


Iranian Revolution

Iranian Revolution (Islamic Revolution) (1979 Revolution)	
 <p>Protesters in Tehran, 1979</p>	
Participants	People of Iran Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini
Location	Iran
Date	1963-1979
Result	Overthrow of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi Establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran headed by <i>vilayat-e faqih</i> Iran–Iraq War

The **Iranian Revolution** (also known as the **Islamic Revolution** or **1979 Revolution**;^{[1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6]} Persian: انقلاب اسلامی, Enghelābe Eslāmi or تسلیب بالقرن (نم‌ه‌ب و د و تسلیب بالقرن) refers to events involving the overthrow of Iran's monarchy (Pahlavi dynasty) under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and its replacement with an Islamic republic under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution.

Demonstrations against the Shah began in January 1978.^[7] Between August and December 1978 strikes and demonstrations paralyzed the country. The Shah left Iran for exile in mid-January 1979, and in the resulting power vacuum two weeks later Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Tehran to a greeting by several million Iranians.^[8] The royal regime collapsed shortly after on February 11 when guerrillas and rebel troops overwhelmed troops loyal to the Shah in armed street fighting. Iran voted by national referendum to become an Islamic Republic on April 1, 1979,^[9] and to approve a new theocratic constitution whereby Khomeini became Supreme Leader of the country, in December 1979.

The revolution was unusual for the surprise it created throughout the world:^[10] it lacked many of the customary causes of revolution (defeat at war, a financial crisis, peasant rebellion, or disgruntled military);^[11] produced profound change at great speed;^[12] was massively popular;^[13] overthrew a puppet regime heavily protected by a lavishly financed army and security services;^{[14] [15]} and replaced a modernising monarchy with a theocracy based on Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists (or *velayat-e faqih*). Its outcome — an Islamic Republic "under the guidance of an extraordinary religious scholar from Qom" — was, as one scholar put it, "clearly an occurrence that had to be explained."^[16]

Causes

The revolution was populist, nationalist and later Shi'a Islamic. It was in part a conservative backlash against the Westernizing and secularizing efforts of the Western-backed Shah,^[17] and a liberal backlash to social injustice and other shortcomings of the ancien régime.^[18] The Shah was perceived by many as beholden to — if not a puppet of — a non-Muslim Western power (the United States)^{[19] [20]} whose culture was impacting that of Iran.

The Shah's regime was seen as oppressive, brutal,^{[21] [22]} corrupt, and extravagant;^{[21] [23]} it also suffered from basic functional failures — an over-ambitious economic program that brought economic bottlenecks, shortages and inflation.^[24] Security forces were unable to deal with protest and demonstrations;^[25] Iran was an overly centralized royal power structure.^[26] The extraordinarily large size of the anti-shah movement meant that there "were literally too many protesters to arrest", and that the security forces were overwhelmed.^[27]

That the revolution replaced monarchy and Shah Pahlavi with Islamism and Khomeini, rather than another leader and ideology, is credited in part to the spread of the Shia version of the Islamic revival that opposed Westernization, saw Ayatollah Khomeini as following in the footsteps of the beloved Shi'a Imam Husayn ibn Ali, and the Shah in those of Husayn's foe, the hated tyrant Yazid I.^[28] Also thought responsible was the underestimation of Khomeini's Islamist movement by both the Shah's regime — who considered them a minor threat compared to the Marxists and Islamic socialists^{[29] [30] [31]} — and by the secularist opponents of the regime — who thought the Khomeinists could be sidelined.^[32]

Historical background

Shi'a clergy (*Ulema*) have had a significant influence on most Iranians, who have tended to be religious, traditional, and opposed to any process of Westernization. The clergy first showed themselves to be a powerful political force in opposition to Iran's monarch with the 1891 Tobacco Protest boycott that effectively destroyed an unpopular concession granted by the Shah giving a British company a monopoly over buying and selling Tobacco in Iran.

Decades later monarchy and clerics clashed again, this time monarchy holding the upper hand. Shah Pahlavi's father, army general Reza Pahlavi, replaced Islamic laws with western ones, and forbade traditional Islamic clothing, separation of the sexes and veiling of women (hijab).^[33] Police forcibly removed and tore chadors of women who resisted his ban on public hijab. In 1935 dozens were killed and hundreds injured when a rebellion by pious Shi'a at the most holy Shi'a shrine in Iran^[34] was crushed on his orders.^{[35] [36] [37]}

In 1941 Reza Shah was deposed and his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was installed by an invasion of allied British and Soviet troops. In 1953 foreign powers (American and British) again came to the Shah's aid-- after the Shah fled the country, the British MI6 aided an American CIA operative in organizing a military coup d'état to oust the nationalist and democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh.

Shah Pahlavi maintained a close relationship with the United States government, both regimes sharing a fear of/opposition to the expansion of Soviet/Russian state, Iran's powerful northern neighbor. Like his father's regime, Shah Pahlavi's was known for its autocracy, its focus on modernization and Westernization and for its disregard for religious^[38] and democratic measures in Iran's constitution. Leftist, nationalist and Islamist groups attacked his government (often from outside Iran as they were suppressed within) for violating the Iranian constitution, political corruption, and the political oppression by the SAVAK (secret police).

Rise of Ayatollah Khomeini

The leader of the Iranian revolution — Shia cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini — first came to political prominence in 1963 when he led opposition to the Shah and his "White Revolution", a program of reforms to break up landholdings (including those owned by religious foundations) and allow religious minorities to hold government office.

Khomeini was arrested in 1963 after declaring the Shah a "wretched miserable man" who had "embarked on the destruction of Islam in Iran."^[39] Three days of major riots throughout Iran followed, with Khomeini supporters claiming 15,000 dead from police fire.^[40] However, much lower estimates of 380 killed and wounded were later made.^[41] Khomeini was released after eight months of house arrest and continued his agitation, condemning the regime's close cooperation with Israel and its capitulations, or extension of diplomatic immunity to American government personnel in Iran. In November 1964 Khomeini was re-arrested and sent into exile where he remained for 14 years until the revolution.

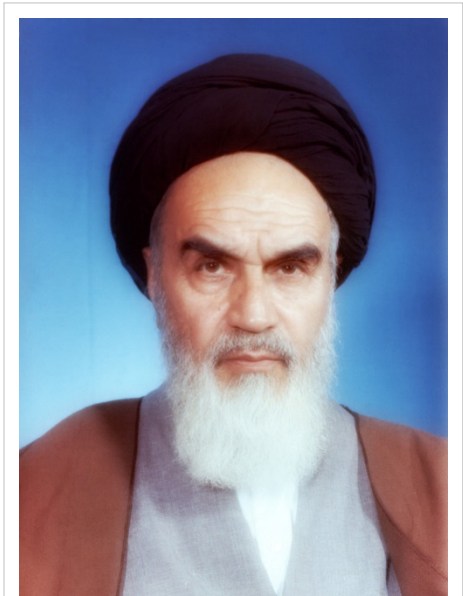
Exile period

In this interim period of "disaffected calm" ^[42] the budding Islamic revival began to undermine the idea of Westernization as progress that was the basis of the Shah's secular regime, and to form the ideology of the 1979 revolution. Jalal Al-e-Ahmad's idea of *Gharbzadegi* — that Western culture was a plague or an intoxication to be eliminated;^[43] Ali Shariati's vision of Islam as the one true liberator of the Third World from oppressive colonialism, neo-colonialism, and capitalism;^[44] and Morteza Motahhari's popularized retellings of the Shia faith, all spread and gained listeners, readers and supporters.^[43]

Most importantly, Khomeini preached that revolt, and especially martyrdom, against injustice and tyranny was part of Shia Islam,^[45] and that Muslims should reject the influence of both liberal capitalism and communism with the slogan "Neither East, nor West - Islamic Republic!"

Away from public view, Khomeini developed the ideology of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) as government, that Muslims — in fact everyone — required "guardianship," in the form of rule or supervision by the leading Islamic jurist or jurists.^[46] Such rule was ultimately "more necessary even than prayer and fasting" in Islam,^[47] as it would protect Islam from deviation from traditional sharia law, and in so doing eliminate poverty, injustice, and the "plundering" of Muslim land by foreign non-believers.^[48]

This idea of rule by Islamic jurists was spread through his book *Islamic Government*, mosque sermons, smuggled cassette speeches by Khomeini,^[49] among Khomeini's opposition network of students (*talabeh*), ex-students (able clerics such as Morteza Motahhari, Mohammad Beheshti, Mohammad-Javad Bahonar, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Mofatteh), and traditional business leaders (*bazaari*) inside Iran.^[49]



Ruhollah Khomeini

Opposition groups and organizations

Other opposition groups^[50] included constitutionalist liberals — the democratic, reformist Islamic Freedom Movement of Iran, headed by Mehdi Bazargan, and the more secular National Front. They were based in the urban middle class, and wanted the Shah to adhere to the Iranian Constitution of 1906 rather than to replace him with a theocracy,^[51] but lacked the cohesion and organization of Khomeini's forces.^[52]

Marxists groups — primarily the communist Tudeh Party of Iran and the Fedaian guerillas^[53] — had been weakened considerably by government repression. Despite this the guerillas did help play an important part in the final February 1979 overthrow^[54] delivering "the regime its coup de grace."^[55] The most powerful guerilla group — the People's Mujahedin — was leftist Islamist and opposed the influence of the clergy as reactionary.

Many clergy did not follow Khomeini's lead. Popular ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani supported the left, while perhaps the most senior and influential ayatollah in Iran — Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari — first remained aloof from politics and then came out in support of a democratic revolution.

Khomeini worked to unite this opposition behind him (with the exception of the unwanted `atheistic Marxists`),^[56]^[57] focusing on the socio-economic problems of the Shah's regime (corruption and unequal income and development),^[56]^[58] while avoiding specifics among the general public that might divide the factions,^[59] — particularly his plan for clerical rule which he believed most Iranians had become prejudiced against as a result of propaganda campaign by Western imperialists.^[60]^[61]

In the post-Shah era, some revolutionaries who clashed with his theocracy and were suppressed by his movement complained of deception,^[62] but in the meantime anti-Shah unity was maintained.^[63]

1970-1977

Several events in the 1970s set the stage for the 1979 revolution:

The 1971 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire at Persepolis, organized by the Shah's regime, was attacked for its extravagance. "As the foreigners reveled on drink forbidden by Islam, Iranians were not only excluded from the festivities, some were starving."^[64] Five years later the Shah angered pious Iranian Muslims by changing the first year of the Iranian solar calendar from the Islamic *hijri* to the ascension to the throne by Cyrus the Great. "Iran jumped overnight from the Muslim year 1355 to the royalist year 2535."^[65]

The oil boom of the 1970s produced "alarming" increase in inflation and waste and an "accelerating gap" between the rich and poor, the city and the country,^[66] along with the presence of tens of thousand of unpopular skilled foreign workers. Many Iranians were also angered by the fact that the shah's family was the foremost beneficiary of the income generated by oil, and the line between state earnings and family earnings blurred. By 1976, the shah had accumulated upward of one billion dollars from oil revenue; his family—including sixty-three princes and princesses—had accumulated between five and twenty billion dollars; and the family foundation controlled approximately three billion dollars^[67] By mid-1977 economic austerity measures to fight inflation disproportionately affected the thousands of poor and unskilled male migrants to the cities working construction. Culturally and religiously conservative,^[68] many went on to form the core of revolution's demonstrators and "martyrs".^[69]

All Iranians were required to join and pay dues to a new political party, the *Rastakhiz* party — all other parties being banned.^[70] That party's attempt to fight inflation with populist "anti-profiteering" campaigns — fining and jailing merchants for high prices — angered and politicized merchants while fueling black markets.^[71]

In 1977 the Shah responded to the "polite reminder" of the importance of political rights by the new American President, Jimmy Carter, by granting amnesty to some prisoners and allowing the Red Cross to visit prisons. Through 1977 liberal opposition formed organizations and issued open letters denouncing the regime.^[72]

That year also saw the death of the popular and influential modernist Islamist leader Ali Shariati. This both angered his followers, who considered him a martyr at the hands of SAVAK, and removed a potential revolutionary rival to

Khomeini. Finally, in October Khomeini's son Mostafa died of a heart attack, his death also blamed on SAVAK. A subsequent memorial service for Mostafa in Tehran put Khomeini back in the spotlight.^{[73] [74]}

Outbreak

Start of demonstrations in late 1977

The first militant anti-Shah demonstrations were in October 1977, after the death of Khomeini's son Mostafa.^[75] Khomeini's activists numbered "perhaps a few hundred in total", but over the coming months they grew to a mass of several thousand demonstrators in most cities of Iran.^[76]

The first casualties suffered in major demonstrations against the Shah came in January 1978. Hundreds of Islamist students and religious leaders in the city of Qom were furious over a story in the government-controlled press they felt was libelous. The army was sent in, dispersing the demonstrations and killing several students (two to nine according to the government, 70 or more according to the opposition).^{[77] [78]}

According to the Shi'ite customs, memorial services (called Arba'een) are held forty days after a person's death. In mosques across the nation, calls were made to honour the dead students. Thus on February 18 groups in a number of cities marched to honor the fallen and protest against the rule of the Shah. This time, violence erupted in Tabriz, where five hundred demonstrators were killed according to the opposition, ten according to the government. The cycle repeated itself, and on March 29, a new round of protests began across the nation. Luxury hotels, cinemas, banks, government offices, and other symbols of the Shah regime were destroyed; again security forces intervened, killing many. On May 10 the same occurred.

In May, government commandos burst into the home of Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, a leading cleric and political moderate, and shot dead one of his followers in front of him. Shariatmadari abandoned his quietist stance and joined the opposition to the Shah.^[79]

Shah and the United States

Facing a revolution, the Shah appealed to the United States for support. Because of Iran's history and strategic location, it was important to the United States. Iran shared a long border with America's cold war rival, the Soviet Union, and was the largest, most powerful country in the oil-rich Persian Gulf. The Shah had long been pro-American, but the Pahlavi regime had also recently garnered unfavorable publicity in the West for its human rights record.^[80] In the United States, Iran was not considered in danger of revolution. A CIA analysis in August 1978, just six months before the Shah fled Iran, had concluded that the country "is not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation."^[81]



The Iranian Shah (left) meeting with members of the U.S. government: Alfred Atherton, William Sullivan, Cyrus Vance, Jimmy Carter, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1977.

According to historian Nikki Keddie, the administration of then President Carter followed "no clear policy" on Iran.^[82] The U.S. ambassador to Iran, William H. Sullivan, recalls that the U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski "repeatedly assured Pahlavi that the U.S. backed him fully." On November 4, 1978, Brzezinski called the Shah to tell him that the United States would "back him to the hilt." But at the same time, certain high-level officials in the State Department and the White House staff believed the revolution was unstoppable but largely went unheard until Ambassador Sullivan issued the "Thinking the Unthinkable" telegram, which formally discussed policy options if the Shah were to fail to quell the fervor.^{[83] [84]} After visiting the Shah in the autumn of 1978, Secretary of the Treasury W. Michael Blumenthal complained of the Shah's emotional collapse, reporting, "You've got a zombie out

there."^[85] Brzezinski and Energy Secretary James Schlesinger were adamant in their assurances that the Shah would receive military support. One scholar (sociologist Charles Kurzman), argues that rather than being indecisive, or sympathetic to the revolution, the Carter administration was consistently supportive of the Shah and urged the Iranian military to stage a "last-resort coup d'etat" even after the regime's cause was hopeless.^[86]

Many Iranians believe the lack of intervention and the sympathetic remarks about the revolution by high-level American officials indicate the U.S. "was responsible for Khomeini's victory."^[82] ^[87] A more extreme position asserts that the Shah's overthrow was the result of a "sinister plot to topple a nationalist, progressive, and independent-minded monarch."^[88]

Summer

By summer 1978 the level of protest had been at a steady state for four months — about ten thousand participants in each major city (with the exception of Isfahan where protests were larger and Tehran where they were smaller). This amounted to an "almost fully mobilized `mosque network,`" of pious Iranian Muslims, but a small minority of the more than 15 million adults in Iran. Worse for the momentum of the movement, on June 17, 1978 the 40-day mourning cycle of mobilization of protest — where demonstrators were killed every 40-days as they mourned the dead of earlier demonstrations — ended with a call for calm and a stay-at-home strike by moderate religious leader Shariatmadari.^[89] In an attempt to appease discontent the Shah made appeals to the moderate clergy, firing his head of SAVAK and promising free elections the next June.^[90]

But by August protests had "kick[ed] ... into high gear," ^[91] and the number of demonstrators mushroomed to hundreds of thousands.^[92] Two factors were blamed.

In an attempt to dampen inflation the Shah's regime cut spending, but the cutbacks led to a sharp rise in layoffs — particularly among young, unskilled, male workers living in city slums. By summer 1978, these workers, often from traditional rural backgrounds, joined the street protests in massive numbers.^[93]

Abadan cinema fire

The other factor was the August 1978 Cinema Rex Fire in Abadan where over 400 people died. Movie theaters had been a common target of Islamist demonstrators^[94] ^[95] but such was the distrust of the regime and effectiveness of its enemies' communication skills that the public believed SAVAK had set the fire in an attempt to frame the opposition.^[96] The next day 10,000 relatives and sympathizers gathered for a mass funeral and march shouting, 'burn the Shah', and 'the Shah is the guilty one.'^[97]

Black Friday and its aftermath

A new prime minister, Jafar Sharif-Emami, was installed in late August and reversed some of the Shah's policies. Casinos were closed, the imperial calendar abolished, activity by political parties legalized — to no avail. By September, the nation was rapidly destabilizing, and major protests were becoming a regular occurrence. The Shah introduced martial law, and banned all demonstrations but on September 8 thousands of protesters gathered in Tehran. Security forces shot and killed dozens, in what became known as Black Friday.

The clerical leadership declared that "thousands have been massacred by Zionist troops,"^[98] but in retrospect it has been said that "the main casualty" of the shooting was "any hope for compromise" between the protest movement and the Shah's regime.^[99] The troops were actually ethnic Kurds who had been fired on by snipers, and post revolutionary tally by the Martyrs Foundation of people killed as a result of demonstrations throughout the city on that day found a total of 84 dead.^[100] In the mean time however, the appearance of government brutality alienated much of the rest of the Iranian people and the Shah's allies abroad.

By late summer 1978 the movement to overthrow had become "viable" in the minds of many Iranians," boosting support that much more.^[101] A general strike in October resulted in the paralysis of the economy, with vital

industries being shut down,^[93] "sealing the Shah's fate".^[102] By autumn popular support for the revolution was so powerful that those who still opposed it became reluctant to speak out,^[101] According to one source "victory may be dated to mid-November 1978."^[101] A military government headed by General Gholam Reza Azhari replaced conciliatory prime minister Sharif Emami.

In an attempt to weaken Ayatollah Khomeini's ability to communicate with his supporters, the Shah urged Iraq to deport Khomeini. The Iraqi government cooperated and on October 3, Khomeini left Iraq for Kuwait, but was refused entry. Three days later he left for Paris and took up residence in the suburb of Neauphle-le-Château. Though farther from Iran, telephone connections with the home country and access to the international press were far better than in Iraq.^[103]



Ayatollah Khomeini at Neauphle-le Château surrounded by journalists

Muharram protests

On December 2, during the Islamic month of Muharram, over two million people filled the streets of Tehran's Azadi Square (then Shahyad Square), to demand the removal of the Shah and return of Khomeini.^[104]



Mass demonstration in Tehran

A week later on December 10 and 11, a "total of 6 to 9 million" anti-shah demonstrators marched throughout Iran. According to one historian, "even discounting for exaggeration, these figures may represent the largest protest event in history."^[105]

It is almost unheard of for a revolution to involve as much as 1 percent of a country's population. The French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, perhaps the Romanian Revolution of 1989 - these may have passed the 1 percent mark. Yet in Iran, more than 10% of the country marched in anti-shah demonstrations on December 10 and 11, 1978.^[13]

By late 1978 the Shah was in search of a prime minister and offered the job to a series of liberal oppositionists. While "several months earlier they would have considered the appointment a dream come true," they now "considered it futile".^[106] Finally, in the last days of 1978, Dr. Shapour Bakhtiar, a long time opposition leader, accepted the post and was promptly expelled from the oppositional movement."

Victory of revolution and fall of monarchy

Shah leaves

By mid-December the shah's position had deteriorated to the point where he "wanted only to be allowed to stay in Iran." He was turned down by the opposition. In late December, "he agreed to leave the country temporarily; still he was turned down."^[107] On January 16, 1979 the Shah and the empress left Iran. Scenes of spontaneous joy followed and "within hours almost every sign of the Pahlavi dynasty" was destroyed.^[108]

Bakhtiar dissolved SAVAK, freed political prisoners, ordered the army to allow mass demonstrations, promised free elections and invited Khomeinists and other revolutionaries into a government of "national unity".^[109] After stalling for a few days Bakhtiar allowed Ayatollah Khomeini to return to Iran, asking him to create a Vatican-like state in Qom and calling upon the opposition to help preserve the constitution.

Khomeini's return and fall of the monarchy

On February 1, 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Tehran in a chartered Air France Boeing 747.^[110] The welcoming crowd of several million Iranians was so large he was forced to take a helicopter after the car he was being transported in from the airport was overwhelmed by an enthusiastic welcoming crowd.^[111] Khomeini was now not only the undisputed leader of the revolution,^[112] he had become what some called a "semi-divine" figure, greeted as he descended from his airplane with cries of 'Khomeini, O Imam, we salute you, peace be upon you.'^[113] Crowds were now known to chant "Islam, Islam, Khomeini, We Will Follow You," and even "Khomeini for King."^[114]

On the day of his arrival Khomeini made clear his fierce rejection of Bakhtiar's regime in a speech promising 'I shall kick their teeth in.'

Khomeini appointed his own competing interim prime minister Mehdi Bazargan on February 4, 'with the support of the nation'^[115] and commanded Iranians to obey Bazargan as a religious duty.

[T]hrough the guardianship [*Velayat*] that I have from the holy lawgiver [the Prophet], I hereby pronounce Bazargan as the Ruler, and since I have appointed him, he must be obeyed. The nation must obey him. This is not an ordinary government. It is a government based on the *sharia*. Opposing this government means opposing the *sharia* of Islam ... Revolt against God's government is a revolt against God. Revolt against God is blasphemy.^{[116] [117]}



Iranian prime minister Mehdi Bazargan was an advocate of democracy and civil rights. He also opposed the cultural revolution and US embassy takeover.

As Khomeini's movement gained momentum, soldiers began to defect to his side. On February 9 about 10 P.M. a fight broke out between loyal Immortal Guards and the pro-Khomeini rebel Homafaran element of the Iranian Air Force, with Khomeini declaring jihad on loyal soldiers who did not surrender.^[118]

Revolutionaries and rebel soldiers gained the upper hand and began to take over police stations and military installations, distributing arms to the public. The final collapse of the provisional non-Islamist government came at 2 p.m. February 11 when the Supreme Military Council declared itself "neutral in the current political disputes... in order to prevent further disorder and bloodshed."^{[119] [120]} Revolutionaries took over government buildings, TV and Radio stations, and palaces of Pahlavi dynasty.

This period, from February 1 to 11, is celebrated every year in Iran as the "Decade of Fajr."^{[121] [122]} February 11 is "Islamic Revolution's Victory Day", a national holiday with state sponsored demonstrations in every city.^{[123] [124]}

Consolidation of power by Khomeini

From 1979 to either 1982 or 1983 Iran was in a "revolutionary crisis mode". The economy and the apparatus of government had collapsed, military and security forces were in disarray. But by 1982 Khomeini and his supporters had crushed the rival factions and consolidated power. Events that made up both the crisis and its resolution were the Iran Hostage Crisis, the invasion of Iran by Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and the presidency of Abolhassan Banisadr.^{[125] [126]}

Conflicts among revolutionaries

Some observers believe "what began as an authentic and anti-dictatorial popular revolution based on a broad coalition of all anti-Shah forces was soon transformed into an Islamic fundamentalist power-grab,"^[127] that except for his core supporters, the members of the coalition thought Khomeini intended to be more a spiritual guide than a ruler^[128] — Khomeini being in his mid-70s, having never held public office, been out of Iran for more than a decade, and having told questioners things like "the religious dignitaries do not want to rule."^{[129] [130]}

Another view is Khomeini had "overwhelming ideological, political and organizational hegemony,"^[131] and non-theocratic groups never seriously challenged Khomeini's movement in popular support.^[132] Regime supporters themselves have claimed that Iranians who opposed Khomeini were "fifth columnists" led by foreign countries attempting to overthrow the Iranian government.^[133]

Khomeini and his loyalists in the revolutionary organizations implemented Khomeini's velayat-e faqih design for an Islamic Republic led by himself as Supreme Leader^[134] by exploiting temporarily allies,^[135] (such as Mehdi Bazargan's Provisional Government of Iran), and eliminating from Iran's political stage both them and their adversaries one-by-one.^[136]

Organizations of the revolution

The most important bodies of the revolution were the Revolutionary Council, the Revolutionary Guards, Revolutionary Tribunals, Islamic Republican Party, and Revolutionary Committees (*komitehs*).^[137]

While the moderate Bazargan and his government (temporarily) reassured the middle class, it became apparent they did not have power over the "Khomeinist" revolutionary bodies, particularly the Revolutionary Council (the "real power" in the revolutionary state^[138] ^[139]), and later the Islamic Republican Party. Inevitably the overlapping authority of the Revolutionary Council (which had the power to pass laws) and Bazargan's government was a source of conflict,^[140] despite the fact that both had been approved by and/or put in place by Khomeini.

This conflict lasted only a few months however. The provisional government fell shortly after American Embassy officials were taken hostage on November 4, 1979. Bazargan's resignation was received by Khomeini without complaint, saying "Mr. Bazargan ... was a little tired and preferred to stay on the sidelines for a while." Khomeini later described his appointment of Bazargan as a "mistake."^[141]

The Revolutionary Guard, or *Pasdar-e Enqelab*, was established by Khomeini on May 5, 1979 as a counterweight both to the armed groups of the left, and to the Shah's military. The guard eventually grew into "a full-scale" military force^[142] and "the strongest institution of the revolution."^[143]

Serving under the Pasdaran were/are the *Baseej-e Mostaz'afin*, ("Oppressed Mobilization")^[144] volunteers in everything from earthquake emergency management to attacking opposition demonstrators and newspaper offices.^[145]

The Islamic Republican Party^[146] fought to establish theocratic government by velayat-e faqih.

Thousands of *komiteh* or Revolutionary Committees^[147] served as "the eyes and ears" of the new regime, and are credited by critics with "many arbitrary arrests, executions and confiscations of property".^[148]

Also enforcing the will of the regime were the Hezbollahi (the Party of God), "strong-arm thugs" who attacked demonstrators and offices of newspapers critical of Khomeini.^[149]

Non-Khomeini groups

Two major political groups formed after the fall of the shah that clashed with, and were eventually suppressed by, pro-Khomeini groups were the moderate religious Muslim People's Republican Party (MPRP) which was associated with Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari, and the secular leftist National Democratic Front (NDF).

Establishment of Islamic republic government

Referendum of 12 Farvardin

On March 30 and 31 (Farvardin 10, 11) a referendum was held over whether to replace the monarchy with an "Islamic Republic" — a term not defined on the ballot. Khomeini called for a massive turnout^[150] and only the National Democratic Front, Fadayan, and several Kurdish parties opposed the vote.^[150] It was announced that 98.2% had voted in favor.^[150]

Writing of the constitution

In June 1979, the Freedom Movement released its draft constitution for the Islamic Republic that it had been working on since Khomeini was in exile. It included a Guardian Council to veto unIslamic legislation, but had no guardian jurist ruler.^[151] Leftists found the draft too conservative and in need of major changes but Khomeini declared it 'correct'.^[130] ^[152] To approve the new constitution and prevent leftist alterations, a relatively small seventy-three-member Assembly of Experts for Constitution was elected that summer. Critics complained that "vote-rigging, violence against undesirable candidates and the dissemination of false information" was used to "produce an assembly overwhelmingly dominated by clergy loyal to Khomeini."^[153]

Khomeini (and the assembly) now rejected the constitution — its correctness notwithstanding — and Khomeini declared that the new government should be based "100% on Islam."^[154]

In addition to the president, the new constitution included a more powerful post of guardian jurist ruler intended for Khomeini,^[155] with control of the military and security services, and power to appoint several top government and judicial officials. It increased the power and number of clerics on the Council of Guardians and gave it control over elections^[156] as well as laws passed by the legislature.

The new constitution was also reportedly approved overwhelmingly by referendum, but with more opposition^[157] and smaller turnout.^[158]

Hostage Crisis

Helping to pass the constitution, suppress moderates and otherwise radicalize the revolution was the holding of 52 American diplomats hostage for over a year. In late October 1979, the exiled and dying Shah was admitted into the United States for cancer treatment. In Iran there was an immediate outcry and both Khomeini and leftist groups demanding the Shah's return to Iran for trial and execution. On 4 November 1979 youthful Islamists, calling themselves Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line, invaded the embassy compound and seized its staff. Revolutionaries were reminded of how 26 years earlier the Shah had fled abroad while the Embassy-based American CIA and British intelligence organized a coup d'état to overthrow his nationalist opponent.

The holding of hostages was very popular and continued for months even after the death of the Shah. As Khomeini explained to his future President Baniisadr,

This action has many benefits. ... This has united our people. Our opponents do not dare act against us. We can put the constitution to the people's vote without difficulty ...^[159]

With great publicity the students released documents from the American embassy or "nest of spies," showing moderate Iranian leaders had met with U.S. officials (similar evidence of high ranking Islamists having done so did not see the light of day).^[160] Among the casualties of the hostage crisis was Prime Minister Bazargan and his government who resigned in November unable to enforce the government's order to release the hostages.^[161]

The prestige of Khomeini and the hostage taking was further enhanced with the failure of a hostage rescue attempt, widely credited to divine intervention.^[162]

It ended with the signing of the Algiers Accords in Algeria on January 19, 1981. The hostages were formally released into United States custody the following day, just minutes after the new American president Ronald Reagan was sworn in. The hostages had been held at the U.S. embassy in Tehran for 444 days.

Iran-Iraq War

In September 1980, the Arab Nationalist and Sunni Muslim-dominated regime of Saddam Hussein in neighboring Iraq invaded Iran in an attempt to take advantage of revolutionary chaos and destroy the revolution in its infancy. Iran was "galvanized"^[163] and Iranians rallied behind their new government helping to stop and then reversing the Iraqi advance. By early 1982 Iran regained almost all the territory lost to the invasion.

Like the hostage crisis, the war served in part as an opportunity for the regime to strengthen Islamic revolutionary ardour and revolutionary groups.^[164] such as the Revolutionary Guard and committees at the expense of its remaining allies-turned-opponents, such as the MEK.^[165] ^[166] While enormously costly and destructive, the war "rejuvenate[d] the drive for national unity and Islamic revolution" and "inhibited fractious debate and dispute" in Iran.^[167]

Suppression of opposition

In early March, Khomeini announced, "do not use this term, 'democratic.' That is the Western style," giving pro-democracy liberals (and later leftists) a taste of disappointments to come.^[168]

In succession the National Democratic Front was banned in August 1979, the provisional government was disempowered in November, the Muslim People's Republican Party banned in January 1980, the People's Mujahedin of Iran guerillas came under attack in February 1980, a purge of universities was begun in March 1980, and leftist Islamist Abolhassan Banisadr was impeached in June 1981.

Newspaper closings

In mid August, shortly after the election of the constitution-writing assembly, several dozen newspapers and magazines opposing Khomeini's idea of theocratic rule by jurists were shut down.^[169] ^[170] ^[171] When protests were organized by the National Democratic Front (NDF), Khomeini angrily denounced them saying, "we thought we were dealing with human beings. It is evident we are not."^[172]

... After each revolution several thousand of these corrupt elements are executed in public and burnt and the story is over. They are not allowed to publish newspapers.^[173]

Hundreds were injured by "rocks, clubs, chains and iron bars" when Hezbollahi attacked the protesters,^[174] and shortly after, a warrant was issued for the arrest of the NDF's leader.^[175]

Muslim People's Republican Party

In December the moderate Islamic party Muslim People's Republican Party (MPRP), and its spiritual leader Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari had become a rallying point for Iranians who wanted democracy not theocracy.^[176] Riots broke out in Shariatmadari's Azeri home region with members of the MPRP and Shariatmadari's followers seizing the Tabriz television station, and using it to "broadcast demands and grievances." The regime reacted quickly, sending Revolutionary Guards to retake the TV station, mediators to defuse complaints and activists to stage a massive pro-Khomeini counter-demonstration.^[177] The party was suppressed^[176] and in 1982 Shari'atmadari was "demoted" from the rank of Grand Ayatollah and many of his clerical followers purged.^[178]



Kazem Shariatmadari

Islamist left

In January 1980 Abolhassan Banisadr was elected president of Iran. Though an adviser to Khomeini, he was a leftist who clashed with another ally of Khomeini, the theocratic Islamic Republic Party (IRP) — the controlling power in the new parliament.^[179]

At the same time, erstwhile revolutionary allies of Khomeini — the Islamist modernist guerrilla group People's Mujahedin of Iran (or MEK) — were being suppressed by Khomeini's revolutionary organizations. Khomeini attacked the MEK as *monafeqin* (hypocrites) and *kafer* (unbelievers).^[180] *Hezbollahi* people attacked meeting places, bookstores, newsstands of Mujahideen and other leftists^[181] driving them underground. Universities were closed to purge them of opponents of theocratic rule as a part of the "Cultural Revolution", and 20,000 teachers and nearly 8,000 military officers deemed too westernized were dismissed.^[182]

By mid-1981 matters came to a head. An attempt by Khomeini to forge a reconciliation between Banisadr and IRP leaders had failed^[183] and now it was Banisadr who was the rallying point "for all doubters and dissidents" of the theocracy, including the MEK.^[184]



When leaders of the National Front called for a demonstration in June 1981 in favor of Banisadr, Khomeini threatened its leaders with the death penalty for apostasy "if they did not repent."^[185] Leaders of the Freedom Movement of Iran were compelled to make and publicly broadcast apologies for supporting the Front's appeal.^[186] Those attending the rally were menaced by Hezbollahi and Revolutionary Guards and intimidated into silence.^[187]

The MEK retaliated with a campaign of terror against the IRP. On the 28 June 1981, a bombing of the office of the IRP killed around 70 high-ranking officials, cabinet members and members of parliament, including Mohammad Beheshti, the secretary-general of the party and head of the Islamic Republic's judicial system. The regime responded with thousands of arrests and hundreds of executions.^[188] Despite these and other assassinations^[146] the hoped-for mass uprising and armed struggle against the Khomeinists was crushed.

The MEK bombings were not the only violent opposition to the Khomeinist regime. In May 1979, the Furqan Group (*Guruh-i Furqan*) assassinated an important lieutenant of Khomeini, Morteza Motahari.^[189] Marxist guerrillas and federalist parties revolted in some regions comprising Khuzistan, Kurdistan and Gonbad-e Qabus which resulted in fighting among them and revolutionary forces. These revolts began in April 1979 and lasted for several months or years depending on the region.

Casualties

The number of protesters and revolutionaries killed during the Iranian Revolution range between 3,000 to 60,000. Ayatollah Khomeini stated that "60,000 men, women and children were martyred by the Shah's regime,"^[190] ^[191] but estimates compiled by a researcher (Emad al-Din Baghi) at the Martyrs Foundation (Bonyad Shahid)^[192] come to only 2,781 killed in the 1978 and 1979 clashes between demonstrators and the Shah's army and security forces,^[190] ^[193] ^[194] which if true mean that Iran suffered remarkably few casualties compared to contemporary events such as the South African anti-apartheid movement.^[195]

After the revolution human rights groups estimated the number of casualties suffered by protesters and prisoners of the new Islamic regime to be several thousand. The first to be executed were Members of the old regime - senior generals, followed by over 200 of the Shah's senior civilian officials^[196] - as punishment and to eliminate the danger of coup d'État. Brief trials lacking defense attorneys, juries, transparency or opportunity for the accused to defend themselves^[197] were held by revolutionary judges such as Sadegh Khalkhali, the *Sharia* judge. By January 1980 "at

least 582 persons had been executed."^[198] Among those executed was Amir Abbas Hoveida, former Prime Minister of Iran. Between January 1980 and June 1981, when Bani-Sadr was impeached, at least 900 executions took place,^[199] for everything from drug and sexual offenses to `corruption on earth,` from plotting counter-revolution and spying for Israel to membership in opposition groups.^[200] In the 12 months following that Amnesty International documented 2,946 executions, with several thousand more killed in the next two years according to the anti-regime guerillas People's Mujahedin of Iran.^[201]

Impact

Views differ on the impact of the revolution.^[202] For some it was "the most significant, hopeful, and profound event in the entirety of contemporary Islamic history,"^[203] while other Iranians believe that the revolution was a time when "for a few years we all lost our minds",^[204] and which "promised us heaven, but... created a hell on earth."^[205]

International

Internationally, the initial impact of the Islamic revolution was immense. In the non-Muslim world it changed the image of Islam, generating much interest in Islam — both sympathetic^[206] and hostile^[207] — and even speculation that the revolution might change "the world balance of power more than any political event since Hitler's conquest of Europe."^[208]

The Islamic Republic positioned itself as a revolutionary beacon under the slogan "neither East nor West" (i.e. neither Soviet nor American/West European models), and called for the overthrow of capitalism, American influence, and social injustice in the Middle East and the rest of the world. Revolutionary leaders in Iran gave and sought support from non-Muslim causes in the Third World — e.g. the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, IRA in Ireland and anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa — even to the point of favoring non-Muslim revolutionaries over Islamic causes such as the neighboring Afghan Mujahideen.^[209]

Persian Gulf and the Iran–Iraq War

In its region, Iranian Islamic revolutionaries called specifically for the overthrow of monarchies and their replacement with Islamic republics, much to the alarm of its smaller Sunni-run Arab neighbors Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the other Persian Gulf States — most of whom were monarchies and all of whom had sizable Shi'a populations. It was with one of these regimes that the Iran–Iraq War — which killed hundreds of thousands and dominated life in the Islamic Republic for the next eight years — was fought. Although Iraq invaded Iran, most of the war was fought after Iran had regained most of its land back and after the Iraqi regime had offered a truce. Khomeini rejected it, announcing the only condition for peace was that "the regime in Baghdad must fall and must be replaced by an Islamic Republic,"^[210] but ultimately the war ended with no Islamic revolution in Iraq.

Other countries

In the Mideast and Muslim world, particularly in its early years, it triggered enormous enthusiasm and redoubled opposition to western intervention and influence. Islamist insurgents rose in Saudi Arabia (1979), Egypt (1981), Syria (1982), and Lebanon (1983).^[211]

Although ultimately only the Lebanese Islamists succeeded, other activities have had more long term impact. The Ayatollah Khomeini's 1989 fatwa calling for the killing of British citizen Salman Rushdie had international impact. The Islamic revolutionary government itself is credited with helping establish Hezbollah in Lebanon^[212] and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

On the other side of the ledger, at least one observer argues that despite great effort and expense the only countries outside Iran the revolution had a "measure of lasting influence" on are Lebanon and Iraq.^[213] Others claim the devastating Iran–Iraq War "mortally wounded ... the ideal of spreading the Islamic revolution,"^[214] or that the Islamic Republic's pursuit of an ideological rather than a "nationalist, pragmatic" foreign policy has weakened Iran's

"place as a great regional power".^[215]

Domestic

Internally, the revolution has brought a broadening of education and health care for the poor, and particularly governmental promotion of Islam, and the elimination of secularism and American influence in government. Fewer changes have occurred in terms of political freedom, governmental honesty and efficiency, economic equality and self-sufficiency, or even popular religious devotion.^{[216] [217] [218]}

Opinion polls and observers report widespread dissatisfaction, including a "rift" between the revolutionary generation and younger Iranians who find it "impossible to understand what their parents were so passionate about."^[219]



Iran marks 32nd anniversary of Revolution on 2011

Human development

Literacy has continued to increase under the Islamic Republic which uses Islamic principles,^{[220] [221]} By 2002 illiteracy rates dropped by more than half.^{[222] [223]} Maternal and infant mortality rates have also been cut significantly.^[224] Population growth was first encouraged, but discouraged after 1988.^[225] Overall, Iran's Human development Index rating has climbed significantly from 0.569 in 1980 to 0.732 in 2002, on par with neighbour Turkey.^{[226] [227]}

Politics and government

Iran has elected governmental bodies at the national, provincial and local levels. Although these bodies are subordinate to theocracy — which has veto power over who can run for parliament (or Islamic Consultative Assembly) and whether its bills can become law — they have more power than equivalent organs in the Shah's government. Iran's Sunni minority (about 8%) has seen some unrest.^[228] While Iran's small non-Muslim minorities do not have equal rights, five of the 290 parliamentary seats are allocated to their communities.^[229]

Definitely not protected have been members of the Bahá'í Faith, which has been declared heretical and subversive. More than 200 Bahá'ís have been executed or killed, and many more have been imprisoned, deprived of jobs, pensions, businesses, and educational opportunities. Bahá'í holy places have been confiscated, vandalized, or destroyed.^{[230] [231]} More recently, Bahá'ís in Iran have been deprived of education and work. Several thousand young Bahá'ís between the ages of 17 and 24 have been expelled from universities for no particular reason.^[232]

Whether the Islamic Republic has brought more or less severe political repression is disputed. Grumbling once done about the tyranny and corruption of the Shah and his court is now directed against "the Mullahs."^[233] Fear of SAVAK has been replaced by fear of Revolutionary Guards, and other religious revolutionary enforcers.^[234] Violations of human rights by the theocratic regime is said by some to be worse than during the monarchy,^[235] and in any case extremely grave.^[236] Reports of torture, imprisonment of dissidents, and the murder of prominent critics have been made by human rights groups. Censorship is handled by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, without whose official permission, "no books or magazines are published, no audiotapes are distributed, no movies are shown and no cultural organization is established."^[237]

Women

Women — especially those from traditional backgrounds — participated on a large scale in demonstrations leading up to the revolution.^[238] Since the revolution university enrollment and the number of women in the civil service and higher education has risen^[239] (to the alarm of some regime authorities),^[240] ^[241] and several women have been elected to the Iranian parliament.

However, the ideology of the revolution opposes equal rights for women. Within months of the founding of the Islamic Republic the 1967 Family Protection Law was repealed, female government workers were forced to observe Islamic dress code, women were barred from becoming judges, beaches and sports were sex-segregated, the marriage age for girls was reduced to 13 and married women were barred from attending regular schools.^[242] Women began almost immediately to protest^[243] ^[244] and have won some reversals of policies in the years since. Inequality for women in inheritance and other areas of the civil code remain. Segregation of the sexes, from "schoolrooms to ski slopes to public buses", is strictly enforced. Females caught by revolutionary officials in a mixed-sex situation can be subject to virginity tests.^[245] Women may also be sentenced to fines, beatings, or even death if they are found to be engaged in pre-marital sex.^[246]

Economy

Iran's economy has not thrived since the revolution. Dependence on petroleum exports is still strong.^[247] Per capita income fluctuates with the price of oil — reportedly falling at one point to 1/4 of what it was prior to the revolution^[248] ^[249] and has still not reached pre-revolution levels. Unemployment among Iran's youth has steadily risen, with economic sanctions and internal corruption to blame.^[250] ^[251]

Gharbzadegi ("westoxification") or western cultural stub o stubbornly remains, brought by music recordings, videos, satellite dishes, fast food, and bacon products.^[252] One post-revolutionary opinion poll found 61% of students in Tehran chose "Western artists" as their role models with only 17% choosing "Iran's officials."^[253]

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