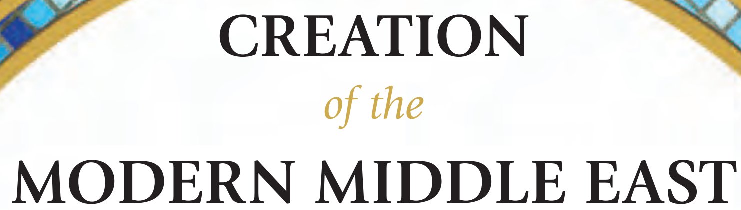
CREATION
of the
MODERN MIDDLE EAST

Iran

Second Edition

Heather Lehr Wagner | Series Editor: Arthur Goldschmidt Jr.



Iran

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1

Two Presidents at the United Nations

On September 25, 2007, two very different men—both presidents of their countries—addressed the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in New York. Their words were spoken before representatives of many different countries, but their audience was truly global, and the content of their speeches revealed much about the focus they each wanted to place on their countries' foreign policy and diplomatic efforts.

The schedule of the General Assembly allows 15 minutes for each country's head of state or head of government to speak. As a result, there may be nearly 200 speeches stretching over several days. The General Assembly does not set a specific topic for the speeches; each country may decide the issues it wishes to highlight in its leader's speech. As a result, the speeches given by certain heads of state or foreign ministers are often carefully studied to determine what that country has chosen to emphasize in this very public forum.

On September 25, 2007, one of the most closely watched speeches was that given by U.S. president George W. Bush. The American president was under pressure at home because of a war in Iraq that had stretched well beyond the point that many American citizens felt was acceptable. Under American occupation, Iraq had become chaotic, and the violence had divided the country in civil war. This had soured America's reputation throughout the world, and particularly in the Middle East.

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaks during the sixtieth session of the General Assembly at the UN on September 17, 2005. The International Atomic Energy Agency's charge that it has evidence that Iran has a program to produce high explosives like those used for denotating nuclear weapons makes the country and its president a potential security threat.

During his 15 minutes, President Bush mentioned Iraq only in passing, as one of the countries where "brave citizens" had "made a choice for democracy." Instead, President Bush's focus was on the struggle against extremism, and here he specifically highlighted countries where human rights had been violated, citing Myanmar (formerly called Burma), Belarus, North Korea, Syria, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Sudan, and Iran.

"In Belarus, North Korea, Syria, and Iran, brutal regimes deny their people the fundamental rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration," President Bush said. Later, he again spoke of human rights violations in Iran, and he included the country's capital, Tehran, in his critique of the failure of the UN Human Rights Council to speak out on "repression by regimes from Havana to Caracas to Pyongyang and Tehran."

On that same day, the president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, also spoke before the General Assembly. As President Ahmadinejad moved toward the podium, members of the U.S. delegation left the room, with only a low-level notetaker remaining. President Ahmadinejad was equally strident in his criticism of the regimes he perceived as violating basic principles of human rights. "Setting up secret prisons, abducting persons, trials and secret punishments, without any regard to due process, extensive tappings of telephone conversations, intercepting private mail, and frequent summons to police and security centers have become commonplace and prevalent," he said through a translator. His words suggested that the target of his criticism was the United States; later, he was more specific: "The rights and dignity of the American people are also being sacrificed for the selfish desires of those holding power."

Criticism of the United States by Iran's president, much like criticism of Iran by America's president, caused little surprise for those who were listening to the speeches. What interested them was what the Iranian president would say about Iran's nuclear ambitions—a topic of great international concern. And he did not omit this from his 15 minutes.

He stressed that Iran had pursued its nuclear activities through what he described as "the appropriate, legal path"—the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is the nuclear watchdog agency of the UN. Ahmadinejad insisted that Iran's nuclear program was peaceful, aimed at developing nuclear reactors to generate electricity. The United States and several European nations did not trust this optimistic assessment, believing instead that Iran intended to ultimately produce nuclear weapons. Ahmadinejad criticized the nations that had attempted to prevent Iran from developing nuclear technology, stating that "because of the resistance of the Iranian nation," their efforts had failed.

Finally, he leveled a blistering prediction that "we are nearing the sunset of the time of empires," stating that "the era of darkness will end. Prisoners will return home. The occupied lands will be freed. Palestine [now Israel] and Iraq will be liberated from the domination of the occupiers. And the people of America and Europe will be free of the pressures exerted by the Zionists [Jewish people]."

Two men, both presidents of their countries, were speaking at the same place on the same day; each was passionately speaking out for human rights and criticizing those who, he felt, had violated the basic principles of dignity and freedom. And yet their views of the world were dramatically different; each felt that the other's country was a great threat—if not the greatest threat—to global security and world peace.

LEGACY OF MISUNDERSTANDING

The story of Iran today, and its role in the contemporary Middle East, was highlighted that day at the UN. President Bush was not the only world leader who spoke out against Iran. Other leaders specifically cited the threat posed by Iran's efforts to accelerate its nuclear technology program. French president Nicolas Sarkozy noted that allowing Iran to develop nuclear weapons would mean an "unacceptable risk" for regional and world sta-

bility. "There will not be peace in the world if the international community falters in the face of the proliferation of nuclear arms," he said.

Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, was equally blunt, noting the "disastrous consequences" for Israel and the world if Iran developed the capacity to produce nuclear weapons. "The world does not have to prove to Iran that Iran is building a nuclear bomb," she said. "Iran has to convince the world that it is not striving towards such a bomb."

The prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran posed grave concerns to the global community. Iran had, in the past, been willing to pursue an aggressive foreign policy, particularly in terms of anti-American activity—most recently in the early 1990s. Equipped with nuclear weapons, it seemed likely that the government in Iran would once more revert to its more aggressive stance, both in the region and around the world.

Similarly, the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran raised the likelihood that more countries in the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia, would move swiftly to acquire nuclear weapons themselves, if only in an effort to deter an attack by Iran. With more nuclear weapons in more countries, there is a greater likelihood that those weapons will be used.

One year earlier, the same kind of conflict had been aired at the UN. Presidents Bush and Ahmadinejad spoke on September 19, 2006, again separated by several hours and a very different perspective on the world. President Bush spoke first, in the morning, and at one point directly addressed the Iranian people, telling them that their leaders were misleading them about the United States and were abusing their resources. "You deserve an opportunity to determine your own future," he said. "The greatest obstacle to this future is that your rulers have chosen to deny you liberty and to use your nation's resources to fund terrorism and fuel extremism and pursue nuclear weapons."

President Ahmadinejad spoke near the end of the day. He alternately labeled the United States as "the occupiers" (in speaking of Iraq) and "masters and rulers of the entire world"

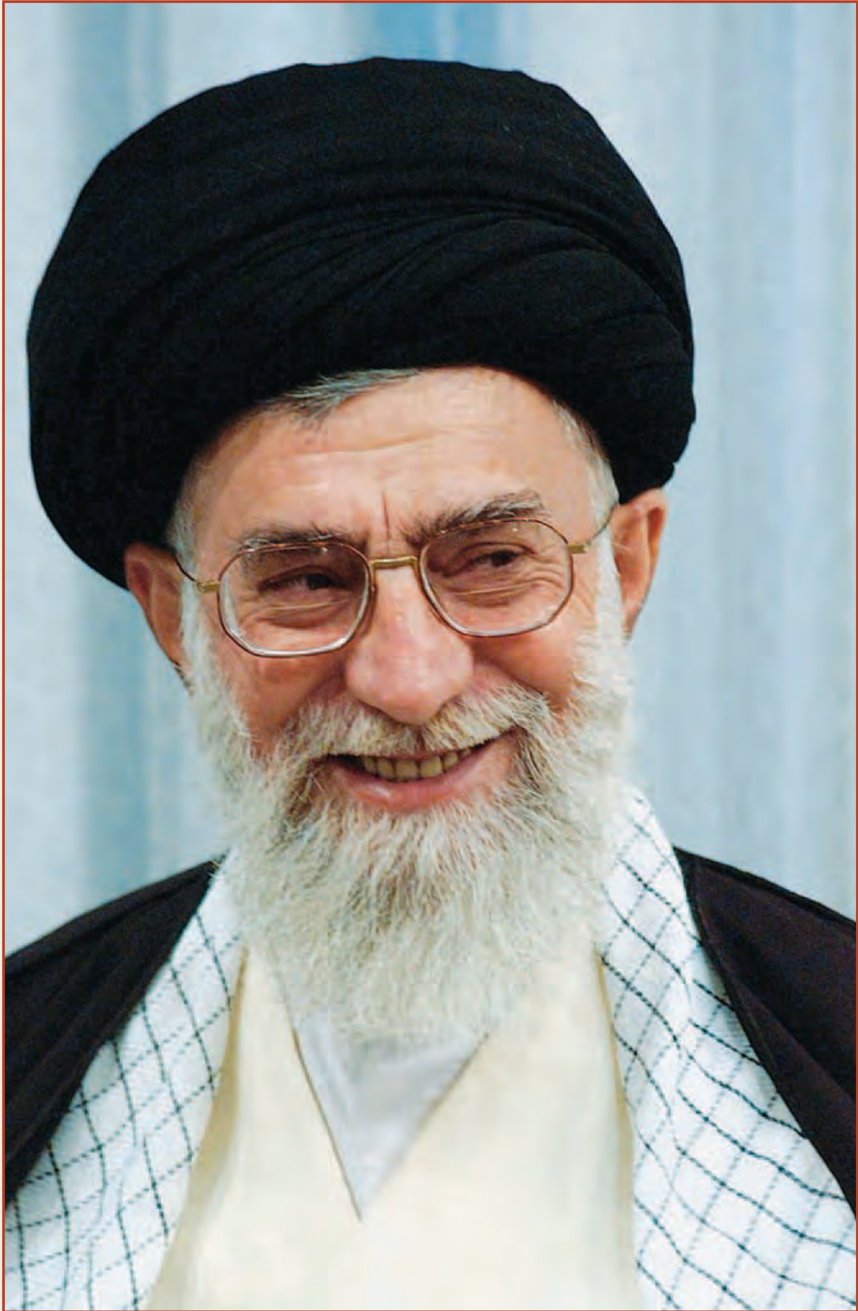
(in speaking of an imbalance between world powers and other countries).

In 2006, the focus of speeches in the UN General Assembly had also been on Iran's nuclear ambitions and global concern about its nuclear program. While various proposals and diplomatic efforts were undertaken, little of substance was achieved. Iran continued to move forward. Twelve months later, the same two presidents addressed the General Assembly; once again, concern was expressed about Iran's nuclear technology program.

For nearly a century, Iran's relationship with the West has been dependent on its leaders' views of the West. At times, that leadership has depended heavily on Western powers in order to maintain its right to rule. At others, the West has been made the scapegoat for all that is wrong in Iran. The legacy of this roller-coaster relationship has been a residue of suspicion and misunderstanding.

Even the image of Iran that is presented to the world can be misleading. Its president—for example, a man like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—speaks at the United Nations and presents his country's view of the current world situation. But his is, in a sense, only the face that Iran chooses to present to the world. The president is not the head of state in Iran, nor is he the commander in chief. Those roles are held by the supreme ayatollah—meaning "sign of God," an honorary title for the most learned religious leaders in the Shiite Muslim faith—whose power combines authority over both state and religious matters. While Ahmadinejad spoke out about the United States, Israel, women's roles in his country, and more, most Iranians were puzzled at the attention he drew. They knew that their country truly was ruled not by Ahmadinejad but by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and that it was his support that enabled the president to serve as Iran's spokesman at the UN.

For nearly 30 years, Iran's power has been firmly in the hands of a small group of religious leaders—the Supreme Council, led by an ayatollah—who have adhered to the principles first spelled out in Iran's revolution in 1979. Iran is defined not by



Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is Iran's spiritual leader and its highest authority. He is viewed as the dominant voice in Iran's conservative hierarchy and has been harshly critical of the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

the man who is its president, nor by the technology it possesses. It is defined by ideology, by the revolutionary values that transformed Iran from a monarchy to an Islamic state. Ayatollah Khamenei is not simply the head of state; he is also known as "the guardian of the revolution." That revolution allowed a select group of people to become both powerful and wealthy, and they have fought fiercely over the past nearly three decades to ensure that that does not change.

In Iran, the ideologies of the revolutionary leaders continue to form part of the daily fabric of life. To understand Iran today, it is important to first look back. Contemporary Iran is very much a product of its past.

2

The Ruins of an Ancient Empire

From its earliest days, Iran's location—spanning the gap between Asia and the Middle East—has given it strategic importance. Its neighbors currently include Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, which sets it squarely in the middle of a region whose most recent history has been marked by conflict.

The ancient history of the land we know today as Iran was also marked by conflict. For centuries, northern Iran was a key passage for trade routes between the Far East and the West. Both the names *Iran* and *Persia*, as the region was known in earlier times, have their roots in ancient history. Nomadic tribes are believed to have moved into the region from Central Asia around 1500 B.C. One of these tribes was known as the Iranian tribe, and a smaller group within this tribe, the Parsa, settled in the territory lying below the Caspian Sea. The name of their land became Pars or Fars, and eventually foreigners began to refer to this stretch of territory as Persia. The language spoken there became Persian (or Farsi to Iranians). It was not until 1935 that the Iranian government required that all countries refer to their land as Iran rather than Persia.

In 558 B.C., Cyrus the Great became ruler of Persia. He conquered neighboring tribes, including the Medes and the Babylonians, and shaped an empire that would become the most powerful in the world. His son would extend the might of the Persian Empire by conquering the Egyptians.

But the empire built by Cyrus the Great would be destroyed by another mighty conqueror—Alexander the Great. Part of Alexander's campaign involved the creation of a more equal

Iran is neighbored by Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. Although ethnically and linguistically diverse, the country is almost entirely Muslim. Iran ranks among the world's leaders in its oil and natural gas reserves.

society, based on Greek principles, which unified parts of his Macedonian and Iranian empires into a single mighty state. He insisted that his soldiers all take Persian brides to demonstrate this new union. But after Alexander's death, the vast stretches of land he had conquered were divided.

There were other armies who would conquer this land in the following centuries. The Turks moved into the region, followed by the Mongol army of Genghis Khan, and still later by Afghan forces. By the 1700s, Russia and Turkey had moved into Persia and briefly carved it up to suit their own interests.

Throughout the nineteenth century, and on into the earliest part of the twentieth century, Britain attempted to gain influence and territory, striving to increase their opportunities for trade and the critical access into Asia that Persia's location provided. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, Russia and Great Britain had reached a kind of understanding in which northern Persia was controlled by Russia and the southern region around the Persian Gulf became a buffer zone for British-ruled India. Throughout this period of turmoil and chaos, a series of weak rulers, or *shahs*, had attempted to govern the region but only succeeded in increasing the influence of foreign powers.

As the twentieth century began, the pressure was steadily increasing on the luckless shah, Muzaffar-ed-Din, to address concerns about the dominant role foreign governments were playing in Persian affairs. The shah finally buckled to the pressure and convened a national assembly, or *Majlis*, to oversee the establishment of a constitutional government. But he would die one year later, and his son, backed by the Russians, was fiercely opposed to the idea of a government that might challenge his own authority.

As World War I unfolded, Iran found itself in a treacherous position: claiming neutrality but still hosting battles between the Ottoman Turks, aided by their German allies, and an alliance of British and Russian forces. All claimed to be fighting for the good of the "citizens of Persia," but all were busily seeking to extend their hold over a country rich in oil and strategic importance.

It would take the actions of a Persian soldier to transform the chaotic landscape into a powerful nation. The land that would soon become known as Iran was ready to embrace a leader who would guide it into a more modern era. That modern age would last little more than 50 years.

THE ANGLO-PERSIAN TREATY

In the aftermath of World War I, British government officials attempted to cement their position in the Middle East—in part to stave off the advances of Revolutionary Russia, and in part to take advantage of the chaos so they could install governments and regimes friendly to British interests. The political turmoil that marked the land British officials referred to as Persia made it a prime target for their plan of expansionism.

The British government found a cooperative partner in the weak shah reigning over Persia, the young Ahmad Shah. Great Britain was already paying him regular sums of money in exchange for his maintaining a "friendly" position toward British interests; he was willing to sign any treaty that offered the security his weakened monarchy desperately needed to maintain its hold on power.

On August 9, 1919, the Anglo-Persian Treaty was signed—an agreement that essentially gave Great Britain the right to oversee all future development in Iran. British officials would supervise the nation's finances, its railroad construction, its military, its customs duties, and its taxes. Great Britain's claim that it was merely attempting to ease Persia's transition to greater independence was greeted with great skepticism by other nations who were well aware of the opportunities for oil the region offered, and Britain's excuse of trying to ensure Iran's freedom from Russian threats seemed feeble in light of the collapse of the Russian Empire two years earlier. In fact, it began to seem clear to many—particularly the citizens of Iran—that the greatest threat to their independence came from the very country that was claiming to want to protect it.

Ahmad Shah Qajar *(center)* ascended to the Peacock Throne on July 16, 1909, following the overthrow of his father, Mohammed Ali Shah. However, he was a weak ruler who faced internal unrest and foreign interference, particularly by the British. In 1921, he was ousted by Reza Khan in a military coup and went into exile with his family in 1923.

While the shah and a few loyalists supported the British, many others did not, and the country began to split. Troops from Soviet Russia soon were skirmishing with British forces along the Caspian Sea. Those who feared British efforts to dominate their country saw a kind of salvation in the Soviet

incursions, and attempts were made to negotiate a new treaty—this time with Soviet Russia. It was rapidly becoming clear that the shah would be overthrown, and a new government might soon take power. Great Britain saw the danger that this potential new government would be distinctly less friendly to British interests.

It seemed that only one possible solution remained: Both British and Russian military forces had to pull out of Iran, provided that a government was in place that would be strong enough to rule—and cooperate with British efforts. The shah was too weak and ineffective to offer this unifying presence, so British officials began to look around for a new ruler—one who would be acceptable to the people, not too closely connected to Great Britain or the current shah, but powerful enough to seize control and begin to pull the chaotic territory back together.

THE RISE OF REZA KHAN

The answer came from a small military division in northern Iran—the Persian Cossack Brigade. The corps had been created 40 years earlier to serve as the shah's bodyguards, but British officials had become interested in them as Great Britain made plans to pull out of Iran and looked around for a military force strong enough to maintain the peace in the absence of British soldiers.

The Persian Cossack Brigade was led by Russian officer Vladimir Platonovich Liakhov, but British officials soon ensured his dismissal, as well as the dismissal of his second-in-command. In their place, the British put the most rugged Persian soldier they could find, a man named Reza Khan. Their goal was to ensure the safe departure of British forces, as well as a strong military that could help govern Iran after they had left.

Reza Khan did not disappoint them. He was in his forties at the time that British officials first helped him rise to the head of the Persian Cossack corps, but he had made a name for himself because of his bravery in battle and through his outspoken

desire to rescue Iran from the chaos that foreign domination and weak rulers had brought. He offered his promise that his forces would not take any violent action against either the departing British military or the shah. The British, in turn, let him know that his plan to peacefully overthrow the government would not pose a problem for Great Britain.

On February 21, 1921, an army of 3,000 men marched on the capital city of Tehran and seized control of the government. Reza Khan was named the new commander in chief of the armed forces. The troops took over all ministry offices, all government buildings, and all police stations. Approval from the military became a requirement to enter or leave the city.

At first, it seemed that Reza Khan would serve as a kind of enforcer while the new prime minister, Seyyed Zia, would begin to issue edicts. But slowly, working behind the scenes, Reza Khan started gathering additional responsibilities—and additional sources of power. He was named Minister of War, and then he was given command of the police force. Gradually this unknown soldier seized control of all peacekeeping forces until it became clear that the ability to preserve order and stave off chaos was no longer in the hands of the shah or the new prime minister, but was instead in the hands of Reza Khan. It was not long before Seyyed Zia was gone, and Reza Khan took control. It seems that many misjudged the soldier from the humble peasant background. The British, who had overseen his rise to the head of the Cossack forces, would find that they had counted too heavily on his good will.

Reza Khan would oversee the beginnings of the modernization and Westernization of Iran. But he would do so without the help of Great Britain. His reign would begin and end with a struggle between British and Russian attempts to dominate his country. It would be his son's ambition to transform Iran into an international power and his son's misfortune to watch that power slip away. The shadow of foreign influences would haunt the creation of modern Iran, and they would foretell the doom of its last shah.

3

The Rise of the Pahlavis

Little more than two years after he led a military regiment into the streets of Tehran to overthrow the Iranian government, Reza Khan had risen to become the prime minister. The military had provided him with a career, and then it had guaranteed him the power to aim even higher.

He was born on March 16, 1878, to a peasant family that lived in a small village in the Elburz Mountains in northern Iran. His family had traditionally served in the military, so it was no surprise when the young man—who grew to be six feet three inches tall—decided to follow the same career path. The Cossack Brigade of the military that he joined had been named for its training at the hands of Russian instructors; it was a corps that had been created to protect the royal family. By the time he had successfully overthrown the government he had sworn to protect, Reza Khan was middle-aged and fiercely determined to right the wrongs he felt had been committed by centuries of incompetent rulers and corrupt leaders, as well as by crippling foreign intervention.

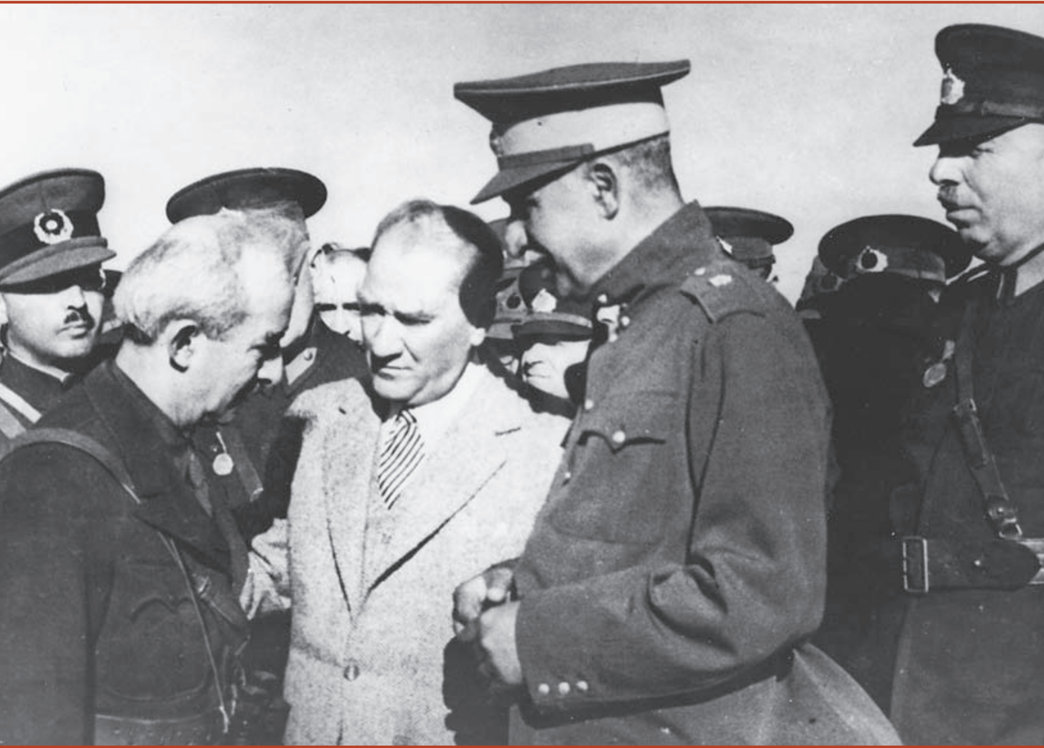
One of the most serious problems facing Reza Khan was the far-flung tribal leaders who threatened his efforts to modernize Iran and to build a stable and powerful government. The tribal leaders were nomads, and they needed lots of grazing land for their animals. They controlled huge stretches of the country and had little interest in submitting to the authority of the Iranian government. Their willingness to cut a deal with foreign powers

had helped establish British and Russian areas of control in Iran and had done much to prevent any shah or leader from fully governing the country. Reza Khan had no interest in seeing himself overthrown, either by the efforts of the tribal leaders or through their response to the prompting of foreign governments.

Reza Khan determined to use his military forces to send out a powerful message. Some 15,000 Iranian soldiers were sent to the province he deemed most likely to spark trouble for his government—Khuzestan. Khuzestan is in southwestern Iran at the head of the Persian Gulf and bordering Iraq to the west. Some of the tribes there spoke Arabic; it is also the region richest in oil. Its sheikh was soon persuaded to come to Tehran, where he would remain under armed guard for several years. Without fighting a single battle, the army—and Reza Khan—had made its point. Iran was a unified country now. There was no place for troublesome tribal leaders to threaten the government or for dissatisfied provinces to be lured away by foreign governments or oil companies.

Reza Khan's earliest days in power were marked by a strong desire to reform his country. He had been impressed by the reforms undertaken by neighboring Turkey and had initially considered the possibility of transforming Iran into a secular (nonreligious) republic, as had been done in Turkey. Perhaps not surprisingly, the opposition of Muslim religious leaders to the plan to establish a secular form of government in Iran was strong, and ultimately Reza Khan determined to give up the plan.

Still, he modeled many of his early actions after those of Turkey's dynamic leader, Kemal Atatürk. Reza Khan made plans to oversee a campaign of industrialization, and he instituted such social reforms as requiring all Iranians to take on family names and eliminating the honorary titles that had served to create even greater divisions in Iranian society. In 1925, he set an example for his people by selecting his own family name: Pahlavi. It was a name rich in tradition—Pahlavi was an ancient Iranian language—and it implied a deep connection to the history of the country. In addition, *pahlavan* is the Persian word for "champion."



Pictured is Reza Pahlavi *(left)*, also known as Reza Shah, meeting with Kemal Atatürk *(center)*, the first president of Turkey, of whom he thought highly. Reza Shah is credited with the construction of many major developments, including the building of the Trans-Iranian Railway, and with attempting to modernize the country. Many criticized his reforms, such as banning the *chador* for women, as being too fast and superficial.

Within seven months, it would become the name of a royal dynasty when Reza Khan had himself crowned king.

THE PAHLAVI ERA

Before Reza Khan could become Iran's ruler, he had to ensure that the current ruler did not decide to return to Iran to challenge his authority. Ahmad Shah, the weak leader who had

fled his country a few years earlier, had spent his time in exile traveling through Europe, enjoying the benefits of his wealth in such settings as Paris, Geneva, and the French resort of Biarritz. But as Reza Khan's popularity soared and his hold on power increased, the shah began to understand that unless he returned to Iran quickly to take back his throne, he would have no throne to take back.

As the shah wavered, expressing his uncertainty about whether he would prefer to remain in exile (provided that he would be paid a substantial allowance) or return to his country, public opinion inevitably turned against him. It was becoming clear that a ruler who truly cared about his people, who wished to govern them, would have returned by now. Following a series of demonstrations against the absent shah that were organized by supporters of Reza Khan, a resolution was passed in parliament abolishing the Qajar dynasty. The end of 130 years of Qajar rule came without much surprise and with little protest. The country seemed happy to be rid of a selfish, greedy ruler who had cared little for the fate of his people. Instead, Reza Khan offered a strong central government free from foreign influence which promised opportunity and unity. But the man who talked about modernizing Iran chose to do so using the traditional tools of Iranian government—as a king.

Little time would pass before Iran had a shah once more. On October 31, 1925, the parliamentary vote was passed that abolished the rule of the Qajar dynasty. On December 12 of that same year, Iran's constitution was amended to declare that Reza Khan would become the country's new ruler, to be known as Reza Shah.

His coronation took place on April 25, 1926. The witnesses chosen to attend the simple ceremony included both political and religious leaders. The crown was presented to the newly named Reza Shah by two men: his Minister of Court (a skilled diplomat with extensive connections to key European leaders) and a senior religious leader. But it was Reza Shah himself who would place the crown on his own head, seizing this symbol of

rule as confidently as he had seized power. In the speech following the ceremony, Reza Shah emphasized the important role he saw Islam playing as a way to further unify Iran. His words would prove prophetic.

The humble Cossack soldier had ensured his place in history by forcing two strong foreign powers back from their dominant position in Iranian politics and by overthrowing a monarch whose family had ruled Iran for more than a century. And his work was only beginning.

MOVING TOWARD MODERNIZATION

The task of modernizing Iran was an overwhelming one. Reza Shah's initial priorities were to reform the country's legal system, which had become corrupt and crippled by its reliance on outdated systems and incompetent judges, and to oversee the construction of a major railway as a means to improve transportation of people and goods from one part of the nation to the other. The first task was accomplished quickly. But the secular nature of the legal system Reza Shah implemented, which was based on the example of European courts, meant it alienated many Islamic clerics. They wanted Iran to continue to be governed based on traditional Islamic principles through the legal system known as *Shari'ah*, which is binding on all Muslims. The Trans-Iranian Railway also was constructed with surprising rapidity, a visible example for both Iranians and foreigners that progress and modernization were taking place within the borders.

Reza Shah also provided his country with another important achievement—renewed focus on education. His government prompted the training of many new teachers and promised equal opportunities for education for girls and boys. This was accomplished by severing the old relationship with Muslim clerics that had ensured religious control over the educational system. Schools became secular, just like the courts, and were no longer overseen by Islamic clerics but instead by newly trained instructors. New elementary and secondary schools

were built, and education was now legally required for all 6- to 13-year-olds.

Education was furthered at the next level as well. Teachers' colleges, technical and vocational schools, and military schools were constructed, and the University of Tehran opened in 1935.

While Reza Shah took several steps to remove religious control over important state institutions, he did not attempt to transform Iran into a purely secular nation. He did, however, attempt subtly and not so subtly to portray the religious traditions as old-fashioned and often in contrast to the modern, Western society he envisioned flourishing in the streets of Tehran. He began to connect his reign, and the glory of Iran, more closely with its roots in ancient Persia, and to the empires of Cyrus and Darius—to the Iran that existed before the coming of Islam.

In 1935, Reza Shah announced that his kingdom would no longer be referred to as Persia. He selected the name that harked back to the country's ancient past: Iran. The shah decreed that the post office was to send back any foreign letters addressed to Persia.

His next modernization campaign—and the next step guaranteed to outrage Islamic traditionalists—focused on the status of women. Reza Shah determined that true progress could not be achieved in Iran while a significant portion of the citizens—its women—remained uneducated, unemployed, and hidden away from society. The debate focused on the *chador*, the heavy black, floor-length garment that covered women. Despite public outcry and the fury of religious leaders, the Shah passed an edict in 1935 that banned women from wearing the chador, an important part of dressing modestly to many Muslims. Women wearing chadors were not allowed into movie theaters or to ride in taxis or buses. Police would forcibly remove the chador from any woman seen in public wearing it.

But Reza Shah's attempts to modernize Iran carried the contradiction of his rule—with the same energy that he pursued efforts to carve out a contemporary society from centuries of tradition, he ruthlessly stamped out any challenge to his authority.

The chador, a floor-length loose garment worn over the head and body, originated in the sixth century B.C. under Cyrus the Great and the Achaemenian Empire in Persia. Its use was revived in the 1970s by Ayatollah Khomeini after the revolution and overthrow of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.

He focused more intently on creating an independent and modern nation than on bettering the lives of its citizens.

Reza Shah's hopes for ongoing progress and industrialization would be cut short by forces outside his control—the forces that unleashed World War II. As Germany swept into Poland in September 1939, Iran assumed the same position it had taken in World War I: neutrality. In fact, Iran (particularly its shah) felt much closer ties to Germany than to Great Britain or to the USSR.

Early on the morning of August 25, 1941, a combined attack by British and Soviet forces was launched upon Iran. The official explanation was that large numbers of German spies were working in Iran, threatening the Allied forces, but there is little evidence to support this and, in fact, shortly before the invasion, Reza Shah had forced many German workers in Iran to leave.

More than 100,000 British Empire forces (mainly Indian) crossed over the Iranian borders from the south, the west, and the north. As the ports and oil fields were quickly seized and British planes soared overhead, the surprised Iranian military was unable to mount much of a defense. Within three days, Iran had surrendered.

Once more, British and Russian administrators were in control of Iran, selecting the governors and representatives to Parliament, shaping the finances, controlling the resources, and doing their best to turn back the clock on the secular achievements Reza Shah had brought to Iran. The tribal leaders were strengthened and their tribes rearmed; the Islamic clerics were set up in one corner, Communist officials in another. The strong central government that had been so quickly crafted by Reza Shah disappeared, and the Iran left in its place bore a much greater resemblance to the Persia that had existed at the beginning of the century than to the modern nation he had attempted to build.

But Reza Shah would not be there to witness the collapse of his dreams for Iran. On September 16, 1941, he was forced to step down, and his 21-year-old son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, was named the new shah. Reza Shah was ordered to leave the country.

He fled first to the island of Mauritius and then to Johannesburg, South Africa. He would die less than three years later.

THE MOST SUITABLE PRINCE

The decision to name Reza Shah's oldest son the new ruler was not an easy one. British and Soviet forces had at first turned to their old ally, the Qajar family, to see if the heir might make a more suitable—meaning easier to dominate—leader for Iran. But the only candidate from the Qajar family proved unsuitable, in large part because he could not speak a single word of Farsi, the language of the country he was supposed to rule.

Ultimately, British and Soviet politicians decided that the young Pahlavi would prove little threat to their control of Iran. He would be a ruler in name only; his reputation as a playboy who was indifferent to politics only meant that he would be even easier to dominate.

But the Soviet and British leaders would prove mistaken in their estimation of the young prince's potential. Witnessing the humiliation of his powerful father, the new shah resolved to ensure that Iran would not remain under foreign control. He would find assistance from a new ally—the American president Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The young prince was only seven years old when his father was crowned shah of Iran, and he would later recall feelings of awe as much as love when he was in the presence of his father. The prince had been stricken with typhoid fever shortly after the coronation and had remained weak and sickly for much of his youth. He was educated in Lausanne, Switzerland, and spoke fluent French thanks to the tutoring of his French governess. From the age of 12 until he was 17, he lived away from Iran, in Europe, and it is perhaps not surprising that he felt much more closely connected to Western—particularly French—thinking than to the traditional philosophies and customs of Iran.

He did not feel alienated from Tehran upon his return. Instead, he was impressed at how successful his father's efforts had been at transforming Tehran into something closely resembling the capitals of Europe. For the next few years, he was trained by his father, who prepared him to become the next ruler of Iran. The date would, of course, come much sooner than either had expected. His father's exile left him—at the age of 21—in the awkward position of trying to rule over an occupied nation. It

Mohammed Reza Pahlavi reads his inaugural speech at the initial session of his nation's first senate in Tehran, Iran, on February 16, 1950. He replaced his father, Reza Khan, shortly before his twenty-second birthday. He tried to continue the reforms his father initiated, but a contest for control of the government soon ensued between the shah and Mohammed Mossadeq, his prime minister.

was a humiliating period for Iran. The country was occupied by Soviet and British forces as the two fought during the final years of World War II. Iran paid for its earlier neutrality by suffering all of the hardships other nations at war were suffering—food shortages, black market racketeering, troops marching through their streets—but this was a war that Iran had not chosen to fight.

The young Mohammed Reza Pahlavi had little choice but to build alliances with many of the groups his father had alienated. The tribal leaders, now armed and strengthened by British and Russian forces, were threatening to collapse the central government. Mohammed Reza turned to the religious leaders. He agreed to allow pilgrimages to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia—a journey all able-bodied Muslims must make, but that had been prohibited during the reign of his father. He agreed to enforce the restrictions on the consumption of food and drink during Ramadan, the holy month of fasting observed by devout Muslims. Once more, women could be seen in the streets garbed in the chador.

To survive politically, Mohammed Reza was forced to cooperate with the Allied forces occupying his nation. It was an almost impossible burden: He had followed behind the dominant rule of his father, had come to power only due to foreign intervention and the exile of his father, had been forced to battle rebel tribes and contend with a newly powerful (thanks to the Soviet occupiers) Communist party whose members were agitating protests against his reign, and had attempted to build an alliance with a highly suspicious religious leadership.

As if all of this was not daunting enough, the young shah would soon face a new challenge—a dynamic Iranian politician named Mohammed Mossadeq. And it all began with a dispute over the Iranian asset Britain clung to the most tightly—oil.

ANGLO-IRANIAN OIL COMPANY

Oil had played a critical role in British-Iranian relations for decades, ever since the discovery of oil in southwest Khuzestan

in 1908. In the early part of the twentieth century, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) was formed thanks to a generous grant from the Qajar shah, who had provided his British friends with a 51 percent ownership in the company for 60 years. By World War I, when the importance of oil to British warships became clear, Britain had overseen the construction of an oil refinery at Abadan, in Khuzestan, that would become one of the largest in the world.

Reza Shah had done his best to break Britain's control of Iran's most significant export, but the deal had never been satisfactorily resolved in the matter of fair pricing—until 1951, that is. For decades, Iranians had complained about AIOC's questionable accounting practices, particularly bookkeeping that no Iranian was allowed to audit to determine whether or not a fair share was being paid. For decades they had complained about the unfairness of Great Britain benefiting much more significantly than Iran from Iran's own resource. For decades they had suffered under the simple injustice of drinking fountains in the Iranian oil fields that bore the sign "NOT FOR IRANIANS." But it was not until Mohammed Mossadeq arrived on the scene that the balance of power began to shift.

In 1951, Mossadeq was 69 years old and a wealthy member of the Iranian parliament. He had been opposed to the creation of the Pahlavi dynasty under Reza Shah, and he had an even more unfavorable impression of the young shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Mossadeq soon began to issue calls for the nationalization of the AIOC, and he was joined by a coalition of other politicians and—more importantly—by Ayatollah Kashani, an Islamic cleric who was fiercely opposed to the British presence in Iran and to the more liberal policies of the Pahlavi rule. The ayatollah had successfully begun to meld religion with politics, and he had gathered a large following. He would set the stage for a subsequent ayatollah—Ayatollah Khomeini—to build a revolution based on the explosive combination of religion and politics, but in 1951 he was more closely focused on oil.

With the support of these forces, Mossadeq was able to lead a movement in Parliament that, on March 15, 1951, called for the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. On April 29, the action would prompt Mossadeq to be elected as prime minister.

Suddenly, the most powerful man in Iran was not the shah but was instead the prime minister. Iranians admired the way in which Mossadeq had stood up to the British occupiers. But his dramatic gesture, and his subsequent ordering of all British AIOC employees out of the country, would have serious consequences. Iranians had not been trained in how to manage an oil company. They did not have the expertise to operate the refinery or the wells. And as the Iranians confronted the reality of trying to learn to run the AIOC on their own, the British launched a boycott of Iranian oil on the foreign market.

Lacking oil revenue, the Iranian economy went into a tailspin. Government employees, policemen, and teachers received IOUs rather than their paychecks. Mossadeq seemed powerful within Iran, but to foreign governments who were worried about the stability of their investments in Iran, he was viewed with alarm.

As his power began to falter, Mossadeq ordered the shah's mother and sister to leave Iran, perhaps fearing these powerful women more than the young ruler. Mossadeq next turned to the United States, seeking assistance and support in exchange for a promise to keep the Communist influence from spreading into Iran. But the United States, deeply suspicious of Mossadeq, instead determined to quietly work behind the scenes to restore power to the shah.

It was a confusing time in Iran. The prime minister had assumed absolute control over most of Iranian life, dismissing the Senate and the Supreme Court, cutting back the powers of the shah, and imposing martial law. The shah seemed paralyzed.

Finally, in August 1953, the shah sent out a messenger to arrest Mossadeq, but instead Mossadeq arrested the messenger.

The prime minister made it clear that he had no intention of bowing to the authority of the shah. A small group of army officers attempted to seize Mossadeq but failed.

Early in the predawn hours of August 16, word reached the shah of the failed attempt by his army. He woke his wife and informed her that they would need to leave the country at once. Flying the small plane himself, the shah headed for the furthest point that the plane's limited fuel tank would allow—the airport in Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. With only a small bag of clothes, the ruler of Iran next headed for Rome, where his own embassy refused to give him shelter.

Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the ruler of Iran, found himself in exile—hounded by the press, seemingly unwanted by his people, forced to attempt to rebuild a coalition far from the palace that had been his home. He would return to power, but the lessons he learned in exile would forever change Iran's future.

4

King of Kings

It was a subdued ruler who found himself seeking shelter in a Rome hotel. The shah and his wife, Soraya, had taken with them only what they could grab in haste. They had little money, few clothes, and apparently fewer friends. The paparazzi surrounded them, but it was more to chronicle their downfall than to provide them with any kind of a forum to launch a new public relations campaign. Nonetheless, the shah took advantage of each opportunity to stress his belief that what had happened in Iran was illegal, that he still retained the full constitutional authority, and that he was not abdicating but instead had left to avoid any kind of bloodshed.

International allies were somewhat uncertain as to the best response. Having fled his country in the middle of the night, the shah seemed weak. But Mossadeq had few friends in the global community—his behavior seemed unpredictable and his responses to events uncertain.

The U.S. government determined that the shah, even in his politically weak state, would prove a more reliable ally than Mossadeq, and should the Americans be able to help restore him to power, he would no doubt tilt Iran's policies—and its oil—toward American interests. To this end, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) paid a significant number of Iranian protesters to counter anti-American demonstrations with ones that supported the shah. Iranian soldiers soon joined the pro-shah demonstrations, and it quickly became clear in the streets of Tehran that the pro-shah forces were more numerous.

Ultimately, Mossadeq was ousted by supporters of the shah, and a prime minister friendlier to the shah, Zahedi, was named

A Communist newspaper kiosk is burned by pro-shah demonstrators in Tehran in August 1953 during a coup against Iranian prime minister Mohammed Mossadeq. The coup, engineered by the United States in support of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, reestablished Pahlavi's throne and ousted Mossadeq in favor of General Fazlollah Zahedi.

as his replacement. On August 19, 1953, the news reached the shah in Rome that his armed forces were once more in control. He quickly returned to his homeland equipped with the promise of American loans and convinced that his future security depended on American support. His time in exile had taught him that he could not, in the future, permit anyone to develop the kind of power that Mossadeq had—power that would challenge his authority.

What kind of Iran might have developed had the shah not been forced into exile in the early 1950s? It is certain that the fear he had experienced during his time in Rome—the experience of having no funds and few friends to rely upon, the recognition that his power could be snatched away by politically powerful enemies—forever altered the course of the Pahlavi dynasty. The shah would return to Iran determined to ensure that his experience in Rome never happened again. He would proceed to build a huge personal fortune, much of it hidden away outside of Iran in foreign banks. He would build a strong military presence, relying heavily on U.S. aid to transform Iran into a significant international power. And he would build a secret police, to be known as SAVAK (*Sazman-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Keshvar*, a Farsi name meaning Organization of National Security and Information). SAVAK's founding mission was to eliminate any opposition to the shah. Instead, it would become a feared and dreaded symbol of all that was wrong with the Iranian monarchy, brutally torturing and executing those who were deemed to be unfriendly to the shah's regime.

America's involvement in ousting Mossadeq would also have a lasting legacy. Following the 1979 revolution in Iran, the new leaders began demanding that the United States apologize for its role in this clear manipulation of Iran's government. The demands would continue for more than two decades. Finally, on March 17, 2000, President Bill Clinton's secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, gave a speech in Washington, D.C., acknowledging America's role in Mossadeq's overthrow.

> "In 1953, the United States played a significant role in orchestrating the overthrow of Iran's popular prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq," she said. "The Eisenhower administration believed its actions were justified for strategic reasons, but the coup was clearly a setback for Iran's political development. And it is easy to see now why many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America in their internal affairs."

The speech was intended as a diplomatic "olive branch" to what was perceived in the United States as more moderate elements in the Iranian government. But the attempt failed. Ayatollah Khamenei swiftly responded in a speech before crowds in Meshed: "After half a century, or over 40 years, the Americans have now confessed that they staged the 28th Mordad [August 19, 1953] coup. They confessed that they supported the suppressive, dictatorial, and corrupt Pahlavi shah for 25 years. . . .What good does this admission—that you acted in that way then—do us now? . . . An admission years after the crime was committed, while they might be committing similar crimes now, will not do the Iranian nation any good."

RELIGION AND POLITICS

One of the lessons the shah had learned from the rapid rise of Mossadeq was the importance of religious leaders in shaping political thought. Because of this, he strengthened his relationships with the ayatollahs who had not already aligned themselves with Mossadeq. The shah would never be described as a religious man, but following his return, he took tentative steps to emphasize the importance of Shiite Muslim thought to Iran.

Over the next few years, the shah made very public visits to various sites important to Shiism. He made the hajj—the pilgrimage to Mecca that Muslims believe is one of the most important pillars of their faith. He agreed with the Muslim authorities' plans to include more religious teaching in public schools and to more tightly control the movies being shown in

local movie theaters. He did his best to demonstrate that he was a true believer.

The Muslim faith that prevails in Iran has several important differences from the Islam practiced in other parts of the world. In Iran, the majority of Muslims are Shiite Muslims, quite different from the Sunni Muslims (*Sunni* meaning "obeying tradition" in Arabic) who make up much of the rest of the Muslim world. The dispute between mainstream Sunni Muslims and the Shiite branch focuses on the question of who should—and did—succeed Islam's most important prophet, Muhammad.

In A.D. 632, when Muhammad died, a disagreement arose over who would become Islam's spiritual and political leader. Sunni Muslims felt that the same system of choosing leaders that had been used prior to Muhammad should still be used: The system was based on a meeting of the community's elders who would select the next leader. A small minority of Muslims disagreed with this tradition. They felt that the wishes of Muhammad himself—who had proclaimed his first cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as his successor—should be honored. They became known as Shiites, an Arabic word meaning "partisans," because they were partisans—or supporters—of Ali.

The debate raged on for nearly 30 years after Muhammad's death, until Ali was stabbed to death while praying in Iraq. Ali's son, Hosein, launched a rebellion against the ruling Sunni leaders, and nearly 20 years later he, too, would be stabbed to death in battle. From this event, some 13 centuries ago, a history of conflict would evolve between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, a conflict that continues to be played out in the Middle East today.

Shiites believe in the importance of imams—spiritual leaders who receive divine guidance to interpret the teachings of the Koran. In Shiite belief, there have been 12 imams since Ali. Shiites believe that the twelfth and final imam disappeared in the ninth century, but he still exists in spirit. They believe that he will one day reappear to right the wrongs of the world.

The Shiite interpretation of Islam focuses on the importance of discussion and debate. The understanding is that informed

arguments, even over interpretations of the Koran, may lead to a better understanding of Muhammad's prophecies and dictates. This policy of encouraging debate is what permitted the ayatollahs to take different positions toward the shah and Mossadeq, and it is what has continued to affect the course of religious leadership in Iran today.

NEW PHASE OF LEADERSHIP

Publicly embracing the legitimacy given to him by his new relationship with the religious leadership of Iran, the shah spent much of the 1950s cementing his own power and authority. While he understood that he owed much to the actions of foreign allies, particularly the United States, he believed that his rule had a new authority because, given the opportunity to choose between Mossadeq and the shah, his people had chosen him. Whether this was true or not, he would spend the rest of his years as ruler convinced that his people would support him—no matter what.

His focus soon centered on building a dynasty so that the Pahlavi line would continue to rule Iran after he was gone. His first marriage, to Queen Fawzia, the sister of Egypt's King Farouk, had produced a daughter but ended in divorce. His second marriage, to Queen Soraya, would end after seven years when the young queen failed to give birth to a child. In 1959, the 39-year-old shah married for the third time, to a 21-year-old architecture student, the daughter of a wealthy Iranian family, who had been going to school in Paris. His new wife, Farah, soon gave birth to a male heir, and the shah felt certain at last that the Pahlavi rule over Iran would continue.

He turned his attention next to his plans for land reform. The White Revolution, launched in January 1963, included plans to reorganize the government, to offer workers a profit-sharing plan, to privatize some government-owned businesses, and to give women the right to vote. Literacy was to be extended into the countryside, and health care was to be made more widely

available. It was, in a sense, a plan to rapidly transform Iranian society.

At the time the campaign was launched in 1963, roughly three-quarters of Iranians lived and worked as peasants. Only a few hundred families controlled nearly all of Iran's land, with the rest working for them in primitive conditions and living in poor rural communities. But it was not this apparent injustice that was the inspiration for the shah's White Revolution. Instead, the shah had determined that the wealthy families who controlled much of Iranian land might one day pose a challenge to him. The families had proved reluctant to rally behind him, so instead he decided to take away their power and give it to the people. The peasants, he was certain, would remain loyal to his rule.

Despite its name, the White Revolution was not a true revolution. It was, more than anything else, one ruler's attempt to cement his own power, to weaken those opposed to him, and to give the appearance of a ruler seeking to improve the lives of his people.

The biggest change came in the effect the White Revolution had on the relationship between the shah and the religious leaders in Iran. Many of the most important religious leaders came from the very families whose assets were being threatened. In addition, the Shiite Muslim leaders received generous donations and support from these families. The shah's revolution threatened not only the income of the wealthiest families—it threatened the income of the religious leaders, as well.

Soon, a split developed between the religious leaders who actively spoke out against the shah's program and those who did not. The shah was quick to take advantage of this split, noting that only the leaders who supported his revolution could be recognized as the true religious leaders of the country.

It would prove a fateful step in Iranian history. The debates among Shiite clerics began to focus more and more on what role, if any, Islam should play in politics. As the shah used political positions to divide the Shiite leadership, the Shiite leadership soon responded by recognizing that perhaps they could not

remain isolated and separated from the secular world of politics. Instead, they began to believe, they must follow in the footsteps of the prophet Muhammad, who had been actively involved in the politics and current events of his society's time.

This was the true revolution the shah's policies would spark—not a revolution of land reform, but instead a revolution in religious thought. For the next 16 years, as the shah began to push his country toward modernization—by following Western models—the religious leaders would begin to organize themselves and, ultimately, their followers into active opponents of the shah. As they saw their traditions, their income, and their Islamic heritage and beliefs threatened by an increasingly secular government, they began to plan their own revolution.

THE AYATOLLAH

At the heart of this revolution was a cleric (religious leader) named Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. He was born in 1902 in the small town of Khomein to a family who claimed to be descended from Muhammad. Until 1926, when Reza Shah passed the law saying that all Iranians must take a last name, he was known only by his first name, Ruhollah, which means "soul of God." Shiite Muslim tradition requires ayatollahs to take as their name their place of birth—for this reason he would ultimately become known as Ayatollah Khomeini.

The lives of the shah and the ayatollah intersected at several important moments in Iran's history. In the same year that Reza Shah became ruler, the ayatollah became a mullah, the first level in Islamic religious scholarship. *Mullah* literally means "master," but it is more commonly interpreted to mean "cleric," or "religious figure." Khomeini wore the black turban that all clerics who are thought to be descended from Muhammad wear (the others wear white turbans). His teachings and lectures soon made him a popular religious figure. As Reza Shah was setting out on his campaign to modernize Iran, Khomeini was becoming known as a teacher and legal scholar.

Following Reza Shah's abdication, Khomeini published a book that was highly critical of the ruler and his abandonment of Islamic teachings. Khomeini would soon have the same criticisms of Reza Shah's son, who, he felt, was abandoning traditional Islamic teachings in favor of Western ways. These criticisms crystallized with the White Revolution. The land reform, Khomeini knew, threatened the financial backbone of the clergy.

Ayatollah Khomeini (full name: Sayyid Ruhollah al-Musavi al-Khomeini) led the revolution that toppled the Pahlavi government in 1979. Khomeini criticized Mohammed Reza Pahlavi for his support of Western ideas and secular education, and was imprisoned and later exiled in 1964. Upon his return he was instrumental in establishing an Islamic theocracy.

The shah's efforts to expand literacy challenged the authority of village mullahs as teachers. The shah's campaign to expand opportunities for female Iranians was, in Khomeini's eyes, an effort to corrupt young women by bringing them into close contact with male students.

In the early years of the White Revolution, life did improve for many Iranians. Women enjoyed greater rights, more people were better educated and healthier, and the economy grew. A new middle class began to arise in Iranian society, benefiting from industrialization. Outside of his own country, particularly in the West, the shah's policies were viewed with favor. He was seen as a modernizer who was attempting to lead Iran into the future despite the opposition of feudal landowners and intolerant religious leaders.

As the politics of the Middle East (particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict) increasingly dominated headlines, Iran became an important ally of the West. While much of the Arab world rallied around the charismatic leadership of Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the shah provided the West—and even Israel—with a strategically important ally (it is important to note that Iranians, while Muslim, are not Arabs).

But the shah's support of Western interests and his alliance with Israel only further enflamed Khomeini and his supporters. Khomeini continued to speak out, denouncing the shah and his policies as a threat to Islam. The shah responded with equally harsh criticisms of his religious opponents. The war of words culminated in June 1963, when Khomeini led a series of public demonstrations at the Great Mosque in the city of Qom, a city known as the site of much Shiite teaching and scholarship. The demonstrations criticized the shah as an enemy of Islam. The 61-year-old cleric spoke passionately of the need for courage and for martyrdom, linking religion and politics and threatening the shah with the loss of his throne should his policies not change.

The next day, Khomeini was arrested. His speech and the shah's response would catapult the respected scholar and religious figure into a symbol of martyrdom, a kind of icon for the

misdeeds of the monarchy. Within 24 hours, riots broke out. Khomeini's picture was plastered throughout the streets of Tehran, and in cities throughout Iran demonstrations against the shah created chaos. Government buildings were stormed, and stores and bazaars were set on fire.

The shah sent in troops to put down the demonstrations, and thousands of soldiers responded with force, opening fire on their own people. For three days, the riots consumed much of Iran before ending with the loss of hundreds of lives and the destruction of millions of dollars of property.

Lacking political parties, free newspapers, and open elections to express their dissatisfaction with the ruling powers, Iranians rallied around the cause of this little-known cleric as a way to express their opposition to the shah's policies. Khomeini would remain in prison for nearly a year and then be sent into exile in 1964, but his influence would continue to grow.

PROGRESS AND POWER

Despite the June 1963 riots' clear signal that popular support was not firmly behind him, the shah pressed ahead with his White Revolution. In reality, his policies provided little long-term benefit to the peasants. Land redistribution left them without the skills or finances they needed to become modern farmers. Many moved into urban areas instead, in search of other ways to make a living.

A gap was growing in Iran between the small minority of people who were benefiting from the shah's rule and the vast majority of impoverished Iranians who were not. The shah did little to quiet the murmurs of unrest when he decided that the time had come to formally celebrate his coronation. On October 26, 1967—the day of his forty-eighth birthday—the shah and his wife, Farah, rode in a gilded coach drawn by white horses to the very palace where Reza Shah had been crowned. The shah placed the jeweled crown on his own head. Then he placed an equally splendid crown on the head of his wife and named her

On October 26, 1967, his forty-eighth birthday, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was crowned as His Imperial Majesty, along with his wife, Farah Diba, who was made empress, and their son, Reza, who was made the crown prince. The elaborate ceremony in which he crowned himself King of Kings caused discontent among various levels of society.

empress as well as regent for their six-year-old son in the event of the shah's early death.

It was a ceremony rich with symbol and spectacle, a strange contrast to the modernization campaign the shah claimed to wish to bring to all facets of Iranian life. As his personal fortune and political influence continued to expand, he began to draw connections between his own rule and that of the ancient rulers of Persia. SAVAK, his secret police force, became even more vigilant in its crackdown on those who spoke out against the shah. His power seemed absolute.

But from the shrine of Shiite Islam in Najaf, Iraq (where Ali had been martyred and was buried), one voice continued to speak out against the shah. Ayatollah Khomeini had moved to Iraq from Turkey, where he had first been exiled, in 1965. He would spend the next 13 years there, delivering fiery speeches denouncing the shah and his policies. He spoke out against what he saw as the growing corrupting influence of the West. He criticized the excesses of the Pahlavi monarchy, from the royal family's lavish lifestyles to the shah's taking of the title "King of Kings."

By 1970, Ayatollah Khomeini was calling specifically for the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty and for the creation of an Islamic government as its replacement. Even in exile, the Ayatollah's messages were being transmitted back into Iran through an extensive network of supporters. The shah decided that the time had come to take action against this threat to his rule. Slowly, he began to strike back against the religious establishment—cutting off many of their sources of economic support, closing down some of the meeting places where more critical speeches had been delivered, gradually ensuring that no Iranian clerical leader could become powerful enough to challenge him.

The shah also began to speak more boldly about the great heritage of ancient Persia and the glorious connection between its rulers and his own reign. Using a combination of history and storytelling, the shah began to create a new history for his people, one in which his own rule was descended from that of

the ancient Persian kings, one in which Islam played a smaller and smaller role.

This rewriting of Iranian history culminated in a lavish celebration at Persepolis in southwest Iran, beginning on October 15, 1971. The shah wanted to host an unforgettable gala to mark his thirtieth anniversary of rule over the people of Iran, as well as the tenth anniversary of the White Revolution. Kings and dignitaries from around the globe were invited to attend the party.

Months of preparation resulted in a lavish and extravagant celebration, whose outstanding features seemed much more European than Iranian. A French decorator was chosen to create and furnish 50 private tents, made from beige and royal blue cloth, which would house the most favored guests. These air-conditioned, two-bedroom tents contained elegant European furniture and American plumbing, and they were clustered around the Imperial Reception Hall, where the shah and his empress received their honored visitors and hosted dinners and receptions complete with gilded chairs and crystal chandeliers.

Fabulous meals were prepared by French and Swiss chefs, and the guests were served lavish meals of French food and given French wine and champagne to drink. There was a spectacular fireworks display and a sound and light demonstration. Leading artists and designers competed for the honor of creating the linens, the crystal goblets, the china place settings, even the uniforms that the shah's courtiers would wear. The only hint of Iran lay beneath the feet of the dignitaries—the Persian carpets on which they stood.

The setting for the party was as impressive as the elaborate preparations. Persepolis had served as the capital of the ancient kings of Persia, and it was in this stark and bare plain that Cyrus the Great chose to build a palace worthy of his empire. All that remained of the mighty Persian Empire were the traces of the palace that had stood on the site—the remains of ancient columns and carvings that had been carefully excavated to reveal the secrets of the emperors who had once ruled over the land.

It was a glorious heritage, and one that the shah seized on as his own, claiming that the party at Persepolis marked the continuation of a mighty 2,500-year-old dynasty, an empire that dated back to the time of Cyrus the Great in the sixth century B.C. The guests who flocked to join him in toasting the centuries of history included the kings of Denmark, Belgium, Greece, and Jordan; the emperor of Ethiopia; and Prince Philip and Princess Anne of England. There were 13 presidents and 10 sheikhs. The vice president of the United States came, as did the prime minister of France and numerous foreign ministers and ambassadors.

Ayatollah Khomeini openly criticized the Persepolis gathering, labeling anyone who participated in it a traitor to Islam. And quietly, the Islamic leaders still in Iran began to meet on their own to discuss ways in which the monarchy might be overthrown. The shah had broken his ties with his faith. Now, its leaders would do their best to break him.

5

The Shah's Downfall

Iran in the early 1970s was a country heavily influenced by the West. Western tourists flocked to its cities, where they enjoyed luxurious accommodations in Western-style hotels. As part of the shah's efforts to modernize his nation, Western experts in technology arrived to bring new products and new ways of life to Iran. American and European goods and culture began to seep into the streets of Tehran, often clashing with the values that centuries of tradition had shaped.

The nationalism that the shah had called for at the beginning of his reign was not very recognizable in the growth and expansion the country was undertaking. In 1973, the price of oil would quadruple, bringing seemingly unlimited wealth to the shah and a select few of his people. The shah had helped to spark that price increase in 1971, when at a meeting in Tehran of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) he had suggested changing the price structure of oil to bring more money to the producers, rather than to the companies that marketed it. Two years later, when Egypt crossed the Suez Canal and invaded the Israeli-occupied Sinai, and the United States rushed to Israel's assistance, Arab countries launched an oil embargo against the United States and other Israeli allies.

The oil embargo sent oil prices skyrocketing. Although Iran continued to ship oil to the United States, it—as a member of OPEC—benefited from the price increase as much as any Arab nation. Millions of dollars poured into Iran, and the shah, determined to build an empire in keeping with those of the ancient Persian kings, decided to invest much of it in military

equipment. He would spend the next several years acquiring massive numbers of weapons, thanks in part to the support of his most important ally, the United States.

The Americans were happy to supply the shah with whatever he needed. The viewpoint of leading Americans, includ-

U.S. president Richard Nixon is greeted by the shah during a visit to Iran in May 1972. Also pictured are the shah's wife, Farah Diba (*left*), and First Lady Pat Nixon (*center*).

ing then-president Richard Nixon, was that Iran was a critical ally in the Persian Gulf. The shah was seen as a vital presence in the Gulf region, and American diplomats and CIA agents were highly visible in Iran, enjoying the benefit of the shah's goodwill and living in opulent style. The Americans made little effort to associate with the average Iranian citizen, and they essentially lived separate lives in Tehran, enjoying American films, American restaurants, and shops stocked with American goods in their own private enclave. They enjoyed a much better lifestyle than they could have known in the United States, and certainly a vastly superior lifestyle to that of the average Iranian. They were also exempt from Iranian jurisdiction and Iranian taxation.

These Americans were highly visible in a country whose customs and traditions they openly ignored. With their behavior and dress, they demonstrated a great insensitivity to their host country, and they laid the groundwork for a sudden spread of anti-American sentiment. These feelings helped create the climate of unrest that sparked the Iranian Revolution.

By March 1975, the shah had determined to provide a political legitimacy for his rule by ensuring that elections cemented his position. He established a single political party for the entire country, to be known as the *Rastakhiz*, or Resurgence Party. All adults were required to join. If they did not, the shah announced, they could leave the country.

This experiment, designed to stabilize the shah's rule, instead contributed to his downfall. Previously, Iranians had believed that even if they disagreed with the shah's policies, as long as they did not actively campaign against them, as long as they kept quiet, they would be fine. Instead, they were being forced to join this new party—to visibly and publicly declare their support—or face the consequences.

Secondly, the shah was determined in 1976 to change the way that Iranians measured the passage of time—their calendar. In a sudden move, he announced that Iran was not being properly served by its connection to the Islamic calendar, which

measured years dating back to when Muhammad first fled from Mecca to Medina. The shah wanted to institute the use of a brand-new calendar that measured time from the date when Cyrus the Great first established his Persian Empire. Seemingly overnight, the year changed from 1355 to 2535.

These dramatic moves sparked a new wave of furious speeches from the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini. His influence had continued to spread, and in religious schools throughout Iran, clerics carefully instructed their students in the important tenets of Islam.

The shah's secret police, SAVAK, increased its efforts to stamp out dissidents abroad as well as at home. As dissatisfaction with the shah's regime grew, SAVAK's job—to eliminate opposition—became more challenging. More and more Iranians were subjected to horrific torture at the hands of SAVAK agents, and internationally, murmurings of dissatisfaction with these human rights abuses began to build.

By 1977, the newly elected U.S. president, Jimmy Carter, had invited the shah to visit Washington. Leading intellectuals in Iran had drafted a letter to the shah, asking him to address the allegations of human rights abuses. The letter went on to ask the shah to abolish some of the more oppressive aspects of his rule—the dependency on the one-party system, the censure of the press, the limits of freedom of expression. It was a sign that opposition was building in many facets of Iranian society—with the well-educated; with the landowners whose property had been seized during the White Revolution; with the Shiite Muslim leadership; and with the lower-class citizens, whose hopes had been dashed by the reality of an authoritarian monarchy.

This wide range of Iranians, united almost exclusively by their opposition to the shah, surfaced in full view of the world and of one another on the occasion of the shah's visit to the United States. Protestors demonstrated outside the White House. Students rallied in Tehran and in other Iranian cities. But neither

the shah nor the American president sensed the violence that was boiling up. Only weeks after the shah's visit to the United States, President Jimmy Carter returned the favor, traveling to Tehran for a New Year's Eve celebration and toasting the shah. Iran, Carter declared, was "an island of stability . . . a great tribute to the respect, admiration, and love of your people for you." Little more than a year later, the shah would be forced into exile, abandoned by his supporters and allies, including the very president who had praised him so lavishly.

FROM A VILLA IN FRANCE

Shortly after President Carter left Iran, an article appeared in a state-supported newspaper attacking Ayatollah Khomeini. Many believed that the article's publication had been encouraged by the shah. It sparked a series of riots in the city of Qom—the city that was home and training ground for the majority of Iran's religious leadership. Police rushed in, and six demonstrators were killed. The deaths marked a significant turning point. By specifically naming Khomeini, the government had mistakenly increased his stature by placing him at the center of religious opposition.

More moderate Shiite Muslims who might not have agreed with all of Khomeini's pronouncements now found themselves moving closer to his positions when confronted with the government's crackdown on the protestors in Qom. The protests soon spread to other cities; again, several protestors were killed. Khomeini's response to the events was clear—the shah must be overthrown, and an Islamic government must take his place.

For several months, protests sprang up in various parts of Iran. They would then be brutally put down, sparking even more protests against the violence. It was a never-ending cycle, one that the shah was seemingly helpless to control. No matter what steps he took, no matter what his actions were, Ayatollah Khomeini

was ready, across the border in Iraq, to issue yet another statement pointing out the evils of his regime.

The shah was fighting a physical battle as well as a political one. But this battle was being waged in secret. The shah had been stricken with cancer. Only his wife and his doctors knew the seriousness of his condition, and he would permit only the kind of treatment that could take place secretly in his palace without raising any concerns among his subjects or giving any sense that something was wrong.

His weakened physical condition may have made it more difficult for him to develop a strong and coherent plan for countering the unrest that was sweeping his country. But it was becoming increasingly clear that Khomeini must be silenced before the protests would end.

Iranian government officials began to put increasing pressure on the Iraqi government to crack down on Khomeini. The Iraqis were willing to oblige—there was a large Shiite Muslim population in Iraq, and there was some concern that Khomeini's revolutionary talk might find a receptive audience in Iraq as well as in Iran. In October of 1978, the Iraqi government agreed to expel Khomeini from the country. He attempted to flee to Kuwait but was refused entry there. His second choice was France.

When the French president, Giscard d'Estaing, learned of Khomeini's request to be granted asylum, he posed the question to the shah. Would the shah have any objection to France taking in Khomeini?

The shah made a decision that, in hindsight, proved regrettable. His past experiences led him to believe that Khomeini most threatened Iran's stability when he was close at hand and in a Muslim country. Distant France seemed a much safer location for the radical cleric.

But in France the ayatollah was surrounded by assistants who were savvy in the ways of Western media. He suddenly had access to a global network—to international newspapers that published his criticisms of the shah on a frequent basis and to

television cameras and radio networks that beamed his speeches to supporters worldwide. In Iran, his supporters could hear his messages on the BBC and listen to tape-recorded sermons smuggled in by aides.

From the peaceful garden of his villa in France, Khomeini did not seem like a raging revolutionary. Instead, he seemed, to many Western observers, like a quiet, scholarly old man who was seeking a more just and more democratic society than the corrupt regime of the shah.

BLACK FRIDAY

As Ayatollah Khomeini sat in his garden receiving visitors, the streets of Iran were erupting regularly in protests. The opposition had most clearly begun with intellectuals, who voiced their disgust with Pahlavi rule in letters, articles, and other written documents. But by the middle of 1978, the tone and focus of the protests had changed. They were now being organized and led by the clergy at mosques and religious events. It was the ordinary people who were being mobilized—as they gathered at the mosques to pray and as they celebrated religious holidays.

The message was spreading: The shah must be overthrown. Iran must become an Islamic nation. And, increasingly, Khomeini was being named as the true leader of the Iranian people.

The protests reached a new level in September 1978. It was the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, and to celebrate the clerics had organized a kind of mass prayer meeting. In Tehran, nearly 100,000 people gathered for the prayers and then marched through the streets chanting their support for Khomeini. For three days the protests continued, increasing in size and boldness, until demonstrators were openly calling for the overthrow of the shah. The government was forced to declare martial law, but many of the protestors refused to disperse. On September 8, in a working-class neighborhood of Tehran, a

On September 8, 1978, the government used deadly force against citizens who were peacefully protesting the shah's policies. Reports claim that 88 people were killed that day, and less than a year later, the monarchy was overthrown. Pictured are troops surrounding crowds of demonstrators, with many victims lying in the middle of the street, in Jaleh Square, Tehran.

protest formed in Jaleh Square. Government troops opened fire on the demonstrators, and many were killed.

The massacre quickly gained the label "Black Friday." Those who had not closely aligned themselves with Khomeini still found little reason to rally behind a shah who would authorize the assassination of his own people. The protests continued and spread. By October, a series of strikes had begun. For several weeks, the first striking workers were joined by other workers in such critical industries as banking, newspapers, and oil, as well

as the post office and some government-owned factories. Gradually, Iran was shutting down.

The shah made a series of essentially futile moves. He dismissed certain government officials and replaced them with others. He released some political prisoners. He made many promises, all of which fell on deaf ears. It was too little, too late.

The shah turned to his American allies, but the advice they gave him was as uncertain as his own actions. This was due, in part, to differing views on Iranian policies within President Jimmy Carter's cabinet. A massive crackdown on the protestors would have resulted in widespread violence, and the shah was reluctant to pursue this action, uncertain that such a step would restore calm. His army was given a particularly difficult order—to maintain the peace, but to do so without hurting anyone. It would become an impossible assignment, as day after day the army faced hostile and often threatening crowds without any support or any backup plan should things turn violent. The soldiers quickly grew discouraged, not to mention angry at being asked to prop up a monarchy without any clear instructions or the ability to defend themselves.

By December, it had become clear that events had spiraled out of the shah's control. An envoy from President Jimmy Carter visited the shah and conveyed a clear message: He must leave the country. The envoy agreed to ask the president to grant the shah asylum in the United States, a request that was accepted. However, the two parties had very different views of what was being asked and what was being granted. The shah believed that he would go to the United States for a brief stay until events in his country had settled down, similar to when he had left for Italy all those years before. He would, as a head of state, meet with the American president and top officials to explain the current situation and to seek their assistance in once more reestablishing his rule.

To American officials, the shah presented a problem, one that needed to be handled quickly. The shah must be removed

Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi *(left)* is escorted by Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat *(right)* from his plane in Egypt on January 16, 1979. The Iranian monarch and his wife claimed to be on vacation, but in actuality they were starting their life in exile.

from Iran at once and then brought into the United States not via Washington, but instead through a remote air force base along the East Coast, well away from the capital. He would then be transferred to another flight and sent to California, where he would swiftly be moved to his proposed new home, the Palm Springs estate of Walter Annenberg, a wealthy newspaper publisher and close friend of former president Nixon. The United States was operating under the belief that, by providing a home for the shah, they would be building a new relationship with whoever would assume power after he had left. It was a tragically incorrect assumption.

On January 16, 1979, the shah and Empress Farah left their palace for the last time. They traveled to the airport, where empty airplanes lined the runways—evidence of the strikes that had brought travel and many other elements of life in Iran to a virtual halt. The shah made a small speech before boarding the plane, indicating that he was leaving the government in new hands—Shapour Bakhtiar, the new prime minister (and vice president of the party of the late Mossadeq), had been confirmed by the shah only minutes earlier. The shah said that he now needed a short rest outside the country.

The scene at the airport marked a final, tragic moment in the downfall of the Pahlavi dynasty. Shortly after 2:00 P.M., the shah's plane rose into the sky and headed west. The self-proclaimed King of Kings would spend the final months of his life moving from place to place, desperately seeking asylum from the leaders who had, only a short time earlier, declared themselves his strongest allies. The generals who lined his path to the plane, weeping and kissing his hand, would soon lose their lives, along with many others who were too closely connected to the shah. The newly appointed Bakhtiar would remain prime minister for a month only, before he would be forced to flee for his life to Paris, where he would be assassinated in 1991.

As the shah's plane headed toward his first destination—Egypt—the news of his departure was broadcast on Iranian

radio. The streets of Tehran were filled quickly with citizens celebrating and dancing, with car horns blaring, and with women waving flowers and posters of Khomeini. Statues of the shah and Reza Shah were torn down. The Pahlavi dynasty had ended, and the revolution had begun.

6

Revolution and Religion

In the days after the shah left Iran, Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar set about trying to bring the country back under some kind of control. He aimed to correct many of the shah's excesses, stating his commitment to constitutional rule, to dissolving the hated SAVAK, and to setting up a new freedom for the press. In another popular move, he announced that diplomatic relations with Israel would be severed.

Bakhtiar knew that the return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran would undermine his efforts to restore order in the country. He urged Khomeini to remain in France until the country could reach a relative state of calm.

But Khomeini refused. Bakhtiar was no friend of the shah's, but the shah had officially handed the country over to him, so he, too, was unacceptable to the revolutionaries. At Khomeini's instruction, the officials Bakhtiar had appointed were blocked by Khomeini's supporters from entering their own offices. Huge crowds marched through the streets of Tehran, but now they were calling for Bakhtiar to step down.

Bakhtiar did all that he could to delay the return of Khomeini to Iran. But on the morning of February 1, 1979, an airplane carrying the ayatollah home after 14 years in exile touched down in Tehran. The Iranian air force had apparently considered the idea of shooting down the plane before it landed, but the plan was abandoned. As the plane touched down on Iranian soil, a journalist on board asked the ayatollah how he felt about finally

returning to Iran. Reportedly, his answer was, "Nothing. . . . I don't feel a thing."

The same lack of emotion was not true for the one million Iranians who had assembled to welcome home their spiritual leader. Khomeini immediately made a speech in which he reassured Iranians that Islam would triumph over the corruption left behind by the shah, and in which he called for the immediate expulsion of all foreigners.

Ayatollah Khomeini *(center, with black turban)* is greeted by supporters after his arrival at the airport in Tehran upon his return from exile.

For 10 days, the remnants of the shah's army and government struggled with Khomeini, each side attempting to cement its control over Iran. Khomeini ignored Bakhtiar and the officials he had appointed to help form a government. Instead, Khomeini named his own prime minister and set about appointing his own officials. Divisions within the military added to the confusion. Some members of the armed forces supported Khomeini, while others remained loyal to the shah and the government he had left behind. Militias and soldiers fought against each other, the streets were full of people and tanks, and chaos was everywhere. Armed citizens seized government buildings, military offices, prisons, and television and radio stations, ignoring Bakhtiar's declaration of martial law and implementation of curfews. Outnumbered and, in some cases, facing heavily armed citizens, the divided army could do nothing to restore order.

By February 11, 1979, it was clear that the revolutionary forces were in control of Tehran. Khomeini broadcast a triumphant message: Iran was now an Islamic state.

The ayatollah appointed Mahd Bazargan, a 72-year-old politician who had been a minister in Mossadeq's cabinet, to head up Iran's new government. Bazargan had helped to establish the Iran Freedom Movement, a religiously oriented political party that focused on the principle of Islam serving as a force for political and social change. He believed strongly in the need to combine Islam with nationalism and that political views and religious convictions could and should be joined. For his views, he had spent time in jail during the shah's reign. Now, he was Iran's prime minister.

Having unleashed mass chaos, Khomeini now set about trying to bring the country back under control. He issued pleas for calm, asking the people to preserve symbols of Iran's heritage and to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. But the revolutionary passion that he had sparked was not so easily stamped out. The shah and his agents had made many enemies. SAVAK had brutally tortured many Iranians. Now they wanted revenge.

Soon the supporters of Khomeini were demanding the swift executions of all of the shah's leading government officials. Bazargan protested, but Khomeini agreed to a series of quick trials and hasty executions. These executions stretched out over a period of weeks as all those linked to—or thought to be linked to—the shah were seized, found guilty, and killed.

One of Bazargan's earliest declarations had been that the new government would correct the human rights abuses carried out under the shah. As word of the mass executions spread, horrified protests came to Iran from all corners of the international community. Bazargan's claim that Iran now would be a nation that respected human rights was swiftly proved false, and his own authority grew weaker. It was becoming clear that while Bazargan might hold the title of prime minister, Ayatollah Khomeini was the man who really held all the power.

There was one other link to the shah that would soon draw the fury of the revolutionaries: the American Embassy.

EMBASSY ATTACK

The American Embassy in Iran stretched out over some 27 acres of prime real estate in the heart of downtown Tehran. It was a substantial property that contained the consulate, the residences of the ambassador and his deputy, four additional staff homes, a dining facility, an office building, two warehouses, and staff quarters for the Marines posted there, plus an athletic field, woods, two pools, and two tennis courts. With the collapse of the shah's army, the embassy was left with little protection. Its vast estate was guarded by only 13 American Marines and the few Iranian police stationed nearby.

The American ambassador, William Sullivan, was well aware of the danger he faced. As soon as the Bakhtiar government collapsed, he began warning his staff—as well as his superiors back in Washington—that the embassy was a likely target for attack. Most felt that he was being excessively cautious.

They were wrong. On the morning of February 14, 1979, the sound of gunfire was heard throughout the embassy compound. From the high-rise buildings that surrounded the embassy, an attack was being launched on all sides. Embassy staff frantically shredded documents as the Marine guards attempted to hold off the attackers with tear gas. As Iranians battered down the metal doors protecting the heart of the embassy, the Americans were forced to surrender. But soon another attack broke out within the embassy compound—a group of rival Iranians led by Ibrahim Yazdi, a former American pharmacist who would eventually become Khomeini's foreign minister, was directing the counterattack, this time to liberate the embassy. Yazdi's group of Tehran University students managed to outnumber the original attackers in both men and guns, and the attackers agreed not to harm the Americans in exchange for being allowed to leave the embassy grounds. Within a few hours, the crisis had ended. But the peaceful resolution would not last.

THE GREEN BALLOT

Bazargan, as part of his plan to provide a more constitutional framework for the Iranian government, had called for a referendum to decide what form the new state of Iran would take. Bazargan had hoped to offer Iranian voters a choice between two distinct forms of government, but in the end, following the wishes of Khomeini, the Iranian voters were given only one option. They could either choose to vote "yes" or "no" on the question of whether Iran should become an Islamic Republic.

The choice was represented by two different colored ballots. Those who wanted to vote "yes" in favor of the creation of the new Islamic Republic form of government would file a green ballot. Those voting "no" would need to use a red ballot. The lack of secrecy surrounding the choice of ballot was only one problem. In addition, it soon became clear that, at many polling places, only one color ballot was available—the green one. Most of

those who opposed Khomeini's demand for an Islamic Republic decided to boycott the elections. Nonetheless, an estimated 90 percent of eligible voters turned out for the referendum, and they voted in overwhelming numbers in support of the new form of government.

Debate soon turned to the specifics of how the Islamic government would operate. Initial drafts of the new constitution called not for a government run by a single cleric, but instead for a government run by experienced civil servants who would receive advice from religious leaders to ensure that the government's policies conformed to the teachings of Islam. This soon changed. The shape of the new government contained four branches rather than the three customary to Western governments. In addition to the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch, a fourth branch was added: the Council of Guardians, or the Supreme Council. This council, consisting of 12 religious leaders, would oversee all of the legislative branch's activities. It was their job to confirm that all laws complied with Islamic teaching and to veto any that they felt did not. Any activity, any law, or any action felt by the council to be "anti-Islamic" was banned.

While the initial plans for the new constitution had intended to form a strong presidency that was advised from a distance by leading clerics, the final version stipulated a much weaker role for the president. Instead, there was to be a *faqih*, a Supreme Ruler, who would have extensive powers over all facets of the Iranian government. He would be able to approve or veto any and all candidates for political office. He would be able to appoint members of the judiciary and the military. He would serve as commander in chief. He would appoint half of the members of the Council of Guardians. And his term would be unlimited—he would serve for as long as he wanted.

Many moderate clerics spoke out publicly against the virtual dictatorship that this new constitution would create. By October, the public protests against the proposed constitution were spreading. Voting day was scheduled for two months later,

in December, and for a time it seemed that the people of Iran might demand something closer to the new, more democratic form of government they had hoped for following the shah's departure. But those hopes would end on the morning of November 4, 1979, when Iranian students once more stormed the American Embassy, this time seizing its occupants as hostages. The crisis that followed would ultimately bring about the downfall of an American president, dramatically change the international attitude toward Iran, and rally the people of Iran behind their ayatollah.

AMERICA HELD HOSTAGE

As competing forces struggled for control over Iran, trying to shape the constitution that would guide Iran into the future, the most public symbol of its past was desperately moving from country to country, seeking a permanent refuge and battling cancer. The shah had believed that he would spend his exile in the United States, as had been promised, but President Jimmy Carter had quickly realized how much Iranians would resent his decision to admit the shah to the United States. The U.S. government wanted to build diplomatic relations with the new government in Iran, and American officials began to understand that hosting the shah would defeat this purpose. The attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tehran had provided a warning—the presence of the shah on American soil would pose further danger to the Americans remaining in Iran.

The shah had traveled from Egypt to Morocco and then to the Bahamas. His cancer had spread, and medical treatment was becoming vital. After weeks of hesitation, the shah and his family were finally allowed to enter New York on October 22, 1979, where the shah was quickly admitted to a hospital for treatment. Few people, other than his doctors and immediate family, knew how serious the shah's condition was and how rapidly his health had deteriorated. Suspicions were high in Iran that the admittance of the shah to the United States for the stated reason—

medical treatment—was simply a ruse to permit the shah to rally American support for his return to power.

With the shah's arrival in the United States, anti-American sentiment reached a new high in Iran. Better levels of protection had been instituted at the American Embassy following the attack nine months earlier. Ambassador Sullivan had retired, but he continued to warn officials in Washington that the shah's presence in the United States posed a real threat to Americans in Tehran, particularly those at the embassy. Still, the danger was not fully understood. Bulletproof glass and armor-plated doors had been installed at the embassy, and this seemed sufficient to hold off another attack.

But it was not. November 4, 1979, marked the anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's forced exile 15 years earlier and the one-year anniversary of a violent clash between Tehran University students and the shah's forces. On that morning, the embassy was attacked by a large crowd, initially composed of women, who broke through the front gate. There was little panic at the sight of the group of women clad in black *chadors*—the garments that fully covered women from head to foot, in accordance with new Islamic regulations governing how women should properly dress. While the women cried out "Death to America," most inside the embassy believed that this would be a relatively quick protest, one that would require little response before the women trailed away.

But the women were merely the first stage of a well-planned attack, which benefited from inside information about the location of the most vulnerable access points to the embassy, the position of Marine guards, and the area where the majority of American diplomats were likely to be found. The women were quickly followed by a large group of students from the universities in and around Tehran, who slipped in through a basement window. The Americans were seized, blindfolded, and bound with cords, and then they were paraded outside.

The U.S. Embassy provided one of the most visible remnants of the shah's legacy. Its seizure, and the parading of American

On November 4, 1979, 60 employees of the American Embassy in Tehran were taken hostage by supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini, some of them university students. At least two former hostages have said that they believe the man third from the right is Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, while several former hostage takers have denied it. Ahmadinejad has denied the allegations.

hostages, sent a powerful message that the days of the shah and his allies were over. But the motivations of those who seized the embassy were not merely symbolic. The internal debate over exactly what form of government Iran would take in the future had sparked great unease and concern among many Iranians. They looked to Khomeini to speak out, to make it clear that he and he alone would shape the future policies of Iran. Now, with the takeover of the embassy, Khomeini would have to take a stand.

For two days, the 52 hostages and their captors waited. The grounds around the embassy became a gathering spot for protestors to visibly demonstrate their hatred for America. Sensitive documents seized during the takeover were read out loud to the crowd from loudspeakers. Anti-American graffiti was scrawled on the embassy walls. The crowds chanted their support for the captors, who were waiting inside to determine whether the government would support their actions or force them out.

On November 6, Tehran Radio gave them their answer. A broadcast informed the people of Iran that Ayatollah Khomeini had given his blessing to the seizing of the embassy. Prime Minister Bazargan and his government had resigned. Control of Iran now belonged to the Revolutionary Council. Within one month, the more conservative version of the constitution would pass, granting supreme powers to Khomeini. And for 444 days, the Americans would be held hostage. Their capture would strengthen the position of the extremists in Iran, and it would prove to be a tragedy that would doom Jimmy Carter's presidency.

POLITICS AND VIOLENCE

The year 1980 would mark the beginning of a cycle of violence inside and outside Iran's borders. Internal and external wars would shape the beginning of the 1980s, forever changing the perceptions and policies that surrounded the revolution.

There were many inside Iran who remained moderate, who had wanted to get rid of the shah but not to replace him with another autocrat. They saw the position Khomeini had assumed as contrary to the more democratic government they had believed they were fighting for. Many of them were religious scholars who felt that Shiite principles and thought prohibited the very system that Khomeini was erecting in Iran.

It was inevitable that these forces would clash. Assassinations and executions of noted public figures had become almost the norm for Iranians, who were becoming desensitized to the vio-

lence after months of viewing it on their televisions and in the streets. Now, a new campaign of terror was launched as rival factions fought fiercely and bloodily for control of the Iranian government.

On January 25, 1980, an election was held to choose the new president of the Islamic Republic. Khomeini, aware that many fellow clerics opposed his reforms and might stage a challenge to his leadership, prohibited any religious leaders from running for president. As a result, Abolhasan Bani-Sadr was elected. Bani-Sadr was 46 years old. He was a Western-educated member of Khomeini's circle in France whose thoughts veered closer to Marxism than to the fundamentalist principles Khomeini was advocating. In France, he had written papers and articles highly critical of the shah, and he had served as an effective propagandist for Khomeini in exile. But Bani-Sadr's policies were critical of all extreme forms of authority—particularly the fascist policies being wielded by the more ruthless clerics. He wanted to see the government strengthened, the judiciary restored to a position of impartial authority, and the army and police built up. It seemed inevitable that his policies would clash with the authoritarian structure that Khomeini was building in Iran.

But Khomeini had deliberately planned, through the new constitution, to create a weaker president, one who would ultimately be accountable to him. Bani-Sadr set out to try to shape a government that would be separate from the religious authorities and, in many ways, hold greater authority than them as well. It was a task doomed to failure almost from the beginning.

Initially, Bani-Sadr believed that he had Khomeini's support for his plans to restructure the government in a more orderly fashion, with a central base of authority residing with the government rather than with scattered groups of clerics. Khomeini had supported Bani-Sadr's run for president—he had won an overwhelming majority of the votes due in large part to Khomeini's advocacy of him. The majority of votes also convinced him that he had the people's support for his policies. He was mistaken on both counts.

In early elections held in March, Bani-Sadr's party failed to win control of the Parliament and the Cabinet. The Council of Guardians was involved in both handpicking the candidates and influencing the outcome of the elections. The majority of seats were taken by the candidates from the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), a revolutionary group that contained many of the most militant clerics. Bani-Sadr was forced to approve as prime minister an IRP candidate, and the two immediately began a series of very public clashes over many policies.

Bani-Sadr's lack of control was demonstrated by the sweeping executions of suspected supporters of the shah, opponents of

Senior Iranian army officers along with Ayatollah Sadegh Khalkhali *(wearing glasses)*, a member of Iran's revolutionary government, observe the remains of a burned-out C-130 cargo plane used in the aborted commando raid to rescue U.S. Embassy hostages on April 26, 1980.

the current government, those guilty of "anti-Islam" policies—in short, anyone who had somehow offended someone with the power to order an execution. His weakness was similarly evident in the ongoing hostage crisis. Bani-Sadr issued a decree urging that the American hostages be turned over to the government. The IRP responded by suggesting that the students should continue to hold the hostages.

As the struggle for internal control intensified, rumors spread that the Americans would launch an attack against Iran to restore the shah to power. Khomeini had fanned this paranoia, urging Iranians to be ready for the American invasion.

On April 24, 1980, an attempt to rescue the American hostages was set into motion. The Carter administration had planned to fly in a team of commandos that would storm the embassy in Tehran to rescue those being held there. But the mission failed. The helicopters, launched from the aircraft carrier *Nimitz* in the Arabian Sea, encountered a sandstorm before reaching their target landing strip 275 miles from Tehran. The sandstorm disabled two of the eight helicopters and sent another two crashing into each other before bursting into flames. The rescue attempt ended in disaster, with eight military personnel dead, the disabled planes discarded in the sand, and the hostages still in Tehran.

Khomeini rejoiced over the failed rescue attempt as an act of God, the sandstorm a divine sign that the Islamic Republic would triumph over its enemies. It was a sign to Bani-Sadr as well. To him, it indicated that religion, not politics, would shape the future of Iran.

The end of the hostage crisis would come only with the end of Jimmy Carter's presidency. In November 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected the new U.S. president. Needing financial assets that had been frozen by the United States and fearful of the unpredictability of the new president, the Iranians finally proved willing to negotiate. In the final days of the Carter presidency, frantic meetings, mediated by Algeria, were held to secure the release of the hostages. But it would not be until the very

moment the Carter presidency ended—the official inauguration of Ronald Reagan as the new president—that the hostages would be put on a plane and allowed to leave Iran.

CULTURE WARS

Yet another war took place in 1980—a war on values. Following the ill-fated American rescue attempt, Khomeini supporters launched riots aimed at certain universities in Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, and Shiraz. These were universities where groups had rallied in opposition to many of Khomeini's policies, instead supporting the return to a more secular state. Opponents to the Islamic rule were brutally cut down during these violent demonstrations.

It is almost impossible to believe that the same 50-year period that contained Reza Shah's sweeping efforts at reform also contained the rapid return to Islamic culture. Under Reza Shah, women had been forced to assume modern attire and could be beaten if they were seen wearing the chador in public. Less than 50 years later, women were forced to observe the rules of *hejab*—meaning "covering." Now, they could be beaten if they appeared unveiled, showed their hair, or wore makeup in public. It was acceptable for women to appear with their heads uncovered only in the privacy of their own homes, in the company of close family.

Other restrictions soon followed. Men's ties, considered too Western, were banned. Journalists could be imprisoned for writing articles critical of Islam. Western music was banned. Ancient punishments for various crimes (for example, stoning) soon became part of the judicial system.

In the same way that the Pahlavi dynasty had glorified the Persian past, the new republic busily set about erasing it. First names that sounded too Persian were discouraged; Persian ruins were frequently subjected to demolition. Even the historic Persian ruins at Persepolis were threatened by bulldozers; they

were saved only through the swift intervention of historical preservationists.

The man who had attempted to link Iran with its Persian past and to pull away from Islamic control did not long survive the destruction of the Iran he had shaped. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the shah of Iran, died in exile on July 27, 1980. Having been publicly shunned and humiliated by many of the leaders he had hosted as shah, he had been forced to move from one home to another as he slowly died from cancer. He had traveled from Egypt to Morocco to the Bahamas, and then to Mexico, briefly to the United States for medical treatment, and then on to Panama before finally returning to Egypt. The Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat proved to be the only ally who would remain loyal to the shah. He provided the shah on both of his visits a welcome with full diplomatic honors and honored him in death with a formal, ceremonial burial. His generosity toward his fallen friend and his willingness to seek a peaceful compromise with Israel would cost Sadat his life little more than a year later.

The news of the shah's death was greeted with great celebration in Iran. The enemy of the revolution was dead at last. But the Iranians would not have to wait long for yet another war to break out. This time the attack would come from the outside. On September 22, 1980, some 50,000 Iraqi troops swept across Iran's western border at four points. Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, had become concerned by Khomeini's demands to export the Shiite revolution outside Iran. He had no intention of seeing his substantial number of Shiite citizens—nearly 60 percent of the Iraqi population—caught up in the revolutionary fever that had toppled the shah.

The Iranian leadership had not been prepared for war, but they quickly recognized the opportunity it provided to rally an internally divided population. Cries of nationalism quickly replaced the cries for and against the rule of clerics that had previously threatened the government's stability. For the weakened Bani-Sadr, the war offered a chance to reaffirm

his position as president, as his opponents were diverted temporarily by the need to develop a coherent war policy. And for the clerics, the war offered an opportunity to realize their dream of establishing Islamic regimes worldwide, beginning in neighboring Iraq.

As these conflicting forces prepared for war, they felt confident in a victory, convinced that the war would be swift and that the forces of Islam would quickly triumph. Eight long years later, they would be proved wrong.

7

War and Peace

The war between Iraq and Iran demonstrated the contrasting ideologies and personalities shaping the modern Middle East. Ayatollah Khomeini, when the war broke out, was nearly 80 years old. For several months, he had been broadcasting a message of *jihad* to the Shiite citizens of Iraq, calling upon them to overthrow the secular government that ruled them just as the people of Iran had done. But these verbal attacks were, in some ways, the strongest weapon Iran possessed at the beginning.

Many of the most experienced senior officials in the Iranian military had been thought to be loyal to the shah, so most higher-echelon military men had been dismissed and, in many cases, executed. The military was not only lacking leadership, it was lacking proper equipment as well. During the shah's reign, the major supplier of military equipment and weapons had been the United States. With the seizure of the embassy, though, all military deliveries had been immediately halted. The Iranian government also canceled a planned billion-dollar arms deal made by the shah. So much of the equipment the military now possessed was outdated or in need of repair. The Islamic Republic had, at the beginning, deliberately kept the military weakened, fearing that remaining soldiers might stage a coup to attempt to overthrow the government. The army was thus ill-equipped to mount an immediate counterattack, as they were caught by surprise as Iraqi forces swarmed into Iran.

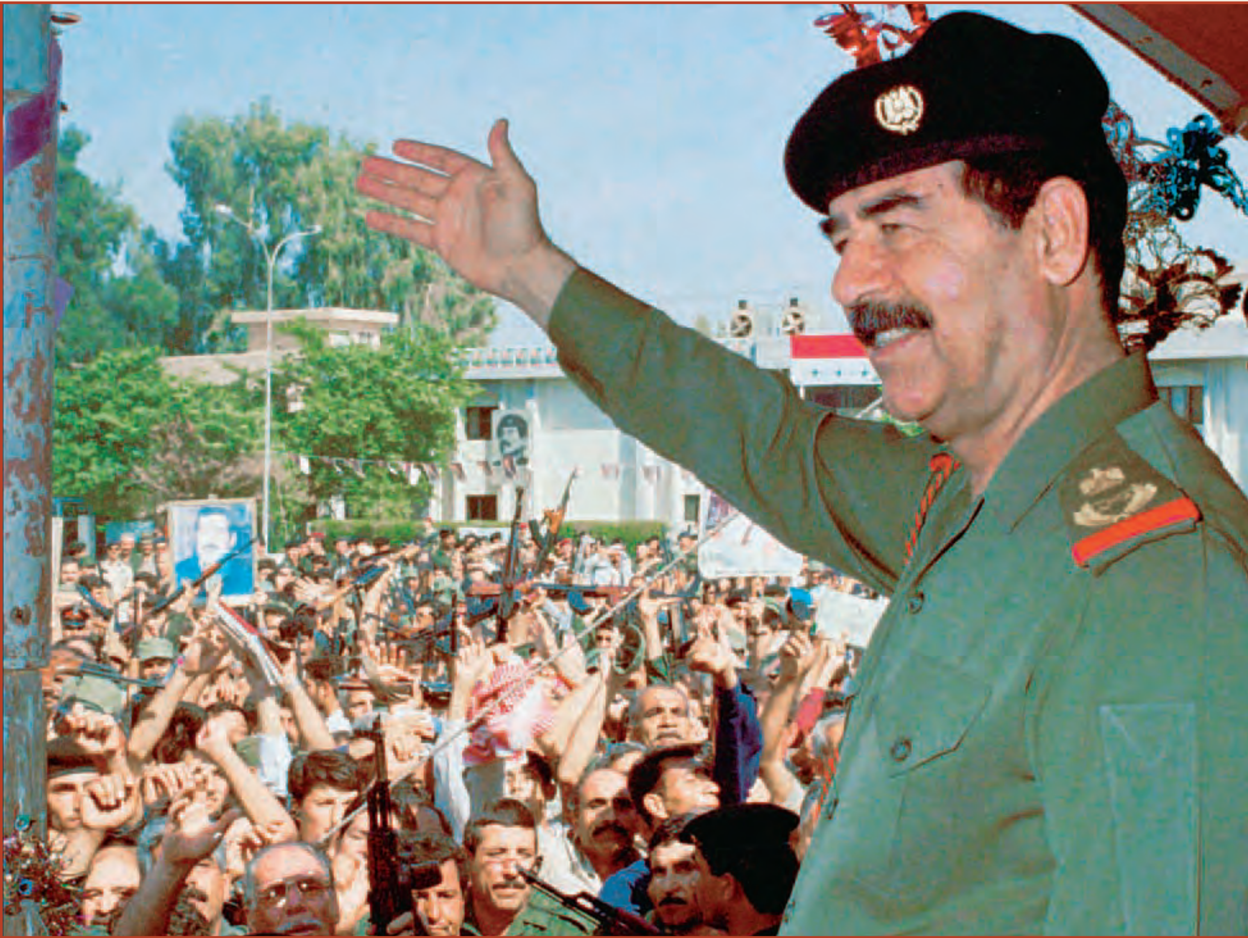
The 730 miles of desert, mountains, and swamps that separate Iran and Iraq had been the scene of many border disputes, and at the beginning this was thought to be one more—a battle that would swiftly be resolved, most likely by Iraq seizing

a substantial amount of Iranian territory and then calling for peace. In fact, the conflict had been sparked by a dispute over possession of the Shatt al-Arab, a strategically important waterway. The Tigris, Euphrates, and Karun rivers all empty into the Shatt al-Arab, which then flows on into the Persian Gulf. The waterway gave Iraq its only access point to the Gulf. It also provided Iran with the route by which it exported oil from its large Abadan refinery, and it served as the site for Iran's important port city of Khorramshahr.

The dispute over control of the Shatt al-Arab had reached a new height in the twentieth century as more goods were being shipped up and down those rivers—especially petroleum products. Reza Shah had granted the right to control the waterway to Iraq in 1937 in a formal treaty, but that treaty was broken by his son in 1968 when the Iraqis began charging Iranian ships for access to the waterway. In 1975, a new agreement was reached in which the eastern side of the waterway was granted to Iran, based on the median point of the deepest portion of the channel.

But the disputes between Iran and Iraq extended beyond borders and religion to the very personalities of the two men who were leading the nations. The aged ayatollah stood in sharp contrast to the 43-year-old newly named president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. In the same way that the ayatollah wished to see the influence of Islam spread throughout the Middle East, Saddam Hussein wished to see his own personal influence spread. He saw himself assuming the mantle of leadership in the Middle East left vacant by the exile of the shah and left available by Egypt's Anwar Sadat, who was facing Arab anger following his signing of a peace accord with Israel.

In addition, the ayatollah's message of jihad was reaching the Shiite citizens of Iraq, and Hussein had no intention of seeing his secular government crumble in the face of an Islamic revolution. His military was vastly superior, and it was in possession of the latest technology. Iraq launched an initial series of punishing attacks against economic and military targets in southern Iran, which were followed by an invasion.



Iraqi president Saddam Hussein waves to supporters one day after being sworn in as president for another seven years.

For the Iraqi president and the Iranian ayatollah, the fight was personal. As vice president, Saddam Hussein had been obliged to sign the agreement that gave partial control of Shatt al-Arab back to Iran. And, also as vice president, he had ordered the expulsion of Khomeini from Iraq, forcing him to flee to France. For one side, the war was about territory and political status; for the other, it was about the triumph of Islam.

VICTORY AND DEFEAT

In the first two days of the invasion, Iraqi troops seized and held a 30-mile stretch of land in the oil-rich Iranian territory of Khuzestan. The Iranians soon forgot the disputes that had so recently divided them internally, and they came together to fight off the invading forces. In a sense, Saddam Hussein helped to strengthen the Islamic Republic by unifying its people under the solidarity of nationalism.

Khomeini emphasized that this was not simply a war between two neighboring nations—it was instead a war between Islam and "the infidels," a kind of good-versus-evil battle. Because the war was depicted in these black-and-white terms, there was only one possible outcome that Iranians could accept: complete victory. A simple border dispute could be resolved by treaties and negotiations, by ceding some territory in exchange for peace or some other benefit. But a war of good versus evil could be satisfactorily resolved only if good won out—in other words, if Iran defeated the Iraqi forces, not merely in Iran but in Iraq as well. But what was best for Islam would not necessarily prove best for the Iranian people.

From 1980 to 1981, the focus of the war was on defending Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan region. By 1982, the tide had turned, and Iran took the offensive, pushing Iraqi forces back from Iranian territory. At this point, Saddam Hussein attempted a peace negotiation, but he was rebuffed in harsh terms by the ayatollah, who called upon the Shiites in Iraq to join with the Iranian forces to overthrow Hussein's government. Iranian forces crossed the Iraqi borders and besieged Fao Island and, for a while, Basra, which is Iraq's second largest city.

At this point, the war ceased to be a two-nation conflict. Many Arab states had stood by during the early years of the conflict, viewing it as little more than a border dispute. But they had no desire to see the Islamic revolution spread from Iran to Iraq and then on to their own Arab populations. The West was equally concerned at the prospect of a substantial amount of oil-rich land falling under the control of the Islamic Republic. Soon

Saddam Hussein found himself financed by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and armed by the Soviet Union, the United States, and other Western nations.

The casualties began to mount, and gradually the impact of the war began to be felt by all Iranians, whether or not they had a relative volunteering at the front. Rationing of resources, periodic shortages of electricity and gasoline, and high inflation all caused hardships. Then came shortages of food and skyrocketing prices for such staples as butter, rice, and meat. The population, responding to the ayatollah's decrees to increase family size, began to grow rapidly, far outpacing the available housing in urban areas. Overcrowding quickly led to poverty.

A BLOODY END

The war between Iran and Iraq would prove to be the longest conventional war of the twentieth century, outlasting both the First and Second World Wars. The cost of fighting it—a cost financed by Iran, Iraq, and the other nations that eventually supported them—would ultimately prove to be in the billions of dollars.

The human cost would be difficult to calculate. Saddam Hussein targeted many of Iran's urban areas for bombing raids. Over the eight years of the war, some 300,000 Iranians would be killed and approximately twice as many would be wounded. More than a million Iranians would be left homeless.

While the war did provide Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters with an opportunity to consolidate their power and to unify the Iranian people under the banner of the Islamic revolution, their hope to export that revolution failed. They were unable to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime or to convert Iraq to an Islamic republic. The revolution halted at the borders that had proved so costly to defend.

The war would become an international conflict, with nations covertly aiding one side or the other. One incident in particular proved shocking when revealed. On November 3, 1986, a

Lebanese newspaper published an article stating that the United States and Iran had participated in a secret arms deal—a revelation that damaged both governments. Between late August and the middle of September 1985, the United States had used Israel as a conduit to provide arms to the Iranian war effort in exchange for the release of an American hostage being held in Lebanon. (Lebanon's Hezbollah guerrilla army had links to Iran.) A later meeting between two members of President Ronald Reagan's security council and high-ranking Iranian officials, in which weapons were exchanged for the release of other American hostages, would add to the perception that the government was covertly negotiating with the very country it had labeled an "enemy." The United States had officially labeled Iran a "terrorist" state whose assets were frozen in the United States; Iran had labeled the United States the "Great Satan." The people of both nations could not help but view the news of this secret deal, when it was ultimately revealed, as a betrayal of national interests.

The war in its final stages proved brutal for both sides. Life in Iran, as the seventh year of fighting stretched on, became almost intolerable for its people. Unemployment was high, inflation was high, and casualties were high. Iraqi bombs rained down on mosques. In the cities of Iran, antiwar demonstrations became common. After all of the years of fighting, after all of the hardship, the war front was almost exactly where it had been when the fighting began. Seemingly, neither side had achieved anything.

Morale was low when, on July 3, 1988, the U.S. naval ship USS *Vincennes*, from its position in the Persian Gulf, mistakenly shot down Iran Air Flight 655, a domestic flight passing over the Persian Gulf that was carrying nearly 300 adults and children. The pictures of bodies floating in the Gulf—yet another legacy of the war—further demoralized Iranians.

Khomeini called for a meeting of leading military commanders; the Iranian president, Ali Khamenei; and other officials. They determined that they would risk losing Iran if they continued to

Oliver North is sworn in on July 7, 1987, before the Iran Contra Committee prior to his testimony. North, a key official in the Reagan administration, was involved in the sale of weapons to Iran for the release of U.S. hostages, with money from the sale of these weapons going to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. In 1989, he was sentenced to a three-year suspended prison term, two years of probation, $150,000 in fines, and 1,200 hours of community service. All charges were dismissed in 1991.

attempt to spread the revolution to other countries. They made their recommendation—end the war—to Khomeini, and then they waited for his final decision.

He ultimately agreed to a cease-fire mandated by the United Nations, bitterly announcing to his nation that he was conceding, only reluctantly, because he believed that it was God's will. His nation had spent nearly eight years at war. Khomeini had ensured the survival of the Islamic Republic in Iran, but the country had paid a very steep price.

PRESIDENTS AND POLITICS

During the course of the war, Khomeini had continually led Iran as its Supreme Ruler, but the position of president had changed hands. The war with Iraq had given Bani-Sadr a brief respite, but his presidency would not survive. The hostage crisis had been a critical catalyst. He had initially urged that the hostages be turned over to the government, but his demand was refused. When the hostages were finally released, he had been publicly critical of the terms negotiated—terms that he felt had provided Iran with neither much-needed financial resources nor military ones.

The clerics he criticized did not remain silent. Instead they fought back, restricting his powers and cutting his budget. Documents seized from the American Embassy revealed meetings between Bani-Sadr and the CIA. Although these documents did not ultimately prove that any kind of relationship had developed between American intelligence officers and the president, the revelation of these meetings poisoned public opinion against Bani-Sadr.

Finally, in June 1981, Khomeini stepped in. He demonstrated publicly, by removing some of the president's powers, that Bani-Sadr no longer had the ayatollah's backing. The Parliament quickly responded, declaring that the president was no longer competent to serve and should be arrested immediately. But

Bani-Sadr, sensing the danger, escaped and went into hiding, ultimately fleeing to France.

President Bani-Sadr was succeeded by the prime minister, Mohammad Ali Raja'i, whose term in office would last a mere 28 days. He, along with four senior government officials, was killed in a bomb blast in the government offices. A few days later, two prominent ayatollahs were assassinated. Executions, bombings, and unrest were everywhere.

As war raged, the leader of the Islamic Republic Party, Ali Khamenei, was sworn in as the new president. It was the third round of presidential elections in less than two years. Khamenei would serve as president for the remaining years of the war with Iraq and then oversee the rebuilding campaign after the fighting had finally ended.

SATANIC VERSES

The period of February 1–11, 1989, was a time of much-needed celebration in Iran. The "10 Days of Dawn" marked the tenth anniversary of the Iranian revolution—the period of time when Khomeini had returned to Iran and the government left behind by the shah had crumpled. But within days of the celebration and only a few months after the end of the war with Iraq, Khomeini would once more plunge Iranian politics into the international spotlight.

On February 14, 1989, he declared on Iranian radio a *fatwa* (religious ruling issued by an Islamic scholar) targeting a former Muslim from India who was living in England. The 41-year-old author Salman Rushdie had written a book titled *The Satanic Verses*; it was a novel that seemed to question certain Islamic beliefs, including the authenticity of Islam's holiest text, the Koran. The book had drawn the wrath of Muslims in Great Britain, South Africa, and India; some five months after its publication, it would spark an even more inflammatory rage in Khomeini. The ayatollah called for the execution of the book's author and anyone else involved in its publication.

Other religious figures came forward with substantial sums of money, offered as a reward to the person who would succeed in killing Rushdie. Protests erupted in Iran, calling for the death of the author and threatening Great Britain and the United States for publishing the book. The British Embassy, only recently reopened in Iran, was the target of protests and stones.

Iran once more became recognized as an exporter of terrorism, as suddenly threats were being made against British airlines, bookstores carrying the novel, and the publishers who printed it. Salman Rushdie, fearing for his life, was forced into hiding. Iran ultimately decided to cut off diplomatic relations with Great Britain for not condemning the book and for not turning over its author to Iranian authorities.

Why did one book—a novel that might have reached only a limited audience without the publicity campaign that swirled out after the outraged response from Muslims—spark such fury from the leader of Iran five months after its publication? One explanation is that the book provided Khomeini with an opportunity to place himself as the leading spokesman for Muslims. By seizing upon Rushdie's critique of the Muslim faith, Khomeini was able to reposition himself—and the Iranian revolution—at the forefront of Islam. There was another aspect as well. In the aftermath of the war with Iraq, dispirited Iranians were beginning to once more focus on domestic problems—inflation, unemployment, and shortages of necessary items. The fatwa against Rushdie gave the revolution a new enemy to focus on, a new evil to be fought, and a distraction from the country's domestic problems. It also gave Khomeini an excuse to ensure that other government officials, who had been tentatively attempting to build alliances with the West, would be forced to switch their policy.

Once more, this attempt to rally internal support would have serious external costs for Iran. Again, Iran would be regarded internationally as a home to terrorists and as a backward regime

that was intolerant of free speech and unwilling to allow any criticism, even from foreign voices.

DEATH OF THE LEADER

Salman Rushdie would survive, though he spent years in hiding, but less than four months after issuing a death sentence against the author, Ayatollah Khomeini died at the age of 87. The announcement of his death, following surgery to stop intestinal bleeding, sparked a massive outpouring of grief in the streets of Tehran. In oppressive heat, a huge crowd of black-clad mourners surrounded the open coffin containing Khomeini's remains. At one point, the grief and emotion of the crowd grew so great that the mourners surged toward the litter carrying the coffin, grabbing for a piece of the ayatollah's shroud. The litter rocked and overturned, spilling the body of Khomeini onto the ground. Soldiers were forced to beat back the crowd from the body until a helicopter could drop down and lift the coffin up above the heads of the frantic mourners.

For 10 years, Ayatollah Khomeini had attempted to unify Iran under the goals of the Islamic revolution—goals he defined. It was a difficult legacy, one that would cripple his successors and the country he left behind.

Within 24 hours after Khomeini's death, his successor as *faqih* was named—the president of Iran, Ali Khamenei. He was an experienced politician, and he had spent time as a student of Khomeini. The speaker of the Parliament, Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, was sworn in as Iran's new president a short time later.

Shortly after Khomeini's death, efforts were made to pursue his plans for constitutional reform. Rafsanjani's election as president was seen as a sign that more moderate voices would begin to be heard in Iranian policies, and he was even temporarily granted the title of commander in chief of the armed forces. But the title was not his for long; soon after his election, the title was

returned to Ayatollah Khamenei. Rafsanjani explained the move as necessary so that he could focus more attention on Iran's economic problems, but clearly it was an indication that the powers of the presidency were still limited.

KHOBAR TOWERS AND ILSA

In the mid-1990s, U.S. president Bill Clinton made several discreet overtures to Iran. He believed that the more moderate tone coming from Iran meant that the time might be ripe to attempt to reopen diplomatic channels. There was fierce opposition to these subtle overtures from conservative politicians both in the United States and in Iran.

On June 25, 1996, a terrorist truck bomb exploded outside the northern perimeter of the Khobar Towers housing complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. The complex provided housing for many U.S. military personnel operating in the region. The explosion killed 19 members of the U.S. military and wounded hundreds more, in addition to claiming victims who were civilians of other nationalities. The attacks were quickly linked to a Saudi terrorist group known as Hezbollah al-Hejaz ("The Party of God in the Hejaz"), but eventually it seemed clear to both Saudi and American investigators that the group had been supported by the Iranian National Guard, who had trained many of the Saudis' personnel and had suggested that they attack American targets in the country. While the investigators had plenty of evidence to support the connection to Iran, it was not the kind of evidence that would be legally binding. President Clinton was reluctant to respond without the strongest case, and that kind of evidence would not be released to the United States by Saudi officials until 1999.

Economic sanctions had been in place against Iran, but the U.S. Congress decided to extend the sanctions' reach. The bill that would become known as The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA)—Libya was added later to the sanctions by Massachusetts senator Ted Kennedy as an acknowledgment of Libya's involve-

ment in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103—was originally the creation of New York senator Alfonse D'Amato. D'Amato's belief was that simply instituting sanctions against Iran was not enough—his proposal was that secondary sanctions should be placed on any foreign corporation that invested in Iran's oil industry in excess of $20 million. The bill passed on July 23, 1996. Companies that violated the ban and proceeded to invest in Iran's oil fields would be barred from any commercial transactions in the United States. For nearly a year, no company would invest in an Iranian oil field. It was not until May 1998 that the United States and the European Union reached an agreement in which ILSA waivers could be given to European corporations in exchange for greater European cooperation with the United States on nuclear nonproliferation and counterterrorism.

Hashemi Rafsanjani served as president for eight years, positioning himself as a new and more moderate voice in the midst of conservative clerics. But in 1997, he was defeated, as his policies were no longer accepted in a nation desperate for even greater reform. Rafsanjani was the victim of an electorate who felt that the promises they had been made had not been delivered. Their lives were not better; their society was as repressive as ever. Rafsanjani had served for two terms as president and then attempted to force a constitutional amendment so that he could run for a third term in office. But Iranians wanted change, not more of the same, and his efforts failed.

Rafsanjani's successor was Mohammad Khatami, a reformer who spoke of the need to transition toward an Islamic democracy and of the need to respect and recognize differences.

8

Modern Iran

The election of Mohammad Khatami was a surprise to the governments in Iran and in the United States. Khatami won the presidential election in May 1997 with 70 percent of the vote. His defeat of the conservative-ruling elite was seen as a repudiation of much of the excesses of the past and a demand for a more moderate future. He was younger than many of Iran's past leaders—only 54 when he was elected.

Perhaps more importantly, Khatami had won by speaking discretely of the need for change, using phrases like his plan to eliminate "superstition and fanaticism from government"—interpreted by many to mean that the government would begin to move away from some of its stricter social regulations. His speeches also hinted that he might be willing to lessen tensions with the West, including the United States. Khatami had spent time in the West, living in Hamburg, Germany. He understood the West in a way that few Iranian leaders could.

In a country where voting began at age 15, the support of the young was very important, and Khatami won enthusiastic support from young Iranians and women. Khatami was a cleric with family roots that could be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad. He insisted that his policies and plans were in keeping with the philosophy of Ayatollah Khomeini, and that he had been a supporter of the revolution that overthrew the shah. But voters read into his speeches, taking from them that he would support change—the kind of change that could transform Iranian society—and so whatever change they desired, whatever philosophy they believed in, they ascribed to Khatami.

Presidential candidate Mohammad Khatami casts his vote at a polling station in Tehran during the Iranian presidential election in May 1997. Iranians, urged to vote or answer to God, cast ballots for a new president in a showdown between hardliners and moderates within the Islamic establishment.

The conservative politicians had initially dismissed Khatami, believing he would not be a threat. But when they saw the huge support he was attracting, they went on the offensive. Khatami's rallies and televised speeches were canceled. His campaign headquarters in Tehran were determined to have been set up "illegally" and were shut down.

But Khatami won the election, shocking both Iranians and Americans who had felt sure that the votes would be tampered with to prevent him from assuming the presidency. The conservative elements within Iran now had clear evidence that the vast

majority of Iranians disagreed with the actions they had taken and the policies they had promoted. Their fear was that this vast public dissatisfaction could be harnessed into an overthrow of the existing system of government, just as the shah had been overthrown two decades earlier.

As a result, initially, few conservatives were willing to openly challenge Khatami. He picked several liberals for his cabinet, including some who had advocated a change in foreign policy toward the United States. He took steps toward exerting greater influence over the security services. He gave an exclusive interview to CNN on January 7, 1998, in which he spoke of his regret for the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in 1979 and gave hints that the misunderstandings that existed between Iran and the United States could be overcome.

These were extraordinary actions in Iran and soon prompted a harsh response from the conservatives. But Khatami pressed forward. In his first year in office, more than 200 new newspapers and magazines were granted licenses, and these publications began printing topics that previously would have been forbidden. Social restrictions over clothing and the arts were eased.

These seemingly modest changes opened up the divide between Khatami and the conservatives. Social restrictions and a fiercely anti-American policy were two of the hallmarks of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. An effort to change them was perceived as a betrayal of the principles of all that Iran had become since then.

By the summer of 1998, the conservatives had regrouped and had begun to launch a counterattack against Khatami. First, his interior minister was impeached. A reformist journal that published photos of unveiled women had its offices firebombed. The conservative-dominated Majlis (Parliament) passed a bill authorizing the judicial branch to set up a special court for journalists who could be charged with threatening national security if they discussed Islamic principles in a way that was deemed "disrespectful."

In late 1998, the retaliation became more violent. The vice president and the Minister of Culture were attacked by unknown thugs after attending Friday prayers. The former Interior Minister was attacked by a crowd after giving a speech. Opposition figures were assassinated. President Khatami launched an investigation into the attacks and discovered that the killings had actually been committed by members of the Iranian security services.

STUDENTS PROTEST

In July 1999, conservatives moved to shut down the reformist newspaper *Salaam*. A group of students decided to hold a protest outside the University of Tehran, but the protestors were attacked by a group of hardliners known as the Ansar-e Hezbollah ("Helpers of the Party of God").

Student protests immediately erupted throughout Iran. Chants at the protest openly criticized Ayatollah Khamenei, even accusing him of murder. The demonstrations nearly transformed into riots at one point, and some foreign observers incorrectly believed that the nation was on the brink of another revolution.

Khatami urged calm, encouraging the students to pursue change through legal means, specifically the parliamentary elections in 2000. Khatami had suffered a deep blow when his close friend and political advisor, Saeed Hajarian, was the victim of an assassination attempt. Hajarian was left permanently disabled, and the incident had a profound effect on Khatami. With students still in the streets calling for change and for the support of Khatami, he began to believe that compromise was what was called for at this stage.

It was a decision that seemed to indicate weakness on Khatami's part, and the conservatives wasted no time in capitalizing on it. Many wealthy Iranians, initially sympathetic to the reformers, were horrified at the violence in the streets and the prospect of another revolution—one that might threaten their

economic security. They shifted their support to more conservative leaders.

Nonetheless, in February 2000, Khatami's supporters and other reformist candidates won a majority of the seats in elections. For the first time since the revolution, this gave control of Iran's Parliament to more moderate leaders. In June 2001, Khatami was reelected, this time winning approximately 75 percent of the votes cast.

But Ayatollah Khamenei and other members of the Guardian Council took firm steps to ensure that the parliamentary victory was essentially meaningless. When the Parliament attempted to pass legislation protecting the freedom of the press, Khamenei publicly intervened to prevent its ratification. In holding the two key government institutions—the judiciary (which interpreted laws) and the Guardian Council (which checked all legislation to ensure that it was compatible with Islamic law)—Khamenei and his supporters made it clear that the real power in Iran was still in their hands.

SEPTEMBER 11

Given the history of conflict and misunderstanding that had divided the United States and Iran, Iran's response to the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, may seem astonishing. The Iranian government swiftly condemned the attacks. President Khatami and the mayor of Tehran both expressed their condolences. On the streets of Tehran, candlelight vigils were held, and many Iranians demonstrated against terrorism. The chants of "Death to America" were no longer heard during Friday prayers. Even Ayatollah Khamenei, in his remarks after the attacks, seemed almost conciliatory. "Islam condemns the massacre of defenseless people, whether Muslim or Christian or others, anywhere and by any means," he said, adding that for this reason, Iran did not wish to see an attack on Afghanistan.

But for the first time in a very long while, Iran and the United States had a single enemy in common: the Taliban in Afghanistan, who had supported and hosted the Sunni Al Qaeda terrorist network that had masterminded the attacks against the United States. In 1998, Iranian diplomats had been murdered by Taliban militia. President Khatami had seriously considered

The coffin of Mahmoud Saremi is carried in front of the Iranian News Agency office, where he had worked as a correspondent, in September 1998. Saremi, his picture seen on his coffin, was killed along with six Iranian diplomats by Afghanistan's Taliban militia. The killings brought to a head simmering tension between Iran and the Taliban, with Iran ordering tens of thousands of troops to be on high alert on its border with Afghanistan.

mounting a military operation against the Taliban. Iran was one of the few Islamic nations to have openly criticized the Taliban, accusing them of having perverted Islamic values and teachings.

Negotiations were quietly held between representatives for Iran and for the United States. Overflight rights were granted to U.S. aircraft, enabling them to access operations in western Afghanistan. Iran stated that it would assist in search-and-rescue missions for any American airmen who were forced down over Iran. And, perhaps most significantly, Iran assisted the United States in establishing connections with the Northern Alliance, an opposition group in Afghanistan that had resisted the Taliban.

It was an extraordinary period in Iranian-U.S. relations. The Iranians were, in a quiet sense, allies in the war in Afghanistan, and President Khatami's efforts to transform Iranian foreign policy suddenly seemed to be bearing fruit. In this time of reconciliation, hardliners in both countries still were resisting this easing of tensions, but it seemed that perhaps, for the first time in many decades, change might be possible.

AXIS OF EVIL

President George W. Bush's State of the Union address in January 2002 brought an abrupt end to this possibility. It was an equally extraordinary, if devastating, development—a few words in a speech served to end any hope for an improvement in U.S.-Iranian relations.

President Bush linked together three countries—North Korea, Iran, and Iraq—and described them as "an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world." Rather than specifically citing nations with a connection to Al Qaeda or to the attacks of September 11, the speech now seemingly introduced a dramatic shift in American foreign policy, a shift that widened the "war on terror" beyond the entities responsible for the attacks on America to other countries described as "evil."

The consequences for President Khatami were devastating. He had fought to offer support for the efforts of America and its allies in the war in Afghanistan, arguing that the results would prove extremely beneficial to Iran. Instead, Iran was being labeled "evil" and connected to its enemy, Iraq.

The strategy of dialogue and moderation that Khatami had championed was immediately discarded by the Iranian government, and Khatami clearly became president in name only. A return to the old policy in relations with America—a policy of confrontation—was inevitable.

The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 did not spark the kind of protest in Iran that it did in many other Middle Eastern nations. Many in Iran were pleased at the downfall of Saddam Hussein and the quick dismantling of his government. There were some who believed there was an opportunity to extend Iranian influence and power in an Iraq where the Shiite majority could finally gain power. But others worried that, once one member of the so-called "axis of evil" had been attacked, others would follow, and the conservatives in Iran capitalized on this fear as a way to increase their influence.

AHMADINEJAD

In June 2005, the mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was elected president of Iran. Ahmadinejad was known to be a proponent of strict Islamic values, but in his presidential campaign he presented himself as a simple man of the people whose focus would be on ensuring greater economic opportunity for all Iranians, not simply the wealthy. He spoke of his background as the son of an ironworker, and he promised to stabilize prices, to give teachers a raise, to shift state money to lesser-developed areas of Iran, and to fight for the poor.

The 49-year-old Ahmadinejad, despite his campaign, was known to be a fundamentalist, someone who strictly adhered to Islamic values. His victory ensured that the more moderate

voices would no longer be heard—power was once more firmly in the hands of Iran's most conservative leaders.

Ahmadinejad's electoral victory clearly was supported by the Guardian Council and Ayatollah Khamenei. More than a thousand candidates were barred from running, easing Ahmadinejad's path to electoral victory. His background included participation in the Basij religious militia, the group that polices strict adherence to conservative dress codes for women. As mayor, he turned cultural centers into prayer halls and canceled many concerts and secular programs.

While Ahmadinejad's campaign had focused on ending corruption and creating economic reform, he failed to resolve the inequities in Iran's economy. Instead, Iran aggressively moved forward with nuclear research. In January 2006, Iran broke the United Nations' nuclear agency seals on its nuclear facilities and resumed sensitive enrichment activities, a process that can be used for making nuclear bombs or nuclear fuel.

In May 2006, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sent a letter to President Bush. It was the first time an Iranian president approached a U.S. leader since the 1979 revolution. In the letter, Ahmadinejad questioned America's actions in Iraq; its relationship with Israel; and its stand on issues like human rights, the role of religion in foreign policy, and the rights to nuclear research. "Liberalism and Western-style democracy have not been able to help realize the ideals of humanity," he wrote. "Today these two concepts have failed. Those with insight can already hear the sounds of the shattering and fall of the ideology and thoughts of the liberal democratic systems. We increasingly see that people around the world are flocking towards a main focal point—that is the Almighty God. Undoubtedly through faith in God and the teachings of the prophets, the people will conquer their problems. My question for you is: 'Do you not want to join them?'"

In 2007, Iran took steps to expand its role in Iraq. It established an Iranian national bank branch in Iraq's capital, Baghdad; offered training and equipment to Iraqi government forces; and gave economic support for Iraq's reconstruction.

Despite his promises to focus on Iran's economy, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's country was facing severe economic hardships in late 2007. Inflation was near 17 percent; some 10 million Iranians lived below the poverty line. Under Ahmadinejad, there were increasing crackdowns on social behavior as well. Barbershops that offered men inappropriate hairstyles were closed in Tehran. Women were banned from riding bicycles.

Ahmadinejad was openly defiant at Western efforts to slow down Iran's nuclear program. His statements that Israel should be "wiped off the map" and that the Holocaust is a "myth" caused anger and concern around the world.

During Ahmadinejad's presidency, prominent Iranian-American scholars were arrested. These actions were interpreted by many as a warning to those in Iran who were expressing concern about Ahmadinejad's policies and the direction in which Iran was moving. (This was a reaction, in part, to perceived threats of a U.S. invasion of Iran.) University faculty who were thought to be critical of fundamentalist policies were fired. Newspapers were closed, and students and female activists were under intense pressure or encouraged to leave the country. Ahmadinejad ordered banks to lower interest rates, but the plan resulted in loans becoming harder to obtain. He ordered the price of cement to be lowered, which resulted in a marked decrease in the number of cement factories being built in Iran. Ahmadinejad's criticism of the Iranian stock market prompted many to invest instead in real estate, making homes and apartments more and more expensive and making homes out of reach for the poor he had promised to protect.

However, Ahmadinejad's policies had the only support that really mattered—that of Ayatollah Khamenei. Iran was once more dependent on the rule of the ayatollah.

A GLIMPSE AHEAD

The Iran that began the twentieth century is quite different from the one that exists today. Each of the men that shaped it through

Since the mid-1990s, the Iranian goverment has made strides to promote Kish Island as a rival to Dubai. Turned into a luxury resort in the 1970s by Reza Shah Pahlavi, today Kish Island enjoys free trade zone status and massive construction projects attract foreign investment. The duty-free shopping, mild climate, and the Kish Free Zone (an area where the standard laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran are more relaxed) brings about 1.5 million domestic visitors to the island annually. Here, an Iranian family sits at a Kish Island teahouse.

that tumultuous time achieved some portion of his dreams. Reza Shah's hopes for a unified Iran governed by a central government were realized, although in ways quite different from the modern Westernized country he had envisioned. His son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, achieved his goal of propelling Iran into a significant force in the Middle East, although it would survive as a republic rather than a monarchy. Ayatollah Kho-

meini would see his vision of an Islamic nation transform life in Iran, but he would not live to see the realization of his dream to export this Islamic revolution outside Iran's borders.

The men who follow these leaders face new challenges. But many of the questions they must answer are the same that their predecessors faced: How best to combine tradition with the pull of modernity, how best to blend government and religion, how best to determine what role Iran will play in the modern Middle East? These sweeping questions are coupled with more fundamental concerns, for a nation based on religious principles must still meet the needs of its people for food, for jobs, and for certain basic freedoms.

The leaders of Iran in the twenty-first century have, at least for now, chosen to move Iran away from possibilities of reconciliation with the West and an easing of social restrictions. Their focus is on maintaining an Iran true to the principles of the 1979 revolution and on maintaining a tight hold on the power they wield. It is this focus that is shaping contemporary Iran, and this focus will dictate Iran's role in the contemporary Middle East.

Chronology

1921 Reza Khan seizes power.

1926 Reza Pahlavi is crowned shah.

1935 Iran (rather than Persia) becomes the country's official name.

1941 Reza Pahlavi is deposed. Great Britain and Russia occupy Iran. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi becomes shah.

1951 Mohammed Mossadeq becomes prime minister; oil industry is nationalized.

1953 The shah flees Iran. With Western help, however, the army is able to overthrow Mossadeq, and the shah returns to power.

1963 The White Revolution is launched.

Timeline

1921 — 1979

1921
Reza Khan seizes power

1926
Reza Pahlavi is crowned shah

1941
Reza Pahlavi is deposed. Great Britain and Russia occupy Iran. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi becomes shah

1953
The shah flees Iran. With Western help, however, the army is able to overthrow Mossadeq, and the shah returns to power

1963
The White Revolution is launched. Ayatollah Khomeini is forced into exile the following year.

1979
The shah is forced to leave Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini returns. The Islamic Republic of Iran is proclaimed. The American Embassy is seized, and 52 hostages are taken

1964 Ayatollah Khomeini is forced into exile following his public criticism of the shah's rule.

1971 The celebration at Persepolis marks the shah's thirtieth anniversary of rule.

1978 Martial law is imposed following riots and strikes.

1979 The shah is forced to leave Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini returns. The Islamic Republic of Iran is proclaimed. The American Embassy is seized, and 52 hostages are taken.

1980 Abolhasan Bani-Sadr is elected the first president of the Islamic Republic. The shah dies in Egypt. Iraq invades Iran.

1981 American hostages are released after 444 days. Bani-Sadr is ousted.

1980
Abolhasan Bani-Sadr is elected the first president of the Islamic Republic. The shah dies in Egypt. Iraq invades Iran

2002
President George W. Bush describes Iran as part of the "Axis of Evil" in a State of the Union speech

1988
The Iran-Iraq War ends

1980 2005

1989
Ayatollah Khomeini dies. Ali Khamenei becomes Supreme Leader. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani becomes president

1981
American hostages are released after 444 days.

2005
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is elected president of Iran

1988 The Iran-Iraq War ends.

1989 Ayatollah Khomeini dies. Ali Khamenei becomes Supreme Leader. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani becomes president.

1997 Mohammad Khatami becomes president, winning a majority of votes from more conservative candidates.

2001 Khatami again wins a majority of votes in his bid for reelection. Iran expresses condolences to the United States after the September 11 terrorist attacks; Iran provides assistance in U.S. war in Afghanistan.

2002 President George W. Bush describes Iran as part of the "Axis of Evil" in a State of the Union speech.

2005 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is elected president of Iran.

2006 In January, Iran breaks the internationally monitored seals on its nuclear facilities.

2007 Iran expands its presence in Iraq by opening a branch of the Iranian national bank and offering assistance with reconstruction efforts.

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