

An Island of Stability

*the Islamic Revolution of Iran
and the Dutch Opinion*

Mark Thiessen



An Island of Stability



Voor vader en moeder.

“Iran, because of the great leadership of the Shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world. This is a great tribute to you, your Majesty, and to your leadership, and to the respect and the admiration and love which your people give to you.”

Jimmy Carter

Mark Thiessen

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Introduction

On his way, through his very own “White Revolution”, to a modernized and powerful Iran, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran and King of Kings, envisioned his country being a “Great Civilization” by the end of the twentieth century. Since the 1960’s, when he started his program of modernization, Iran had transformed from a backward rural society to a confident and lively nation of change: a regional superpower on its way to the future, independent in its actions, though with powerful friends all over the world. In the West, Iran was seen to be an example for other third-world countries. A beacon of light in the troubled Middle East. But somewhere around 1978, something went wrong.

When the banners of Islam took over the streets of Tehran in the final months of 1978, it seemed the world was taken by surprise. Again, when Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed the Islamic Republic under his own rulership as *velayat-e faqih*, the West seemed astonished. Apparently, from its very beginning, the rise of the Iranian revolutionary movement and its leaders was misunderstood around the globe.

The Shah had seemed to sit securely on his Peacock Throne. Only a year earlier, he had spent New Year’s Eve with President Carter in Tehran, where he was lavished with praise.¹ Iran appeared as though it was steadily on its way to becoming a developed and modern country, in a region that was known for its instability. The process of liberalization was started in 1963, when the Shah introduced his “White Revolution”. Meant to bring Iran firmly into the twenty-first century, the program consisted of all kinds of reforms. These ranged from land reforms to the sale of state-owned businesses, and from electoral reforms including women’s suffrage to literacy programs.²

In the West, the Iranian socioeconomic policies appeared to be a great success. Partly owing to its revenues from oil exports, the Iranian economy was booming. This was evident in the growth of the Iranian Gross National Product, which rose from \$4.4 billion in 1961/1962 to \$68.0 billion in 1977/1978. The per capita income of Iranians multiplied tenfold between 1967 and 1977, from \$210 to \$2,220.³

However, the Shah’s reform policies were coupled with repression. In 1957, SAVAK, which functioned as the Shah’s secret police, was created. Their methods of repression included the torture of dissidents. Over the years many Iranians were imprisoned for political reasons. Through SAVAK, the Shah crushed the opposition.

1 William Shawcross, *The Shahs Last Ride: The fate of an ally* (New York, 1988) 21.

2 Donald L. Wilber, *Iran: Past and Present: From monarchy to Islamic republic* (Princeton, 1981) 155.

3 Wilber, *Iran: Past and Present*, 259

Moreover, the Shah did not yet allow Iran to develop into a full liberal democracy. On some occasions he even questioned whether this Western political system was suited for a nation like Iran.⁴

It was this mixture of change and repression that ultimately fuelled discontent and brought the Iranian people onto the streets. Like every other revolution, the Iranian revolution was clouded by the fog of war and anyone who tried to predict the outcome was likely to be wrong. With the web of different interests and groups characteristic of revolutionary times, it is hard to see clearly where a certain situation is going. Of course, this was also the case in Iran. Even during the final days the Shah himself could not imagine Iran without monarchy.⁵

The goal of this thesis will be threefold, amounting to the conclusion. First, I will examine the Iranian Revolution, specifically the aspects that created the situation in which it could take place. What made a broadly supported popular revolution possible in Iran at the end of the seventies? Next to this, we also need an understanding of the revolution itself, and the events that took place. Second, I will set out the ideology of Ayatollah Khomeini and take a look at his life up till the revolution. Before reaching iconic status during the revolution, Khomeini had already traveled a long road of religious study and political involvement. It is important to understand his studies and thoughts, in order to understand the nature and outcome of the Iranian Revolution itself. The most important questions for this part will be what Khomeini's thoughts on different subjects were throughout his life, who were his biggest inspirations and what were his influences, and finally how all this evolved into his defining ideology which gave birth to the Islamic Republic. Third, I will examine to what extent the Dutch mission in Tehran had knowledge of the developments in Iran. Where they, for example, early enough aware of the role played by Ayatollah Khomeini before and during the revolution? In what way did their view of the situation change along the way, as the revolution became unstoppable? And did they have any idea of what was about to happen to the Shah and the changes about to take place in the Iranian political system? In what way did they consider an Islamic Republic ultimately ruled by *velayat-e faqih*, in the person of Khomeini, as an option for the future, when the revolution was still going on? My choice for extensively trying to cover all three of these subjects was made after the study of literature and sources that I completed before writing this thesis. When trying to understand the response of the Dutch mission, these subjects are all intertwined. We should have sufficient knowledge ourselves about both the revolution and Khomeini, before we can see clearly in what manner the actions of the Dutch embassy should be regarded and judged. Then again, it is impossible to get an understanding of the revolution, without knowledge of Iranian recent history,

4 Michael D. Richards, *Revolutions in World History* (New York, 2004) 76.

5 William Shawcross, *The Shahs Last Ride: The fate of an ally* (New York, 1988) 20.

and impossible to understand the revolution without knowing something about the life and ideology of Khomeini. In short, it is my opinion that there is a direct relation between these three subjects, which makes it important to know more about all of them, to help understand the reaction of the Dutch mission and government.

To answer these questions and to get a general picture of the Dutch embassy in Tehran before and during the revolution, I have spent countless hours studying the archives of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague, where there is an extensive section on the subject of Iran during this period. Here, all the correspondence between The Hague and its embassies around the world regarding Iran is kept. Of course, the Dutch government through their embassies around the world kept a firm eye upon the situation in Iran and was seriously concerned about its oil interests in the region. Thus, developments in Iran were followed closely. For the other two parts, about the Revolution and Khomeini, I have made an extensive literary survey, to get an understanding of all the aspects regarding Iran's recent history, and these two subjects in particular. This also meant researching broader Islamic philosophy and the history of Islam itself.

Before answering the questions mentioned above, it is necessary to get an understanding of the Islamic revolution.⁶ Therefore, we have to take a close look at the history of Iran during the twentieth century, to see how the revolution could have happened. In the first chapter of this thesis the road to revolution will be the main subject.

Chapter two will take us to the Islamic ideology of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his career as a dissident. Also, I will try to set out how he based the new political system of Iran on his own ideology of *velayat-e faqih*. In chapter three we will take a look at the Islamic revolution itself. We will see how the small demonstrations snowballed into a broad popular revolt against the Shah and his regime. We will see what happened during the final months of 1978 and first months of 1979, when the revolutionary movement was able to topple the Shah, and we will take a look at the first period after the abdication of the Shah and the rise to power of the Islamic revolutionary movement. In the fourth and final chapter, I will present the outcome of my research regarding the Dutch embassy in Tehran and the way that the Dutch mission in Iran and other Dutch embassies around the world, have experienced the revolution, reported and evaluated it. Together with my study of the Islamic revolution, this will lead to the conclusion in the final pages of this thesis.

In the course of reading a number of Farsi or Arabic words will be used. These are explained in the thesaurus at the end of the thesis.

6 Since the Iranian Revolution of 1978/1979 is commonly known as the Islamic Revolution, this is the term I will use throughout this thesis from now on.

1 Iran in the Twentieth Century

1.1 Iran before 1953

Prelude to revolution

Revolutions never happen without proper reasons, often embedded in society for multiple generations and waiting to surface, and these reasons always have their origins in the recent history of a country. To get an understanding of why the Iranian people rose to revolt against the Shah and his regime, it is necessary to take a look at the Pahlavi rule of Iran throughout the twentieth century. To do this, I will shortly describe Iran's history in the period leading up to the Islamic Revolution in this chapter.

At the start of the twentieth century, Iran - which was by then still called Persia - was a country where the process of modernization on Western standards was still miles away. Technologically, the country lagged far behind the European nations. The dynasty of the Qajars was in control, and had been since the eighteenth century. They ruled a country that had no significant role on the world stage. This weakness forced the Qajars to allow a range of foreign influences into Iran. Thus, already in the beginning of the twentieth century many oil concessions were in the hands of the British and the Russians. The dynasty needed the funds brought by the Europeans to pay for Western-inspired reforms, often military, but also to ease their own hunger for luxury and excess. The actual governing of the country was largely in the hands of foreign mercenaries, who the Qajars paid a royal salary to make sure Iran was ruled well.⁷

Though the country was still largely backward, there had been some efforts to modernize Iran in the nineteenth century, starting with Amir Kabir, who was prime minister from 1848 till 1851. Amir Kabir realized the dangers of Iran's weak position and the ensuing foreign influence to the country's sovereignty. During his reign he forbade foreigners to hold land in Iran and halted all concessions. He strengthened the military, and set out for all kinds of other reforms, including educational and economic, and pushed for centralization. He was always cautious not to upset the religious establishment and gravely took in account Iran's ancient structures. At the end of his short reign, the dynasty started to fear his growing influence and power base, which eventually led to his assassination.⁸

After the death of Amir Kabir, foreign influence in Iran once again increased. This led to a series of revolts at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1891 a protest flared up against the recent concession to a British firm of the exclusive rights to

7 Robin Wright, *In the Name of God: The Khomeini Decade* (London 1989) 41.

8 M. Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century: a political history* (London 1989) 22-23.

the sale and import of tobacco. Public discontent, instigated by the political activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, fuelled a fatwa by the leading *ulema*. This led to a nationwide boycott of tobacco, and the Shah had to cancel the concession. The Tobacco Boycott showed the power of religious forces in mobilizing discontent, which would become even more important later on.⁹

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when foreign influence was again on the rise, anti-western sentiments rose up again. To curb the influence of foreign nations and companies in Iran, the *ulema* (Islamic clergy), intelligentsia and the powerful *bazuaris* (the bazaar merchants) forged a pact against the Qajar dynasty. They saw foreign presence as a danger to the ancient Iranian religious and social traditions and pleaded for extended rights for the people. Finally, these feelings of discontent led to a massive organized revolt in 1905, which was to be known as the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. For months, the country was paralyzed by strikes and demonstrations. Ultimately, the Qajars had to succumb to the pressure. In 1906 the first *majles* (parliament) was opened, and in 1907 the constitution, which was largely a copy of the Belgian one, was drafted.¹⁰

With the new constitution, personal rights and liberties were guaranteed, the monarch had to ask the *majles* for permission on all important subjects and all civilians had equal rights before the law. Unfortunately, this did not solve the existing problems or prevent new problems from rising. Though the *ulema* had played an important role during the Constitutional Revolution, they were unhappy with the outcome. They had wanted the *shari'a* to be the core of the new legal system, which eventually did not happen. Instead, parliament quickly started to secularize law and education. Though this led to a widespread sense of dissatisfaction among the *ulema*, there was no form of organized religious resistance, owing to their own divisions and their traditional reluctance to engage in politics. Moreover, the majority of religious leaders were convinced that the new reforms were a necessary evil in their battle against foreign influence.¹¹

They were about to find out that their reforms actually could not stop the growing pressures from abroad. From 1910 into the 1920's, foreign influence in Iran exploded. In 1911 the Russians invaded the country and closed down the *majles*. During the course of the First World War, Russian and British forces attacked the country once again. After 1918, Britain tried to turn Iran into a British protectorate. Ironically, this only failed after Iran called in the United States and the USSR for help. This painfully showed Iran's dependence on foreign powers and its lack of sovereignty. Iranians were no longer able to be in charge of their own country.¹² This was a problem that up till today is regarded as one of the biggest motors of resentment against the West in the Islamic world. The obvious power gap between Iran and the West resulted

9 Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 27.

10 Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: an interpretive history of modern Iran* (Yale, 1981) 73.

11 Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: a History of Fundamentalism* (New York 2000) 195.

12 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 197.

from time to time in anti-Western outbreaks, which also had a crucial role, at least on the surface, during the Islamic Revolution. The Iranians were not soon to forget that foreign powers had treated their country like a puppet in earlier times.

The widespread popular dissatisfaction over their weak national government and international position finally led to a new change of power. In 1921 a small group of high-ranking officials seized power. Part of this group was a young officer named Reza Khan. In 1923 he claimed power for himself and became prime minister. After this, he forced the Qajar monarch to abdicate and flee abroad. Finally, in 1925, the last step was made. He took the name Pahlavi, which means “Brave One”, and named himself the new Shah. With Reza Shah, Iran finally had a strong leader sitting on the Peacock Throne. Moreover, the new Shah had big plans for the future.¹³

Reza Shah was a proponent of what he called “modernization from above”. Even in 1925 Iran had not changed much economically. The country still was not modernized and government largely depended on foreign money for the execution of its policies. Reza Shah sought to change this and envisioned to turn his country into a strong and independent power on the world stage. Between 1925 and 1930 his program for modernization from above started. Taxes were used to construct railroads, the army was strengthened and modernized using British standards, bureaucracy was extended and its efficiency improved, education was brought into the hands of the state and the power of the *ulema* was contained through new legislation. The expansion of the army and the bureaucracy created new jobs and made a new generation of Iranian youth dependent on the government and the state. Through the heavily centralizing policies of Reza Shah in this period, urbanization finally started to take place. This in turn also created new jobs and employment options in the urban areas, which propelled the growth of the cities. The policies of the Shah were strongly nationalist, aimed at getting the entire country under his control. Iran had a history of unrest at its frontier areas, which were inhabited by tribal people as well as larger minorities such as the Kurds and Azeris. As one of the first rulers of Iran, Reza Shah succeeded in doing this, owing largely to the strong army he had created. With his rise to power, foreign influence in Iran was temporarily halted and curbed. The Shah no longer wanted to be subordinated by foreign governments and, being a leader with a strong power base especially in the army, he was able to draw back the influence of Western powers in Iran, though he never really succeeded in controlling the oil sector, which by that time had become very important.¹⁴

Reza Shah’s reign was also characterized by repression. Rebellious groups in society were often brutally marginalized or even destroyed. Despite his Western-inspired reforms, Iranian civilians knew few liberties. In some way or other, everything was ultimately controlled by the state. Moreover, modernization from above did not

13 Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (Yale 2003) 84-86.

14 Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 89-91.

solve all problems. New institutions were built on top of old rural foundations, and Iran's social structures failed to reform themselves. Reza Shah's reform policies can thus be typified as largely superficial. Differences between the small group of rich and westernized upper classes and the poor segments of society grew larger and larger.¹⁵ From the end of the twenties onwards Reza Shah felt strong enough to directly attack the traditionally powerful *ulema*. This contributed to the already growing sentiment of alienation felt by the Iranian population. Islamic law and religious taxes were secularized and brought under the control of the government in Tehran. This harsh process of secularization from above was very rigorous and often violent. The regime did not hesitate to lock up members of the clergy, or banish and even kill them.¹⁶ These developments in Iran gave the Islamic world a new negative image of secularization, which, as in Egypt and Turkey, was often forced from above. In general, Reza Shah showed some remarkable similarities with Kemal Atatürk, who had ruled Turkey since 1920. Their drive for modernization, secularizing policies and their own personal histories had much in common.

Reza Shah's reign abruptly came to an end during the Second World War. Due to his pro-German attitude, the Shah was forced out of power by the British, who saw their oil supplies endangered, and replaced with his 25-year old son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. However, his lack of experience and power base meant that the new Shah was not able to maintain complete control over the country, and this contributed to the rise of old and new opposition groups. The *ulema* regained their important role, and new political groups like the communist Tudeh and the liberal National Front of Mohammad Mossadeq became increasingly influential.¹⁷

The power shift also provided the Western powers with a new opportunity to increase their hold on Iran. This time, the U.S. and the Soviet Union were the main countries vying for interests in Iran. Once again, strong anti-Western sentiments rose. In 1951, the liberal Mohammad Mossadeq took hold of power when he was elected prime minister by the *majles*. Mossadeqs' policy of nationalization made him widely popular with the Iranians. His aim was to rid Iranian industry from Western interests and influence, who in his eyes were robbing the Iranian people of their valuable riches and raw materials. It was precisely this policy of nationalization that led to Mossadeq gaining powerful enemies abroad. In 1953, the Shah was, through a C.I.A.-backed coup, able to oust Mossadeq from power and regain a bigger role for himself. Remarkably, the coup was widely supported by the clergy - led by the political activist Ayatollah Kashani, and concerned about the secularizing politics of the Mossadeq government. The coup returned the majority of power back into the hands of the new Shah.¹⁸

15 **Armstrong**, *The Battle for God*, 227-227.

16 **Wright**, *In the Name of God*, 43.

17 **Armstrong**, *The Battle for God*, 229.

18 **Keddie**, *Modern Iran*, 124-130.

Thus, around 1955 a new situation had risen in which the Shah was once again the most powerful person in the country. After a turbulent period, in which the first Pahlavi Shah had tried to modernize the country and was deposed during World War II for his German sympathies, another Pahlavi was once again on the throne. Mohammad Reza had the same dreams and goals as his father, and even wanted to realize them by the same means. Iran had to become a modern nation, shaped by Western mold.

1.2 Modernization and its consequences

The White Revolution

Like his father, Mohammad Reza strongly believed in modernization from above. Sometimes his methods seemed to be even more ruthless than his predecessor's. Unlike his father, the new Shah was not hesitant in welcoming foreign powers to Iran. He made the U.S. a strategic partner and used foreign funds to finance his modernization program. Over the years, the U.S. would supply Iran with loads of arms deliveries.¹⁹ His program of modernization-from-above took full swing after the start of the Shah's White Revolution in 1963, also known as the Shah-People Revolution. Mohammad Reza had a vision of Iran becoming a top-5 world power by the end of the twentieth century. The White Revolution was his first step towards reaching this goal. Its aim was to transform the traditional rural Iranian society into a modern one, based on Western standards. Another reason for the reforms of the White Revolution was the Shah's dependence on the West, and the U.S. in particular. The Shah was under pressure from the Kennedy administration to pursue a more liberal policy. Kennedy insisted on social, economic and political reforms, some of which the Shah tried to enforce through his White Revolution.²⁰

His reforms had a wide range, and it is hard to place them in a specific ideological context. They were a mixture of socialist reforms and more liberal ones. The Shah established a form of state capitalism, with 5-year plans and an emphasis on heavy industry. He introduced increased profit sharing for the workforces, which he hoped would lead to a more evenly distributed per capita income. Other important reforms were his agricultural and land reforms, the introduction of a literacy corps and women's suffrage. These reforms were welcomed enthusiastically in the West and they seemed to confirm the image of the Shah as an enlightened ruler, who was placing his country firmly on the road to a modern and democratic future.²¹

Despite the image he had in the West, the Shah was never mysterious about the way he sought to transform his country. His emphasis on strong government and modernization from above meant that he tried to rule by decree to avoid the *majles*, although this was technically unconstitutional. This symbolized his ambivalence to-

19 Richards, *Revolutions in World History*, 76.

20 Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 192.

21 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 244.

wards Western culture. Whereas he had great admiration for Western technology and geopolitics, he still had a passion for Iranian values and traditions. He knew that his countries' relative backwardness and his drive for modernization could be conflicting. Therefore, what Iran needed was an authoritarian leader who could modernize the nation from above, as his father had tried. The Shah made his point very clear in an interview with the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci:

“Believe me, when three quarters of a nation doesn’t know how to read or write, you can provide for reforms only by the strictest authoritarianism – otherwise you get nowhere. If I hadn’t been harsh, I wouldn’t even have been able to carry out agrarian reform and my whole reform programme would have stalemated.”²²

The first aspect of the White Revolution was a vast land reform program, aimed at tackling the semi-feudal Iranian system of land ownership. In the first phase of the land reform program, landlords who owned more than one village were forced to sell the rest of their holdings to peasants. They had a choice of keeping one specific village or the “equivalent” of one village. This resulted in a greater share of small landlords. These new landlords quickly began to invest in their new holdings, by buying new equipment and improving their land. A great deal of Western equipment was bought and the farmers used Western techniques to irrigate their lands, instead of the traditional Iranian techniques they had used for centuries. The fact that the bulk of Iranian agricultural land was not fit for these Western techniques resulted in land no longer being cultivable after several years. Also, the use of heavy tractors for plowing destroyed parts of the fertile Iranian topsoil. Despite these problems, Western imports were often subsidized heavily by the government, with its preference for state of the art Western technology.²³

A big segment of the Iranian landowners consisted of *ulema*. Owing to the White Revolution, some of them lost a big part of their holdings, and this created great feelings of discontent against the regime. The *ulema* were not very pleased with this revolutionary uprooting of the traditional Iranian agricultural system. They rejected the land reform bill on three grounds. The *ulema* denied the claim that their system of land ownership was feudal, they rallied against the Shah’s opinion that the new land reform represented progress, since in their minds it would only cause social and economic dislocation, and they attacked the land reform program because it was unconstitutional and therefore illegal, in conflict with both Iranian and Islamic law. The land reform program caused the traditional, mainly religious, elite of Iran to regard the Shah as a negative force for change.²⁴

22 Robert Graham, *Iran: The illusion of power* (London, 1978), 58.

23 Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 149-151.

24 Ali M. Ansari, *The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, ‘Modernization’ and the consolidation of power in Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 37, nr. 3 (July 2001) 9.

Owing partly to the discontent of the rural elite, the subsequent phases of the land reform program were less revolutionary, and aimed more at revising the older system than at dramatically changing it. This made sure that the old landowners that were not included in the first phase were able to hold on to their holdings, and fewer peasants were able to buy their own piece of land, which resulted in migration to the cities. The emphasis of the program shifted from equal distribution of agricultural land, with a preference for small landownership, to big agribusiness-like enterprises. This constituted a big shift in policy. These new farm corporations were run by specialists in the service of the Iranian government, and they were generally disliked by the peasants that they employed, who were paid very badly in comparison to the specialists. Especially the poorer part of the peasantry was hit hard. The government spent huge amounts of money on equipment for the corporations, but never seemed to be able to make the agribusiness industry profitable.²⁵

The modernization of Iran also meant a heavy emphasis on industry. A big program of investment in heavy industry was started in the 1960's and this was represented in a sequence of Three and Five Year Development Plans throughout the sixties and seventies. A bulk of equipment for the construction of factories and the production of goods were imported from the West. By 1975 the Shah was importing so much that ships carrying his imports had to wait for 160 days before they could unload their goods, and once they were unloaded there was no place to warehouse them. The Shah was able to buy these amounts of imports because of the spectacular rise in oil prices, which quintupled from 1973 to 1975.²⁶

The emphasis of the industrial program was on large projects, like the automobile industry. With his preference for huge prestigious projects such as these, the Shah neglected small enterprises by regular people, who often had to turn to the bazaar for credit. The *bazaaris* in turn were threatened by the big American-style supermarkets that were built and the continuing import of Western consumption goods. In this way another traditionally very powerful segment of Iranian society was put under pressure by the ruler. The Shah intended to curb the powerful role the *bazaaris* had in Iranian society, and also sought to crush their role as credit suppliers by strengthening the banking system.²⁷

The impact of oil money was felt on different levels. Although it gave the Shah the opportunity to invest huge sums of money into the Iranian economy, the effects were not all positive. The money the Shah spent on weapons was outrageous, and with this in mind it is not very strange that the West regarded him as an ally. The money that the West had to pay the Shah for oil almost invariably returned into their pockets by his purchase of arms and other imports. In general, foreign investment in Iran was

25 Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 164-165.

26 Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 199.

27 Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 199-200.

much smaller than the amount of foreign goods that were imported. The influx of oil money encouraged waste, corruption, inflation and inefficiency in the spending of government funds.

Corruption was becoming a big problem in Iran by the seventies. Because of the huge sums that Iran received for its oil exports, there was no need for a stringent taxation policy. Taxation at the higher levels of society and in industry was kept at a low rate, in order to encourage multinationals to invest in Iran. Income tax was regressive and generally low, which contributed to a lack of equal income distribution. Wealth was concentrated at the higher echelons. The emphasis on the production of modern expensive consumer goods in combination with the unequal income distribution meant that goods produced by the subsidized heavy industry were only available for a very small market of rich consumers. The needs of ordinary Iranians were neglected. Small businesses often found it hard to sustain themselves because of the above-mentioned reluctance of supplying them with loans, the system of taxation and the import of foreign goods. Adding to this preferential policy for Western style industries and the income inequality, was the high rate of unemployment and bad wages. In the government-supported industries, foreigners filled a big part of the vacancies. Western employees with high wages were resented for their salaries. Moreover, Afghans were often hired for the more simple jobs, and these poor workers depressed wages even more. Small businessmen were unable to hire more personnel, because of their difficulties in finding credit. Thus, by the start of the revolution there was a huge difference in income between big segments of Iranian society. As the rich got significantly richer, the poor also profited from the influx of oil money into Iran, although not enough to get close to European standards or the standards of their own wealthy Iranian elite.²⁸

The Shah used economic controls as a means of keeping people close to him and attaining their loyalty. The system under the Shah was very much like a patronage system. While the upper class was dependent on the Shah for receiving his favors concerning jobs and permits, the middle class, for a big part, were also dependent on him. The salaried middle class in Iran by 1977 consisted of 630,000 people, of whom 512,645 were employed by the state. In this way the Shah secured loyalty of his people by attempting to associate Iranians economically to the state.²⁹

Politically, the Iranians did not have much to say. Modernization was checked at the political area. In the early 1960's the Shah supported a new party, Iran Novin, and, needless to say, this was the party that held power in the *majles*. Its leader was Amir Abbas Hoveyda, who served as prime minister from 1965 to 1977. In effect, his task was only to make sure that the Shah's will was carried out correctly. The Shah ruled by decree during this entire period. In 1975 he decided to merge all political parties, including Iran Novin, into the new *Rastakhi* (which meant resurgence) party, provid-

28 Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 157-163.

29 Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 198.

ing Iran with a one-party system. This party was also to be headed by Hoveyda. Membership of the Rastakhiz party was required for most jobs in government or education. This move to a one party system and the general feeling of being left out of politics was added to the resentment of the Iranian people during the seventies.³⁰

Another form of control over his civilians was formed by the SAVAK, the Shah's secret police. They were involved in the arrest, beatings and torture of dissidents and were responsible in general for most of the repression directed against the people. This internal security force was of very big importance to the Shah, which is underlined by the 2.65 billion dollar he invested in SAVAK from 1973 to 1978. Through its terrorizing of the opposition, SAVAK was feared and especially hated and became a symbol of the darker side of the Shah's reign for long after the revolution. His foreign allies often neglected this repression of the Iranian people through the Shah's secret police. Their loyal allegiance to the Shah, despite of his brutal repressive tactics, did not improve their popularity among the population. In the eyes of the Iranian people, the Western countries were two-faced in their propagation of human rights. This added to the feelings of resentment and the aggressive anti-foreign stance of a significant part of the Iranians during and after the revolution.³¹ Throughout the period of the White Revolution there was also a move towards massive urbanization. Especially in the last decade before the revolution, people started to move from the countryside to the cities. Between 1968 and 1978, the urban population in Iran rose from 38% to 47% and the population of Tehran almost doubled in the same period. These new urban residents often found themselves living in poor conditions in the poorer quarters on the edge of the city, and had trouble finding steady jobs. Within the cities a new division became apparent, with the richer classes moving away from the poorer segments. This is still visible in Tehran, with the upper class residing in the upper north of the city and the less fortunate in the southern parts. This also meant a split between traditional and more modern parts of the city, which in turn caused much of misunderstanding of and animosity against the rich among the lower classes.³²

An important effect of the urbanization was its contribution to a sense of alienation from the old world that was felt throughout Iranian society. With the high pace of modernization that the Shah had set for his country, many Iranians found it difficult to adjust to the range of changes that they were forced to go through. They felt like the roots of their existence were being pulled out from underneath them. Like Karen Armstrong described very accurately, for Iranians "the familiar world had grown unfamiliar: it was itself, and yet not itself, like a close friend whose appearance and personality have been disfigured by illness." The Iranians were caught between two very different worlds: a traditional one, and a modern one. An important aspect of this feeling of alienation was the influx of Western influences into Iran, like the

30 Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 166.

31 Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 197.

32 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 245.

Western model of education, the wide range of imports and the decadent Western-style behavior of the Iranian elite. The Iranian philosopher Ahmed Fardid with the term *gharb-zadegi*, which meant something like “West-toxication”, put this dilemma into words. The foreign influences were thus seen as a disease poisoning Iranian culture, something they had to get rid of. As a reaction, people clung to the old things they still had left, like religion and the mosque. The repression of religious political activity by the Shah thus also added to the uprooting of Iranian society. This cleared the ground for the rise of Khomeini in the sixties and seventies.³³

Thus, in the Iran of 1978 there were numerous problems facing the country. There was widespread corruption; repression by the government; high inflation; a big dependence on oil money; an inefficient system of state capitalism; foreign influences that were perceived as hostile to Iranian culture; very little political rights for civilians; massive urbanization; huge income inequalities; an elite that was showing extremely decadent behavior; traditionally powerful groups that felt threatened in their positions; and the uprooting of old traditional ways of living. All this added to a great sense of dissatisfaction among a big part of Iranian society, which would ultimately lead to the Islamic Revolution, but first of all to the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini. His ideology was extremely well suited for canalizing all the negative feelings that Iranians experienced in day to day life, and, whether the Western world noticed it or not, they flocked to his message en masse.

33 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 245-246.

2 *Shiite Political Ideology*

2.1 *Islam and the State: Khomeini's predecessors*

To fully understand the way the Islamic revolution took place and how the state evolved into the Islamic Republic of Iran in the eighties, one has to take a look at the thoughts of its founding father, ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was also the spiritual leader of the Islamic Revolution and the inspirational force for many Iranians during these years. In this chapter we will take a look at his life, thoughts and ideology. What exactly was this ideology, where did it come from, and when were his thoughts about Islamic government and the governance of the Islamic jurist, *velayat-e faqih*, becoming clear?

Antiquity and early Islam

To find the roots of Khomeini's thoughts on politics and religion, we have to go back to ancient history. The Islamic world has a strong sense of consciousness of its own past. There is no reluctance to go back centuries in order to find a connection with the present. This also means that the Islamic world can be very sensitive when it comes to allusions to this past. Islamic rhetoric often uses historical examples as positive or negative precedents for the present, and these examples can have a very powerful influence on people's behavior. This too was the case in the Islamic Revolution of Iran.³⁴

The Islamic philosophical tradition was heavily influenced by ancient Greek philosophy. Khomeini too was inspired by the Greek. His *velayat-e faqih* can be traced back to Plato's Republic, where the writer pleads for a wise and virtuous leader to help the community reach a higher level.³⁵ In the Islamic context, the leader is part of the clergy, whereas Plato's leader is an enlightened philosopher. The Islamic tradition, inspired by Greek philosophy, believes that the individual can only reach full potential in a society that strives for the highest common purpose. The leader of the community shouldn't only be the best and wisest of them all; he also has to be morally superior to the rest. An important difference between the two is the fact that while with Plato the leader was only limited by objective truth, in the Islamic case limitations can only come from the divine law, which is the *shari'a*.³⁶

34 Bernard Lewis, *The crisis of Islam: Holy war and unholy terror* (London, 2003) xviii-xxii.

35 This goes back to early Islamic literature, for example the work of Al-Farabi. It is not clear whether Khomeini was directly influenced by Plato, or by his Islamic predecessors, although he does mention the Greek Philosopher in his works.

36 Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (London 2000) 34-35.

Although Islam shares common elements with the Christian tradition, there are some important differences too. One of these is the separation of church and state. An idea of the separation of the worldly and the divine, like we have seen coming up in European history, is not present in Islam. This difference dates back to the birth of both religions, and the way they were founded and exported. Christianity started out as a religion of the lower classes, until after a few centuries the Roman emperor Constantine became a Christian. Thus, Christianity only found itself protected by a powerful worldly ruler after hundreds of years after its birth. Within Islam, on the contrary, this lack of worldly protection was never the case, except for a couple of years after Mohammad's vision of the archangel Gabriel. During his own lifetime, the prophet succeeded in creating not only a religious following, but also a worldly empire reaching across the Arab peninsula. Mohammad ruled his people as the highest religious as well as worldly authority. He enacted and executed laws, was engaged in warfare, and ruled the newly conquered Islamic territories as an empire. In this case the prophet was not a carpenter, but head of state: the state of Islam. His successors, the caliphs, inherited the same position. In this respect, Islam has always been connected with politics, contrary to Christianity. Later on, Khomeini himself said: "Islam is politics, or it is nothing."³⁷

Khomeini's idea of *velayat-e faqih* thus can be seen in a tradition of combined political and religious authority over a community, the muslim *ummah*. His interpretation, though, was not shared or approved by all of the Shiite clergy.

Nineteenth century

In the nineteenth century it became painfully evident that the Islamic world was lagging far behind the West in all kinds of respects. Technologically, the countries of the West were superior, and this gave them the opportunity to enforce their will upon the weaker Islamic nations and peoples. While the Christian nations had made a huge effort to reach the same technological level as their Islamic and Chinese counterparts, eventually surpassing them and everyone else in the world somewhere around the eighteenth century, change seemed to be stopped in the Islamic world around the same period. In the nineteenth century, the differences between the Christian and Islamic territories became so big that everywhere in the Islamic world the Western power was felt. In a reaction to this, the nineteenth century saw the first wave of Islamic thinkers who tried to modernise Islam, in a way to be able to fight back Western imperialism.

One of them was the before mentioned Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1898), leader of the Tobacco Boycott. Al-Afghani saw the importance that innovation and originality had played in the rise of the West, and that the only way muslims reacted to this was by trying to modernise their societies through imitation. Al-Afghani resented this lack of originality, and was convinced that muslims would find success, if they only tried to modernise following their own ways. He was afraid of the destruction

37 Lewis, *The crisis of Islam*, 5-7.

of Islamic culture by means of modernisation along Western lines. He wanted to find a rational, all encompassing Islam that hailed and promoted science and thus would help Muslims on their way to a more modern world. Al-Afghani and his followers were pan-Islamic and very activist. Their goal was to convince their fellow believers of the necessity of change within Islam, in order to be able to successfully confront Western imperialism. Unfortunately, the balance between Western scientific emphasis and Islamic religion and culture was very hard to find, and Al-Afghani lacked a detailed program or ideology to make his efforts of reform work. Khomeini borrowed the idea of a strong, modernised Islam that was capable in itself to repel foreign influences, from Al-Afghani.³⁸

One of Al-Afghani's students was Rashid Rida (1865-1935). Rida saw the *shari'a* as the guideline for human behaviour, and wanted to strictly follow its laws. He also noted that the *shari'a*, written in the seventh century, was not fit to cover all the areas and aspects of modern life. In this respect, Rida envisioned a role for a modernised version of the old idea of *ijma'*, which means consensus of the *ummah*. The ruler or *caliph*, being a great spiritual and religious leader (*mujtahid*) and having a perfect and independent knowledge of Islamic law (*ijtihad*), had to issue new laws to add to the areas that were not covered by the *shari'a*, and had to make sure that these laws were followed by the *ummah*. For this task, he had to be assisted by the most learned *ulema*. In this way there would finally be real Islamic government that would be capable of merging Islam with the modern world. These thoughts of the Sunnite Rida have influenced Khomeini's later works on *velayat-e faqih*, and Rida is even mentioned in *Islamic Government*.³⁹

Another cleric that had profound influence on Khomeini's ideology was Sheik Fazlullah Nuri (1843-1909). This Persian *mujtahid* and Iranian hero had a strong belief in constitutionalism, but only when according to the laws of Islam. In his mind, parliamentary legislation was illegitimate, because it undermined the *shari'a*. The *shari'a* itself should function as the constitution. Nuri was one of the first to see the dangers the new *majles* meant for the clergy in the beginning of the twentieth century. Ignoring the *majles*, he saw the *mujtahids* as the legitimate substitutes of the Twelfth Imam⁴⁰ on earth, and they were supposed to be the ones making the laws that the community should live by. Because of Nuri's continuing objection against the *majles*, the constitution was altered during the end of his lifetime. There was to be a council of five *ulema* that had the right to veto the legislation passed by the *majles*, when it contradicted the *shari'a*. This was resembled by Khomeini with the Guardian Council, and also with

38 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 156-158.

39 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 102-103.

40 The Twelfth Imam is seen by Shiites as the saviour of the world. He is supposed to be hidden, and Shiites await his return.

the position of *faqih* as highest source of authority. In his lifetime, Nuri belonged to a minority of politically active and radical clerics. In this respect also, he was an example to Khomeini.⁴¹

Twentieth Century

Apart from Khomeini, there were more twentieth century Islamic clerics who tried to reform Islam by its own traditions, to create an Islamic version of modernity. Islamic fundamentalism blossomed in the nineteen hundreds, especially following World War II. This can be explained by the fact that the muslim world was not sufficiently modernised in the period before WWII. Politically, religiously, socially and technologically it was lagging far behind the West. Religious fundamentalism can be seen as a reaction against modern forces, and thus it can reach full potential in a society that first comes into touch with modernity. Khomeini and his twentieth century compatriots were a result of their traditional rural societies coming into touch with modern times.

One of the most important Islamic fundamentalist thinkers of the twentieth century was Hassan Al-Banna (1906-1949). Al-Banna was an Egyptian teacher who had had religious schooling at an Islamic *madrassah*. He realised early on that the people were in a state of confusion owing to the beginning modernisation and the arrival of Western influences in their traditional societies. The *ulema* were not able to help them because they did not want to involve themselves in the changing world, creating a distance between them and the regular religious people. Al-Banna wanted to make the *ummah* strong again by making it conscious of its own Islamic culture and identity. He believed that Islam as an all-embracing ideology, integrated in all aspects of life, could revive the muslim world, and return it to the powerful position it had had centuries ago. To help the *ummah* reach this goal, he founded "The Society of the Muslim Brothers" in 1928, also known as the Muslim Brotherhood, or just the Brotherhood. At his time of death the Brotherhood had 2000 chapters in Egypt, which represented some 300.000 to 600.000 Brothers and Sisters. Al-Banna wanted to interpret and use the Quran by the standards of his own time. This led him to strongly believe in unity of Islamic nations, social equality and justice, a battle against illiteracy and poverty, and a final liberation of Islam out of the hands of foreign powers and influences. Although he did not think of his movement as violent and radical, and never meant it to be like that, some groups within the Brotherhood were extremely activist. At the end of Al-Banna's life the Brotherhood became increasingly militant and was increasingly involved in attacks on British and Israeli targets, as well as in several plots for bringing down the government. Eventually, Egyptian government agents killed Al-Banna in 1949.⁴² Even today the Muslim Brotherhood is a very important factor in Egyptian politics and society, with a strong hold on a significant number of Egyptians through their networks of health care, education, charity and religion.

41 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 196.

42 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 218-222.

Roughly around the same time a similar movement was started in Shiite Iran. Mojtaba Navvab Safavi (1924-1956) was the founder of the *Fedayeen-e Islam*, a movement that would have a significant role in Iranian politics and the future revolutionary movements, within his own lifetime and after. His movement had a profound influence on the Islamic character of the revolution and Khomeini himself felt committed to Safavi's ideology. Moreover, a number of Iranian politicians and statesmen of post-revolutionary times up till now, have a past within the *Fedayeen*-movement. In Iran, Safavi was one of the founders of the idea of an Islamic state and Islamic form of government.⁴³

Safavi radicalised at an early stage of his life, and ventured his rage against the secularist policies of the Shah. He regarded Iranian clerics who discarded a form of Islamic government guided by the *shari'a*, as apostates of Islam. Safavi was extremely activist and militant, with an extremely fundamentalist ideology. This became very clear in 1945, when he tried to assassinate the highly influential Ahmad Kasravi. Kasravi was a former cleric turned secularist judge, who now pleaded for a drastic reformation of Islam. Although Safavi's attempt on his life failed, some of his supporters succeeded in killing Kasravi the following year. After being imprisoned for a short period, Safavi decided to found the *Fedayeen-e Islam* in 1946.⁴⁴

Safavi's primary goal was to force back the process of secularization that was started by the Shah, and to bring back Islamic values and law as the highest authority, where he believed they belonged. His ideology was strictly doctrinarian and stripped of all non-Islamic influences. The state should be moulded precisely as stipulated in holy Islamic scripture. In effect, this meant a return to seventh century Arab tradition. Safavi strongly resisted any kind of foreign influence. In this case too, resistance could be violent, as he felt legitimated to defend Islamic culture. Safavi believed that the Islamic state should be responsible for the supplying of basic needs for its citizens, and for social equality and justice. To achieve these goals, the raising of the Islamic taxes of *zakat* (income tax), *kharaj* (land tax), and *jaziyeh* (tax for non-muslims) should be sufficient. Furthermore, he counted on the voluntary contributions of sincere muslims to their society.⁴⁵

The *Fedayeen-e Islam* found protection in the hands of Ayatollah Kashani, one of the most important Iranian clerics. Kashani loved to get involved in national political issues, which at that time was a very rare quality among the *ulema*, who preferred to distance themselves from meddling in political issues. In the fifties the *Fedayeen* became increasingly radical and committed a string of violent attacks on, in their eyes, anti-Islamic targets. In 1951 they succeeded in assassinating the Iranian Prime Minister Razmari, who tried to obstruct the nationalization of the oil industry. After

43 Sohrab Behdad, 'Utopia of Assassins: Navvab Safavi and the Fada'ian-e Eslam in Prerevolutionary Iran' in Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity* (Oxford 2004), 71.

44 Behdad, *Utopia of Assassins*, 75.

45 Ali Rahnema & Farhad Nomani, 'Competing Shi'i Subsystems in Contemporary Iran' in Saeed Rahnema & Sohrab Behdad, *Iran After the Revolution: Crisis of an Islamic State* (London 1995), 80-82.

a new brief encounter with the Iranian penitentiary system, Safavi had some contacts with the Shah regime for a while. The Shah had come to power again after the coupe against Mossadegh, which was helped by a broad revolt of the clergy led by Ayatollah Kashani. After a short while though, Safavi again became disillusioned with the new government and started a campaign of resistance with his *Fedayeen*. However, since his recent rise to power, the Shah had become increasingly powerful, and was able to repress the groups in society that tried to oppose him. In 1956 the leaders of the *Fedayeen*, including the 32-year old Safavi, were arrested and executed. This meant the end of the *Fedayeen* as an organised society.⁴⁶

The movement enjoyed some popularity among the poor lower classes of Iran, and would continue to have an influence on important revolutionary groups. Moreover, as one of the first organised movements it had expressed a vibrant desire in Iranian society to return and hold on to old Islamic traditions and values. This desire would later on strongly influence the Islamic character of the Islamic revolution.⁴⁷ Many of Safavi's followers would later unite in Khomeini's *Heyatha-ye Motalefeh-ye Islami*, which continued the militant tradition of the *Fedayeen* in the sixties and seventies.⁴⁸ From the fifties on, there were more Iranians who tried to reconcile political Islam with modernity. In this time, communism was an ideology that enjoyed support among people who wanted to find an alternative for Western European or American capitalism. The most important Iranian who tried to merge Islam with socialism and managed to create a large support for his ideas, was Ali Shariati (1933-1977). Shariati is seen as the ideological father of the Islamic revolution.⁴⁹

Shariati was an intellectual who was strongly influenced by and had good knowledge of Western ideas. He was a layman and received his knowledge of Islam through years of self-study. Because Shariati was his own teacher, he developed a unique interpretation of the holy Islamic scriptures. In Islam, Shariati saw the possibility to solve the worldwide problem of inequality between the classes. His thoughts relied on Western thinkers like Marx, Voltaire and Sartre. His ideology became a mixture of European socialism and Shiite Islam.⁵⁰

Shariati regarded Imam Ali as the perfect ruler⁵¹, and the society that was ruled by him should be seen as an example for the world to follow. It was the true Islamic society, as meant by the holy books. When the right path of Islam was taken, it would make sure that class and power structures would transform themselves. This would help improve the economic, social and political position of the *mostaz'afin* (dispossessed) against the *mostakberin* (possessors). The Islamic state would thus help achieve to reach a solution to the problem of class conflict that would finally result in social equality and justice. This notion of class struggle between the *mostaz'afin* and *mostak-*

46 Behdad, *Utopia of Assassins*, 77-81.

47 Behdad, *Utopia of Assassin*, 71-72.

48 Rahnema & Nomani, 'Competing Shi'i Subsystems in Contemporary Iran', 82-83.

49 Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (Londen 1998), ix.

50 Rahnema & Nomani, *Competing Shi'i Subsystems in Contemporary Iran*, 74.

51 Imam Ali was the son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad and the first Shiite Imam.

berin was heavily influenced by Marxist ideology. Later on, Khomeini used Shariati's terminology of *mostaz'afin* and *mostakberin* in his speeches and texts, to point out the differences between the poor and rich in Iran and create a division between his supporters and the regime. Shariati was strongly anti-imperialist, and thus against foreign influences in Iran, he had a believe in free will of the individual and collective responsibility of the community to combat suppression and injustice. He believed in the priority of moral values over materialism, in involvement of citizens in politics and activism, and together with al this he laid a heavy emphasis on revolution and revolutionary justice. Moreover, he was anti-capitalist and thought that democracy and capitalism fundamentally excluded each other. He was against exploitation and private property, and wanted to force equal income distribution from state-level and thought that Islam could play an important part in this process. He also saw that Islam should be purified, and needed a return to its roots and basic principles. Shariati envisioned an Islamic reformation, like the Christian one in the sixteenth century. Very important was his idea about the role of Islam in politics. He wanted Islam to be actively involved in politics and despised the traditional political inactivity that the clergy had displayed for centuries. In his eyes, the silence of the *ulema* was an indirect approval of all the social injustice in Iran.⁵²

In the sixties and seventies Shariati succeeded in influencing an entire generation of young Iranian muslims, and created a huge base of support. Although after the revolution his ideology was to be seen as a deviation of Islam by the new rulers, his ideas were partly incorporated by Khomeini in his own ideology. After the death of Khomeini Shariati was in fact rehabilitated and his Islamic ideology again rose in importance, also with the political elite. Some of the youth he had influenced in the seventies had reached the higher echelons of Iranian society and returned to the teachings of their old master.⁵³

2.2 Khomeini, 1902-1961

Youth

Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini was born on the 28th of august 1902, in the small town of Khomein, 200 kilometres southwest of Tehran. His father was a local religious leader, and was killed when little Ruhollah was only six months old. Early on in his long career as a student, Khomeini showed that he possessed a more than average intelligence. His life can be split into two parts. The first, his time of training and study for becoming a *mujtahid*, which was up till the beginning of the 1960's. And the second, starting with his political activities and eventual banishment to Iraq in the beginning

52 Rahnema & Nomani, *Competing Shi'i Subsystems in Contemporary Iran*, 75-76.

53 Rahnema & Nomani, *Competing Shi'i Subsystems in Contemporary Iran*, 78.

of the sixties, to the revolution and his years as supreme leader. With his new ideas concerning the Islamic state and his activist engagement in politics, he would change his own country, the Islamic *ummah*, and the rest of the world indefinitely.⁵⁴

Because of his fathers' early death, Khomeini was raised by his mother and aunt. In his younger years he frequented a couple of religious schools, before his individual teaching by local clergy started. By the time he was sixteen, both his mother and aunt had passed away. Khomeini remained in his hometown for some time, and was being taken care of by other members of his family. Only at the age of nineteen did he leave Khomein to pursue his education in Arak, an important religious town.

55

This was where he first met Sheik Abd al-Karim Ha'iri Yazdi. Ha'iri was an important *marja-e taqlid*: a cleric of the highest rank, meaning source of imitation. At any given time in Iran, there were only several *marjas*. Ha'iri was to become Khomeini's most important mentor in the coming sixteen years. He was renowned for his great knowledge of Islam, but also for his fundamental rejection of clerical engagement in politics. While it was normal for an Iranian cleric in the first half of the twentieth century not to involve himself with political activities, Ha'iri was one of the staunchest supporters of political inactivity for *ulema*. Even during the turbulent years of the Constitutional Revolution and the rise of Reza Shah, Ha'iri managed to stay out of the most pressing political subjects.⁵⁶

Khomeini's stay in Arak would not last very long. His teacher Ha'iri invited him in 1921 to join him in moving to Qum. In the nineteenth century, Qum was one of the most important seminaries in Iran, but by the time Khomeini arrived it had lost most of its significance. It was only after the arrival of Ha'iri and other important ulema in the twenties, that Qum started to regain its importance as a religious town and as a centre for Islamic studies. Qum was patronized by Reza Shah, as a means for him to exert control over the *ulema*, so they did not involve themselves with his policies. This made sure Qum would remain a quiet and obedient clerical town during his reign, only to become one of the hot spots of resistance during his sons'. Next to Ha'iri there were more prominent clerics in Qum with whom Khomeini conducted his studies, among whom were the activist Ayatollah Kashani, Muhammad Khansari and a prominent teacher of mystical philosophy, called Mirza Mohammed Ali Shahabadi.⁵⁷

54 Farhang Rajace, *Islamic Values and World View: Khomeyni on Man, the State and International Politics, Volume XIII* (Boston 1983), 25.

55 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 29.

56 Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (London 1993), 6-7.

57 Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 7.

ʿIrfan

In Qum, Khomeini studied the usual religious Islamic subjects like *usul* (first principles of Islam), *fiqh* (justice), *kharaj* (Islamic taxation) and logic, which Ha'iri taught him in person. Next to these subjects, Khomeini made an extensive study of Islamic mystical philosophy (*ʿirfan*) and ethics (*akhlāq*), under the guardianship of Shahabadi. At the remarkably early age of 34, Khomeini received his *ʿijāza*, his nomination as *mujtahid*, in 1936.

Shahabadi and the study of *ʿirfan* would have a significant impact on the intellectual development of young Khomeini. The goal of the mystical philosophy of *ʿirfan* is to unite the individual with the divine. Its foundation is the idea that everything created was derived from the One, the eternal truth or the divine. At the beginning of the nineteenth century *ʿirfan* could count on a growing amount of popularity within Islam, which can be explained as a reaction to the beginning influx of foreign influences from the West. *ʿIrfan* always had kind of a doubtful reputation in the Islamic world, because its teachings of divine transcendence could bring the individual dangerously close to the prophet. It could also be subject to suspicion of the state, because the study of *ʿirfan* could lead to the rejection of all earthly authority and the rise of the individual above the community. Khomeini studied the subject of *ʿirfan* under Shahabadi. Shahabadi did not only have a reputation of being a respected teacher, but was also known to be a politically activist cleric. He wanted to educate the regular people, and through this way tried to spread the teachings of Al-Afghani. From the forties onwards Khomeini started to teach *ʿirfan* too, next to his classes on ethics. His *ʿirfan* classes soon became very popular among the students of the seminary.⁵⁸

Because *ʿirfan* makes it possible for the individual to become at one with the divine, it offers the opportunity to a person to rise above the rest of the community. The gnostic sees *tanhēed*, the unity of all things, in everything. A person with knowledge of this is seen as a perfect being. In this respect this person stands as close to the prophet as is possible, though the prophet is still a few steps up on the ladder. Accordingly, the gnostic can reach a level of perfect knowledge and judgment, which gives him the right to act exactly as he sees fit and effectively places him above all earthly authority. Such a person is on the same level as the caliphs, who are the successors of the prophet on earth. This provides him with the right to interpret the laws of the Quran and Islamic laws in general. In fact, it is thought that there can actually be no discrepancies between his interpretation and the intended meaning of the texts. In this way, a person with perfect knowledge of *ʿirfan* receives direct authority from God, and can be seen as a successor of the prophet as a source of perfect Islamic knowledge. This part of the theory of *ʿirfan* very strongly influenced Khomeini during the writing of *Islamic Government* and in his later role as supreme leader.⁵⁹

58 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 33.

59 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 36.

Khomeini describes his thoughts about *irfan* and the role for the perfect being in his book *Light of Guidance*. In it, he tries to reconcile the theory with Shiite tradition. He tries to set out the path a person has to follow in order to become a perfect being. The path constitutes four spiritual “travels” a person has to make, and only he who has completed them all can call himself perfect. Important in this respect is the conquering of the ego, and by way of this the receiving of absolute knowledge of the self. Apart from this, a great knowledge of ethics, which Khomeini taught himself, and moral superiority are very important. Only the one who has reached these goals can truly be the leader of the community. Khomeini would reach this stage himself when he became the supreme leader and absolute authority of Iran in his role as *faqih*.⁶⁰

The ulema in Qum

As stated before, the Iranian clergy had a tradition of political inactivity and thus for the biggest part played no significant role in politics. A very good example of a traditional cleric wary of mingling with politics was Khomeini's former teacher in Qum, the *marja-e taqlid* Ha'iri. Ha'iri was known for his fundamental rejection of involvement in politics, which at the time was the common opinion among the biggest part of the *ulema*. When Ha'iri died in 1937, the void he left behind as the most important cleric in Qum was gradually filled by Ayatollah Mohammed Hussain Borujerdi. Borujerdi was a man of great stature who was respected by a big part of the population, and had fairly good relations with the court of the Shah. This went to the extent that in the forties Borujerdi had an oral agreement with Mohammed Reza, in which he had promised to support the monarchy and to try to silence his politically more active colleagues. The Shah in turn promised to ease the yoke of secularization that his father had started.⁶¹ In the forties, Borujerdi was seen as Iran's highest and most important *marja*, in fact as the highest among all the active *maraje* in Iran. This was an honor that had not been granted to a single person since the nineteenth century. Borujerdi was the very picture of a conservative, unworldly cleric that tried to maintain the status quo between religion and politics, while at the same time trying hard to escape involvement in politics. In the minds of someone like Khomeini, the ruling ayatollahs, through their fundamental rejection of involvement in politics, actually made the *ulema* part of the Pahlavi regime and with their silence they approved of the injustices that were common in Iran during the time of the Pahlavi's.⁶²

That by now Borujerdi was seen as a kind of pope of Shiism was extraordinary, because it conflicted with the Shiite tradition of striving for *ijtihad* (consensus). Most of the time, there were several *maraje* active, who would try to find a common view

60 Martin *Creating an Islamic State*, 38-41.

61 Which led, among other things, to the lifting of the ban on wearing an Islamic headscarf for women.

62 Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 8-9.

on religious issues. In the time of Borujerdi, the power increasingly fell in the hands of one person, just like it would in later days when Khomeini was supreme leader in the Islamic Republic.⁶³

The relationship between Khomeini and Borujerdi started off very well. Borujerdi saw in Khomeini a talented and very capable cleric, and Khomeini regarded Borujerdi as a very gifted teacher. Under Borujerdi's leadership Qum became increasingly important as a religious place, and more gradually evolved into becoming the spiritual centre of the Shiite world. He also created a kind of Islamic propaganda movement, for spreading his message. This movement traveled town and country to educate the people, something that Borujerdi thought of as crucial for the conservation of Islamic culture. He regretted the impotence of Islamic nations on the international level and blamed this on the big divisions that pulled the *ummah* apart. Up until his death Khomeini viewed these same divisions as the reason for the weakness of the Islamic states.⁶⁴

Although in general Khomeini obeyed Borujerdi's orders to stay out of politics, he published his first political work in 1943. In *Kashf' al-Asrar* (Secrets Revealed), he was very critical of the secularization supported by Reza Shah and people like Ahmad Kasravi. After this however, Khomeini returned to quietism for some time. It would take twenty years, up to the sixties, before he would really actively involve himself in Iranian politics.⁶⁵

After some time, the relationship between Khomeini and Borujerdi deteriorated, because Khomeini had increasing problems with his views about political inactivity. In the forties Khomeini had a relatively low position in the clerical system, which meant that he could not really authoritatively express himself on political subjects. In this respect he had a long way to go. At the same time, he increasingly expected Borujerdi to assume a political role. In this, Khomeini was an exception. Apart from a couple of clerics, the majority still obeyed the strict order of Borujerdi not to get involved in politics, despite the increasingly authoritarian style of government that the Shah displayed.⁶⁶

One of the most prominent clerics, who did not follow the line of Borujerdi, was Ayatollah Abdul-Qasem Kashani. He became the most important politically involved cleric in Iran. Kashani at first was a big opponent of the Shah's regime and actively supported Mossadeq's government and the *Fedayeen-e Eslam*. During World War, Kashani was captured by the British because of his alleged pro-German sympathies. In 1949 he was exiled when a member of the Fedayeen made an attempt on the Shah's life. In both cases, he received a hero's welcome on his return. Kashani was strongly anti-imperialist. He changed his opinion about Mossadeq owing to the latter's secularizing policies, and supported the coup against him in 1953. In that year

63 **Martin**, *Creating an Islamic State*, 49.

64 **Martin**, *Creating an Islamic State*, 52.

65 Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 9.

66 **Martin**, *Creating an Islamic State*, 53.

he supported the American backed coup against Mossadeq, but in this period the U.S. did not have the bad reputation in Iran that it would have several years later. The U.S. actually had a fairly good standing with the Iranians and was commonly seen as an ally, in contradiction to what the Iranians thought about the British and the Russians for example, who they blamed for decades of imperialist involvement in their countries welfare. When the U.S.-backed coup did not work out the way that Kashani had wanted, since the Shah had no intention of sharing power with and loosening control over religious groups, he turned against the regime and the Americans. A sort of myth was created, that dismissed any involvement or complicity of the Iranian people with the revolt against Mossadeq and blamed it all on the Shah and the Americans. In this view, the Americans had neglected the will of the Iranian people for their own benefit. Some time after the coup he accurately described the general feeling of discontent among Iranians about the role of the Americans: "For the hundreds of millions of dollars that the American colonialist imperialists will gain in oil, the oppressed nation will lose all hope of liberty and will have a negative opinion about all the Western world." From this moment on, the United States too were seen as a negative foreign influence in Iran. This was the start of a process of resentment against the U.S. that resulted in massive anti-American demonstrations and the branding of the U.S. as The Great Satan.⁶⁷

Because of his active engagement in politics, Kashani was an example to Khomeini. Later on, he would recite an anecdote about Kashani when he wanted to stress the importance of religious involvement in politics. When Kashani was being brought to prison for one of his political activities and was asked by reporters why he kept involving himself in politics, his answer was: "You asses, if I should not be in politics, who should?" This typified Kashani's belief in political involvement for the clergy, which was one of their responsibilities in his view. Khomeini absolutely agreed with these words.⁶⁸

Up until Borujerdi's death in 1961, Khomeini would remain quiet on the political stage, though he already knew that his ambitions ultimately lay in the political arena. In the sixties he would leave the road of political quietism, and would never return to it.

2.3 Khomeini's ideology

Kashf'al-Asrar

Khomeini only started to be politically involved from the sixties onwards, but had touched upon the relation between religion and state and criticized the Shah in some of his writings before. When looking at Khomeini's view of the Islamic state around the time of the revolution, it is important to realize that his view of this subject

67 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 230-231.

68 Amir H. Ferdows, 'Khomeini and Fadayan's Society and Politics' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol 15, no. 2 (mei 1983), 245.

changed several times during his lifetime. The first time he wrote about the subject was in *Kashf' al-Asrar* (Secrets Revealed), which was publicized in 1943-44. The book was written in response to the secularization policies of Reza Shah and people like Ahmad Kasravi. It was also an answer to the critical stance that the press had taken towards the *ulema*, brandishing them as a reactionary force in the years before. Khomeini accused the press of undermining Islam and thereby damaging Iran's base for independence.⁶⁹

In this book we can see Khomeini think about different forms of government in general, and specifically the Islamic state. With the Islamic State, we mean a form of government that is shaped by Islamic values and which is subject to the laws of Islam (for example the *shari'a*). By the time of *Kashf' al-Asrar*, Khomeini still regards the monarchy as a legitimate form of state, but only if Islam and Islamic values are at its core. In the book he states to have no intention of rising up against the monarchy and even that a "good monarch" can count on his dedication. Also, he writes that no cleric was ever justified to the right of ruling the country. He sees an important role for the clergy in politics, though, and asks the monarch to seat more clerics in the *majles* to make sure that the laws of the state does not contradict the laws of Islam.⁷⁰

Because of the existence of the *ummah*, which is thought to be "one" under the guidance of God's substitute on earth, the caliph, and which is not dividable in separate groups, the concept of a state as it is understood in the West is in fact alien to Islam. In *Kashf' al-Asrar*, though, Khomeini says that a state is desirable, because of the need of the people for a government that ensures their welfare, public order, and of course the protection of Islam. In this state, he envisions a role for the *ulema* to help a regime, no matter how bad it is considered, solve the severe problems a country is facing. Collaboration with an evil regime, in the specific case of trouble arising in the country, is allowed, but should nevertheless never be desirable.⁷¹

Khomeini had one big problem with the constitutional system. In this system with elected representatives, the issue of legislation would be dependent on the will of the people. This conflicted with the idea that all authority should and could only come from God, which in effect made legislation by the people illegitimate. Also, he thought that such a system was not fit for Iran as it was for the West. Adding to this, he thought that by copying too much of the Western system of government, all the social ills of the West would be imported into Iran too. He also saw the danger of the system being abused by one strong ruler, as he had seen happen in Europe in the thirties. To be sure that nothing of this kind would happen, all legislation should be brought under the supervision of the clergy, and thus under the supervision of the laws of Islam. At one point in *Kashf' al-Asrar*, he even disputes the idea that *shari'a* only encompasses some parts of life. This was Khomeini at his most radical.⁷²

69 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 104.

70 Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 20.

71 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 105.

72 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 106.

In *Kashf' al-Asrar*, Khomeini seems to be already thinking about the merits of a purely Islamic state, although he is clearly just in a phase of shaping his thoughts and is nowhere near to a complete image of Islamic government. He pleads for a system that is under the supervision of important clerics. The *shari'a* is seen as the key to a government of justice and the only justifiable rule is the rule of God, which together brings Khomeini very close to propagating a theocracy. The state should be made responsible to the laws of Islam and be under the control of the *ulema*, although in this form they would not have full governmental powers. Government would still be in the hands of regular people. The *ulema* that would have a part in this religious control mechanism should be properly educated in Islamic law.⁷³

Remarkably, in *Kashf' al-Asrar*, Khomeini shows some common grounds with his nemesis the Shah. He is a strong supporter of a powerful centralized state and even regards the state that Reza Shah had created as an example. He sees a strong army as an important factor, just like the Shah did. Adding to this, the state should have a close relation to Islam and should be capable of curbing foreign influences. In this, his opinion differs from the Shah's. Moreover, the army should be based upon Islamic principles, for it should also have a role in propagating and spreading Islam. A healthy treasury and flourishing economy should be brought about by Islamic taxation, of which some taxes are obligatory and some voluntary. Money should primarily be spent on poverty reduction, to help the poor and bring about social justice. The rest should be spent on the army, governance, and maintenance of the infrastructure.⁷⁴

During the time Khomeini wrote *Kashf' al-Asrar*, it was clear that he was already thinking about the relationship between politics and Islam, although he did not yet get involved in politics himself. Some of the early ideas in *Kashf' al-Asrar* would disappear in his later works, but others remained: whether in their original or adapted version. Some of the ideas he had while writing *Kashf' al-Asrar* would even be used after the Revolution when the Islamic Republic took shape.

Velayat-e Faqih

Khomeini's most important work is *Islamic Government*, which was released in 1970, eight years before the revolution, when he was living in Iraq. It consists of a series of lectures Khomeini gave during his exile, combined in one book. From it, three important ideas can be derived. First, the idea that monarchy is inherently conflicting with Islam. Second, legislative authority and government should, in the absence of the prophet and *imams*, exclusively belong to the *fuqaha* (singular: *faqih*), which means the Islamic jurists. Third, the idea that Islam is in a struggle to survive, because of corrupting influences like materialism, individualism, imperialism, Christendom and Zionism.⁷⁵ The goal of Islamic government was to show the existence of a legitimate

73 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 108.

74 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 110.

75 Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 192-193.

base for the fulfillment of executive powers by the *ulema* within Islamic law. Also, it was a shout out to the *ulema*, telling them not to remain in the background but to actively involve themselves in the political spheres of Iran.⁷⁶

While the concept of *velayat-e faqih*, which literally means *governance of the jurisprudent*, in itself was not entirely new, it used to confine itself mostly to the things that were dealt with in the *shari'a*. Khomeini wanted to extend the range of influence of the Islamic jurists, to make sure that his authority would contain all aspects of life. This would be a clear rupture with traditional Shiite thought. Here, all executive and legislative authority lay in the hands of the hidden Twelfth Imam. During his absence, no ruler could make a claim for actual legitimate power. Because of the need of the Shiite community for guidance in the form of for example legislation, jurisdiction and all other areas of the *shari'a*, these tasks were delegated to the *ulema*, whose authority was derived from their extensive knowledge of Islamic scripture. The faithful community should follow the examples set by the *ulema*, who were seen as the guides of society. This guiding role of the clergy should not be confused with legitimate authority, as this couldn't exist without the return of the Twelfth Imam. The clerics were guardians of the Islamic laws, waiting for the Twelfth Imam to reclaim his authority. The *ulema* were not considered to be infallible, so their workings and verdicts should be based on consensus. Thus, the *ulema* were hesitant to reach for full political authority. In their eyes, this conflicted with Islamic scripture. These things put the clergy in the position not to involve themselves in Iranian politics and government, although there always were some of them that took a more activist stance.

Although in *Kashf al-Asrar* Khomeini still accepts the monarchy as a form of state, in Islamic government he has clearly shifted his opinion and tries to explain on the basis of Islamic scripture that a state, in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, can only legitimately be ruled by Islamic jurists from within the clergy. The *ulema* are the guardians of all the tasks of the Imam during his absence, including his governmental duties. Even things which are not attended to by the *shari'a*, should be under the control of the *ulema* and should be subject to their interpretation of them through Islamic teachings. Because an individual living in a society ruled by a corrupted regime, i.e. non-Islamic, cannot reach full potential, he calls upon the *ummah* to rise up against these regimes and stresses the need for "political revolution". It is only under Islamic rule that Islam can be protected and the muslim community can blossom.⁷⁷

In an Islamic state private property should be recognised and protected. Khomeini sees dictatorships and monarchies as forms of state which are directed at the threatening of private property. Islam on the contrary, regards private property as a gift from God. This means no other being has the right to rob another of his possessions. Because Khomeini sees people as selfish and greedy by nature, he stresses the need for a state to protect private property. Ofcourse, the Islamic state is most fit for

76 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 115.

77 Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government: Governance of jurisprudent* (Honolulu, 2005) 13-14.

this job. This respect for private property meant, according to Khomeini, that even the prophet or the imams had no right to dispossess a person if this was not allowed or sanctioned by Islamic laws.⁷⁸

In *Islamic Government* Khomeini pleads strongly against constitutionalism, which he thinks of as a foreign product that is not suited for a non-Western country like Iran. Moreover, he sees the idea of sovereignty as something that can be derived only from the people as a fundamental misunderstanding. In Islam, sovereignty can only come from God, and this makes him the only power to legitimately make new laws. The prophet, the imams and, in the case of Khomeini, the *ulema*, are the only ones who can function as his representatives. The *shari'a* can be seen as an Islamic constitution. The existence of an Islamic state is legitimated because it is the only means of implementing *shari'a* law into society, and thus effectuating God's constitution. According to Khomeini it is the *shari'a* which makes sure that human beings can lead a righteous existence and he sees it as a social system that includes all spheres of human life. The *shari'a* is not bound to the specific time and place where it was written, but instead is suitable for all times and places and is open to interpretation by the clergy. It can be said that, in the absence of God, the *shari'a* is the ruler. The *fuqaha*, or Islamic jurists, are in this absence the only ones to interpret the *shari'a* and they derive this important position from their extensive knowledge of Islam. Of course, there are different levels of *ulema*, and only the ones in the higher echelons can function as a *faqih* in this way. His interpretation of the *shari'a* should lead to its execution in the same manner, and thus the *faqih* also has executive powers. Khomeini does not consider this as a dictatorship or tyranny by the *ulema*, because the *fuqaha* are subject to the *shari'a*, just as in the West a government is subject to the constitution. He considers this rule by the *shari'a* and the Islamic jurists as completely legitimate, because, although there is no constitution that was directly approved by the people, every muslim automatically accepts the *shari'a* as the word of God and the ultimate power. With this, the pure fact of being a muslim legitimates the rule of an Islamic state in a place where the majority of the people is Islamic.^{79 80}

In *Islamic Government*, Khomeini also presents the Islamic state as the means for resolving social injustices. The Islamic state is a defender of the poor and deprived, in contradiction to the monarchy, which aims at collecting as much power and wealth in the higher ranks of society as possible. In his book, he describes the "wronged and deprived" as being victims of "the tyranny of aggressive rulers" and also "a handful of exploiters and foreigners who dominate with the force of arms". It is "the duty of the ulema and of all Moslems (..) to put an end to this injustice and to seek to bring happiness to millions of peoples through destroying and eliminating the unjust governments and through establishing a sincere and active Moslem government". Khomeini is clearly pointing his finger accusingly at the regime of the

78 Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 40-41.

79 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 121-122.

80 Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 17-21.

Shah and at foreign nations, in defense of the poor.⁸¹ From the seventies onwards, Khomeini increasingly uses Shariati's words *mostaz'afin* (oppressed) and *mostakberin* (oppressors). Khomeini regards society as consisting of these two classes, based on economic assumptions, who are fighting each other in an eternal struggle. This view is clearly influenced by the Islamic socialism of Shariati, and ofcourse Marx's class struggle. The upper classes, the *mostakberin*, are seen as corrupt and try to hold their position by oppressing the lower classes. They are anti-Islamic and supporters of the Pahlavi monarchy and the imperialists from the West. The *mostaz'afin* on the contrary, had always fought for a just and Islamic form of government. It was the *ulema's* duty to lead the *mostaz'afin* in the battle against the oppressors and show them the path to their liberation. This clear element of class struggle was a strong part of Khomeini's ideology, and also returns in *Islamic Government*. The Islamic State would create a society free of injustice, poverty, inequality, social conflict, crime and corruption.⁸²

An important issue in *Islamic Government* is the question who is suited to rule the country in the position of *faqih*. General qualities like intelligence and governmental capabilities are ofcourse very important. The two most important qualities, though, are knowledge of Islamic law and a feel for justice. The *faqih* should be the one with the greatest knowledge of Islamic law. As a just ruler he has to make sure that the rights of muslims are being guarded and that the taxes will be reasonable and fair. Collected taxes should be used to promote social equality and to protect Islam, which can also mean a reliance on a strong army.⁸³

What remains, is the question whether power should be concentrated in the hands of one *faqih* or delegated to several *fuqaha*. Khomeini says he prefers a system with one *faqih* on the top, but only if this is a person who can meet all the criteria for a just ruler. When this is the case, it is even the duty of this person to fulfill this role. The concept of one cleric at the top of the governmental powerstructure was a revolutionary idea in the Shiite world, in the time of *Islamic Government*. The culture of consensus in fact did not really allow one cleric to have more power than the other high ranking *ulema*. Usually, there were several *ulema* in Iran at the same time who could claim the title of *marja* or *mujtahid* and who were regarded as the top of the clergy. Khomeini, though, sees the concept of *velayat-e faqih* specifically as a continuation of the system of government under the prophet or imams, where power rested in the hands of one person only. Although the *faqih* did not have the same spiritual position as the prophet or imams (which in effect means that he is not infallable), according to Khomeini he is on the same level authority-wise. Khomeini thinks that the *faqih* could even be given the title imam, but specifically to indicate his position as supreme leader and guide. Later, Iranians would refer to him as Imam Khomeini.⁸⁴

81 Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 15.

82 Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 47-49.

83 Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 11-13.

84 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 120.

Khomeini's thoughts in *Islamic Government* are also pan-Islamic. He regards nationalism as an imperialist doctrine that was designed to divide the Islamic world. Islamic nations should cooperate to throw off the imperialist yoke. The Islamic state does not tolerate economical and ideological influences from abroad and wants to make sure that the muslim world can further develop itself through Islamic tradition.⁸⁵

Islamic Government is Khomeini's most important work. In the light of the revolution and the eventual founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is important to remember that *Islamic Government* was written years earlier. The concept of *velayat-e faqih* was not a new thing, when Khomeini took the title of supreme leader after the revolution. His plans for an Islamic republic were clear from the moment these lectures, which are put together in *Islamic Government*, were given. His emphasis on a jurisprudent as ultimate authority is already made in this book. He outlines the exact way that he thinks taxes should be raised, and in what amount. He stipulates what to do with the taxes, and explains these things can be derived from the Islamic holy scriptures. His rhetoric in *Islamic Government* is also very clear, and later became the rhetoric of the revolution. His emphasis on the battle between oppressed and oppressors, between the outside world and Iran, and between Islam and the West was the same in *Islamic Government* as it was during and after the revolution. These were all points that described exactly how a big segment of Iranian society was feeling at the time: alienated, cheated and wronged. If people in Iran, who complained afterwards of the hijacking of the revolution by religious reactionaries, and people in the West, who were surprised by the founding of an Islamic republic under the guidance of a cleric, had read *Islamic Government* somewhere before 1978, the surprise probably would have been much less stunning.

85 Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 54.

3 'An Island of Stability'

Now that we have an understanding of Iran's history from the late nineteenth century onwards and a picture of Iran in the seventies, at the brink of the revolution, we can start looking at the revolution itself. In this chapter I will give a detailed overview of incidents during the revolution. We will also take a look at the reaction of the people and the regime to these incidents, and will try to understand the outcome of the revolution. Before looking at the revolutionary years of 1978 and 1979 we will first take a short look at the period before that, and the creation of a religious revolutionary movement in Iran.

Prelude to revolution

After the death of Borujerdi a gap opened up in the Shiite power structures. The search for a new *marja* had begun. Although his students actively wanted to help him spread his message, at first Khomeini had no interest in claiming candidacy for *marja*. Among his students in Qum, Khomeini had created a base of support. The lessons that he taught in his *madrassah* were very popular and his students venerated him. They praised his piety, virtue, strength and strong character. These students would be the first Khomeini supporters, and it can be said that the building of his support and movement started with them, in the holy city of Qum. From the early sixties on, Khomeini would gradually expand to greater Iran and his support would grow steadily.⁸⁶

His fame increased substantially after the revolt of June 1963. In the years before, Khomeini had started to venomously criticize the regime in his lectures and sermons. These were directed first at the, in his eyes, dramatic reforms that the White Revolution sought to push through. At the start of the sixties the Shah was at the height of his power, which effectively meant that almost nobody dared to criticize his policies. The general fear for the power of the Shah did not scare Khomeini, though, and from 1962 onwards he started to attack the Shah from his pulpit. He thought he had come close enough to God, to start involving himself actively in politics. His critique was aimed against the atrocities the regime committed, as well as the White Revolution, general injustice, suppression of opposition, the closing down of the *majles*, and the support for America and Israel. In his attack, there was a strong concentration on the position of the poor in Iran. Shortly after Khomeini started criticizing the Shah, retaliatory actions took place. In March 1963 Khomeini's *madrassah* was attacked by SAVAK and a couple of his students were killed. Khomeini himself was arrested and incarcerated.⁸⁷

86 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 56.

87 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 248.

From the moment Khomeini was released from his imprisonment, he wouldn't be stopped anymore. Immediately, he began aggressively criticizing the Shah and his regime. This time he said the Shah was waging a war against Islam. Why else would SAVAK tear up a copy of the Quran during their attack on his *madrasah*? Why else would they kill Islamic students and arrests this many *ulema*? The Shah had become a danger to Islam. During the holy day of Ashura on the 3rd of June 1963, the most important Shiite holiday, commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussayn at the battle of Karbala, Khomeini addressed a huge crowd and attacked the Shah from this position. The following morning he was arrested once again. This time his arrest led to a massive nationwide protest, in all the big cities of Iran. Common people and clergy marched hand in hand during these demonstrations. SAVAK was ordered to shoot at the crowds and tanks were employed to disperse them. It took days before SAVAK was able to quell the resistance. When they succeeded on the 11th of June, hundreds of protesters had been killed.⁸⁸

After being released for the second time, Khomeini once again started his sermons directed against the Shah. In October 1964 he pushed it too far. In this month a law was passed that gave American military personnel and their relatives immunity from prosecution for acts they had committed in Iran. Khomeini connected this to the granting of a 20 million dollar loan that the Shah had received from the U.S., to speed up his process of modernization. For Khomeini, this meant that the Shah had sold Iran to the highest bidder. Iran's dignity was at stake here. This was the occasion that led to the famous speech that directly triggered his exile from Iran. In this speech he said that this new law placed the Iranian people on a level that was lower than that of an American dog. He explained this by saying that when an Iranian car hit an American dog, the Iranian driver would be prosecuted. But when an American cook would run over and kill the Shah himself, nobody would have the right to punish him. According to Khomeini, this was the point where people should start asking themselves: "Are we to be trampled underfoot by the boots of America simply because we are a weak nation and have no dollars?" His speech was recorded by his supporters and the tapes were spread throughout the country. In November Khomeini was arrested again. This time, he was not imprisoned in Iran, but deported to Turkey. His exile had started.⁸⁹

In this period Khomeini's fame took flight. He was the first cleric who dared to oppose the regime openly in this manner. Strikingly, his popularity grew so rapidly not because of his religious activities, but because of his increasing involvement in politics. His support grew so significantly that in the sixties, for the first time, it could be seen as a movement. Students still provided the base of his support, but *bazaaris*, the small shopkeepers and craftsmen, also became an important part of his movement. This was a very religious segment of society, and traditionally very pow-

88 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 249-250.

89 Wright, *In the Name of God*, 52-53.

erful, because over the centuries the bazaars had become the centre of the Iranian economy. This group felt threatened by the Shah's White Revolution, and feared that life as they knew it would come to an end. The *bazaaris* felt that they had a strong sense of justice and saw the Shah's regime as inherently unjust. They also felt threatened by the secularization the Shah wanted to push through. Within this group, social and religious networks were very important, and a big deal of social life was concentrated around the mosque. This powerful group supplied Khomeini with an already organised following, with a big reach in Iranian society.⁹⁰

From 1962 onwards, Khomeini and his students realised the need for creating a broad base of support for their movement. He started teaching common people and his message was recorded on tapes, flyers and posters that were distributed all over the country. Groups of around 20 people were invited to his house, with whom he would exchange opinions and information. These sessions made Khomeini famous and he was known for the fact of always taking an interest in what people had to say. He tried to make clear which actions were of value to Islam, and which were not. After some time, other clerics were involved in this process and thus he created a movement in which the people involved were kept at the same level ideologically. His network expanded very fast and used very modern technology by the use of mass media like cassette tapes, radio and telephone. Members were recruited in three areas: in the mosque, on the workfloor and in the families. The movement was characterized by its good organization, willingness for action, internal coherence and was overall fairly well off.⁹¹

According to Abrahamian, "Khomeinism" as a popular movement was mainly middle class, and mobilised the masses by the use of radical rhetoric against the internal and external enemies (the Shah and the West). He says the attack on the establishment never went so far as to question the concept of private property and that it avoided issues that could cost it the support of the middle class. Rhetorical elements were more important than substance and program, and its aims were confined to reform or dispose of cultural institutions, rather than upsetting the whole system of production and distribution.⁹² Khomeini indeed liked to use rhetoric and was not afraid to mould his speeches to the crowd of the day. This led to a general lack of knowledge of his political views, including his views on *velayat-e faqih*, outside the core of his movement. This does not mean, however, that his message only consisted of rhetorical statements, and that it had no ideology. As we saw before, Khomeini's views on society and the state were outlined in his earlier works and speeches. Although he changed his mind on numerous subjects over the years, their core was always to be found in Islam and they all had a general goal, which was the founding of an Islamic state. This should have been known to all his admirers and critics by the time the revolution kicked off in 1978.

90 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 64.

91 Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 67-68.

92 Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 37-38.

Revolution

During the years after Khomeini's exile to Najaf, the Shah increased the level of repression. He also tried to reinforce his control over the religious authorities by creating stricter supervision over the *ulema* and the *madrassahs*. This led to a decline in activity on the side of the opposition. Although from time to time there were still some forms of protest, like the 1975 demonstrations to mark the anniversary of Khomeini's arrest, they never reached the scale of the big 1963 outburst and did not have a sustaining character. In these years, the Shah's regime seemed to become more tyrannical than ever before. Opposition leaders and members were arrested and put in jail, where they were often brutally tortured. Some died during these torture sessions, others were kept in jail or executed. By 1977, though, there seemed to be a relaxation of the repression on behalf of the regime. There were several reasons for this. Due to a report of Amnesty International about the horrific state of the Iranian prison system, Western media had picked up on the darker side of the Shah's regime. There was some attention in the West for the violation of human rights in Iran. Also, the new president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, put a heavy emphasis on human rights in his foreign policy. Carter implied that countries guilty of human rights violations could be cut off American aid and arms supplies. Another possible reason could be the fact that the Shah was suffering from illness during this time of his life. He was ill with cancer and appeared to be making preparations for a succession by his son or wife.⁹³

Although he showed no sign of really enforcing his human rights policy, Carter's statement could have had some influence on the Shah, as well as on the Iranian opposition, who were becoming more activist after his inauguration. In early 1977, they started spreading open letters and petitions. By this time, the active opposition mainly consisted of liberal or leftist intelligentsia, as well as some small radical guerrilla groups. The Shah had had success in quelling the religious resistance in the years before. The protest of the intelligentsia had its peak in October 1977, when around 60 Iranian writers and poets recited their work to huge groups of Iranians at the Goethe Institute in Tehran. In this session they clearly displayed and vented their hostility to the regime, and despite this there was no interference from SAVAK. So it seemed that the Shah had taken a new more relaxed stance about peaceful opposition. This relaxation that had been going on throughout 1977 would not last very long. Already a month after the Goethe Institute protest a number of known dissidents were arrested. On November 3, one of the most important incidents of the coming revolution took place. Khomeini's son Mustafa died in Iraq. The mysterious circumstances under which he died, almost immediately fuelled rumours about the involvement of SAVAK. In fact, now it is widely accepted that SAVAK was indeed involved in his death. Khomeini remained silent after the incident, but in Iran there was a wave of protest in several cities. Protesters were attacked by the police. During these days,

93 Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 214-215.

president Carter visited the Shah in Iran on New Year's Eve, calling Iran "an island of stability in a turbulent corner of the world". The death of Mustafa Khomeini can be seen as one of the direct incentives of the revolution, although there still was no organised and massive revolt against the Shah by November 1977.⁹⁴ The fact that the regime once again strengthened their methods of repression could have been a direct result of the Shah's visit to Jimmy Carter in Washington in October 1977. Here, they discussed some important subjects, like the economy, arms deliveries and the Cold War - but there was no discussion on the topic of human rights violations in Iran. It is likely that the Shah perceived the threats Carter had made as purely rhetorical, and saw that he had nothing to fear from the US. Carter had no intention of making an example of Iran.⁹⁵

The real kick off for the Islamic revolution in Iran happened on January 8, 1978. On this day the regime committed a mistake that would prove to be fatal, and showed their miscalculation of the strength of the religious opposition in Iran. In the semi-government controlled newspaper *Ettelaat* an article about Khomeini was published, in which he was publicly humiliated and called "an adventurer, without faith, and tied to the centres of colonialism". Khomeini was accused of a dissolute lifestyle and of being a British spy, who was even paid by the British. This publication led to an immediate reaction in Qum, where four thousand students held a protest at his former *madrassah*, demanding it be opened again. Other demands were a return to the 1906 constitution, freedom of speech, the release of political prisoners and the return of Khomeini to Iran. When the police arrived at the scene, with instructions to shoot at the mob, they did exactly that. It would be the most violent clash between the opposition and police forces since 1963. When the police opened fire at the demonstrators, seventy of them were killed (although regime numbers say only ten were killed). Owing to this violent response of the police, mass outrage was felt against the authorities by millions of Iranians. This was the spark that started the fire.⁹⁶

Now, a cycle of demonstrations was started, that resembled the Shi'ite cycle of mourning. In the Shia, 40 days after a person's death a traditional mourning ceremony is to be held. In the case of the revolution, this meant new demonstrations every 40 days after the last one. This religious mourning cycle had enormous revolutionary potential as it fuelled the outrage of the people again and again. In this way, the demonstrations grabbed momentum. It would give the demonstrators time to think through and prepare their actions, and all of them knew exactly when they would take place. So, after a cry from Khomeini for further action, 40 days after the massacre in Qum, there were demonstrations against the regime in all cities of Iran. In most of the places the February 18 demonstrations were peaceful, but in Tabriz

94 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 300-301.

95 Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge, 2004), 19.

96 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 303, 304.

they soon became violent. Rioting broke out and the police needed two days to restore order. In these two days between twelve (official claims) and over a hundred people (opposition claims) were killed.⁹⁷

The 40-day cycle, a good example of political use of Shiite tradition, continued the next month on March 30. Demonstrators took to the streets of Iranian cities to mourn the victims of the Tabriz riots. Once again, the police shot at the mobs. In Yazd, a hundred people were killed when the police opened fire at the protesters. These victims were honoured 40 days later on May 8. All over the country new protests were being held and it seemed they were getting bigger with each new cycle. Next to the significant number of casualties, the police was jailing many protesters. The Iranian prisons were packed with opposition members and ordinary demonstrators, who were not being treated very gently. All this led to the demonstrations becoming more and more vigorous and the people more fanatical. During the demonstrations they carried anti-Shah banners and the protests had a strong Shiite character. Casualties were seen as *shahed*, or martyr, and the mobs carried and shouted Shiite slogans while marching through the streets. For many protesters, the revolution was seen as a means of spiritual purification. The already strong religious character of the young revolution helped to give meaning to it, especially for the poor and uneducated. It was also an outlet for the mass of uneducated rural youngsters and unemployed that had moved to the cities in recent years.⁹⁸

Next to the religious Khomeini supporters, there were other groups involved in the incidents. Iranian students filled a big part of the ranks. Students had been active in the opposition for a long time. Because of the growing number of students in Iran, there was a big revolutionary potential at the universities. Many students were originally from rural areas. Among the student population serious anger was felt against the Shah, because of his control over the universities, poor educational, academic and housing conditions, and of course for the usual political reasons. At first, student protest was primarily confined to the campuses, but extended outwards once the popular opposition broadened and became more activist in 1977-1978. Because they had a great deal of experience with demonstrations at the universities, students would become a very important factor during the revolution. Among the students, all kinds of groups could be found. There were Marxists, liberals, leftists and religious groups. During the revolution, they all marched together.⁹⁹

Other big contributors to the revolutionary movement were members of the illegal Tudeh party and Mossadeq's former party, the National Front. The Tudeh was an Iranian Marxist/communist party, which was banned in 1949. Members of the party were being prosecuted and they had to go underground to survive. During the revolution, the Tudeh was revived and enjoyed support among the Iranian workers. The National Front had virtually ceased to exist in the 1970's, but was revived in 1977

97 Martin Wright, *Iran: The Khomeini Revolution* (London, 1989) 10.

98 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 304-305.

99 Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 218-219.

when the Iranian politicians Bakhtiar, Forouhar and Sanjabi wrote an open letter of protest to the Shah. The progressive National Front would continue to play a role in the revolution and afterward, but the role of these liberal intellectuals was severely overrated by the West.

Then there were two small guerrilla groups whose influence should not be underestimated. First, there was the *Feda'iyān-e Khalq*, not to be confused with Safavi's *Fedayeen*, which was a combination of three smaller leftist guerrilla groups that had merged in 1970. This group had conducted a guerrilla war in the mountains of Northern Gilan in the early seventies, which had some success, but was soon crushed by the Shah. Almost all members were killed during skirmishes or executed. Their exploits showed, though, that the Shah was not invulnerable. After this, the group was able to revive itself and their guerrilla tactics were of some importance during the revolution. Second, there were the *Mojahedin-e Khalq*, who were largely inspired by Ali Shariati's ideology. They too were very activist and occasionally violent, which resulted in their prosecution by the police and SAVAK. The *Mojahedin* were bigger than the *Feda'iyān*, and continued to play an important role after the revolution, when they were engaged in a power struggle with Khomeini's supporters. Because of their smaller numbers, the *Mojahedin* lost this struggle, and were declared illegal by Khomeini. They are still active in Northern Iraq, and in Western countries, where they try to present themselves as the Iranian opposition, but have a dubious reputation and are on the E.U. list of terrorist organizations.¹⁰⁰

The 40-day cycle temporarily came to an end in June 1978. The government started to see the danger of the mass demonstrations and tried to calm the mood with a number of concessions. The Shah banned pornographic movies, dismissed the hated head of SAVAK General Nasseri, instructed royal family members to dismiss their business connections and ended his price-control restrictions. This seemed to be working when the next date on the 40-day cycle, June 17, passed quietly. This was in part because of a call for calm from several religious leaders, like Ayatollah Shariatmadari, the senior Shiite leader in Iran. The calm would not last very long. After the death of a prominent cleric in a car accident, riots broke out in Mashad on July 22. In fights with the police and troops over 40 people were killed. This led to mourning ceremonies in several Iranian cities seven days after the cleric's death, and in Tehran, Qum, Tabriz and Isfahan serious rioting broke out. After 10 subsequent days of violence, martial law was declared. The incidents were snowballing and the revolution seemed more and more unstoppable.¹⁰¹

By the end of July, after the outbreak of new riots, the Shah promised more reforms. The most dramatic of these was his promise of free elections being held in the following year. Adding to this, he promised the people more political liberties, even "as much as democratic European nations". Although Khomeini and his staunchest

100 Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 221-222.

101 Wright, *The Khomeini Revolution*, 10.

supporters could not be pleased by these words – how could they when the Shah was promising democratization on Western standards? – a big part of the, more liberal, opposition reacted more optimistic, although they remained suspicious. The demonstrations once again seemed to become quieter, although the religious opposition seized opportunities during the holy month of Ramadan for acts of violence against the police and some smaller demonstrations in which many civilians were killed when police and troops reacted with force. These protests were in big cities like Shiraz and Isfahan, but during the days between the end of June and half August, they failed to set up big Ramadan protests in Tehran. By this time, though, the core of the revolutionary movement was very clearly made up of religious Islamists and somewhat less radical Iranian Muslims.¹⁰²

So just when the demonstrations were becoming smaller and confined to angry Iranian Muslims, something happened that once again infuriated Iranians of all ranks and colours. On August 19, a movie theatre called Rex, in the city of Abadan, was burned down after an arson attack. People inside failed to escape the flames, because the doors were closed, and hundreds of people died inside the theatre. Immediately, Iranians linked this act of violence to the regime and especially to SAVAK, although there was no proof of its involvement. It seems unlikely that the Shah could have been involved in the ordering of such an incident, just when matters seemed to have calmed down. In 1980, a trial of one of the accused pointed towards the involvement of a religious fundamentalist group, who attacked the cinema because of its link with Western decadence. Nevertheless, the people blamed the killing of four hundred civilians during the fire in Rex cinema on the authorities, and this inflamed the situation in Iran once again.^{103 104}

The following days mass protests took place, with twenty thousand or more people in Mashad and fifty thousand in Qum by government count. The mobs were chanting angry slogans like “burn the Shah” in Abadan. By the end of August, eleven cities were placed under martial law. The government reacted with more promises and some reforms. The prime minister was replaced by Sharif-Emami, who was thought to be more agreeable to the Islamists. The regime returned to using the Islamic calendar, casinos were closed and press freedoms were promised. This marked a change in the reporting of incidents by newspapers. Words like “hooligans” to describe the protesters disappeared and the demonstrations were reported more objectively than before. The reforms and events led up to a huge protest on September 4 in Tehran, the last day of Ramadan. For the first time, the regime had permitted religious demonstrations that were scheduled for this day, which could mean that police forces would react more mildly if the demonstrations would remain peaceful. This gave an opportunity to Iranians who at first were afraid to participate in the dangerous demonstrations, to join in. Several religious gatherings in Iran combined into an enor-

102 Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, 58-59.

103 Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 231.

104 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 305.

mous crowd of between two hundred and five hundred thousand people, carrying pictures of Khomeini and anti-Shah banners. Although the military had orders not to intervene, troops were clearly visible along the road of the demonstration. In the demonstration, Islamists walked side by side with liberals, leftists and more moderate believers. Protesters put flowers into the barrels of soldiers' guns. The demonstration on the last day of Ramadan continued peacefully, and was a huge success.¹⁰⁵

Although during the September 4 march, the regime had purposely reacted peacefully, without a shot being fired, this new stance was not to be continued. The Shah coupled his reforms and concessions with repression. The new mass protest brought up a different kind of problem for the Shah, because of the involvement of the middle classes. If he lost the support of the middle classes, he would be in real danger. His reaction would be one of force, and repression became worse than ever. Three days after the Ramadan march, martial law was declared. This happened early in the morning, so protesters who took to the streets the next day were not aware of it. On that day, September 8, between 500 and 900 people were killed during a big but peaceful protest at Jaleh Square in Tehran. After the police had opened fire on the mobs when they refused to disperse, the people were enraged and erected barricades on which soldiers opened fire from their tanks. The Jaleh Square massacre would be remembered as "Black Friday". This would be a defining day for the Shah and the revolution. The Shah lost the last bits of support he still enjoyed from the middle classes. President Carter called the Shah on September 10 to assure him once again of his support, which confirmed the picture Iranian's already had of "The Great Satan". In Iran, the Shah's position was getting weaker every day. From now on, the revolution was unstoppable.¹⁰⁶

The Jaleh Square massacre meant the entry of the working classes, both salaried and industrial, and the middle classes, led by the progressive National Front, into the protest movement. There seemed to be no more means of accommodating the different groups within Iranian society with the regime, as they had given up hope of real concessions after the recently stepped up repression, despite the promises and reforms the Shah had already made to his people. The repression and anger that was felt by the workers and middle classes drove them into the arms of Khomeini, whatever the personal views they had of him. In the meantime, Khomeini had been forced to leave Iraq and had moved to Paris in October. This allowed him more opportunities to spread his message through telephone and cassettes, as the Iraqi-control over him had now ended. Moreover, Khomeini had vast access to worldwide media coverage in Paris, where he enjoyed the attention of the European journalists.

The appearance of new popular groups in the opposition movement gave a new impetus to the revolution, as the workers went on mass strikes in the late summer and fall of 1978. These strikes would cripple the country's economy and last up

105 Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, 62-64.

106 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 306.

till the end of the revolution. Major strikes in the oil and petrochemical industries in September were followed by strikes by government employees, and in October the output of oil barrels had fallen to 28% of its former level. Although the government tried to stop the strikes by promising large wage increases, they found the different groups involved in the opposition, liberal, leftist and religious, unmoveable. Strikes expanded to all areas of life and by November public services were virtually nonexistent, and oil production had almost ceased. An attempt to return to more censorship was followed by press strikes. While the strikes had crippled the regime both economically and governmentally, guerrilla groups like the *Feda'iyān* and *Mojahedeen* switched to open attacks on government targets. During 1978, these movements had become significantly bigger and they felt powerful enough to directly attack the regime. They targeted Iranian officials and military and police leaders, and their presence was felt during demonstrations. Thanks to the press strikes, these groups and also Khomeini's supporters, were able to reach a big audience through their own newspapers and pamphlets, which helped to spread revolutionary fervour.¹⁰⁷

In Paris, Khomeini refused to take serious any attempt at concession by the regime. He was visited by National Front leader Sanjabi, and their talks resulted in a combined statement where they stressed the importance of both democracy and Islam as basic principles. This in fact conflicted with Khomeini's opinion that democracy was an import from the West and not suitable for the Islamic world. Later, he would refuse to put the word democracy into the name and constitution of the Islamic republic. Khomeini's tone in Paris was less radical than his earlier works on government. He indicated that he did not want to rule directly and his statements actually convinced secularists that there was a fair chance of Khomeini supporting their rule after the revolution was over. The way Khomeini expressed himself on several issues regarding government during this period was largely because of the advice of some of his Western educated advisers like future president Bani Sadr and future foreign minister Yazdi. Many Westerners and Iranians in the revolutionary movement, without knowledge of Khomeini's ideology in earlier works, thus came to regard him as someone not inherently opposed to democracy. The Khomeini-Sanjabi visit was seen as proof of the possibility of a midway solution between religion and democracy when the revolution was over.¹⁰⁸

While the strikes were paralysing the country, there had been no big demonstrations since Black Friday for two months. This changed in early November, when students clashed with police forces as they tried to leave the campus of Tehran University. Some students were killed in the event, and the next day, November 5, others attacked several buildings in Tehran including one at the British embassy compound. The rioters created scenes of destruction all through Tehran, and the security forces were surprised and overwhelmed with the new streak of violence. The ease with

107 Keddīe, *Modern Iran*, 232-233.

108 Keddīe, *Modern Iran*, 234.

which the students went on a rampage through the city encouraged talk of a set up by elements within the regime. Letting the students have their way, they would force the Shah into taking firm action. If this was the case, they succeeded. The Shah reacted in force, dismissing the prime minister and appointing a military government in his place. Meanwhile, the army marched into Tehran and other Iranian cities, where they violently struck down every form of protest. Strikers were threatened with death if they kept refusing to start working again. At the same time, the Shah expressed sympathy with the protesters on national television. He apologised for the repression his people had felt through the years, and promised to transform the country into a constitutional monarchy. This was felt by Iranians as a sign of weakness on the Shah's behalf, and his message was not taken seriously. The coupling of new repression and concessions, a tactic used often during the revolution by the regime, led to encouragement for the protesters to continue and at the same time was giving them new reasons to do exactly so. The Shah was caught between genuine care for the well being of his citizens, as well as the need for him to quell the resistance with extreme repression. Reports indicate that he was not willing to accept measures that in his eyes were too violent. While some of his closest officials urged him to step up the repression absolutely, he kept refusing this and called to "do the impossible to avoid bloodshed". Of course, this did not necessarily mean that he would stop the already harsh way of dealing with protests and the opposition. While the revolution was getting older, each month seemed to bring more casualties. This can be seen as a sign of bigger demonstrations on the one hand, and a continuing if not worsening violent reaction of police and armed forces on the other hand.¹⁰⁹

After he had realised that repression was not working and actually seemed to be propelling more protesters into the streets, the Shah tried to find other ways to calm the situation. By December, he was still convinced he could remain in power as constitutional monarch, if he could offer reconciliation to his people. He started looking for a new prime minister among the liberal opposition. Meanwhile, the regime was waiting frightfully for the upcoming event of Ashura, the holiest day in the Shia. Khomeini's statements from Paris fuelled the enormous revolutionary potential of this day of remembrance for the battle at Karbala. He called upon the Iranian people to demonstrate against the regime, instead of doing the usual passion plays and processions in honour of Imam Husain. The days before Ashura brought peaceful demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of Iranians in cities all through the country. On the day of Ashura itself an enormous peaceful protest took place in Tehran, with two million people walking through the city streets for eight hours, with green, red and black flags representing the colours of the Shia. During these days, there was no violent reaction from the military. This changed again some days after Ashura, when there were new clashes between the revolutionaries and armed forces. At the same time, the Shah had trouble finding a suitable prime minister, because there were

109 Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, 105-108.

few people who still wanted to be involved in his regime. Ultimately, he appointed the known liberal Shahpour Bakhtiar to form a new government. New promises were made about dismantling SAVAK, releasing prisoners and making changes in economic and foreign policy. Khomeini kept refusing to talk with any Iranian government, while the Shah was still in Iran. Thus, the new government and its promises couldn't stop new protests from taking place. These continued through December and January, with more victims of clashes with security forces. Finally, on the 16th of January, Bakhtiar negotiated the departure of the royal family including the Shah. He left to visit his friend Sadat in Egypt, and never returned to Iran again. Bakhtiar tried to hold on to his office, but, despite new promises and concessions to the religious opposition, did not succeed. The people were longing for the return of Khomeini, but their leader still refused to do business with a government that had been appointed by the Shah. Ultimately, Bakhtiar was forced to allow Khomeini to return. On February 1, he arrived on an Air France plane, welcomed by enormous crowds of his supporters. From the moment he had arrived, the Bakhtiar government was virtually meaningless, and was not recognised by Khomeini or the majority of the people. After a year of violence and protests, the uncrowned leader of the Iranian revolution had arrived in Tehran victoriously.¹¹⁰

The Islamic revolution of Iran became stronger with each new dramatic event that took place, and became uncontrollable pretty early during the process. Probably owing to the relaxation of repression in 1977, the first sparks of protest found their way to the outside. During that year, most of the protests were confined to the intelligentsia. The religious groups were not involved until the death of Khomeini's son Mustafa in November, which would prove an important and usable event for the revolutionaries later on. By the end of 1977, though, there was still no substantial organized revolutionary movement, except for several small ones concentrated in different segments of society, with no cooperation among them. At the same time, the regime stepped up the repression again by the end of the year, after the Shah's meeting with Carter in Washington. It is possible that this new form of repression gave an impulse to the unrest, because people felt that something that they had been given was taken away again. In January 1978, a crucial event in the revolution took place. The reaction against the anti-Khomeini article in *Ettelaat* was furious. The very violent response of the police to the demonstrations and the ensuing death of several protesters triggered the 40 day Shiite cycle of mourning, which would prove to be tremendously important for the revolutionary movement. By this stage of the revolution, the active movement mainly consisted of religious groups, and most importantly the supporters of Khomeini. They would stage new demonstrations every 40 days after the last one, to mourn its victims. These events hugely propelled the revolution,

110 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 307-308.

as every new victim on the side of the protesters added to the widespread outrage felt in all parts of Iranian society. Thus, the demonstrations got bigger and bigger, and more groups got involved.

By the summer of 1978, the 40 day cycle came to an end, after the regime made some concessions and promises. Things calmed down temporarily, but exploded again in July after the death of a prominent cleric in Mashad and the following protests. Now, the most important phase of the revolution started, as more and more Iranians felt the urge to join the demonstrations. August 1978 was the breaking point for the Shah's regime. After the fire in Rex Theatre, the demonstrations became nationwide events, supported by a big part of the Iranian population. In retrospect, it seems clear that when the big demonstrations of July and August were followed by the mass strikes, the regime had lost any chance of survival. The Shah tried to halt the revolution by means of concession, repression and promises, but had lost control completely. The demonstration never stopped after this point, and every event snowballed into bigger ones. Already in September, it should have been clear to all that the Shah would not remain in power for very long.

4 *The Persian Drama*

In this chapter we will take a look at the understanding the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Tehran and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs had of the situation in Iran during the revolution. Our objective will be twofold. First, to see whether their evaluation of the events that were happening in Iran before and during the revolution was accurate. Second, whether the picture they had of Khomeini and their assessment of his role in the revolution and his ideology was right, and if they considered him a liable option as a political factor for the future.

The Netherlands and Iran before the revolution

In the years before the revolution the Dutch government had fairly good relations with the Shah, and the embassy in Tehran had a positive picture of his regime, although there was awareness of some of its more authoritarian sides. This was not very peculiar, since the relations of most of the Western nations, just like the Soviets and their allies, with the Shah were well. In these days, the Shah was a well-seen guest on all international occasions.

Relations between the two countries were put to the test in 1974, when the Iranian embassy in the Dutch city of Wassenaar was temporarily occupied by Iranian students, as a sign of protest against the Shah. This caused some frustrations with the Iranians, who felt that this action could have been prevented by the Dutch. The Iranian regime was unsatisfied with the slow process of judgment of the students in Holland, and for a short while withdrew its ambassador from the Netherlands. Their relations were normalized after a visit to Tehran of the Dutch minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Max van der Stoep, in July 1974, where he was personally received by the Shah.¹¹¹

Dutch-Iranian relations were primarily of an economic kind. Because of the boom of the Iranian economy in the early nineteen-seventies and Iran's leading position in the oil market, there was ample opportunity for trade and investment from Western countries. This weakened from 1977 on, as the Iranian economy slowed down and experienced some problems. In 1975, the leaving Iranian ambassador to the Netherlands, Mr. Farzanegan, noted that the relations between both countries at that time were well, and this could be used to extend and intensify the economic cooperation between the two.¹¹² This resulted in a partnership later that year, for "economic and technical cooperation".¹¹³

111 Message from the Direction Africa and Middle East (DAM) to the embassy in Tehran on September 5 1977, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMFA), Code 9, inv. nr. 1291.

112 Memorandum to the minister on 17th of January 1975, AMFA, Code 9, inv. nr. 1291.

113 Message about "ministerial joint commission for economic and technical cooperation", AMFA, Code 9, inv. nr. 1291.

New problems arrived in 1977 when Iranians were angered about a conference of human rights organization Amnesty International in Amsterdam. With the conference, Amnesty wanted to raise attention for the situation of political prisoners in Iran. On the 18th of January, Amnesty had requested minister Van der Stoel for a contribution of his ministry to the conference to “express your interest for these problems”.¹¹⁴ Although Van der Stoel answered that he saw no need to send a representative of the Dutch government, the Iranians expressed their anger by threatening with a boycott of Dutch products, if the Dutch government did not take any steps to prevent the conference. The Iranians could not imagine that such a conference could be held without permission “from above”, which for them meant that the Dutch had actively approved of it. The Dutch tried to explain that in a country like the Netherlands, organizations did not need approval from the government for the organizing of gatherings. In the end, no boycott was effectuated and the Iranians were somewhat satisfied with the Dutch explanation.^{115 116} This shows again that the Shah’s regime actually had no idea of or no interest in the workings of the Western democracies. Although the Shah was seen as an enlightened monarch helping his country towards the democratic path, this should have been a clear sign that there were significant differences of opinion on how a state should function in relation to its citizens.

Some elements in Dutch society were definitely aware of these differences, and different groups were trying to expand this awareness to a more general level. During the seventies a discussion in the Netherlands took place on the subject of human rights abuses in Iran. These violations were brought to the attention of the Dutch by organizations like Amnesty International and also Iranian students, like the ones who occupied the embassy in 1974. In May 1975, there was a protest of Iranian students in front of the Dutch parliament in The Hague, where they held banners with and chanted anti-Shah slogans. The ministry of Foreign Affairs tried to ban the demonstration because they feared it would jeopardize relations with Iran, but was overruled by the ministry of Justice.¹¹⁷ In January 1976, Iranian students went on a hunger strike in Amsterdam to support eleven Iranians, who were convicted as terrorists in Iran and sentenced to death.¹¹⁸ This led to questions in parliament about these “terrorists” and the overall human rights situation in Iran and to a communiqué of the Iranian embassy about the convictions.¹¹⁹ After a ministerial inquiry to the embassy in Tehran

114 Letter of Amnesty International to the minister on 18th of January 1977, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

115 Letter of Minister to Amnesty International on 3rd of February 1977, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

116 Message of the Dutch ambassador Lavalette to the ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on 9th of February 1977, AMFA, Code 9, inv. nr. 1291.

117 Message of MFA to the embassy in Tehran on 9th of May 1975, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

118 Message of the minister to the embassy in Tehran on 9th of February 1976, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr.445.

119 Press communiqué of the Iranian embassy on 9th of January 1976, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

about the arrests and convictions, ambassador Renardel de Lavalette answered that the convicted had committed murders and had made confessions. About the overall situation of human rights in Iran and rumours about torture of prisoners, he stated that he did not know about this for lack of information of persons concerned, but that “the security service over here has a name of a less good-natured kind when it comes to their actions, next to their reputation of effectiveness in the performing of their tasks”. This must have been a very political way of saying that there were in fact violations of human rights in Iran, especially by the security service, which must have meant SAVAK. We have read about this “effectiveness” in earlier chapters.¹²⁰ This issue somewhat damaged Dutch-Irano relations, as the Dutch parliament was attacked in Iranian papers and accused of “wanton interference in the internal affairs of Iran” and “ignorance about the real conditions prevailing in the country” by the Iranian parliament.¹²¹ Between 1975 and 1978 the ministry of Foreign Affairs would receive increasingly more letters of civilians, stressing their concern for the violation of human rights in Iran and due to cases like the before mentioned, there was a rising awareness of the situation in Iran.

In the years leading up to the revolution there was some coverage of small incidents, mostly by terrorist groups. It is also clear that the overall situation on human rights was being watched, although this usually was because of requests from civilians or organizations, protests by Iranian students in the Netherlands and questions raised in parliament. The embassy often acknowledged that the situation in Iran was not perfect, but seems to have had a habit of downplaying the problems. Next to this, the Dutch also seemed to think that the situation was improving. There was never any mentioning of a general feeling of unrest in Iran. Incidents were always blamed on small groups, with no coherence or support among the population. Sources were in majority government-related: either the Iranian government through contacts or newspapers, or other governments through their embassies in Iran. Seeing this, the Iranian parliament probably had a point in saying that they were ignorant about “the real conditions prevailing in the country”.

He can ride it out

When the incidents that snowballed into the revolution started in November 1977, the Dutch mission in Tehran had no real perception of the frustrations of a great deal of the Iranian people. The amount of messages sent between the ministry and the embassy in the period of May 1977 and November 1977 was extremely low. This amount started going up again after the death of Mustafa Khomeini in November. The first report of unrest is made on the 29th of November by Mr. Schneider of the Dutch embassy in Tehran. He writes about a series of student protests in Tehran on November 15 and 16, which thousands of people should have attended. One of his

120 Answer of ambassador Lavalette to the minister on 10th of January 1976, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

121 Ambassador Lavalette to MFA on 29th of January 1976, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

contacts had signalled an increasing cooperation between religious and leftist groups over the last weeks, which he determines as Islamic-Marxist. He also mentions the gathering of groups of young people in Tehran during the Islamic festival of sacrifice, which could indicate that the opposition did not consist of only Marxists, but also orthodox muslims. In the message, there is no mentioning of the death of Mustafa Khomeini, which was the main incentive for the protests. Mr. Schneider, though, seems to have been accurate very soon about the religious nature of the protest, although he doesn't seem to notice their significance and relation to Khomeini.¹²²

On the 16th of January, an article from the Iranian newspaper *Kayhan* was sent to the ministry, which headed "Qom protest condemns return to stone age". This obviously biased article about a probably largely staged protest seemed to be taken very seriously by the mission. Especially since the protest took place in the city of Qum, where there was minimal support for the Shah, this should have raised some questions. Whether these protest were staged is not sure, but the coverage by *Kayhan* should not be taken too seriously. Nevertheless, the embassy seems to have believed its general message.¹²³ By the end of January, ambassador Campagne expresses his opinion on recent student protest in a letter to the ministry. He does agree with his British colleague that "the turbulence and violence was much bigger in previous years". Still, Campagne writes that the number and magnitude of the protests had made an impression on the regime. Moreover, he has started to see a shift in importance from students to religious groups and reports on an incident in Qum with orthodox muslims, where several were killed. According to the ambassador, though, the general human rights situation in Iran had improved during the last year, which gave more opportunity for protest. This fits perfectly in the general thesis that when people are given more space for expressing their feelings, they usually will. In the light of the recent improvements in the human rights situation, Campagne says that "well-informed and experienced diplomatic observers think a crackdown is unlikely, and that was also the opinion on a recent meeting of the ambassadors of the nine (E.C.-countries)". Strikingly, in the month of January, there was no mentioning of the article in *Ettelaat* on the 8th, which directly led to the protests that Campagne reports about. The same thing happened earlier with the November protests, where the death of Khomeini's son, which was the direct incentive for action, was not mentioned by the embassy.¹²⁴ On the 29th Campagne exchanges his view of the recent measures that the regime had taken to contain the resistance: "Whether this is the way to contain the powers of the red and black reaction is doubtful. For the time being, Iran has to cope with the tensions that a too fast transition from an undeveloped to a developed country bring about".¹²⁵ The second sentence is probably very right. We have seen in chapter one that modernization and especially the sort of modernization from above that the Shah desired, had its

122 Message of Schneider to MFA on 29th of November 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

123 *Kayhan*-article sent to MFA on 16th of January 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

124 Message of Campagne to MFA on 30th of January 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

125 Message of Campagne to MFA on 29th of January 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

consequences for the country. In his message, though, Campagne seems to be saying that the tensions were mere transitional problems, that would be overcome in time. If this is the case, he was underestimating the magnitude of the tensions.

There were also reports about the two meetings of Carter and the Shah. The first meeting in Washington, was reported about on 23rd of November 1977, by the Dutch embassy in Washington, where Mr. Tamenoms Bakker specifically states that the subject of human rights was not discussed, and Carter had said that there was a clear improvement in Iran on this item.¹²⁶ This was repeated by Campagne after Carter's visit of Tehran in December, where again the subject of human rights was no issue. He also stresses the very close relations between the Shah and the American president, and thinks that the visits will "contribute somewhat to a diversion of the internal critique on the regime".^{127 128} Carter's message also must have strengthened the opinion of Campagne, that the human rights situation in Iran was indeed improving.

The next mentioning of unrest is reported in April. These are related to the protests of February 18 in Tabriz, where police needed two days to restore order. These were also the first in the sequence of riots attributed to the 40-day cycle, following 40 days after the January 8 riots. Campagne recognizes this religious proponent of the protests, writing that they were meant to mourn the victims of the earlier demonstrations in the beginning of January. He doesn't specifically mention the 40-day cycle. According to his source at the American embassy, "the Shah is, because of the series of events in Qum and Tabriz and the unrest among students, in doubt whether to increase liberalization or to step up repression again. My contact thinks it is not unlikely the Shah will pursue the last option". This conflicts with Campagne's earlier opinion that a crackdown was not likely.¹²⁹

Another interesting report was sent to the ministry in May, from the Dutch embassy in London. This speaks of a conversation with Tatham, of the Middle East Department in the Foreign Office, who says the unrest started in the summer of 1977, when the "conventional opposition consisting of leftist middle class groups was encouraged to express their frustration by the loosening of repression by the regime. There was a great disappointment, that the promised 'Great Society', could not be fulfilled after the economic problems in 1976". This is somewhat in line with Campagne's earlier remarks about the problems of transition that modernization imposed. Tatham also notes that "there is a growing importance in the opposition for religious groups, and that the Shah had been unwise in the past to frustrate these groups." The overall opinion in the Foreign Office, though, was that the Shah's authority was not

126 Message of Tamenoms Bakker to MFA on 23rd of November 1977, AMFA, 911.21 VII, folder nr. 443.

127 Message of Campagne to MFA on 18th of January 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

128 Message of Campagne to MFA on 8th of January 1978, AMFA, 911.21 VII, folder nr. 443.

129 Message of Campagne to MFA on 12th of April 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

in danger and that he could “ride it out”.¹³⁰ On the 31st of May, Campagne reports about a visit of the royal family to Mashad, where they attended the tomb of Imam Reza and met with some religious leaders. This was obviously a signal of the royal family to the clerics that they, in the words of Tatham, had “frustrated” in the past. According to Campagne, this succeeded and led to a positive reaction of the Iranian clergy, which appeased tensions between the religious groups and the Shah.¹³¹ The same opinion about the Mashad visit is stressed in a letter of Mr. Schneider, who does not seem to have any reason to think that the unrest of the previous months was a sign of future trouble.¹³² This symbolic visit of the royal family to the holy visit of Mashad probably did have some effect on their relations with some of the ulema, but definitely did not mean a real appeasement of the two groups. Especially the more radical *ulema* surrounding the very powerful Khomeini were not influenced by gestures like these. Again, Campagne and Schneider do not seem to realise the depth of the tensions between the Shah and the people, in this case the religious groups. No quick visit to a holy visit could have solved these in itself.

Khomeini is mentioned for the first time on the 23rd of May 1978, in a letter from Mr. Tamenoms Bakker of the Dutch embassy in Washington to the ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is important to notice that the discovery of Khomeini actually came from Washington, rather than from the mission in Tehran. If they had any knowledge of him at the embassy, they did not think it important enough to report it to The Hague up till May. Bakker writes about a conversation with his source Myles Green, acting director for Iran on the State Department, where Green stresses the involvement of religious groups in the incidents. Green sees the religious groups as the core of the opposition, and says they enjoy support among the lower middle classes and students, who are reacting against the recent economic problems. Tamenoms Bakker mentions Khomeini for the first time as “an important figure in the background”, who “from his place of exile in Iraq, where he was sent after the Iranian riots of 1963, is sending a wave of messages recorded on cassette tapes into Iran, where they find a big audience, despite of their unsophisticated character”. According to Green, the religious leaders wanted their traditional influential positions restored, and thus desired limiting the Shah’s powers.¹³³ This first mentioning of Khomeini is somewhat late, especially as the unrest started first with the murder of his son Mustafa, and then again in January when he was attacked by the newspaper *Ettelaat*. Furthermore, nothing is said about Khomeini’s message or ideology, apart from its “unsophisticated character”, which leaves some room for interpretation.

130 Message from the Dutch embassy in London to MFA on 17th of May 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

131 Message of Campagne to MFA on 31st of May 1978, AMFA, 911.21 VII, folder nr. 443.

132 Message of Schneider to MFA on 31st of May 1978, AMFA, Code 9, inv. nr. 123.

133 Message of Tamenoms Bakker to MFA on 23rd of May 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

Nevertheless, reports of new protests and unrest are increasingly being sent to The Hague. On the 25th of May, Campagne reports to the ministry about new riots, especially in Qum. He also criticizes the coverage in foreign media, who, in his eyes, create an exaggerated picture of the events in Iran. He says that this “raises questions with businessmen, who are starting to think that a trip to Iran is irresponsible. We were approached with issues like this by telex, and responded that under the current conditions there is no reason not to travel to Iran”. Campagne still doesn’t see any real danger for the Shah, and says that “the Shah, backed by the army, can certainly control the situation”.¹³⁴ Looking back, the coverage in the media was certainly not exaggerated. It is more likely that Campagne was still not seeing the situation as it really was: very dangerous and bound to explode. This explosion would finally happen in the summer.

During these following summer months, when ambassador Campagne had taken leave, there were no significant reports from the embassy about the situation in Iran, except from Schneider on the 14th of June. He describes some recent statements from the Shah about the internal troubles. The Shah says that these are a consequence of his quest for liberalization, which he will continue pursuing. These problems would continue for about two years, according to the Shah, and could only be stopped by a higher pace of reforms. This higher pace of reforms actually meant some concessions to the liberal opposition. Schneider sees this as an attempt by the Shah to include certain good willing forces within the opposition in the political process. This was an accurate evaluation on the part of Schneider. He also says that there are indications that moderate oppositionists would support the Shah’s plans. He was probably also right about this, but by the time of these concessions, the liberals were not the most powerful and dangerous force in the opposition.¹³⁵ As said before, these promises and concessions the Shah made did help for a short while, but already by the end of July and during Ramadan new riots and protests broke out, instigated once again by religious groups. Regarding these Ramadan protests, Mr. Hamer of the Dutch embassy writes about the “stereotypical pattern of religious meetings in a mosque or the house of a cleric, after which the stirred up believers take to the streets en masse, while chanting ‘unpatriotic’ slogans and set fire to party bureaus, banks and communal buildings”. He stresses that the influence of the clergy on the regular people is very big. He also reports protests throughout the entire country. This evaluation of the Ramadan protest is very correct, and the first accurate mentioning of the religious character of the protests. Hamer seems to have understood the way these protests took shape, and in his message he underlines the important role of religious holidays and the clergy. His letter to the ministry in The Hague was dated August 16 1978, already 8 months after these “stereotypical patterns” were first started.¹³⁶

134 Message of Campagne to MFA on 25th of May 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

135 Message of Schneider to MFA on 14th of June 1978, AMFA, 911.21 VII, folder nr. 443.

136 Message of Hamer to MFA on 16th of August 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

When Campagne had returned to Tehran and sent his first report to The Hague on the 22nd of August, there was a drastic change in tone about the seriousness of the events. Before his leave, the ambassador had no doubts about the capability of the Shah to control the situation and downplayed the events. By now, he seemed to be changing his opinion. This can be seen immediately in the title of his first report, which was titled “To a crisis situation in Iran?”. The title in itself suggests that doubts are beginning to rise at the embassy: is the situation more dangerous after all? Campagne describes a “long hot summer”, which he himself couldn’t have experienced since he was on leave, and writes about the death of 400 people in the Rex Theatre in Abadan. Regarding the Abadan fire, he does not specify possible suspects, but instead blames it on overall “terror”. Whether he means government terror or terror of oppositional groups is not clear, but as we have seen in the previous chapter, the Abadan-drama has not been really solved up till today. In short, Campagne says that “the audacity of the terror has no limits anymore”. He signals the hijacking of the opposition by extremely orthodox muslims, who have forced the more moderate ones to take their side. Just like Hamer, he sees that the protests start in the mosques and then take to the streets, and that after 40 days the victims of each protest are being mourned with new ones. The 40-day cycle actually had come to an end by June, making this statement by the ambassador redundant. For the first time too, Campagne mentions Khomeini’s role in the revolution: there was “sharp agitation by the mullahs, led by the exiled fanatical leader of the Iranian Shiites Khomeini, who has a big influence in Iran and wants nothing less than getting rid of the Shah”. Campagne describes the protest movement as consisting of small shopkeepers, students, youth and lower civil servants, and says that up till then the working classes had stayed out of the riots. He ends the report with a striking anecdote: “It is sure that the position of the Shah has weakened. At the festivities in the palace for the 25th anniversary of the revolt I saw a concerned looking, emaciated man, surrounded by a thousand yes-men, who concealed for him the reality of the things going on in the country”. This report of August 22 is a very important one. There is a clear voice of despair in it, and for the first time assesses the situation close to how it really was. This makes the report a very interesting one. Especially the desperate tone of the ambassador makes it dramatic. Finally, the embassy had realized that they were dealing with nothing less than a revolution.¹³⁷

Complete breakdown

This new realization must have been fuelled even more by the wave of protests continuing in late summer. By August, the situation in Iran was out of control. Although there was a growing consciousness of the seriousness of the events, outsiders sometimes still could see ways out of the danger for the Shah. There was no real talk of a religious coup or abdication of the Shah. This can be seen in different reports from

137 Message of Campagne to MFA on 22nd of August 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

Dutch embassies all over the world. A message from the Dutch embassy in Paris to the ministry in The Hague confirms this picture. A conversation with the vice-president of the Levant department on the Quai d'Orsay is described, in which he says that the magnitude of disasters like the one in Abadan, helped by the coverage in the media, has wrongly called up the image that the country is in a pre-revolutionary stage. This is a very bold statement, for the revolution by this time was almost at its peak.¹³⁸ Thankfully, the reports of the Dutch embassy in Tehran were becoming increasingly accurate since the report from Campagne after his return to Iran in late August. On the 8th and 9th of September, Campagne reports about the declaration of martial law, which he calls, in the light of recent clashes, "inevitable". He says that the recent concessions of the Shah had only strengthened the opposition in their opinion that his position was weakening, and had led to more actions. He even thought of a new role for the military, saying that "the erosion of power has reached a dangerous stage, in which it is not impossible to think that the military will take fate in their own hands when the government will continue to hesitate". Campagne also realises that the gap between the clergy and the government had widened, and that their relation was beyond saving.¹³⁹ ¹⁴⁰ The position of the army was a very popular issue in the reports and messages from the Dutch embassy. From August onwards, there was increasing fear of involvement of the army. Although the army never really took faith in its own hands during the revolution, the threat of this happening was ofcourse very real. At this point Campagne seems to think that the army is the only resolve left for the Shah.

In his message of the 23rd of September, titled "Iran Quo Vadis", Campagne speaks of several oppositional groups who see the abdication of the Shah as the only solution for the situation. Again, the tone of his letter is more desperate. Although after the declaration of martial law things had calmed down, he says that the overall opinion is that the trouble will start again when it will be lifted. On the other hand, he writes that "there are Middle East experts who say that 'the logical course of events' doesn't always show the expected pattern of development in this part of the world". This shows that there is a sense of uncertainty about where things are going. The title of the message, "quo vadis", makes this very clear. It also shows that the religious oppositionists were not the only ones using religious rhetoric.¹⁴¹

In October, Schneider reports that the Shah has promised that Iranian dissidents living abroad are free to return to Iran without prosecution, as long as they respect the constitution and respect the independence, integrity and freedom of Iran. This would allow a return of Khomeini, although Schneider doubts that the religious leader will return to Iran. Khomeini indeed did not return to Iran until after the de-

138 Message of the embassy in Paris to MFA on 23rd of August 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

139 Message of Campagne to MFA on 8th of September 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

140 Message of Campagne to MFA on 9th of September 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

141 Message of Campagne to MFA on 23rd of September 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

parture of the Shah. What would have happened if he did is open for speculation, but it probably would not have helped his position, which at this point was very strong.¹⁴² This would become obvious again with the mass strikes of October, which show the widening of his support among Iranians, of which Campagne reports on the 10th: “Up till now, it was seen as a plus for the position of the government and regime that the working classes did not manifest themselves in the demonstrations.(..) Now however, a dangerous situation is also developing there, with probably serious consequences for the economical and financial stability of the country”. He expresses his worries for the coming Ashura and the opening of the universities.¹⁴³

Meanwhile, there seems to be some room for improvement in the eyes of other European Iran experts. On the 24th of October, Tamenoms Bakker of the London embassy describes another conversation with his contact at the Foreign Office, Mr. Tatham. Tatham thinks that the situation in Iran in mid-October is better than in the weeks before. He even says the role of Khomeini will diminish further with his transfer from Iraq to Paris, because contact between the leader and his followers will go down, and some of his supporters are already blaming him for the fact that he moved to a non-muslim country. The departure of Khomeini would be good for other religious groups, for it gives them a chance to take a more moderate stance now the ayatollah can not control them anymore. That Tatham was absolutely wrong about this would show in the coming weeks, in which Khomeini would become the symbol of the revolution ever more.¹⁴⁴ Henry Precht, the contact at the State Department of the Dutch embassy in Washington, says that there is a growing realization among the opposition that continuation on the road of violence carries the risk of developments getting completely out of hand. They would be more and more willing to look for a *modus vivendi* with the government.¹⁴⁵ The reports on these two conversations show that experts in Western government service are still seeing – or are they hoping? – liable opportunities for the situation to resolve itself.

In this period, we can see an increasing number of reports on Iran. These are not only coming from the embassy in Tehran, but also from the Dutch embassies in London, Paris and Washington. Again on the 29th, Campagne sends two letters to the ministry in The Hague. In the first, he mentions the recent statements of support from Carter and British Prime Minister Callaghan to the Shah. Rumours on the streets are, according to the ambassador, that these had the opposite effect, as they seemed to underline the already strong idea that the Shah is a puppet of the West. He also notices a growing xenophobia in Iran, especially against the U.S., the U.K. and other Western countries, which had already led to some incidents where foreigners had been attacked.

142 Message of Schneider to MFA on 4th of October 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

143 Message of Campagne to MFA on 10th of October 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

144 Message of Tamenoms Bakker to MFA on 23th of October 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

145 Message of the embassy in Washington to MFA on 25th of October 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

In the second letter, Campagne reports about the recent riots and unrest. He writes that there is a new wave of demonstrations in Iran, with a new role for violent underground guerrilla organizations. There are heavy clashes in Tehran between students and police. He says the already tense situation is intensified by strikes throughout the entire country, of which he had already expressed his fear in previous messages. Campagne also stresses the opinion of his European colleagues in Iran, with whom he is in regular contact: "Several colleagues (..) think that the situation is currently heading for the worst at a rapid pace, and seems to be reaching a dramatic low, where the seizure of power by a military regime seems almost inevitable, ending all attempts at liberalization. (..) Nothing is pointing at positive development." We can see that a military takeover is still considered a very plausible option. Seeing that there is never a real mention of a takeover by Khomeini or his supporters, the ambassador must have thought a military coup more likely to occur. According to him, religious leader Khomeini refuses any compromise and wants nothing less than the substitution of the current monarchy for an Islamic republic. This is the first time Campagne mentions the creation of an Islamic republic, although he doesn't explain what is meant by it, or what the chances are that this form of state will be a realistic alternative for the future. At this point, a military coup is seen as the biggest danger for the Shah and the overall situation.¹⁴⁶

As we have seen before, the military government was instituted on the 6th of November. A summary of the Shah's speech in which he informs the people of this, was sent to the ministry in The Hague by the embassy. It sums up some points of this speech. In the speech, the Shah actually justifies the recent strikes in Iran, and promises that the combination of financial and political corruption will not repeat itself. He says that free elections will be held and that he has heard the "message of your (the Iranian people, i.e.) revolution, and guarantee that your sacrifices will be honoured". The Shah ends his speech with a call for cooperation and dialogue between all different groups. The speech is a clear attempt by the Shah to normalize realitions and perhaps to try to create more support among the less radical opposition groups.¹⁴⁷ The embassy in Washington describes a conversation with Mark Johnson, acting officer for Iran with the State Department, about the same speech and the institution of the military regime. Johnson says the institution of the military regime has had a positive influence on the situation in the country. The speech of the Shah had been received quite well, and would hopefully contribute to the restoration of peace in Iran. He notes that the monarchy still enjoys support among big parts of Iranian society, in the countryside as well as in cities. He says that cooperation from Khomeini is not to be expected, and calls the ayatollah "adamant and obdurate". Johnson notes that while Khomeini had succeeded in gathering a large support, he lacks any kind of political base, and thus is not a real alternative for the current regime in Tehran.

146 Message of Campagne to MFA on 29th of October 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

147 Summary of the Shah's speech sent to MFA on 6th of November 1978, AMFA, 911.21 VII, folder nr. 443.

The overall tone of Johnson's opinion on Iran is positive. He thinks that the future is depending on the Shah's actions".¹⁴⁸ The same optimism seems to be rising in Paris, where the Dutch embassy reports that "they seem to be more optimistic on the Quai now, with regard to the survival chances of the regime."¹⁴⁹ Johnson once again repeats his optimistic statements some days later, of which the embassy in Washington writes to The Hague. According to Johnson, "the military regime has apparently succeeded to restore order and peace in the country". This would create an opportunity for the Shah to set up a national government to substitute the military one. Johnson is certain that the National Front and especially Khomeini at some point had to realise that their only chance lay in participating in a civil government.¹⁵⁰ In Tehran, the Dutch embassy also seems to become a bit more positive, but they are still afraid and uncertain of what the coming period will bring. Schneider writes that he is especially worried about the coming Ashura, which could prove to be a breaking point.¹⁵¹ This positivism must have come from the relative calm that was brought by the military regime, after the first days of its institution. Also, the speech of the Shah could have had a positive influence on the opinion of the embassy and the different sources, who could have thought that this attempt to normalize tendencies could have a reasonable chance of succeeding. In reality, though, there was no more stopping the revolution, and the relative calm would very soon come to a quick end again with the days before and during Ashura.

The Ashura protests and their violent aftermath drastically changed the hopeful positive tone, also in Washington. In a message from the embassy in Washington describing a pre-Ashura conversation with Carl Clement, desk officer for Iran on the State Department, all hope seems to be lost. Clement says that the situation in Iran is very alarming, and if the protests continue on this scale, the Shah has no other option than leave. Clement thinks that in that case he will be succeeded by a military dictatorship, and doesn't see an Islamic republic as a long-term option.¹⁵² Campagne also reports on the peaceful Ashura demonstrations in Tehran, and seems impressed. He writes with astonishment about the capability of the religious leaders to rally huge masses of over 2 million people, and their ability to control these masses. This time, he questions the loyalty of the army in the light of such massive popular support against the Shah, and wonders when the Shah will get the picture. This is somewhat contradicting his earlier thoughts that the army would sooner or later take faith in its own hands, for example with a coup. About Khomeini, he says: "Khomeini is more a

148 Message of the embassy in Washington to MFA on 7th of November 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

149 Message of the embassy in Paris to MFA on 14th of November 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

150 Message of the embassy in Washington to MFA on 17th of November 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

151 Message of Schneider to MFA on 27th of November 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

152 Message of the embassy in Washington to MFA on 6th of December 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

symbol for people to gather around in this time of resistance, than the true leader of tomorrow". This reflects that both Clement and Campagne still don't see Khomeini as a viable option for future government.¹⁵³

Meanwhile in Washington, Mark Johnson still remains positive. The embassy reports that Johnson "thinks that the disciplined course of recent events could be the beginning of a period of relative quiet, in which talks between the military government and the opposition could lead to some results". Johnson thinks that the Shah "is still like a father figure for a big part of the population", and wonders how long Khomeini could maintain himself if he was to return to the country: "Objectively, the monarchy still has a fairly good chance of surviving the storm". This proves that even at the State Department, opinions could vary greatly, like those of Johnson and Clement. The positivism of Johnson in the light of all the events can be called somewhat naive.¹⁵⁴

In London there is a more realistic opinion. Tatham, as interviewed by Mr. Fack from the Dutch embassy, was surprised that the Shah survived the month leading up to Ashura. Tatham sees three important elements in the current situation: the army, the National Front, and "a broad mass of opposition against the Shah led by Khomeini". Tatham has some problems seeing Khomeini as a head of state. At best, he could function as "a conscience of the nation, like Gandhi in the first years after India's independence". Tatham was actually very close with this thought. Khomeini would indeed function as a sort of national and religious conscience, although he would have more power than Tatham probably could have envisioned. Moreover, Tatham was not a fan of the religious leader and his supporters: "A rise to power of this fanatical, strongly religious group can only be feared". Tatham concludes by saying that the general opinion at his office, was that "the Shah is not even going to pull through as a constitutional monarch". When we compare this evaluation and prediction of Tatham to those of Johnson, and to a lesser extent Clement, in Washington, there is a huge difference. Needless to say, Tatham was much closer to the truth than his American counterparts.¹⁵⁵

Meanwhile, concerns about the well-being of foreigners in Iran was at a high point. Already on the 6th of November, the Dutch embassy had made an evaluation of evacuation options and concluded that the evacuation of the one hundred thousand people of Western origin was impossible.¹⁵⁶ In December, the situation worsened, and some foreigners were being threatened or attacked. Some received threatening letters in French, German or English. These were delivered to houses or put underneath the windshields of cars with diplomatic license plates. The most famous of these was the Cursed Yonky-letter, which was delivered all over Tehran to foreign-

153 Message of Campagne to MFA on 12th of December 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

154 Message of the embassy in Washington to MFA on 6th of December 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

155 Message of Fack to MFA on 22nd of December 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

156 Message of Campagne to MFA on 6th of November 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VII, folder nr. 445.

er's cars and houses, with the following text: "O, cursed Yonky, Although you know well about Shah's Monarkism and his general massacre but while all liberal people condemn this executioner you and your domned president support him. This is the reason that all the Iranian people hate you. Down with Imperialism, down with zionism, down with commonism. Viva Islam!" Campagne reported this last letter to The Hague with some amusement, although his worries were absolutely clear.¹⁵⁷ By the end of December, American employees of oil companies were being shot in Ahwaz, and Campagne stresses his worries about the fate of the Dutch in Iran, as well as the oil production.¹⁵⁸ On the 27th, he writes that the production of oil has come to a near standstill, as a result of these terrorist actions and strikes.¹⁵⁹ Then on the 29th, he again reports about heavy clashes between police and protesters, and writes that "total breakdown is coming in fast".¹⁶⁰ Looking back, the fear of Campagne was absolutely legitimate, but no Dutch nationals were seriously harmed during the revolution.

In January 1979, a dramatic increase in reports from embassies all over the world on the subject of Iran can be seen. The embassy in Tehran is now reporting almost daily to The Hague. As the situation is heading towards a climax, the tone of the writings is one of puzzlement and uncertainty. On the 5th of January, Dutch minister Van der Klaauw of Foreign Affairs issues an order for the immediate availability of aircraft for possible evacuation in the following week.¹⁶¹

Tamenoms Bakker of the embassy in Washington cites a conversation with Gary Sick, Iran expert for the National Security Council. Sick says that: "The situation is on a knife's edge". Although Sick is sure that within a short time very important changes will take place in Iran, he also says that no one could make a decent prediction for the future. In his eyes, there are three options that are worth considering. First, that the Bakhtiar government would succeed. He adds that this will only work if the Shah leaves the country. Second, that Khomeini will return after the Shah's departure and will take over power. Third, that the Shah will somehow again strengthen his bond with the army, and create some kind of military regency council. It is clear that Sick thinks the role of the Shah is over. On the contrary, he considers Khomeini "a force to be reckoned with", and does not see him losing his authority in the short run.¹⁶² This is one of the first times that Khomeini is mentioned as an option for future leadership of the country. It is also clear that there is a growing sense of uncertainty about what exactly this future will bring.

157 Message of Campagne to MFA on 6th of December 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.
 158 Message of Campagne to MFA on 24th of December 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.
 159 Message of Campagne to MFA on 27th of December 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.
 160 Message of Campagne to MFA on 29th of December 1978, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.
 161 Message of Van der Klaauw on 5th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.
 162 Message of Tamenoms Bakker to MFA on 5th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

In a letter about the appointment of the Bakhtiar government, ambassador Campagne gives it a 50-50 chance of survival, depending on whether the Shah leaves the country. By now, everyone seems to have given up the Shah.¹⁶³ The day after his last message, Campagne writes about a recent power struggle within the opposition and says that there is “great division”. Religious leaders are having big differences of opinion, especially Shariatmadari and Khomeini. The National Front is also said to have broken with Khomeini, or the other way around. The ambassador eagerly quotes from newspaper articles. After a 62-day strike, this must have been a source he had really missed. Newspapers also write about the low level of popular support that the National Front enjoys. This may have come as a surprise, since much of Western countries thought the National Front to be the most legitimate option for the future, and envisioned an important role for it in the formation of a new government. Campagne also writes again about strong rumours that a military coup is on its way. With this in mind, he thinks that “the most important question is when the Shah will leave and how the army will respond”. Campagne still sees a military coup as the best possibility now the Shah’s position has weakened severely.¹⁶⁴ Mark Johnson also fears the moment when the military and the religious groups will clash, as cited in a message from Tamenoms Bakker to The Hague.¹⁶⁵ Between the 9th and the 15th messages with evaluation and information about Iran are sent to The Hague by the embassies in Moscow, Brussels, Djedda, Jerusalem, Washington, Paris and Bonn. The world’s eye has turned to Iran.¹⁶⁶

On the 16th, Campagne reports on the 11-point program of the Bakhtiar government, which includes the abolishment of SAVAK, release and rehabilitation of political prisoners, free elections, the departure of “non-essential” foreigners from Iran, complete individual and social freedom and freedom of speech, support for the “Palestinian nation” and an oil boycott of Israel. The 11-point program is full of concessions to the opposition, and a new attempt to get closer to each other.¹⁶⁷

The day after that, the Shah leaves. This couldn’t have come as a surprise, as we can see that realism about the weak and impossible position of the Shah had grown over the past few weeks. Campagne writes that “the departure of the Shah has led to euphoria and celebrations in the city, comparable to our experiences in 1945”, when Holland was liberated by allied forces. He reports that Khomeini still refuses any cooperation with “le gouvernement usurpateur”, and that cooperation with the government is considered an offence. In this letter, Campagne is asking many questions, instead of giving information. This shows the uncertainty of the situation and the

163 Message of Campagne to MFA on 9th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

164 Message of Campagne to MFA on 10th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

165 Message of Tamenoms Bakker to MFA on 11th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

166 Messages from the embassies in Moscow, Brussels, Djedda, Jerusalem, Washington, Paris and Bonn to MFA from 9th to 15th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

167 Message of Campagne to MFA on 16th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

inability to make a clear assesment of the balance of power in revolutionary Iran. He wonders about the power struggle about to break lose. He wonders when Khomeini will return and what the chances of the Bakhtiar government are. He is worried about the stance of the army, and is not sure what to expect of them. He concludes the letter with the announcement that foreigners are increasingly being targeted by Iranians, and that there is a growing sense of xenophobia.¹⁶⁸ In another report of the same day, Campagne writes that Khomeini has announced the formation of a muslim revolutionary council, to supervise and organize free elections and form an Islamic national government. This is the first time Campagne mentions anything about Khomeini's future plans for the Iranian state. His information was derived from a press statement of Khomeini from Paris.¹⁶⁹

An interesting message is sent from the embassy in Washington, in which Henry Precht of the State Department is said to have admitted that the Americans have had some contact with Khomeini, as well as with the other opposition groups, already. Precht says not to be optimistic about Khomeini's susceptibility to the America views. According to him, the situation in Iran is "fluid and completely unpredictable". It seems that the political and diplomatic world are completely in the dark regarding Iran's future.¹⁷⁰ The same picture is painted of the British Foreign Office by the embassy in London.¹⁷¹ Schneider reports from Tehran to The Hague on the 21st of January, writing about the attention in newspapers for the mass demonstrations of the past days. According to him, these demonstrations have given a mandate for the formation of an Islamic republic. He does not specify what he means by this, and seems to have borrowed the phrase from newspaper articles that say the same thing. In these newspapers a lot of attention is given to the coming "muslim revolution", led by Khomeini, and references to the demonstrations as a "mammoth referendum" on the future of Iran. Other newspapers specifically warn for the hijacking of the revolution by religious fanatics. Press freedom is at a peak during these days, and the embassy clearly makes good use of it.¹⁷² Moreover, the uncertainty of the future led to more speculation. On the 23rd, Campagne writes about the possibility of a clash between the army and Khomeini's supporters, if the religious leader would return to Iran. That he will return very soon seems clear to the ambassador. The thing he is still not sure of is how the army would respond.¹⁷³

Then, on the 31st of January, Campagne sends a message to The Hague titled "Iran on the eve of Khomeini's return". He says that the ambassadors of the nine E.C.-countries are "holding their breath, waiting for the new act in this Persian

168 Message of Campagne to MFA on 17th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

169 Message of Campagne to MFA on 17th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

170 Message of Tammenoms Bakker to MFA on 18th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

171 Message of Fack to MFA on 19th of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

172 Message of Schneider to MFA on 21st of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

173 Message of Campagne to MFA on 23rd of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

drama". He wonders what Khomeini will do when he has returned to Iran. Will he immediately appoint a new government, with the support of the people? Will he cooperate with the Bakhtiar government, under pressure of his more moderate compatriots? Still, Campagne is mainly asking questions.¹⁷⁴ He reports the return of Khomeini on the 4th of February, and in this message he only cites some of Khomeini's quotes. Khomeini clearly denounces the Bakhtiar government and refuses to speak to them. Khomeini again announces the formation of a revolutionary council, which should supervise elections and the setting up of a new government. Campagne says that Khomeini repeatedly contradicts himself and that his message is "not very accurate".¹⁷⁵ Next, Khomeini gives the authority to set up a new government to Mehdi Bazargan, of which Campagne reports on the 6th. This government should lead the country towards a referendum in which the people can put the concept of an Islamic republic to a vote. Campagne also says that Khomeini, who according to the ambassador now thinks he is the absolute religious authority in Iran, has explained that the government of Bazargan is one formed and held by Islamic canonical law. He writes that Bakhtiar has responded to the idea of an Islamic republic, saying that "it is incomprehensible to me, and I have not seen this in any book". About Khomeini's role in the revolutionary council, Campagne writes something very important. He says that "the relation between Khomeini and the revolutionary council is unclear. For so far as his theoretical work *vilayat-i faqih* and the Shiite tradition sketch his opinion, it is likely that he regards himself as 'an advisor with compelling authority'. Right now, there is no reason to believe that he aspires to become head of state. It is thus probable that the revolutionary council will function as a sort of head of state".

This is the first time Campagne, or anyone else for that matter, mentions Khomeini's work on *velayat-e faqih*. Although he does not say much about his knowledge of the subject, it looks like he has come to know at least the basics. Whether he has read the text himself is doubtful. It is more likely that he has found out about it through conversation or other sources. *Islamic Government* was not in full circulation by this time, and certainly not in English. The fact that he mentions the book this late, and with previous letters obviously showing that he was oblivious about Khomeini's religious, let alone political views, suggests that he might have found out about it quite recently. Nevertheless, the mentioning of *velayat-e faqih* is an important moment. This meant that the picture of Iran's future should now have become more clear to the involved.¹⁷⁶

The messages and reports sent from the embassy in Tehran to the ministry in The Hague, give a clear picture of the way the Dutch mission in Iran experienced the events of the Islamic revolution. During the first months of 1978, when the revolution had started, there is no real concern for the position of the Shah, and the embassy down-

174 Message of Campagne to MFA on 31st of January 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

175 Message of Campagne to MFA on 4rd of February 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

176 Message of Campagne to MFA on 6th of February 1979, AMFA, 911.31 VIII, folder nr. 446.

plays the events. It is only after the summer that ambassador Campagne realises that the protests are no ordinary demonstrations of angry radicals. From August onwards, there is an increasing voice of despair in the messages sent to The Hague, sometimes interrupted by a note of positivism when the situation seems to have calmed down a little. In December, it seems clear to the embassy staff writing to the ministry, that the Shah has no real chances left. They are waiting for his abdication.

Khomeini is first mentioned by the end of May. This is strange, since the two main events that triggered the first incidents that led to the revolution, were related to Khomeini. First, there was the murder of his son Mustafa in November 1977, and second, the slanderous newspaper article in *Ettelaat* in January 1978. The incidents following these events were reported about without the mentioning of the religious leader. Although Khomeini was not mentioned, it seems highly unlikely that there was no knowledge of him at the Dutch embassy. They probably deemed him too unimportant at first.

His ideology was also not mentioned very often. There are some remarks about an Islamic republic in the second half of 1978, but nowhere does anyone explain what is meant or understood by that idea. It also seems that Khomeini is not being taken seriously as an alternative for future government. In 1979, Khomeini is mentioned more and more, and by this time he is increasingly seen as a liable option for government, or at least for the formation of one. We can see that by this time his thoughts on the Islamic republic come up more often, but still there is no real explanation of its meaning. Campagne mentions *velayat-e faqih* for the first time in February 1979, which shows that by then he did have some knowledge about the ideas of Khomeini. Some excerpts of *Islamic Government* were sent by the Dutch embassy in Jerusalem to the Hague, which they had received from the Israeli government. These excerpts in English led to some consternation at the ministry, as they were in part about the destruction of Israel and Western imperialism. They showed Khomeini at his most radical. These excerpts are the first proof that someone at an embassy or ministry had actually read parts of *Islamic Government* himself.¹⁷⁷

It can be said that the Dutch embassy in Tehran was late. Late in assessing the danger of the events and late in realising the importance of Khomeini and his ideology. The real question is whether they can be blamed for that. All over the world, the situation in Iran was unclear. We can see this in the different reports coming in from London, Washington and Paris, as well as the ones from Tehran. During a revolution, it is hard to see what exactly is happening. The outcome of these times of turbulence is mostly unpredictable. The world in 1978 and 1979 did not have the benefit of hindsight.

177 Message of the embassy in Jerusalem to MFA on 14th of February 1979, AMFA, 911.31 IX, folder nr. 447.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters we have taken a look at the history of Iran in the twentieth century, leading up to the Islamic revolution, the ideology of Khomeini and how it evolved over the years, the revolution itself and the way the Dutch embassy in Tehran has experienced the turbulent revolutionary period. In this conclusion, we will take a brief look at our findings and try to answer the questions that we posed in the introduction.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Iran was fighting against its backward position and its unimportant role on the world stage. The Tobacco Boycott and the Constitutional revolution showed the already significant power religious groups had in Iran around 1900. This was a sign of the capability of the clergy to gather support among the Iranian masses. The weak dynasty of the Qajars was substituted for the rule of the strong Reza Shah. Under his leadership, the real uprooting of traditional Iranian society began. With his modernization from above, he tried to force Iran into becoming a modern nation, shaped by Western mould. He tried to do this by ruthless governance. The battle between the Pahlavis and the *ulema* had by then started. Through strictly secularizing policies, Reza Shah tried to change the traditional Iranian society, in which the role of the clergy was everywhere.

When he was succeeded by his son Mohammad Reza, Iran was standing at a turning point in its history. The power of the Shah after the Second World War was significantly less than in the years before. This gave the chance to all kinds of oppositional groups to flourish. There were radical religious groups like that of Navvab Safavi, and there were more mainstream opposition groups like the liberal National Front of Mohammad Mossadeq. It was only after the coup that ousted Mossadeq, through a pact between the Shah, religious groups and the C.I.A., that the Shah regained the power his father had had. Now, he could start fulfilling the dream that he and his father shared: changing Iran into a developed, modern and powerful country.

The White Revolution would be his way of realising all this. Through authoritarian government, the Shah started a similar program of modernization from above. Unlike his father though, he became a close ally of Western powers, specifically the United States. With some help of the U.S., but mostly with the help of the amounts of oil money flowing into Iran, the White Revolution was started in 1963 and was still going on when the Islamic revolution started. The White Revolution was one of the most important catalysts of unrest in Iran, and probably indirectly led to the revolution at the end of the seventies. What was its impact? Although the White Revolution - or was it the oil money? - succeeded in raising the standard of Iranian life and in dramatically raising the GNP, there were many negative side effects. The authoritar-

ian way of government encouraged corruption, the Shah had created a terrible secret police that repressed his people, he had upset the traditional power and importance of Islam and the divisions between poor and rich were never as big in Iranian society. By 1978, there was high inflation, affecting the poorest segments of society the most. The Shah was dependent on oil money for his big projects and arms purchases. These big projects had failed turning Iran into a profitable industrial country. The form of state capitalism that the Shah had introduced was highly inefficient. Iranian culture was uprooted by foreign influences, the disappearing of traditional Iranian ways of living, urbanization, huge income inequalities and the repression of traditionally powerful groups like the *bazaaris* and the *ulema*. All these things were strongly felt by the Iranian population. This great feeling of discontent ultimately led to the Islamic Revolution and gave ground to the activist and fanatical ideology of religious leaders like Khomeini, who saw his support growing steadily during the sixties and seventies.

Khomeini was the first of a new generation of politically activist clerics in Iran. During his time as a student and his first years in Qum as a *mujtahid*, the Iranian clergy was still opposed to involvement in politics. This tradition would be opposed from time to time by clerics like Kashani and Nuri, but the greater part of the *ulema* thought they had no role in politics. Khomeini very consciously chose a political course, after his speeches in 1963. With this, he became the voice of the religious opposition against the regime of the Shah. His movement consisted mainly of students, but gradually expanded to traditionally religious groups like the *bazaaris*. His message was spread through the old networks of Iranian society: the mosque, the family and the bazaar. After his exile, his supporters spread wave of cassette tapes, pamphlets and lectures. By the time the revolution broke loose, they had created a movement that had supporters all over Iran.

His ideology should have been clear by the late seventies. By this time he had written *Islamic Government*, in which he clearly describes the way a state should function according to him. The basics for the future Islamic republic were set out in this work. It was an activist work, with rhetoric suited for a revolution. His message of the oppression of the poor spoke to millions of Iranians, as did his emphasis on the traditional Islamic values of Iran. In a fast changing world, this was something the people could hold onto. Nevertheless, it is comprehensible that outside his circle of followers there was no great knowledge about his thoughts and ideas. In Iran, he was not considered a real factor until 1977, when the frustration found an outlet. Even up till the end of the revolution, many Iranians, including his supporters, did not have a real idea of what Khomeini wanted. In the West, the same thing was true. During his years in Paris, Khomeini, assisted by some of his Western educated advisers, had succeeded in creating a less radical image for himself. He never really laid down his plans, and from time to time even let it seem that he was interested in a mixture of religion and democracy for the future Iran. It took months after the revolution for

Khomeini to finally become clear about what he had in mind. What he probably had in mind all the time, was the Islamic republic as it took shape after 1979, and as he had written about in his most important work *Islamic Government*.

The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Tehran was sitting at the front row when the revolution took place. Nevertheless it was hard for them to get a clear picture of what was happening. We can see this from the start of the events in 1977. The unrest and protests started in November, after the death of Mustafa Khomeini in Iraq. Although the embassy reports about protests, no reason is given. Again in January, they fail to name the direct incentive for the big protests that started the 40-day cycle, which was the article in *Ettelaat* about Khomeini. These two incidents that started the revolution, were both significantly related to Khomeini. Thus, it is strange that he is not mentioned once. Moreover, the unrest is downplayed by the embassy, saying that it had been worse in years before and blaming it on a too fast transition to modern times. Incidents continue to be reported, without mention of the Shiite 40-day cycle of mourning. Khomeini is first mentioned in a message from the embassy in Washington by the end of May 1978, but still very brief.

It takes until August before the situation is assessed in all its seriousness by the embassy. In May and June the ambassador expresses his frustration coverage by the media, who in his mind picture things out of proportion. Then, in August, he takes a more dramatic tone and wonders if a crisis situation is coming up. By this time, the revolution was indeed at a breaking point. It is strange though, that it took so long for the embassy to realise that the protests were not ordinary and inherently very dangerous. From this time on, it is clear that the embassy is very worried about the situation, and that they see increasingly less perspective for the Shah. We can clearly see that the situation is becoming more and more unclear for the embassy. In the reports to The Hague there are often more questions asked than answered, and there is a lot of speculation about the future. Contrary to the period before August, every little incident is followed closely and reported about. We can also see a rise in reports about Iran from other embassies, especially in Washington, London and Paris. It is striking that these reports, based on government sources, are often contradictory or make different evaluations of the situation. This shows the difficulty Western nations had with understanding the events in Iran during the revolution. Still, the Dutch embassy in Iran was fairly quick with assessing the danger of the situation in Iran. Where they were having serious doubts about the future of the Shah already in August, this realisation came slower in other countries.

Khomeini was being increasingly reported about from October to January. We can see that while time passes, the embassy attributes more importance to him. First, Khomeini is seen as an important figure residing abroad. Then he moves to being the leader of the opposition, but no real alternative for future power. At the end, in January, he is increasingly seen as a force to be reckoned with, even when thinking about the future government of Iran. Still, there doesn't seem to be a real knowledge

of who Khomeini is and what he stands for. The subject of an Islamic republic is touched upon a couple of times, but never really is there explained what is meant or understood by it. *Velayat-e faqih* is mentioned for the first time by the ambassador himself, in February 1979. Again, there is no real explanation of what it means. On the whole, the mention about Khomeini's ideology, his plans for the future and his work, is virtually non-existent.

It is very probable that the knowledge of the person Khomeini and what he stood for was small. The question is whether we can consciously blame this on the embassy. As we have seen, there were wide ranging opinions about the revolution, while it was still happening, between different people in different countries. During a revolution, when everything is clouded with the fog of war, it is very hard to predict an outcome or make an assessment of the situation. Events follow up on each other in a rapid pace. A big spectrum of groups is involved, and all have a different opinion about how the future should be. Furthermore, the embassy was greatly dependent on government sources for its information. In the first place, Iranian government sources: either government controlled newspaper or people within the government. And in the second place, government sources of other, mostly Western, nations: either embassies or people from government offices. We can see that after the lifting of the newspaper strike in January 1979, the information in the messages to The Hague becomes much more diverse and realistic. The lifting of the ban and the disappearing of censorship seems to have seriously helped the embassy. Furthermore, Khomeini was a mystery for a big part of the Iranian people, let alone the Western world. He did not really speak much about the ideas he vented in *Islamic Government*, about how an Islamic republic should be created. During his stay in Paris, when he grabbed the attention of the Western media, a different picture of him was portrayed than later. This picture was deliberately created by his closest advisers, to try to create a positive image of Khomeini in the West. Thus, he seemed much more moderate by the time he returned to Iran, than he really was. We should ask ourselves the question: can we accuse the Dutch embassy of ignorance when big parts of the Iranian population itself had no real idea of Khomeini's plans for the future, or of the ideology that he set out in *Islamic Government*?

The Iranian revolution was a breaking point in world history. It was the defining moment for Islam in the twentieth century, and fuelled the Islamic confidence that has since then only grown. For the West, it must have been hard to understand the importance of it. The Islamic revolution was a rejection of a Western way of living and of Western standards and values, that were seen as universal. It was a change of paradigm, and it is always hard to notice this at the time of change itself. We can judge the events with the benefit of hindsight, which is especially helpful when it comes to evaluating revolutions. It took much more than fifty years for people to understand the French revolution, another change of paradigm. With this in mind, who are we to blame people living in the clouds of the smoke, of a lack of understanding?

Thesaurus

Akhlaq	Ethics
Bazaari	Bazaar merchant
Ettelaat	Iranian newspaper
Faqih	Islamic Jurisprudent
Fuqaha	Plural for Faqih
Fedayin-e Islam	Iranian Islamic resistance group, founded by Navvab Safavi
Fedayin-e Kalq	Underground Iranian communist resistance group
Fiqh	Jurisprudence
Ijaza	Appointment to the religious rank of mujtahid
Ijma'	Islamic teaching of consensus
Ijtihad	Interpretation of Islamic holy scripture
'Irfan	Islamic mystical philosophy
Jaziyeh	Tax for non-muslims, which is a part of the Islamic system of taxation
Kayhan	Iranian newspaper
Khalifa	Caliph (plural), Sunnitic leader of the ummah
Kharaj	land tax, which is a part of the Islamic system of taxation and is also used to define the overall system of Islamic taxation
Madrassah	Islamic school
Majles	Iranian parliament
Marja	Short for marja-e taqlid
Marja-e taqlid	Shiite cleric of the highest rank, meaning source of imitation
Mostakberin	Oppressors, the rich
Mostaz'afin	Oppressed, the poor
Mujahedin-e Kalq	Undergrond Islamic resistance group
Mujtahid	Shiite cleric of high rank
SAVAK	The Shah's secret police
Sharia	Islamic religious law
Tawhid	The unity of all things
Tudeh	Iranian communist party
Ulema	Islamic clergy
Ummah	The global muslim community
Usul	Teachings of the first principles of Islam

Velayat-e faqih
Zakat

Government by the jurisprudent
Income tax, which is a part of the Islamic system of taxation

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An Island of Stability

In 1979, the world was taken by surprise when the Iranian people revolted against their westernized ruling elite, and traded in the Shah for a radical Islamic republic ruled by the most senior Shiite cleric, ayatollah Khomeini. The Islamic revolution of Iran was a breaking point in history. It was the defining moment for Islam in the twentieth century and fuelled the Islamic confidence that has since then only grown. The roots of the revolution were deeply entrenched in the recent history of Iran, yet in the West, almost no one knew what was happening. The rise of ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic republic seemed to have come out of nowhere.

In this book, historian Mark Thiessen (1982) tries to answer the most important questions of the Islamic revolution. What happened, and where did it come from? This book explores the background of the revolution, and gives a detailed account of its course. It analyzes the rise of Khomeini, and his ideology. By studying the archives of the Dutch embassy in Tehran, Thiessen finally tries to find out about the way the Dutch mission experienced and interpreted the revolution, at a time when the outcome was not yet clear.



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