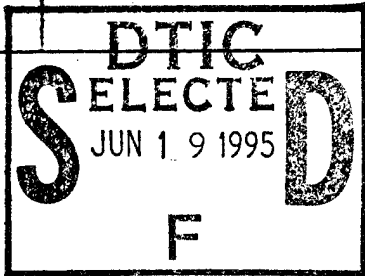


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**Abstract**

**Al-Afghani and Khomeini:  
A Study in Islamic Anti-Imperialism in Iran**

by

**Carol S. Northrup, M.A.**

**The University of Texas at Austin, 1995**

**SUPERVISOR: Hafez Farmayan**

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As the nineteenth century progressed, Iran developed increasing contacts with the West and its modern, industrial society. This led to the slow process of modernization in Iran. From the beginning of its journey toward modernization, Iran has also fought the imposition of those Western ideas which were not compatible with Iranian culture. This led to a long period of anti-imperialist activity. This paper analyzes the history of anti-imperialism in Iran from the beginnings of modernization in the nineteenth century through its final triumph in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In doing this it will focus on two different characters with surprisingly similar goals: Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al Afghani," the father of Islamic anti-imperialism in the Muslim world, and the Ayatollah Khomeini, whose Islamic Revolution finally succeeded in ending the influence of Western powers in Iran.

95070

**Al-Afghani and Khomeini:  
A Study in Islamic Anti-Imperialism in Iran**

by

Carol Stuart Northrup, B.S.

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of the University of Texas at Austin  
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of the Requirements  
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Master of Arts

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May 1995

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by

Carol Stuart Northrup

1995

To Parker

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I would like to thank Dr. Farmayan for his invaluable insight, wisdom and guidance. Without his patience and knowledge, this project would not have been possible. Thank you also to my parents, who have always been a source of inspiration for my education. Finally, I thank my husband, Parker for his unending support and encouragement. Of course I take sole responsibility for the content and any deficiencies contained in this thesis.

11 April 1995

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## Introduction

As the nineteenth century progressed, Iran developed increasing contacts with the West and its modern, industrial society. This acquainted some Iranians with events occurring in European science and culture, and gradually led to the slow process of modernization in Iran. With increased modernization, however, many Iranians felt threatened by the West. Iran was ready for social, scientific and technological progress, but its people were not prepared to exchange their way of life for an entirely foreign one. What Iranians (especially religious leaders and the monarchy) sought was a modern Iran that did not damage or radically change the Iranian way of life. Western imperialist ambitions in the region exacerbated these conflicting feelings amongst Iranians.

From the beginning of its journey toward modernization, Iran has also sought to fight the imposition of Western ideas which were not compatible with Iranian culture. This has led to a long period of anti-imperialist activity. This paper will attempt to analyze the history of anti-imperialism in Iran from the beginnings of modernization in the nineteenth century through the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In doing this it will focus on two very different characters with surprisingly similar goals: Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani" and the Ayatollah Ruholla Musavi Khomeini. Al-Afghani was in many ways



the father of anti-imperialism in the Muslim world, and was the forerunner of a certain type of religious leaders who sought to change Iran's autocratic government and to end Western colonialism in Muslim lands. Khomeini presided over the culmination of anti-imperialist goals in Iran. His Islamic Revolution finally succeeded in ending the influence of Western powers in Iran. The great irony lies in the fact that his success was made possible by Western technology and the Iranian "awakening" that occurred largely as a result of exposure to Western concepts and philosophies.

A history of anti-imperialism in Iran must necessarily begin with a discussion of modernization. This paper will therefore very briefly highlight the primary modernizing elements of nineteenth century Iran. It will then move on to analyze the life and works of al-Afghani and the beginnings of the anti-imperialist movement. Nearly one hundred years separate the lives of al-Afghani and Khomeini. During this period the anti-imperialist movement progressed and matured. Chapter three will outline some of the more important anti-imperialist incidents in Iran during the twentieth century. While the scope of this project does not permit in-depth analysis of these events, they will each be fully discussed in the context of their anti-imperialist impact. The final chapters will analyze Khomeini, his life, works and conception of the Islamic government, which culminated in the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79.

## Chapter 1: Beginnings of Modernization in Nineteenth Century Iran

At the root of Iranian anti-imperialism is the conflict between modernization and preservation of a proud and ancient culture. A study of anti-imperialism must then begin with a discussion of modernization in Iran. Beginning in the nineteenth century, Iran began the very difficult process of applying the intellectual and material changes that had put Europe on a superior level since the seventeenth century. Adapting Western civilization to traditional Persian society was no easy feat. Modernization in nineteenth century Iran was influenced primarily influenced by the prominent writings and literature, technological advances, and influential personalities of the time.

Descriptive and critical writings have played an extremely important role in the modernization and awakening of the Persian people from early in the nineteenth century. The earliest work of this kind is a book entitled *Tohfah ol-'Alam* by 'Abdol-Latif Musavi Shushtari, which is a social and political history of Persia and the world.<sup>1</sup> It is the first Persian work dealing with the political history of modern Europe. *Tohfah ol-'Alam* was fairly unique, in that it was purely historical. Most of the writings of this period were in the form of travel accounts. At first there were few such memoirs;

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<sup>1</sup>Hafez Farmayan, "The Forces of Modernization in Nineteenth Century Iran," in Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East, ed. William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 132.

but as contact with the West increased, their numbers grew. During the second half of the nineteenth century, travel literature became very voluminous and influential. These accounts provide a wealth of information on all aspects of Iranian life and of Europe as seen through the eyes of Iranian travelers. They were repeatedly copied and widely read. The ideas expressed in this genre of literature penetrated deeply enough to affect the thoughts and actions of the Iranian educated class.<sup>2</sup> The travel memoir was a significant channel through which the culture of Europe was passed.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, writings emerged which were highly critical of Persia's political and social situation which deeply affected modernization. Perhaps the most influential of these were the writings of Mirza Malkam Khan, an Iranian Armenian who converted to Shi'ism. He was Iran's ambassador to London, but fell out of favor with the Shah over the cancellation of a concession for a national lottery system in Persia. Upon the Shah's cancellation of the concession, Malkam Khan kept the cancellation a secret, and then proceeded to sell it as if it were his own. A huge scandal and court battle followed, and Malkam Khan was stripped of all his honors and titles and banished from government service.<sup>3</sup> In the ensuing ten years, Malkam Khan remained in London waging war on the Shah and his government through his newspaper *Qanun*.

The primary purpose of *Qanun* was to attack the shah's regime as backward and repressive. He centered his writing on the need to adopt

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup>Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 2 (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1958): 398.

Westernized reform and the necessity to codify the Shari'a into a European-style justice system and constitution.<sup>4</sup> Malkam Khan had a thorough understanding of the West and a gift for communicating his ideas in terms his fellow Iranians could understand. He believed that the answer to Iran's political and social ills was wholesale adoption of Western political ideas and culture. However, he realized that the only way to make European reforms acceptable to Iranians was to present them in an Islamic guise. Therefore, he followed a policy of attributing modern legal and political ideas to Islam, using the argument that these modern notions were first taken by Europeans from Islam.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to his newspaper, Malkam wrote hundreds of reports to his government. In these reports he boldly criticized and even berated the shah, his prime ministers and the Persian government in general. Although *Qanun* was officially banned in Iran, it was smuggled in, and was eagerly sought out and avidly read by the elite, the nobility, the royal family and even the Shah himself.<sup>6</sup> The influence of Malkam Khan's writings in the dissemination of modern Western political thought should not be underestimated.

The critical writings of other intellectuals in nineteenth century Iran also aided in modernization. Mostashar od-Dowleh, a contemporary of Malkam Khan, wrote advocating the construction of trans-Persian railways and the establishment of a code of law under a constitutional form of

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<sup>4</sup>Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1973), p. 191.

<sup>5</sup>Nikki R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup>Farmayan, p. 139.

government. During the nineteenth century many Western ideas came to Persia via Russia. Two Iranians who resided in Russia took significant part in the awakening of Persia were Fath 'Ali Akhundov and Mirza 'Abdol-Rahim Tabrizi. Akhundov was a playwright whose comical satires targeted the clergy, the nobility, and the wealthy middle class. His solution for the modernization of Iran was a curtailment of the influence and power of the clergy and the ruling class. Mirza 'Abdol-Rahim Tabrizi, known as Talebov directed his writings at the problems of modernization in Iran. Both Talebov and Akhundov were widely read and respected by the Iranian intelligentsia and ruling class. These authors' mode of criticism became so popular that they could not help but increase the flow of Western ideas into Persia.

After the introduction of the printing press into Persia in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a number of important books which had a modernizing influence were published by the government. By the order of Naser od-Din Shah a department of Translation and Publication was established which systematically translated books from European languages in history, geography, natural sciences, military science and other subjects. The immense body of literature produced by this Department became an important modernizing factor in the second half of the nineteenth century in Iran.

The introduction of social and scientific innovations proceeded at a slower pace in Iran than it did in other Middle Eastern countries which were outright Western colonies or protectorates. The fact that Iran remained politically independent through the age of imperialism allowed for the slower

penetration of Western materialism.<sup>7</sup> This gave the country the advantage of being able to absorb new concepts at its own pace rather than at a pace forced by a Western colonial power.

The introduction of printing was undoubtedly the most important technical innovation brought from Europe. In 1819 a printing press was set up in Tabriz. In 1824 a press was established in Tehran and in 1835, the lithographic process was introduced. This method was especially popular because it allowed for the reproduction of calligraphy.<sup>8</sup> It was not long until presses were set up in Isfahan and other major cities.

Another innovation crucial to the modernization of Iran was the newspaper. The first was published by Mirza Saleh, in Tehran in 1835. It was published under the title "Current News from the Capital," and contained items of general interest from Persia and Europe. The second was printed by order of the Grand Vizier, Amir-e Kabir, and was a weekly journal containing internal and foreign news. In 1868 Naser od-Din Shah called for the establishment of four newspapers, all of which were published and sponsored by the government. Imperial policy required that all significant newspapers be sent to important officials at the capital, and also required provincial governors to distribute them.<sup>9</sup> This greatly facilitated the spread of new information and ideas to more remote areas of the country.

The greatest journalistic impact, however, was made by newspapers published abroad where they were outside the government's control, and

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p. 144.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 145.

<sup>9</sup>ibid, p. 147.

criticisms and ideas could be expressed more freely. In spite of the fact that most of these newspapers were officially banned, they were usually somehow circulated within the country. Such was the case with Mirza Malkam Khan's *Qanun*. All in all, the influence of journalism as a modernizing factor in Persia was extremely important.

Education is another important component of modernization. No real progress was made in this area until after the assassination of Naser od-Din Shah in 1896.<sup>10</sup> Naser od-Din's successor, Mozaffar od-Din Shah, was weak and indecisive. While his lack of leadership led to a period of general chaos for the country, it did allow for the establishment, by a few strong, influential citizens, of several private schools, adapted from European models. The first of these schools was established by Mirza Hasan Roshdiyeh in Tabriz. This school was soon closed in 1890, but six years later, Amin od-Dowleh, governor of Azerbaijan, and a firm believer in Westernization, recalled Roshdiyeh and gave him official support for his school. In 1897, Roshdiyeh set up a similar school in Tehran. Others followed this example, and Mozaffar od-Din Shah lent his official support to the new education system by founding the Society for Education. By 1906 thirty-six elementary schools and the "College of political Science" had been established.<sup>11</sup>

Iran's long history of secret organizations and brotherhoods led many of its citizens to participation in Freemasonry when Iran

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 148.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, p. 149.

reestablished contact with Europe. The Masonic movement had been known to Iranians before that time, but with increased European contact, the movement became a significant force within Persian elite and intellectual society. It was Mirza Malkam Khan who established Freemasonry as a political and social force in Iran.<sup>12</sup> He received permission from the Shah for its official establishment, and it was joined by many persons in the royal family and the nobility and the intelligentsia. However, Naser od-Din Shah soon became suspicious of some of the society's political activities, and issued a royal decree forbidding its operation.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to the shah's intention, Freemasonry flourished and assumed an important role in the Persian awakening. Connected to all the centers of Freemasonry in Europe, the society helped spread Western thought to its members. During the constitutional rebellion, Freemasonry served as a political organization for those seeking constitutional, democratic government.

The installation of the telegraph and postal systems in Iran was another giant step toward modernization, helping to eliminate the centuries-old isolation of many regions of the country. They provided Iran with infinitely better communications with the rest of the world, and also within its own boundaries. The post and telegraph systems allowed for the spread of modernizing concepts beyond the capital and a few major urban centers, to the remotest areas.

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<sup>12</sup>Algar, p. 36-37.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p. 38.



The writings and innovations of modernization would have been meaningless without strong personalities to make use of them. While it is certain that there are countless personalities who facilitated the modernization of Iran, only a few who stand above the rest will be mentioned here.

The first of these was 'Abbas Mirza, crown prince under Fath 'Ali Shah. At the age of sixteen he commanded the Persian army in two campaigns against Russia, both of which ended in the crushing defeat of the Persian army by a much more modern Russian one. These humiliating defeats instilled in 'Abbas Mirza a passion for modernization. He saw modernization as the only way to check further Russian aggression. He pleaded with his father to retrain, reorganize and re-equip the army and to introduce more modern education for his subjects. The young crown prince faced considerable opposition from his father and brothers who failed to see the value of funding such ventures.

'Abbas Mirza was the first to see the advantages to sending young men to Europe for study, and in 1811 he sent two students to London with a British ambassador to study. Hajji Baba-ye Afshar, one of these first two young students, finished his study of medicine in six years and returned to Tabriz where he was appointed as chief physician to 'Abbas Mirza.<sup>14</sup> In addition to his success in medicine, Mirza Hajji Baba also became influential in politics, and went to St. Petersburg as a member of the Khosrow embassy.

In 1815 'Abbas Mirza sent a group of five more young men to Britain

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<sup>14</sup>Farmayan, p. 121.

for study. Despite the problems created by their general lack of knowledge about European customs, all five complete their study by 1819 and returned to Tabriz where 'Abbas Mirza put them to work using their newly acquired skills. These first European-educated protégés of 'Abbas Mirza opened Persia to a whole new world of technologies and ideas.

The most famous of these early scholars was Mirza Mohammad Saleh, who mastered the mechanics of the printing press while abroad, and, as has already been mentioned, eventually established Persia's first newspaper. He later wrote an account of his travels and experiences in Europe which contributed to the important body of travel literature whose importance has also been previously discussed. In his memoirs, Mirza Saleh discusses everything he sees or learns in Europe. In addition to his descriptions of European political and social institutions and history, he denounces the actions of Muslim clergymen in obstructing reforms and modernization in Iran.<sup>15</sup>

Between 1819 when the first students returned from abroad and 1840 when the second group was sent, Persian leaders made little conscious effort to modernize or reform. During this time the humiliation and reparations resulting from the 1828 Treaty of Turkmanchay made Persians and their leaders reluctant to accept new ideas and Western-style progress. Contacts between Persia and Europe during this time were tainted by an imperialistic aspect that soured attitudes toward Western reform. Iranian reactions to nearly all European contacts at this time were hostile. This does not mean

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p. 123.

that during this time there was no awareness of the progress being made in other parts of the world.

Records of the embassy of Khosrow Mirza to Russia in 1829 document how well informed certain of the Iranian elite were as to the need of their country for progress and reform and as to what was happening in neighboring nations.<sup>16</sup> The record of the attitudes and impressions of these distinguished, powerful members of the Iranian elite is a remarkable record of their awareness of the progress in Russia, and the lack of modernization and progress in Iran.

It took several years for Iran to recover from the devastating psychological and economic effects of the Russo-Persian wars, but in 1845 Mohammad Shah (1834 - 48) was persuaded to send more students abroad for study. Due to the strained relations between Iran and Great Britain, the government turned to France for help, and five students were sent to Paris to study. From this point forward, the sending of students abroad for technical training became routine, and these Western-trained students have had a significant modernizing effect on Iran during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Reform and modernization programs were undertaken first by Persian rulers or by the highest ranking members of the governing elite. During the mid and latter nineteenth century, these reforms were largely the work of three personalities: Mirza Taqi Khan Amir-e Kabir (1848-51), Naser od-Din

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 124.

Shah (1848-96), and Mirza Hosain Khan Sepahsalar (1870-73).<sup>17</sup> Let us turn now to a brief discussion of these three pivotal personalities in modern Persian history.

Mirza Taqi Khan, more commonly known as Amir-e Kabir, was born in the court of 'Abbas Mirza, and rose rapidly through the ranks of Persian bureaucracy from a clerk in the chief minister's office to the head of a border dispute mission in Turkey. With the succession of sixteen year-old Naser od-Din Shah to the throne in 1848, Amir-e Kabir was appointed as the chief minister, and thus was given the title "Amir-e Kabir" or "first man of the realm." As regent, he ruled Persia until 1851. Then, court intrigues and foreign meddling combined with the extreme youth of the new Shah caused his fall from power, and eventual death. Later, with the benefit of hindsight and maturity, Naser od-Din was to gravely regret his part in the destruction of his mentor.

During his relatively short tenure as regent of the Persian empire, Amir-e-Kabir effected considerable reforms. In 1851 he established the Polytechnic college in Tehran, a Western-styled college from which many esteemed statesmen and leaders of Iran have been graduates. He also set up numerous small factories for military equipment, textiles and glass. These factories later formed the center for a new industrial system in Persia.<sup>18</sup> He ordered an overview and several reforms to the military organization, as well as review and reform of the justice system. Finally, as mentioned before, he

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid, 127.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p. 127.

contributed to the general awakening of the Iranian people by establishing the first regularly published newspaper in Iran.

No discussion of the history of nineteenth century Iran could be complete without Naser od-Din Shah. The history of the second half of the century is a history of his reign--he had ruled for fifty years when he was assassinated by one of al-Afghani's disciples in 1896. Naser od-Din came to the throne very young, and was always torn between his desire to be a liberal, generous monarch, and his fear of losing control if he did not maintain a firm hand. At first he favored the nobility's education abroad and encouraged travel. In the early years of his reign, he encouraged and supported reform and modernization. He made three trips to Europe himself, and upon his return from each of them, instituted a number of reforms and innovations which greatly helped the cause of modernization. It is clear that in many instances Naser od-Din was sincerely eager for reform. He was often a chief instigator of programs for modernization and Progress.

As his reign progressed, however, the spread of imperialism and the increasing influence of a very conservative clergy so threatened the shah that he felt the need to keep Persia in an "unprogressive state"<sup>19</sup> in order to maintain power. He became reactionary and inflexible, and began to be known as an indifferent, reactionary monarch.<sup>20</sup> He placed rigid censorship on newspapers and banned travel in an effort to impede further change within

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<sup>19</sup>Sykes, p. 395.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, p. 374.

his borders. However, the more autocratic the shah became, the more insistent the demand for change.

Another man who effected great modernization reforms during Naser od-Din Shah's reign was Mirza Hosain Khan Moshir od-Dowleh. He was among the first Iranians to be educated abroad (at private expense) and began his long career of government service at age twenty three as a diplomatic representative to Bombay. From there he went on to posts in Russia and the Ottoman Empire (where he acquired the title Moshir od-Dowleh). In 1870 he was recalled to Tehran to serve as Minister of Justice, Minister of War, Chief of the Army, and finally, in 1871, he was made Grand Vizier. He held this position for two years until he was dismissed in 1873. Unlike Amir-e Kabir he survived his fall from power, and even went on to hold other prominent government positions.

Moshir od-Dowleh was a strong advocate of reform and Westernization, and while he was abroad sent observations to the Shah regarding politics, nationalism and liberalization, the necessity for a parliament and for judicial reform. He stressed repeatedly the need to adopt a program of aggressive Westernization and reform. His observations did not go unnoticed by the shah, and Moshir od-Dowleh undoubtedly had a significant influence upon the ruler. As minister of justice he effected reform and centralization of the justice system. As Commander-in-Chief of the Army, he reformed budgeting and training practices. While Grand Vizier, he instituted administrative reforms and set up a cabinet system based on models used in Europe.

The most important modernizing influence Moshir od-Dowleh had was to convince the shah, over loud protestation from the conservative clergy, to travel to Europe. He wanted the Shah to see for himself the European way of life and how it could be adapted to Persia, and the benefits of doing so. While they have often been criticized for their expense and extravagance, through this and Naser od-Din's other trips abroad, the scope of Persia's contact with the world outside its borders was widened considerably. They provided the ruling class contact with modern Western societies which gave impetus to modernization that would perhaps not have been possible otherwise. The majority of the reforms instituted by Naser od-Din Shah were a direct result of what he saw and experienced on these journeys.

## Chapter 2: Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani

Of the prominent historical figures of nineteenth-century Iran, there is perhaps none so intriguing as Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani." He sparked the beginnings of an anti-imperialist movement which was to culminate nearly one hundred years later. He was, in many ways, the father of Islamic anti-imperialism in Iran.

Al-Afghani was one of the first influential figures to try to adapt traditional Islam in a way that it might meet the increasing demands of a modern world without blindly imitating the imperialist nation states of the West. He recognized the need for values of the modern world such as freer use of human reason, activism, and political and military strength. However, he sought to encourage and develop these values from within the Muslim community. He believed that Islamic countries must band together and fight off Western imperialism, and that the tools to do this were to be found from within the rich Islamic tradition. By seeking reform from within the Muslim tradition instead of openly borrowing from the West, Afghani was able to attain a credibility and influence not only with devout middle class Muslims, but also with many members of the ruling class which was not possible for those who simply parroted Western ideas.



Afghani is in many ways the father of Islamic anti-imperialism in the Middle East. He did not achieve his goal of unifying entire Islamic nations against Western imperialism during his lifetime, and was unsuccessful in convincing rank and file Muslims to throw off the yoke of Western dominance, and to depose incumbent governments who stood in the way. He did, however plant a seed that was to grow, and with the help of others with a similar vision, culminate in the only truly *Islamic* revolution the world has known. Although Afghani's direct influence in these events was small, his mode of reinterpreting the Islamic past in modern and nationalist terms displayed a temper of thought that was to become increasingly popular in the Middle East.<sup>21</sup> His anti-Western message of Islamic unity has been continually reiterated throughout the modern Middle East.

### *The Life of al-Afghani*

The historical facts of Afghani's life have been surrounded by controversy and mystery, largely due to the fact that nearly all biographies of him stem from two very closely related sources, both written by Arab admirers whose aim was to project the image Afghani wanted his listeners to see. The most prominent mysteries concern his nationality and his religious orthodoxy. Afghani himself, and his Arab followers maintained that he was born and raised in Afghanistan, which would have made him a follower of the majority, Sunni branch of Islam. Many Iranians, including Afghani's

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<sup>21</sup>Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani"* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1968). p. 4.

cousin, claim that he was born and raised in Iran and educated in the minority, Shi'i, branch of Islam.

There is considerable historical evidence to show that Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani" was indeed born in Northwestern Iran, and subsequently educated in the Shi'i tradition.<sup>22</sup> Analysis of Afghani's philosophies and teachings further supports this position.

Throughout his life, the methods, style and content of Afghani's teachings were highly reflective of the traditional Iranian influences and education of his day. Three characteristics in particular point to an Iranian Shi'i background. First is his advocacy of reinterpretation of religious doctrine--he was a strong advocate of *ijtihad*. The Shi'i tradition provides a better theoretical basis for the introduction of innovation than does Sunnism. Both Afghani's later messianic tendencies and his frequent advocacy of reinterpretation of religious doctrine are most likely based in Iranian Shi'i traditions.<sup>23</sup>

Another indication of Afghani's Shi'i education was his frequent use of *taqiyya*--precautionary dissimulation of one's true beliefs and the use of different arguments for an elite audience of intellectuals than to a mass audience. Shi'ism, which began as a minority, persecuted religion, legitimized dissimulation for precautionary reasons. It was justified to hide one's true beliefs in the face of the enemy for the survival of the religion. In

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<sup>22</sup>Substantial documentation to support this argument can be found in various works by Nikki R. Keddie, as well as in Elie Kedourie's *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*, and in Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*.

<sup>23</sup>Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, p. 9.

addition to this dissimulation, both the Sufi mystics of Iran and Islamic philosophers believed that the world could be divided into two spheres: an educated, initiated elite and the ignorant masses. It was necessary to speak to the uneducated masses in terms they could comprehend. These "terms" were often different in both form and content than the arguments used before the educated, who were capable of understanding the true meaning. *Taqiyya* is a practice commonly used in the Shi'i tradition, and Afghani is unlikely to have learned it in Afghanistan, or anywhere else in the Sunni community.

The use of *taqiyya* is linked to the third trait which is the obvious influence of Islamic philosophers on his ideas. Unlike Arab and Turkish societies where Greek-inspired philosophers had been suppressed and condemned for centuries as heretics, Iran has always had a strong philosophical tradition. Afghani's profound acquaintance with the Islamic philosophical tradition, especially Avicenna, was one that most plausibly came from Iranian Shi'i schools and teachers.<sup>24</sup>

After completing his basic education in Iran, it is most likely that Afghani went to India in his late teens. There is some controversy over the exact time and length of his stay, but it seems that his Indian stay can be counted among the major influences on his life and thought.<sup>25</sup> It was in India that he first came into contact with modern Western ideas and education. This knowledge had a decisive influence on his life and political ideas. It was also in India that he first came into contact with Western Imperialism.

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<sup>24</sup>Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962). p. 108.

<sup>25</sup>Nikki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, p. 11.

From the time of his first recorded appearance in Afghanistan in 1866, Afghani was a vocal, ardent champion of the Muslim struggle against British imperialist encroachments in the Middle East. He always held a special contempt for the British and their imperialist policies. It is nearly impossible for him to have developed these attitudes in Iran where British presence was hardly felt. Before 1882, British colonial conquest was an influence known only to Muslims in India. It is much more likely that he developed these strong anti-British, anti-imperialist attitudes during his stay in India. His trip there coincided with the period right before, and most likely during, the Indian Mutiny of 1857. His contact with Muslims under British rule sparked a lifelong hatred of Western imperialism and of the British in particular. This enmity was a perennial theme in Afghani's later teaching and writing. The impact of his experiences on this first trip to India and the heavy influence of rational thought in the tradition of the Islamic philosophers served as the two primary influences of Afghani's thought and life goals.

After India, Afghani made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and toured much of the Ottoman Empire. Evidence places him in Afghanistan for the first time in 1866. He became close with A'zam Khan and followed him to Kabul when he became the new Amir. In his capacity as adviser to the Amir, Afghani encouraged him to ally himself with the Russians and fight the British. His first well-documented appearance on the stage of history was as a man with purely political, anti-British aims, and there is no evidence that he appeared at that time as either a religious man or as a reformer.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Nikki R. Keddie, "Afghani in Afghanistan," *Middle East Studies* 1, no. 4 (July 1965): 326.

In 1868 A'zam Khan was defeated in battle by his half brother. Afghani tried to ingratiate himself with the new Amir, but Shir 'Ali Khan quickly became suspicious of Afghani, and ordered him escorted out of the country. From Kabul, Afghani went to Bombay, Cairo and Istanbul. He reached Istanbul in 1869 and used his considerable charisma and personal charm to become intimate with the political elite. It was in Istanbul that he first began to call himself "al-Afghani." Early in 1870 he was chosen to give a speech at the opening of the new university. In his speech he praised the Westernizing reforms of the Tanzimat. Later in that same year he was appointed to the council on Education, but a short while later he gave a public lecture which caused his expulsion on grounds of heresy.

The speech was part of a lecture series sponsored by the university. The topic was to be a scientific discussion of industry and the crafts. Rather than sticking to the assigned topic, Afghani introduced themes from the Islamic philosophers, comparing prophecy and philosophy as the higher of the crafts. By introducing philosophical ideas which had long been condemned as heretical in Sunni Islam, Afghani gave the Ottoman religious establishment the perfect vehicle through which to attack the Westernized education in general and the university in particular.<sup>27</sup> They had been waiting for an opportunity to attack the growing secularism of the regime, and Afghani's mention of philosophy provided just such an opportunity.

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<sup>27</sup>Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani": A Political Biography* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1972), pp. 70-71.

The ulama demanded Afghani's expulsion from Istanbul, and their wish was granted by the authorities.

From Istanbul, Afghani went to Cairo where he used his connections with a prominent Egyptian politician to gain employment. Riyad Pasha offered Afghani a stipend from official funds and it was apparently on this that Afghani lived while he was in Egypt. The stipend involved no specific duties, and Afghani lived in Cairo for his entire eight-year stay as an informal teacher.<sup>28</sup> His personal charisma and teaching style drew many of the young intellectual crowd in Cairo (including Muhammad 'Abduh who later distinguished himself as a prominent educator and reformer) to his unorthodox ideas for reform. One reason for Afghani's popularity among the students was his reintroduction of the study of the Islamic philosophers. Afghani presented Islamic philosophy as something which came from within Islam, something which was part of the indigenous tradition. It was not something borrowed from Western imperialists, but something Islamic which could enable Muslims to build a more independent, rational, modern society.

In 1878 and 1879 Afghani began to make fiery public speeches. It was not until this time that he began to have significant influence outside his fairly limited circle of students. His speeches often spoke of the danger of European intervention and the need for national unity to resist it. He planted the first stirrings of nationalism and the need for Egyptian independence.<sup>29</sup> In addition, he denounced Khedive Tawfiq as compelled to serve British

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<sup>28</sup>Keddie, *Biography*, p. 81.

<sup>29</sup>Hourani, p. 109.

ambitions.<sup>30</sup> Afghani's inflammatory anti-British, anti-government speeches eventually led the Khedive to order his expulsion from Egypt in 1879.

In 1880 he returned to India where he again spent most of his time writing and teaching. It was after this two-year stay in India that he began to present himself as a defender of the faith and soon after became the chief advocate of pan-Islam and the unification of the Muslim world against the West. In 1882 he left India for Europe and eventually settled in Paris where he and 'Abduh published a pan-Islamic newspaper, *al-'Urwat al-Wuthqa* in which he continued to castigate the British for their policies in the Middle East.

It was while in Paris that Afghani wrote his famous "Answer to Renan" which will be discussed in more detail below. During his stay in Paris, Afghani also courted the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid, and actively sought a position at his court. As the strongest independent ruler of the Muslim world, and the only one with claim to the loyalty to all Muslims, the Sultan was the logical focus for Afghani's ideas on Islamic unity to ward off the West.<sup>31</sup> However, the Sultan declined, and in 1885 Afghani left for Iraq.

A year later he was invited to Teheran by the Shah of Iran. His violently anti-British ideas soon alarmed Nasir ad-Din Shah, however, and he was asked to leave in 1887. He then spent two years in Russia trying to convince the Russian government to go to war against Great Britain. He saw

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<sup>30</sup>Elie Kedourie, "Further Light on Afghani," *Middle East Studies* 5, no. 4 (October 1969): 188.

<sup>31</sup>Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, p. 27.

war between these two imperial powers as a possible means of encouraging Muslim and Indian revolts against British rule.<sup>32</sup>

In 1889 Afghani was invited back to Iran where he again, unsuccessfully, attempted to convince the Shah to rise up against British hegemony. Once he realized he was to have no influence with the government, he began gathering around him a group of Iranian disciples to whom he preached the necessity of reform in the government a strong stance against foreign interference. Nasir ad-Din Shah became extremely concerned about the considerable influence Afghani appeared to have, and again made plans to exile him, this time permanently, from Iran. Afghani got wind of the plot and took sanctuary in a shrine south of Tehran, where he continued his preaching against the British and the Shah.

In 1891, the Shah became sufficiently alarmed to violate Afghani's sanctuary and have him forcibly removed from the country. Violation of Afghani's sanctuary in a religious place was unusual, and very degrading. This humiliating treatment prompted Afghani to campaign in earnest against the Shah and his policies. While in Iraq, he wrote letters to many of his followers, and to members of the ulama protesting on religious grounds the Shah's policy of granting concessions to foreigners.

The 1891-1892 movement against the concession of a Tobacco Monopoly to an Englishman marks the beginning of anti-imperialism in Iran. This protest was led by the ulama and was justified in religious terms. It was the first successful mass movement in modern Iranian history, and led to

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<sup>32</sup>Keddie, *Biography*, p. 305.



victory for the protesters and fulfillment of their demands for complete cancellation of the concession. The success of the opposition gave courage to opponents of the Qajar government and of foreign encroachments, and led many to see for the first time that it was possible to successfully oppose an autocratic government in power.<sup>33</sup>

This concession on behalf of the Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Persia was strictly a private venture, but it served to unite for the first time the merchant and religious forces, both of whom opposed foreign interference and any expansion of royal authority. For an annual fee and twenty-five percent of the profits, the Imperial Tobacco Corporation gained the exclusive right to control the production, sale and manufacturing of Persian tobacco. This meant that a foreign company would be able to spread its influence to every corner of Persia since over half of the population used some form of tobacco.

It was almost a year before this concession caused serious problems. The deportation of a member of the ulama who publicly voiced his strong opposition to the concession provided the catalyst that helped to make the issue of the tobacco concession a cause for public outrage. As a result, Afghani wrote a letter to the head of the Shi'i ulama asking him to intervene and protest the sale of tobacco to infidels.<sup>34</sup> By enlisting such high-level, distinguished leadership, Afghani helped involve the entire nation in a protest to protect the national and religious interest. Soon Muhammad Hasan

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<sup>33</sup>Keddie, Religion and Rebellion in Iran, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup>Algar, p. 211.

Shirazi, the leading Shi'i mujtahid residing in Karbala at the time, issued a decree calling for the boycott of all tobacco products by Iranians. The success of this boycott (even the Shah's own harem participated) was instrumental in bringing about the eventual cancellation of the concession.

Afghani's tactic of opposition on religious grounds was especially clever, considering the social and political climate in Iran at this time. The leading Shi'ite ulama were at this time centered in Iraq, beyond the Shah's control, and played an increasingly prominent role in Iranian opposition to the Shah's policies.<sup>35</sup> The issue of granting concessions to Christian foreigners was one on which merchants, nationalists and religious reformers could unite in opposition to the Shah. Afghani's use of religious appeals to unite these segments of society against the government and his organizational skills and personal charisma were instrumental in encouraging a mass protest in Iran in 1891.

Afghani has often been given undue credit as the chief organizer of the Tobacco Protest. While he did play a part in encouraging active opposition to the government, and was instrumental in bringing about the alliance of religious and radical leaders that helped make the movement a success, his role in the protest was much smaller than his admiring disciples suggest. In fact, although Afghani and his followers were an important part of this successful movement against the tobacco concession, it was the ulama's leadership that was the chief factor in bringing about the success of the movement.

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<sup>35</sup>Keddie, An Islamic Response to Imperialism, p. 30.

Shortly after the tobacco protest, Afghani went to Istanbul at the invitation of Sultan Abdulhamid. Although he undoubtedly hoped that the Sultan would use him as an adviser in pan-Islamic, anti-Western policies, it is more likely that Afghani was invited to Turkey so that the Sultan could keep him under strict control and continually monitor his activities.

Although he was treated as an honored guest, he had no influence with the Sultan, and within a few years, was not even allowed to travel unescorted.<sup>36</sup>

In 1895, one of Afghani's ardent Iranian followers, Mirza Reza, came to see him. In May of 1896, Mirza Reza returned to Iran and assassinated Nasir ad-Din Shah. Afghani had spoken for years of the necessity of killing the Shah, and probably encouraged Mirza Reza to carry out this deed.<sup>37</sup> Although the Sultan did not bow to Iranian demands for Afghani's extradition to Iran for execution, his last years in Istanbul were spent with little or no political influence. In 1897, Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani" died of cancer. There have been rumors that he had been poisoned by the Sultan, but it is most likely that these rumors are just another example of the many myths surrounding his life.

### *The Writings and Ideas of al-Afghani*

During his lifetime, Afghani appealed to a wide variety of audiences. He did not consider the masses to be open to rational philosophical argument, therefore, a literal interpretation of Islam, stressing Judgment Day, was necessary to keep them loyal to the cause. With the elite, on the other

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<sup>36</sup>Sykes, p. 397.

<sup>37</sup>Keddie, *Biography*, p. 408.

hand, the rational, philosophical arguments of the Islamic philosophers could be employed. Thus his writings and speeches which were directed at an educated, elite, and often Western audience were necessarily vastly different in style and in content from those meant for the uninitiated masses.

As has been noted, Afghani had a strong background in Islamic philosophic teachings. Thus he was heavily influenced by Greek and Hellenistic philosophy, especially Aristotle and Neoplatonism. This led to a pessimistic view of the common people. The Islamic philosophical tradition has the problem of reconciling logical, rational thought with the Prophet's revelations. The means of achieving this is the belief that literalist revelation was for the common man who was incapable of grasping the higher meaning. The masses could only be moved by emotional rhetoric. The higher understandings were to be achieved only by those few who were capable of rationalist interpretation of scripture.

While he recognized the importance of Islamic reform as a prerequisite to the acceptance of modern science and technology, his overriding goals were the political unification and strengthening of the Islamic world and the ending of Western domination there. Religious reform was merely a by-product of the necessary political reform. Islam, however, does not distinguish between religion and politics, so it is fair to say that Afghani stresses the practical, political side of Islam. Political unification of Islam was the end goal, and a variety of "unorthodox" means were justified in achieving it.

Afghani was constantly aware of the conflict between the need to modernize, and the desire to avoid identification with the West. While he was a strong anti-imperialist, he was also astute enough to realize that the West was the center of modern science, art, military power, and modern education. These were the keys to power in a modern world. His solution was to not acknowledge the Western origin of these things, but to seek Islamic origins for them. Even though Afghani loudly proclaimed the origins of modern science, in the early Islamic community, it is doubtful that he really believed his own rhetoric, especially when one considers the rational, enlightened view he took in his writings aimed at Western audiences and other educated elites.<sup>38</sup>

The "Refutation of Materialists," and the "Answer to Renan" are two of Afghani's most well-known works. They also serve as excellent examples of, not only his general opinions on religion, but the different style and content used for a Western audience, and a Muslim one. The article "Refutation of the Materialists" was published at the end of his second stay in India, and is an attack on Ahmad Khan and his brand of reform. Ahmad Khan was an Indian thinker who, after visiting Britain in the 1870's began to preach a new form of Islam called "naturalist" or "materialist" Islam. This new Islam taught that the Qur'an and Islam in general must be interpreted in accordance with reason and nature. There was nothing which transcended nature and man was the judge of all things.<sup>39</sup> For Afghani this amounted to

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<sup>38</sup>Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, p. 43.

<sup>39</sup>Hourani, p. 124-125.

an explanation of the world which did not include the existence of a supreme God. It was after publishing the "Refutation" that Afghani began to be seen as a "defender of the faith." Although it has often been held up as a defense of Islam, it is, in reality, a discussion of religion in general terms, and its utility to the social order. Ahmad's teachings were a danger to religion which was in turn a danger to Muslim unity and Muslim supremacy.

In the "Refutation," religion is explained as an evolutionary process whereby revealed religion (Islam) marked a stage in the progress of man from barbarism to civilization and gave him social cohesion and material progress. From this religiously based community there could arise philosophic and scientific developments which led to further comprehension of the true nature of the world. Religion pushes nations to achieve the highest goals in science and reason and religious belief in an afterlife and a Judgment Day prompts man to strive for the perfection necessary to transfer him to heaven This effort forces him to continually improve his mind which, in turn facilitates and orderly, efficient society.<sup>40</sup> Through this process, there are very few who will be able to comprehend the world on a philosophical level.

Rather than a defense of Islam, the "Refutation" is an example of Afghani's view of religion as a necessary tool for the proper functioning of society. Religion is good because it extols humans to lead virtuous lives, and because it elevates an elite few to philosophic and scientific thought. He is not concerned with the truth of any particular religion--it is the social

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<sup>40</sup>Keddie, An Islamic Response to Imperialism, p. 77.

utility of religion that is important. He spends some time arguing the supremacy of Islam, but that is largely because in his view, the masses would respond only to a religious appeal.<sup>41</sup>

With the "Refutation" Afghani appears to be defending religion in general, and Islam in particular. But his concern is not the strengthening of Islam, as many of his more devoted followers would have us believe, but to harness Islamic sentiment in his political struggle against imperialism.<sup>42</sup> Muslim political unity and anti-imperialism were the continual themes of Afghani's work.

Afghani's other famous work the " Answer to Renan", written in 1883 while Afghani was in Paris. It was written in response to a lecture by Ernest Renan on "Islam and Science." "Answer to Renan" was aimed at an educated, Western audience, and was never translated into Arabic or Persian. (The original was published in French) Renan's lecture had two main points. The first was the rather racist one that Arabs are, by nature, hostile to science and philosophy and these subjects were only introduced to the Islamic world by non-Arabs. The second was that religion in general, but Islam especially, is hostile to science.

In his "Answer," Afghani rejects Renan's racism and replaces it with an evolutionary view of civilization. He freely acknowledges the superiority of Western society, but attributes it, not to an inherent flaw in Arab character, but to the fact that Christian civilizations had an evolutionary head

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<sup>41</sup>Nikki R. Keddie, "Islamic Philosophy and Islamic Modernism: The Case of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani," *Iran* 6 (1968): 56.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid*, p. 56.

start on Islam.<sup>43</sup> In Afghani's view, all religions are the same. Western Christians have done as Muslims have to stifle science and stop progress in the name of religion. The difference is that Christianity had a six-century head start on Islam, and has been reformed to accommodate science and logic. (Martin Luther was a role model for Afghani, and he saw his call to reform in the Islamic world in the same light as the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation in Europe.) With regard to Renan's description of the Muslim as a slave to dogma, Afghani has no quarrel. In fact, he is even more severe in his view of the hostility of Islam to science and reason:

It is permissible, however, to ask oneself why Arab civilization, after having thrown such a live light on the world, suddenly became extinguished; why this torch has not been relit since; and why the Arab world still remains buried in profound darkness.

Here the responsibility of the Muslim religion appears complete. It is clear that wherever it became established, this religion tried to stifle the sciences and it was marvelously served in its designs by despotism...

Religions, by whatever names they are called, all resemble each other. No agreement and no reconciliation are possible between these religions and philosophy. Religion imposes on man its faith and its belief, whereas philosophy frees him of it totally or in part...Whenever religion will have the upper hand, it will eliminate philosophy; and the contrary happens when it is philosophy that reigns as sovereign mistress. As long as humanity exists, the struggle will not cease between dogma and free investigation, between religion and philosophy; a desperate struggle in which, I fear, the triumph will not be for free thought, because the masses dislike reason, and its teachings are only understood by some

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<sup>43</sup>Keddie, An Islamic Response to Imperialism, p. 87.



intelligence's of the elite, and because science, however beautiful it is, does not completely satisfy humanity, which thirsts for the ideal and which likes to exist in dark and distant regions that the philosophers and scholars can neither perceive nor explore.<sup>44</sup>

This article provides striking proof that Afghani is far from the orthodox believer he presented himself to be before Muslim audiences. Rather than refuting Renan's argument, he, in effect, improved on it by insisting that not only Islam, but all other revealed religions were reactionary and obscurantist.<sup>45</sup> His answer also provides an explanation for why he chose to put this religious guise before the people. The masses dislike reason, and are only moved by religious sentiment. Religion serves as a useful tool to keep the masses moral and obedient.<sup>46</sup>

The fact that this article was aimed strictly at a Western elite and not intended for the ordinary Muslim is made apparent by the fact that it was never translated to Arabic, or disseminated in the Muslim world. 'Abduh wrote to Afghani informing him of his intent to have the article translated for the believers. Afghani wrote to 'Abduh forbidding him to do so. One of the methods Afghani employed to achieve his goal of political unity of all Muslims was the practice of a "false but showy religion."<sup>47</sup>

Al-Afghani was not a religious reformer. He was a pragmatic political activist, ready to appear in many different religious guises to

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<sup>44</sup>Afghani, "Answer to Renan," in Keddie An Islamic Response to Imperialism, p. 89.

<sup>45</sup>Kedourie, Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam (London: Frank Cass, 1966), p. 41.

<sup>46</sup>Keddie, An Islamic Response to Imperialism, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup>Kedourie, "Further Light on Afghani," p. 192.

different audiences in his attempt to unite disparate groups with dissimilar interests and different goals against a common Western enemy. He was a man of bold action and extraordinary personal magnetism, with an unusual ability to find his way into the high circles of the political elite. However, he almost always managed to lose favor very quickly--probably because of his single-minded propensity for reform and his often violently anti-foreign schemes.

He was an impatient man who favored quick, violent actions: assassinations, wars, mass revolt. He also had a tendency toward grandiose, often unrealistic schemes (for instance, his plot to foment war between Russia and Great Britain as a means of unifying Muslims against British imperialism). He was also, perhaps, a man ahead of his time. In the nineteenth century Middle East, there was not enough of a popular movement, and social conditions were not yet ripe for mass rebellion against foreign influence. The masses had yet to be "awakened" and were not ready for such radical concepts as revolution and Muslim unity.

It was not until years after his death that Afghani and his ideas began to have real influence in the Muslim world. He was not successful in his time in convincing Muslims to rise up against foreign domination. During his lifetime, the stage was not yet set for mass popular revolt. But he planted a seed, and with the help of his disciples, and others who have used his message and adapted it to their own needs, the masses have awakened. While he failed to convince even one government or nation to forcibly expel a foreign government, in a larger sense, Afghani can be called a great

success. He was the leading figure in the nineteenth century to initiate the anti-imperialism movement in Iran. He began the transformation of Islam from a generally held religious faith into an ideology of political use in uniting Muslims against the West.<sup>48</sup> The efforts of al-Afghani set the stage for the final outburst of anti-imperialism in Iran which came one hundred years later in the form of the Islamic Revolution.

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<sup>48</sup>Keddie, An Islamic Response to Imperialism, p. 35.

### **Chapter 3: Anti-Imperialism in Twentieth-Century Iran**

After Afghani's death, anti-imperialist sentiment continued to grow in Iran. The Tobacco protest was but the first in a number of anti-imperialist movements which led to the eventual eradication of Western influences from Iran. This process, however, took nearly a century. If Afghani was the first of the Iranian anti-imperialists, then Khomeini was the last. His Islamic Revolution was the final chapter of imperialism in Iran. Before this revolution could succeed, however, Iran first had to experience two World Wars, and a number of anti-imperialist movements within her own borders. These events precipitated the right conditions within the government, and prepared the bureaucracy, the ulama, and the people for change. This chapter will examine some of the more prominent incidents to have taken place between 1900 and the appearance of Khomeini in 1963.

#### ***The Constitutional Movement***

The first such incident was the Constitutional Movement of 1905-1909. The ascension of Mozaffar od-Din to the throne led to widespread political and economic unrest in Iran. The new shah was weak and sickly, and had little use for the rigors of leadership. His main concern was for increased resources, which he used partially for his own pleasure. He

borrowed heavily from Britain and Russia, and by 1903 Iran was significantly in debt to both of the Great Powers. When Mozaffar turned once again to Russia for financial assistance, he was denied. With troubles brewing at home and abroad, Russia was unwilling to make further loans, and insisted on payment for money already borrowed.

Russia's grip on the economy was stronger than ever, and a Belgian firm under Joseph Naus was especially relentless in collecting Persian custom duties that were pledged to repay Russian loans. The increase in customs taxes was borne mainly by merchants in Tehran and the other large cities. The plight of merchants and workers in the cities proved to be the focal point for many who were dissatisfied with the inefficient, corrupt practices of the shah and his officials. The merchants and workers turned to the ulama for guidance.

The ulama had plenty of grievances of their own. They had traditionally opposed any non-Islamic interference in Persian affairs, and feared loss of their own power and prestige if the government was successful in breaking their exclusive right to control education and law and the right to serve as the principal advisors on governmental policy. As with many protests, this discontent by a variety of groups was ostensibly led by the ulama and took on a religious form.<sup>49</sup> Because of the important role the ulama played in the constitutional movement, it is easy to paint them as the instigators and initiators of the revolt. However, the ulama were neither the

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<sup>49</sup>Vanessa Martin, Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906 (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989), p. 63.

leaders nor the initiators of the movements of revolt; they were not the instigators, but the agitators.<sup>50</sup> Religion was not the key issue, rather it provided the opposition with the symbology, rhetoric and legitimacy necessary to rally the masses. Religion and the ulama served as the rallying point around which the various factions gathered.

Merchants and the ulama were not the only factions calling for change. There were also members of the bureaucracy, the intelligentsia, and professional classes who saw the need for governmental and societal reform. Many among these groups had considerable contact with the West, and felt that a Western constitution and administrative practices would end the arbitrary acts of their rulers.

The generally uneducated masses, however, were deeply ingrained with traditional values and, were not prepared to oppose the government based on a program that had sprung from Western influence and tradition. The presence of prominent ulama as leaders of the opposition ensured that resistance was on behalf of traditional Persian values. The combination of grievances from nearly every segment of society led to a movement to preserve Iran's independence from undue foreign influence and restore the traditional role of different strata of society--particularly the clergy.

The combination of accumulated grievances led to a great deal of popular and clerical discontent and eventually to large-scale protests in Tehran and other cities. In December of 1905, a number of merchants were

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<sup>50</sup>Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 261.

flogged for allegedly violating government price controls on sugar. By way of protest, a large number of merchants took *bast* (sanctuary) from the government in the Shah's Mosque. When the Shah's head religious official drove the agitators out of the mosque with sticks, they took refuge in the Shahzadeh 'Abd al-'Azim shrine where more protesters joined them.<sup>51</sup> *Bastis* consisted of merchants, both large and small, and a number of leading ulama.<sup>52</sup>

On January 13, 1906, the Shah gave in to popular pressure. He acceded to the demands of the *Bastis*, and signed a letter promising to dismiss certain court officials and to establish a "House of Justice." With the signing of this letter, the protesters dispersed and returned to Tehran, convinced that they had won the first phase of the struggle against a corrupt and arbitrary government. At this the main aim of the movement was to remove specific ministers from the court, and to reform the Persian government. There was no demand at this time for a constitution.

In spite of his promises, the Shah retained officials he had agreed to dismiss, and took no steps to implement the policy changes he had promised. His refusal to make good on his promises led to rioting and violence in the capital city. The death of a student and the arrest of others led to a second large-scale *bast*. This time soldiers prevented supplies from being brought in and soon the agitators were ordered to Qom.<sup>53</sup> In enforcing this order, military

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<sup>51</sup>Sykes, p. 401.

<sup>52</sup>Robert A. McDaniel, The Shuster Mission and the Persian Constitutional Revolution (Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1974), pp. 56-57.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid, p. 402.

troops killed a *sayyid* (one who claims descent from the house of the Prophet), and provided the anti-government cause with a religious martyr. The *bastis* used this incident very effectively to their advantage. Finally, however, they succumbed to the overwhelming force of the Shah's troops and agreed to go to Qom. But on the way out, they threatened that if their demands were not met, they would take the entire clergy on pilgrimage to holy places outside the country, thus making it impossible to carry out any legal transactions in Tehran.<sup>54</sup>

There followed wide participation in the *bast* in various mosques. The government made it plain that it was willing to violate *bast*, and drag *bastis* out of their refuge as al-Afghani had been dragged from the *Shahzadeh 'Abd al-'Azim* shrine fifteen years earlier. The only refuge that government troops could not violate at will was foreign legations. Thus, thousands sought refuge on the grounds of the British legation in Tehran.<sup>55</sup>

The British were concerned that Iran was slipping into anarchy, and urged the shah to meet the demands of the people for the "House of Justice." In September of 1907, embarrassment of the government combined with pressure from the British to force Mozaffar od-Din Shah to agree to hold parliamentary elections for the National Assembly. Elections were held in early October, and elected representatives from Tehran, not wanting to wait for the arrival of representatives from the more far flung regions, met to write a constitution and enact basic laws for the legislative body.<sup>56</sup> Tehran was,

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<sup>54</sup>Edward G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), pp. 117-118.

<sup>55</sup>McDaniel, p. 60.

<sup>56</sup>Sydney Nettleton Fisher and William Ochsenswald, *The Middle East: A History* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1990), p. 365.



therefore, dramatically over represented in the parliament as compared to other provinces. Those in the capital who had more Western goals for their country used this opportunity to assert their influence, and the new constitution which was considered and approved by the Assembly (the *Majles*) was far more "Western" than it might have been with a truly representative input. Many of the landed class, the clergy, and a significant portion of peasant and worker followers were not happy with certain provisions of the new constitution. The leaders of the constitutional movement insisted on the signatures of not only Mozaffar od-Din, but also the crown prince, Muhammad Ali. While the British were outwardly pleased with this apparent step toward democracy, both Muhammad Ali and the Russian government were extremely suspicious of this document which limited the power of the monarchy.

While more liberal elements of society enjoyed a brief period of prominence, Muhammad Ali had no intention of complying with the constitution. His first act when he succeeded to the throne in January of 1907 was to attempt to impose a conservative, and very unpopular Amin as-Sultan as premier against the known wishes of the *Majles*. Amin as-Sultan, however was assassinated later that same year, and large public demonstrations in the cities forced the new shah to accept the Supplementary Fundamental Laws which stated that his power came, not from God, but from the people. The Supplementary Laws also stipulated that all of the shah's ministers must be answerable to the *Majles*. While the conservative ulama won some concessions ( it was agreed that Shi'i Islam was the official

state religion, and that the ulama would approve all legislation), it became clear that the secularists were in control of the *Majles*. The passage of the Supplemental Laws left no doubt as to the intention to secularize institutions traditionally under religious control.<sup>57</sup> Muhammad Ali officially accepted all these restrictions, but it was understood by all concerned that he did so under duress. Neither he nor the Russians approved of the independence of the new legislative branch of the Persian government.

In August, 1907, the constitutionalists suffered a fatal injury when the Anglo-Russian Convention was signed in St. Petersburg. This convention, which was concluded without the Iranian government's knowledge, divided Iran into spheres of influence and meant that the Iranians could no longer play the "Great Powers" off against one another. The agreement divided Persia into three parts: the first, including Tehran and the north would be Russia's sphere of influence; the south-east would be the British zone, and the area in between would remain neutral.<sup>58</sup> British and Russian concern over emerging German economic and military strength inspired them to reconcile, for the moment, their conflict over control of Iran. Iranians feared that the agreement foreshadowed the eventual annexation of their country.

The opposition party had been, as are many revolutionary parties, a coalition of disparate factions with dissimilar goals. Beneath their commonly adopted rhetoric and desire for change and reform in the government, lay divisive forces that kept the central government from any coherent approach

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<sup>57</sup>Bayat, p. 199.

<sup>58</sup>Martin, p. 144.

to governing. The ulama, in particular, was divided. There were those who advocated reform and sought a change from the despotic power of the Shah, but at the same time, saw constitutionalism as un-Islamic. Open confrontation within the opposition party exposed sharp ideological differences between the reformers and the revolutionists who had allied themselves against the shah, and severely split the constitutionalist ranks.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the fragmentation of the constitutionalists, Iran's foray into constitutionalism lasted longer than it would have otherwise because of the activities of the *anjumans* or societies. Prior to this time the *anjumans* operated in secret. They counted a fairly large number of clergy among their members, who were generally well educated and at least somewhat acquainted with Western ideas and practices. The societies varied in their composition and ideologies, but most shared a common goal of curbing the authoritarian government and Iranian sovereignty.<sup>60</sup>

The implementation of constitutional government gave the *anjumans* a sudden opportunity to participate in activities they had heretofore only heard about from the West. *Anjumans* virtually bombarded the country with newspapers, speeches and newsletters advocating change and reform. These changes, however, were a radical departure from traditional values and beliefs, and were seldom understood or accepted by most Iranians, who had neither the education nor the exposure to Western concepts to understand the underlying principles and ideologies. The *anjumans* were in many ways the

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<sup>59</sup>Bayat, p. 143.

<sup>60</sup>E.C. Bogle, "Modern Iran: A Historical Survey," in *Modern Iran: A Course Reader*, ed. Hafez F. Farmayan (Austin, TX: Paradigm Books, 1994), p. 13.

backbone of the revolution and many *anjumanis* emerged as leaders of the movement. Unfortunately, they failed to understand that most of the allied factions and individuals who participated in the activities of the constitutional movement were acting according to separate agendas of their own.

In 1908, the *Majles* demanded that Muhammad Ali purge all anti-constitutionalists from his court. The Shah refused to comply, and the parliament had neither the financial nor the military capacity to back up its demands. In June of that year, Muhammad Ali gathered his forces, and with Russian approval, moved on the *Majles* in Tehran. A brigade of his Cossacks bombarded the *Majles* building, arrested many of its leaders, and executed three of them.<sup>61</sup> Before the day was out he had dissolved the parliament and had reestablished his absolute control of Iran.

With the shah's reassertion of control in Tehran, Tabriz became the center of constitutional activity. Radical elements, under the influence of socialist ideologies popular in Russia at the time, gained prominence and eventually established Tabriz as the center of leftist activity in twentieth century Iran. Russian-trained activists combined with indigenous Azerbaijani agitators to establish a movement that advocated policies unacceptable to most Iranians.<sup>62</sup> The Tabriz society was far too radical for the majority of the very traditional Persian population. In general, they wanted a strong, secular government, free from foreign control, electoral

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<sup>61</sup>Fisher and Ochsenswald, p. 369.

<sup>62</sup>Bogle, p. 16.

rights for all and compulsory, Western-style education for all--including women. The Democrats as they were called had strong socialist leanings from the start. By contrast the Moderates were strongly under the ulama, landlord and Bazaari control--the more traditional elements of society. they called for greater local autonomy, limited electoral franchise, private property and Islamic law. These were ideals much more readily understood by the populace, and the split between the two formerly aligned factions widened.

Constitutionalists in Tabriz declared Azerbaijan a separate state and invited other parts of the nation to join them rather than accept Muhammad Ali's coup. Leftist Russian Cadres helped secure the city and helped it to withstand a siege from the Shah's forces. Similar developments took place in Gilan, and highlighted the Shah's lack of control and ability to squelch the movement after his successful Coup in Tehran. the siege of Tabriz resulted in a stalemate which lasted nine months. Finally, in April of 1909, both Britain and Russia became sufficiently uncomfortable with the instability in Persia that Russian troops entered the city and ended the siege.<sup>63</sup>

In July , 1909, Muhammad Ali was forced to abdicate. he went into exile in Russia, and his twelve year old son became shah under a regency. The ulama approved the execution of Ayatollah Fazlollah Nuri, a prominent member of the ulama who spoke out against the constitution as un-Islamic. The ulama's approval of his execution indicated that the constitutional movement still had a great deal of support from the clergy. The

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<sup>63</sup>Sykes, p. 417.

constitutionalists regained control in Tehran, but they remained as divided as ever.

This government, like those before it, had the problem of insufficient funds. It could not afford to both operate the government and expel foreign influence. In fact, Russian troops remained in northern Persia, and there was little that could be done to stop them. In 1911, W. Morgan Shuster, an American with financial experience in the Philippines, was hired as a financial adviser to the government. Neither Britain nor Russia was pleased with Shuster's presence in Iran since he refused to recognize the extraterritorial rights of either power. He viewed foreign interference in Persian affairs as illegitimate, and saw it as contrary to his duty to organize and reform the finances of the treasury.<sup>64</sup> Russia, in particular, saw Persian financial independence as a threat to their control over their southern neighbor, and fought against Shuster's reforms. Finding loans impossible to arrange since Britain and Russia openly threatened any banker who showed signs of giving one, Shuster began to collect taxes from wealthy notables in Tehran who had not paid taxes in years.<sup>65</sup> This did not go over well, and many sided against the American.

At the same time, Muhammad Ali was allowed to cross the Russian border in an attempt to regain the throne. The former shah received very little support in Persia, and was eventually defeated in October, 1911. The defeat of Muhammad Ali prompted British and Russian action to quell the

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<sup>64</sup>McDaniel, p. 137.

<sup>65</sup>Fisher and Ochsenwald, p. 371.

increasing independence of Persia's constitutional government. While British troops entered southern provinces, Russian troops took control of Tabriz, Rasht and Mashad. Russia demanded the dismissal of Shuster, and stipulated that Persia not hire foreign advisers without express Russian and British approval.<sup>66</sup> The *Majles* had strong public support, and refused Russian demands. Russia captured Tabriz and threatened to march on Tehran. Under this pressure, the cabinet dismissed the *Majles* in December, and fired Shuster the next day.

Thus ended Iran's constitutional experiment. While the movement failed to achieve its goal of independent constitutional government, it had a lasting effect on the Iranian political and social development. The promulgation of the Iranian Constitution marked the triumph of secularist trends. It ushered in an era of changes which underscored the shrinking of ulama authority in society.<sup>67</sup> This era of change planted a seed of discontent and rebellion within the clergy. Eventually the ulama would rebel against this secularization of Iranian society and the subsequent loss of religious authority and control.

### *World War I and its Aftermath*

The Iranian government was in a state of near anarchy in the aftermath of the Constitutional Movement. The newly appointed regent

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<sup>66</sup>Telegram from the American Minister to the Secretary of State, Tehran, November 30, 1911. In Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1911 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1958), p. 684.

<sup>67</sup>Bayat, p. 10.

Nasser ol-Molk fled to Europe in 1912, effectively leaving Iran with no executive authority until Ahmad Shah came of age in 1914 and the third *Majles* was summoned. In November 1916, the Shah proclaimed the neutrality of Iran. The preservation of Iranian neutrality, however, became impossible, for Great Britain and Russia were, by this time, effectively controlling Iran.

Ottoman forces invaded and held Tabriz until Russian forces entered and expelled them, and then continued to garrison troops in the northern provinces. British troops occupied the south. Many in Iran hoped that an Ottoman victory would help to bring about true Iranian independence, and the Ottomans fostered this hope as much as possible. In 1915, the third *Majles* convened and voted to sign a treaty with the Germans to become a belligerent. Anglo-Russian pressure combined to force the cabinet out of office, and though a coalition of Moderates and Democrats met at Qom to sign another treaty, this effort, too, was short lived.

In June, 1916, Prime Minister Sepahdar agreed to a formal military occupation of Iran by British and Russian troops. He also granted a Russian oil concession in the northern provinces. Neither agreement was ratified by the *Majles*, but the oil concession formed the basis for later Russian claims to exploration rights in northern Iran. Great Britain capitalized on the agreement to solidify its hold on southern Iran, and secured its oil reserves there. Russia's plight during the war, and internal problems kept it from fully exploiting its occupation of the north. Local tribes and independence



movements emerged in the northern sector which would eventually pose a threat to both the British and the chaotic Iranian government.

At the end of World War I Russia was embroiled in her own fight against foreign intervention, and the British were, by contrast in occupation of most of the Middle East--including Iran. There were many in the British government who favored including Iran in the British-influenced protective zone adjacent to India and the Persian Gulf. Sir Percy Cox, a veteran British diplomat in Tehran, was instructed to negotiate a treaty that would ensure British dominance in Iran. The Anglo-Persian treaty was signed in August 1919. Under the terms of the treaty, Britain would provide financial and military assistance and would control many Iranian government agencies, public services and the treasury in exchange for a loan of two million pounds. The British would also administer customs and tariffs in order to secure their loan.<sup>68</sup>

The treaty, which amounted to a virtual protectorate, created widespread resentment within the Iranian government. The British had overestimated their ability to extend their colonial influence, and had underestimated the strength of Iranian nationalism.<sup>69</sup> The *Majles* refused to ratify the agreement, and the British, unwilling to use force, eventually began to withdraw their troops. By 1921 the British military establishment was evacuated from Iranian soil.

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<sup>68</sup>Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), p. 204.

<sup>69</sup>George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 169.

Iran's postwar dealings with Russia went well. The new Soviet regime was eager to secure friendly relations with her southern neighbors. In 1918 the revolutionary government in Moscow denounced the imperialist concessions its tsarist predecessor had secured in Iran, and in 1920, negotiations were underway for a treaty of friendship between the two countries.

These initial friendly moves by the new Soviet government were marred, however, by Soviet support of separatist movements in the north. When Bolshevik expeditionary forces pursued remnants of the White Russian army into Iran and landed troops in Iranian territory in 1920, they joined with the local rebel Kuchik Khan and helped him proclaim the Soviet republic of Gilan in Rasht.<sup>70</sup> Iran vigorously protested, but the Soviets claimed that the expedition was part of the new Soviet republic of Azerbaijan, over which it had no control. Moscow later insisted on retaining Soviet troops in the area until British troops withdrew from Iran.

In spite of these difficulties, negotiations proceeded and on February 26, 1921, Iran and Soviet Russia concluded a treaty of friendship. The treaty reiterated Soviet renunciation of old Russian concessions except the Caspian Sea fisheries; neither would harbor enemies of the other; if a third power threatened or occupied any part of Iran, Russia might send troops to Iran.<sup>71</sup> (This article of the treaty was to cause Iran a great deal of trouble in later years.) Nine months later, Soviet forces were withdrawn from Gilan and

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Yahya Armajani, Iran (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 135.

Kuchik Khan's regime collapsed. Strengthened by the new treaty and the assurance of Soviet military assistance, the Iranian government officially rejected the Anglo-Persian agreement, and regained her independence.

Between the collapse of the constitutional movement and the advent of World War I, nationalism in Iran waned. Occupation by imperialist powers tended to suppress anti-imperialist demonstrations and rhetoric. Wartime conditions led to a decrease in newspapers and newsletters which had previously been used to alert the masses and encourage nationalistic fervor. While events of World War I dampened anti-imperialist activities, they did not kill them. Rather, the movement was forced underground. The presence of foreign, troops suppressed the expression of anti-imperialist movements, but the very fact that Iran was occupied by imperialist powers fueled nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiment among the bazaaris as well as the ulama.

*The Coup D'état of 1921  
and the Establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty*

On February 21, 1921, five days before the signing of the Soviet-Iranian Treaty of friendship, Reza Khan an officer of the Iranian Cossacks and Sayyid Ziya od-Din Tabatabai, a radical pro-British newspaper man staged a coup d'état and took over the reigns of government.<sup>72</sup> At this time, the Cossack Division was under the command of White Russian officers Reza was determined to rid this unit of Russian domination. The British,

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<sup>72</sup>Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., A Concise History of the Middle East (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), p. 207.

who hoped for control of this unit of the Iranian army, supported his views, and in 1920, helped him to arrange the dismissal of all Russian officers. Their positions were filled by British officers and commanded by Colonel Smyth who remained with the division until 1921.<sup>73</sup> On February 21, Reza Khan and his collaborator Sayyid Ziya marched on Tehran. British advisers offered them technical advice, military equipment, and funds to accomplish their goal. While Reza Khan and Sayyid Ziya had accepted British aid, they were both fiercely nationalistic, and generally opposed to any foreign interference in Iranian affairs.

As a result of the coup, the Shah had no choice but to appoint Reza Khan commander-in-chief and minister of war. Ziya od-Din became the Premier. Ziya was a zealous reformer, and as such effected a number of harsh measures against many wealthy, powerful members of the nobility. Reza, who was a real politician, took the side of the nobles and forced Ziya to resign and flee the country. From that point forward Reza Khan's power became paramount in Iranian government. In 1923, he became prime minister, and a year later forced the weak-willed shah to take "an extended trip to Europe."

For a time Reza Khan intended to create an Iranian republic patterned after the Turkish Republic. But when Attaturk abolished the caliphate and set Turkey along a secular path, the Shi'ite ulama raised such an outcry that Reza met with the religious leaders in Qom.<sup>74</sup> Their vehement opposition

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<sup>73</sup> Lenczowski, p. 170.

<sup>74</sup>Fisher and Ochsenwald, p. 465.

convinced him to abandon the idea altogether. In fact, any mention of republicanism thereafter was expressly forbidden by law. On October 31, 1925, the *Majles* officially deposed Ahmad Shah, and on December 13 proclaimed Reza Khan Shahanshah of Iran, ending the one hundred-twenty-five-year-old Qjar dynasty, and ushering in the new Pahlavi dynasty.

Reza Shah's primary ambition was to strengthen Iran and emancipate her from foreign influence by adopting Western reforms and technology. He realized that in order to achieve these ends he needed to first strengthen his own position and that of the central government. Under Pahlavi rule, a strong central government was created for the first time in centuries.<sup>75</sup>

Reza first turned his attention to military affairs. He knew the power of a well-trained, well-paid, disciplined force for his program. His first job was to restore order to the country. In a series of expeditions he defeated the pro-Communist rebel Kuchik Khan, put an end to provincial rebellions in Khorasan and Azerbaijan, and brought under control unruly nomad tribes in the north.<sup>76</sup> By the time of his coronation in the spring of 1926, Reza Shah was the undisputed ruler of Iran.

Once he had militarily restored order, Reza turned to financial reform. He recognized that much of Iran's political dependence stemmed from financial insolvency. He hired an American by the name of Dr. Arthur Chester Millspaugh to reorganize Iran's public finances. Dr. Millspaugh was granted vast powers and had the support of Reza's loyal military force behind

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<sup>75</sup>Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 581.

<sup>76</sup>Lenczowski, p. 171.

him, and was successful in providing the government with a steady income. Reza's military successes over the distant provinces of Iran upped state revenues and made Millspaugh's policies that much more effective and widespread.<sup>77</sup>

Financial stability allowed Reza to turn to his pet project--the construction of the Trans-Iranian railway which would link Tehran with the Caspian and the Persian Gulf. The shah believed that modernization and development depended heavily on effective communications. Effective government control, security and economic development all depended on reliable transportation systems.<sup>78</sup> The railroad was begun in 1927, and finished in 1939. The rail line was especially remarkable because, while technical assistance was entrusted to various foreign engineers, the entire project was financed by the government of Iran itself without any special loans through a special tax on tea and sugar.<sup>79</sup> In addition to this, the Shah ordered the construction of many important highways and establishment of air communications throughout much of Iran.

In addition to technological advances, Reza wanted to modernize social and educational spheres as well. However, he had to proceed cautiously. According to the constitution, which was still officially in force, Shi'i Islam was the official religion of Iran, and the shah was responsible for upholding the faith. It also forbade the *Majles* to pass any legislation contrary to the principles of Islam, and provided for the consultation of the

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<sup>77</sup>Fisher and Ochsenwald, p. 466.

<sup>78</sup>Lenczowski, p. 172.

<sup>79</sup>Goldschmidt, p. 208.

ulama in the legislative process. The shah recognized the power of the clergy, and did not feel it wise to openly challenge these provisions. Instead of attacking the religious establishment and its power directly, he set about indirectly limiting their power.

While the trend toward secularization was clear, he never allowed it to reach the proportions that it did in Turkey. The biggest changes were those pertaining to education, legal reform, and emancipation of women. In 1927 he introduced a European judicial system, which challenged the religious courts in civil matters. All reforms in these areas reduced the influence of the clergy. Compulsory primary education was instituted, while at the same time compulsory religious education was eliminated from primary and secondary schools.<sup>80</sup>

Educational focus turned toward patriotism and civic-minuends. All foreign primary schools were forbidden. Veneration of Iran's proud and glorious past was emphasized. Sports were encouraged and participation in Boy Scouts and Girl Guides was made mandatory as a means of fostering a nationalistic spirit among the youth.<sup>81</sup> Many among the ulama felt that such pursuits kept the younger population from participation in religious duties and education.

Another blow to the religious establishment was the prohibition of traditional Iranian dress in 1928. The traditional headdress--the fez and the turban--were replaced by a European hat. The shah also encouraged Western

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<sup>80</sup>Lenczowski, p. 173.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

dress among women, and his wife and daughters appeared in public in European outfits. After that day women were forbidden to wear the veil. This declaration caused rioting among the more traditional elements of society, but, as with all of his reforms, Reza Shah was adamant, and strict enforcement ensured compliance.

The Shah also sought social reform for women. He took various measures to grant Iranian women rights and privileges similar to those enjoyed by their Western counterparts. Under his influence the *Majles* (which was little more than a rubber-stamp body) passed legislation limiting divorce privileges of men, and made women eligible for public office. As with his educational reforms, these sparked resentment and hostility among the ulama. Reza Khan's reforms were seen by many *mollahs* as yet another anti-Islamic plot hatched by the Christian West.<sup>82</sup> "Westernization" and "modernization" became synonymous with "anti-Islamic" and "irreligious."

Reza Shah Pahlavi was "an uneducated soldier with a soldier's respect for authority and an expectation that his will be followed implicitly."<sup>83</sup> He saw that public veneration given to religious leaders would not only prove to be a major stumbling block to modernization and independence for Iran, but a threat to his own personal power as well. He therefore took steps attempting to relegate religious institutions and leaders to a less influential position in public life. Though his strict, often brutal enforcement of secularizing reforms ensured compliance, resentment grew among the clergy

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<sup>82</sup>Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah* (Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1986), p. 75.

<sup>83</sup>Fisher and Ochsenwald, p. 470.



and other traditional members of society. Although Reza was himself avidly anti-imperialist, his eagerness to adopt Western ways identified him with the hated imperial powers, and alienated clerical elements of the anti-imperialist movement.

### *World War II*

From 1925 to 1941 Reza Khan carried out his intensive modernization programs, and succeeded in making Iran a "typical" modern, independent, nationalist state. Imperialism appeared to be a dead issue in Iran during this period. However, the violent events of World War II drastically changed the political situation in Iran. At the outbreak of the war in 1939, Iran once again declared her official neutrality, but kept her strong economic ties with Germany.

The Nazi invasion of Russia in June 1941 changed this. War on the Russian front posed a major supply problem for the allies. There were four possible supply routes: through Murmansk, through Vladivostok, through the Turkish Straits, and over the Iranian highlands. Neither Murmansk nor Vladivostok could handle the large quantity of supplies necessary. Turkey had closed the straits and forcing her to open them would have necessitated military force--a move the Allies were not willing to take since Turkey was a non-belligerent ally. That left the Iranian route.

There were many German technicians and engineers in Iran, working on various government projects. These were considered to be potentially dangerous to the Allies. Hence British and Soviet officials demanded that Iran expel the Germans. Reza Shah, incensed at being ordered about, refused. Consequently, in August, 1941, British and Soviet forces entered the country and, meeting negligible military resistance, occupied it. At last, the Shah agreed to expel the Germans. But he remained defiant, and the agreement was only partially implemented. Allied forces approached Tehran and prepared to occupy it.<sup>84</sup> Instead, the Shah abdicated on September 17, in favor of his Twenty-one-year-old son Mohammad Reza. Reza Shah Pahlavi was taken to South Africa in September 1941 where he eventually died three years later.

A full discussion of the effects of the events of World War II on Iran and her government and her people is not within the scope of this paper. It can be said, however, that the occupation of the Allies re-kindled anti-imperialist activities in Iran. The abdication of Reza Shah brought in its wake an interruption of reforms, pronounced inflation and unrest. Because of the presence of foreign troops, most of the old internal problems were now linked with Iran's foreign relations.<sup>85</sup> There was a pronounced resurgence of extremist movements in general, with the radical leftists emerging in the form of the Tudeh party, and the clergy eager to reassert their influence. The power of the clergy had appeared to diminish under Reza Shah, but while the

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<sup>84</sup>Wilfrid Knapp, "1921-1941: The Period of Riza Shah," in *Twentieth Century Iran*, ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi and R.W. Ferrier (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1977), p. 48.

<sup>85</sup>Lenczowski, p. 179.

Shah was able to force compliance with his reforms, the ulama still held considerable sway with the traditional Iranian masses. With the confusion and de-centralization of the Iranian government that followed Reza's abdication, the clergy set about methodically re-establishing the influence and power they had once enjoyed over the people and government.

### *The Oil Crisis*

In April 1951, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran yielded to popular pressure and appointed Mohammad Mosaddeq Prime Minister of Iran. Mosaddeq was a lawyer, and a wealthy landowner who had been prominent in Iranian politics since the beginning of the century. He had a reputation as a liberal and an ardent nationalist, and had identified himself with the two most pressing issues of Iranian politics: the transfer of political power from the Shah and his royal court to the *Majles*, and Iran's desire to gain control over her own oil industry which was at the time controlled by the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil company (AIOC).<sup>86</sup>

Both of these issues came to a head in 1949, when a new oil agreement, favorable to the AIOC, was announced and when the Shah tried to rig elections in the *Majles*. These actions enraged the opposition parties, and precipitated the formation of an organization known as the National Front. The National Front was a broad coalition of groups and political

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<sup>86</sup>Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup D'état in Iran," International Journal of Middle East Studies 19 (1987): 262.

parties, organized to coordinate opposition to the Shah (who was seen as a British puppet) and the British. Mosaddeq emerged as the leader.

In 1950, the National front led demonstrations against the Shah and managed to elect eight candidates to the *Majles*. Once in parliament, National front members continued to press for a reduction in the powers of the Shah and the British controlled oil company. Mosaddeq submitted a bill calling for nationalization of the oil industry in March 1951. The bill was quickly passed and Mosaddeq was appointed prime Minister. Immediately upon taking office, Mosaddeq signed the bill into law.

The nationalization law quickly brought Mosaddeq into conflict with the British, since they owned 50% of the AIOC, and were not willing to accept nationalization. Great Britain adopted a policy to re-establish their control over the AIOC and tried to pressure Mosaddeq into a more favorable stance, or by removing him from office.<sup>87</sup> They first tried legal maneuvers, and the International Court of Justice sent a negotiating team to Tehran to negotiate a settlement. Mosaddeq rejected all offers. Next they attempted to undermine his base of support by imposing economic sanctions and carrying out military maneuvers in the region. The AIOC announced that it would take legal action against anyone buying Iranian oil. Large numbers of workers were laid off at the AIOC in an attempt to foment opposition to Mosaddeq. These measures failed to produce their intended results.

Throughout the crisis, the Soviet Union maintained a wait-and-see attitude. Officially, she declared a policy of non-intervention, but the

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<sup>87</sup>Gasiorowski, p. 263.

government-controlled press voiced support of Iran's struggle against foreign imperialism.<sup>88</sup> Iran was in chaos; not sure of the true position of the USSR, in open hostility with Great Britain, and receiving no support from the United States.

The final component in the British effort was to remove Mosaddeq from office. An MI6 (British Intelligence) plan was in place to oust Mosaddeq and install Sayyid Ziya Tabatabai. The British pressured the Shah to install Sayyid Ziya, and drew up plans to invade Abadan.<sup>89</sup> The United States informed Britain that it would not support an invasion and encouraged further efforts at negotiation. U.S. opposition persuaded Great Britain to abandon its plans to overthrow Prime Minister Mosaddeq.

Mosaddeq became the hero of the times. Nationalization had come to mean independence, and Mosaddeq had openly confronted the British-- something many Iranians had been longing for. He had challenged the British and the Shah's power, and had won. Mosaddeq failed, however, to realize the intricacies of the international oil industry and the difficulties of selling Iranian oil without international cooperation. He did not take into account the fact that neighboring oil-producing countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait would not be willing to restrict oil production in their fields to provide a market for Iranian oil. Mosaddeq had gained control of Iranian oil for Iranians, but the oil was useless without a market.

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<sup>88</sup>Lenczowski, p. 193.

<sup>89</sup>Gasiorowski, p. 263-265.

Mosaddeq was convinced that Britain and western Europe required Iranian oil to support their economies and would force Britain to accept nationalization on Iranian terms. After all, Iran was the world's largest oil supplier in the first half of the twentieth century. He also expected assistance from the United States out of fear that Iran would fall behind the Iron Curtain. While this was true to a limited degree, it was also true that nationalization in Iran would invite similar moves in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait--a thought that no western European or American government even wanted to contemplate. By early 1951, the U.S. government developed a plan to ease the effect of the British oil blockade on U.S. allies. U.S. oil companies were asked to provide oil to allies who had been affected by the blockade.<sup>90</sup> By the summer of 1951, the oil industry in Iran was shut down, the tanks were full and no oil was being sold. Production was upped in other Gulf states to mitigate the crisis

Contrary to Iranian expectations, as the controversy dragged on, Britain and the West adjusted to the loss of Iranian oil, as did the rest of the world. By spring 1953, there was a glut of oil on the world market. The loss of oil revenue was beginning to hurt and the laid off workers had to be added to the government payroll. There was no solution in sight and there were serious splits in the National Front. Mosaddeq began to lose much of his support. The nationalization issue had made him immensely popular with the people, but without adding any new funds. As often happens, the people became bored with the principle of the issue and sought a solution that would

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid, p. 267.

put money in their pockets. His failure to effect a solution that would be to Iran's economic advantage weakened his popularity even among the masses.<sup>91</sup> He had the support of the most influential religious figure of the time, Ayatollah Sayyid Abd al-Qasim Kashani, but when he demanded absolute "emergency" powers, Kashani deserted him.

Many Iranians hoped that Mosaddeq would be able to obtain significant aid from the United States. They believed that because of Iran's strategic position, the U.S. would either buy Iranian oil or provide financial aid to prevent the collapse of Iran's economy and her subsequently slipping under Soviet influence. By 1953, however, the U.S. State Department and the CIA had decided to stage a coup to overthrow Mosaddeq and install General Fazlollah Zahedi as prime minister.<sup>92</sup>

U.S. and British pressure persuaded the Shah to back Zahedi and in August, 1953 he issued a *firman* (royal decree) dismissing Mosaddeq. Mosaddeq denounced the *firman* as a forgery and refused to acknowledge it.<sup>93</sup> Military troops and other demonstrators loyal to Mosaddeq created riots in the streets, shouting for the death of the Shah. However, the CIA stirred up anti-Mosaddeq demonstrations, and arranged to have Ayatollah Kashani publicly denounce Mosaddeq and lead a demonstration against him in the streets of Tehran.<sup>94</sup> Within a few days, crowds in the streets were shouting

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<sup>91</sup>Telegram from the Ambassador in Iran (Henderson) to the Department of State, Tehran, May 8, 1953. In Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, X (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1989): 727.

<sup>92</sup>Gasiorowski, p. 271.

<sup>93</sup>Kermit Roosevelt, Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1979), pp. 174-175.

<sup>94</sup>Gasiorowski, pp. 273-275.

"long live the Shah" and Zahedi's men, the police and the military were in pursuit of Mosaddeq.<sup>95</sup> By August 22 Mosaddeq was caught and arrested; a new cabinet under Zahedi was formed; and President Eisenhower granted \$45 million to Iran in emergency funds.

The Iranian Oil Crisis of 1949-1953 began as one of the most successful anti-imperialist movements in the third world. Mosaddeq and his National Front successfully thumbed their noses at one the greatest imperial powers of all time. For reasons that go beyond the scope of this paper, this success was reversed by U.S. government covert operations carry out a coup d'état against the only legitimate anti-imperialist government to ever hold office in Iran. Even the Shah recognized the importance of the United States role in the Coup. He was heard to say, "I owe my throne to God, my people, my people, my army--and to the U.S. government."<sup>96</sup> The coup of 1953 was a decisive turning point in Iranian history. Particularly important was the role of the United States in consolidating the power of the Shah's dictatorship.<sup>97</sup> U.S. involvement in these events would figure prominently in future anti-imperialist activity in Iran. It is within this environment that Khomeini begins to wield influence within the Iranian anti-imperialist movement.

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<sup>95</sup>Fisher and Ochsenwald, p. 521.

<sup>96</sup>Roosevelt, p. ix.

<sup>97</sup>Gasiorowski, p. 279.



## Chapter 4: Ayatollah Khomeini

*Khomeini is a generalist, a kind of Philosopher King who means to end corruption and then withdraw to his school at the holy city of Qom.*

**CIA memo<sup>98</sup>**

Although no revolution is the work of one man, it is arguable that the Islamic revolution of 1978-79 would not have occurred when it did, and would not have had the decisive impact that it did, if not for the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini. His leadership and profound influence on the revolution were not, as some have suggested, a sudden or accidental phenomenon, but the outcome of fifteen years of diligent political, ideological, and organizational work.<sup>99</sup> By the time Khomeini entered politics in 1962, he had behind him nearly forty years of intensive study, and close involvement with the Iranian religious institution, and the social and political affairs of his country. He had developed a very clear picture of what Islam should be, and its rightful place in Muslim society.

Who was Khomeini, and how was he able to succeed in establishing an Islamic form of government in Iran? In order to answer this question we

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<sup>98</sup>Taheri, p. 23.

<sup>99</sup>Hamid Algar, "Imam Khomeini, 1902-1962: The Pre-Revolutionary Years," in Islam, Politics and Social Movements, ed. Burke and Lapidus, p. 263.

must learn about Khomeini's early, formative years; the years in which the major elements of his world view were established.

### *The Life of Khomeini*

Khomeini was born into a family of *sayyids*, claiming descent from Musa al-Kazim, the seventh Imam of the Shi'ites who migrated from Iran to Kashmir in the early eighteenth century. In the mid-nineteenth century Khomeini's grandfather, Sayyid Ahmad, while on a pilgrimage to the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala in Mesopotamia, met Yusef Khan Kamara'i, a leading citizen of the small town of Khomein in southwestern Iran. Yusef Khan persuaded Sayyid Ahmad to return to Khomein with him to attend to the religious needs of the people. In addition, Sayyid Ahmad married one of Yusef Khan's daughters, thus forging a strong link with the town's wealthiest, most powerful landowner.

In 1855 Sayyid Mustafa, the father of the Khomeini, was born. Sayyid Mustafa followed the traditional course of study: preliminary study in his hometown, followed by advanced training in Isfahan, the main center of religious learning in Iran at the time. His primary instructor in Isfahan was Mir Muhammad Taqi Mudarris, father of Sayyid Hasan Mudarris, a well-known leader of the opposition to Reza Shah.<sup>100</sup> Sayyid Mustafa went on from Isfahan to the holy shrine cities of Iraq and studied under Mirza Hasan Shirazi, author of the celebrated *fatwa* that started the tobacco boycott of 1891-1892. He then returned to Khomein and inherited his father's position of religious leadership.

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<sup>100</sup>Algar, "Imam Khomeini," p. 265.

Sometime around 1887, Mustafa sought the hand of a local landowner's daughter. His wife, Sadiqeh, brought to the marriage with her the right to a plot of land, so that Mustafa could start to farm. Mustafa was just nineteen, and had stayed unmarried a bit too long--Shi'ite tradition requires a man to take a wife, or wives, as soon as he turns sixteen. Sadiqeh was nine years old, exactly the right age for a girl to marry, according to tradition.<sup>101</sup> In November of 1902, on the anniversary of the birth of Fatima, the daughter of Mohammad, Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini was born, the last of six children. Ruhollah never knew his father; Sayyid Mustafa was killed before the Ayatollah was six months old.

Like many topics concerning the Ayatollah's early life and family, the story of Sayyid Mustafa's death has been the subject of many legends since the Islamic revolution. One such legend, present in some of the official biographies, and often quoted by the foreign press claims that Sayyid Mustafa was a revolutionary who fought against Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, before being murdered by the Shah's agents. Some biographies even suggest that Mustafa's murder was planned by the British, who brought their "lackey" to the Persian throne.<sup>102</sup> These stories are most likely forged for the purpose of linking Ayatollah Khomeini's life-long opposition to the Pahlavi regime with a traumatic childhood event, and to create a long-standing Khomeini-versus-Pahlavi rivalry. Reza Khan (as he

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<sup>101</sup>Taheri, p. 32.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid, p. 33.

was known at the time) did not seize power until 1921--nineteen years after Sayyid Mustafa's death.

Whatever the cause, Sayyid Mustafa's death had a profound impact on Ruhollah. It was rumored, at the time, that Mustafa was murdered because his latest child, Ruhollah, was *bad-qadam* (ill omened). The hostility that was heaped upon Ruhollah and his mother because of this was so intense that he was left with his aunt, and never returned to his mother's home. Both his mother and his aunt died in 1918, thus leaving, the young Khomeini fully orphaned at the age of sixteen. In later years Khomeini's followers who saw him as liberating leader, recalled that the Prophet Muhammad was also an orphan, and raised by his aunt and uncle.

Khomeini's early schooling consisted of classes in reading and writing from a tutor who came into the home, and later he attended a local *maktab*. When he was fifteen, he had completed his Persian studies and was ready to start his Arabic and Islamic education. He initially studied under his brother, but when he was seventeen, it was decided that he should study in the more formal setting of a *madrassa*. Khomeini was sent to Arak to study under 'Abd al-Karim Hairi who, like Sayyid Mustafa, was a student of Mirza Hasan Shirazi.

This was the beginning of Khomeini's life-long association with the ulama. This association with the religious institutions of Iran was more than a matter of family and tradition and inheritance. Khomeini had, throughout his life an unmistakable sense of commitment and loyalty to the ulama as heirs to the Imams and the Prophet, the guardians of Islamic learning, those

destined to restore the Islamic community to its former glory.<sup>103</sup> For Khomeini, the concept of the ulama, and its proper place in Islamic society, would always be paramount. The beginning of his religious education marks an event of primary significance in Khomeini's life.

After a year in Arak, Khomeini followed his teacher to the city of Qom. Qom had been one of the earliest centers of Islam in Iran, and had always been a center of learning and pilgrimage, but it was an unpleasant town, and was overshadowed by the shrine cities of Iraq and even the famous *madrastas* of Isfahan. Shaikh Abd al-Karim moved to Qom to create a new center of learning to rival those of Iraq, and in the process to become one of the great Mullah's of his time.

Ruhollah was a hard-working and enthusiastic student, and soon won his master's favor. While it usually takes even the most dedicated student a year before receiving the honor of being able to call on the master at his home, Ruhollah gained that distinction much earlier, and within the year became 'Abd al-Karim's personal companion and scribe.

Khomeini and the few other seekers who had become part of 'Abd al-Karim's circle hoped to complete the course of study that would allow them to become *mullahs*. Although Islam was originally meant to be the first major religion without priests, Shi'ism is deeply rooted in the belief that the majority of the people are largely unable to distinguish right from wrong, and must be constantly shepherded through the perils of this life. The *mullahs* are to be the Shepherds; the unlearned masses must imitate the learned ones

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<sup>103</sup>Algar, "Imam Khomeini," p. 267.

in every aspect of life. The task performed by mullahs is *ijtihad*, or interpretation of the laws of faith. Thus, this small minority of people who are capable of *ijtihad* and worthy of imitation are called *mujtahid*. To become a *mujtahid* is no easy task, and requires years of study and devotion, as well as recognition by one's peers as one who is not only devout, but intimately familiar with matters of Islamic law.

Shaikh 'Abd al-Karim had a profound influence on Khomeini's life and his view of Islam and the world. Years later, Khomeini would quote his teacher almost word for word when prescribing criteria for becoming a *mujtahid* and *marja-e-taqlid* (source of imitation). The shaikh made a point of leading a very modest life, scorning the pleasures of this world, an attitude which Khomeini incorporated into his life as well. 'Abd al-Karim also believed that the ulama had no place in the world of power and politics, and should remain aloof from such matters. He refused to involve himself in such matters.<sup>104</sup> While it is unlikely that he ever did so publicly, Khomeini strongly disagreed with this stance, and was, in his later years, to condemn such apolitical Mullahs as enemies of Islam.

It was also from 'Abd al-Karim that Khomeini learned to love poetry. While he initially shared The Prophet's well documented distaste for poetry, he, soon became enchanted with the medieval Persian poet Hafiz, and at one time, dreamed of writing sonnets like those of Hafiz. Although it is likely that Khomeini learned to love poetry from his teacher, it is equally probable that the matter remained a secret between them. To the Mullahs, writing

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<sup>104</sup>Taheri, p. 60.

poetry is usually a sign of either mental derangement or propensity to blasphemy. In fact, the word *sh'ir* (poetry) is used as the antonym for the word *manteq* (logic).<sup>105</sup> Writing and love of poetry is also seen as a sign of weakness. Even at this early stage of his career, Khomeini sought to appear iron-willed and logical, and so, when writing poetry, used the *nom de plume* Hindi (the Indian).

Despite his somewhat secret affinity for poetry, Khomeini swiftly gained proficiency in *fiqh* and *usul*. However, Khomeini is said to have always been convinced that the study of law does not exhaust the riches of Islam and that the ultimate concern of religion is situated on a separate plane from the legal.<sup>106</sup> And so, it was also during his early years at Qom that Khomeini began to study *hikmat* or *falsafa* (philosophy) and *'irfan* (mysticism) in earnest. Both disciplines have deep roots in the Shi'i faith, but were studied only sporadically in religious institutions of the time, and were often regarded with extreme suspicion.

In spite of such suspicions, Khomeini became well versed in these controversial areas, and chose to begin his teaching career, at the age of twenty seven, in philosophy. The Ayatollah's earliest writings were also concerned with mystical matters. It is clear that the early and intense cultivation of *hikmat* and *irfan* were not merely a passing episode in Khomeini's early life, but a powerful contribution to the formation of his persona as a political and religious leader.<sup>107</sup> It is perhaps the unique ability

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Algar, "Imam Khomeini," p. 268.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid, p. 272.

to relate the technical details of the Shari'a to the spiritual matters of irfan, his mastery of both exoteric and esoteric learning which made Khomeini stand out. Perhaps his obvious knowledge of all aspects of religion and law paired with his passionate concern for the socio-political sphere made Khomeini believable as a leader of an Islamic revolution.

In the 1930's Khomeini began a series of lectures on *akhlaq* (ethics) at the madrasa in Qom. In these lectures he taught true Islamic ethics. These lectures attracted a large following, and were so well attended that Khomeini was prevailed upon to teach twice a week.

As a result of his exceedingly well-attended lectures of *akhlaq* during this time, Khomeini had his first clash with state authorities. When the police ordered him to cancel his lectures, Khomeini refused, and challenged the authorities to forcibly prevent him from lecturing. Instead of force, the police sabotaged the lectures by means of secret agents within the ulama.<sup>108</sup> Khomeini was forced to move his lectures to a lesser-known school with more difficult access.

At this time the Pahlavi regime was seeking, with some measure of success, to isolate and discredit the ulama. The new Shah sought to unify the semi-autonomous provinces of Iran, and to create national pride in the great Persian heritage. He recognized the power of the ulama, and saw their power as barriers to his goals of the modernization and Westernization of Iran.<sup>109</sup> He set about enacting laws and programs that would diminish their influence.

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<sup>108</sup>Algar, "Imam Khomeini," p. 273.

<sup>109</sup>Shaul Bakhash, The Reign of the Ayatollahs (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984), p. 21.



One of these laws that especially galled Khomeini was his decree abolishing the traditional dress. All men were ordered to wear a European-style suit and hat, thus eliminating the immediate distinction and prestige that came with wearing of the mullah's turban. Huge bonfires were built to destroy thousands of turbans and tribal hats.<sup>110</sup> This was just the beginning of the Shah's numerous sideways attacks on the clergy.

The reforms of Reza Shah left a deep mark on Khomeini. His first twenty years in Qom roughly coincided with the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi, and his attitude toward the dynasty were largely formed during this period. Khomeini saw the main aim of Reza Shah as the elimination of Islam as a social, cultural and political force. Moreover, the Ayatollah was convinced that this aim had been bred and encouraged by imperial powers--especially Britain. As for Mohammad Reza Shah, he was forever in Khomeini's eyes "the son of Reza Khan."<sup>111</sup>

In 1937 Shaikh 'Abd al-Karim Hairi died, and his position as the leading mullah in Iran was eventually filled by Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Borujerdi. Borujerdi had occasionally opposed Reza Shah, and had vowed that he would "never remain silent in the face of the wrong and illegal acts of the regime"<sup>112</sup> Many hoped Borujerdi would use his position to confront the regime. They were, however, to be disappointed, for Borujerdi proved to be just as apolitical as 'Abd al-Karim, if not more so. In the 1940's Borujerdi reached an agreement with Mohammad Reza Shah: Borujerdi

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<sup>110</sup>Taheri, p. 78.

<sup>111</sup>Algar, "Imam Khomeini," p. 275.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid, p. 278.

agreed to support the regime, and the Shah agreed to relax his father's secular policies and lift the prohibition against the veil.<sup>113</sup> By the middle of the 1940's Borujerdi was recognized as the supreme *marja-e-taqlid* or source of imitation, but was seen by many reform-minded Muslims as the epitome of the conservative cleric: supporting the status quo (and therefore his own power) while claiming to stay out of politics.

Khomeini's relationship with Borujerdi was close--he was active in promoting his candidacy and later served as his teaching assistant and personal secretary, and Khomeini's daughter even married into Borujerdi's family. Khomeini concentrated on his teaching during this time, and avoided politics. He knew that Borujerdi Ayatollah was old, and was preparing to make his own bid to take over the mantle of the Grand Ayatollah. He was reluctant to offend Borujerdi, and he knew that he would need the support of the Shah if he was to succeed. In the Shi'i tradition of *taqiyya*, he kept his political differences with Borujerdi, and with the Shah to himself for the sake of achieving a goal.<sup>114</sup> He pretty much followed the instructions of the Grand Ayatollah, and stayed out of politics during this period.

In 1943 Khomeini took his first tentative steps into politics by publishing an unsigned work entitled Secrets Unveiled. Under the guise of defending Shi'ism against Wahabism, he attacked many contemporary secularists and the Pahlavi government. The primary target of his attack was Ali Akbar Hakimzadeh, the author of a recently published book called

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<sup>113</sup>Ervand Abrahamian, Khomeinism (Los Angeles, CA: The University of California Press, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>114</sup>Taheri, pp. 115-116.

Thousand Year Secrets which questioned the historical authenticity of the central Shi'i myths.<sup>115</sup> After this brief entry into the political arena, Khomeini again withdrew from politics, devoting his time to study and teaching--even during the oil crisis. Khomeini also used this time to work on his work Questions Clarified, a work intended to cement his position as a grand ayatollah.<sup>116</sup>

Khomeini's more permanent entry into politics came in 1962-63 soon after Borujerdi's death with the implementation of a series of reforms, known as Mohammad Reza Shah's "White Revolution." The central component of these reforms was land redistribution, and was opposed by many in the religious establishment. Khomeini, on the other hand, opposed it on different grounds. He concentrated on the new electoral law giving women voting rights in Iran. The Ayatollah may not have felt that his authority as an ayatollah was strong enough yet to declare open revolt against the government, but the program for the emancipation of women was too far across the line for him to ignore.<sup>117</sup> The Qur'an is very explicit about the fact that God meant for women to be dominated by men. The entire traditional Iranian society was based on the division of the sexes. Women could expect to enjoy many rights and privileges, and deserved the proper respect, but they could never be equals of men.

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<sup>115</sup>Farhang Rajaei, Islamic Values and World View:: Khomeini on Man, the State and International Politics (New York: University Press of America, 1983), p. 27-28.

<sup>116</sup>Abrahamian, p. 10.

<sup>117</sup>Taheri, p. 126.

Khomeini's denouncements of the White Revolution helped to turn the Moharram processions of that year into violent street protests against the regime. His disciples often date the beginning of their movement to this event often called "The June Uprising."<sup>118</sup> In the midst of this crisis, Khomeini was arrested and detained in Teheran for two months. When he was released, the regime spread the rumor that he had agreed to stay out of state affairs because he believed that politics was beneath him. In 1964, however, when the shah extended diplomatic immunity to American military personnel, Khomeini seized the opportunity to prove them wrong. He compared this action to the infamous Capitulations of the nineteenth century, and accused the shah and his government of cowing to Western pressure, and betraying Iran and Islam. He was immediately arrested again and, this time, deported to Turkey. His deportation as well as his attacks against the regime greatly enhanced Khomeini's standing and established him as the leading "anti regime" ayatollah.<sup>119</sup>

From Turkey, Khomeini made his way to Najaf, in Iraq where he was to spend the next thirteen years. During the first six years of his exile, he concentrated on teaching religious jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and writing academic works. During this period he issued relatively few political pronouncements.

In 1970 Khomeini published a series of lectures entitled *Velayat-e-Faqih* or The Guardianship of the Jurisconsult. This slim work was to become the handbook of the Revolution. This series of seventeen lectures

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<sup>118</sup>Abrahamian, p. 10.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid, p. 11.

develops four essential themes: First, is a condemnation of the Persian monarchy as contrary to Islam. Second, the Islamic state, based on the Qur'an and the Shari'a as a practical form of government. Thirdly, it forcefully asserts that the ulama as heirs to the prophet, have a duty to assume leadership of the community. Finally, *Velayat-e-Faqih* describes it as incumbent upon all believers to work actively for the overthrow to the non-Islamic state.<sup>120</sup> Though the lectures were delivered in Najaf, copies were soon widely circulated in Iran, and made available to the common people. From this point forward, Khomeini issued a steady stream of decrees, *fatwas*, sermons and denouncements.

At the height of the revolution in late 1978, he was giving daily press interviews and declarations. Khomeini's pronouncements had increasingly little to do with Islamic theology, and more to do with sociopolitical issues. They were intended for the masses and used simple, everyday language. The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to reprint Khomeini's sermons, lectures, decrees, interviews and political pronouncements. The fact that Khomeini's works still hold such a revered place in Iranian Society testifies to the importance of his role in the Islamic Revolution. Without Khomeini and his charismatic leadership, there would have been no Islamic Revolution.

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<sup>120</sup>Bakhash, pp. 38-39.

### *Khomeini's Concept of Man, Politics and the State*

For Khomeini, the key to understanding the world is to understand man. Man is a microcosm of the universe, and is therefore the key to understanding God. Man is obsessed with himself, because he is the source of all human problems. If this man is left on his own, he will lead the whole world into destruction.<sup>121</sup> However, man also has the potential to be the "noblest of creatures." He has been made in the highest form, and is even capable, of attaining perfection.<sup>122</sup> In order to understand Khomeini's view of politics and government, it is necessary to understand his basic understanding of human nature. The solution to worldly problems is a reformed man. The key to the success of the world is found in man himself-- a man who understands and scrupulously follows God's laws. For Khomeini, man is both the problem and the solution.<sup>123</sup>

Khomeini frequently points to the dichotomy of man's nature. There are two poles in the universe (and, as man is a Microcosm of the universe, in man's nature as well), one attributed to God, and the other attributed to Satan. Man has elements of both these forces. On the one hand man is "animal and maybe even inferior to other animals." On the other hand, man "is an animal endowed with aptitude of becoming human and attaining perfection..."<sup>124</sup>

Khomeini's man lives in a state of bestiality until he is guided to the right path and develops the desirable side of his nature. He who does not

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<sup>121</sup>Rajaei, p. 35

<sup>122</sup>Hamid Algar, Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1992), pp. 409-410.

<sup>123</sup>Rajaei, p. 37.

<sup>124</sup>Algar, Islam and Revolution, p. 410.

seek the right path, or who refuses it, possesses all the undesirable qualities of man and none of the desirable ones through which he is capable of attaining perfection. Khomeini's man is a creature governed by conflicting drives: passion and desire versus the need to perfect himself spiritually.<sup>125</sup> While his Godly essence drives him upward toward a spiritual and perfect existence, his desires and appetites pull him down to a base life of animalistic qualities.

In Khomeini's conception of the world, natural rights are blasphemous. Man has no "natural rights," because man owes everything he possesses to God. "There is no being in the world that possesses independence. All there is stems from God."<sup>126</sup> God is the supreme essence and all creatures depend on His will for existence.<sup>127</sup> Total dependence on God is the only true freedom. Man is therefore, by nature dependent on some source of guidance. He does, however, possess a right to choose. He has the limited ability to choose either the right path or the wrong one. He can choose to serve either God or Satan. This concept of the two paths is important to Khomeini's concept of the state as well. Any political order which helps man to follow the right path is an accepted one, and any which distracts him from it is not an accepted order.<sup>128</sup>

According to Khomeini, man is capable of being led by the forces of *taghut* (Satan), or by the forces of God. Without the Prophet's help, he

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<sup>125</sup>Rajaei, p. 42.

<sup>126</sup>Algar, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 371.

<sup>127</sup>Shahrugh Akhavi, "Islam, Politics and Society in the Thought of Ayatullah Khomeini, Ayatullah Taleqani and Ali Shariati," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 24, no. 2 (April 1983): p. 404.

<sup>128</sup>Rajaei, p. 45.

would have been condemned to follow the darker path. It is possible, with proper guidance, for man to obtain justice and happiness in this world. This guidance was provided by Muhammad and the Imams during the early period of the Islamic era. In the absence of the Prophet and the Imams, who is to lead the people along the right path? This question is answered through an examination of Khomeini's concept of politics, government and the state.

Ayatollah Khomeini wants to reform man and guide him to the right path by establishing a just political order.<sup>129</sup> This is an order in which Islamic law rules:

Islamic government is neither tyrannical nor absolute, but constitutional. It is not constitutional in the current sense of the word, i.e., based on the approval of laws in accordance with the opinion of the majority. It is constitutional in the sense that the rulers are subject to a certain set of conditions in governing and administering the country, conditions that are set forth in the Noble Qur'an and the Sunna of the Most Noble Messenger...*Islamic government may therefore be defined as the rule of divine law over men.*<sup>130</sup>

This ideal form of government is possible only with the establishment of the rule of the *faqih* (the learned jurisconsults or religious scholars of Shi'i Islam.) The *faqih* must possess general intelligence and managerial ability, but most importantly, he must have extensive knowledge of the law (*"Ilm e-qanun*) and righteousness (*edalat*).<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>130</sup>Algar, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 55.

<sup>131</sup>Ayatollah Khomeini, *From Name'i az Imam*, as cited in Rajaei, p. 66.



For Khomeini, politics means managing the affairs of the country. Since all affairs must be regulated by the Shari'a, "politics" becomes synonymous with "implementing the affairs of Islam."<sup>132</sup> Hence, for the Ayatollah, politics means individual conformity to the Shari'a and collective implementation of the laws of the Qur'an and the sunna of the Prophet. The crucial factor is the presence of a person or persons to ensure proper implementation of Islamic law. This function is to be fulfilled by the *faqih* (pl. *fuqaha*). The *fuqaha* are special representatives of God whose duty it is to safeguard the implementation of the law and to guard the people against sinfulness. Without proper guidance from the *fuqaha*, man would tend to be guided by the forces of *taghut*, and not by the forces of God.

Khomeini admits that textual evidence from scripture and hadith are not entirely conclusive on this matter, but argues that supervision of politics, or even rule by religious scholars is logically self-evident from the nature of Islam.<sup>133</sup> While there is no single verse of scripture, or hadith which explicitly delineates the right or the duty of the *faqih* to rule, consideration of the hadith and the examples of the Prophet and the Imams, taken together, support the supervision of politics by learned religious scholars. He denounces the idea of the separation of politics and religion as contrary to Islam. The separation of church and state is a Western concept, used to confuse and exploit the Islamic world.<sup>134</sup> It would be absurd to acknowledge

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<sup>132</sup>Akhavi, p. 425.

<sup>133</sup>Michael M.J. Fischer, "Imam Khomeini: Four Levels of Understanding," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 157.

<sup>134</sup>Amir H. Ferdows, "Khomeini and the Fedayan's Society and Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, no., 2 (May 1983): 245.

the ulama as the inheritors and successors of the prophet without recognizing their authority and duty as political leaders.<sup>135</sup> Were not the Prophet and the Imams political as well as religious leaders?

Khomeini's *faqih* goes beyond the traditional Shi'i conception of the jurist as a mere expert in religious law. The *fuqaha* are to be the supreme overseers, guardians and judges of state administration.<sup>136</sup> Total obedience is owed to them as they are the successors to the prophets. Although Khomeini does not give the *faqih* the Prophet's and the Imam's special spiritual status and infallibility, his interpretation greatly expands the prestige and power of the religious scholar beyond the traditional Shi'i view.<sup>137</sup>

While the *faqih* has not only a right, but a duty to participate in and supervise affairs of government, he should not actually assume governmental positions. These positions are to be assumed by politicians, who are then supervised by the ulama to ensure that government is being conducted in accordance with the Shari'a. Religious leaders have more important duties than getting involved in "executive affairs."<sup>138</sup> This contradicts the fact that the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran was a religious leader.

Khomeini explains this situation by saying:

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<sup>135</sup>Hamid Enayat, "Iran: Khomeini's Concept of the 'Guardianship of the Jurisconsult,'" in Islam in the Political Process, ed. James P. Piscatori (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 169.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid, p. 161.

<sup>137</sup>Mangol Bayat, "The Iranian Revolution of 1979: Fundamentalist or Modern," Middle East Journal 37, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 39.

<sup>138</sup>Ayatollah Khomeini, From a sermon delivered on June 21, 1982, as cited in Rajaei, p. 63.

When we gained control of the country, we realized that we were mistaken. [we realized that] if the religious leaders do not assume executive posts, the country will be either swallowed by the Russians or by the Americans... We are pursuing our interests and not the implementation of our words... Therefore until the time that a group of capable non-religious leaders have been trained to assume these positions [we accept governmental jobs for the religious leaders].<sup>139</sup>

In spite of his harsh condemnation of monarchy, and the despotic rule of the Pahlavi dynasty, the system of government proposed by Khomeini is no more democratic than that of the Shah. It does contain a small element of formal democracy, in that the *faqih* achieves his status by virtue of his long-standing reputation as a man whom the public can trust. However, the functions granted the *faqih* by Khomeini's form of government give him powers far superior to any modern ruler. Not only is he handed sweeping political powers, but also vast spiritual prerogatives.<sup>140</sup> In theory, however, there are two important factors which will ensure that the *faqih* does not abuse his power. The first is his moral and ethical superiority, which, in addition to religious knowledge is a prerequisite to becoming a *faqih*. The second is the Shi'i belief that no *faqih* can complete authority over the others. There is to be no hierarchy among the *fuqaha*.<sup>141</sup> This principle has proved extremely difficult to put into practice.

The *faqih* is charged with supervising the politics of the state, but what is a state? The Ayatollah's idea of the state differs greatly from the

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>Enayat, p. 177-178.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid, p. 173.

traditional Western concept. Khomeini's state is the Islamic *umma* or community. This society is based on a shared ideology, as opposed to the Western territorial state which is based on such elements as a common language, race, or shared memory. Khomeini dismisses the notion of the state and its accompanying ideas of nationalism as products of Western imperialism. This Western concept of the state which has been adopted by so many corrupt leaders in the Muslim world has, in his view, damaged the solidarity of Muslim peoples by promoting divisive nationalism within the *umma*. Before the imposition of nationalism, Muslims were united by their faith, and had no internal divisions based on territory or culture. In Khomeini's state, ideology is the central foundation of political society. Other elements--such as territory and population--are important only insofar as they provide the basis of operation for the government, which is in turn, simply the means by which the *fuqaha* ensure the proper implementation of the Shari'a.<sup>142</sup>

In summary, Khomeini conceives of man as a creature with a dual nature. He is capable of both extreme evil and extreme good. It is possible for him to overcome his evil nature, and eventually to achieve perfection, but in order to do this, he must follow the correct path to righteousness which is laid out in the divine law of Islam. Common man is incapable of interpreting and understanding the Shari'a alone, and must be guided by God's appointed representatives on earth. The *faqih* is charged with supervision of the government. Government is, in turn, the mechanism for proper

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<sup>142</sup>Rajaei, p. 70.

administration of the Shari'a. The primary feature of this government is the question of sovereignty. Sovereignty belongs only to God, but He has delegated some of His sovereignty to the Prophet, and then through the Imams to the *fuqaha*.<sup>143</sup> The *faqih's* ultimate duty is to guide and guard the *umma* so that they can live their lives in accordance with God's revealed law.

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid, p. 67.

## Chapter 5: The Triumph of Anti-Imperialism

### *The Islamic Revolution of 1978-79*

The revolutionary movement that took the world by surprise in 1978 and toppled the twenty-five hundred year old Persian monarchy began with the June uprising of 1963. By crushing the protests and exiling Khomeini the Shah may have won the immediate battle, but he lost the war. His behavior was seen as brutal and excessive, and served to solidify much of the opposition. Although the incident ended in apparent victory for the Shah, the opposition learned valuable lessons. The impact of the June uprising on the ualma was dramatic. Khomeini's courage in confronting the Shah served to politicize the clergy in Qom and his exile increased cooperation among the ulama in general.<sup>144</sup> Whatever their differences may have been, they could all unite in opposition to the Shah.

The events leading to and immediately following the uprising paved the way for the formation of formal Islamic political opposition. In fact, the most important consequence of the incident was the emergence of Khomeini as a political leader. It was not until after his actions during the uprising that he was able to identify himself as the leader of the anti-regime movement.

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<sup>144</sup>Mohsen Milani, The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 54.

His arrest and deportation solidified his position even further as not only a religious leader of great importance, but a political leader as well.

Within weeks of Khomeini's exile tapes of his declarations began to be smuggled into Iran. He alleged that America, like other imperial powers before her, desired to exploit Iran and thus to destroy Islam and the Qur'an.<sup>145</sup> He called on the ulama to speak out against these powers and on the people to agitate against the shah's policies of reform and foreign exploitation. His remarks were further publicized by word of mouth. In the early 1970's he began to exchange messages with Iranian student organizations in the United States, in which he urged students to reject secularism and devote themselves to the promotion of an Islamic government for Iran.<sup>146</sup> While these groups did not always adhere to Khomeini's theocratic concept for the Iranian state, they saw him as a leader for their common cause against the Shah, who was widely viewed as a puppet of the American government.

The Shah's forced modernization strategy of the 1960's and 1970's created a multitude of tensions, and eventually alienated his base of support. His program of reforms alienated the bazaaries, the ulama, and the landed upper class--three traditional bastions of support for the monarchy. He tried to garner the support of the lower classes, but his reforms were unable to achieve their goal of redistribution of wealth and power. His desire to modernize Iran while maintaining firm control and absolute power ensured that he would fail to win the hearts and minds of the masses. Meanwhile,

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<sup>145</sup>Bakhash, p. 34.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid, p. 40.

many of his policies and actions so offended the ulama that he increased the ever-present tension between the secular authorities and the mujtahids.

In addition to alienating much of his traditional support and the extremely important religious class, the Shah devoted considerable effort to suppressing the modern middle class. The Westernized Iranian professional middle class was ready for active political participation, and the increasingly dictatorial regime of Mohammad Reza Shah denied them a participatory role in government. Like many of the Iranian student organizations in America, much of the middle class did not expressly subscribe to Khomeini's view of absolute power of the ulama, but they saw Shi'i Islam and Khomeini's movement as a means to assert their independent national ideology in opposition to Western, especially American, intervention in national affairs.<sup>147</sup>

As the Shah alienated his regime from more and more segments of society, he was plunged into isolation. In order to survive he increasingly relied on repressive measures and foreign support--he looked mainly to the United States. This further incensed the revolutionaries and increased the perception of the monarch as a mere puppet of U.S. governmental policy. Meanwhile, Khomeini's message appealed to everybody who was in opposition to the political oppression of the Shah, the abuses of SAVAK and the consequences of foreign economic and military presence. The result was

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<sup>147</sup>Bayat, "The Islamic Revolution of 1979," p. 33.



that the Shah and the ruling elite stood on one side against all other socio-political groups on the other.<sup>148</sup>

Since the establishment of Shi'ism as the state religion of Iran in 1501, there has been an perpetual tension between the monarchy and religious authorities. The balance of tension has shifted back and forth, but each side managed to maintain its own sphere of influence and power. This semi-peaceful coexistence ended after the June uprising, when Khomeini and his core of supporters began to campaign heavily against the Shah's regime and protested it as a violation of the laws of Islam. He spoke to the poor and the downtrodden, and railed against the ill-effects of government policies of foreign economic participation on bazaaris and shopkeepers.

He also frequently denigrated the Shah's liberalization program. He saw many of these measures as dangerous to the traditional power base of the ulama, and he was deeply disturbed by what he considered to be attempts by the state to secure control over religious affairs.<sup>149</sup> Of particular concern were reforms dealing with education. Government attempts to supervise mosques, seminaries and religious schools were a serious encroachment into the affairs of the mujtahids, and the ulama fought back against these efforts to destroy their influence. They saw the struggle as one for self defense and survival.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid, p. 34 and Milani, p. 72.

<sup>149</sup>Bakhash, p. 35-36.

<sup>150</sup>James A. Bill, "Power and Religion in Revolutionary Iran," Middle East Journal 36, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 27.

In 1971, in response to his increasing isolation and the agitation of the ulama, the Shah's government launched an attack on the Shi'i religious establishment. Government forces closed down Islamic meeting places, and prayer meetings were often infiltrated by the secret police. Religious publishing houses in Tehran and Qom were shut down, religious student organizations on campuses were disbanded, and agents of SAVAK and the military were put in charge of the holiest shrines.<sup>151</sup> In 1972 the Prime Minister developed a detailed strategy on how Khomeini could be discredited through the fabrication of documents and through a coordinated effort on the part of various governmental agencies and SAVAK.<sup>152</sup> More commonly, mollahs and mujtahids were repeatedly arrested and interrogated.

The Shah's repressive policies were not able to eliminate the current of discontent that ran through the country. In fact, it radicalized the opposition and gave it a sense of righteousness and legitimacy.<sup>153</sup> In the midst of these repressive reforms, the people took refuge in religion. In addition to appealing to the people's deeply held resentment against foreign exploitation of Iranian resources and territory, the Ayatollah bolstered his opposition by adding Islam to the list casualties of the Shah. By raising the banner of Islam, he revived an old doctrine of Islam as the victim of centuries

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<sup>151</sup>Bill, p. 25.

<sup>152</sup>Shahrough Akhavi, Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1980), pp. 135-138.

<sup>153</sup>Milani, p. 75.

of humiliation by colonial domination, capitalist exploitation and tyrannical oppression by capitalist lackeys.<sup>154</sup>

When he went into exile in 1964, Khomeini left behind clerics in Tehran, Qom and other cities who were either committed supporters, or who shared his broader political aims of anti-imperialism and the elimination of the Shah's repressive regime. After he moved to Najaf, substantial amounts of money were contributed in the form of charitable dues in his name. Religious leaders across the country collected this money as representatives of the Ayatollah, and was used to wield considerable influence and to support sympathetic mollahs and seminary students, and also to fund overt political opposition.<sup>155</sup> In the years before the revolution, many of Khomeini's adherents were sent to prison and exiled to remote areas of Iran. Ironically, this internal exile enabled Khomeini's network of support to expand to include even isolated provincial regions. By the time the first wave of protests broke out in 1978, there was, therefore, a nucleus of Khomeini's organization already in place--a network of mosques, Islamic associations, mollahs sympathetic to Khomeini, and large numbers of the population who had learned through Islamic discussion groups that Islam was a dynamic force for change and opposition.<sup>156</sup> Thanks to the Shah's increasingly coercive and authoritarian regime, this network had a vast reservoir of dissatisfaction from which to draw.

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<sup>154</sup>Jahangir Amuzegar, Dynamics of the Iranian Revolution: The Pahlavi's Triumph and Tragedy, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 32.

<sup>155</sup>Bakhash, p. 40.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid, p. 44.

This smoldering dissatisfaction burst into flames in January 1978, when the Tehran newspaper printed a government news release attacking the background, motives, and ambitions of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Religious students in the capital and in Qom took to the streets to protest the article. Demonstrations continued through the spring and summer months. The Shah tried to salvage the situation by replacing some members of his administration, most notably, the long-time head of SAVAK, General Nasiri, and in early August, he announced that free elections would take place the following spring. He was convinced that through continued commitment to reform and liberalization could win back the people.<sup>157</sup> It was too little, too late, however. His decrees were largely ignored, and the rioting continued.

On August 19, more than 400 men, women and children were burned to death when a cinema in Abadan was set on fire by arsonists. The shah's government was immediately charged with starting the fire to discredit its opponents, and the government blamed Islamics and Marxists for the atrocity. The tragedy galvanized the opposition. By September, the rioting and demonstrations had reached unmanageable proportions, and martial law was imposed in Tehran. On September 7 thousands demonstrated in the streets of the capital city. On September 8, known as Black Friday, the Shah's troops fired into the crowds, killing over 250 protesters, most of them

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<sup>157</sup>Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Answer to History (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1980), p. 159.

from the religious class.<sup>158\*\*</sup>

Khomeini worked hard to fuel the fires and keep the protests from faltering. He also took great care to ensure that the Shah remained the central issue. He reminded the people that the Shah had been imposed on the country, and would not have survived without American backing. He had personally ordered the killing of demonstrators, repression of rights and the destruction of Islam. He was a traitor and the people no longer wanted him.<sup>159</sup> In addition, the Ayatollah spoke out emphatically against any tendency toward compromise. U.S. participation in all such compromise solutions added insult to injury. Any compromise that allowed for the preservation of the Pahlavi dynasty or the monarchy was deemed treasonous.

Black Friday became a rallying cry against the regime, and Khomeini's anti-shah, anti-West, pro-Islamic rhetoric garnered a broad base of support from a variety of factions within Iran. These factions did not share a common ideology, or even a common goal for the future of Iran, but they shared a common enemy, and Khomeini was able to unite them, at least for a time. The coalition included Marxist-atheists, liberal agnostics, non-practicing Muslims, progressive Islamic elements among intellectuals and students, social democrat followers of former Prime Minister Mosaddeq, Islamic-Marxist reformers and the established Shi'ite hierarchy, as well as the

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<sup>158</sup>Said Amir Arjomand, The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 237.

\*\* I have used the figures provided by Arjomand, however the number of Black Friday fatalities varies from the original government estimate of 59, to the 86 noted in the Shah's autobiography, to over 15,000 as inflated by the revolutionary government and quoted by Taheri in Spirit of Allah

<sup>159</sup>Bakhash, pp. 45-46.

core of hard-line Khomeini supporters.<sup>160</sup> This wide base of urban support was an important feature of the Islamic Revolution, and was key to its success.

In October 1978, the Iraqi government, in response to request from the Iranian Prime Minister, asked Khomeini to leave.<sup>161</sup> After being refused asylum by the Kuwaiti government he transferred his operation to Paris. This transfer to France contributed to the consolidation of the revolutionary movement by giving Khomeini worldwide media exposure journalists from the world's leading print, television and radio media hastened to his door. During his four-month stay at the Neuphle-le-Chateau, the Ayatollah gave over 120 interviews.<sup>162</sup> The move to a more modern locale had another benefit: given the excellent air and telecommunications links with Tehran, Paris permitted much closer coordination between Khomeini and his leaders in Iran than had been possible at Najaf.<sup>163</sup> Khomeini transmitted his declarations daily to Tehran, where they were taped, transcribed and distributed in the form of leaflets and posters throughout the streets of Tehran and other major cities.

In October and November 1978, workers and public employees joined the revolutionary movement by participating in a series of paralyzing nationwide strikes. Even the school teachers went on strike, making thousands of students available for demonstrations.<sup>164</sup> The strikes--especially

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<sup>160</sup>Amuzegar, p. 14.

<sup>161</sup>Milani, p. 118.

<sup>162</sup>Bakhash, p. 49.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid.

<sup>164</sup>Milani, p. 119.

those of the electrical and the oil workers--crippled the major cities, causing blackouts, forcing many factories to shut down, and shortages of heating oil.

The government's failure to stop the strikes led to the final crisis of the Shah's reign. In order to save his throne, the Shah turned to the armed forces and established a military government. He was plagued with indecision, however, and tried to continue with liberalizing. At the time that he announced the installation of a military government, he told the nation that he had heard the message of the revolution.<sup>165</sup> The military government was not given the freedom or authority necessary to apply martial law, and was therefore ineffective. The military government was a farce, and further evidence of the Shah's fatal indecision and inconsistency.

Khomeini seized upon the Shah's weakness and exploited it. In early December, which coincided with the Shi'i holy month of Moharram, the opposition leaders in Tehran called for two rallies to commemorate *Tasu'a* and *'Ashura* (the ninth and tenth days of Moharram, and the Climax of the commemorations). The marches were well-organized and peaceful and supported by millions of people from all walks of life in Tehran. The rallies also produced a seventeen-point declaration which recognized Khomeini's leadership and called for the end to the Shah's rule, and a government based on Islamic precepts.<sup>166</sup>

The success of the rallies and their massive participation shattered any illusions the Shah still held about the military government's ability to control

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<sup>165</sup>Arjomand, p. 116.

<sup>166</sup>Milani, p. 123.

the situation. The Shah waited for the United States to tell him what to do, but Washington was divided, and gave him conflicting advice and signals. Finally, by late December, the situation had become intolerable, and the Shah looked for a civilian Prime minister in a last-ditch effort to save the monarchy. There was by this time a shortage of willing candidates, and British and American ambassadors were urging him to go abroad. Finally, Shapur Bakhtiyar, a former member of Mosaddeq's administration agreed to form a constitutional government on the condition that the Shah leave Iran on an indefinite "vacation." The Shah initially refused to leave the country, but when he realized that he could not count on U.S. intervention he agreed to leave. On January 16, 1979, the Shah left Iran and died in exile in 1980.

Although Bakhtiyar acted promptly to give freedom of the press, dissolve SAVAK and announced that he would sever diplomatic relations with Israel, he lacked the popular appeal of the opposition. Khomeini had, by this time gathered too much momentum to be stopped. Bakhtiyar was, as an appointee of the Shah, a symbol of the old order. Within days of the Shah's departure, people marched in the streets of Tehran demanding his resignation. When Khomeini triumphantly returned to Iran on 1 February 1979, he appointed his own Prime Minister. Bakhtiyar's government collapsed on ten days later and the revolutionary forces took control.

Major revolutions in which mass populations have risen to overthrow entrenched traditional monarchical regimes have historically been followed by violent periods of extremist politics.<sup>167</sup> Iran was no exception. The

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<sup>167</sup>Bill, p. 30.



immediate post-revolutionary period was characterized by violence, chaos and extremism. With the fall of the Pahlavis and the final triumph of anti-imperialist forces, Iranian social and political systems lay in a shambles. The coalition that had united against a common enemy now struggled from within to gain control. With Khomeini as the recognized leader of the revolution, the ulama eventually gained direct control of the Iranian political process and became involved in the day-to-day running of government. In so doing, they placed themselves in the unenviable position of responsibility for solving the social, economic and political problems of Iran.<sup>168</sup>

The role of the United States in the downfall of the Pahlavi regime has been the subject of numerous studies, and will be only very briefly analyzed here. In short, it seems certain that the Carter administration did not realize the seriousness of the challenge of the opposition until it was much too late. In December 1977, the U.S. embassy in Tehran was of the opinion that the prospects for sustained growth and political stability in Iran were excellent.<sup>169</sup> Even as late as August-September 1978, the U.S. Intelligence establishment was relatively confident that the opposition did not pose a real threat to the regime.<sup>170</sup>

The United States government failed to grasp the gravity of the situation, and when it finally did, it could not agree on a coherent policy, and thus the Shah was left with ineffective measures of support, and finally no

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<sup>168</sup>Ibid.

<sup>169</sup>Amuzegar, p. 11.

<sup>170</sup>Foreign Economic Trends, pp.-163 (Washington: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1977): p. 9, as cited by Amuzegar, Dynamics of the Iranian Revolution, p. 11.

support or guidance whatsoever. While it would certainly be a gross exaggeration to assert, as did Mohammad Reza Shah in his memoirs, that Washington supported the revolution as a potential bulwark against communist factions in Iran, or that the Carter administration was determined to oust the Shah, it is true that The Iranian perception that the United States had abandoned the Shah, and the opposition need no longer fear U.S. intervention was a significant contributing factor to the success of the revolution.<sup>171</sup> By their lukewarm support and lack of a coherent policy and guidance, the government of the United States hastened the destruction of the Pahlavi government.<sup>172</sup>

Even after fifteen years of retrospection and analysis, the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1978-79 is remembered with a surprise and disbelief. Very few outside Iran saw it coming, and even Khomeini seemed surprised at the regime's rapid collapse and his sudden rise to power.<sup>173</sup> The revolution ended a long cycle of anti-imperialism in Iran's history that began in the nineteenth century. It was an explosion of pent-up frustrations of the population against the consequences of changes imposed on them by foreigners and a westernized monarchy.

#### *After the Revolution: Future U.S. - Iranian Relations*

The Islamic Revolution has largely determined the course of U.S. policy toward Iran for the past fifteen years. During the decades between

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<sup>171</sup>Arjomand, p. 132.

<sup>172</sup>Pahlavi, p. 165-166.

<sup>173</sup>Amuzegar, p. 10.

World War II and the revolution, U.S. allies in the Middle East--including the Shah's government--received generous U.S. support, because of their strategic position and the perception that cultivation of allies in the region would provide a necessary buffer against the Soviet Union. In the name of the greater good, much corruption, repression and generally un-democratic practices were often tolerated. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of these countries lost their value to the U.S. as strategic allies. Unless they can gain strategic value against a new threat, they fear (with good reason) loss of U.S. support. Islamic fundamentalist movements have become the new threat to U.S. interests in the region. Iran's revolution was the ultimate Islamic fundamentalist movement, and has therefore become, for American policy makers, a symbol of evil in the Middle East.

It was initially feared that Iran would try to export its revolution to other Islamic countries. While Iran continues to support militant Islamic movements, it hardly stands alone in this venture, and the fears of an Iranian-style revolution elsewhere have failed to materialize. Iran is not the cause of Islamic radicalism in the Middle East. The Islamic revolution was the expression of vast dissatisfaction with corrupt government, poverty, lack of political participation, and increasing Western involvement in internal affairs. When Iranians turned to nationalism and socialism, they failed to find acceptable solutions to these pressing problems. Rather than trying to eradicate Islamic fundamentalism--an unrealistic, and not necessarily beneficial goal--the U.S. and other major powers would do better to address the conditions that led to revolution.

Many of the conditions leading to the Islamic Revolution in Iran are present in other Islamic countries today.<sup>174</sup> By understanding and learning to realistically deal with Iran today, perhaps the U.S. can appreciate the nature of Islamic movements in other countries, and prevent similar disastrous results for American relations with them. It is toward this end that examination of events leading to the revolution prove most useful.

Since the death of Khomeini in 1989, Rafsanjani has moved increasingly toward moderation. His economic policy of curtailing state subsidies and moving Iran away from the crude form of socialism established in the immediate post-revolutionary years is an example of this, as is Iran's help in the release of U.S. hostages in Lebanon, its neutrality during the Gulf War, and its failure to fully support the Shi'ites in Iraq during the Iraqi Civil War.<sup>175</sup> Iran has come to see the value of a favorable international opinion, and the value of Western alliance.

The fact that moderation is on the rise does not mean that Iran is not still heavily influenced by the conservative Islamists, nor does it mean that she no longer faces significant economic, political and social troubles. It does mean that with careful foreign policy initiatives on the part of nations like the U.S. that moderation can survive.

Since May 1993, the U.S. has followed a Dual Containment Policy (DCP) for countering the lingering threat from Saddam Hussein and the threat from the theocratic government in Iran. This policy calls for collective

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<sup>174</sup>Milani, p. 244.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid, p. 247.

economic action against the Islamic Republic of Iran, in an effort to embargo Iran into poverty unless it alters its de stabilizing, terrorist foreign policies.<sup>176</sup> The idea is to economically pressure the Islamic government into good behavior. Besides the fact that U.S. allies are unwilling to sacrifice substantial financial gain to uphold the policy and thus make it effective, is the fact that it is not the most effective way to encourage moderation in Iran and the defeat of the militant, Islamic fundamentalist rulers of Iran.

In Iran, as in most of the Middle East, even while decrying Western influence, and denouncing "Westoxication," Iranians are fascinated with the West and the freedoms and comforts its technology can provide. Modern communications have made Iranians all too aware of what the West has to offer. The Islamic Revolution promised to make everyone better off and to improve the economic status of the masses. This has never happened. Since the revolution, the populace has watched with growing dismay as the clergy gets richer and the poor get poorer.

Khomeini's legitimacy as a leader was never in question, and his personal charisma was able to overcome the problem of raised expectations and failed promises. But Khomeini is gone, and the ulama now must face questions about their legitimacy to rule. They live in fear of the revolution's failure to make realities out of its rhetoric.

If U.S. policy objectives in Iran--and by extension any other potential "Islamic" country--is to pressure the ulama into moderation and cooperation, the best course of action is to open Iran to American business. American

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<sup>176</sup>Edward G. Shirley, "The Iran Policy Trap," *Foreign Policy* no. 96 (Fall 1994): 75.

investment in Iran undermines many of the tenets and myths of the revolution.<sup>177</sup> Contact between American businesses, universities and financial institutions serve to undermine the regime, and the myths it has perpetrated with regard to the United States.

In contemplating future relations between the U.S. and Iran, it would be prudent to recognize that the ulama were in the best position to assume leadership of the revolutionary, anti-imperialist movement in Iran, and the charismatic presence of the Ayatollah Khomeini ensured their success in the post revolutionary power struggle. Islam stimulated profound social and political change in Iran, but Islam was not the cause of the revolution. Therefore simply reacting to Islam will not serve any useful purpose in restoring stability to Iran and other Middle East nations.

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<sup>177</sup>Ibid, p. 93.

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