

Forum: Historical Crisis Committee

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Introduction

Present-day Iran is located in what was Ancient Persia. The word "Persia" is derived from several Greek adjectives including *Pérsēs* and *Persís* meaning country, used to refer to Cyrus the Great's empire during the fifth century BC. The earliest artifacts found in this region date back to around 100,000 years ago, going all the way back to the Paleolithic Era. During the 10,000s BC, early agricultural groups such as the Chogha Golan began to settle in around the Zagros Mountains--a region in western Iran. A portion of Iran was part of the Fertile Crescent, where villages like the Susa were first settled around 4395 BC. The two main Neolithic settlements in Iran were the Zayandeh River Culture and Ganj Dareh.

During the mid 300s BC, Alexander the Great defeated Darius III, who was king of Persia at the time, and consequently conquered the Persian empire by 331 BC. The next significant empire is the Sassanian Empire, which rose around 224 AD. The Sassanian Empire is known as the last Persian kingdom before the establishment of Islam. The Sasanian Era is considered one of the most important and influential periods in Iran. During this time period, Persia culturally influenced civilizations such as the Roman Empire, Western Europe, China, and India.

During the Muslim conquest of Persia from 637 - 651 AD, Islam became the official religion. Before the Muslim conquest, other religions such as Christianity and Judaism had begun to thrive in Iran. Nonetheless, as Islam was introduced to Iranians, the nobility and land-owners were the first to convert, spreading more slowly among the peasants. By the end of the 11th century the majority of the Persians had converted to Islam.

The Safavid Dynasty began in the 16th century and ruled through until 1736. Ismail, the leader of the family, claimed supremacy over the nation after having claimed descent from the Shia Imams. Such a position meant he had great power both religiously, and even more important politically. The Safavids quickly expressed their eagerness to impose Shia Islam on Persia's population, even to the extent of using military means (Ghasemi). One of Ismail's successors, Shah Abbas, is often seen as the greatest Safavid king, having defended Persia from several attacks from the Ottomans. In 1935, the Shah officially changed the country's name from Persia to Iran in an attempt to reflect Iranian nationalism. The name Iran is derived from "Aryan" that was the race of the ancient people of the region. The modern day ethnic composition of the Iranian people has remained quite constant throughout the centuries, seeing as about two thirds of its population are descendants of the Aryan people that migrated to Persia in 1500 BC. Modern day historians believe that the majority of other ethnic groups are also descendants from the Aryan people. Other minority ethnic groups include "the Azerbaijanis, the Khamseh, the Qashqais, and Turkomans. Some Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, and Jews also live in Iran." (Worldbook).

During the 20th century, Iran was among the world's unassailable nations: rich in oil and enjoying strong diplomatic ties with the United States, the United Kingdom, and other powerful nations. Few could have speculated the dramatic turn of events that would take place in 1978-79. It was Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, often referred to as the Shah, that was in power during from 1941 until he was overthrown in 1979. He had inherited the Peacock Throne of Persia from his father, Reza Shah Pahlavi, continuing to lead the monarchy in a similar fashion to his father. Iran's predominantly Shia population meant that the Shia clergy had significant influence over the people, something that was later seen through the Muslim Cleric Ayatollah Khomeini's influential leadership through the revolution. Islam is divided into two sects: the Shia (or Shiites) believe that all their religious leaders are descendants from Muhammed, stemming from the belief that only Allah can select the religious leaders. In contrast to that, Sunni Muslims believe that religious leaders should be selected by popular vote. Iran was, and still is, one of the few nations with a Shia majority.

He is credited with the modernization and westernization of Iran through a controversial campaign that started off with changing the nation's name from Persia to Iran in 1945.

His wishes to establish pro-Western and nationalist reforms were largely fueled by the country's history of economic underdevelopment (McNeese), and such reforms ranged from the exclusion of Arabic and Persian words from the Persian language to making Western style clothing mandatory for men as opposed to robes and turbans. Though many of these cultural reforms came under large controversy, other reforms such as new standards of medical practice and the replacement of urban slums with modern apartment buildings were often gladly accepted by the public. The Shah's first serious uprising occurred in 1951, and was led by his own prime minister, Mossadeq, whose dislike for the Shah had gained him popularity with the people. Recognizing him as a threat, though, the Shah collaborated with the Americans to allow a coup that brought him down.

The Shah's ongoing reforms of the country had fierce supporters on both sides: on one, citizens were hopeful about the direction the country was headed, where campaigns such as the one fighting illiteracy brought hope to the people; however, many were very unhappy in the way the Shah was slowly attempting to secularize the country, and outspoken critics such as Khomeini made sure their displeases were made public. Though religion did not define the Iranian revolution, it most certainly propelled it into action. The Muslim conservatives "hated reforms, hated modernization, hated the Shah and hated the United States" (McNeese). Notwithstanding the numerous changes brought by the Shah into the nation, the conservatives still saw inequality and inconsistencies in the distribution of wealth in the country, which set the foundation for their protests. The revolutions took Iran on the short journey from a key US ally to a fierce enemy, lasting from January, 1978 to February, 1979.

Definition of Key Terms

Shah

Title used to refer to the monarch of Iran. The Shahs were born into the throne, meaning that they weren't elected through a democratic system. The term was also used for monarchs in other regions such as Afghanistan and the Mughal Empire.

SAVAK

The SAVAK was the secret police in Iran established by Mohammad Reza Shah and supported by the CIA.

Shia

One of the main divisions of Islam. It recognizes Ali as Muhammed's first true successor. Shia Muslims believe that only God is responsible for deciding who will be the successor of a prophet. Therefore, they believe that God appointed Ali as Muhammed's successor, making him the first true caliph.

Sunni

Almost 90% of all Muslims are Sunni. Sunni comes from the word "Sunnah", which refers to Muhammad's behavior. Sunni Muslims believe that Muhammad had no rightful heir and that the next leader of Islam was elected.

Sharia Law

Sharia Law is defined as Islam's legal system. It is derived from both the Koran, Islam's central text, and fatwas - the rulings of Islamic scholars. They are religious values that form the Islamic culture. The word "Sharia" means God's unchanging law, which has now become a subject of dispute between conservative and modern Muslims.

Martial Law

Temporary rule where military forces of a certain area are given power when civil authorities are unable to function.

Islamists

Islamists are supporters of a political movement that urges governments to follow the Islamic laws; Islamists are similar, though not the same, as Islamic fundamentalists. To be Islamist is not a synonym of being Muslim; tension exists between the two. Islamists are against democracy and secularism, which

means that they believe governments should be heavily influenced by religion.

General Overview

Reza Shah

In 1921, the Pahlavi Dynasty began. Iran's leader and founder of this dynasty, Reza Pahlavi (also referred to as Reza Shah) established Western laws. He prohibited the use of hijabs for women and traditional Islamic clothing. If anyone broke these laws, the authorities used violence to force them into submission. The Shah began to experience growing and fierce opposition against him after he ordered all men be forced to wear European-style bowler hats in 1935. Thousands publicly showed their distaste towards the westernization of the country, and later that year the Goharshad Mosque rebellion took place in response to that resulting in an estimated 2000-5000 killed.

The Last Shah

Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in 1941 due to an invasion by Britain and the Soviet Union caused by the suspected alliance between the Shah and the Nazis. Britain and the Soviet Union appointed Mohammed Reza as the new leader, the son of Reza Shah. In 1953, Mohammed Reza had to leave Iran after an altercation with Iran's Prime Minister. Shortly after, Iran's allies facilitated Shah Mohammed Reza's re-installation into the country. During the following years, Shah Mohammed worked closely with the United States to prevent the Soviet Union from growing.

Ayatollah Khomeini

During Shah Mohammed's ruling, several radical groups rebelled against him for the lack of conservative rules. In 1963, Shia Ayatollah Khomeini led a revolution group called the "White Revolution", which targeted the government's ideologies. He aimed to lead a revolution which would result in equal rights for women among other changes in the law. He specifically called the Shah's form of government "destruction of Islam in Iran". This resulted in Ayatollah Khomeini's arrest in 1963, which incentivized riots all across Iran led by his supporters. After he was liberated, he continued to express his

opinion regarding the Shah. After several incidents, he was sent to exile in 1964, indefinitely.

Despite his exile, Khomeini's speeches about how rebelling against injustice was a fundamental part of Islam resonated across Iran. Khomeini suggested a new form of government, a government that required everyone to be monitored and overseen by an Islamic jurist. His hopes were that this would guarantee that Sharia law was followed and that Iran would abide by tradition. The book in which he wrote his ideas spread all over Iran. As a result, the movement gained more supporters and more people were joining the opposition.

Opposition Groups

One of the first opposition groups formed in 1977. It was mainly made up of middle-class Iranians who wanted the government to follow the 1906 constitution that stood for the peace of all Iranian citizens. Other opposition groups lied outside of Iran. These rebellious groups all had different ideologies and political standings. They recorded speeches which were illegally brought into Iran for people to hear.

A large part of the rebelling population consisted of Islamists. However, they didn't belong to the same group. One group was called the Freedom Movement of Iran, who believed that the Shah should be overthrown using the law. However, the rebellious group that gained the most power was that of Ayatollah Khomeini. Smaller opposition groups merged with his and would eventually become extremely important to the Iranian Revolution.

Years Before the Revolution

In 1974, the oil industry was beginning to skyrocket. However, this didn't benefit the Iranians as the Shah had promised. Instead, it caused an even larger division between social classes. In 1975, the Rastakhiz party was created, which Iranians were forced to join and pay monthly fees. This party started to adopt Populist ideology and started arresting merchants, which was not productive for the economy.

In 1976, the Shah put in place severe economic measures to reduce inflation. This caused a lot of unemployment and unconformity within the Iranian population. In 1977,

President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, send the Shah a letter emphasizing the importance of human rights. The Shah liberated 357 political prisoners as a response to this letter. At the end of that year, Khomeini's son died. The opposition believed that he was poisoned by the police, so everyone's attention was back on Khomeini. Once again, he started to gain supporters and the opposition gained strength.

The Shah's Decline

In the 1970s, the Shah's policies had started tightening up. He began experiencing new opposition groups rallying against him that were mainly made up of young Iranians. Between 1950 and 1970, Iran had been the recipient of over \$1.8 billion from the United States in the form of military-aid grants. The image of the United States in Iran began to worsen, and the Shah's relationship with them kept critics active with speculations that their power and military strength were the sole reason the Shah was still in power. The Shah seemed quite unperturbed by this, and still led his country on as if he had all the support of his citizens. This might have been true in 1963, when a referendum of the people was held over his new policies showing overwhelming support. His close relationship with the United States was largely driven from his hatred of communism, and established an autocracy in Iran as all other political parties had effectively been banned by 1975 putting in place one single party - the Resurgence party.

Despite Iran's successful oil sales and significant American support, the country as a whole was not exactly well off, with rising inflation rates and food prices in the 1970s. Poor farmers represented over 70% of the people in the nation at that time, and many of those moved to the city to find jobs however they were always in short supply. Government corruption was rampant and inequality widespread; the city of Tehran for example "consumed 50 percent of the country's available services and products, though it held only 10 percent of the population" (McNeese). While Tehran had often been lauded as the perfect example of the Shah's successful efforts at modernization, the city's successes were mainly limited to the north as the south still suffered basic problems that put it on par with slums. In Iran, the successes in oil had made the wealthy wealthier, with a controversial example being the absurd spending of an estimated \$200 million for the celebration of Persia's two and a half millennia anniversary.

The Revolution Begins*

It was the inequalities and inconsistencies between the upper and lower classes that was mainly responsible for the rising tensions. A significant number of citizens were firmly opposed to the heavily Westernized future the nation was heading towards, and distaste towards modernization grew. As the first protest of its kind kicked off in January 9th 1978 due to the government's article on Khomeini, it is important to note that not all of the protests were unified under one cause. Some were genuinely dissatisfied with how the economic successes of the country were not shared amongst all, while other more Muslim conservatives had a view for a revolution in the nation that would unite religion and politics. These religious opponents came in large numbers, and would often gather in local mosques to discuss their views with other revolutionaries who shared similar ideologies.

Overthrowing of the Shah*

In January of 1978, young students from religious schools started to take the protests to the streets. Consequently, many young Iranians followed their lead, protesting against the economic decisions of the regime. During one of the protests in March 1978, the Shah reportedly stated "Nobody can overthrow me. I have the support from 700,000 troops, all the workers, and most of the people". At this time, the Shah was already weakened by cancer and under pressure due to the threats against him. He managed to continuously alternate between methods of concession and repression against protestors. Thousands were killed throughout this period of demonstrations, and the martyrs began to play a fundamental role in religious expression. Soon, it got out of the government's hands to control these political demonstrations, where each death only served to fuel further protests.

On September 8 of 1978, as violence and uprisings continued to escalate at a fast pace, the government decreed it would go under martial law. Martial law is a means of temporary rule where military forces of a certain area are given power when civil authorities are unable to function (Britannica). Because the military was given authoritarian power, troops opened fire against protesters in Tehran, and hundreds were killed. This caused the work force to begin going on strikes. The oil workers were one of the first to go on strike, making the oil industry spiral downwards. On December

10, protests continued to grow and a large portion of the population took on the streets of Tehran alone.

During this time, while Khomeini was in exile for his political crimes, he was planning to overthrow the Shah regime. He coordinated his plans first from Iraq and then from France. In 1979, the Shah and his family fled Iran under the excuse of going on vacation. During the Shah's absence, the Regency Council was established to run the country, yet it soon proved unable to function, and so did the Prime Minister appointed by the Shah before his departure. Over one million citizens demonstrated on the streets of Tehran supporting Khomeini's cause.

On February 1 of 1979, Khomeini arrived in Iran after over a decade of being in exile. Ten days later, on February 11, the military forces declared their neutrality against the opposition, and the Shah's regime was officially overthrown. Bakhtiar, the former Shah, went into hiding and eventually into exile in France.

**Please note that these events are AFTER when the committee begins. They are part of the Issue Bulletin to help give you more context, but NONE of this will have occurred when the committee begins.*

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Opposition Groups

There were five main opposition groups that emerged before the revolution. The symbolic leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, intentionally kept his beliefs and visions for his country in vague terms such as "social justice" so as to not specifically identify with one single opposition group. While these five opposition groups were not radically different as they were all unified in their discontent with the Shah, there are distinct differences which will be outlined below.

Religious Conservatives

This group believed in the elimination of the monarchy in the "completion of the political revolution" (Abrahamian), but did not express any strong desire in the deep

social and cultural changes that other groups fought for. A significant number of their supporters came from religious officials and the senior clergy.

Religious Radicals

Also known as the Movement for the Liberation of Iran, this group was one of the largest and most influential of the opposition. Their large number of young followers protested with the intent of implementing radical social principles. This group was often seen as disorganized, though, as they had not quite made the transition from a “revolutionary movement against the Shah into an organized party for the creation of a new Iran” (Abrahamian). This meant that their principles and beliefs had not been translated into concrete plans and ideologies; this was seen as the group's biggest weakness.

Religious Reactionaries

A smaller group, this mainly included theologians—many of whom were influential in Iranian society. Their beliefs involved strict applications of early Islamic laws, and they detested anything that had to do with the Western world, such as technology and Western clothing. The strict application of Islamic law they believed in included, but is not limited to the stoning of adulterers, cutting off of robber's hands, and forced public veiling of women.

The Secular Reformers

This group was led by the National Front, and believed in the creation of a modern constitution for Iran. They advocated for a secular—or even democratic—republic, and found much of their support in “newly-formed organizations such as Writers Association, Lawyers Association, Engineers Association...” (Abrahamian).

The Secular Radicals

This party was divided into the Revolutionary Tudeh, the Tudeh Party, and the Fedayi. This Marxist-Leninist organization overall had few followers. They essentially embodied the country's “Left”, and fully supported the revolution against the Shah, but opposed the establishment of a dogmatic clerical state, fearing that it would endanger their own existence. The group mainly comprised of university students, some newspapers, and

trade unions.

Timeline of Events

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| 1978 January 9 | Thousands of citizens protest in Qom; religious city. Authorities take action and there are several casualties. |
| 1978 February 18 | Several protests are held to honor the people who died at Qom 40 days prior. |
| 1978 June 7 | In an attempt to calm down the public, the leader of the Shah replaces the leader of SAVAK police. |
| 1978 September 8 | Martial law is imposed and authorities kill protestors in Jarehd Square. This day is called "Black Friday" |
| 1978 December 10-11 | Millions of protestors want to expel the Shah. |
| 1978 December 29 | Shapur Bakhtiar is appointed prime minister by the Shah. |
| 1979 January 4 | Bakhtiar officially becomes prime minister. |
| 1979 January 12 | Khomeini forms a Revolutionary Council to oversee the Shah's exit and transition to a new government. |
| 1979 January 16 | The Shah and his family leave to Egypt. |
| 1979 February 1 | The Shah is back in Iran and is welcomed back by thousands of citizens. |

- 1979 February 11** Iran's general staff orders all military back to their barracks. This ensures that the Iranian Revolution happens.
- 1979 February 16** The revolutionaries start killing supporters of the Shah, including generals.
- 1979 March 30** Referendum is made and the Islamic Republic is formed. 99 percent of the people who voted chose this option.
- 1979 August 3** A new constitution for the Islamic Republic is made
- 1979 October 22** The Shah travels to the United States for cancer treatment.
- 1979 November 4** Iranian students take 52 Americans hostage from the US embassy. They do this so that the Shah is brought back to Iran.
- 1979 December 15** The Shah goes to Panama
- 1980 Jan 25** Abolhassan Bani-Sadr becomes the first president of the Islamic Republic
- 1980 March 23** The Shah is given asylum in Egypt.
- 1980 July 27** The Shah dies in Cairo at age 60.

Different Pathways For The Committee

Creating the Constitution

Since Khomeini was sent to exile, the Freedom Movement had been working on a

constitution for the new Islamic Republic. Some people were concerned that the constitution was too conservative, which led to the election of 73 members for the Assembly of Experts for Constitution. They didn't approve the constitution and Khomeini agreed that it should be solely based on Islam. Also, Khomeini ensured that he had more military power with the new constitution.

The Shah's Regime Continues

The Shah manages to resist the violent protests against him, and though thousands of protesters may die, he eventually remains in power. The traditionally conservative and primary sector-based population of Iran, though, is, in its current state, unable to keep up with the rapidly-industrializing nation, resulting in a lack of skilled workers. In addition, the workforce was constantly going on strike in order to protest against the Shah, therefore Iran's economy was experiencing a constant plummet. As for the social impact on the Iranian society, the Martial Law that was decreed may have continued for a longer period of time until the Shah's control had been reestablished.

Iran Becomes Secular

If the revolution led by Khomeini fails, Iran would continue to be under the Shah's rule. Khomeini's revolutionary group, called the "White Revolution", who targeted the government's ideologies, would have failed to reinstate Islamic ideals into the political system of the country. The revolutions and protests have swiftly been shut down by the Shah's secret police SAVAK, and Khomeini remains in exile. Small protests are still occurring here and there, however most of the citizens are beginning to accept the future of the nation. Less and less workers' strikes are occurring, meaning that the economy is slowly recovering with more labourers at work. The Shah's campaign to modernize the nation continues, and Iran is officially declared a secular nation.

When the Committee Begins

The year is 1978, it is September 8th. The economy has rapidly been declining. Where it had been producing six million barrels of oil daily in the beginning of 1978, it now only a few hundred thousand per day (New York Times). The Shah has exhausted most of his

options, and with few other cards left to play the government is being placed into martial law - meaning temporarily placed under military rule.

Let the crises ensue.

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