields than in all other Ira-



Reza Shah signs his own abdication while his son Mohammad Reza looks on.

Roger Viollet Collection. Getty Images. Used with permission.

nian industries combined, although very few Iranians held important technical and administrative jobs.

How did the German presence in Iran led to the shah's abdication?

During the 1930s, the shah allowed Nazi Germany to play an increasing role in Iran. Between 1939 and 1941, Germany became Iran's leading trading partner. Reza Shah had a deep distrust of the British and hoped a German presence would balance the power of the British. Hundreds of German agents operated in Iran, using it as a base of operations against British interests throughout the region during World War II.

With the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Allied leaders worried that Nazi Germany would use Iran as a base for military operations against the Soviet Union. The British and Soviet governments sent a note to Reza Shah demanding the expulsion of all Germans from Iran. The shah did not give in, and in late August 1941, Soviet forces moved in from the north, British from the south.

“We have decided that the Germans must go, and if Iran will not deport them, then the English and the Russians will.”

—leaflet dropped from British planes over Tehran, August 1941

Under pressure from the Allies, Reza Shah relinquished the throne to his son, Mohammad Reza, in September 1941. Deported from Iran, he died in 1944.

“I cannot be the nominal head of an occupied land, to be dictated to by a minor English or Russian officer.”

—Reza Shah's resignation statement, September 16, 1941

During the occupation, both the Soviet Union and Great Britain worked to influence Iranian politicians and interest groups. Britain,

which had allowed the young and inexperienced Mohammad Reza to succeed his father, saw the new shah as someone whom they could influence. For his part, Mohammad Reza Shah knew that he owed his position and his power to British officials.

How did the occupation of Iran during World War II affect Iran's politics?

During World War II, neither Mohammad Reza Shah nor the Majlis had final control over policy in Iran. The occupation of Iran reduced the power of the central government and led to the rise of factions in Iranian political life, each vying for influence.

With a weak shah and government, conditions were right for the growth of competing political groups and ideas. Newspapers flourished and called for economic and political change. New political parties began to emerge, including the “Tudeh” (masses), an anti-monarchist party. Initially moderate and liberal, the Tudeh party increasingly came to reflect the policies and wishes of the Soviet Union. It grew strongest in the north, the Soviet zone in Iran.

“When the Allies deposed Reza Shah....

We were really free; you could say anything you felt like saying, write almost anything you felt like writing and wear almost anything you felt like wearing. Women such as my aunt, who hadn't left her house since Reza Shah's forced unveiling of women, felt as if they had been released from prison, because they could appear in the streets in their chadors. But what could we do with our freedom? Watch the British, American, and Russian soldiers who protected goods going from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian?.. Because when Reza Shah went, it was really clear how weak and poor we really were.”

—Jalal-al-e Ahmad, Iranian Writer

In addition, another emerging world power began to gain a foothold in Iran. The United States sent financial advisors to assist the Iranian government and military officers who trained the Iranian police and army. U.S. policy makers were quick to realize that the United States would want a share of Iran's oil after the war. Both the Americans and the Soviets began negotiating for oil concessions in Iran like the one the British already possessed.

“I was informed...that the United States after the war was to play a large role in that region with respect to oil, commerce, and air transport, and that a big program was under way.”

—Dr. A.C. Millspaugh, American Administrator General of Iranian Finances

How did World War II affect Iran's economy?

The occupation and the presence of foreign troops strained the economy of Iran. The wartime allies commandeered use of Iran's transportation facilities like the railroad to send supplies to the Soviet Union. This made internal trade in Iran more difficult. Prices rose for basic goods, including food supplies. Many Iranians suffered from famine after a bad harvest in 1942. In addition, there was little money for the government to invest in infrastructure or programs to develop Iran's economy. Between 1930 and 1941, approximately 35 percent of government expenditures had gone to state industries or economic projects. By 1945, the share of economic development in government expenditures was only 7 percent. At the conclusion of World War II, Iran was an economically destroyed country, still subject to foreign interference, and ruled by a weak shah.

In Part I of your reading, you have explored several thousand years of Iranian history. You have seen how the values of Zoroastrianism and Islam took root and affected Iranian political life. In particular, the Safavid Dynasty's (1501-1722) declaration that Shi'i Islam was the religion of the state and its support of the clergy strengthened the role of Islam in Iran. In addition, you have read how Iran's rulers often struggled to centralize control and assert their power. You have also seen that foreign concessions increased Iranian anger at the shah and resentment of outsiders. The concessions violated many Iranians' sense of economic justice and fairness, and reminded them of their own national weakness. Many also saw the presence of Westerners as a threat to Iran's religion and culture. As you read Part II, try to keep these themes in mind. They will help you understand the reasons behind the next dramatic events in Iran.



An American engine in Iran transporting Allied aid for the Soviet Union during the Second World War.

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USW3-028145-E.

Part II: Mossadegh to Khomeini

At the end of the Second World War, Iran stood at a crossroads. Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States had agreed to withdraw their occupation forces six months after the end of the war. Each would have to reassess its own position and role in Iran.

The question of how Iranians would govern their country assumed new importance. The constitution of 1906 remained in place, and with the departure of the dictatorial Reza Shah, the Majlis and prime minister assumed increasingly important roles in Iranian politics.

Why did Iran become more open politically during the occupation?

During the occupation of Iran throughout the Second World War, the young and inexperienced Mohammad Reza Shah was unable to exercise the political power that his father had. This meant that those whose political ideas had been suppressed during his father's reign found themselves able to participate in politics. A free press flourished. With elections for the Majlis every two years, and the introduction of new political ideas, Iran began to develop a more democratic political process.

At the same time, struggles for power among the branches of government led to frequent change. For example, between 1941 and 1951, the prime minister and the cabinet changed, on average, every eight months.

How did the shah attempt to strengthen his power?

Following an assassination attempt in 1949, Mohammad Reza Shah drew on public sympathy to back his efforts to increase his power. He put pressure on the Majlis to accept a new law that would allow him to dissolve the Majlis and then call for new elections. He also demanded and received the right to appoint the prime minister, previously the prerogative of the Majlis.

Many voices and interest groups in Iranian

politics had developed by this time. For the lower classes, basic economic issues were a concern. Unemployment was high and approximately 60 percent of Iranians who lived in towns and cities lived in slums. Those in the upper classes wished for a government that would be more efficient, free from foreign control, and that would promote economic growth and stability. University graduates, frustrated by their lack of opportunities for employment that utilized their education, joined and led social protest movements. The ulama, whose influence had been suppressed during Reza Shah's reign, pushed for a reassertion of Islamic law. Many women returned to wearing *chadors*, a traditional Persian Islamic dress. Increased political freedom and widespread economic hardship led to social unrest and calls for change and reform.

Why did resentment of foreign powers unite Iranians?

While Iranians had differing views of politics, most were united by the desire to see the end of foreign involvement in Iran. Iranians had a long list of grievances. High on the list were the concessions to foreigners. The list also included the repeated British and Russian incursions into Iranian lands since the nineteenth century. Finally, the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) became a focus of resentment and represented to Iranians the exploitation and weakness of Iran.

“All of Iran’s misery, wretchedness, lawlessness, and corruption during the last fifty years has been caused by oil and the extortions of the oil company.”

—Radio Tehran, June 1, 1951

Mohammad Mossadegh and Oil Nationalization

Britain's role in Iran's oil industry had its origins in 1901, when Mozaffar al-Din Shah granted William D'Arcy a concession for oil

in southern Iran. With the discovery of oil, the British government stepped in and became the majority shareholder of the company. The terms of the arrangements with Iran were extremely favorable for the British. Even though Iran negotiated the terms again in 1933, the British had secured rights to oil through 1993 and at a fixed rate of royalty payments to Iran. Increasing profits and rising prices brought more and more profit to the AIOC, but no more to the Iranian government. In addition, the royalties were paid only on the unrefined crude oil. Iranians received nothing for AIOC's profitable refining and distribution operations.

By the late 1940s, Iran had become the world's fourth largest oil exporter, and produced 90 percent of Europe's oil. The AIOC excluded Iranians from skilled jobs and gave Iran no say in the running of the company. Iranians were not permitted to examine the company's financial records to ensure they were being treated fairly.

Other factors contributed to Iranian resentment of the AIOC. Working conditions at the refinery in the city of Abadan were atrocious. Iranian workers lived in rat-infested slums without running water or electricity. These workers made about fifty cents a day and were not entitled to vacations or sick days. British managers ran the company and lived in the British section of Abadan with swimming pools, clubs, and tennis courts. When riots broke out in Abadan in 1946, the Iranian public demanded that their government renegotiate the terms of the arrangement with the AIOC.

What were the results of negotiations between the AIOC and the Iranian government?

When the Iranians demanded a renegotiation of the oil agreement, Britain was not anxious to accommodate Iranian demands. For more than two centuries, Britain had built its empire by extracting resources from its colonies and protectorates on terms greatly advantageous to Britain. Accommodation of local interests had never been a priority. Disagreements were settled through the threat or use



The AIOC oil refinery at Abadan in 1951.

of force. Britain manipulated local politicians behind the scenes with bribes or coercion if necessary to ensure policies favorable to the British Empire. In Iran, British officials had the ear of the shah.

In addition, Britain was in the midst of post-war financial hardship and relied on Iranian oil to fuel its economy. Nevertheless, Iranian threats to revoke the concession altogether and continuing violence at Abadan forced the British to the negotiation table. They offered to train more Iranians for high-level positions and promised that royalty payments would not drop below £4 million pounds per year (about \$134 million in today's dollars). They did not offer Iran any say in the running of the AIOC or the right to examine the financial records to ensure Iran received its fair share of royalties.

Why did the shah want to support the Supplemental Agreement with Britain?

In Iran, British officials had advised and groomed Mohammad Reza Shah to serve their interests. Indeed, it had been British officials who had allowed Mohammad Reza to succeed his father in 1941. He knew he owed his position to the British and calculated that he could strengthen his power by supporting them in their quest for a modified agreement,

even though it was a deal tilted in favor of the British. Mohammad Reza Shah was anxious that these new terms, known as the Supplemental Agreement, be accepted. In July 1949, the shah ordered cabinet members to accept them, which they did. Much to the shah's frustration the Majlis refused to support the Supplemental Agreement.

Why did the Majlis refuse to support the Supplemental Agreement with Britain?

The constitution required the Majlis to ratify the agreement for it to become law. Members of the Majlis were aware that public opinion was strongly against accepting the terms dictated by the British, yet they were also afraid to anger the shah. Debate began, but was interrupted by elections for the next session of the Majlis. Anxious to pass the supplemental agreement, the shah resorted to bribes and electoral fraud to place his supporters in the Majlis. Outraged by the shah's attempts to hijack the vote, a prominent politician named Mohammad Mossadegh led protests in Tehran in October 1949 for new and fair elections for the Majlis. There were protests in other cities as well. Ultimately, the shah gave in.

Mossadegh formed a coalition of political parties into the "National Front," which wanted to free Iran from foreign influence. The National Front included secular groups, who were opposed to foreign influence and hoped to build an Iranian democracy, and members of the ulama, led by the Ayatollah Kashani. The pro-Soviet Tudeh party also supported the goals of the National Front. Though these groups held dramatically different political viewpoints, they were unified by the desire to nationalize Iran's oil resources, which meant returning control of these resources to Iran.



Members of the Tudeh Party demonstrating for nationalization of the AIOC.

Photo by Dmitri Kessel. ©Time Life Pictures/Getty Images. Used with permission.

“Islamic doctrines apply to social life, patriotism, administration of justice and opposition to tyranny and despotism. Islam warns its adherents not to submit to a foreign yoke.”

—Ayatollah Kashani, 1951

How did the shah respond to the demands of the National Front?

Mossadegh and the National Front called for the end of the oil concession to the British. In February 1951, Mossadegh proposed full nationalization of the AIOC. This had widespread appeal throughout Iran.

The prime minister, newly appointed by the Shah, rejected the proposal. On March 7, a member of the Fedaian-e Islam, a group that had links to Ayatollah Kashani, assassinated the prime minister. Iranians demonstrated in support of nationalization of the oil industry throughout the country. On March 15, the Majlis passed a bill nationalizing the AIOC. The Majlis requested that the shah appoint Mossadegh as the new prime minister. Under intense domestic political pressure, the shah appointed Mossadegh as prime minister and signed the nationalization bill.

How did Britain respond to the nationalization?

Britain's response was rapid. Britain depended on the revenues from the AIOC as well as the oil itself. Britain increased its military forces in the region, filed a complaint with the International Court of Justice, and asked the United Nations (UN) Security Council to intervene. Mossadegh went to the UN in New York to argue Iran's case.

“My countrymen lack the bare necessities of existence. Their standard of living is probably one of the lowest in the world. Our greatest national asset is oil. This should be the source of work and food for the population of Iran. Its exploitation should properly be our national industry, and the revenue from it should go to improve our conditions of life. As now organized, however, the petroleum industry has contributed practically nothing to the well being of the people or to the technical progress or industrial development of my country.”

—Mohammad Mossadegh, speech to the UN, October 15, 1951

Britain refused to accept the nationalization of the AIOC and even considered invading Iran, a possibility that alarmed U.S. officials. U.S. President Truman (1945-1953) urged both sides to reach a compromise. The United States, now deep in the Cold War, worried that a continuing crisis in Iran could lead to increased Soviet influence or even control of Iran. Britain led an international boycott of Iranian oil. Oil revenues that were needed to fuel the Iranian economy dried up. Iran and the Mossadegh-led government faced a severe financial crisis.

“Persian oil is of vital importance to our economy, and we regard it as essential to do everything possible to prevent the Persians from getting away with a breach of their contractual obligations.”

—British Prime Minister
Clement Atlee, 1951

British intelligence officials in Iran began working behind the scenes to engineer a coup against Mossadegh. This confirmed for Mossadegh that the British were untrustworthy negotiating partners. In October 1952, Mossadegh broke diplomatic relations with Britain and expelled all British officials from Iran.

International Events and Iran

Events beyond Iran's borders had a profound impact on events in Iran. Almost immediately after World War II ended, tensions increased between the former wartime allies, the Soviet Union and the United States. The confrontation, known as the Cold War, would shape the relations of the United States and Iran for the next thirty-five years. One of the earliest confrontations of the Cold War was the presence of the Soviet military in northern Iran, which the United States and Britain demanded be withdrawn.

Another development was the decline of the British Empire. World War II had nearly bankrupted Britain, and Britain's postwar leaders saw their enormous empire as a financial burden because of the costs of defending against growing local resistance. Britain, which had been the leading imperial power in the Middle East since the 1840s, told American officials in 1947 that Britain could no longer maintain its presence in the Middle East. Britain urged the administration of President Harry Truman to fill the vacuum in the Middle East ahead of the Soviets. Britain's declining power and U.S. fear of Soviet expansion would have profound effects on Iran. These effects would include the U.S. sponsorship of Mossadegh's overthrow and the nearly unqualified support of the shah for the next twenty-five years.

Plotting for the coup came to a halt for the time being.

What other reforms did Mossadegh attempt to enact in Iran?

Mohammad Mossadegh was a strong nationalist who hoped to rid Iran of what he saw as crippling and parasitic foreign influences. He was a strong advocate of the rule of law and for the constitution. He also worked to reduce the power of the shah and the size of the army. In 1952, he convinced the Majlis to take control of the army out of the hands of the shah and place it under the control of the Majlis and prime minister. Finally, he hoped to enact land reforms, which would reduce the power of wealthy landowners and allow peasants to own their own land. These proposed land reforms alienated the powerful landowners who dominated the Majlis.

By 1953, economic hardships due to high prices led to public dissatisfaction with the Mossadegh-led government. The Tudeh party led demonstrations in cities. In addition, some of the ulama saw Mossadegh’s programs and ideas as too secular.

What role did the United States play in Iran?

Initially, the United States hoped that Great Britain and AIOC would come to some sort of compromise with Mossadegh. The Truman administration worried that Britain’s failure to compromise, and any efforts to get rid of Mossadegh might result in Iran turning to the Soviets.

“...the British are so obstructive and determined on a rule-or-ruin policy in Iran that we must strike out on an independent policy or run the risk of having Iran disappear behind the Iron Curtain.”

—Dean Acheson, secretary of state for President Harry S. Truman, 1951

How did the British and the Americans overthrow Mossadegh?

The U.S. emphasis on compromise

changed with the election of President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961). New U.S. officials also worried about Iran falling into the Soviet orbit, but they were willing to take steps that the Truman administration had not taken.

American and British officials saw the shah as key to their goals in Iran. Both countries wanted an oil-producing Iran firmly aligned against the Soviet Union. They aimed to rid Iran of the Mossadegh government, and increase the power of the shah, whom they were convinced would do their bidding. The shah, who was also anxious to increase his power, approved of the coup in advance.

The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) came up with a plan to overthrow Mossadegh. Although British diplomats and spies were no longer in Iran, they had a well-established network of Iranians



Photo by James Whitmore. ©Time Life Pictures/Getty Images. Used with permission.

The CIA paid thugs to roam the streets and intimidate those opposed to the shah during the 1953 coup. Here a famous wrestler known as Shaban “the Brainless” Jafari attacks two anti-shah demonstrators.

who worked for them. This included members of the clergy and the military, many of whom saw Mossadegh's reforms as a threat to their ideas and their power.

The plan was to convince the Iranian people that Mossadegh was corrupt, an enemy of Islam, and pro-communist. CIA agents bribed newspapers and religious leaders to spread these ideas. The CIA also paid for physical attacks on religious leaders and made it appear as if the attacks had been organized by Mossadegh supporters. The CIA bribed members of the military so that they would help carry out the coup and paid protesters to demonstrate against the government. U.S. involvement turned Iran into a hotbed of instability, rioting, and chaos.

Although the shah fled to Rome when it appeared that the coup might fail, the CIA convinced its Iranian allies to press on. On August 19, 1953, they captured Mohammad Mossadegh. Members of the Majlis, who had been bribed by the CIA or who were weary of Mossadegh's land-reform project, voted to dismiss Mossadegh as prime minister. General Fazlollah Zahedi announced that the shah had appointed him as prime minister. The shah, believing incorrectly that he was returning to widespread adoration and support, boarded a plane and flew back to Tehran.

“I knew it! I knew it! They love me!”

—Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi,
August 19, 1953

Royal Dictatorship

Anxious to avoid a repeat of the threats to his power and throne, the shah took steps to ensure that these events would not occur again. More experienced than he was when he took the throne in 1941, the shah was also anxious to modernize Iran and make it a more powerful country. He had the support of the United States and Britain, who wanted a stable, oil-producing Iran as an ally against the Soviet Union.

What steps did the shah take to consolidate his power?

To secure the support of Britain and the United States to which he owed his position, the shah moved quickly to settle the oil dispute that had sparked Mossadegh's rise to power. Terms were renegotiated so that Iran would receive 50 percent of oil revenues, an arrangement similar to other deals that the United States had in the region. The shah disbanded the National Front and tried and imprisoned its leaders, including Mohammad Mossadegh.

“My only crime is that I nationalized the Iranian oil industry and removed from this land the network of colonialism and the political and economic influence of the greatest empire on earth.”

—Mohammad Mossadegh, at his 1953 trial

The shah also banned the pro-Soviet Tudeh party. With the help of the United States and Israel he formed SAVAK (in Persian, SAVAK stood for Intelligence and Security Organization of the Country), a secret police organization, which he used to hunt down Tudeh members and other opponents. SAVAK became known for its mistreatment, torture, and execution of the shah's opponents. The shah's actions severely limited the public expression of political ideas and effective public opposition.

During the 1950s, the United States provided more than \$500 million in military aid to the shah. The shah, in turn, followed a strongly pro-American foreign policy that many Iranians didn't support. Memories of the U.S. role in the coup of 1953 persisted.

With an increasingly powerful military and SAVAK at his disposal, the shah had more power in his hands. While elections to the Majlis continued, the shah allowed only two political parties to exist. Iranians jokingly called them the “Yes” and “Yes, sir” parties.

The White Revolution: “Plagued by the West”

In the early 1960s, an economic downturn in Iran coincided with U.S. pressure on the shah to ease restrictions on political expression as a condition for ongoing financial and military aid. When the shah allowed the National Front to reconstitute, it criticized his policies. As political repression eased, unrest and discontent simmered again in Iranian cities.

In 1963, a cleric named Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini began to criticize the regime in his sermons and articles. Khomeini opposed the shah’s close relations with the United States, Iran’s sale of oil to Israel, the corruption of the regime, and Iran’s failure to help its masses of poor people. Other Iranians bemoaned Iran’s dependence on the West in general and on the United States in particular.

“Today we stand under that [Western] banner, a people alienated from ourselves; in our clothing, shelter, food, literature, and press. And more dangerous than all, in our culture. We educate pseudo-Westerners and we try to find solutions to every problem like pseudo-Westerners.”

—Jalal-al-e Ahmad,
“Plagued by the West,” 1962

What was the “White Revolution”?

The White Revolution was not a revolution at all. Rather, it was the name given to reforms the shah adopted to reduce growing unrest and dissatisfaction. The most important reforms included redistributing land to peasant farmers and sharecroppers, giving women the right to vote, and creating the Literacy Corps.

The Literacy Corps was part of the shah’s drive to modernize Iran by increasing education. Elementary school enrollment increased from 1.6 million in 1963 to more than 4 million in 1977.

Land reform had profound consequences. Designed to give Iran’s two million peasants ownership of the land that they farmed,



Photo by Ralph Crane. ©Time Life Pictures/Getty Images. Used with permission.

Village farmers clutching certificates to newly-acquired land formerly owned by absentee landlords.

the reforms took away land from wealthy landowners as well as the ulama who used the land to support religious schools and mosques. Still, 75 percent of the peasants did not receive enough land to even reach a level of subsistence. Dissatisfied, frustrated, and still impoverished, many migrated to Iran’s growing cities.

Other changes contributed to the growth of Iran’s cities as well. Improvement in access to health care lowered infant mortality rates and contributed to a rapid population growth. In 1966, the population was twenty-six million; ten years later it was approaching thirty-four million.

How did the shah change the status of women?

The shah, in an effort to make Iran more like the powerful Western countries that he admired, somewhat reluctantly gave women the right to vote and increased educational and employment opportunities for them. He also introduced laws that gave women more rights in marriage. Polygamy was still permitted, but

now the husband had to obtain the permission of his current wife before taking another. These reforms were a source of resentment among some of the ulama because they challenged their interpretations of Islamic law and replaced them with what religious leaders saw as Western values and norms.

Although some supported the shah's efforts to modernize, he angered many segments of society for other reasons. His family took millions of dollars of Iranian government revenues for its own use. Corruption was common and benefited those with close connections to the shah.

Why were relations with the United States a sore point for many Iranians?

The close relationship of the shah with the United States was also a sore point for Iranians. The shah spent hundreds of millions of dollars on U.S. weapons, at first with money loaned from the United States. The United States was happy to supply most of its advanced weapons to an ally in the U.S. struggle against the Soviet Union. With the weapons came American advisors, trainers, and businessmen. When the Majlis approved a law that made all Americans residing in Iran exempt from Iranian laws and taxation, the Ayatollah Khomeini spoke out, risking the wrath of the shah. Khomeini urged all Iranians to protest these laws, also called "capitulations," because he argued it would "...turn Iran into an American colony."

“They have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog. Even if the shah himself were to run over a dog belonging to an American, he would be prosecuted. But if an American cook runs over the shah, the head of state, no one will have the right to interfere with him.”

—Ayatollah Khomeini, October 27, 1964

Khomeini believed the shah and his reforms were an assault on Islam and the role

of the clergy in Iranian society. He demanded that Article 2 of the Constitution of 1906, which gave the ulama final say over the laws of the Majlis, be enforced. He proposed canceling all laws that he considered un-Islamic, including the one giving women the right to vote, banning "corrupt content" from television and radio programs, and prohibiting alcohol. Khomeini considered the shah to be an enemy of Islam and a ruler who was unconcerned about the welfare of the Iranian people.

Why did Khomeini's message appeal to so many Iranians?

Khomeini's ideas struck a chord with Iranians of many classes and ideologies. Some Iranians began to protest and demonstrate. When the shah's soldiers killed protesting theology students, Khomeini compared the shah to the man who had ordered the killing of Iman Hussein, a central figure in Shi'i Islam, some hundreds of years before. The students were seen as Shi'i martyrs. Although not all Iranians agreed with Khomeini's religious ideology or his interpretation of Islam, they were pleased to have someone speak out against the shah.

“We have not been allowed to form political parties. We have no newspapers of our own. But the religious leaders have a built-in communications system. They easily reach the masses through their weekly sermons in the mosques and their network of mullahs throughout the nation. That is why so many non-religious elements cloak their opposition in the mantle of religion.”

—Anonymous Iranian lawyer, 1963

What important idea did Khomeini develop in exile?

The shah ordered Khomeini arrested and exiled. Demonstrations broke out; government forces killed hundreds. Khomeini was exiled to the city of Najaf in Iraq. Najaf was a Shi'i shrine visited frequently by Iranian pilgrims. After Khomeini was exiled, these pilgrims

would smuggle pamphlets and cassette recordings made by Khomeini back into Iran.

While he was in exile, Khomeini developed a religious and political framework for Iran's future. The framework was called *Velayat-e Faqih*, which translates as the Guardianship of the Jurist. In it, Khomeini attributed injustice in Iran to the cultural and political influences of Western countries. Khomeini introduced the concept that clergy should be the ultimate conscience of the state. Khomeini argued that an Islamic government needed to replace the corrupt influence of kings, which he believed were illegitimate rulers.

How did the shah respond to Khomeini?

In response to Khomeini's call for change in Iran, the shah used SAVAK to suppress and weaken the religious leadership in Iran. SAVAK tortured and killed religious leaders, and the shah prevented large religious gatherings from taking place.

The shah hoped to reduce the influence of Islam by replacing it with Iranian nationalism and by emphasizing monarchy as the lynchpin of the Iranian nation. The shah saw himself as a successor to the ancient Persian kings and cited the greatness of Darius and Cyrus the Great. In 1971, he ordered a celebration of 2,500 years of the Iranian monarchy. The shah, whose opinion of himself was quite high, called himself the king of kings and the bringer of light to the Aryans (Aryan is an ethnic designation for the race of the group of tribes who inhabited ancient Iran.)

In 1971, more than 100 million dollars (almost 500 million in today's dollars) was spent for a celebration at Persopolis, the seat of the ancient Achaemenian Empire. The Shah ordered luxurious accommodations built, and drew up a guest list of mostly foreign dignitaries. Only a few wealthy or powerful Iranians were invited. Ironically, in a celebration of Iranian culture, more than a hundred French chefs flew in from Paris to prepare French food. Guests drank more than five thousand bottles of French champagne. The Shah held

an elaborate ceremony in Persepolis that celebrated the glory of Iran and Mohammad Reza Shah's connection to the tradition of the pre-Islamic Iranian kings.

Iranian leftists and intellectuals found this comparison absurd, as the Achaemenian and Sassanian dynasties had lasted for centuries while the Pahlavis had been in power for only fifty years. For many, one hundred million dollars spent on a banquet while Iranians remained mired in poverty illustrated the shah's lack of compassion and judgement.

How did opposition begin to grow?

From exile in Iraq, Ayatollah Khomeini preached that the Shah's celebration was against Islam and the Iranian people. Inside Iran, the ulama quietly spread the word that the shah's celebration of the Persian kings showed his disrespect for Islam.

“The title king of kings...is the most hated of all titles in the sight of God. Islam is fundamentally opposed to the whole notion of monarchy.”

—Ayatollah Khomeini

Anger against the shah grew. The shah repressed political dissent, but small groups met in secret. These groups did not all share Khomeini's vision for an Islamic state. Many, including members of the illegal Tudeh party, hoped for a reorganization of society along socialist lines. Others, who could be considered the political descendants of Mohammad Mossadegh's National Front, wished for an Iran with an effective parliamentary system of government, ruled with checks and balances.

Political dissatisfaction with the shah continued to grow throughout the 1970s. SAVAK fiercely repressed dissent through arrests, torture, and executions. In 1975, as part of his efforts to tighten control the shah decreed that Iran would have a single political party. He labelled all who refused to join as traitors and communists.

“Those who do not wish to enter into this political organization have two alternatives: they either belong to an illegal political party, like the Tudeh, in which case they should be jailed. Or with gratitude and without asking them to pay for a foreign exit visa, they may have their passport and go anywhere they would like.”

—Mohammad Reza Shah, 1975

Although Iranian dissatisfaction with the shah was widespread during the 1970s, he was able to remain in power for three reasons: the brutal suppression of his opponents and political dissent, nearly unconditional support from the United States and Britain, and the vast amounts of money brought into Iran through oil revenues.

How did the rising price of oil affect Iran?

Events in the early 1970s led to a dramatic increase in Iranian oil revenue. The 1973 Arab-Israeli War led Arab nations to impose an oil boycott on nations that supported Israel. Oil prices doubled worldwide, and the shah pushed the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to double the prices again. Huge sums of money from the sale of oil flowed into the Iranian economy.

The shah, who believed that Iran was about to become one of the five great powers of the world, devoted new oil revenue to large-scale industry and agriculture. He also spent billions of dollars on the most advanced American and British armaments. The United States continued to see Iran as an ally against the Soviet Union and was willing to overlook the abuses of the shah to preserve that alliance.

The huge amounts of money that flowed into the Iranian economy were not all beneficial. The new large-scale agricultural businesses failed to produce more food. Shortages led to price increases that outpaced growth in wages. Thousands streamed into the cities to find work. The cities were plagued by inadequate housing, slums, unemployment, and hardship.

How did international criticism of Iran’s human rights record affect Iran?

Iran began to receive international criticism for its poor human rights record. An organization called Amnesty International had drawn attention to Iran in 1975 for its terrible record on human rights. The shah, anxious to restore his international image as well as preserve the support of the United States, loosened press censorship and promised to allow more political participation. International attention to human rights in Iran curtailed the shah’s ability to use brutality and force against those who dared to oppose him publicly. The political opposition saw an opportunity to push for change.

“Today in Iran, a break is in sight: take advantage of this opportunity.... Today, the writers of political parties criticize; they voice their opposition; and they write letters. You, too, should write.... Write about the difficulties and declare to the world the crimes of the shah.”

—Letter to the ulama from the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, September, 1977

In this climate, the Tudeh party dared to voice its opposition to the shah. Other parties also began to organize. In 1977, the National Front sent a public letter to the shah criticizing his economic policies. The letter also pointed out the human rights abuses of the shah’s government, and called for the 1906 Constitution to be followed. They also demanded freedom of the press and fair elections. The universities became centers of discontent and the sites of protests by students. Workers’ protests also became more common in Iran’s crowded cities.

When Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) became president of the United States, he wanted to elevate the importance of human rights in American foreign policy. Nevertheless, he continued the U.S. government’s nearly unqualified support for the shah.

Hulton Archive. Getty Images. Used with permission.



Shah Reza, President Jimmy Carter, Empress Farah, and First Lady Rosalyn Carter at the White House in 1977.

“Iran, under the great leadership of the shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled regions of the world.”

—President Jimmy Carter, 1977

How did the shah’s efforts to discredit Khomeini backfire?

In January 1978, a government newspaper published an article attacking the Ayatollah Khomeini in an effort to discredit him. Theology students protested in the city of Qom and were brutally put down by the army. Several students were killed.

Leading members of the clergy who opposed the shah called for Iranians to protest and then to attend their mosques forty days after the deaths of the students. This was in accordance with the Islamic tradition of mourning for forty days and then gathering to remember the dead. Protests were peaceful, except in the city of Tabriz where the

government sent in tanks to control the demonstrations, and killed more than one hundred protestors. After the period of mourning, protests were held again forty days later. The crowds attacked buildings that they considered symbols of the West, like banks, liquor stores, and movie theaters. The government realized that if it tried to outlaw the traditional mourning rituals, it risked losing all control that it held.

Iran was teetering on the verge of revolution. The shah, whose health was failing in a battle with cancer, was losing his iron grip on Iran. He was also losing his grip on reality. His aides told him, and he believed them, that the demonstrators represented a small minority who had been misled by a group of activists. The shah clung to the idea that he could regain his popularity and continue as a great modernizer of Iran.



Image by Patrick Chauvel. ©Sigma/Corbis. Used with permission.

Protestors call for death to America and the shah in January, 1979.

1979: Iranians Debate Their Future

In the summer of 1978 the shah's government imposed a new economic policy. Intended to help the Iranian economy, it only added to his unpopularity. The new policy froze wages and led to a sharp increase in unemployment. As a consequence, more and more working-class Iranians joined the protests, which were still interspersed with forty-day cycles of mourning. The protests had moved beyond demanding the restoration of the constitution to demanding the death of the shah. In response, the shah banned demonstrations and imposed martial law. Nevertheless, protests continued.

On September 8, 1978 soldiers with tanks put down a massive protest in Tehran with tanks and helicopters. Hundreds of Iranians died on a day that would become known as Black Friday. Protests spread to include strikes throughout Iran, including in the oil industry. The largest protests were held during the traditional period of mourning for Iman Hossein. In early December, on the days that marked the martyrdom of Iman Hossein, more than two million people took to the streets of Tehran.

Many soldiers, especially those who had been drafted into the army, refused to fire on unarmed demonstrators. Some joined the protests against the shah. Without the full backing of the military, the shah's hold on power disintegrated. A politically moderate prime minister, Shapour Bahktiar, negotiated a departure for the shah. On January 16 1979, the shah boarded a plane to leave on "an extended vacation." The streets of Iran's cities were filled with people who sang, danced, and hugged each other in celebration of the shah's departure.

“The shah has fled, SAVAK is fatherless.”

—Slogan shouted by Iranian demonstrators

After the departure of the shah, Ayatollah Khomeini announced that he would return from exile. He arrived in Iran on February 1, 1979. Millions lined the streets to greet him.

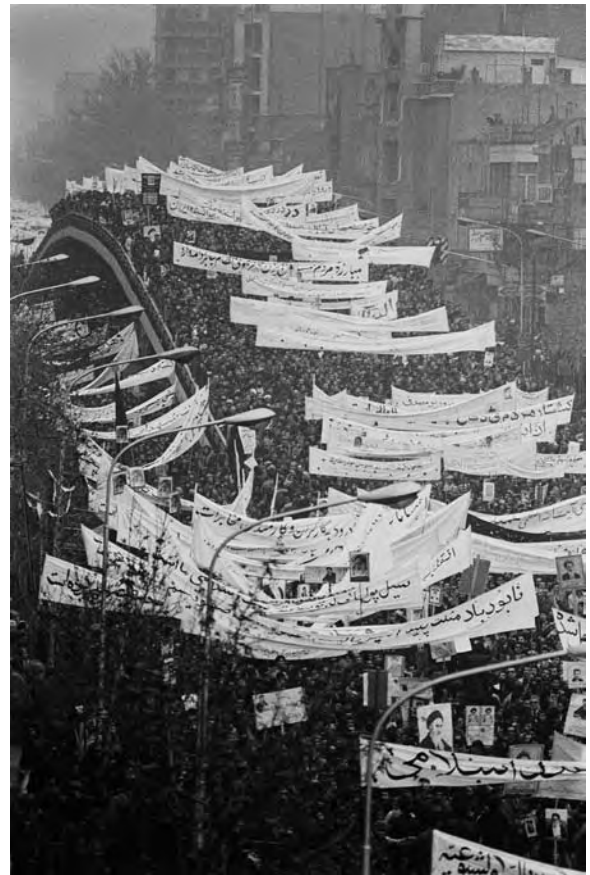


Image by Patrick Chauvel. © Sigma/Corbis. Used with permission.

December 11, 1978. Millions of Iranians marched to protest the shah.

Because the shah's security forces had eliminated most of the leaders of political resistance over the years, most Iranians saw Khomeini as the leader who had ended the tyranny of the shah.

Prime Minister Bahktiar's hold on power was shaky. Many Iranians saw Bahktiar as a puppet of the United States and a traitor because the shah had appointed him prime minister. Bahktiar vowed to review foreign contracts, to eliminate SAVAK, and to cut back on military expenditures. He also decided to declare martial law. Nevertheless, violence continued.

On the day that he returned, Khomeini declared that he had appointed a man named Mehdi Bazargan as the actual prime minister. After a tense ten-day standoff and additional

violence, Bahktiar resigned and Prime Minister Bazargan formed a coalition government.

In March 1979, a referendum was held. Khomeini worked behind the scenes to engineer the wording of the referendum: Iranians could only vote for or against forming an Islamic republic. Khomeini did not have the support of all the religious leaders in Iran, but he had enough.

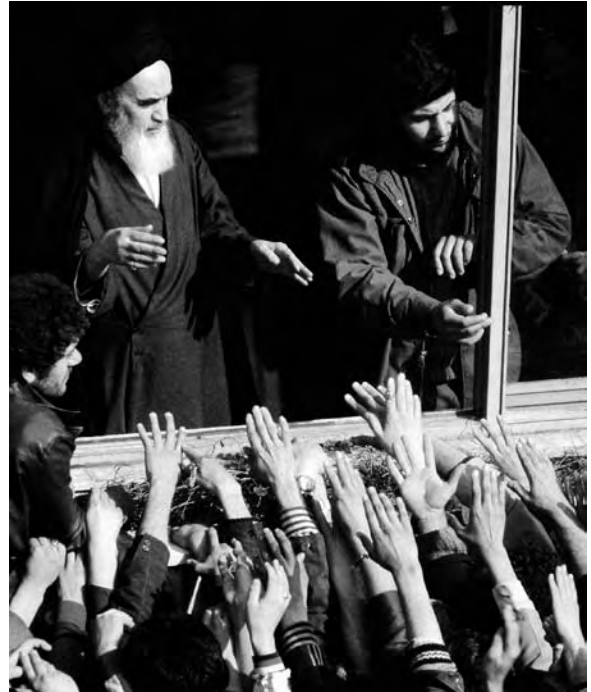
“We must ask them what kind of government they want instead of asking people to say yes or no to an Islamic republic.”

—Ayatollah Shariatmadari, March 13, 1979

Ninety-eight percent of twenty million Iranians voted for an Islamic Republic. At this point, Iranians began a months-long debate about exactly what the phrase “Islamic Republic” meant. A process of drafting a new constitution began.



Prime Minister Shahpour Bahktiar.



February 2, 1979. Ayatollah Khomeini is greeted by his supporters after returning from exile.

“All this happened in the hopes of having an Islamic republic, but what exactly will this republic be?”

—former Prime Minister Bahktiar,
March 25, 1979

Iran was a country in turmoil: groups from all points of the political spectrum attempted to assert that their vision for the future of Iran was the correct one. Some shared Khomeini’s vision for an Islamic state. Some hoped for a reorganization of society along socialist lines. Others wished for an Iran with an effective parliamentary system of government, ruled with checks and balances. The unity Iranians had used to overthrow the shah was dissolving.

In the coming days, you will have an opportunity to recreate this debate with your classmates. As you do, keep in mind what you have discovered in the reading. You should strive to put yourselves in the shoes of Iranians in early 1979 by considering how history may have shaped their outlook and politics.

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Options in Brief

Option 1: Develop a Social Democracy

For more than one hundred years, Iran has been edging towards social democracy. Today we must put these noble ideas into practice and reform our government. After years of suffering the tyranny of the shah, the Iranian people are ready for democracy. We do not need radical clerics or socialists to lead us; we will not find the liberty we desire with them. We must change Iran. Let us reform the government so that it is just, so that human rights are respected, and so that the economic needs of all the Iranian people are addressed. We must shake off the legacies of colonialism and ongoing foreign efforts to control Iran. The shah, who was the puppet of the Americans, is gone. The Iranian people are ready for an end of tyranny and corruption.

Option 2: Build a Socialist Future

Iran's socialists have led the large-scale opposition to the shah for much of the twentieth century. We have drawn our inspiration and guidance from the writings of Karl Marx, our Soviet comrades in Moscow, and other socialist revolutions around the world. The shah is gone; we are at a turning point. We must destroy the remnants of the shah's oppressive political system, write a new constitution, and elect a new government. We must end the

influence of the United States in Iran. Until we amass the power we need to build a socialist Iran, we must be willing to cooperate with clerics like Khomeini to protect the revolution. We will no longer be a pawn of the United States in their Cold War struggle against our socialist comrades. We are ready to remake our society.

Option 3: The Guardianship of the Jurist

Iran has been adrift under the immoral and unjust leadership of the shah, but we can set Iran on a path of righteousness. We can build a just government for all Iranians based on the principles developed by the great religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. He understands what Iran needs. Forget the democratic dreamers in love with the imperialist West, and the wild-eyed Marxists trapped in a web woven by Moscow. Iran can find a just and moral path for its future right here at home. It is time to end our reliance on Western ideas about government and build an Iran led by a just, religious leader. Only in this way can Iran cast off the chains of the imperialists, bring justice to the criminals who have led us for decades, help the poor, and rebuild our economy. We must build the Islamic republic around the principle of the Guardianship of the Jurist.

Option 1: Develop a Social Democracy

For more than one hundred years, Iran has been edging towards social democracy. During this time, emerging political movements have taught Iranians dissent towards our autocratic rulers. The ideas of constitutionalism and democracy have grown to become important parts of these political movements. Today we must put these noble ideas into practice and reform our government.

Our growing desire for a social democracy can be traced to the early years of the twentieth century. Indeed, in 1906 Iran paved the way and became a pioneer in the region when it forced the absolutist shah to agree to a constitution. In the early 1950s, Mohammad Mossadegh led a popular movement supporting the nationalization of the oil industry and once again demanding sovereign rights of autonomy. Mossadegh wanted to build a democratic Iran free of the meddling of the imperial powers; we, who follow in his footsteps, can succeed at this momentous task. After years of suffering the tyranny of the shah, the Iranian people are ready for democracy. We do not need radical clerics or socialists to lead us; we will not find the liberty we desire with them. We must change Iran. Let us continue the legacy of Mossadegh and the National Front. Let us reform the government so that it is just, so that human rights are respected, and so that the economic needs of all Iranians are addressed. We must shake off the legacies of colonialism and end foreigners' efforts to control Iran as part of their Cold War struggle. The shah, who was the puppet of the Americans, is gone. The Iranian people are ready for an end to tyranny and corruption. The Iranian people are ready to reform their government, protect their sovereignty, and create a democracy. Let all of their voices be heard.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 1:

1. Social democracy as a political system is understood by the populace. The leadership of such a movement can be trusted to take all the necessary steps to ensure its application.
2. The superpowers that control Iran economically and ideologically would permit this transition to take place and will not pose an obstacle either directly or indirectly.
3. The Shi'i clergy would accept this transition and would not see it as a threat to its religious authority.

Supporting Arguments for Option 1:

1. Social democracy is the only political system that could limit the power of the ruler and empower the people, thus making laws that better reflect the needs of the majority.
2. Social democracy would be an acceptable model for the United States because it: a) resembles the U.S. system of government and b) because it represents reform and not revolution. This would minimize the danger of a repeat of a CIA-led coup d'état.
3. Iran is ready for social democracy: there is a growing middle class that is educated and eager to enter the political scene.
4. Social democracy would ensure a secular modern Iran, where human rights would be respected; this would include respect for private property, women's rights, etc.

From the Historical Record

Ahmad Faroughy, Iranian Journalist, March 16, 1975

“The struggle for freedom of expression in Iran should...be seen as a struggle to uphold the nation’s cultural identity, the outcome of which will determine the country’s national sovereignty, and economic independence.”

Letter to the shah, author unknown, 1977

“...the only way...to reestablish national cooperation, and to escape from the problems that threaten Iran’s future, is to abandon authoritarian rule, to submit completely to constitutional principles, to revive people’s rights, to respect the constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to abandon the single-party system, to permit freedom of the press and freedom of association, and to establish a popularly elected government based on the majority will.”

Prime Minister Bahktiar, January 1979

“Martyrs who recently fell in Iran did not die so that one rotten dictatorship would be replaced by another as a new repression.”

Prime Minister Bahktiar, January 1979

“But one mullah is not a government. It’s not the job of one mullah to direct a government.”

Karim Sanjabi, leader of the National Front, January 10, 1979

“What the people want is a fundamental change in the apparatus of power. For once and for all they want to be involved in shaping their political destiny and to prevent outside interference.”

Abdel Karim Lahidji, founding member of the Human Rights Committee, January 17, 1979

“...after 25 years of dictatorship, what a chance for democracy and freedom.

“I’m waiting for tomorrow when the real struggle starts for democracy—tolerance for ourselves, prevention of anarchy, the start of a democratic life under the rule of law.”

Prime Minister Bahktiar, January 1979

“...some people have become accustomed to dictatorship. They accepted Mohammad Reza Shah’s dictatorship and maybe another future dictatorship would be to their satisfaction too. However, I am in favour of freedom and liberty in this country and nothing else.”

Prime Minister Bahktiar, February 3, 1979

“Any change in the form of government of Iran should be through free elections and not through demonstrations by an emotional crowd in the streets.”

Ayatollah Taleqani, February 5, 1979

“We, the Islamic leaders, do not have a claim on government.”

Prime Minister Bahktiar, in address to Parliament, February 5, 1979

“The Iranian nation and Iranian state are indivisible entities: one country, one government, one constitution, or nothing else.... We will tolerate this thing about anybody forming its own government until it is a joke and in words only, but if they take actions in this regard, we shall reply with our own actions.... If blood is spilled and if aggression is committed against the people, I will expose the aggressors without regard to their name or position right here [in parliament].... I shall remain in the position of the legitimate prime minister of this country until future free elections are held.... Whoever enjoys a majority, shall then govern.”

Ali Shayegan, February 24, 1979

“No dictatorship of any kind must be established by any side. People of any ideology must be free to express their views.”

Anonymous Iranian professor, April 15, 1979

“I only hope the present and future government will let people be free to think and say what they like. Right now there are signs that give you hope and signs that make you fear.”

Option 2: Build a Socialist Future

Iran's socialists have led the large-scale opposition to the shah for much of the twentieth century. We have drawn our inspiration and guidance from the writings of Karl Marx, our Soviet comrades in Moscow, and other socialist revolutions around the world. The shah is gone; we are at a turning point. We must destroy the remnants of the shah's oppressive political and economic system, write a new constitution, and elect a new government. We must end the influence of the United States in Iran. Until we amass the power we need to build a socialist Iran, we must be willing to form a united front with clerics like Khomeini to protect the revolution against a counter revolution led by the United States.

Our history suggests we are ready to lead Iran. Iran's Communist Party was formed in 1920 and reborn as the Tudeh party in 1941. Socialist groups have played an important role in Iranian politics ever since. For example, many Iranian militants were instrumental in spreading the communist revolution in the north. In the 1950s during the oil nationalization movement, socialist groups grew to a position of prominence in the Iranian political scene. Our ranks have grown in recent years. With the help of students and workers we can put tens of thousands of protesters on the streets. Socialist student groups, influenced by the success of the Cuban and the Chinese revolutions, know that Iran is ripe for such a transition. We are ready to expel the imperialists and capitalists who plunder Iran and who keep the masses impoverished. We will no longer be a pawn of the United States in its Cold War struggle against our socialist comrades. We are ready to remake our society.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 2:

1. Opposition to the shah comes as a result of unfair distribution of the country's wealth and the absence of freedom. Since the Constitutional Revolution, the social democratic model has proven itself incapable of empowering the people and giving them control of their own future. These things can only be achieved through socialism.
2. Iran can follow the revolutionary models of China, Vietnam, and Cuba. We are ready for the transition to socialism.
3. In the past, attempts to introduce change in Iran failed as a result of foreign intervention. This time, the massive presence of people on the streets offers a perfect revolutionary situation. We must seize this moment to bring about real revolution.

Supporting Arguments for Option 2:

1. A socialist model is the only model that would ensure Iran's economic and political independence from the United States.
2. A socialist model is the only model that can ensure the redistribution of wealth and a decent standard of living for all.
3. A socialist model is the only model that can restore the Iranian people's national pride through self-sufficiency and independence.

From the Historical Record

Ali Shariati, Iranian intellectual, 1976

“God looks more favorably on a ‘materialist man’ who does not pray to God, yet, having realized his social responsibility, serves the people, than a believer in God, who prays, yet, not sensing his social responsibility, does not serve the people.”

Tudeh Party statement, February 1979

“The Iranian society needs a fundamental change—a revolution which should change all the different aspects of life for the benefit of the masses. The only way to achieve the popular and democratic revolution is by the participation of the masses in the struggle and not by the heroic actions of either individuals or a single political group and party.”

Twenty-six-year-old Iranian architect, February 1979

“It’s inevitable that in four or five months there will be a fight between the communists and the government. The government is moving toward some sort of fascism.”

Tudeh Party supporter, February 1979

“I’m not opposed to Khomeini, but I’m afraid he will be trapped in the bourgeoisie and the struggle of the people will be ruined.”

Tudeh Party statement, February 1979

“The history of true revolutions shows that reaction and economic domination by imperialism can not be overcome by only achieving political independence and dismissing some of the most criminal officials of the old regime. The untouched economic position of imperialism and reaction poses serious threats to the future of the revolution. The undisputable demands of millions of deprived working people can only be fulfilled by crushing and destroying these positions....”

Tudeh Party Statement, February 1979

“Tudeh Party of Iran calls on all the forces participating in the people’s struggle to agree to form a united front on the basis of a joint programme which reflects the demands and aspirations of millions of working people and middle strata of our society as soon as possible. Our Party also emphasizes that this programme has to be the basis of a joint and united action in our future struggle for the compilation of a new constitution, election of the people’s assembly and the adoption of the constitution and election of members of parliament and national government.”

Tudeh Party statement, February 1979

“The content of the revolution is to eliminate the domination of imperialism’s monopolies from the economic and natural resources of our country, to secure total economic and political independence, to remove all the remnants of the pre-capitalist social system and adopt the socialist orientation of development, to democratize the political and cultural life in the country. At this stage, the necessary condition for revolutionary development in Iran is the overthrow of the old monarchist regime, to break down the reactionary machinery of the government, to end the rule of the big capitalists and landowners and transfer power from these classes.”

Tudeh Party statement, May 1979

“You must attack the Yankee imperialists because this is the only language they understand.”

Mardom, Tudeh Party Newspaper, May 11, 1979

“[Prime Minister] Bazargan’s tone is conciliatory toward the rich and angry toward the masses.”

Option 3: The Guardianship of the Jurist

Iran has been adrift under the immoral and unjust leadership of the shah, but we can set Iran on a path of righteousness. We can build a just government for all Iranians based on the principles developed by the great religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. He understands what Iran needs. Forget the democratic dreamers in love with the imperialist West, and the wild-eyed socialists trapped in a web woven by Moscow. Iran can find a just and moral path for its future right here at home.

For more than a decade, one man, Ayatollah Khomeini, has spoken more clearly than others against the excesses of the shah. The shah's regime systematically exploited our people, poisoned them with foolish ideas from the West, and ruthlessly oppressed us. It is time to end our reliance on Western ideas about government and build an Iran led by a just, religious leader. Only this way can Iran cast off the chains of the imperialists, bring justice to the criminals who have led us for decades, help the poor, and rebuild our economy. Since the Safavid era, Shi'i Islam has been a major moral force in Iran. Now it is time to become a political force. Throughout the twentieth century, groups of clergy have played a prominent role in social and political movements such as the Constitutional Revolution and the nationalization of the oil industry. Our time has come again. We must build the Islamic republic around the principle of the Guardianship of the Jurist, a learned, moral figure, who will have final say over all matters in Iran.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 3:

1. Iranian politicians have proven untrustworthy. We can trust our religious leaders to build a just and incorruptible government.
2. The shah's policies undermined Iran's Islamic heritage and forced cultural, political, and economic dependence on the West. An Islamic Republic is the only model that can restore pride.
3. Shi'i Islam reflects Iran's identity. It is an Iranian model; it imitates neither the West nor the East.
4. Shi'i Islam is progressive and modern. The Islamic republic will respect the sovereignty of the people and will base itself on a constitution.

Supporting Arguments for Option 3:

1. The Islamic republic will respect the sovereignty of the people. It will defend private property; it will release the political prisoners; it will punish the perpetrators of repression.
2. The Islamic republic will release Iran from its dependence on the West. Islam offers a social as well as an economic model that would safeguard Iran's autonomy.
3. Islam will pose as an obstacle to all forms of materialism, be it the Western social democratic model or the Eastern socialist model. With Islam, the Iranians are saying: neither East nor West.

From the Historical Record

Ayatollah Khomeini, Veleyat-e Faqih 1970

“The administration of the country, the issuing of judicial decrees, and the approving of legislative programs, should actually be entrusted to religious scholars who are guardians of the rights of God and knowledgeable about God’s ordinances concerning what is permitted and what is forbidden.”

Ayatollah Khomeini, December 1978

“...our religion associates politics with social problems and prayers.... From the beginning, [Islam] represented a political power, not limiting itself to problems of religious practice. In fact, if one refers to the books of Sunna [the practices of Mohammad], which are the main Muslim texts, one sees that they deal as much with politics, government, the struggle against tyrants, as with prayers.”

Ayatollah Khomeini, December 1978

“We want to exploit the country’s riches—mines, farming, petroleum—and to devote the revenues to the general interest. Our plan is not to protect the rich. We will work to help the poor and to oversee the fortunes of the rich class in order to balance social differences.”

Ayatollah Khomeini, December 1978

“We are for an Islamic system, that is to say a democratic regime founded on popular consensus and Islamic law. Western democracy is incomplete. Our democracy will resemble it but be perfected. ...[A]ll citizens of such an Islamic democracy, from the leaders to those at the bottom of the social ladder, are equals before the law. They are equals. There are no legal differences among them. Thus it is a democracy based on divine law which should be applied to humanity. It is really perfect. It is not a sham democracy or a dictatorship in practice, as are some other governments.”

Ayatollah Khomeini, February 1, 1979

“We will not let the United States bring the shah back. This is what the shah wants. Wake up. Watch out. They want the country to go back to what it was previously.”

Ayatollah Khomeini, February 1, 1979

“I must tell you that Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, that evil traitor, has gone. He fled and plundered everything. He destroyed our country and filled our cemeteries. He ruined our country’s economy. Even the projects he carried out in the name of progress, pushed the country towards decadence. He suppressed our culture, annihilated people and destroyed all our manpower resources. We are saying this man, his government, his Majlis are all illegal. If they were to continue to stay in power, we would treat them as criminals and would try them as criminals. I shall appoint my own government. I shall slap this government in the mouth. I shall determine the government with the backing of this nation, because this nation accepts me.”

Ayatollah Khomeini, December 1978

“All rights given to men are given to women. They shall have the right to vote. They shall be allowed to run for office. They shall be able to own their own goods. All those rights will be the same for men as for women. If there are things forbidden for men, they will also be forbidden for women. For example, the law on corruption will be the same for all. As for woman, anything that damages her decency and her honor is forbidden. Islam has insisted on protecting woman so that she would not become an object in the hands of men. The propaganda that Islam is hard on women, that they are mistreated in comparison to men, is false propaganda. Such lies are not accidental. They are deliberately spread by persons who find advantage in doing so.”

Epilogue: The Islamic Republic

Prime Minister Bazargan's provisional government faced many obstacles as it attempted to create order amidst ongoing strikes and demonstrations. One of the challenges came from the Ayatollah Khomeini, whose vision for the future of Iran was of an Islamic state led by a spiritual leader who had final say in major political matters. Bazargan favored the restoration of Islamic cultural values in combination with secular and democratic governing institutions.

Khomeini formed the Council of the Islamic Revolution. Composed largely of the ulama and guided by Khomeini, it claimed the power to veto policies of Bazargan's provisional government.

In addition, various revolutionary organizations made claims to power. Some groups retained weapons. Throughout 1979, there were many individuals and groups contesting each other for power and control in Iran.

The debate about the future of Iran among Iranians was highly charged, particularly about the nature of Iran's new constitution. In the early spring of 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters took steps to strengthen their position.

How did Khomeini begin to consolidate his power and weaken other political groups?

Khomeini's supporters organized three new groups that changed the political balance in Iran and challenged the authority of Bazargan's government. The first were the "Committees." They were essentially vigilante groups organized by local mosques, students, and workers. They were determined to prevent a counter-revolution and to enforce their own idea of Islam on others. They arrested men, women, and children, often arbitrarily. It was not unusual for them to invade private homes and destroy Western music recordings and alcohol.

A second development was the decision of the Council of the Islamic Revolution to

form the Revolutionary Guard (*Pasdaran*) after a leftist group assassinated a powerful cleric in May 1979. The Revolutionary Guard's task was to protect the Council from the army and militant leftist groups. Drawing from the ranks of the poor, the Revolutionary Guard became an army of the clergy loyal to Khomeini.

Finally, Khomeini and his supporters formed revolutionary tribunals to try and execute, most often without a fair trial, former members of the shah's government, the army, and SAVAK.

Iran's New Constitution

Prime Minister Bazargan's government revealed the draft of a new constitution in June 1979. It was similar to the constitution of 1906, but did not include a monarch. Neither did it give the clergy any special administrative powers. The cabinet and the Council of the Islamic Revolution approved the draft, as did the Ayatollah Khomeini after he added language that prohibited women from becoming judges or the president of Iran. Khomeini's support for this draft was probably a short-term tactic designed to give him time to influence the final draft of the constitution,

The Iranian people had elected an assembly of experts to produce a final draft of the constitution. The group was dominated by clerics who supported Khomeini's idea that the new constitution must be completely based on his idea of *Velayat-e Faqih* [The Guardianship of the Jurist], which gave supreme authority over the state to Khomeini as the guardian jurist and his advisory committee of twelve judges. (Six were experts in Islamic law and six were experts in the civil legal code.)

Tensions about the future of Iran were high, with many holding doubts about Khomeini's vision for the future. Khomeini, a masterful politician, used an important event to influence the debate in Iran. That event was the American embassy hostage crisis.

The crisis, which began in November 1979 and would last for more than a year, played a significant role in Khomeini's efforts to shape Iran's future.

What was the U.S. hostage crisis?

In November 1979, a group of Iranian students led by militant clerics seized the American embassy in Tehran. The students were worried that the United States was plotting another coup in Iran to overturn the revolution. The shah's recent admission to the United States for cancer treatment, and a meeting between Prime Minister Bazargan and high-level U.S. officials fueled fears that the United States was planning to return the shah to power. The students demanded that the shah be returned to Iran for trial. The students also demanded that the United States apologize for its role in the coup against Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953.

Although Khomeini had not ordered the embassy seized, he realized that it was an important political event that could be used to strengthen his hold on power. Khomeini used Iranian resentment of the U.S. role in Iranian history to rally popular support to strengthen his control over the government. What began as the action of a few students became an international incident. Khomeini rallied the masses against "The Great Satan," which is what he called the United States. Memories of the U.S. role in the coup of 1953 fueled Iranian anger. Khomeini also released selected documents captured from the embassy that showed that his political opponents had met with the U.S. government.

American officials pleaded with Prime Minister Bazargan and his government to intervene. When the students ignored his order to evacuate the embassy, Prime Minister

Bazargan's government resigned. Only the Revolutionary Council was left to govern Iran.

What was included in the final draft of the constitution?

The constitution in its final form included the principle of "The Guardianship of the Jurist" that Khomeini had espoused for years. Khomeini was given the new position of Supreme Islamic Jurist with final say over all political and religious matters. Khomeini's decision to allow active participation of clergy in political institutions and decision-making marked the beginning of a new era in Shi'i Islam in Iran. Never before had the clergy played this sort of a political role.

A Council of Guardians, made up of appointed Islamic jurists and other lawyers, had the power to review all the legislation of the Majlis. It also gave the Iranian people the power to elect a president, a Majlis, and municipal councils. In December 1979, fourteen million Iranians participated in a referendum on the constitution, and 99.5 percent voted in favor. The American hostages, after being held for 444 days, were released in January 1981.

What political opposition remained in Iran?

Not all of Iran's clerics agreed with



Iranians climbing the gate at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, November 1979.

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The Constitution of 1979: Structure of Iranian Government

Elected Government Bodies

Dashed lines represent appointments.
 Solid lines represent elections.
 The dotted line represents approval of candidates for election.

Voters
 • every Iranian over the age of 15 may vote

President
 • elected for up to two four-year terms
 • the second-highest ranking official
 • responsible for implementing constitution
 • candidates must be approved by the Council of Guardians

Cabinet
 • cabinet ministers are chosen by the president and approved by the Majlis
 • ministers can be impeached by the Majlis

Majlis
 • 290 members elected every four years
 • candidates must be approved by the Council of Guardians
 • can impeach cabinet ministers
 • all bills passed by the Majlis must be approved by the Council of Guardians

Assembly of Experts
 • directly elected body, but only clerics may run
 • appoints Supreme Islamic Jurist
 • candidates must be approved by the Council of Guardians

Unelected Government Bodies

Supreme Islamic Jurist
 • highest leader in Iran's political structure
 • appoints and controls military
 • appoints six members of the Council of Guardians
 • appointed by the Assembly of Experts
 • final say on foreign policy

Head of Judiciary
 • oversees enforcement of legal system based on Shari'a
 • appointed by Supreme Islamic Jurist

Armed Forces
 • regular military and Revolutionary Guard
 • all military commanders appointed by the Supreme Islamic Jurist

Council of Guardians
 • consists of six theologians appointed by the Supreme Islamic Jurist, and another six nominated by the judiciary and approved by the Majlis
 • selected for six-year terms
 • must approve and can veto bills passed by the Majlis if they are inconsistent with the constitution of Shari'a
 • the Council must approve all candidates for the Majlis, the presidency, and the Assembly of Experts

Khomeini's idea of the Guardianship of the Jurist or his interpretation of Shi'i Islam. Many of them worried that political power would have a corrupting influence on whomever held that position. They also worried that it would undermine the legitimacy of religious leaders.

“May God forbid autocracy under the cover of religion. Let us join our voices with the people and the suffering masses.”

—Ayatollah Taleqani, September 9, 1979

The first election for the presidency of Iran was held in January 1980. Khomeini forbade clerics to run in this first election for the position of president of Iran.

Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, who wanted an economy that distributed resources more fairly and an Iran free of foreign influence, was elected. Bani-Sadr embraced Iran's Islamic identity and culture, but was a supporter of a secular government. Ultimately, his vision for Iran would conflict with Khomeini's.

Why did violence continue in Iran?

Various groups used political violence to try to achieve their goals. For example, Khomeini and his followers began to rely more and more on violence and intimidation to eliminate political opposition. When American military helicopters crashed in a failed attempt to rescue the embassy hostages in April 1980, Khomeini stated that God had intervened to protect the Islamic Republic. Inspired by Khomeini's rhetoric, his followers launched attacks throughout Iran on any organization or group that opposed his idea of an Islamic state.

In 1981, a leftist group known as Mujahadeen-e-Khalq began a terrorist campaign to assassinate religious and political leaders. Historians have characterized the government response to this campaign as a “reign of terror.” The security forces arrested and executed thousands. Civil servants were forced to undergo loyalty tests. Universities were closed and coursework changed so as to emphasize

Islamic values. Only students who could demonstrate they were loyal to the principles of Islam were admitted to universities.

“For years we protested against the Shah's SAVAK for abducting people in broad daylight and subjecting them to beatings and torture during interrogation in isolated quarters. And now, in the name of Islam and the Islamic Republic, SAVAK and its apparatus of suppression, repression, violence, and intimidation is being reintroduced on a far more extensive scale. If a blind, crude, and violent fascism is rising to replace Pahlavi fascism, of what use would it be if it calls itself by a different name and hides itself under an ‘Islamic’ cover?”

—Ali Javadi, Iranian Writer

The changes that Khomeini wanted were cultural as well as political. Women were forced to comply to the code of hijab (veiling). In the 1930s, Reza Shah's police had forced women to remove their veils; Khomeini's police forced women to don them again. The press was prohibited from criticizing Islam. References to pre-Islamic Persian culture were discouraged. At one point a group of Khomeini supporters set out to bulldoze the remnants of the ancient city of Persepolis, but were convinced to stop.

War with Iraq

The new Iranian constitution included the goal of spreading Iran's Islamist revolution beyond Iran. The thought of millions taking to the streets, as they had in Iran, created anxiety within the authoritarian governments that neighbored Iran.

“...the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps are to be organized in conformity with this goal, and they will be responsible not only for guarding and preserving the frontiers

The United States during the Iran-Iraq War

The administration of U.S. President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) remained officially neutral during the war but did not want a victory by Iran's government, which was clearly hostile to the United States. The United States gave Iraq military intelligence for use against Iranian targets and financial credit to buy advanced American weapons. In 1986, when Iran stepped up attacks against Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf, Washington permitted Kuwaiti ships to sail under the American flag and provided them military escorts. In July 1988, an American navy ship in Iranian territorial waters, believing it was about to be attacked, shot down an Iranian airliner killing 290 civilian passengers and crew. The United States paid Iran \$133 million in damages.

During the Iran-Iraq War, the United States led an international arms embargo against Iran. However, in a contradiction of this public policy, the Reagan Administration secretly sold thousands of anti-tank missiles and military spare parts to Iran. The administration hoped this would improve relations with Iran enough so that Iran would help to free American hostages held in Lebanon. This goal was only partially met; some hostages were freed, but others were taken. The secret arms deals, which supported Iran with one hand while supporting Iraq with the other, damaged the credibility of the United States in the region and beyond. Money from the sales of weapons to Iran was sent to support the anti-communist *Contra* guerillas in Nicaragua. This violated a U.S. Congressional ban on support to the *Contras*. These events became known as "Iran-Contra" in the United States and forced President Reagan to admit he had known of the effort to bypass the Congress.

of the country, but also for fulfilling the ideological mission of jihad in God's way; that is, extending the sovereignty of God's law throughout the world..."

—From the Preamble to the Iranian Constitution of 1979

In neighboring Iraq, a secular government led by Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq's Shi'i majority. Saddam Hussein imagined that he would become the leader that would unify the Arab world and that Iraq would become the dominant power in the oil-rich Persian Gulf. Hussein imagined that Iran and its vast oil resources, weakened by revolution, could be easily conquered. This proved to be a miscalculation.

Saddam Hussein hoped to take advantage of an Iranian army in turmoil, and invaded Iran in September 1980. Hussein also hoped the invasion would prevent the spread of Shi'i Iran's Islamist revolution to Iraq. Hussein aimed to win quickly by concentrating on Iran's oil facilities. Instead, Iraq's invasion stalled.

Iran counter-attacked but lacked the strength to defeat Hussein's military. For the next eight years, the war see-sawed back and forth. Iraq had an advantage in air power, missiles, and chemical weapons that it received in arms shipments from the United States, France, West Germany, and the United Kingdom. Saddam Hussein also benefited from the financial backing of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Arab oil producers, who feared the Islamic revolution could spread to their countries as well.

How did the war against Iraq affect politics inside Iran?

The war helped Khomeini rally support for his vision of the Islamic Republic. Khomeini channeled the strong feelings of patriotism and nationalism that the Iraqi invasion provoked into support for his regime. He cast the conflict as a defense of Islam against Saddam Hussein's secular regime. Iran's forces swelled with millions of dedicated volunteer soldiers. Tens of thousands were killed charging Iraqi positions in human-wave assaults. Iranian soldiers often had plastic keys, which they were told would



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This 1994 photograph shows a farmer working in his field on the site of a battle during the Iran-Iraq War. Millions of landmines and unexploded ordnance still litter the former front line of the Iran-Iraq war.

open the gates to heaven, dangling from their necks.

Iraq's invasion increased nationalism and religious fervor in Iran. The remaining few who hoped for a secular Iranian government were forced from power. President Bani-Sadr, supported by secular middle-class reformers, saw war with Iraq and the direction of Khomeini's Islamic Republic Party as bad for Iran. Thousands of Bani-Sadr's supporters demonstrated in Tehran and other Iranian cities, but were met with counter-demonstrations that were often violent. With encouragement from Khomeini, the Majlis impeached Bani-Sadr and he fled Iran into exile in June 1981.

By the time Iraq and Iran agreed to a ceasefire in 1988, the war had claimed more than one million lives. Millions more were injured

or became refugees in huge battles of a scale not seen since the Second World War. The war cost each country approximately \$500 million. Iraq had gained the upper hand on the battlefield in the final months of the conflict, in part through the use of chemical weapons, but neither side could claim victory.

How did Iranian society change during the 1980s?

Throughout the 1980s, a process of "Islamization" of Iranian society occurred. In 1982, Khomeini decreed that all of Iran's courts and judges had to implement Islamic laws based on the Shar'ia. (The Shar'ia is a wide body of literature that lays out legal principles and norms but is not a legal code or single document.) Judges had to know Islamic legal theory.

School textbooks purged references to pre-Islamic Iranian history and instead focused on Islam and the Revolution. Women lost the right to attend school if married. On the streets of Iran, a Morals Police kept a watchful eye making sure that men and women who were not of the same family did not touch and that women were properly veiled. In addition to these social changes, Khomeini hoped to address issues of economic inequality.

Two of the principal goals of the revolution were social justice and an equitable distribution of wealth. To accomplish these goals, Khomeini's government increased its role in the economy, and began to take control of industry and banks. In the countryside, properties were taken from wealthy landowners and given to villagers and small farmers. This process did not go smoothly. There were sharp disagreements about how much control the state should take. With the government spending huge sums to pay for the Iraq war, it had less money to help reduce economic hardship and shortages of food. Housing shortages in the cities hurt the poor, many of whom had no choice but to live in shantytowns.

Between 1978 and 1988, Iran's gross domestic product fell by 1.5 percent per year. In 1988, unemployment reached 30 percent

and crime had become a significant problem. When the war with Iraq ended in 1988, the government faced an economic crisis.

Iran after Khomeini

One factor in Iran's economic crisis was its population growth rate of nearly 4 percent per year. Iran's population was growing while its economy was shrinking. Those who suffered most were Iran's poor and lower middle classes. These groups had formed the basis of support for the revolution. For them, the revolution had not fulfilled its economic promises.

The economic crisis was compounded by the death of Ayatollah Khomeini at age eighty-seven in 1989. The new Supreme Jurist, Ayatollah Khamenei, faced these challenging domestic issues.

He also faced significant international challenges. When Khamenei assumed power, Iran was isolated internationally. His predecessor's belief in exporting the revolution had worried and angered Iran's neighbors in the Middle East. Beyond the region, Iran was also isolated. Khomeini had worked to eradicate the influence and power of the United States, which he referred to as the Great Satan. He also had no interest in working with the other superpower, the Soviet Union, which he referred to as the Little Satan.

A newly elected president, Ali Rafsanjani, (1989-1997), began efforts to integrate Iran more into the world economy. He encouraged other nations to invest in Iran. Debates in the Majlis were broadcast live on TV and provided the public the opportunity to hear disagreement and debate about political and social issues. Rafsanjani asserted that coop-



Protestors at Tehran University in 2002 demand freedom for political prisoners. They display a picture of Mohammad Mossadegh (center) and other reformers. Mossadegh, who died in 1967, remains a political hero for many.

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eration, not confrontation would guide Iran's international behavior. While Iran did work to decrease its international isolation, its support of Hamas and Hezbollah, groups labeled as terrorist organizations by the United States, was a source of friction and an obstacle to improving international relations.

What was significant about the election of Mohammad Khatami as president in 1997?

Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Khamenei, retained the powerful position of Supreme Jurist, with final say over legislation and decisions about foreign policy. When the candidate for president supported by Khamenei lost to Mohammad Khatami, a senior moderate member of the ulama, it was clear that there was public enthusiasm for reforming the Islamic Revolution.

Khatami won for several reasons. First, Iran's population had changed dramatically. Between 65 and 70 percent of Iran's population were younger than twenty-five. Too young to remember the abuses of the shah, they had grown tired of the rules imposed in the name

of Islam. This included the prohibition of public contact between unrelated men and women and of listening to Western music or watching imported videos.

Khatami spoke out against “fanaticism” and for the rule of law. He signalled that he wanted to improve Iran’s international relations by calling for a “dialogue among civilizations.” Women and young people, hungry for a loosening of social restrictions and improved economic opportunity, ardently supported Khatami. Khatami proposed opening a dialogue with the United States, which had not had diplomatic relations with Iran since the hostage crisis of 1979-80.

Khatami’s reelection in 2001 with 60 percent of the vote signaled continued public support for his agenda. But the president’s authority was limited; the power remained in the hands of the Supreme Jurist and the Council of Guardians.

For example, in February 2004, the Council of Guardians disqualified many reform candidates from running for the Majlis. Many Iranians chose to boycott the election in protest of the Council’s action. Public demonstrations calling for reform and criticizing Iran’s clerics became more common.

“I would not be surprised if we see more of such protests in the future because the ground is ready. Our society now is like a room full of gas ready to ignite with a small spark.”

—Anonymous member of Iran’s Majlis,
June 2003

How has the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad affected Iran?

The presidential election of 2005 turned Iranian politics on its head once again. The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a religious conservative who supports the system of ruling clerics, took the wind out of the sails of the reformers. Ahmadinejad ran on a platform that focused on stamping out corruption and providing aid to the poor. Khatami and other reformers acknowledged the need to address the economic hardships of many Iranians if

they wanted to broaden their appeal.

“We were the party of the intellectuals, so we must change this to develop ideas for the poor and workers. We will still talk about democracy and human rights, but we should explain to people how it will make their lives better.”

—Former President Mohammad Khatami,
July 2005

Why is Iran’s nuclear program a source of controversy and international tension?

In the midst of domestic political challenges, Iran’s international relations with the world remain tense. The Iranian government claims the right to develop nuclear materials for peaceful purposes. President Ahmadinejad has staunchly defended Iran’s right to a nuclear program. Meanwhile, his assertion that Israel should be “wiped off the map” has increased international anxiety about Iran’s intentions. The dilemma for the international community is that it is difficult to distinguish between “good atoms” for peaceful purposes like nuclear power and “bad atoms” for military purposes. In 2006 Iran restarted its uranium enrichment program in a move that has heightened concern around the world.

Although many Iranians have a positive view of the United States, the relations between the Iranian and U.S. governments are tense. Iranian officials see the presence of U.S. military forces in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan as a threat to Iran. For its part, the United States is deeply concerned about Iran’s nuclear program and believes that Iran’s support of the Shi’a in Iraq fuels sectarian violence there. U.S. officials also condemn Iran’s support of Hamas and Hezbollah and are divided on how to deal with Iran.

Conclusion

Most Iranians are better off under the Islamic Republic than they were under the shah. Life expectancy in the country has risen from fifty-five years in the late 1970s to seventy years today. Remote villages, neglected by the



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A team at a soccer club for girls. Today in Iran, women and girls in public are required to wear a loose fitting cloak or coat and a headscarf that covers their hair. This is referred to as hijab and is required as a means of encouraging modesty and morality.

shah, now have schools, health clinics, roads, and safe drinking water. Nonetheless, economic hardship and widespread unemployment are ongoing problems.

Iranian politics have see-sawed between constructing a more participatory and open society and strengthening the power of the state. For example, in 2005 the Council of Guardians prohibited all but six of more than one thousand candidates from running for office.

For Iran's population, the majority of whom were born after 1979, the Islamic Revolution has lost its luster. Economic frustration continues to fuel debate and desire for political change. Repression of dissent through imprisonment and human right violations are common. Nevertheless, Iranians express themselves in protests at universities, on weblogs on the internet, and by secretly watching satellite TV broadcasts from the West.

Iran's ongoing struggle to incorporate

ideas about participation and democracy into its own cultural and religious heritage can be traced back over the past century. The political ideas that contribute to the continuous evolution of Iran have origins in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, the Mossadegh era of 1951-1953, and the Iranian Revolution of 1979. A desire for social and economic justice is as present today as it has been throughout Iranian history. The tensions between democratic participation, cultural values, and a strong government remain ever-present.

Iran is a country facing change, under pressure from both inside and outside, shaped by its rapidly growing young population and its relationship with the past and its religious heritage. Iran's future is uncertain. Yet its importance in the Middle East and the questions surrounding its nuclear program make understanding the history and values that shape Iran an urgent priority.

Chronology

ca. 1000 BCE	Parsa move into the region of Iran
ca. 600 BCE	Prophet Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism founded
530-330 BCE	Achaemenian Empire
220 CE	Sassanian Dynasty founded
637-651	Islam arrives when Arabs conquer Iran
1502-1722	Safavid Dynasty
1779	Qajar Dynasty founded
1813 and 1828	Iran fights wars with Russia and loses territory in the north
1857	Iran signs treaty with Britain giving British merchants trading rights
1872	Reuters Concession awarded and rescinded one year later
1891	Tobacco Protest
1901	D'Arcy Oil Concession awarded
1906	Constitutional Revolution begins
1907	British and Russian Empires divide Iran into spheres of influence
1909	Iran descends into civil war
1911	Britain lands troops in southern Iran to protect oil fields; Constitutional Revolution ends
1914-1918	World War I
1925	Pahlavi Dynasty begins
1941	Reza Shah abdicates, his son Mohammad assumes the throne
1941-1945	British, Soviet, and U.S. troops occupy Iran
1946	Riots at AIOC refinery at Abadan
1951	Mossadegh forms the National Front
1953	CIA sponsors coup against Prime Minister Mossadegh
1961	Shah imposes the White Revolution
1964	Ayatollah Khomeini exiled
1971	Shah celebrates "2,500 years" of Iranian Monarchy
1975	Amnesty International criticizes Iran's human rights record
1978	Large demonstrations against the shah begin
January 1979	Shah goes into exile
February 1979	Khomeini returns to Iran
March 1979	Iranians vote for an Islamic Republic
December 1979	Iranians approve new constitution that includes Veleyat-e Faqih
1980-1988	Iran-Iraq War
1989	Ayatollah Khomeini dies, Ayatollah Khomeini appointed as Supreme Jurist
1997	Mohammad Khatami elected president
2005	Mahmoud Ahmedinajad elected president