

Comparative Civilizations Review, No. 45, Fall 2001

I. Introduction

The Islamic Revolution of Iran has had spillover effect throughout the Middle East and the world. In the intervening two decades since that cataclysm, many scholars have attempted to analyze the causes and to speculate why a modernizing revolution turned into a backward march. Although scholars generally agree on the basic events of the monarchy's collapse, there is no agreement on the causes and the reasons for such draconian consequences. It is not at all clear, despite the conventional wisdom, that this revolution was the inevitable consequence of a modernizing and dictatorial leader in confrontation with a dearly beloved religion.

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was second in a dynasty dedicated to the modernization of a once distinguished, but by 1920, underdeveloped pivotal state. The Shah's long reign (1941-1979) was brought to an end in 1979 and his government was replaced by an "Islamic republic." We now know that all of the players and observers were astonished by this collapse and unprepared for the theocracy that triumphed. It had not looked at all inevitable.

Elsewhere in the world, two centuries of revolutions have replaced monarchies with at least ostensibly representative governments. The creation of the United States was the first, followed by France, Russia, and China. Other states lost their monarchies after World War I (Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungary, and Germany) and others revolted against colonial masters to obtain their independence.

In all of these cases, the revolutions were conceived as modernizing movements: that is, movements that extended the franchise to people who traditionally had been subject to authoritarian government. In the case of the United States, the franchise has continued to expand from its initial group of land owning white male peers to all males, and finally to females.

France, whose revolution was far more violent than America's, suffered a number of pendulum swings from monarchy to anarchy and then to empire and then to republic, with the franchise permitting women to participate as late as the mid-20th century. Russia and China went from absolute monarchies to absolute dictatorships, ostensibly of the proletariat, but in actuality party-military dictatorships. In all of these cases, however, the revolutions professed that their people were capable of participation in their own governance, and universal public education was established to make it so.

What happened in Iran in 1979 cannot rightly be called a revolution. It was a counter-revolution -- that is, a revolt against most of the elements of 20th century modernization that had been undertaken by the Pahlavis. (1) People voted, but only for candidates that met the approval of the clerics. The actual rule was in the hands of an 80-year-old charismatic cleric and a council of like-minded clerics who "knew best" for everyone. After an orgy of executions (2) and assassinations, the clerics maintained their total power through the use of religious storm troopers, who invaded (and still invade) households and apprehend women in the street to check for makeup, perfume, and insufficient coverage. They also created a parallel military arm to keep a close eye on the regular army, even in the battlefields of the Iran/Iraq war. (3) In addition, they have censorship power over communications and even after 20 years, veto power over political candidates for office.

Elections continued to be held, but the first secular elected president did not have a chance to carry out his programs in the face of clerical objections and the second was assassinated by dissidents. The first president, Bani-Sadr, barely escaped with his life to France (4) and then Foreign Minister, Qobtzadeh, was executed. Thereafter, there were no more secular presidents. Every official since then has been a member of the clergy, including today's favorite of the liberals, Mr. Khatami. (5)

Iran is now in a revolutionary mode again--this time, perhaps, to take back what the people thought they were getting twenty years ago--a secular and modern state without an all-knowing father to tell them how to live.

How did such an event as strange as the Islamic Revolution occur? What have the experts said about it over the years? How can one know what actually happened and how can one account for the astonishing lack of critical thinking that set it off?

II. Theories

In the existing literature, the theories for why this strange counter-revolution occurred can be summed up as follows: 1) the Shah modernized too fast and alienated masses of people; 2) the growing middle class wanted to have some say in their governance but the autocratic Shah prevented it; 3) the public resented the Americanization of the culture and wanted to reassert Persian traditional values; 4) the oil boom spurred a revolution of rising expectations, and when the boom collapsed, resentment exploded; 5) population explosion sent rural populations into cities, which could not rapidly accommodate them or deal with their culture shock; 6) intellectuals, infiltrated by Marxist plants, took national discontent international; 7) the best traditionally-organized sector, the Shiite clergy, were joined by Marxist-trained plants, to unseat what seemed to be an invulnerable monarchy; 8) the Shah was fighting a secret battle with cancer which left him vulnerable at the exact same time that the US, under Jimmy Carter, was clueless and divided in its policy toward Iran; and of course 9) the favorite Iranian conspiracy theory that the British did it with American help.

All of these theories, with the exception of Nos. 3 and 9, have an element of truth.

Only the clergy resented America culture, not the public. The youthful participation in the 1978 revolution was done in the style of the US anti-war movement and the French student revolts of the 1960s. It is obvious from today's simmering revolution that the youth, people under 30, who make up 70 percent of the country, have no grievance whatsoever against American culture and risk punishment in flaunting it.(6)

As for the conspiracy theory that the British wanted to get rid of the Shah and replace him with the Ayatollah, this is the usual Iranian predilection for blaming outside forces for their own bad choices.(7) Even the late Shah could not conceive that what the BBC did and what the British government did were not one and the same. He never did understand press freedom.(8)

III. Why Did it Happen?

Iran's painful process of modernization resembles those of Turkey, Russia, China, India, and many others. Most backward countries are backward because the groups that hold the power want it that way. Old feudal aristocracies, including tribal ones, do not want to see power in the hands of their peasants or herdsmen and certainly not in their merchants. For these conservative elites, public literacy, noisy intellectuals, and participatory government are anathema.

In all such countries, however, a new class was emerging, the intelligentsia, comprised of disenchanted elites and merchants, enlightened by travel and education. This group is very small in a backward country, and they have never succeeded in transforming their countries into modernizing states without the intervention of an authoritarian leader backed by military might.

Established conservative religious leadership is often one and the same with feudal landowners. Consider how much land the Catholic Church owned throughout Europe before the Reformation, and how much the Russian Orthodox establishment controlled before the Russian Revolution. In Iran, the Shiite establishment owned 50 percent of the land before the Shah's land reform took effect and the clergy treated their peasants no better than did aristocratic land owners.

For Iran, as well as for the modernizing countries mentioned above, feudalism can only be challenged by an emergency that threatens the country's very existence. An autocrat backed by arms must seize power, and unless he can coopt the intelligentsia, they are the first to be exterminated.

The emergency for Peter the Great was Sweden, which nearly rolled over feudal

Russia. For China it was encroaching Western colonization. For Japan, it was the arrival of the American fleet. For Russia and Turkey, it was their disastrous performances in World War I, and for Iran, it was a close call with dismemberment during World War I and its aftermath. None of these countries had the leisure for sentiment over their traditional establishments or to wait for well-meaning, but ineffectual intellectuals to do it.

From 1922 until 1978, Iran was successfully transformed from a feudal country with a declining population of 10 to 12 million into a country of 35 million with a growing middle class; secular schools, legal system, and bureaucracy; political and social equality for men and women (on the books, at least); a modern non-political military; a growing network of banks, universities, and industrialization; and genuine achievements in public health.(9) By 1975, it was difficult to find a pair of bowed legs on a child (no more rickets), a condition that was prevalent in the 1920s and certainly still visible in the late 1950s. Something was working right.

However, one of the negative fruits of modernization and improved public health is population explosion and the flight of people from rural to urban areas, which is initially very destabilizing. Population explosion is endangering the modernizing achievements of all of the above states.

IV. The 1970s

Iran's modernization started with Reza Shah Pahlavi's ascension to power in the mid-1920s, at which time it was literally like starting from scratch. Iran did not even have a railroad, nor anything like a national army to permit safe travel on the country's dirt roads, nor public schools, secular law courts, secular bureaucracy, safe drinking water, reliable food supply, nor basic medical care. It did, however, have a strategic location which made it vulnerable to the machinations of the British, who were concerned with oil and the route to India, and the Russians, who had already devoured half of Iran in the 19th century.

Reza Shah Pahlavi was the right autocrat at that moment in history. It might have been better had he been as sophisticated and modern as Ataturk in Turkey, but then again, he matched the country he led. There was not much that was sophisticated in Iran. He did what he could, tirelessly, with astonishing success, until he was unseated in 1941 upon the onset of World War II.

His son, only 21 at the time of his ascension to the throne, had to survive the machinations of the superpowers during their occupation of Iran during World War II, and then over the next few years, he had to learn how to become Shah. This was not easy for him. His father had been a tough autocrat who knew his own mind, whereas his son was of a much more tentative nature, tempered by a Swiss education, and by the awareness that the Iran he inherited was part of the global picture. Foreign policy was going to be much more important during his time than in his father's time.(10)

The close call with a Soviet-attempted dismemberment of Iran's northwest province, Azerbaijan,(11) and a chaotic oil nationalization campaign conducted by a very authoritarian demagogue, Mohammad Mossadeq, who has rather incredibly attained mythical status among Iranian Liberals as a democrat, provided the Shah with a baptism by fire.(12)

By 1960, the Shah was ready to take up where his father left off. He initiated reform and enfranchisement of women, both of which issues inflamed the clergy, and in 1963 he put down a Shiite revolt led by a cleric named Khomeini. Firmness paid off, and the country was quiet and progressed rapidly for the next 15 years.

Like his father, he had become a hands-on autocrat. Also, like all autocrats, he never knew whom he could trust. His cabinets were remarkably good; he was fortunate in the quality of the talented, patriotic and well educated men he attracted, but he could never discount self-interest in their advice.

What succeeded over the period of 15 years, fueled by an enormous boom in oil prices, gave the Shah an overconfidence that began to work against him. By 1975, the rising middle class was ready to take on more governance. The proliferation of western-style universities were churning out intellectuals with western standards and

a taste for American-style protest. The public was frustrated when promised the moon--only to have these ambitious programs be cut back when the oil boom crashed, which it did in 1975.(13)

Finally, instability was increasing as hoards of peasants flocked into the cities where good jobs, but no housing, awaited them. These people became a displaced element that was neither traditional nor modern. The clergy had more success than the Marxists in recruiting them. Here was a ready supply of "rent-a mobs," which played (and still play) a role in the counter-revolution.

V. International Elements.

The internal stresses were not the Shah's only problems. The late 1970s saw also what we now know as the last hurrah of the Soviet Union. The Marxists had a considerable establishment of moles and agents in Iran, and the mid-70s instability offered a tempting target. Marxists infiltrated the intellectuals and lower level clergy, as well as effectively planting stories and manipulating the international press. This is a whole new area for scholars to explore.

The United States, under Jimmy Carter's presidency, was launching a policy of concern for human rights, which had not been a major consideration during the Cold War. However, Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski was not in line with this policy; the Cold War was still his most important concern. The State Department, under Cyrus Vance, was pushing human rights issues. Carter was in the middle, and never did make up his mind which way to go.(14)

The Shah responded to the growing internal stresses in his own country by jumping from one policy to another, in an attempt to find the right formula. He loosened up on repression in an effort to pacify internal criticism and to secure the friendship of Jimmy Carter. This was done unwisely at the time of economic crash, and served only to embolden demonstrators, who no longer feared him.(15)

The thousands of students whom he enabled to study abroad were influenced by the Vietnam War demonstrations in the US and the French student revolt in Paris. Students follow the leader. It became the fashion to attack the Shah as the be-all and end-all of Iran's problems. Students -- and there were many of them--who felt loyalty to the Shah -- were intimidated into silence.

Propaganda wars raged in Iran: ineptly by the Shah and the state organs of dissemination (the Iranian press and television) and very effectively by the BBC programs beamed into Iran and by the Marxists and intellectuals who set up underground presses.(16) A handful of French-trained Iranian leftists allied themselves to the one charismatic figure who could oppose the Shah, the Ayatollah Khomeini, at that time in exile in Paris. This group carefully stage-managed the Ayatollah's meetings with the press (they carefully scripted his answers to written questions from the press) and they disseminated the preposterous notion that he was a gentle saint and Gandhi-like pacifist who would just be a figurehead after they got rid of the Shah.(17)

Once the skills of the leftist were combined with the clout of the clerics, the revolutionary machine was almost unstoppable. SAVAK, which had such a reputation for ruthless efficiency, showed how hollow it really was. It had focused too long on harassing the intelligentsia and was unaware of the danger from the clerics until it was too late. The Shah saw the danger too late -- and called it the alliance of black reaction and red revolution -- but nobody listened.

When the military tried to convince the Shah to crack down before the demonstrations got worse, he protested that he would not shed the blood of his own people. It can be said that had he acted in 1977 as he had in 1963, a firm police response would have aborted the demonstrations, giving him time to carry out the needed democratic reforms in an orderly fashion, backed by a recovering economy.(18)

He did not do what was needed for several reasons: he did not have the stomach for this struggle any more, he was very uncertain about how the US would react to a show of force because he was getting conflicting messages from Washington and from the US Ambassador daily, and finally, he was waging a secret battle with cancer, neglecting his health so that nobody would know the lion was wounded.

Had he acted, and had he succeeded in restoring order to the country, it is conceivable that Iran could have continued to modernize. Under his son, Iran could have been ready for increasing parliamentary power and continuing to educate an

electorate to handle this responsibility.

There is a difference between an autocratic monarch and a totalitarian dictator, as Jean Kirkpatrick once noted. The autocrat wants external obedience; the totalitarian wants mind control. This was the difference between the two "big daddies" who controlled Iran. The Shah thought he was the only person who could make things happen that were for the good of his people, and the Ayatollah knew that God talked to him, and that he knew what was best for them.(19)

The Shah wanted a country that could be like Switzerland -- orderly, prosperous, a player in the global society. The Ayatollah wanted a people who would sit at home on the floor, as he did, praying five times a day, eating bread, cheese, and onions, and reading the Koran. In his more grandiose moods, however, the Ayatollah wanted Iran to be an international player too, fomenting Shiite revolts against the leadership of all the other Muslim countries.(20)

VII. Sources for Critical Thinkers Today

In undertaking the task of revisiting the Iranian Revolution after 20 year, I was confronted with the conventional view that the Shah was his own worst enemy and that he deserved unseating, and that nobody could possible have known how terrible the Ayatollah Khomeini would be. My research, gathered from the printed literature during the revolution and afterwards, put out both by major players--including the Shah himself--and all sorts of minor players, including young intellectuals and some famous Iran scholars, forced me to dismiss both of the above conventional views. In addition, I was in Iran as the revolution gathered steam, and I had my own journals to consult. The following is a sampling of the literature that seemed essential to this study.

The Shah. Three books were written by the late Shah: Mission for My Country (1960), The White Revolution (1970), and his last sad work written in exile just before his death from cancer, Answer to History (1980). Of course autobiographies put the best possible face on the writer, yet the Shah's passionate concern for the development of his country comes through with sincerity. He certainly cared, and at the end of his life, he was aware of many of the mistakes he made. He considered them more mistakes of omission than commission, which is not necessarily so.

A fascinating study of the Shah and his work was E. A. Bayne's Persian Kingship in Transition, the fruit of ten years of interviews and long discussions between the author and the Shah. Bayne had no particular bias, being a foreign scholar and official of the World Bank, and while his book does not flatter the Shah, it does validate the Shah's passion for his work.

A book that was extremely valuable in assessing the Shah's daily life, successes, and foibles, was written by Asodollah Alam: The Shah and I: the Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1969-1977. Alam was Prime Minister during the volatile early 1960s and then Court Minister until his death of cancer, one year before the revolution. He had known the Shah since they were both 20, and in his diaries, which were not published until after his death, he was uncommonly frank for a person from a culture that does not reward bluntness. In this book, one could see the enormous passion for the country's development that the Shah and Alam shared, and their faults were the faults of their country and class: unquestioning chauvinism, touchiness in how the world regarded Iran, compulsive womanizing, and personal vanity.

The brother of the last of the Shah's Prime Ministers, Fereydun Hoveyda, who served for many years in the foreign ministry, wrote a passionate memoir of his time working for the Shah. Hoveyda was an avowed leftist, and was surprised when the Shah invited him into government service. He compared the hopeful early years with the increasing isolation of the Shah during his last five years, and blames the Shah for not rescuing Prime Minister Hoveyda from prison where he was unceremoniously murdered.

Marvin Zonis's work, The Iranian Elite, has always been among the best source books on Iran. Then Zonis wrote Majestic Failure: The Fall of the Shah, which was an attempt at psycho-history, psychoanalysis of the subject without benefit of personal

acquaintance. All of the troubling characteristics he attributes to the Shah's childhood and relationship with his father are characteristics almost universal in Iran. John Stempel (Inside the Iranian Revolution) does a far better job of showing the ancient history of father-son love-hate relationships in Iran and how often they are transferred to the Shah and his subjects.

William Shawcross' The Shah's Last Ride is a sad account of the Shah in exile, being shunted from place to place by politicians, being medically abused during his last bouts of cancer, and rethinking his life and its dreadfully approaching end. He met his fate with dignity and learned at the end who his real friends were. The people who cared about him at the end were the first true friends he had ever had -- among them his wife Farah, Egypt's Anwar Sadaat, Nelson Rockefeller, and surprisingly, Richard Nixon.

This Shah was very Iranian indeed, and not just the product of some peculiar childhood environment. He was not out of touch with all Iranians, but he certainly did not have the common touch. He did not know the religious class and peasants, nor did most westernized Iranians. Court culture and his own personal shyness got in the way of his knowing these sectors of the society, as did his stifling of the press and his scorn for "wooly-headed intellectuals."

Other ways of assessing the Shah came through reading the works of people who had considerable contact with him: the last American Ambassador, William Sullivan (Mission to Iran), the last British Ambassador, Anthony Parsons (The Pride and the Fall: Iran 1974-1979) and American General Robert E. Huyser, (Mission to Tehran).

One needed to be alert that each of these three were writing self-justifying books, and it appears that Sullivan needed the most justifying. His account and Huyser's account differ, and the evidence that Sullivan was secretly undercutting Huyser's mission renders Sullivan the less trustworthy. I interviewed Huyser and found him to be convincing. Sullivan actually professed that the Ayatollah was a benign force, and one better to support than the Shah. This was a questionable judgment indeed.

Anatomy of the Revolution. There are many viewers in hindsight who have attempted over these 20 years to assess why and how this revolution happened. The writers mentioned above did their assessments of these events too, and among them, Ambassador Parsons comes the closest to the mark. He used his knowledge of Iranian 20th century history (in which the British played a major role) to put the revolution in perspective. He quite rightly called it a counter-revolution, which is a very important insight.

Fereyduun Hoveyda, mentioned above, also tracks the personality change of the Shah which may have played a major role in the disaster, which is corroborated by Asodollah Alam.

One particularly interesting analysis comes from a married couple, a British woman and her Iranian husband, both journalism professors in Tehran. Annabelle and Ali Mohammadi's Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution, expose how underground communications by means as simple as duplicating machines undid the state propaganda disseminated by the government. The BBC played a major role here too, which one can criticize as being one-sided and sensational.

An important book was written by Robert Graham, an economist and the London Times bureau chief in Tehran during the revolution: Iran: The Illusion of Power. More than any other observer, he discussed the disastrous impact of economics on spurring this revolution. The euphoria when the price of oil shot up resulted in an unrealistic budget -- and then when the prices collapsed, unmet expectations made people stew.

One of the more interesting books was written by the first elected president of Khomeini's Iran, Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr, a French-educated intellectual, who played a major role as a handler of the Ayatollah in Paris. He and his group made certain that the Ayatollah's real intentions were not made public. They massaged his words through careful translations, sent cassettes of his sermons to Iran for dissemination, and then were astonished when the Ayatollah eliminated them soon after his ascent to power. Bani-Sadr escaped from Iran in a woman's wig and chador, unlike his

colleague Foreign Minister Qobtzadeh, who was executed. After the death of the Ayatollah, Bani-Sadr wrote a scathing account of life with the Ayatollah: *My Turn to Speak: Iran, the Revolution and Secret Deals with the U.S.* Of course the book is self-serving, but Bani-Sadr's ultimate hatred of the Ayatollah Khomeini stemmed from his intimate experience with the old man's betrayals and hypocrisy. It is difficult to imagine that this came as a surprise to him.

The Role of Shi'a. This revolution cannot be understood without having some knowledge of how religion has functioned historically in Iran. There are numerous books written by the disillusioned after Khomeini took power: Suroosh Irfani's *Iran's Islamic Revolution: Popular Liberation of Religious Dictatorship?* and Michael M. J. Fischer's *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*, are two works that contrast Iranian and American perspectives on Shi'a. Mohammad Mohaddessin's *Islamic Fundamentalism: the New Global Threat* and Edgar O'Ballance's unduly sensational and inconsistent book, *Islamic Fundamentalist Terrorism*, paint dire pictures of Shi'a as religious fascism and global menace.

Many of the above authors expressed shock and disappointment at the behavior of the clerical establishment after the revolution. This is surprising in the face of the historic role of Shi'a from its beginnings as a cult of resentment and through such movements as the Assassin Cult in the 11th century and the dreadful and repressive role of Shi'a in Iran since it became the state religion in the 16th century. If anyone had whispered some of these facts of life in the ear of former UN Ambassador Andrew Young, he never would have described the Ayatollah Khomeini as a "Gandhi-like" figure, a notion embraced by the US State Department and Ambassador Sullivan in Iran. This terrible error blighted US policy and left the Shah without a rudder.

Current Views. Iran is going through a slow-motion revolution as we write. On one side are the 70 percent of the country under the age of 30, and on the other are the religious hard-liners who control the police, the religious thugs, and the army, and have veto power over candidates for office and veto over parliamentary laws. Visitors from the west are welcomed (except when thugs bomb their tour busses) and books and long articles are pouring out. Most interesting is Sandra Mackey's *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation*. Mackey is a journalist who wrote a fascinating and damning book about Saudi Arabia some years ago (*Saudis: Inside the Desert Kingdom*, Signet, 1990).

Her current book is worth reading too, except for her conclusion: that Iran's soul lies in the equal attention to Shi'a Islam and its older Persian identity. There are things that people say privately that they would not say to a journalist. The love affair of the left with Shi'a was aborted when the first of many executions took place. Furthermore, there is a long history of Iranian hostility to the clergy and, indeed, toward Islam itself.

It was not beloved among the young intellectuals who surrounded the Reza Shah Pahlavi, a man who realized that until he could pry Shiite fingers off of Iran's windpipe, the country would fail to thrive. The Pahlavis, both father and son, enjoyed more popular support than it is popular to admit, and in retrospect and in private, they are missed.

The other significant recent work on Iran's slow motion revolution is Robin Wright's

The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran, Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 2000. Wright refers to Crane Brinton's *Anatomy of a Revolution* as a blueprint that works in analyzing the Iranian Revolution as well. She notes that Iran's use of religion in a revolution was not original. It was also part of the political uprisings in Western societies (Protestantism, for example). After the anciens regimes were ousted, earlier revolutions also invoked religious values or ideals to define goals and justify revolutionary behavior, especially during the angry early years. There was an almost religious fervor "to make a better, more just world" in even atheist revolutions.

It is clear that the Revolution has not made a better world for Iranians. She notes:

"Iran in mid-1997 was a country rife with corruption more extensive than during the Pahlavi Dynasty, paralyzed politically by irreconcilable factional disputes and sinking fast economically." (21)

The recent election of a fairly moderate president, Khatami, supported by 70 perc

ent
of the population that wants change and something approaching international normality is being thwarted by the old guard that is not about to give up their theocracy easily.

A personality who comes up repeatedly in reports on contemporary Iran is philosophy professor Abdul Karim Soroush, who is advocating the separation of church and state. Compulsion does not make real piety, he says. "Tolerate the thorn [in freedom] for the sake of the flower." (22)

He is enormously popular among the young throughout the Muslim world, and is thoroughly disliked by the Islamists in power. If people are given a choice, they might not choose religion at all. Organized Islam has never taken a chance on this. Women are not permitted choice at all, and are subject to execution if they marry a non-Muslim or if they convert to another religion. Male converts to Islam may not change their minds later, and those born into Islam, of course, have no choice.

The response to Soroush's plea for dialogue and religious freedom was answered by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei: "Interpreting religion isn't something that can be carried out by just anyone. Jurisprudence is the main science of the clergy...If someone confronts the clergy, he gladdens the Zionists and the Americans more than anything else...because they've set their heart on the destruction of the clergy. Well, the Islamic system will slap these people hard in the face!"(23)

Here is the impasse. Until religion and governance are separated, Iran will not have genuine democracy. This issue will have to be confronted down the road, and it will be painful and probably bloody.

The most perceptive book of all, which I have saved for last, is one that appears in most of the scholars' bibliographies, but is not addressed: Gholam R. Afkhami's *The Iranian Revolution: Thanatos on a National Scale*. Afkhami served in the Shah's government and watched with horror as the entire modern infrastructure was dismantled. He was frustrated to see colleagues running with the revolutionary pack with no thought of what would follow, a trajectory that should be no surprise to intellectuals who knew the history of revolutions and the history of Shi'a Islam. *Thanatos on a National Scale*, or put another way, the march of the lemmings over a cliff, is exactly what happened. A revolution thus was transformed from a forward-looking event to a counter-revolution in which for 20 years all dissident voices were silenced.

Where might Iran be today had been no counter-revolution? Afkhami speculates that the Shah would be dead, and his democratic son would probably have been a Shah much in the style of Spain's Juan Carlos. Popular participation in governance would have transformed the parliament into the body it should be: a responsible and middle-class legislature.

VIII. Conclusion

If we are to understand anything about the process of rapid modernization and its enormous dangers, we must look to past events before helping to guide present and future players. There are many countries in the world today with one foot in the present (or future) and one in the past, as one can see in traveling throughout the developing or lesser developed world. In most of these countries, there is great unrest and the modernizing process will evoke military coupes, revolts, and sometimes civil war. Few will have a genuine revolution as in Iran, a process that is continuing as we write, because real revolutions are rare. They are, however, part of the same modernizing process that is resulting in Third World unrest.

It is essential that we understand why the revolution in Iran occurred if we are to have any predictive ability in future like cases. It does not seem that the Pahlavi attacks on Islam were the main issue. Rather, it was the confluence of a volatile economy, a population explosion, a flight of peasants into cities unprepared for them, the misfortune of an autocratic king who was secretly dying, and an incompetent president in the US who was caught between conflicting agendas.

Autocracy appears to be necessary in the modernizing process of a very feudal

culture. It takes force to centralize power and execute changes that would otherwise not happen. However, at some point, the autocrat must know when to let the power flow to an elected parliament, and this transfer should be done at a time of strength, not of weakness. Most diligent autocrats know this, (both Pahlavis spoke about this), but they do not recognize the right time to implement such a transfer. The only autocrat in recent time who has done so was the military dictator of Taiwan, who voluntarily transformed the country into a working democracy, and their democracy is healthy and vibrant. He did this when the economy and literacy rate were adequate to the task.

Finally, there is a serious cautionary element in this exploration of the Iranian Revolution and the dangers of the modernization process. Well-meaning intellectuals who plunge right into unstable modernizing states help create a monster that will eat them first. It happened in every major revolution in the 20th century (Mexican, Russian, Chinese, and Iranian) as well as in the French Revolution, the model for them all. There is truth in the saying that revolutions eat their young.

Modernizing states are complex, and it is too easy to turn on the very autocrat who brought the society to the point of viability. In the Iranian revolution, intellectuals allowed themselves to be deceived by Marxist opportunists, who themselves were deceived by a religious fascist, who would use them both and then exterminate them. Good intentions without solid historical knowledge can have unforeseen consequences that benefit only the next autocrat, and that autocrat may indeed be worse than the autocrat one replaced.

ENDNOTES

1. Abrahamian, 426-7 and Afkhami, 2-4. Both noted that the socio-economic development under the Pahlavis was not matched by equal political development, thereby leaving the socio-economic advances vulnerable to the Ayatollah's political monopoly.
2. O'Ballance, 34-35 and Irfani, an Islamic idealist who was shocked by the executions ordered by Khomeini. See pp 211-14 for a chapter on what Khomeini said for the record and what was done in actuality. See also Fischer, 219, who notes that by March 14, 1979, 68 people had already been executed and the Ayatollah responded to his critics that "criminals have no right to lawyers." See also Naraghi for an account of Islamic Justice during his three years of imprisonment and near-execution.
3. Zabih, *The Iranian Military*, 14-18 and Bani-Sadr, Chapter 6. Zabih provides the structure of the Iranian military before and after the revolution, and Bani-Sadr provides a warfront picture of the Iranian army's surprising performance in the Iran/Iraq war, despite the Ayatollah's hostility to the military.
4. Wright, 16.
5. Taheri, 296. Former editor-in-chief of *Kayhan*, his biography of the Ayatollah Khomeini provides useful tables and charts of the interlocking directorate of Shiite clergy.
6. Mackey, Wright, and Montaigne. Of these writers, Robin Wright has had the longest contact as a journalist-observer of Iran, but all of them note Iranian friendliness toward Americans and the love of American popular culture.
7. See Daneshvar for a typical Iranian's view that nothing happens in Iran without secret interference of the British, Russians, and Americans.
8. Parsons, 34, Parsons, the last British ambassador to Iran, and Radji, the last Iranian ambassador to the UK, were constantly confronted by the Shah to "do something" about the BBC.
See also Shawcross and Pahlavi (the Shah's last book) for insights into the Shah's suspicion of Great Britain.
9. Banani and Wilber, *Riza Shah Pahlavi and Iran Past and Present*. These three books provide the most thoughtful and encyclopedic coverage of Iran's modernization.
10. Alam. This very frank diary by the Shah's most important ministers and confidantes catalogues the foreign policy interests of the Shah. See also Bayne, a World Bank official who conducted interviews with the Shah over a long period regarding modernization and the responsibilities of a modern monarch.
11. Pahlavi. In all three of the Shah's books, it is clear that he saw himself as an important global player, which for a time, he was. See also Alam's day by day account of the global diplomatic scene in Iran.
12. See Stempel, 5, Bayne, 203, and Zabih (the Mossadegh Era) 25-27, for descriptions of Mossadegh's transformation from democrat to demagogic dictator.
13. Graham, 17-18. This author was the London Financial Times Middle East

Correspondent in Tehran from 1975-77 and his financial analysis is indispensable.

14. See Sullivan, Sick, and Huyser for first-hand accounts of policy conflicts and confusion in the White House and State Department.
15. Parsons, 144. Ambassador Parsons tried to warn the Shah of the unwisdom of this policy.
16. Mohammadi. This Iranian journalist and his British wife were the first to show how an underground press using hand duplicating machines and cassettes could cancel out an expensive state propaganda machine.
17. Bani-Sadr, 1-2. Bani-Sadr admits that Khomeini was "handled" in France. Reporters submitted questions in writing and the committee (Bani-Sadr and Khomeini said later: "In Paris, I found it expedient to say certain things. In Iran, I find it expedient to refute what I said, and I do so unreservedly.")
18. Afkhami, 94. He cites the three times the Shah had a crisis of nerve: in 1953, when the CIA helped to bail him out; in 1963, when Prime Minister Alam did it for him, and in 1978, when he refused to use force.
19. Taheri, 19. Taheri describes the Ayatollah's first cassette, which was designed for the "little people" whom the Shah had tried to teach how to live and the Ayatollah told how to die.
20. Mohaddessin, 20, and O'Ballance, xvii.
21. Wright, 24.
22. Ibid, 32.
23. Ibid, 35.

Selected Bibliography

- Abrahamian, Ervand. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Afkhami, Gholam R. *The Iranian Revolution: Thanatos on a National Scale*. Middle East Institute, Washington, DC 1985.
- Alam, Asodollah. *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1969-1977*. translated by Alinaghi Alikhani and Nicholas Vincent. St. Martin's Press, 1991.
- Banani, Amin. *Modernization of Iran: 1921-41*. Stanford University Press, 1961.
- Bani-Sadr, Abol Hassan. *My Turn to Speak: Iran, the Revolution & Secret Deals with the U.S.* Translated from the French by William Ford. Brassey's (US), Inc., 1991 (French edition 1989).
- Bayne, E. A. *Persian Kingship in Translation*. American Universities Field Staff, Inc., 1968.
- Brinton, Crane. *Anatomy of a Revolution*. Vintage Books, 1965.
- Daneshvar, Parviz. *Revolution In Iran*. St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996.
- Farman Farmaian, Sattareh. *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem Through the Islamic Revolution*. Crown Publishers, 1992.
- Fischer, Michael M. J. *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*. Harvard University Press, 1980
- Graham, Robert. *Iran: The Illusion of Power*. Croom Helm, London, 1978.
- Hoveyda, Fereydu. *The Fall of the Shah*. Wyndham Books, 1979.
- Huyser, Robert E. *Mission to Tehran*. Harper & Rowe, 1986.
- Irfani, Suroosh. *Iran's Islamic Revolution: Popular Liberation or Religious Dictatorship?* Zed Books Ltd., 1983.
- Mackey, Sandra. *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation, with a New Afterword by the Author*. A Plume Book (Penguin, first published 1996), 1998.
- Malek, Mohammed H. "Iran after Khomeini: Perpetual Crisis of Opportunity?" *Conflict Studies* 237: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, January 1991.
- Mohaddessin, Mohammad. *Islamic Fundamentalism: The New Global Threat*. Seven Locks, Press, 1993.
- Mohammadi, Annabelle Sreberny- and Ali. *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution*. University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Montaigne, Fen. "Iran: Testing the Waters of Reform." *National Geographic*, Vol.196, No. 1, July 1999, pp 1-33.
- Naipal, V.S. *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples*. New York, 1998.
- Naraghi, Ehsan. *From Palace to Prison: Inside the Iranian Revolution*. Translated from the French by Nilou Mobasser. Chicago, 1994.
- O'Ballance, Edgar. *Islamic Fundamentalist Terrorism, 1979-95*. NY University Press, 1997.
- Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. *Answer to History*. Stein and Day Publishers, 1980.
- See also the Shah's earlier books, *a Mission for my Country* and *The White Revolution*.
- Parsons, Anthony. *The Pride and the Fall: Iran 1974-1979*. London, 1984.
- Radji, Parviz C. *In the Service of the Peacock Throne: The Diaries of the Shah's Last Ambassador to London*. Hamish Hamilton: London, 1983.
- Shawcross, William. *The Shah's Last Ride: The Fate of an Ally*. NY, 1988.

Sick, Gary. All Fall Down. Random House, 1985.

Simpson, John. Inside Iran: Life Under Khomeini's Regime. St. Martin's Press, 1988.

Stempel, John D. Inside the Iranian Revolution, Indiana University Press, 1981.

Sullivan, William H. Mission to Iran, W. W. Norton & Co., 1981.

Taheri, Amir. The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini & the Islamic Revolution. Adler & Adler, 1986.

Wilber, Donald N. Riza Shah Pahlavi: the Resurrection and Reconstruction of Iran. Exposition Press, 1975.

Wilber, Donald N. Iran Past and Present: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic. Ninth Ed Princeton U Press, 1981.

Zabih, Sepehr. The Iranian Military in Revolution and War. Routledge, 1988.

Zabih, Sepehr. The Mossadegh Era: Roots of the Iranian Revolution. Lake View Press, 1982.

Zonis, Marvin. Majestic Failure: The Fall of the Shah, University of Chicago Press, 1991.