



## IRAN II. IRANIAN HISTORY (2) ISLAMIC PERIOD (PAGE 6)

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### IRAN ii(2), concluded

MOḤAMMAD REZA SHAH (1941-79)

*Iran and World War II.* The long history of Russian and British interventions in Persian affairs had fostered widespread resentment against the two great powers. As a result Germany, which did not have a history of dealing with Persia and stood against both in World War II, was accorded a measure of sympathy in Persia. Its ideology of Aryan supremacy added to the people's admiration without their realizing the nature of Nazism. The Allied forces demanded right of passage through Persia in order to transport food and ammunition to the Soviet Union. They also demanded the expulsion from Persia of the Germans, some of whom were engaged in anti-Allied activities. Reza Shah, proud of his position and insisting on the neutrality of the country, refused. The British and Soviet armies attacked from the south and the north, respectively; the Persian army could not present any effective resistance, and Reza Shah had to abdicate his throne, leaving it to his eldest son, the 22-year-old Moḥammad Reza (16 September 1941), following an agreement with the invading powers. The censorship having been lifted overnight with Reza Shah's departure, the country was exposed to a torrent of ideas and ideologies, including communism (q.v.). A period of relative freedom and ineffective government with a faction-ridden Majles, in some respects reminiscent of the



situation prior to Sayyed Žiā's coup, followed. A communist party (*hezb-e tudeh*), supported by the Soviet forces in Iran who had occupied Azarbaijan and were encouraging a secessionist movement there, took shape and became a considerable opposition force, attracting the great majority of intellectuals and idealistic young talents.

Pressed by the Majles and those whose property in Māzandarān had been "purchased" by Reza Shah, Mo-ḥammad Reza Shah agreed to return most of his father's acquisitions in that province to their original owners. The first phase of Moḥammad Reza Shah's reign (1941-53) was characterized by factionalism in the Majles, unbridled disputes, and sometimes character assassinations in the press, as a fruit of unprecedented freedom, despite a measure of government control. Successive governments, none of which lasted too long, were appointed by the shah after the Majles made its choice about the next prime minister clear. The shah, who had been educated in Switzerland and who, after returning to Iran, was sent to the military academy (*daneškada-ye afsari*) for two years of training, exhibited a democratic attitude and followed the vote of the Majles in the appointment of prime ministers. The Tudeh party's goals were, however, considered harmful to Iranian interests by the Majles, and the government and therefore the Party was opposed, except for a brief period, by the successive cabinets under Moḥammad Reza Shah.

In the meantime, the Soviet Union was pressing to obtain oil concessions in northern Persia, a demand that was generally opposed, except by the Tudeh party. The pressure was particularly threatening because of the continued presence of Soviet troops in Azarbaijan and northern Persia, even after the war had ended and contrary to an agreement signed by Josef Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Franklin D. Roosevelt in their Tehran Conference of 1943. Whereas the British and the Americans had accordingly withdrawn their troops, the Soviets stayed on and encouraged a separatist movement in Azerbaijan headed by Ja'far Piševari, who, for all practical purposes, had staged an autonomous government in that province, with a program of dividing the lands among the peasants and replacing Persian by Azari Turkish. The Republic of Kurdistan set up in Mahābād, south of Lake Urmiya, instigated by the Soviets, was another reason for Persian government worry.

Pressured by the Soviet Union for oil concession in the north of the country, the Majles gave a vote of confidence to Aḥmad Qawām-al-Salṭana in 1946, a mature and clever politician inherited from the Qajar period and in whose cabinet Reza Khan had once been a minister.



In a smart game of politics, Qawām unbelievably managed to outfox and checkmate Stalin. To appease the Soviets and gain Stalin’s confidence, Qawām included six members of the Tudeh Party in his cabinet and then started negotiating with the Soviet Union. He promised the Soviets most of what they were demanding, particularly the oil concession, against the pledge on their part to withdraw from northern Persia. The Soviets apparently did not pay enough attention to the fine print of the agreement, which made any concessions to the Soviets dependant on Majles approval. Before the Agreement was presented to the Majles, Qawām made sure that the Soviet troops withdrew. They did, and the Persian army entered Azarbaijan on 12 December 1946, but the Majles, as expected, rejected all the promised concessions.

A deputy to the Majles who was not only opposed to the concession sought by the Soviet Union but also considered the Anglo-Persian Oil Agreement an offense against Persian interests and economic independence was Dr. Moḥammad Moṣaddeq. He came from an aristocratic family related on his mother side to the Qajars, had studied law in Switzerland, and had served as a governor of Fārs province under the last Qajar king. He was one of the few deputies like Sayyed Ḥasan Taqizādeh and Ḥosayn ‘Alā who showed the courage to reject Reza Khan’s bid for terminating the Qajar dynasty, in order to remain faithful to his oath upon entering the Majles.

In 1951 Moṣaddeq (1882-1967), who had achieved through his speeches and his votes in the Majles a reputation for patriotism, liberal views, and incorruptibility, was elected by the Majles as its candidate for the premiership. Even though he had not been particularly sympathetic to the court, the shah appointed him as prime minister. He received tremendous backing from all classes of the people. The question of nationalizing Persian oil had been voiced at least once before without any serious consideration being given to it. Moṣaddeq made it a cornerstone of his program. He put through the Majles a bill for the nationalization of Persian oil and entered into a protracted struggle against the British for redressing the country’s right to its resources. As the stalemate dragged on and economic privations caused by the country’s inability to market its oil worsened, many of his erstwhile backers lost their enthusiasm. In the meantime, the Tudeh Party, taking advantage of the concessions made by Mo-ṣaddeq to freedom of speech and assembly, became increasingly vociferous in its demands, to the extent that Britain and the United States feared a communist takeover. Eventually, a coup inspired and



aided by the British and the Americans was conceived with the concurrence of the shah, who dismissed Moşaddeq as prime minister, but Moşaddeq ignored the royal decree and had the shah's envoy arrested. The shah, fearing the consequences, left the country at once for Italy, and the coup was staged without delay. Almost no resistance was offered by Mo-şaddeq's earlier supporters. He was arrested on 20 August 1953 and later tried in a military court and banished to Aḥmadābād, a village he owned. The shah returned triumphantly after the coup, and the purge of the followers of Moşaddeq began. An agreement was reached with a consortium of Western oil companies that gave a greater share of the profit than before to Persia and foresaw the possibility of nationalizing the oil industry altogether.

The Tudeh Party was banned, and its leaders were jailed; and the censorship of the media was established with greater vigor than before. The intellectuals, who became largely marginalized after the coup, found the situation cause for despair; the nostalgia for the lost freedom and a liberal utopia is reflected in the allusive works of most modernist poets and fiction writers of the period.

In January 1963 the shah launched his "White Revolution," which called for giving over the farmlands to the possession of the peasants, organizing farm cooperatives and banks, granting the right to vote to women, nationalizing the forests, and mobilizing young men and women into the Education Corps, Health Corps, and Agricultural Corps. Dividing the farmlands among the peasants naturally did not please the landlords, and the clergy objected particularly to women's franchise; they did not favor impinging on property rights either. A protest movement encouraged by them was staged in Tehran, which was decisively crushed by the prime minister Asad-Allāh 'Alam. The government's control tightened further, and the censorship of the media and books was more diligently carried out.

Stung by the provisions of the White Revolution, a clandestine protest movement began to take shape among the clergy. The banishment of its most forceful leader, Ruḥ-Allāh Khomeini, to Iraq did not weaken the movement, contrary to the Persian government's expectations. It was, in fact, strengthened by the increasing involvement of the government with the United States and the purchase of enormous amount of armament from that country, which the shah's opponents construed as his being a stooge of the United States.

Changes in global politics and the world oil market allowed Iran in the early



1970s to fully exploit Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) collective strength against the weakening position of the Western oil companies. The shah played an important role in leading OPEC to a policy of “price rise, price and production control” between 1970 and 1975, posing as the champion of the oil producers and of the Third World against “domination and exploitation” of the West (*Camb. Hist. Iran VII*, pp. 450-51).

As a result, Persia's oil revenue jumped from USD 1.1 billion in 1970 to 21 billion in 1977. The newly found riches promoted consumerism and stimulated a variety of industrial, entrepreneurial, and importing ventures that tended to clog the ports and the economy as well. The gap between the rich and the poor widened, and this lent further strength to the Islamic protest movement. Khomeini's decision to transfer his exile to Paris as a result of misguided Persian pressure provided him with an effective means of communication with his followers through the media and tape recordings. The anti-regime movement gathered more adherents, and Khomeini's bold pronouncements against the person of the shah distinguished him as an uncompromising and courageous leader to be reckoned with. In Persia the anti-regime sentiment kept growing and was heightened when on Friday, 8 September 1978, police opened fire on a pro-Khomeini demonstration in Tehran where a number of people were killed. The shah eventually found it necessary to make unwonted political concessions and said in a radio broadcast that “he had heard the voice of the people.” On 30 December 1978, after failing to persuade some of the liberal leaders to take on the premiership, he invited Šāpur Bakhtiār, one of Moṣaddeq's leading followers, to assume the position before he left the country on 16 January 1979 in despair for Cairo, together with his family. Bakhtiār relaxed censorship regulations but had difficulty in persuading the army leaders to follow his plans. Fear of the shah and his regime had disappeared, and anti-government and pro-Khomeini demonstrations escalated, with the soldiers refusing to shoot the offenders, who went on a rampage, burning cinemas and destroying banks and some government buildings. Negotiations with Khomeini proved necessary and resulted in inviting him to return to Persia. On 1 February 1979 his plane landed in Tehran, and soon he took the reins of the government, establishing an all out theocracy and attempting to efface all manifestations and symbols of nationalism, monarchy, and modernity in favor of Islamic laws and Islamic nation (*omma*). Indiscriminate executions of officials associated with the shah's regime followed, including many army generals, the head of SAVAK (the security agency), and the prime minister Amir 'Abbās Hoveydā



(1919-1979, q.v.), who delivered himself into the hand of the revolutionary forces on the naïve assumption that he would be acquitted once he had explained that he had committed no wrong and had been only following “a system,” carrying out the shah’s order. He was executed shortly after his arrest on 7 April, 1979.

In 1979 a referendum abolished the age-old monarchical regime in Persia, and the “Islamic Republic of Iran” was established. The constitution as well as various civil and criminal laws were abolished and replaced by the holy law of Shi’ite Islam. Mehdi Bāzargān, an engineer and professor at Tehran University who had earlier sided with Moṣaddeq, but who was a devout Muslim, was appointed prime minister, while the clergy slowly but deliberately, moved to occupy all positions of power. In the summer of 1979 a Majles-e koḅragān (Assembly of Experts) began deliberation on a proposed Constitution for the Islamic Republic in which, despite Bāzargān’s impotent opposition, the *welāyat-e faqīh* (lit. “mandate of the jurist”) or supreme spiritual leadership began to emerge (see [CONSTITUTION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC](#)).

A Constituent Assembly approved the new Islamic Constitution, establishing the *waliy-e faqih*, or supreme leader endowed with all the powers of the government and immune from opposition or contradiction, as well as a Guardian Council to supervise the Majles and approve the qualification of individual candidates for the Parliament, among other powers.

The Islamic Republic of Iran aspired to the leadership of the Islamic world; accordingly, it made some moves in that direction in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq. Such moves irritated the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, who himself was determined to establish Iraqi hegemony in the Persian Gulf. Thinking the Persian precarious situation suitable for gaining a foothold in oil-rich Khuzestan, he canceled a prior agreement on the use of the Shatt al-Arab waterway and invaded the province. He was pushed back at great loss to the young Persian soldiers driven by new Islamic zeal, no less than to the Iraqi soldiers, but then the Islamic regime decided to advance well into Iraqi territory and expand Iran’s influence throughout the Middle East. Iraq was able, however, to resist Iran’s advances with financial support from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates as well as intelligence information and immense arms supply from a number of Western countries who did not want the balance of power in the Middle East to be disturbed and were alarmed by the escalation of tanker wars in the Persian Gulf, which endangered the flow of oil to the West. After eight years of intense warfare,



Khomeini agreed to the ceasefire following UN-sponsored negotiations in Geneva in 1988. The rest is within living memory.

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