
Alexander von Nordheim

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil at the University of St. Andrews

2012

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This dissertation seeks to offer an explanation for the Islamic Revolution, taking into account not only the social, political, and economic conditions of the time, but also religious and cultural elements. It seeks to determine the origins of the trends it identifies as important to an understanding of the causes of the Islamic Revolution. These include the rise of nationalism, Iran’s exploitation by foreign powers, and the assertive posture of the Shi’a ulama.
The names of many individuals, places, and concepts explored in this dissertation are transliterations from Arabic and Persian. Therefore, some allowance should be made for discrepancies between the spelling of these names in the text and in the quotes. For example, Shi’a has been rendered by some of the sources here as: Shi‘i, Shi‘iah, etc. Also, the terms ‘Iranian Revolution’ and ‘Islamic Revolution’ are used interchangeably here to reflect that the term ‘Islamic Revolution’ is challenged by some circles.


How the increasing penetration of Iran by foreign powers in the 19th and 20th centuries weakened the monarchy, and led to the growth of nationalism and the increasing assertiveness of Iran’s Shi’a clergy in political matters

Over the course of the years from 1977 to 1979, a wide variety of groups from diverse ends of the political spectrum came together and accomplished what few would have thought possible only a few short years earlier: they successfully overthrew the Imperial Pahlavi dynasty of Iran and forced the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to flee the country. Most of the groups forming the coalition can be roughly divided into one of three categories, albeit with some degree of overlap: republican, leftist, and Islamist. Importantly, however, almost all of these groups could be labeled nationalist to some degree, a point to which we will return in later chapters.

What followed after the fall of the regime was a brief experiment with a transitional government while the leading groups behind the revolution jockeyed for position. In the end, it was the Islamists who prevailed. A referendum was held in March of 1979 to determine whether the monarchy should be succeeded by an Islamic Republic, without
an alternative having been offered. It was passed, overwhelmingly, with 98% of the vote. A second referendum, passed in the fall of the same year, ratified a constitution that effectively delivered control of all branches of government into the hands of the Shi’a clergy. Led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a vociferous critic of both the Shah and his policies for many years, the Islamists had claimed a popular mandate to govern Iran, and the Iranian Revolution became the Islamic Revolution.

Much of the analysis of the revolution focuses on its two leading protagonists: Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shah. The errors in Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s personal conduct and the myriad failures of his policies are well-documented. However, he had virtually every advantage a monarch or autocrat could possibly hope for. In addition to enjoying the patronage of the United States of America, as evidenced by the 1953 coup against Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh which was arranged largely by the CIA, the Shah had vast oil revenues to dispose of, a powerful military and state security apparatus to keep him in power, and the support of most of the influential constituencies in Iranian society: the aristocracy, the merchant class, and the Shi’a clergy. In fact, the Shah was widely held to be the most stable regime in the region, as evidenced by former US President Jimmy Carter’s infamous toast on New Years Eve 1977:

“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 love and admiration which your people give to you.”

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1Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 2 January 1978.
Charles Kurzman, meanwhile, titled his book, which attempts to retroactively predict the Iranian Revolution, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*.

Khomeini is also the subject of considerable focus in many studies of the revolution, and again, the reasons are not unclear. Khomeini is widely regarded as the leader of not only the Islamist movement, but of the revolutionary movement itself. Not only had he been the most vocal, and therefore the most visible critic of the Shah for years; it was also his vision of a government made up of Shi’a jurists, articulated in a series of lectures he gave in a seminary in Najaf, titled *Islamic Government*, which were recorder and later transcribed by one of his students, that functioned as the ideological foundation of the Islamic Republic. It was the most comprehensive argument in favor of an active role in political affairs by the Shi’a clergy, and entirely unprecedented in that it ascribed to the clergy absolute authority.

Khomeini’s open and persistent criticism of the Shah, and the political philosophy he outlined in *Islamic Government* represent at once the acceleration of one important trend in modern Iranian history and a departure from the status quo in the relationship between the clergy and the monarchy, both of whom had come to an understanding of mutual accommodation and support. The most senior and well-respected Shi’a clerics of the 20th century - and under both of whom Khomeini spent a considerable amount of time studying and/or working - are generally believed to have each come to respective agreements with the successive Pahlavi kings, promising non-interference in politics in exchange for other concessions and patronage of Islamic institutions. However, in another way, the theory outlined in *Islamic Government* represents the apogee of the

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increasing willingness on the part of Iran’s Shi’a clergy to assert themselves in political matters, that had previously manifested itself in multiple crises in Iran, but most notably in the insistence on the creation of an Islamic Consultative Assembly that would have the power to veto laws that it felt contravened Islamic law.

From the late 19th century onward, the Shi’a clergy in Iran assumed the role of voice of the opposition in Iran; if not to the monarchy itself, then to government policy. A review of both the language and rhetoric used by the clerics to articulate that opposition, as well as the source of the crises which compelled them to speak out, indicates another pattern in Iranian politics during this time: nationalism. The rise of nationalism as one of the most powerful political forces in Iran, if not the most powerful, can be traced back to the growing influence foreign powers were able to exert in Iran under the Qajar dynasty and later under the Pahlavi shahs.

This dissertation takes as its point of departure the question: Why did the Islamic Revolution occur? Naturally, this question begs several further questions, of which three will be addressed here: Why did the Shah fall? What had changed so that Shi’a Islam abandoned its traditional position of political quietism? Why did Iranians embrace Islam as a political movement?

Rather than address these questions individually, an attempt will be made to identify trends in Iranian history that may have led to the politicization of Islam and its position as the most visible opposition movement and, therefore, the vanguard of the Revolution. Because, although Mohammad Reza Pahlavi erred gravely and frequently throughout
his reign as Shah, to some extent the die had been cast long before he came to power, and his failings acted as the catalyst for revolution rather than the cause. Nikkie Keddie has argued that there is a strong inverse correlation between the power of the **ulama** and the strength of the country’s central government. She observes that while states such as the Ottoman Empire and Egypt were able to modernize their army and institute a central bureaucracy, the Qajars were unable to do so. Thus, the growth of **ulama** power in Iran in the 19th century was the direct result of a “governmental ‘power vacuum.’”

The weakness of the Qajar state also manifested itself in another important way: the increasing penetration of Iran, politically and economically, by foreign powers, notably Russia and Great Britain, as part of their ‘Great Game’ for imperial domination of Central Asia. The consistent military defeats suffered by the Qajars at the hands of the Russians and the British were not only humiliating, but also had a considerable impact beyond the loss of territory, as Abrahamian notes:

> “Thus military defeats led to diplomatic concessions; diplomatic concessions produced commercial capitulations; commercial capitulations paved the way for economic penetration; and economic penetration, by undermining traditional handicrafts was to cause drastic social dislocations.”

Meanwhile, another effect of the growing foreign presence in Iran was the exposure of the country to Western ideas and the emergence of a new intellectual class, versed in the political terminology of the West. So it was that liberalism, nationalism, socialism, and constitutionalism entered not only the Iranian political vocabulary, but the political

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arena as well. At this time, Iranians also became aware of the relative weakness of the country in the global political order. Thus, political activism and opposition were often couched in terms of nationalism.

Below, the following three trends in Iran from the 19th century onward will be explored: the increasing interference in Iran by foreign powers, first Great Britain and Russia, then the United States of America; the growing assertiveness of the Shi’a ulama; the rise of nationalism as a political force and mode of discourse, used not only by the clergy, but by the monarchy, and various other political groups as well; and, finally, the merging of these three trends in the late 19th and 20th centuries, culminating in the Islamic Revolution in 1977-79.

Chapter 1 examines the Shi’a conception of authority by tracing the philosophical origins of the branch, its historical experiences, and how these have evolved. Beginning with the schism between the Shi’a and Sunni branches of Islam, we will explore the nature of legitimate authority in Shi’a belief. Then, we will assess how this conception might have been affected by the persistent harassment which the Shi’a have had to endure for the better part of Islamic history. Next, the various responses to the Greater Occultation of the 12th Imam will be explored, as well as the conditions under which these responses were developed, concluding with the embrace of the Safavid dynasty in Iran and the transition to a new conception of authority that not only closely mirrored that of Sunni Islam, but also helped to facilitate the negative evaluation of the state by the ulama in later centuries.

\textsuperscript{5}ibid. p50-51.
Chapter 2 explores the history of Shi’a political activism in Iran, beginning with the Tobacco Protest of the early 1890s, followed by the Constitutional Revolution of the early 20th century. This is followed by a review of the oil nationalization crisis and the role of Ayatollah Kashani, and the clerical response to the Shah’s ‘White Revolution,’ instituted in 1963. The natural diversity of Shi’a political thought is touched on briefly, as are some of the characteristics of the Shi’a hierarchy and how these have affected the levels of clerical political activism, as well as the political thought of Mullah Ahmad Naraqi, who elaborated the theory of vilayat-i faqih. The purpose of the 2nd chapter is to chart the development of the ulama as perhaps the only consistent voice of opposition in Iranian politics.

Chapter 3 reviews Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Government. In it, the structure of Khomeini’s vilayat-i faqih, or lack thereof is explored. Khomeini’s religious reasoning for the institutionalization of government by the Shi’a clergy is examined first, followed by his arguments that an Islamic society should naturally have an Islamic government. The politicization of this theoretical exercise by virtue of reference to contemporary events and trends will then be analyzed, as well as the recurring use of nationalist rhetoric. Finally, Khomeini’s ideal vision will then be compared to the Islamists’ political platform during the revolutionary period and the ways in which Khomeini’s vision of Islamic government was adapted to address the popular aspirations of the Iranian public, will be assessed.

Chapter 4 addresses the following question: Why Islam? It is hoped that it will have been made clear through the previous three chapters why the Shi’a clergy in Iran adopted an increasingly assertive stance in politics. However, the question then
becomes: Why did the Iranian people embrace Islam, first as a protest movement, and then as an alternate form of government to the monarchy? The 4th chapter explores the myriad reasons for the general acceptance of the Islamist movement as the leading force of the revolution, including, among others, the structure of the Shi’a network of mosques, the viability of Islam as an alternate identity in a dichotomous world order, and the historical legitimacy of the ulama as critics of the government, among others. Chapter 6 discusses the relationship between the Shah’s foreign relations, particularly with the United States and Great Britain, but also with Israel. The way in which the Shah’s alignment with the West was perceived, especially in the context of the Cold War, will be considered. The relationship, and the way it was viewed by Iranians, will be explored against the trends into which the paper has already inquired, Relations with Israel under the Shah will also be looked at, as will the Shah’s program of modernization which was widely perceived as Westernization. Chapter 7 briefly considers how Keddie’s model of an inverse correlation between the growth of a strong central government on the one hand and the power of the ulama on the other applies to the Islamic Revolution. Concluding that it does not, but instead reflects an aberration from this paradigm, an alternative explanation for the willingness of the clergy to challenge both the personality of the Shah and the institution of the monarchy prior to the revolution will be offered.

This dissertation will then conclude with a summary of the patterns identified in Iranian politics: the increasing penetration of all spheres of life in Iran by foreign powers, in particular Great Britain and Russia (the Soviet Union), and later, the United States; the growth of political consciousness in Iran and the exposure to Western ideas and modes
of political discourse; the increasingly assertive posture of the Shi’a *ulama* in Iranian politics; the emergence of nationalism as the dominant political discourse from the late 19th century onward; and the declining power of the Iranian central government and the reversal of this trend under the Pahlavi dynasty. These trends will then be considered in the context of the Iranian Revolution that displaced the Pahlavi dynasty and installed in its place an Islamic Republic.

The findings of this review will then be presented, and it is hoped that a clear idea will emerge of how the trends listed in the paragraph above spawned and accelerated one another or merged altogether to shape the development of Iranian politics in the 20th century under the Pahlavi dynasty, culminating in the Islamic Revolution that brought Khomeini and the Islamists to power.
Chapter 1: The History of Shi’a Islam

How the origins and the experiences of the Shi’a Branch of Islam shape its conceptions of authority, and how relations between the ulama and the state

In order to understand the dynamics and evolution of the relationship between the Shi’ite clergy and government in modern history, it is useful to explore the basic Shi’ite conception of authority and what role this plays in the formation of the Shi’ite identity. It is also informative to examine how that conception has changed and adapted, as well as under what conditions. In this chapter, the history of Shi’a Islam will be reviewed in brief, with particular attention paid to the schism in Islam that distinguishes Shi’aa from Sunni Islam, the Occultation of the 12th Imam, and the religious policy of the Safavid Dynasty in the early 16th century.

J. S. and T. Y. Ismael write:

"The accepted infallibility of the Prophet’s authority in all matters gave the community a unified outlook on life, religion and politics. His death in 632 A.D., however, forced Moslems to begin to look for answers to the immediate tasks suddenly facing them: Who is the successor? What kind of a government should they have? What is the Islamic method of choosing a successor to the prophet? Who is the best qualified to run the affairs of the community at the time?"

Following the death of Muhammad, competing proposals for the nomination and method of selection of his successor were advanced. However, a consensus could not be

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reached, and infighting within the Islamic community ensued. As Ismael & Ismael further note, what this reflects is that:

"1) The Quran did not provide a guideline on the question of succession or form of the Islamic state. 2) The Prophet neither chose a successor nor established a preference for one form of state over another, as long as the Moslems abided by the teachings of Islam. 3) Three patterns of succession emerged: a) limited choice (Abu Bakr); b) nomination by the caliph (Umar); c) Shoura or consultation (Uthman and Ali). 4) The question of succession led to the greatest conflict, which turned into a religious schism in Islam."

The conflict and schism to which they refer is that which originally distinguished the Shi'a from the Sunnis. Differences between the two groups emerged over two, closely related questions regarding the succession to the Prophet's station: 1) What were the responsibilities the leader had to his community? 2) Who was the most qualified to fulfill those responsibilities?

The Sunnis (from ahl al-sunnah wa'l'jama-ah, people of tradition and consensus) held that Muhammad's role as an interlocutor between God and his believers was unique. They also believed that the Islamic scripture which the Prophet had revealed was perfect, that its deeper meanings had only to be understood, and that ordinary Muslims were capable of doing so. Therefore, it was their belief that the faith's new leader would be succeeding only to the Prophet's temporal station. The role of that leader was to maintain order within the community and to protect and advance the interests of Islam.

\[\text{ibid, p602.}\]
The Shi’a (Shi’a Ali, faction of Ali) however, believed that there were deeper truths within Islam which could not be understood without the help of someone with knowledge of the divine. Therefore, it was necessary that someone occupy this spiritual station of the Prophet. As their full name suggests, the Shi’a held that Ali, Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, was such an individual, and that the Prophet had, in fact, designated Ali as his chosen successor. In advancing these claims, the Shi’a refer to multiple traditions according to which Muhammad repeatedly extols Ali’s virtues, and even appears to suggest explicitly that Ali is also a vehicle of divine knowledge and that Ali should succeed him. For example, al-Tirmidhi, one of the principal collectors of hadiths attributes the following to Muhammad: "The truth circulates with him wherever he goes" and "I am from Ali and Ali is from me." He also recounts that:

"On once occasion, the Prophet called ‘Ali and began whispering to him. After a time those present began saying: 'He has been a long time whispering to his cousin.' Later, the Prophet said: 'It was not I that was whispering to him but God.'"

The Shi’a used these and other traditions and hadiths as proof that the Prophet, whom all Muslims agree was infallible, wished for Ali to succeed him and knew that Ali, too, was blessed with divine insight. Another tradition quotes Muhammad as having said:

"[Ali] is the guardian of every believer after me."

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10 Tirmidhi, 1875, Sunan Volume II, p300, quoted in Momen, 1985, An Introduction to Shi’i Islam, p15.
The Shi'a also believed Ali, like Muhammad, was infallible, and that the same was true of his daughter, Fatima, who was also Ali's wife and the mother of his children. Shi'ites believe that the descendants of the union between Fatima and Ali would also be infallible, and endowed with the same qualities that had given Muhammad and Ali legitimate authority within the community: knowledge of the deepest layer of truths within Islam. The Shi’a claim that the Prophet suggested this himself, quoting, among other traditions, another recorded by al-Tirmidhi:

"The Prophet took the hand of Hasan and Husayn [Ali's sons] and said: 'Whoever loves me and loves these two and loves their mother and father, will be with me in my stations on the Day of Resurrection.'"  

The belief in the Imamate and the exclusive conception of authority that, in effect, mutually reinforce one another, are central to Shi'ite identity. However, the line of Fatima and Ali ended with the disappearance of the 12th Imam. The Shi'a maintain that the 12th Imam has not disappeared, but has instead gone into a state of occultation, and will return at some stage to establish a new order of justice on Earth. What is certain, however, is that the absence of the Imam created a crisis of leadership for the Shi’a and necessitated the formulation of a new conception of authority. The end of the line of Imams, therefore, is another watershed moment in the history of Shi’a Islam and the development of political thought within the sect. As noted above, the Shi’a position had previously been to reject any authority or government except for that of the Prophet and of the Imams. This position had been further strengthened by:

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“the persistent harassment and oppression which the Shi’iah had to endure throughout a significant period of Islamic history. In the face of this harassment and the expectation of the Imam’s return, Shi’iah theory developed the doctrine of taqiyah, a dissimulation of religious and political beliefs.”

Faced with the prospect of a prolonged absence of the Imams, the Shi’a clerics were forced to find a solution to the question of legitimate authority. Ervand Abrahamian, the historian, notes three basic types of response:

"Some argued that because all rulers were in essence usurpers, true believers should shun the authorities like the plague. They should decline government positions; avoid Friday prayers, where thanks were invariably offered to the monarch; take disputes to their own legal experts rather than to the state judges; practice taqiyya (dissimulation) when in danger; and pay khoms (religious taxes), not to the government but to their clerical leaders, in their capacity as Nayeb-e Imam (Imam’s deputies).

Others, however, argued that one should grudgingly accept the state. They claimed that bad government was better than no government; that many imams had categorically opposed armed insurrections; and that Imam Ali, in his often quoted Nahj al-Balaghah (Way of eloquence), had warned of the dangers of social chaos. They also pointed out that Jafar Sadeq, the sixth and most scholarly of the imams, had stressed: 'If your ruler is bad, ask God to reform him; but if he is good, ask God to prolong his life.'

The third response outlined by Abrahamian is the enthusiastic embrace of the state, which, he notes, found increasing currency during the Safavid era in Iran. This

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rationalization of the acceptance of the state is also based on the premium placed on order and the abhorrence of anarchy and chaos. The clerics who adopted this approach often quoted the commandment from the Koran to "obey those among you who have authority." As Abrahamian points out: "In this form the Shii concept of the state was the mirror image of that of the conservative Sunnis." As noted previously, the Sunni conception of authority held that the duties of the leader of the Islamic community were to create order and to protect the interests of the faith.

The Safavids were a Sufi religious order from the Azerbaijan region of Iran. Early in the 16th century, the Safavids began to expand their territory. Despite their Sufi origins, the Safavids claimed to be descendants of the Imams and forcibly converted the people in their newly conquered territories to Shi'a Islam. Most historians agree that this was most likely done in order to forge a new national identity - Iran had been fragmented for centuries, consisting of small, localized dynasties. Furthermore, the territories comprising Iran were surrounded by Sunni states. By forcing the population in these small states to convert to Shi'a Islam, the Safavids may have been directing their focus outwards and establishing a unifying identity in their new empire. The Safavids even went so far as to invite Shi'ite scholars from all over the region, notably Iraq, Syria, and Bahrain. These clerics, it was hoped, would not only propagate Shi'a Islam throughout the new empire, but would also lend the new state an air of legitimacy. The founding of the Safavid Empire represents a third watershed moment in Shi'a history. It is at this

\[\text{\textsuperscript{15}}\text{Koran, 4:59.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{17}}\text{Abrahamian, 1993, \textit{Khomeinism}, p19.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{18}}\text{Stathis, 1999, “The Safavids and the beginning of the modern Iranian nation and state,” p1.}\]
stage that the modern, pre-Khomeini model of mutual support between the state and the clergy first emerged. While the Safavids continued to spread Shi’a Islam and to encourage its growth, the clerics consented not to expose their spurious claims to be descended from the Prophet or the other religious inconsistencies which the Safavids had constructed. In effect, the clergy had become one of the pillars of the state, a relationship which persisted, to various degrees, through the Pahlavi regime.

The symbiotic relationship which developed between the Safavid state and the Shi’ite clergy demonstrates a remarkable adaptability on the part of Shi’a political thought. With perhaps the exception of the Fatimid caliphate (which was, in fact, an Ismaili Shi’a dynasty, and interestingly sought to legitimize its authority in much the same way that the Safavids did), Shi’a Islam had not been in such a strong position before. While the traditional stance of the Shi’a on the nature of legitimate authority appears to be quite inflexible, it has, in fact, evolved over time. As Ismael and Ismael note, however, the oppression of the Shi’a throughout the region and over a substantial period of time "stimulated the search for a theory of the nature of political authority during the period of the Greater Occultation of the last Imam [...]".¹⁹ The rise of the Safavids began roughly 600 years after the disappearance of the 12th Imam. It seems only natural, therefore, that with the passage of time, the willingness of the clergy to consider alternatives to the Imamate during the Occultation would gradually rise. Furthermore, during the period of Safavid ascendancy, the neighboring Sunni states were largely facing considerable levels of adversity, leaving the door open to suggestions that the new dynasty enjoyed some measure of divine favor. The conversion to one true faith (in this case Shi’ism)

and the resounding successes that followed might even have invited comparisons with the Prophet Muhammad. What is certain, however, is that the continued occultation of the 12th Imam, the long history of persecution of Shi’a Muslims, and the emergence of a rising Shi’a state appear to have prompted a serious review of Shi’ite political thought. One of the principal features of Shi’a Islam is the diversity of thought in all spheres of life: social, political, economic, etc. This is most likely the result of the belief in a deeper meaning within religious texts and traditions, which emphasizes the need for interpretation, a duty ideally accorded to the Imams. However, with the Imams gone for so long, and their absence in general unprecedented, this duty fell to the Islamic scholars.

This practice is known as *ijtihad*. "*Ijtihad* is defined [...] in the jurisprudential sense [as] 'the capacity for making deductions in matters of law in cases to which no express text or rule already determined by *Ijma* (consensus) is applicable).' However, it has also been described as a 'rethinking' or, most commonly, as 'independent reasoning.'"20 Of particular interest are the notions of a lack of consensus and "'rethinking.'" The lack of consensus in the face of the absence of the only authority which was universally recognized by the Shi’a clerics is indicative of the reluctance to accept any other model of government. However, it also implies a continuing possibility of new interpretations. The same is true of "'rethinking,'" although this further suggests a rejection of the previous popular thinking.

The rise of the Safavid Empire and its subsequent embrace by the Shi’ite clerical establishment in Iran are evidence of the intellectual and philosophical flexibility of Shi’a

political thought. The embrace of the Safavid dynasty reflects not only the ambiguity within Shi’a traditions of the nature of legitimate authority whilst the 12th Imam remains in a state of occultation, but also the ability - or perhaps even inclination - to respond to contemporary social and political conditions. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the different interpretations of the famous, aforementioned Koranic verse: "Obey those in authority among you." Cited as an exhortation to accept existing political authority by the clerics who sought to legitimize the rule of the Safavids, Ayatollah Khomeini referenced this same verse as an appeal to obey the sacred law and the wishes of the Prophet and the Imams, which, he argued, implied that the Shi’ite clergy should assume the responsibilities of the Imams, both political as well as spiritual. The decline of the Safavid dynasty, however, and the increasing penetration of Iran by foreign powers, permanently altered the dynamic between the state and the ulama.
Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's call for a government of Islamic jurists represented a grand departure from the traditional Shi‘ite position on monarchy. While the clergy had on occasion engaged in open confrontation with the Shahs of Iran, particularly during the late Qajar years and throughout the Pahlavi era, the institution of monarchy itself had never been questioned or threatened. A quick review of the greatest political crises in Iran over the last 120 years illustrates an increasing willingness on the part of the clergy to criticize and confront the nation's rulers. Despite the impressive range of positions on many issues, a result of the jurist's tradition of ijtihad - “the process of arriving at judgments on points of religious law using reason and the principles of jurisprudence”\(^2\) - no Shi‘ite scholar had ever so openly challenged the institution of monarchy or called for the clergy to exercise the functions of government. Below, the various clerical responses to the greatest political crises in modern Iranian history will be examined. It is hoped that it will be conclusively shown that the Shi‘ite clergy had displayed an increasing disposition to assert their will and to confront the monarchy, culminating in Khomeini’s Islamic Government. Furthermore, it will also be shown that segments of the clergy have frequently attached themselves to nationalist movements in Iran. Other factors that may have contributed to the willingness of the clergy to assert itself will also be explored.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, generally acknowledged as the first cleric to have called for an end to monarchy and its replacement by a government of Islamic jurists, spent many years working and studying under Ayatollah Mohammad Hosayn Borujerdi. Borujerdi is regarded as the model of the apolitical cleric. Widely recognized as the senior 'source of emulation' - marja-e taqlid - among the Shi'ite clergy from the late 1940s until his death in 1961\(^\text{22}\), Borujerdi fastidiously avoided politics and is believed to have used his senior position and considerable influence among the clergy to persuade them to do so as well. In fact, known to have been close to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Borujerdi is known to have come to an arrangement with the young king:

"[They] were both worried about the virtual occupation of parts of Iran and they both disliked the Communists. Borujerdi wanted women to have the choice of wearing the veil in public if and when they wished to do so (this choice had been totally forbidden under Reza Shah), and he wanted mullahs and Islam itself treated with more public respect. The shah wanted the tacit support of a paramount Shiah leader who would also remain apolitical in the tradition of Ha'eri. Perhaps each of them understood the other's need without hearing it expressed; [...] By and large, each one lived up to what the other expected of him."\(^\text{23}\)

Ayatollah Shaykh Abdul-Karim Ha'eri is another senior cleric who was "famous not only for his learning but also for his scrupulous avoidance of politics - even during the turbulent 1910s."\(^\text{24}\) Khomeini had also studied under Ha'eri, and even followed him to Qom from Arak in 1921 when the latter was invited to restore the seminary there and

\(^{23}\) ibid, p230.
establish a center of Islamic scholarship in Iran to rival that of Najaf, in Iraq. Qom quickly eclipsed Mashad as Iran's leading center of Shi'i learning, due to three factors: "[In] part because of Ha'eri, in part because clerical refugees from Iraq settled there, and in part because Reza Shah patronized the center to reward the clerics there for staying out of politics. Qom remained conspicuously quiet for much of Reza Shah's reign - in contrast to other religious centers, such as Mashad, which periodically burst into open opposition against Reza Shah's secular reforms. Yahya Dawlatabadi, the historian and politician, wrote that Reza Shah supported Ha'eri to counter the growth of republicanism, communism, and other forms of radicalism."

Both Ayatollah Borujerdi and Ayatollah Ha'eri, meanwhile, spent considerable time under the tutelage of Ayatollah Mohammed Kazim Khorasani. Khorasani, who was unsurpassed, if not without equal, as a jurisconsult of his time, lent his support to the constitutional movement in Iran in the early years of the 20th century. One of his contemporaries, Sheikh Fazlollah Noori, meanwhile sought to limit the constitutional movement.

Both Khorasani and Noori, in turn, studied under Ayatollah Mirza Mohammed Hassan Hosseini Shirazi, who is known for his fatwa prohibiting the purchase or use of tobacco by Muslims after a British company was granted a concession controlling all aspects of the production and sale of Iranian tobacco. Shirazi, meanwhile, studied under Sheikh Mortaza Ansari, the founder of the marja-e taqlid model and the senior Islamic jurist of his time. Roy Mottahedeh writes of Ansari:

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25ibid, p220. See also: Dawlatabadi, 1949, Hayat-i Yahya.
"[He] was probably the first "model" who, according to the principles of the newly reconstructed jurisconsult school, received the recognition of the great majority of other mullahs of that school; but he seems never to have exerted this authority actively among the Shi'ah community."^6

It is apparent, then, that there is no established position on the role clerics may or should play in politics. While, according to Mottahedeh, consultation of religious scholars is a tradition of almost every school of Islamic thought^27 - and one which Fazlollah Noori had sought to codify, in lieu of a legislative parliament - there is no consensus on whether the clergy should openly defy the monarchy if they feel that he is abrogating the laws of Islam. This comes as little wonder considering that the Shi'ah community's central belief is that only the Prophet's line can legitimately exercise authority. Following the disappearance of the 12th Imam, the clergy generally adopted one of three approaches, according to Ervand Abrahamian: to operate outside the established government, effectively making the clerics the administrators of the community as recipients of taxes and judges in disputes; to "grudgingly accept the state" because order, even if imposed by a despot, was significantly preferable to anarchy; or, to embrace the state based on the Koran's commandment to "obey [...] those in authority among you." The latter response to the 12th Imam's absence became particularly popular during the Safavid era, when Shi'a Islam was established as the official religion of the nation. It seems that by the 19th century, during the Qajar era, most clerics had come to adopt one of the latter two approaches. It is not unlikely that this is due in large part to the rise of the Safavids and their patronage of Shi‘ism.

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^27ibid, p220.
Effectively, clerical receptiveness to monarchy rose during the Safavid period because Shah Ismail I forcibly converted the population to Shi’a Islam and executed or exiled those who refused. While Shi’a enclaves had existed in Iran for centuries, not since the Fatimid caliphate of the 10th-12th centuries had Shi’ites had a proper state of their own. The Safavids, therefore, were good for Islam (at least the Shi’ite brand)\textsuperscript{28}. Furthermore, the Safavids claimed to be descended from the 7th Imam and to be acting as the representatives of the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation. Shi’a clerics were invited from all over the region, particularly Syria, Iraq, and Bahrain, and many enthusiastically accepted. As Moojan Momen explains:

"Thus in the early period of the Safavid dynasty there appears to have been an uneasy alliance between the state and the ulama [Muslim legal scholars] with the state supporting the ulama by enforcing Shi’ism on the populace while the ulama supported the state and kept quiet about the inconsistencies in the religious stance of the monarch."\textsuperscript{29}

The inconsistencies to which Momen refers are the Safavids' spurious claims to be descened from the Imams, the notion that this would entitle them to rule (they would also have to have been designated by the Imams as their representatives in the event of a prolonged absence), as well as the Sufism which they practiced before beginning their campaign to conquer Iran.\textsuperscript{30}

It appears that it was at this point in time that the monarchy and the vast majority of the Shi’ite clergy came to an understanding, and the right of kings to rule was accepted. As

\textsuperscript{28}Momen, 1985, \textit{An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam}, p108.
\textsuperscript{29}ibid, p108-109.
\textsuperscript{30}ibid, p106-108.
long as the fortunes of the Shi'ite community were on the ascendancy, the monarchy was considered legitimate. It is interesting to note the attempt here to fabricate of some form of nationalism. Following the decline of the Timurid empire, Iran fragmented into many smaller, local states. It is likely that Shah Ismail I anticipated that these entities would be absorbed by one of the neighboring states, notably the Ottoman Empire, which was ruled by Sunnis. Unifying the different peoples of Iran by exploiting a common religion would not be sufficient; that religion would have to distinguish Iran from its neighbors and unify it against them.

The Safavid dynasty eventually fell and was replaced, by way of the Afsharid and Zand dynasties, by the Qajar dynasty. The fall of the Safavids had seen Iran fragmented once more. Although Iran was reconstituted under the Qajars, some of the peripheral territories held at the height of Safavid power were lost. Despite the decline of the Shi’a state, however, the Shi’a clergy did not question the Iranian monarchy, with one notable exception: Mullah Ahmad Naraqi.

Naraqi is acknowledged as one of the leading ulama of his time (early 19th century), and he is known primarily for his articulation of the theory of the vilayat-i faqih - the guardianship of the jurist, which gives the Islamic Republic of Iran its legitimacy. Hamid Dabashi writes that Naraqi seeks to justify the right of the clerics to administer the people in much the same way that Khomeini does: by referencing the Shi’a traditions, where, he argues, the Imams stipulated that the clerics should exercise their functions, as well as by appealing to reason.
"This approach can be found in Ahmad Naraqi's work where he quotes nineteen separate tradition-reports to support the doctrine and then adds that it is in any case self-evidently logical and rational."

Naraqi's chief contribution appears to be his contention that legal speculation, or al-mazzanah, on the part of the Shi'ite jurists is both necessary and legitimate. The doctrinal basis, or rationale, for the clergy's reluctance to seek greater political power, was that the clerics, unlike the Imams, are not infallible; therefore, they are as prone to error as anyone else, and that this would sully the spiritual station they hold in the absence of the Mahdi, the 12th Imam.

"The significance of Naraqi's notion of 'al-mazannah' lies in its providing the faqih with a doctrinal basis to speculate rather more freely in judicial issues, with its political repercussions."

In effect, the Shi'a jurisconsults, who are the most qualified to interpret the divine will of the Imams, through their extensive knowledge of the Islamic scripture and traditions, are afforded room for error by Naraq. Moojan Momen claims that Khomeini cited Naraqi, as well as Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Na'ini as predecessors whose views were not so different from his own. However, neither is held to have gone as far as Khomeini.

"It is significant that in all these discussions, which lasted on and off for some eleven centuries, no Shii writer ever explicitly contended that monarchies per se were illegitimate or that the senior clergy had the authority to control the state."
Khomeini’s theory of the vilayat-i faqih, then, signifies a radical departure from the status quo, if not from the original Shi’a position. Not only had the Shi’ite clergy and the monarchy led a relatively amicable coexistence for many years, but the Shah had concluded an agreement with Khomeini’s mentor, Ayatollah Borujerdi. In this regard, Khomeini’s steadfast rejection of the institution of monarchy represents an unprecedented theory of legitimate government and program for its implementation. Not even Naraq sought to displace the monarchy; he only argued that the clerics should hold authority over the kings. Furthermore, Khomeini refers explicitly to both the social and political conditions in Iran, and implicitly to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi himself. In this sense, Islamic Government is not simply a theoretical exercise. Instead, it seems to be as much a reaction to the failure of the Shah to fulfill his duty to protect the nation as an interpretation of Shi’ite tradition.

This is not to say that the clergy were silent throughout the Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi periods, up until the revolution that brought the Islamic Republic. Below, the clerical responses to the major political crises of the last 120 years will be examined.

In 1890, Naser ed-Din Shah granted the Imperial Tobacco Company of Great Britain a concession on the production, distribution, and sale of all tobacco grown in Iran, in order to put his finances in order once more. The public outrage was virtually universal. It was not limited to the merchants and farmers, whose livelihoods might be affected; it extended to the general populace, who were angered that control over a crop so vital not only to Iran’s economy, but to the Iranian lifestyle as well, would be so callously handed over to a foreign power.
"The natural voice of a protest so nearly universal was the voice of the mullahs. They spoke in some part out of their own interests: they controlled considerable agricultural land tied up in religious endowments. They spoke also in large part out of shared interests: they had close links to the men of the bazaar, who imposed taxes on themselves to support the mullahs and religious life in general and who were used to turning to mullah courts for settlement of certain kinds of disputes."\(^5\)

In December of 1891, Ayatollah Mirza Shirazi issued a fatwa, or religious decree, that declared that, henceforth, by smoking tobacco, Iranians would effectively be declaring war against the Hidden Imam. By all accounts, the fatwa had its intended effect. Shirazi's decree was disseminated throughout the Shi'iite networks by telegraph and leaflet.\(^6\) The loss of the Iranian market led the British government to withdraw its support for the concession, and Naser ed-Din Shah duly canceled it. Later that month, Shirazi issued another fatwa ending the prohibition on the use of tobacco. This represents perhaps the greatest incident of clerical defiance of the monarchy before Khomeini, as the agenda was direct repeal of the Shah's policy, rather than popular representation or the rescission of a concession issues before the Shah's time. This was a direct and immediate response to the Shah's decision to grant the tobacco concession. In this case, however, the clergy's (in this case Shirazi's) reaction appears to have been determined, at least in part, by the public's reaction. As will be shown below, the clergy actively guided public opinion during Iran's next political crisis. Nevertheless, Shirazi was undoubtedly able to accomplish two things: he directed the

\(^6\)ibid, p217-218.
population's anger, allowing it to manifest itself constructively, and he established that, despite their limited role in government, the clergy were a force to be reckoned with. During the Persian Constitutional Revolution in the early 20th century, the Shi’ite clergy again played a central role:

"By 1906 the collective resentment against the Qajars had reached such a point that it was as natural for the mullahs to join the movement of protest that became the Constitutional Revolution as it was for them to support the resistance to the tobacco concession. In fact, without their support the movement would have failed."

That resentment was due in large part to the growing number of concessions which the Qajars continued to issue, even after the Tobacco Protest, and continued encroachment on Iran by both Russia and Great Britain. Mottahedeh contends that, according to the clergy, the primary government was to guarantee the independence of Muslims and to ensure that they not be subjugated to non-Muslims. The considerable influence exerted by the British and the Russians on Iranian soil, and particularly at the Qajar court, was unacceptable. Ervand Abrahamian contends that some of the origins of the Constitutional Revolution are to be found in the West in two essential respects: first, as illustrated above, it was in many ways a response to Western incursions into Iran; second, the manifestation of that response was influenced heavily by the exposure to Western ideologies and constitutional successes. It should be noted that the effect of the foreign domination of Iran was not merely the injury of Iranian national pride; it also resulted in the economic dislocation of the urban bazaars that produced a "cross-

\[\text{References:}\]

37ibid, p219.
38ibid, p216.
39Abrahamian, 1982, Iran Between Two Revolutions, p50.
regional middle class that was conscious for the first time of its own common grievances.\(^{40}\)

Ayatollah Mohammed Kazim Khorasani was the leading supporter of the constitutional movement within the clerical establishment.

"At first it seemed an even greater coup than the ban on the use of tobacco; the most learned 'model' had not just confirmed the sentiments of his imitators, he had actually led them."\(^{41}\)

The success of the movement resulted in the establishment of an Islamic Consultative Assembly, later renamed the National Consultative Assembly. Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, like Khorasani a former student of Mirza Shirazi, however, sought to restrict the functions of the consultative assembly and called instead for a panel of at least five Islamic jurists who would confirm or reject laws based on their compatibility with Islam, but would not act as a parliament. Furthermore, these men were to be nominated by the jurists themselves, not elected by the people.\(^{42}\) In this, he was supported by Sayyed Mohammed Kazem Yazdi.

While Khorasani had supported Noori’s initiative to include clause outlawing heresy. Nevertheless, he steadfastly supported the constitutional movement until his death in 1911. That two clerics who had both studied under the same mentor would develop such different positions on the role that both they and monarchy should play in the community’s administration is evidence of both the independence the Shi’ite learned men enjoyed to develop their own interpretations of divine will based on the Islamic...

\(^{40}\)ibid, p50.


\(^{42}\)ibid, p221.
texts, and of the new willingness of some clerics to challenge their kings and seek greater authority for themselves.

While the 1910s were quite a volatile time in their own right, the next major political crisis came with the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in 1951. First, however, some of the developments since to Constitutional Revolution will be discussed. Ali Ansari notes an increase in political awareness on the part of the general population, which he attributes in part to Reza Shah’s whose "industrial and educational reforms [...] provided the framework and catalyst for [that] growth."43 This period is characterized by the proliferation of political parties, including the emergence of a communist party, the Tudeh. Despite the still very limited literacy in the country, new newspapers were always being founded, often as the mouthpiece of the new political groupings. The Tudeh party was also active in engaging the rural peasantry, who were mostly illiterate, and making them aware of their apparent exploitation. This was also accomplished by the use of radio broadcasts, which were able to reach those who could not read and did not have access to someone who could.44 Ansari asserts that this is the point at which Iranian nationalism began to emerge as a popular movement. The Pahlavi policies of modernization were perceived instead as Westernization and the abandonment of traditional Iranian values.

"Ordinary Iranians began to identify themselves more clearly with a distinctive Iranian national culture, while elites who were already imbued with a strong sense of nationalist mission were only further convinced of the need for protective measures."45

44ibid, p101.
45ibid, p120.
Mohammed Mossadegh was able to capture this nationalist sentiment and actively shape it into a powerful political force. There is no doubt that Mossadegh was able to capture the imagination of the Iranian public and remains an interesting figure in the Iranian political consciousness, particularly for the secular opponents of the Islamic Republic. Another figure central to the oil nationalization crisis was Ayatollah Abol-Ghasem Kashani. An early supporter of oil nationalization, Kashani previously had urged "all sincere Muslims and patriotic citizens to fight against the enemies of Islam and Iran by joining the nationalization struggle." The fusing of religious and nationalist rhetoric here is of particular interest. The Prime Minister, Haj Ali Razmara, who had sought to find a compromise with the AIOC over a renegotiated distribution of company revenues, was duly assassinated by a member of the Fedayin-e Islam. His murder was roundly celebrated, evidence of a "tremendous upsurge in nationalist feeling throughout the country - a feeling which, as the assassination now indicated, had now been firmly wedded to religion." Of Mossadegh’s National Front, Ansari states:

"[It] was a broad movement composed of different parties including socialists and secular and religious nationalists, and driven less by a cohesive rigorous ideological platform and more by ambiguous if potent ideas of self-determination, nationhood and anti-imperialism."

The power of nationalism as the greatest common denominator of the population, as well as the path of least resistance to its mobilization, was becoming ever more clear. In

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46Kashani, 1950, “Proclamation” Quoted in Abrahamian, 1982, Iran Between Two Revolutions, p265-266.
47Ansari, 2003, Modern Iran, p134.
48ibid, p136,
some ways, the diverse composition of the National Front was reflected once more in the broad movement that led to the Iranian Revolution of 1977-79. However, Kashani withdrew his support when it became clear that Mossadegh’s popularity and perception as leader of the nationalization movement would always be greater than his own. Also, Mossadegh began to accrue to himself ever greater political powers in order to push through the nationalization, which alienated many of his early supporters. Kashani’s withdrawal of support is held by some to have facilitated the 1953 coup that removed Mossadegh from office and reinstated the Shah’s powers. Kashani claimed that Mossadegh had defied the Shah, been a traitor to his country, and abrogated the sacred Islamic law. His mission had lost its sanctification. It is interesting here that for the most part, the clergy remained silent on the subject of oil nationalization. In all likelihood, this is due in large part to the influence of Ayatollah Borujerdi, who, as mentioned above, was recognized at the time as the senior marja-e taqlid and actively encouraged the clerics to stay out of politics. Not even Khomeini spoke out against or in favor of nationalization.

The next major political crisis to hit Iran was the Shah’s aggressive series of reforms known as the Enghelab-e Sefid, or White Revolution. The White Revolution was a wide-ranging program of reforms, centered around land reform. Many in the clergy objected to these reforms on the basis that, in addition to appropriating and redistributing private property, women were given the right to vote. By

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this time, Borujerdi had passed away, as, therefore, had his "ban on [the clergy's]
political involvement."\textsuperscript{50}

None, however, went so far as Ayatollah Khomeini. In a speech in April 1963, he also
took issue with a stipulation of the reforms that to be male and Muslim were no longer
requirements to hold local office:

"The Ministry of Justice has made clear its opposition to the ordinances of Islam by
various measures like the abolition of the requirement that judges be Muslim and male;
henceforth, Jews, Christians, and the enemies of Islam and the Muslims are to decide
on the affairs concerning the honor and person of the Muslims. The strategy of this
government and certain of its members is to bring about the total effacement of the
ordinances of Islam. As long as this usurpatory [sic] and rebellious government is in
power, the Muslims can have no hope for any good."\textsuperscript{51}

As early as 1963, then, he had attacked the Shah's government itself, not just its
individual policies. Furthermore, he had articulated this in a context of Islamic
nationalism. Here, however, he does not mention the Shah by name. That is not the
case in another speech held on the occasion of 'Ashura of the same year. However,
here Khomeini addresses the Shah directly and encourages him to change his ways
and redeem himself. He goes on to address himself to the:

"Iranian nation! Those among you who are thirty or forty years of age or more will
remember how three foreign countries attacked us during World War II. The Soviet

by Hamid Algar, p175.
Union, Britain, and America invaded Iran and occupied our country. The property of the people was exposed to danger and their honor was imperilled [sic]. But God knows, everyone was happy because the Pahlavi had gone!"52

Khomeini also ascribes much blame for a police attack in March on the Fayzieh seminary in Qom, and asks whether the Shah himself might be Jewish. He also draws comparisons between that attack and its victims and the war waged by the Ummayad Caliph Yazid I on Husain. On the occasion of 'Ashura, which remembers Imam Husain's martyrdom at the hands of Yazid at Karbala, this comparison was especially potent. The themes of foreign intervention and exploitation recur here. Two days later, the Shah had Khomeini arrested. As news of this spread, protests erupted throughout the country and were violently suppressed.

When, in 1964, the Shah granted US military personnel immunity from prosecution in Iranian courts, Khomeini was quick to attack the Shah and illustrate once more the fact that Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was subservient to his foreign "masters." In a speech given on 27 October, 1964, Khomeini attacked the new law:

"If some American's servant, some American's cook, assassinates your marja in the middle of the bazaar, or runs over him, the Iranian police do not have the right to

apprehend him! Iranian courts do not have the right to judge him! The dossier must be sent to America, so that our masters there can decide what is to be done!"\[^{53}\]

Furthermore, Khomeini went on to assert that government was seeking to reduce the power and influence of the religious leaders, because, if given the opportunity, they would free Iran from servitude to Great Britain and the US, prevent the takeover of the Iranian economy by Israel, and end the excessive spending of the Pahlavi regime.# Khomeini was eventually exiled to Turkey. Perhaps the only reason he was not executed by the Shah's secret police was his high profile, as well as his status as a marja. From Turkey, Khomeini found his way to the Shi'ite seminaries in Najaf. Here, he was able to criticize the Shah freely, and he continued to do so.

Meanwhile, although the Shah continued to be relatively unpopular, Iran remained stable. Reza Pahlavi, meanwhile, appears to have recognized his shortcomings as far as his nationalist credentials were concerned. Additionally, he also seems to have understood that the nationalist sentiment was increasingly being expressed in an Islamic context. In a speech to the majles, for example, the Iranian parliament, his Prime Minister claimed that "[unless] a man is patriotic there is no room for him in our society."\[^{54}\] Meanwhile, as Ansari notes, the Shah also "proceeded to infuse Iranian political discourse with crude, often dichotomous, religious imagery - the struggle of good versus evil, light versus darkness."\[^{55}\]

\[^{54}\]BBC SWB, 1981, “Hoveida’s speech to the Majles.”
\[^{55}\]Ansari, 2003, Modern Iran, p228.
n 1973, the Shah appears to have sought to cast himself firmly as the Iranian nationalist icon, fearless in the face of the United States and the world powers. Seeking, perhaps, to recapture the initiative and to claim the role of nationalist, in December of that year, the Shah announced that the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries would be quadrupling the price of oil. He is widely held to have been the driving force behind this decision.\(^{56}\) While the Shah may have garnered the attention of the international press, this seems to have done little for his popularity at home. Ironically, in fact, the infusion of this vastly increased oil wealth led to massive inflation. These economic difficulties are held to have been a contributing factor in the demonstrations that evolved into the movement that resulted in the Islamic Revolution.

Two patterns emerge in this review of the almost constant political turmoil in Iran since the late 19th century: the rise of Iranian nationalism, and the increasingly belligerent stance of some sections of the Shi’ite clergy. Furthermore, it can also be seen that these patterns were invariably married to one another when it was deemed expedient or necessary by the actors involved. Of the oil nationalization movement, Ali Ansari writes: "Where religion served the nationalist cause its political utility and potency were clear."\(^{57}\)

One could make a strong case that, in the case of the Islamic Revolution, it was the other way around: nationalism served the religious cause. As will be seen below, Khomeini’s theory and program laid out in Islamic Government make extensive use of nationalist rhetoric and devices. Khomeini capitalizes on a considerable paranoia prevalent in Iranian politics that circumstances are determined by powerful external actors. Abrahamian claims that:

\(^{57}\)ibid, p142.
“[Politics in Iran are] replete with [...] terms [that] treat Iranian politics as a puppet show in which foreign powers control the marionettes - the local politicians - by invisible strings. The message is that the intelligent observer should ignore appearances and focus instead on the hidden links; only then can one follow the plot, understand the hidden agendas, and identify the true villains.”\(^5\)

It seems only natural that in this context, the failures and errant policies of the monarchy are perceived as plots to weaken the nation and exploit it. These charges carried added weight when leveled at the Pahlavi monarchy for several reasons: both the Pahlavi shahs had instituted reforms that were intended to modernize the country but were instead largely perceived as attempts to imitate Western culture; Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was brought to power by the Allied Forces during their occupation of Iran in World War II; Iran's increasing exposure to the world continued throughout the Pahlavi period, in large part because of the emergence of a global economy.

This paranoia has also been observed by, among others, Ann Lambton and Andrew Westwood, who writes that: "[in] Iran the distrust of the possession and exercise of power is pervasive and intense."\(^5\)

Abrahamian goes on to state that:

"most observers would agree that political paranoia exists in modern Iran, as long as one keeps in mind Hofstadter's important caveat that the term means merely a political style and mode of expression, not a clinical and deep-seated psychological disorder. What is more, this style can be explained by history, especially Iran's experience of imperial domination: foreign powers - first Russia and Britain, later the United States -

have, in fact, determined the principal formations in the country’s political landscape over the last two hundred years.”

In many ways, given the pervasive nature of this worldview, the level of political activism in Iran during this period is remarkable. It is a wonder that the development of political consciousness in Iran was not arrested by a greater sense of fatalism. The role Iran’s shahs had played in this phenomenon was crucial to the maintenance and growth of nationalism in Iran. By creating the character of the domestic co-conspirator to accompany that of the manipulative foreign power, the narrative challenged the idea that Iran might, in fact, be legitimately weak. Indeed, this might have been a difficult notion to accept in a country with such a grandiose history, both actual as well as embellished. Instead, it was only in collusion with traitorous rulers and politicians that Russia, Britain, and the US were able to successfully manipulate the country. This accomplishes two important objectives: first, it allows Iran to save face and masks the relative weakness of Iran’s position in the world, and second, it imbues the movement with a sense of viability. Essentially, the Iranians control the fate of Iran. The notion of self-determination is a powerful and important one in the nationalist narratives.

[^Abrahamian, 1993, Khomeinism, p115-116.]}
Chapter 3: The Political Thought of Ayatollah Khomeini

The Velayat-i Faqih, politics, and nationalism

Between January 21, 1970 and February 8 of the same year, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini delivered a series of lectures in Najaf, Iraq. These lectures were recorded and transcribed by one of his students, and later published as a book: *Islamic Government*. The subject of the lectures was, as the title suggests, Islamic government. In it, Khomeini delivers perhaps the most comprehensive recorded argument in favor of the formation of a clerical government. There are four chapters, each examining a different aspect of Islamic government. After the first chapter, the introduction, the titles are: The Necessity for Islamic government, The Form of Islamic Government, and finally, Program for the Establishment of an Islamic Government.

Khomeini’s arguments generally fall into one of three categories:
- Qur’anic verses and Shi’a traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams
- appeal to logic, based on the assumption of a Muslim society
- foreign exploitation demands the protection of Islam and Islamic territory by the clerics

Interestingly, Khomeini’s persistent assertion that Iran, and other Muslim lands, are being exploited by the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union belies the rising tide of nationalism in Iran and in Shi’ite political thought. Khomeini returns frequently to this subject. In fact, it dominates the introduction. Below, the three strands of Khomeini’s argument will be explored individually, based on whether they appeal to scripture, logic, or national pride.
Khomeini begins the introduction to *Islamic Government* by asserting that anyone familiar with Islam must immediately agree with the concept of the *vilayat-i faqih*:

“The subject of the governance of the faqih (vilayat-i faqih) provides us with the opportunity to discuss certain related matters and questions. The governance of the faqih is a subject that in itself elicits immediate assent and has little need of demonstration, for anyone who has some general awareness of the beliefs and ordinances of Islam will unhesitatingly give his assent to the principle of the governance of the faqih as soon as he encounters it; he will recognize it as necessary and self-evident.”

What is implied, obviously, is that anyone who does not agree with Khomeini is either not sufficiently familiar with the tenets of Islam, or not a true believer. The next several pages immediately following the opening paragraph broach the subject of foreign interference in Iran, a subject to which we will soon return below. It is worth pointing out, however, that Khomeini’s attention turns immediately towards the exploitation of Iran by the imperial powers.

We will first examine Khomeini’s arguments which are based on the Qu’ran, the Hadiths, and Islamic tradition. The 2nd paragraph of Chapter 2, The Need for Islamic Government, begins by pointing out that:

“The most noble messenger [...] headed the executive and administrative institutions of Muslim society. In addition to conveying the revelation and expounding and interpreting the articles of faith and the ordinances and institutions of Islam, he undertook the implementation of law and the establishment of the ordinances of Islam, thereby

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bringing into being the Islamic state. He did not content himself with the promulgation of law; rather, he implemented it at the same time.”

This fact sets the tone for argument made in the verses and traditions to follow. He continues, in the next chapter:

“The Commander of the Faithful […] relates that the Most Noble Messenger […] said: ‘O God! Have mercy on those that succeed me.’ He repeated twice and was then asked: ‘O Messenger of God, who are those that succeed you?’ He replied: ‘They are those that come after me, transmit my traditions and practice, and teach them to the people after me.’”

Because neither the Qur’an nor the Prophet himself gave the Shi’a community specific instructions about what to do in the event that the line of Imams should end - or, as Twelver Shi’a believe happened, one should go into occultation - Khomeini appears to draw the following conclusion: the Prophet was not only the spiritual leader of his community, but its administrator as well, and, because the Prophet appears to designate the clerics - “those that transmit [his] traditions and practice” - as his successors, the clerics should naturally also be the administrators of their community.

Later in the same chapter, Khomeini refers to Imam Sadiq, the 6th Imam, quoting the Prophet, as follows:

“The superiority of the learned man over the mere worshipper is like that of the full moon over the stars. Truly the scholars are the heirs of the prophets; the prophets

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63 Ibid, p68.
bequeathed not a single dinar or dirham; instead they bequeathed knowledge, and whoever acquires it has indeed acquired a generous portion of their legacy.”

Here, Khomeini outlines his argument himself over the following pages, addressing each and every possible objection he foresees. According to him, the “scholars” to whom the Prophet must have been referring are the clerics and not the Imams, “for the virtues and qualities of the Imams that have been mentioned elsewhere are quite different from what this tradition contains. Furthermore, a 2nd, slightly different account of this declaration by the Prophet, in whose line of transmission Khomeini places less faith, goes on to advise: “See from whom you may acquire this knowledge.” As far as Khomeini is concerned, this suggests that the Prophet holds some of the scholars to be untrustworthy. He could not, therefore, have meant the Imams. He further contends that the scholars are “the heirs of the prophets” in more than just spiritual station. Instead, he postures that because the most common usage of the term Prophet implies the great prophets, such as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, all of whom were leaders of their communities in addition to functioning as vehicles of exalted knowledge. Therefore, the same must be true of the scholars. Citing the Qur’an now, Khomeini refers to the following verse: “The Prophet has higher claims on the believers than their own selves” (33:6).

Khomeini also argues, however, that simple logic dictates that a nation of true believers should be led by the fuqaha. The most straightforward argument is this:

\[\text{\underline{\text{\textsuperscript{\textit{64}ibid, p99.}}}}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{\textit{65}ibid, p100.}}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{\textit{66}ibid, p104.}}\]
“If the ruler adheres to Islam, he must necessarily submit to the faqih, ask him about the laws and ordinances of Islam in order to implement them. This being the case, the true rulers are the fuqaha themselves, and rulership ought officially to be theirs, to apply to them, not to those who are obliged to follow the guidance of fuqaha on account of their own ignorance of the law.”

The premise is simple: a ruler who must consult the fuqaha before implementing the law is not fit to rule, because he is dependent on the clerics for guidance. Only the clerics themselves can rule without having to consult anyone else.

Another argument which makes monarchies and other forms of government redundant is that Islamic law, the shari’a, provides a framework for all aspects of life, for the individual, society, as well as the nation:

“First, the laws of the shari’a embrace a diverse body of laws and regulations, which amounts to a complete social system. In this system of laws, all the needs of man have been met: his dealings with his neighbors, fellow citizens, and clan, as well as children and relatives; the concerns of private and marital life; regulations concerning war and peace and intercourse with other nations; penal and commercial law; and regulations pertaining to trade and agriculture.”

Khomeini also claims, “The Glorious Qur’an and the Sunna contain all the laws and ordinances man needs in order to attain happiness and the perfection of his state.”

There appears, then, little need for anyone to draft or propose laws. All the regulation needed for a society to function is contained in the Islamic texts, according to Khomeini.

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67 ibid, p60.
68 ibid, p43.
69 ibid, p44.
All that is needed, then, is someone to interpret the texts. Naturally, the most qualified to do so are the Shi’ite clerics. The shari’a and other Islamic laws and provisions are timeless: “According to one of the noble verses of the Qur’an, the ordinances of Islam are not limited with respect to time or place; they are permanent and must be enacted until the end of time.”

Khomeini even appears to cater this argument to a younger, modern audience:

“It is related in the book, Ikmal ad-Din wa Itnam an-Ni’ma that Ishaq ibn Ya’qub wrote a letter to the Imam of the Age […] asking him for guidance in certain problems that had arisen, and Muhammad ibn ‘Uthman al-‘Umari, the deputy of the Imam, conveyed the letter to him. A response was issued, written in the blessed hand of the Imam, saying: ‘In case of newly occurring [sic] social circumstances, you should turn for guidance to those who relate our traditions, for they are my proof to you, as I am God’s proof.’”

Perhaps this was intended as a response to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s policy of modernization, and a reminder that Islam continues to be relevant.

Khomeini is also careful to specify that it must be a just faqih who rules over the nation:

“The highest authority must possess the qualities mentioned - comprehensive knowledge and justice - but his assistants, officials, and those sent to the provinces need know only the laws relevant to their own tasks; on other matters they must consult the ruler.”

Because it would appear that only the clerics fulfill the first criteria set forth by Khomeini, the second criteria may be intended to distinguish among the fuqaha themselves. The

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70 ibid, p41.
71 ibid, p84.
72 ibid, p60.
issue of clerical government was a divisive one. The insinuation that perhaps not all clerics are just may have been intended as a rebuke to those clerics who refused to be openly critical of the Shah. Perhaps to make this point clear, Khomeini chooses to quote the Prophet once more here, albeit by a long way of transmission:

“The fuqaha are the trustees of the prophets, as long as they do not concern themselves with the illicit desires, pleasures, and wealth of this world.’ The Prophet was then asked: ‘O Messenger of God! How may we know if they do so concern themselves?’ He replied: ‘By seeing whether they follow the ruling power. If they do that, fear for your religion and shun them.” 73

Here, Khomeini is less subtle than before. He implies, quite clearly, that those clerics who work with the “ruling power” are collaborators and conspirators. This may have been targeted at Ayatollah Abul-Qasem Khoi, a senior apolitical cleric in Najif, Iraq, or Ayatollah Shariat’madari, who steadfastly refused to be drawn into opposition against the Shah, electing instead to stay out of politics altogether. It is also worth noting that Khomeini delivered this lecture from Najaf, where had gone after initially being exiled to Turkey, his high profile and rank of Ayatollah likely being the only things that prevented his execution by the Shah’s authorities. A reconciliation with Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was out of the question, therefore.

Later, Khomeini refers to Abu Khadija, who quotes Imam Sadiq:

“When enmity and dispute arise among you, or you disagree concerning the receipt or payment of a sum of money, be sure not to refer the matter to one of these malefactors for judgment. Designate as judge and arbiter someone among you who is acquainted..."

73ibid, p76.
with our injunctions concerning what is permitted and prohibited, for I appoint such a man as judge over you. Let none of you take your complaint against another of you to the tyrannical ruling power.”

Imam Sadiq would have had to have said this in the later years of the Umayyad caliphate or the early years of the Abbasid caliphate. Both were despised by the Shi’ite community and seen as usurpers of the line of Imams that descended directly from Ali, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law. In essence, the believer is being urged to circumvent the state, which is illegitimate, and to refer instead, to someone familiar with the precepts of Islamic law, such as the religious scholars. This would effectively make the fuqaha the de facto government and amounts to an open call to rebellion, if not revolution.

It appears that in Ayatollah Khomeini’s opinion, one of, if not the greatest responsibility the leader has, is to act as judge and to secure justice for his people. Quoting Imam Sadiq once more, in response to ‘Umar ibn Hanzala’s question, “What should two Shi’is do then, under such circumstances?” - he is referring to the administration by the caliphs:

“They must seek out one of you who narrates our traditions, who is versed in what is permissible and what is forbidden, who is well acquainted with our laws and ordinances, and accept him as judge and arbiter, for I appoint him as judge over you.”

Khomeini also attempts to convey that just leadership is actually a burden and not a privilege, and that the clerics would assume this position out of a desire to guide the community along the righteous path, not for glory or for personal gain. This stands in

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74 ibid, p96.
75 ibid, p93.
stark contrast to the “profligate royal ceremonies, [...] reckless spending, [and] constant embezzlement” of the monarchs ruling many Islamic countries. The reference to profligate royal ceremonies clearly alludes to the Shah’s coronation ceremony of 1967.77 Khomeini seeks to make this distinction by quoting Imam Ali: ‘Thus the Commander of the Faithful says in his sermon in Nahj al-Balagha: “Were it not for the obligation imposed one me to take up this task of government, I would abandon it.”’78 Here, Khomeini seems desperate to emphasize that if the fuqaha were to assume governance over Iran or the Islamic community in general, they would do so out of a sense of responsibility rather than out of personal ambition or greed.

Khomeini also seems keen to place responsibility for the all the ills of the Islamic world squarely on the shoulders of its corrupt and inept rulers, as well as the imperialists: the United States of America, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the jews, with whom “the historical movement of Islam has had to contend [from the very beginning.” From the second paragraph of the introduction chapter of Islamic Government, Khomeini wastes little time in laying the blame for the absence of a truly Islamic government at the feet of “the Jews” and, later, other groups who sought to exterminate Islam.

“These new groups began their imperialist penetration of the Muslim countries about three hundred years ago [...]. It was not their aim to alienate the people from Islam in order to promote Christianity among them, for the imperialists have no religious belief, Christian or Islamic. Rather, […] they felt that the major obstacle in the path of their

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76ibid, 58.
77ibid, Algar’s note.
78ibid, p65.
materialistic ambitions and the chief threat to their political power was nothing but Islam and its ordinances, and the belief of the people in Islam. They therefore plotted and campaigned against Islam by various means.”

The first eight pages of Islamic Government outline Ayatollah Khomeini’s grievances against the foreign powers that have been active in Islamic countries. “The imposition of foreign laws on our Islamic society has been the source of numerous problems and difficulties,” he writes. Furthermore, “[in] order to make the Muslims, especially the intellectuals and the younger generation, deviate from the path of Islam, foreign agents have constantly insinuated that Islam has nothing to offer.” These statements appear to absolve all parties other than the “anti-national” rulers who have made their fortune by allowing the countries for which they are responsible to be exploited by imperialists who “carry of [their] oil after drawing it out of the ground” and “divide the Islamic homeland,” or the jews who “[dare] to occupy [Muslim] lands, and to burn the Masjid al-Aqsa without the people’s being capable of making an immediate response.”

In addition to holding jews, great powers, and corrupt rulers responsible for the relative poverty of the Islamic countries, Khomeini also appears to absolve the general population of any accountability. Instead, the public, particularly the youth and the intellectuals who may not have been especially close to Islam, have been manipulated. Not only are these groups offered reconciliation, but those who choose not to return to

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79 Ibid, p27.
80 Ibid, p32.
83 Ibid, p115.
84 Ibid, p48.
85 Ibid, p46-47.
Islam are portrayed as puppets of the imperialist powers. This is true of the constitutionalists as well. According to Khomeini:

“[Agents] of Britain were instructed by their masters to take advantage of the idea of constitutionalism in order to deceive the people and conceal the true nature of their political crimes.”\(^8^6\)

Those who supported constitutionalism are also offered a return to the Islamic fold, the error of their ways having been illuminated by Khomeini as foreign machinations against Islam. As far as the concept of constitutionalism itself goes, Khomeini’s only apparent criticism is that the idea is foreign: “[The] basis of the laws that were now thrust upon the people was alien and borrowed.”\(^8^7\)

In fact, Khomeini’s Islamic Government is replete with nationalist rhetoric. However, he simultaneously represents two strands of nationalism: Islamic nationalism and Iranian nationalism. In general, Khomeini refers to Islamic lands and their exploitation by foreign powers, such as the occupation of Palestine by the state of Israel. However, Khomeini also makes some veiled references to the Shah and mentions Iran by name on several occasions.

In addition, he effectively writes exclusively for a Shi’ite audience. Most of the traditions he cites originate with the Imams, of whom only the Prophet himself and Ali are recognized universally by Muslims. Imam Sadiq, for example, who is referenced on several occasions, was the 6th Imam, and was not recognized by the Sunni community, who form the great majority of Muslims. It stands to reason, therefore, that if the message conveyed in his lectures was intended for an audience beyond his students in

\(^8^6\)ibid, p30-31.
\(^8^7\)ibid, p31.
Najaf, that audience was to be found in Iran. Throughout his writings, “he increasingly spoke of the Iranian fatherland, the Iranian nation, the Iranian patriot, and the honorable people of Iran.”

Ervand Abrahamian even postulates that “the nationalistic language, together with the use of exclusively Shi’ite symbols and imagery, helps explain why the Khomeinists have had limited success in exporting their revolution.”

Several patterns in Khomeini’s political philosophy can be closely identified with 3rd world nationalism found all over the world. Khomeini insists that the reason for Iran’s woes is its abandonment of its own culture in favor of imitation of foreign ones and the importing of foreign ideas. Two parties are responsible for this: the imperialist powers who seek to exploit and manipulate Islam, and the rulers who neglect their responsibility to protect the nation from being abused. Additionally, this crisis becomes cyclical: because the nation abandoned its own culture, it was vulnerable to manipulation; Because it was manipulated, it abandoned its own culture.

This narrative serves multiple purposes. First, it externalizes the source of the community’s woes. Second, it suggests that the exploitation of the country was facilitated by internal actors. This, too, is important, because it implies that without this malevolent actor, it would have been impossible to exploit the country. It follows, then, that if this person or group is removed, the exploitation of the country will stop. Finally, it suggests that the native culture is the solution to the country’s issues. Membership in that culture is the least exclusive common denominator, bringing the greatest number of people into the fold.

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89 Ibid, p15.
Khomeini’s challenge, as far as Iran is concerned, however, is crafting an inclusive brand of nationalism. Culturally and ethnically, Iran is incredibly diverse. As Ali Ansari points out, for example, Reza Shah’s attempts at crafting a new nationalism had failed because his was an "exclusive ideology of 'Persian' nationalism."\(^91\) The one identity most the vast majority of Iranians share is their religious one. Most Iranians are Muslims, while most Muslims in Iran are Shi’a. In addition to the Persians, the Azeri and Arab communities in Iran are largely Shi’a. Khomeini, then, as an Islamic scholar, is ideally placed to mobilize the population, doing so by appealing to its Muslim identity. Khomeini’s narrative continues by putting the Shi’ite clerics at the vanguard of the movement to put an end to the imperialist domination of the Islamic lands:

“We must end all this plundering and usurpation of wealth. The people as a whole have a responsibility in this respect, but the responsibility of the religious scholars is graver and more critical. We must take the lead over other Muslims in embarking on this sacred jihad, this heavy undertaking; because of our rank and position, we must be in the forefront. If we do not have the power today to prevent these misdeeds from happening and to punish these embezzlers and traitors, these powerful thieves that rule over us, then we must work to gain that power.”\(^92\)

Here, Khomeini makes it clear that Islamic Government is not simply a theoretical exercise. As the chapter titles suggest, Khomeini is offering a program for the installation of such an administration, as well as describing what that government’s form and limitations might be. Khomeini states:

\(^91\)Ansari, 2003, Modern Iran, p128.
“Islamic government is neither tyrannical nor absolute, but constitutional. It is not constitutional in the current sense of the word, i.e., based on the approval of laws in accordance with the opinions of the majority. It is constitutional in the sense that the rulers are subject to a certain set of conditions in governing, and administering the country, conditions set forth in the Noble Qur’an and the Sunna of the Most Noble Messenger.”\(^9^3\)

This is of great interest, because, according to Cheryl Benard and Zalmay Khalilzad, who conducted two interviews with Khomeini at his home in Neauphle-le-Chateau in Paris during the upheavals in Iran leading up to the revolution, Khomeini and his entourage made a concerted effort to emphasize three points repeatedly: “‘The rights of minorities, the rights of women, and the holding of elections.’”\(^9^4\). It appears, then, that the idea of an ‘Islamic Republic’ was a compromise between Khomeini’s ideal of a cleric led government and appeals for a representative government. Only by attaching itself to the desire for popular representation could the Islamist movement mobilize enough people to overthrow the Shah and institute the vilayat-i faqih.

Abrahamian contends that “‘populism’ is a more apt term for describing Khomeini, his ideas, and his movement because this term is associated with ideological adaptability and intellectual flexibility, with political protests against the established order, and with socioeconomic issues that fuel mass opposition to the status quo.”\(^9^5\) This is evident in Khomeini’s compromise on the issue of popular representation and declaration of an Islamic Republic in Iran. That compromise, however, appears to have been merely

\(^9^3\)ibid, p55.
\(^9^4\)Benard and Khalilzad, 1984, Government of God, pIX.
superficial, intended to mobilize different constituencies against the Shah. Despite its highly publicized elections and substantial democratic infrastructure, Iran’s constitution ensures that power is vested firmly in the hands of the Islamists, who can reject or repeal legislation, as well as disqualify candidates from running in elections on the rather subjective basis that they are not Islamic enough. Khomeini demonstrated an impressive ability to frame his ideas in such a way as to make them as inclusive possible, to adapt them to popular forces, and to mobilize large segments of the population whose goals were not entirely compatible with his own.
Chapter 4: Why Islam?

Exploring the social and structural reasons why Islam was able to assume leadership of the Iranian Revolution and assert itself afterward

In the previous chapters, the evolution of Shi’a Islam from opposition movement to pillar of the state and back to opposition movement has been explored. The changes within Iranian society and advances in technology that made it possible for the clergy to network and to mobilize their followers against the Shah have also been reviewed. However, another questions begs itself: Why Islam? While the numerous errors committed by the Shah have been examined, as well as the progressive alienation of every one of the monarchy’s traditional constituencies, it is still not entirely clear what enabled Islam to assert itself as a legitimate and viable alternative to the monarchy, which had existed in Iran for thousands of years.

In this chapter, we will assess the reasons why Islam was able to rise above the other, competing ideologies and assert itself as the solution to Iran's problems. Those reasons which have been touched upon in the previous chapters will be reviewed briefly in order to offer a comprehensive overview of the factors that made Islam such a powerful movement.

In doing so, we will begin with the question of identity.

Benard and Khalilzad state:

"The setting in which Islamic Third World countries generally must operate is characterized by four overlapping conflicts:
1. The North-South conflict, in its material (economic, military, diplomatic) and ideological aspects;

2. The superpower or East-West conflict and the constraints it places on weaker countries, particularly those who occupy a "strategic" location as defined by these outside powers;

3. The conflict between traditional and new values and actors; and

4. The conflict of ideologies."

As the authors point out, Islam is useful within each of these conflicts. In the first instance it connects that society to a pre-colonial history. Meanwhile, in the case of the East-West conflict, it offers an "alternate source of identification." Finally, Islam offers "the society a continuity that transcends" the last two conflicts.

It is most useful, perhaps, to begin with the function of Islam in the development of an alternative identity during the Cold War, as well as the failure of competing ideologies to assume this role. While these ideologies were met with a considerable degree of enthusiasm, eventually they were all forced to yield primacy to the Islamist movement. In addition to having been perceived as a failure after the Constitutional Revolution, constitutionalism, as well as republicanism, was held in some quarters to be a Western phenomenon. As noted in the chapter on his work, *Islamic Government*, Ayatollah Khomeini had asserted that British agents had been told to spread constitutionalism in

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97 ibid, p26.
98 ibid, p26.
Iran as a means of concealing their political agenda. Furthermore, Iran's Constitutional Revolution of the early 20th century had not produced the results Iranians had hoped and fought for. Despite the establishment of a parliament, Iran's monarch continued to enjoy almost unlimited power. The Oil Nationalization crisis offered Iran's parliament an opportunity to redeem itself and to prove its value. However, foreign intervention undermined its efforts to overrule the Shah and exposed the relative weakness of the institution. While many Western-educated intellectuals continued to promote a stronger parliament in Iran, constitutionalism was unable to gather enough momentum to overtake Islam as the leading force at the front of the revolutionary movement.

The same is true of socialism. While constitutionalism was associated with the West, socialism was linked inextricably with the Soviet Union. Although the Shah's ties to the United States of America were well documented (see Chapter 6), Iranians seem to have been reluctant to trade submission to one of the two world superpowers for prostration before another, particularly as Soviet control was exercised rather more directly. Furthermore, unlike the US or Great Britain, the USSR shared immediate borders with Iran. It would likely also not have been forgotten that separatist movements in both Azerbaijan and Kurdistan during the Allied Occupation had been "supported and arguably ultimately manipulated by the occupying Soviet forces who encouraged the transition from autonomy to separatism, a shift which challenged the integrity of the nation."

As Ali Ansari notes, these movements set a precedent for the integration of socialist policies by most political groups in Iran. Ultimately, however, the strident

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secularism of socialism did not appeal to Iranians. It is worth noting here that Russia and the Soviet Union do not escape Khomeini's wrath either. In *Islamic Government*, he decries the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, assigning blame to Russia, Great Britain, and Austria.

What is evident, then, is that both constitutionalism/republicanism and socialism had major obstacles to overcome in order to assert themselves in what was an increasingly nationalist movement. Instead, Ansari notes the "emergence of 'religious nationalism' as a political force in the country."

Benard and Khalilzad observe a phenomenon in Islamic Third World Countries which they call "The Radicalization of Tradition." They note that the introduction of new political forces and ideologies influenced traditional structures. "Thus leftist ideology could combine with ethnic nationalism; [...] nationalism could combine with religion; [etc]." One need only consider the views of Ali Shar'iati, whom Ervand Abrahamian has called "the main ideologue' of the revolution" and whose political ideology he describes as follows:

"Shar'iati drew his inspiration from outside as well as from within Islam: from Western sociology - particularly Marxist sociology - as well as from Muslim theology; from theorists of the Third World - especially Franz Fanon - as well as from the teachings of the early Shi'i martyrs. In fact, Shar'iati devoted his life to the task of synthesizing modern socialism with traditional Shi'ism, and adapting the revolutionary theories of

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101 ibid, p109-110.  
Marx, Fanon, and other great non-Iranian thinkers to his contemporary Iranian environment.\textsuperscript{105}

During the revolutionary period, Khomeini, too recognized the need to adapt his vision of a government of Shi'iite clerics to the demands of the Iranian people. As Benard and Khalilzad note:

"To the new social forces that had come into being in the Middle East, the vocabulary of the West and the Western media meant that their desire for a voice in government for access to decision-making could be articulated as the desire for a parliamentary system."\textsuperscript{106}

However, the only democratic mechanism Khomeini mentions in \textit{Islamic Government} is the possibility that if the Islamic jurists recognize one among them as being the most just and the most learned, then this \textit{faqih} may accede to a position of supreme leadership. He explicitly states that "Islamic government [...] is not constitutional in the current sense of the word, i.e., based on the approval of laws in accordance with the opinion of the majority."\textsuperscript{107} However, after the Shah had been forced to leave the country, Khomeini and the Islamists proposed an Islamic Republic, which was confirmed by a referendum without a constitution defining the delegation of powers having been proposed, let alone agreed. It seems likely, then, that \textit{Islamic Government}, a series of lectures held in Najaf in 1970, was a purely theoretical exercise. While ideal in his view, Khomeini recognized that he would have to adapt the vision he had


articulated in Islamic Government to make it more palatable to a greater portion of the population. Sami Zubaida observes:

"In this regard it is significant that Khomeini incorporated one European concept into his political vocabulary at the time of revolutionary agitation, that of the 'republic.'"⁠¹⁰⁸

This reflects Abrahamian’s contention that Khomeini’s movement shares many characteristics with populist movements.⁠¹⁰⁹

Benard and Khalilzad also observe that, in the face of the increasing penetration of the region by great powers, four trends followed, of which two are of particular interest here: actors "had to survive the aggressive or at any rate encroaching interests of these outside powers," and "they could employ the foreign presence as a catalyst and a definition point for internal affiliations, in order to unite with each other and/or to play different foreign powers off against each other."⁠¹¹⁰ The identification of "imperialism, foreign capitalism, and the political establishment" as the sources of a country’s problems is a central feature of populism.⁠¹¹¹ It is interesting that Shari’ati observes these same features in his history of Shi’a Islam as an opposition movement: *Red Shi’ism*.⁠¹¹²

Ultimately, however, the revolutionary movement was defined by Iran’s position as a Third World country:

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"The necessity for nationalism, especially in its cultural dimension, which resulted from this status made impossible a modernist rejection of those aspects of tradition, which, in classical European history, could more easily be labeled reactionary and opposed."\textsuperscript{113} Islam's status as an organic, home-grown political force gave it a legitimacy that its rivals could never claim. However, Islam's position in Iran is unique, even among Muslim countries in the Middle East, because of Iran's status as a Shi'ite society and an ostensibly Shi'ite state. Despite its eventual demise, the Safavid dynasty had firmly established Iran as a Shi'ite nation, which, furthermore, saw itself as the center of the Shi'a world. It does not seem unreasonable, then, to suggest that Shi'ism in Iran was uniquely positioned, in comparison with other Islamic countries, to connect itself to the country's glorious history without having to reject the relatively new concept of the nation-state; in fact, it was able to embrace it.

In \textit{Khomeinism}, Abrahamian refutes the notion that Khomeini is a fundamentalist by exploring the characteristics normally associated with fundamentalism and then countering these claims as they apply to Khomeini one by one. One of his arguments is that Khomeini does not reject the nation state.\textsuperscript{114} Khomeini does decry the separation of the Islamic world into small, separate states:

\textit{We see, too, that together, the imperialists and the self-seeking rulers have divided the Islamic homeland. They have separated the various segments of the Islamic umma from each other and artificially created separate nations. There once existed the great Ottoman State, and that, too, the imperialists divided.}\textsuperscript{115}

However, as Abrahamian points out, "[Khomeini] increasingly spoke of the Iranian fatherland, the Iranian nation, the Iranian patriot, and the honorable people of Iran."\textsuperscript{116} Sami Zubaida suggests that this is also implicit in Khomeini's \textit{Islamic Government}, contending that Khomeini's argument is based on the assumption of the modern nation-state with a politically conscious and engaged population.\textsuperscript{117} In fact, this political philosophy would have been conducive, or even necessary, in Khomeini's perception of Iran's role in the world. As Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr observes:

"The Iranian state, controlled de facto by the conservatives in the government, promotes itself as the Vatican of Shi'ism. It bases its argument on the fact that Iran is a Shi'-run state, whereas Shi'i Muslims in other parts of the world live in states that are dominated by Sunnis, and so Iran is free to pay near exclusive attention to Shi'i concerns."\textsuperscript{118}

During the Safavid period, Iran was able to effectively appropriate Shi'a Islam. Although this is not to suggest that the Shi'a the world over recognize Iran as some sort of center of Shi'ite political thought, it appears that the Iranian Shi'a clerics seemed to perceive this to be Iran's role. It does not seem illogical, therefore, to assume that these feelings are shared by large parts of the population.

Another feature of Islam which is likely to have contributed to its appeal as an opposition movement with considerable nationalist credentials is its traditional independence from the state. In light of the assertiveness demonstrated by the faction of the Shi'ite clergy led by Khomeini in seeking the establishment of an Islamic


\textsuperscript{117}Zubaida, 1989, \textit{Islam, the People and the State}, p1-37.

\textsuperscript{118}Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2004, “Iran, the vatican of shi’ism?” p40.
Republic, it is interesting that one of the factors that may have lent the movement some of its legitimacy was its lack of a role in the state. Said Amir Arjomand writes:

"Elsewhere, I have argued that the most important feature distinguishing Shi‘ism from Sunni Islam is the separation of political and religious authority, and the corresponding autonomy of the religious institution from the state. This separation could, under a number of circumstances, induce a negative evaluation of political charisma on the part of the men of religion."  

He continues by postulating that there are at least two responses to such a negative perception of political power: "pious withdrawal," as observed with the Ayatollahs Ha'eri and Borujerdi, or the attempted forced submission of political charisma to the religious establishment, as seen with Khomeini. The transition from the first response to the second can be roughly summarized as follows: "The legitimacy advantage inherently belonging to the ruler is claimed by the opposition, who can argue that precisely they have no visible power or possessions, they are morally stronger."  

Furthermore, the esteemed position of the Shi‘ite clergy in Iran meant that the state could not drive this opposition movement underground. While the clerical establishment had, for the most part, been accommodating of the monarchy, it appears that the Islamic opposition movement may have been the only one that could be sustained without being eventually forced to submit.  

Salehi writes:

120 Khalilzad and Benard, 1984, Government of God, p43.
121 The wife of General Pakravan claims that her husband saved Khomeini from execution by persuading the Shah and Ayatollah Shariatmadari to make him an ayatollah. Retrieved 11.8.2010 from: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~iohp/pakravan.html
"The security forces had focused mainly on the college community, civil and military servants, the large industrial organizations, and other middle-class people who were politically concerned. These new activists [the ulama] were not only unknown to the authorities, but there was additionally no way to cut their lines of communication. Their organization was therefore uncrushable [sic]."  

This was confirmed by Mehdi Bazargan.  

Michael Fischer has also argued that, unlike socialism, constitutionalism, or any other political force, Islam was central to the claims to legitimacy by the state. Therefore, the religious establishment could at any point in time revoke its endorsement of the state, as seen during the revolution. In another work, Fischer observes what he calls a "Karbala paradigm." He defines this as a mechanism "for heightening political consciousness of the moral failings of the government." The Karbala paradigm is essentially a ready-made narrative that ascribes to the actor in power characteristics such as despotism, and also carries connotations of usurpation and personal ambition. On the other hand, it implies a righteous posture on the part of the opposition, as well as an embrace of martyrdom, a powerful theme in Shi’a history, particularly as it relates to the Battle of Karbala. The Shi’a ulama had the greatest access to this device, and, as was noted in Chapter 2, Khomeini drew the comparison between the attack on the Fayzieh seminary in Qom by the Shah's security forces and the death of Imam Husayn at the hands of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyya’s forces.

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125 Ibid, p11.
Perhaps the greatest advantage enjoyed by the Islamic clergy, however, was its lack of a pre-existing political platform. This has been touched on by Ervand Abrahamian in his assertion that Khomeinism, the political movement led by the Ayatollah, was populist in nature. While the other political forces were limited in their ability to adapt to the demands of the Iranian people and the revolutionary movement due to a philosophical rigidity, the Islamists tailored their demands to popular grievances. Up until that point (the Revolution), the only political position with which the clergy had previously identified itself was one of constructive opposition - that is to say that its opposition was largely directed at policy rather than at the regime itself. The absence of a platform allowed the Islamists to tailor their movement around its opposition to the Shah, thereby pleasing large parts of the population without alienating itself from any of the significant political contingents in Iran, even modernists and secularists, as Benard and Khalilzad observe:

"As the fundamentalists (Khomeini, etc) entered into a dialogue with individuals such as Bazargan and Shari’ati and through them acquired access to the modernist and secularist intelligentsia, the modernists in turn were amenable to cooperation which offered access to the mass of the population to a degree the secularists alone could not hope to achieve."

The historical perception of the Shi’a clergy as a voice of opposition with no real political ambition of its own likely endeared it to the other opposition groups, as these would not have viewed the clerics as a competing faction, but rather as allies in the struggle to remove the Shah. In this manner, the clergy also appear to have acted as somewhat of

a bridge between the various political groups which formed the coalition that overthrew the Shah.

Another element which contributed to the ability of the Shi’a clergy to assume some measure of control over the revolutionary movement was the Shi’a cycle of mourning which not only maintained and even heightened the revolutionary fervor in Iran, but also imbued it with a distinctly religious tone. It is a tradition in Shi’a Islam - as well as in some Sunni societies - to mourn the dead not only immediately after their passing, but again 40 days later. The staging of these ceremonies to commemorate the deaths of individuals protesting against the Shah’s government were highly politicized and frequently used as an outlet for criticism of the regime. This, in turn, perpetuated a state of mutual antagonism between the state and the protest movement. The mourning ceremonies were frequently suppressed, violently, and usually resulted in the deaths of some of the civilians. These victims, in turn, were also mourned 40 days later, usually resulting in similar violence. Writing in the context of riots that took place in January 1978, where several people were killed, Chelkowski and Dabashi write:

"Just as Hussein is mourned not only on the 10th day of Muharram but also forty days thereafter, it is customary for Shi’ites to mourn the deceased forty days after their death. Those killed in the riots were mourned publicly forty days later by the multitudes in towns all over Iran. In Tabriz the riot police then fired on the mourners, creating new martyrs, and new cycles of remembrances forty days later. Four times this occurred, generating a chain reaction of mourning demonstrations and shootings, with more and
more people participating every 40 days. That procession of events laid the ground for the final assault on the bastion of the Shah's regime.\textsuperscript{m27}

Charles Kurzman, meanwhile, points out that 40th day mourning ceremonies do not have a history of being politicized,\textsuperscript{128} either in Iran or Shi'a society in general. This suggests that the clergy, or at least the contingent behind the protests, may have sensed a heightened vulnerability in the Shah's government, and therefore, an opportunity to effect real change.

Khomeini seems to be the first cleric to have exploited the tradition of 40th-day mourning ceremony's for the expression of political discontent.\textsuperscript{129} The speech in which he compares the attack by Shah's forces on the Fayzieh seminary in Qom to Husain's martyrdom at the battle of Karbala, mentioned above and in chapter 2, was held on the 40th day after the attack.

Kurzman also introduces the concept of 'critical mass' to his analysis of the reasons for the success of the Iranian Revolution. He suggests that Iranians were able to overcome their fear of violent repression of their protests by the Shah's security forces because they became increasingly aware of the breadth of discontent throughout the nation. Disaffection with the Shah's regime also continued to grow as news of the protests and mourning cycles, and the state's violent response to them, were increasingly widely reported.\textsuperscript{130}

Another crucial way in which the Shi'a clerics also played a part in the ability of Islam to position itself at the front of the revolutionary movement was in the mobilization of the

\textsuperscript{127}Chelkowski and Dabashi, 1999, \textit{Staging a Revolution}, p82.
\textsuperscript{128}Kurzman, 2204, \textit{The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran}, p54.
\textsuperscript{129}ibid, p54-55.
\textsuperscript{130}ibid, p125-162.
extensive network of mosques and seminaries. The network served as a strong and efficient way for the opposition to communicate and to coordinate. According to a report by the Iranian Ministry of Endowments, there were over 9,000 mosques in Iran in the mid-1970s.\textsuperscript{131}

The independence of the Shi’a infrastructure from the state, to which reference is made above, made the development of this network possible. Therefore, the network not only made it easy for the Shi’a clergy to arrange demonstrations and exchange ideas, it also facilitated the raising of funds. Thus, the clerics had both a strong organizational capability as well as a solid financial base which the state could not control.

Furthermore, because this network was institutional rather than personal, it was difficult to deter or disrupt its mobilization. Although clerics remained relatively free of state suppression, the few instances when they were detained or placed under house arrest do not appear to have limited the capacity of the mosque networks to organize the opposition. Perhaps the best example of this can be found in Khomeini’s continued influence despite his being exiled, first to Turkey, then Iraq, and finally France. On this subject, Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi write:

"Exile, literal deterritorialization, therefore did not cut Khomeini off from his followers. It is ironic to note that improvements in the relations between Iraq and Iran in the mid-1970s that aimed to settle the border disputes should have helped to strengthen this process. The Iraqis agreed to allow up to 130,000 Iranian pilgrims to visit the Shiite holy places, second only to Mecca in religious significance, so from 1976 a stream of tapes of Khomeini’s speeches began to flow into Iran from Najaf, brought back by pilgrims and

\textsuperscript{131}Akhavi, 1980, Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran, p208.
visitors, and were distributed through the mosque network. The Shah became cognizant of this alternative communications network, noted briefly in his memoirs in the terse sentence 'cassettes of his [Khomeini’s] speeches and harangues were smuggled into our country and used by his supporters to incite the masses.'

The usefulness of the mosque network, then, is clear.

A further explanation for the success of the Shi’a clergy in mobilizing the people, and, therefore, in assuming leadership of the revolution, is the religious model of the marja-at taqlid, or 'source of emulation.' According to the concept of the marja-at taqlid, those not thoroughly versed in the teachings of Islam should seek out a learned Islamic scholar to serve as a reference in matters where they are unsure of the position of Islam. This relationship between cleric and believer made it far easier for the clergy to revoke the state's legitimacy and to mobilize the people against it. In all likelihood, the Shah's awareness of the ability of the clergy to harness popular discontent is responsible for the relative absence of repression, if not attempted marginalization, of the religious structures in Iran.

Thus, it seems almost inevitable that the Shi’a clergy should have assumed leadership of the revolution, and that they should have commanded a substantial following as well.

During the Cold War, there existed an almost dogmatic dichotomy that forced most countries to align themselves with either the East or the West. However, in Iran, both carried negative political and historical connotations; The East - Russia and later the USSR - had supported separatist movements in the North, among other offenses. The West - Great Britain and the United States - had exploited Iran’s economy, and

supported the unpopular Shah. Islam, therefore, offered an alternate source of identity, independent of East or West. Furthermore, unlike constitutionalism or socialism, Islam also claims traditionalist credentials that extend back to Iran’s proud, pre-colonial history. Islam, therefore, is an organic political force. The continuity which Islam provides also supersedes ideological conflicts, perhaps presaging Islam’s role as the unifying factor in the coalition that toppled the Shah. Neither socialism nor republicanism or constitutionalism could claim any of these advantages. Furthermore, because Islam was not previously a fixed political ideology, it was able to adapt and to absorb elements of other popular ideologies, as long as they did not in any way contradict the ordinances of Islam. Thus, Shari’ati and Bazargan could ally themselves with the Islamists without necessarily having to anticipate future conflicts. The Islamists could also construct their platform around the common grievances of the Iranian people, rather than propose a positive agenda. This flexibility is not only invaluable to Islam’s ability to articulate itself in as inclusive a way as possible, but it is also arguably unique to Islam. Thus, Khomeini was able to introduce the idea of an ‘Islamic Republic,’ which had no precedent in Islamic political thought. It has also been argued that religious institutions were largely exempted from state repression, perhaps due to the prestigious nature of the men of religion. Therefore, the mosques and seminaries became something of a headquarters for the revolutionary movement. At the same time, the network of mosques provided a strong, independent communications infrastructure for the Islamists and the other opposition groups that gradually came to align themselves with the **them**, to organize and to mobilize. The

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133 Supporting Abrahamian’s assertion that Khomeinism is a form of populism.
Shi’a clergy also had access to pre-existing cultural narrative of oppression and marginalization. So, they could repeatedly make reference to the Battle of Karbala, the martyrdom of Husain, and the injustice represented by Yazid ibn Mu’awiyya, an allegory which would have been almost universally understood in Iran. The Shi’a clerics were also able to exploit cultural practices in order to perpetuate the movement. The cycle of 40th day mourning ceremonies which had begun following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini’s son, Mustafah, is a perfect example. Not only did these ceremonies, which were highly politicized, maintain the forward momentum of the movement, they even accelerated it. As these ceremonies were violently suppressed, they triggered the beginning of another cycle. They also imbued the protest movement with an Islamic vocabulary and context.

The Shi’a social dynamic of the marja-e taqlid is also important. Khomeini’s popularity among the populace won him growing numbers of followers in a society that had already been structured in a way so that the senior mujtahids exercised considerable influence. As Khomeini also won over increasing numbers of the clergy (he was not necessarily popular, but rather polarizing, so that while some colleagues embraced him, others distanced themselves from him and his policies), so he also won over their followers.

Most important, however, in explaining Islam’s supremacy in the revolutionary movement, was its history as Iran’s voice of opposition, beginning under the Qajars and continuing throughout the Pahlavi dynasty. This legacy gave the Islamic movement within the revolution a legitimacy which the other groups could only dream of being able to claim. Finally, the fusion of religion and nationalism, whose development Ansari
observes as early as the Allied Occupation,\textsuperscript{134} was crucial in allowing the Islamists to appropriate nationalism as their own. Ansari observes: “The dominating ‘principle’ or ideology in this period is that of ‘nationalism.”\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{134}Ansari, 2003, \textit{Modern Iran}, p110.

Chapter 5: America's Shah

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's Relationship With the US and How It Was Perceived by the Public in Iran

In the previous chapters, both the gradual growth of political consciousness of Iran as well as the increasing penetration of the country by foreign actors have been discussed, as has the nationalism that began to emerge, largely as a result of the two aforementioned trends. In the following chapter, the Shah's relationship with the United States will be explored, as will the public's perception of that relationship. The analytical focus will be on the political crises in Iran and the role the US, and other foreign powers, played in them. At the end, the role of Cold War politics in the Shah's relationship with America and what effect this had on his public image will also be discussed. We will begin by examining the origins of the Pahlavi dynasty, as Shah Mohammad Reza's public perception and claim to legitimacy, or lack thereof, was shaped to no insignificant degree by the legacy of his father.

In 1921, Reza Khan effectively carried out a military coup against Iran's monarch, Ahmad Shah Qajar. He entered the capital, Tehran, together with the Cossack Brigade in February of 1921, and had roughly 60 influential politicians arrested. In claiming that he was hoping to prevent a revolution, he demanded that his co-conspirator, Seyyed Zia Tabatabaie, be named Prime Minister. His order was duly followed. After initially occupying the newly created position of Army Commander, Reza Khan was named Minister of War in May of the same year, while Seyyed Zia was forced from office. In 1923, he himself was named Prime Minister, and in 1925, his dominance of Iranian
politics was so complete that the Iranian parliament abolished the ailing Qajar dynasty and established the Pahlavi dynasty in its stead, with Reza Khan as the country's new monarch.\footnote{Ansari, 2003, \textit{Modern Iran}, p25.}

From the very outset of his regime, Reza Shah had to contend with assertions that he had to come to power not only with British approval, but with British support. As Abrahamian observes, and as is explored in greater depth in chapter 2, the persistent interference in the politics of the country by foreign powers, specifically Great Britain and Russia, had left Iranians somewhat predisposed, not unjustifiably, to paranoia regarding the machinations of other nations.\footnote{Abrahamian, 1993, \textit{Khomeinism}, p111-131.} Michael Zirinsky confirms that the British did, in fact, assist the coup, though authorship of the coup remains unclear: "British aid to the coup was key to its success, and aid to Reza helped him survive; Loraine's policy of good relations and nonintervention was part of the process by which Reza came to dominate Iran."\footnote{Zirinsky, 1992, “Imperial Power and Dictatorship: Britain and the Rise of Reza Shah, 1921-1926,” p639.} The truth of the full extent of British assistance likely lies somewhere in between claims by Reza Khan and his entourage that he accomplished the feat himself and his critics' assertions that he was a lackey of Great Britain. Regardless of actual fact, Reza Khan had to confront claims that he was a puppet of the British, as Ali Ansari suggests:

"[The] continued popular belief in British involvement in the establishment of the Pahlavi state was to haunt Reza Shah and his son as much if not more than the 1953 coup was
to cause problems of credibility for Mohammad Reza Shah. [...] There was an essential crisis of legitimacy which plagued the Pahlavi dynasty from its inception."  

Considerably less controversial is the role played by the British, as well as the Americans and the Soviet Union, in the forced abdication of Reza Khan in favor of his young son, Mohammad Reza. In 1941, the Allied forces occupied Iran. Reza Khan had sought closer relations with Germany during his reign, in large part because he sought assistance in the development of the country, but was disinclined to seek this from the British or Russians. Closer ties to Germany offered not only a viable source of the technical expertise which he had hoped to secure, but also an opportunity to distance himself from the British and the Russians and to confirm his nationalist credentials. Germany, for its part, had no history of interference in Iran, and very little history of imperialism in general. Furthermore, he may have felt that Germany would be particularly inclined to help develop Iran in order to help it break from its own rivals, Russia and Great Britain.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1941, however, Britain and the USSR established an alliance, and quickly determined that the risk of the Abadan oil refinery falling into Hitler's hands or a possible line of Allied supplies to the Soviet Union through Iran being severed, as well as the general cultivation of relations with Germany, was too great. So, in August of 1941, the Allies invaded Iran and forced Reza Khan to abdicate in favor of his son, who they hoped would be more inclined to favor the Allied powers, and no doubt felt would be easier to manipulate. Unlike the slow coup which had installed Reza Khan as the Shah of Iran, there could be no question as to the

140 Eshraghi, 1984, “Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran in August 1941.”
authors of the premature beginning to the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who would have to face even greater challenges to his claims of legitimacy than his father had. It is important to note nationalism's continued prevalence as a political force. Meanwhile, the extent of the impact that the Allied occupation had on Iran can perhaps be better understood in considering that Ayatollah Khomeini refers to it, in the speech held on the afternoon of Ashura, 1963. Seemingly completely out of context, Khomeini invokes the memory of it, simply wishing to emphasize that the Shah answered to foreign "masters."\footnote{Khomeini, 1981, “The Afternoon of Ashura,” in Islam and Revolution, translated by Hamid Algar.}

Ansari also observes an unintended effect of Reza Khan's policy of modernization: "Much to Reza Shah's irritation, his industrial and educational reforms, as we have seen, provided the framework and catalyst for the growth of political awareness."\footnote{Ansari, 2003, Modern Iran, p97.}

Thus, not only would the young Shah have to contend with questions over his legitimacy, but also with the growth of that sector of society that challenged that claim. Also worthy of mention are the increased exposure of the Iranian public to Western ideas through the Allied occupation, as well as through the education of the intellectual elite in the West, the growth of newspapers, the proliferation of political parties, the effect of radio broadcasts, which were able to reach even the large illiterate portion of Iran.

These patterns were crucial in the emergence of oil nationalization as a subject of intense public interest. A renegotiation of the oil concession granted to William Knox D'arcy by the Qajar king, Mozaffar al-Din Shah, became a priority for Reza Khan's
government, and as these failed to produce a satisfactory result and nationalist sentiment continued to rise, calls for the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) grew in both pitch as well as frequency. The movement would not reach its climax, however, until Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh took the reins. As Prime Minister, Mossadegh pushed through legislation stipulating that the AIOC come under the control of the Iranian government after further rounds of renegotiations failed. Mossadegh’s popularity, the source of which seemed to be the fact that he openly defied one of the great powers, meant that he was able to accrue greater powers for himself and to push through the nationalization of the AIOC even though some elements of parliament preferred continued negotiations.

With its position of primacy in the Iranian oil industry under threat, the British. In 1951, all British oil workers were expelled from the country. A year later, the British diplomatic corps followed suit as relations were officially severed. The British, who had previously explored the feasibility of a coup against Mossadegh, no longer had an embassy to serve as a base of operations for such a measure. Therefore, they were forced to address their concerns to the United States and the new president, Dwight Eisenhower. Their case was couched in terms of the ongoing Cold War, exploiting Eisenhower’s paranoia over the possible spread of communism, particularly in a region that was vital to American strategic interests. The young Shah was persuaded to issue a farman, or decree, ordering the immediate removal of Mossadegh from his post as Prime Minister, while mobs were hired to demonstrate against Mossadegh and in favor of the Shah. The intention was to imbue the coup with a false sense of popular support and to paint

143 Washington telegram No460 to FO (5.March.1953), FO371/104581.
Mossadegh as a demagogue. The organization of the coup and its execution were carried out in Iran by American agents. After an initial attempt to remove Mossadegh had failed, the Shah fled to Rome. However, a second attempt succeeded where the first had not, and Mossadegh was brought before trial and was imprisoned, and later placed under house arrest.\textsuperscript{144} However, the coup against Mossadegh had been prophesied in the Iranian political consciousness, and it was, in fact, associated closely with the British and the Americans. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s legitimacy had suffered another blow.

In the context of the themes which this dissertation has sought to explore, it is worth mentioning the role of Ayatollah Seyyed Abol-Ghassem Mostafavi Kashani in both the initial success of Mossadegh and his eventual downfall. It should be remembered that Ayatollah Borujerdi was generally held to be the most senior cleric in Iran, and widely recognized as such by his colleagues. Borujerdi was noted for his close relationship with the Shah and for his refusal to be drawn into politics, and was known to have attempted to use his influence in religious circles to encourage the rest of the clergy to follow his own example. The most prominent cleric to defy Borujerdi’s prohibition of clerical was Kashani. Kashani’s support of oil nationalization was important in legitimizing the process, as Sharia law emphatically and explicitly acknowledges the right to private property and stipulates that contractual obligations should be met.\textsuperscript{145} However, Kashani eventually withdrew his support for Mossadegh, perhaps fearing that Mossadegh might institute a program of secularization or, more likely, feeling that Mossadegh was becoming more popular than the nationalization movement itself. The

\textsuperscript{144} Kinzer, 2003, \textit{All the Shah’s Men}, p194. \\
\textsuperscript{145} Islam, 1998, “Dissolution of contract in Islamic law.”
latter possibility meets Arjomand's model of "negative evaluation of political power by religious authorities," which he bases on a Weberian understanding of the church-state dynamic:

"Whenever hierocratic charisma is stronger than political authority it seeks to degrade it, if it does not appropriate it outright. Since political power claims a competing charisma of its own, it may be made to appear as the work of Satan."

What distinguishes the oil nationalization crisis from the preceding crises is the emergence of a charismatic individual to appropriate the mantle of nationalist hero for himself, thus stripping the Pahlavi dynasty of whatever grasp it may still have had on the narrative. The 1953 crisis, meanwhile, marked a transition from Britain to the US as the most influential foreign power in Iran.

In 1963, the Shah instituted a series of reforms known as 'the White Revolution.' The three principal features of the Shah's program were land reform, women's rights, and education. He was strongly urged to do so by the President of the United States at the time, John F. Kennedy. Kennedy was fearful that the Soviet Union would stir up agitation against the Iranian regime among the poor, particularly in rural areas that had very little contact with the central government. There was considerable poverty in Iran, and the president worried that Soviet claims of exploitation and marginalization of the poor could be met with an enthusiastic response among Iran's peasantry. The aspect of land reform, therefore, was central to the Shah's program. However, April

Summit has characterized the relationship between the Shah and the United States as decidedly more complex, to the extent that it may have even favored the Shah:

"The story of American relations with Iran during the Kennedy administration is one of misunderstandings and missed opportunities. Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi often manipulated and thwarted Kennedy’s policy toward Iran and used American fears of Communism to gain increased financial aid and military support. Disagreements among US policy-makers also contributed to an inconsistent policy toward Iran. These factors resulted in the bolstering of a dictatorship out of touch with the Iranian people, inevitably leading to the revolution that occurred in 1978-79."  

The reforms were largely unpopular in Iran. While the landed aristocracy, who had been traditionally aligned firmly with the monarchy, bemoaned the state's appropriation of their lands, the same was true of the clergy, who drew a considerable amount of their funds from rural villages which were now being threatened by the redistribution of land, and many of whom came from families with substantial land holdings. However, they also objected to what they perceived as the usurpation of their roles in education and the ordering of the family in society. Foreign leaders, however, were effusive in their praise of the Shah and hoped that other Third World leaders might follow his model of top-down reform, thereby challenging the socialist narrative. President Kennedy is said to have called the Shah and congratulated him personally. However, in light of the Iranian distrust of foreign powers, it seems likely that the positive reception the Shah’s

149ibid, p560.


151Ansari, 2003, Modern Iran Since 1921, p160.
'White Revolution' received abroad could only have aroused skepticism of its purpose in Iran.

The Shah must have been aware that he would be alienating himself from two of his oldest and most influential consistencies, the landed aristocracy and the Shi'a ulama. However, when measured against the outpouring of popular support he expected to receive from the rural peasantry, this would have seemed a small price to pay. The Shah also seems to have paid more attention to the foreign press than to domestic public sentiment, and would thus not have appeared to have any reason to reconsider the wisdom of his program of reforms. He had made two critical mistakes, however: in assessing the influence wielded by Iranian social groups, he had favored quantity over quality, failing to recognize the power of the groups whose interests conflicted with his reforms, and fracturing the long-established relationship between Iran's landed aristocracy and the peasantry.

The events surrounding the Shah's 'White Revolution' reveal two important developments: the completion of the transformation of the Shah from a reluctant king, indecisive and passive, to a megalomaniac, convinced of his own divine mission and popularity among his subjects, as well as the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini as the most prominent voice of opposition to the Shah.

That voice would become even more vocal in its criticism of the Shah the following year with the passing of the Status of Forces Agreement:

"In 1964, it became apparent that the US state department was seeking immunity from prosecution for all American personnel, diplomatic or otherwise, living in Iran. The State Department, anxious not to antagonize public opinion, had wanted the agreement to be
informally ratified through an exchange of letter between the Iranian foreign ministry and the State Department."  

However, the Prime Minister, Ali Hasan Mansur, insisted that the agreement pass through the proper channels and submitted the proposal to parliament. The public was outraged, as noted by the British foreign office, and inevitably drew comparisons with the humiliating system of 'capitulations' imposed in Iran during the 19th century, when Europeans insisted that their citizens be granted a type of exemption from local law whereby any verdict or sentencing would have to be co-signed by a representative of the home nation, arguing that no formal judicial system existed and that, therefore, individuals were at the mercy of each Islamic jurist's respective interpretation of sacred law.

Once again, Khomeini was vocal in denouncing the Shah. It is in his speech on October 27, 1964, that Khomeini arguably first alludes to his vision of a government of clerics:

"If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit this nation to be slaves of Britain one day and America the next, [...] they will not permit Israel to take over the Iranian economy, [...] they will not permit the government to impose arbitrarily such a heavy loan on the Iranian nation. [...] All of our troubles today are caused by America and Israel."  

While the machinations of foreign powers and the subservience of the Shah's government to them bear the brunt of Khomeini's diatribe, his program for the religious leaders also includes the educational segregation of boys and girls. Khomeini also drew

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a connection between the ratification of the agreement and the issuance of a loan by the US government to Iran of $200 million (US) to be used, in turn, to purchase advanced arms from the US.

Baqer Moin, the author of Khomeini’s most well-known biography, observes: "Khomeini's shrewd exploitation of the Shah's American link had found its mark. But more importantly, by honing on an issue that affected Iran's sovereignty he had become a political leader, the first time that a teaching marja' had achieved such a position."\(^{155}\)

What little sympathy had remained for the Shah was lost. The balance of power between Iran and the United States appeared to favor America more than ever. Even the Shah, on whom the West had previously seemed at least moderately dependent, had been forced to pass an unpopular bill which he must have known would not be palatable to the public, with only a paltry loan to show for it, a point which Khomeini had emphasized.

Arjomand notes two important patterns between 1953 and 1978: the urbanization of Iran and the growth of higher education. Both would have factored into the continued growth of political consciousness in Iran which has been observed here.\(^{156}\)

"The last ten years of Mohammad Rea Shah's reign witnessed the consolidation, growth, and extension of the Pahlavi state and the apogee of the Shah's personal power. The political and economic power of the state, exaggerated by a dramatic increase in oil revenues in the 1970s, masked the weakness of its social foundations."\(^{157}\)

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By the time the Shah announced on its behalf that the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries would be more than doubling the price of oil, Iran had enjoyed several years of consistent economic growth. However, this growth was predicated largely on oil revenues, which had already been rising gradually. Since the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, those revenues had gone straight into the state treasury, meaning that the average Iranian saw little if any benefit from Iran's steady economic growth. It is at this stage that the Shah seems to have sensed an enormous opportunity. Following the Yom Kippur War between Egypt and Syria, on the one hand, and Israel on the other, and the ensuing oil embargo against the US by the Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, the Shah was in the unprecedented position of having considerable economic leverage over the West.

So, in December of 1973, in a press conference at Niavaran Palace, where he hosted a meeting of OPEC members, the Shah announced that the price of oil per barrel would be quadrupled. At this stage, the Shah was in the unique position of being able to portray himself to the West as its friend (who was still supplying it with oil, after all), while also being able to acquire the credentials of a nationalist which he had long desired by causing even greater difficulties for the US at an already difficult time. It seems reasonable to think that the Shah would have been confident that he would be able to legitimize his own rule without having to concede the patronage of his American ally, whose economic difficulties he was clearly exacerbating. The Shah even became more assertive in his stance against the West in the press:

"As far as the Western world is concerned... the era of extraordinary progress and income - and an even more extraordinary income - based on cheap oil has ended. They
should find new energy sources and gradually tighten their belts. [...] They will have to work even harder."\textsuperscript{58}

As a result, Spencer Davidson wrote in TIME Magazine that “the Shah’s power is exploding and Americans would be wise to pay attention to his dreams.”\textsuperscript{59} However, the Shah’s complete mismanagement of this new wealth would undo or prevent any progress he might have otherwise made in attaining the respect of the Iranian public. The exorbitant rise of oil income flooded the Iranian economy with money it could not yet properly absorb and hyperinflation naturally followed. However, rather than accept the responsibility for the rising prices of every-day goods, the Shah chose instead to assess blame to the bazaar, whom he accused of profiteering.\textsuperscript{60} The bazaar merchant class was not only subjected to enforced price controls, which the Shah intended to mitigate the effects of inflation on the working class, but they were also increasingly denied access to the state loans and were physically marginalized by the Shah’s urban planning, which often cut right through the bazaar.\textsuperscript{61} In doing so, the Shah alienated yet another of the monarchy’s oldest constituencies.

Throughout this entire period, two further trends in Iranian-US relations had an impact on how the Shah was perceived by his people: arms procurements and relations with Israel. Throughout his reign, but particularly during the boom years of Iran’s economy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Shah purchased large amounts of advanced US arms. According to Leslie Pryor (a pseudonym):

\textsuperscript{59}Davidson, 1974, “Oil, grandeur, and a challenge to the West,” p28-38.
\textsuperscript{60}Ashraf, 1988, “The bazaar-mosque alliance.”
“According to a 1976 report of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the United States sells more arms to Iran than to any other country [a total of $8.3b between 1973 and 1976, forming] the backbone of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s efforts to expand his army, navy, and air force.”

These purchases must have seemed not only necessary to the Iranian public, but also as gratuitous stimulation of the economy of the unpopular United States.

Throughout his reign, the Shah also maintained strong relations with Israel. While it is not clear that he did so under US pressure, it must also be understood that this was not popular domestically. Although the Palestinian issue may not have been as prevalent as it was in many Arab countries, it did resonate with many of Iran’s Muslims to the extent that during the Islamic Revolution, the opposition frequently demanded the cessation of relations with Israel. It is not difficult to imagine that the Shah was encouraged by the US, which was heavily invested in Israel’s success, to maintain friendly relations.

Regardless of his motivation, under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iran was not only a supplier of oil to Israel, but also a reliable regional ally.

While the Shah undoubtedly had a close relationship with the United States, claims made by his critics that he was a puppet of the American government seem to have been slightly exaggerated. This does not change the fact that this was popular perception among the Iranian public, which, in the end, is more important than fact.

This is more easily understood in the context of the Cold War, when states were generally forced to align themselves with either the US or the Soviet Union. While the

164 Guiney, 1979, “Israel After the Shah,” p34.
Shah was most certainly close to the United States, particularly from 1953 onward, the relationship was mutually beneficial, if not necessarily for the common Iranian. The outrage caused by the Allied invasion during World War II had demonstrated the degree to which Iranians valued their country's independence, and the Soviet Union was certainly not preferred to the US, as demonstrated in one of Khomeini's speeches: "America is worse than Britain; Britain is worse than America. The Soviet Union is worse than both of them. They are all worse and more unclean than each other!"\(^{165}\)

The enforced dichotomy during the Cold War suggests that it would have been difficult for the Shah to maintain not only a policy of neutrality, but the perception as well. Given that the Soviet Union was based on an ideology that firmly rejected the institutions of monarchy and religion, shared a border with Iran, and had previously expressed ambitions on Iranian territory, it seems only natural that the Shah would have pursued relations with the United States. However, perhaps due to the nature of the way both he and his father had come to power, the Shah was particularly vulnerable to scrutiny.

The reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi represents the apogee of the three trends which this dissertation explores: the rise of Iranian nationalism, the growing assertiveness of the Shi'a clergy in Iranian politics, and the increasing penetration of Iran by foreign powers. Interestingly, in the latter case, it may have been the visibility of that penetration rather than the foreign presence itself. That presence arguably not only accelerated the former two trends, but set them in motion altogether, despite the fact that, in reality, the Shah was able to exercise considerable leverage over the US. This was evidenced by his success in continuing to procure arms which were widely held to

be superfluous, his control over Iran’s oil industry, and his position at the center of the world's energy hub.
**Chapter 6: The Renaissance of Iran’s Central Government**

Keddie’s model of inverse correlation between *ulama* power and a strong central government, and how despite Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s strengthening of the state, the clerics still came to power

Nikki Keddie has observed an inverse correlation between the power of the *ulama* and the strength of the central government. In Iran, the decline of the Qajar state, therefore led to a “power vacuum” which the Shi’a clergy gradually came to fill. This stands in contrast to the Ottoman Empire, or Egypt, where the modernization of the military and the establishment of a strong, central bureaucracy allowed the state to check the power of the *ulama*.166

In considering the ability of the Shi’a *ulama* to challenge the state’s claims of legitimacy, one must consider two factors which have already been explored in previous chapters: the clergy’s monopoly on the interpretation of the sacred texts, including the Koran and the hadiths, and the traditional illegitimacy which was ascribed to any state during the Greater Occultation of the 12th Imam.

The steadfast belief of the Shi’a in the Imamate is indicative of a pessimistic view of human fallibility, as it is rooted in idea that people are incapable of understanding the deepest level of truth within the Islamic traditions and scripture. In this regard, Shi’a Islam is considerably less egalitarian than the Sunni branch. The function of issuing verdicts on these deeper meanings was initially ascribed to the Imams. However, after the Greater Occultation of the 12th Imam, the function was gradually assumed by the Shi’a clergy, although arguably to a lesser extent. Although not divinely inspired like the Imams, the *ulama* were better versed in Islamic theology and therefore, it was argued,

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better qualified to attempt to ascertain these deeper truths. This practice is known as *ijtihad*, and implies the application of reason and, to the extent to which it is available, precedents in the history of Islam, to determine, effectively, what the Imams would have done in a given situation.

As mentioned previously, *ijtihad* can only be practiced in cases where no consensus has emerged yet. Therefore, the *ulama* were capable, theoretically, of exercising a significant degree of influence in these matters, consciously or not. In the 16th century, the majority of the Shi’a *ulama* could assume a posture similar to that of their Sunni counterparts arguing that as long as the state supports Islam it is legitimate in order to justify their embrace of the Safavid dynasty. However, in the 19th and 20th centuries, as the Qajar state which eventually succeeded the Safavids began to decline, the clergy were able to return to the original Shi’a conception of legitimate political authority and revoke their approval of the state. This, in turn, formed the basis of the *ulama*’s “effective and growing hostility to Iran’s Qajar dynasty in the 19th and 20th centuries.”167 Keddie adds that “religious doctrines change with time and circumstance, more than either their adherents or scholars like to admit.”168

Meanwhile, Arjomand argues that in the 20th century, the *ulama* have been the principal proponents of traditionalism, while observing:

“The distinctive feature of traditionalism in 20th century Iran is that it has been a general movement for the defense of Islam against Western influence led by the Shi’ite ‘ulama.”169

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168ibid, p32.
A synthesis of Keddie’s paradigm and Arjomand’s assertion will be attempted here. It will be argued that Keddie’s model is perhaps incomplete in that it does not account for the will of the Shi’a clergy to fill the “power vacuum” created by the decline of the Qajar state. The failures of the Qajars’ central government and the increasingly limited control they exerted over the country did, in fact, create a power vacuum. However, this was filled initially not only by the clergy, but by foreign actors as well, notably Russia and Great Britain. It was therefore not only possible for the clergy to accrue greater powers; it also behooved it to rise to the defense of the country and of Islam against the influence of the West in all its forms: political, economic, and cultural. It is important here, however, to avoid generalizations of Shi’a political thought and the portrayal of the ulama as a homogeneous entity.

Moreover, the penetration of Iran by the West dictated the pace and the discourse of the Shi’a ulama’s growing power. Effectively, the circumstances that allowed the Shi’a to gradually fill the “power vacuum” created by the declining Qajar dynasty also shaped how the Islamic opposition was articulated. In this case, the Shi’a Islamic movement was fused with Iran’s emerging nationalism. Therefore, the advancement of the Shi’a clergy’s political claims was sustained, even during the largely effective centralization of the state under the Pahlavi dynasty, especially under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The continuing influence which foreign powers were able to exert in Iran, or at least the perception that this was the case, remained a vulnerability of the Pahlavi dynasty, and was opportunistically exploited by Khomeini during the revolution.

**The Centralization of Iran’s Government Under the Pahlavis**
When Mohammad Reza Pahlavi led what was effectively a military coup against the Qajar dynasty, he must have been aware of the weakness of the government. When he then came to power, it seems only natural that one of his first orders of business and highest priorities would have been to remedy this by modernizing state institutions such as the military, the bureaucracy, etc. According to Reza Arasteh:

“In his haste to modernize Iran, Reza Shah abolished many long-established customs and institutions. He was himself a soldier and unlike the ruling aristocracy, and the upper-class intellectuals of his day, he did not feel bound to honor traditions or to proceed cautiously. His aim was to bring a European pattern of life to Iran, and to achieve these ends in a short time he imposed a strong centralized administration on the country and suppressed and limited local groups which might offer resistance to his reforms. [...] To eliminate any possible opposition from [the ulama], Reza Shah abolished the waqt (ecclesiastical property) from which they had traditionally derived their income, and henceforth they were financially dependent on the government. Furthermore, the training of the clergy was taken over by the state and a School of Theology was established as part of the University of Tehran.”

Religion was discouraged in general. Reza Shah also insisted that a police officer be present at the meeting of any guild organization, while local political entities increasingly lost their autonomy.

“In tearing down traditional patterns, Reza Shah attempted to forcibly substitute national unity and modernization by three vehicles of change: a strong army, a modern

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Arasteh, 1963, “The role of intellectuals in administrative development and social change in Iran,” p327.
transportation and communication system, and lastly an efficient government administration staffed by educated civil servants.\textsuperscript{171}

Meanwhile, the state gradually began to introduce export tariffs and to impose taxes, instituting a more modern state treasury. One of Reza Shah’s highest priorities was to reform the country’s judicial system. The humiliating regime of ‘capitulations’ had been imposed on Iran by foreign countries based on the subjective nature of the Islamic courts which had been prevalent at the time. By establishing a modern judicial system, therefore, Reza Shah was not only moving forward with his program of modernization, but establishing his credentials as a nationalist as well. He was also antagonizing the \textit{ulama} even further, however, by appropriating one of their traditional functions within society.

Arjomand’s assertion that the Shi’a clergy operated as a force for traditionalism in the 20th century can thus also be understood in another way; Akhavi states that the \textit{ulama} were concerned primarily with the protection of their own cultural and social privileges: “Defensiveness as a reaction to macro-scale, long-term secular changes which have their root in the Western impact upon Iran is understandable, given the dual role of ‘ulama: (a) guardians of the traditions of the prophet and the imams; (b) protectors of the resources of the community against non-believer exploitation of this wealth.”\textsuperscript{172}

Interestingly, Mohammad Faghfoory has differentiated within this period and observes three phases in state-\textit{ulama} relations under Reza Sha from 1921-1941. The first, from 1921 to 1925, reflects a period of mutual accommodation: Reza Shah assured the \textit{ulama} that he would consult them in the affairs of the state, and in exchange, they

\textsuperscript{171}ibid, p327.
\textsuperscript{172}Akhavi, 1980, \textit{Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran}, p183.
supported him in his accumulation of power. Simultaneously, their own influence rose sharply, due mostly to Reza Shah’s continued compliance with their wishes, after they had largely withdraw from politics following the Constitutional Revolution. The second phase of Faghfoory’s model runs from 1925 to 1927. This phase is characterized by the maintenance of similar public postures on the parts of both Reza Shah and the ulama; however, at this point in time, Reza Shah had already come to power and was now looking to neutralize the threat which the clergy posed to himself and his program, but he could not yet act on these ambitions. Instead, this period is marked by the consolidation of power by Reza Shah. The third and final phase spans the period from 1927 to 1941, when Reza Shah was forced to abdicate the throne to his son. This phase is characterized by the progressive modernization and the marginalization of the ulama:

“Military, fiscal, judicial, and educational reforms removed the ulama from the central position of power that they had continuously occupied in Iran until 1920. The shah replaced them with military officers, bureaucrats, lawyers, teachers, and modern-educated intelligentsia. Not surprisingly, the ulama, once considered to be the conscience of the society, began to resist the challenge to their power and status, promptly being identified by the shah as defenders of backwardness and reaction.”

Thus, the power of the Shia’ ulama had been drastically circumscribed by the changes imposed by Reza Shah on the Iranian society, culture, and economy. However, the series of reforms instituted by Reza Shah suffered from three major flaws: they had

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been enforced too suddenly and too quickly; they were largely superficial; and they were institutionalized too closely to the personality of the Shah. Ansari contends that the “nationalist agenda” superseded the implementation of some of the reforms, such as the establishment of a new judicial system including both a new legal code as well as a new profession, in a realistic amount of time.\(^{174}\) Meanwhile, Amin Benani has observed of Iran’s economic reforms under Reza Shah:

“An appetite for industrialization far beyond the bounds of economic rationale, not for the sake of efficiency and welfare, but as a symbol of prestige and status.”\(^{175}\)

In a speech at the opening of the aforementioned Courts of Justice, Reza Shah is quoted as having said:

“It is not necessary for me to mention the effect of judicial reforms on the progress of the national welfare and how these reforms contribute to the national prestige.”\(^{176}\)

One effect of this emphasis on prestige was that many of the reforms and programs of modernization were superficial, or cosmetic. For example, the centralization of all commerce in Tehran and its status as the national capital, and, therefore, the country’s most visible city meant that while “Tehran received electricity, broad, paved avenues, and a variety of state buildings [...] improvements in provincial cities were much more limited.”\(^{177}\) Reza Ghods also reports that:

“The Trans-Iranian Railroad was, like the rest of the Shah’s economic program, more a symbol of Iran’s national pride and independence than an economic benefit to the


country. [...] The railroad was a financial burden on Iran far out of proportion to its benefits."\(^{78}\)

Banani characterizes cosmetic achievements such as these as an “indiscriminate imitation of the surface gloss of Western societies."\(^{79}\)

The third flaw of Reza Shah’s modernization program, as mentioned above, was that it was inextricably linked with the person of the monarch himself. This manifested itself in every area of reform. For example, Reza Shah more than tripled the size of the military while multiplying its budget by five and offering its officers greater salaries.\(^{80}\) The economy, too, was channeled through the state, and through Reza Shah himself, to the extent that all industrial plants during his time as shah were owned either by him or by the Iranian government - ironic, considering that he outlawed the Tudeh party, Iran’s leading Communist political organization. Meanwhile, monopolies for some of the country’s most important commodities, such as sugar, tea, and opium, were awarded to those who had curried favor with Reza Shah. Of the establishment of a national bank, Ghods writes:

“The National Bank of Iran, or Bank-i Melli, was created to make loans to industry at a lower rates than had been current in the bazaar [and] designed as a tangible symbol of the country’s financial integrity, and replaced the (British) Imperial Bank in printing currency. However, unlike the traditional bazaari creditors, the National bank did not

\(^{78}\)ibid, p221.


grant loans to credit-worthy bourgeois enterprises, but to the Shah’s favorite projects and his relatives and associates."^{181}

The Shah also went to great lengths to consolidate his power, not by campaigning for the support of key constituencies and social groups, but by undermining competing sources of power. The way in which he sought to co-opt the Shi’a clergy and to deprive it of an independent power base has already been examined. However, he also made Iran’s Communist and Socialist parties illegal, as well as the various incarnations of the Progress Party, whose ideology was based more or less on an unconditional support of the Shah and his programs. Prominent political figures in the Majles were also banned from politics.

One of Reza Shah’s other policies over the course of his modernization program that is also worth mentioning is the outsourcing of some state functions. Notably, the Bank Melli was initially run by a German, Dr. Kurt Lindenblatt, while the first adequate school of medicine in Iran was run largely by French doctors^{182} and a hospital in Mashhad was founded and operated by German doctors.^{183} The construction of the Trans-Iranian Railroad was also undertaken mostly by Western engineers.

The close identification of the state with Reza Shah would have two important effects: he would become increasingly unpopular, and the power of the state would suffer when he was removed by the Allied Occupation, allowing for the emergence of political pluralism on an as yet unprecedented level. It is likely that the former was exacerbated by Reza Shah’s cultivation of nationalist sentiment, in contrast to the frequent employ of

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^{182}Ansari, 2003, Modern Iran, p66.
^{183}Banani, 1961, The Modernization of Iran, p66
foreigners to run important state institutions and the perception that his reforms did not represent a program of modernization, but rather of Westernization.

However, the reign of Reza Shah should absolutely be understood as the reversal of the long-running decline of the Iranian state. The clergy, among many other social groups, were politically marginalized or suppressed. The failure of the Pahlavi government to maintain this momentum after the Allied Occupation during World War II and the abdication of Reza Shah can be attributed largely to the close identification of the state and its institutions with Reza Shah himself.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, his son and successor, was neither as shrewd nor as ruthless as his father, and was therefore unable to exert the same force of personality on the state. He has also been characterized as callow and weak-willed. Sam Falle, a former British diplomat to Iran makes the following observation in his memoirs:

“He has no moral courage and succumbs easily to fear.”¹⁸⁴

Instead:

“The young Mohammed Reza Shah concentrated his attention on sports cars, race horses, and women. He became a fixture of the international party set [...]. Several times, he tried to consolidate his shaky position at home through repression and vote-rigging, but succeeded only in making himself a figure of ridicule. Newspapers called him a lackey of the British. Public rallies were held to denounce him.”¹⁸⁵

He seems, therefore, to have been particularly ill-suited to assume the role that his father had established for the Iranian monarch. The state, which had over the past 15 years come to be closely associated with Reza Shah, a remarkably strong personality,

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¹⁸⁵Kinzer, 2003, All the Shah’s Men, p62.
suffered when it was deprived of such a forceful individual. The period from 1941, when Mohammad Reza Pahlavi acceded to the throne, to 1953, when the Shah perhaps first perceived that his power and position were under threat, is marked by a proliferation of political parties, newspapers, and other media that were effective in raising the political consciousness of the public. It could be argued that the early years of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s reign represented a recurrence of the power vacuum that had occurred under the Qajars in the 19th century, and on which Keddie bases her model of fluctuations in ulama power.

That “power vacuum” was exploited, however, not by the ulama, in this instance, but by various nationalist political forces. Most prominent among these were the Tudeh party and the National Front. The relative quietism of the clergy at this time can, in all likelihood be attributed to the influence of Ayatollah Seyyed Hossein Borujerdi. Borujerdi is widely acknowledged to have come to an arrangement with the young shah, promising not to interfere in politics and to support the monarchy, while, in exchange, the shah would relax the secular policies of his father. Borujerdi is also believed to have promised to attempt to quiet his more politically inclined colleagues. In fact, Ayatollah Abol-Ghassem Kashani is the only prominent member of the ulama to have openly contravened Borujerdi’s instructions to remain aloof of politics. During the 1953 oil nationalization crisis, he was “virtually alone among the leading mujtahids in joining Mossadeq, [and] provided a crucial ally to the nationalists.”

His reason for distancing himself from Mossadegh, and then publicly criticizing him viciously, was likely the fact

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that Mossadegh enjoyed increasingly broad public support, and that he was seen by some to be accruing too much power for himself.

The emergence of a strong, secular opposition in many ways signalled that Reza Shah’s reforms had been successful, though perhaps not as he had intended; not because the National Front of Mossadegh displaced Islam, but because it suggested a diversification of political forces.

Having seemingly recognized that his style of rule, or lack thereof, was untenable, and that emerging political forces would otherwise slowly appropriate his powers, the shah set about consolidating his power. According to Ansari, the first stage of consolidation is characterized by the strengthening of the military, the “ruthless suppression of Tudeh activities,” and an attempt to cast himself as a nationalist hero and “to fill the apparent vacuum left by Mossadeq.” By the end of the 1950s, the Shah’s position was not nearly so precarious. He had successfully re-established closer ties with his traditional constituencies, increased the size and budget of the military considerably and established SAVAK, the state security service. In addition, he had eliminated General Zahedi as a political rival (whose military pedigree had made him particularly dangerous), successfully suppressed the opposition political organizations, avoided antagonizing the ulama, and sufficiently depoliticized society so that the coup against Mossadegh largely faded from the political consciousness.

However, the death of Borujerdi and the termination of the Shah’s tacit understanding with the clergy would be the first in a series of events that affected this dynamic. Ayatollah Khomeini had been a student of Borujerdi’s, and had even served as his

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teaching assistant and personal secretary.\textsuperscript{188} As early as 1943, Khomeini had published *Kashf al-Asrar*, which was:

“an unsigned tract [attacking] contemporary secularists, particularly Reza Shah, Shariat Sangalaji (a reform-minded cleric who had openly supported the previous monarch), and Ahmad Kasravi.”\textsuperscript{189}

So, when the Shah instituted a series of reforms known as the ‘White Revolution’ in 1963, Khomeini was no longer bound to refrain from entering the political fray. He immediately denounced the Shah’s program, particularly the provisions that allowed women to vote and to stand in elections, appropriated land from the landed aristocracy (including large parts of the *ulama*), and provided for a greater role for the state in education in rural areas, where religious institutions had previously been the primary source of education. In a meeting with other clerics, Khomeini is said to have argued:

“What is happening is a calculated plot against Iranian independence and the Islamic nation, and it is threatening the foundation of Islam. [...] Now we face the shah himself, who is poised between life and death. [...] We are duty-bound to resist him because what now threatens the people is of such enormity that it cannot be ignored or faced with indifference.”\textsuperscript{190}

Khomeini was forced to go into exile the next year when his criticism became even more vocal following the ratification of the Status of Forces Agreement with the United States. However, he had entered the political consciousness of the nation. His new, high profile would later facilitate his leadership role in the Islamic Revolution.

\textsuperscript{188} Pasandideh, 1989, “The Life”
Ansari notes that, ironically, the ‘White Revolution’ was, in fact, intended to further consolidate the Shah’s rule:

“The Shah was anxious to be seen not only as a ‘democratic’ monarch, progressive and benign, always with the welfare of his people in mind - a characterization he had pursued to varied effect in the post-Mussadiq period - but as a ‘revolutionary’ monarch. In doing so, he would appropriate the myths of the Left and the National Front as a champion of revolutionary nationalism which would assist in legitimizing himself and his dynasty.”

As discussed in the previous chapter, its actual effect was to alienate the social classes usually linked with the monarchy, thereby depriving the Shah of his traditional power base. These included the landed aristocracy, the ulama, and the bazaar. By implementing the ‘White Revolution,’ the Shah was taking a calculated risk in that he must have known that he would be discarding his traditional constituencies, while hoping that he would be able to co-opt the general population in their place. The social and economic dislocation caused by the ‘White Revolution’ is discussed in Chapter 7, and prevented him from accomplishing this objective and depriving him of any popular power base.

However, the Shah still presided over a powerful military and police force, and had the feared SAVAK at his disposal, as well as an immense bureaucracy. He was also insulated from criticism and discontent by the enormous revenues generated by the oil boom.

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Charles Kurzman posits that a social scientific approach to identifying the causes of the Islamic Revolution falls short for the following reason: it seeks to adapt the conditions of the revolution to a paradigm that recognizes five “main explanations offered by studies of revolution:” political, organizational, cultural, economic, and military.\textsuperscript{192} He argues that while each of these explanations is in some way useful, each is on its own insufficient. For example, the economic explanation implies that the rapid inflation that was caused by the oil boom and led to a recession in 1977 might have been responsible for the revolution. However, Kurzman argues that the recession was not considerably worse than previous economic downturns, and that the groups most active during the revolution were not those most affected by it. Instead, he offers a synthesis of these explanations: the relaxation of political control, under some pressure from former US President Jimmy Carter, offered an opportunity for constructive\textsuperscript{193} mobilization; the network of Shi’a mosques furnished the movement with the organizational capacity necessary to be relevant; the movement was able to draw on prevalent themes in Shi’a culture, such as martyrdom and righteous indignation at the exercise of ‘unjust’ rule, as evidenced by the comparisons drawn between the Shah and the Ummayad caliph, Yazid ibn Mu’awiyya; the recession caused by the inflation that ensued after the oil boom provided a context for the opposition that was current, and democratized the movement by expanding the number of those involved; and, finally, the Shah failed or declined to use the full extent of his military and security organizations to suppress the movement.

\textsuperscript{192}Kurzman, 2004, \textit{The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran}, p4-6.  
\textsuperscript{193}Here meaning criticism and opposition to policy, not rejection of the monarchy.
Kurzman adds a further explanation, however; what he calls an “anti-explanation, [...] an attempt to understand the experience of the revolution in all its anomalous diversity and confusion.”

His conclusion is that a decisive factor was the emergence of “viability,” or critical mass. Effectively, the demonstrations continued to gather momentum even after the Shah resumed his repression of political activism because the nation became increasingly aware of its cumulative mutual discontent. The prevalence of mass media and the imposition of martial law ensured that the magnitude and frequency of the protests were known to almost everyone. One central thesis of collective behavior theory is that potential protesters are strongly influenced by their perceptions of other potential protesters and the likelihood that these will also eventually engage. The emergence of Khomeini as the voice of the movement may have also affected perceptions of the movement’s viability, by introducing a strong alternative to the Shah and to the monarchy. In the end, the Shah had attempted and, to a considerable degree, succeeded in imitating the patrimonial structure of the state around himself and the institution of the monarchy. The state, therefore, was largely a reflection of himself. Under his father, this relationship had manifested itself in a relatively strong state. While on the surface, the institutions of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi’s state were even stronger, particularly the military, they were only as strong as the Shah. Part of the Shah’s perceived strength lay in the support he received from the United States. However, the election of Jimmy Carter on a platform of human rights may have undermined this perception:

“We didn’t expect Carter to defend the shah, for he is a religious man who has raised the slogan of defending human rights. How can Carter, the devout Christian defend the shah?”

Perhaps most striking is the Shah’s reluctance to use the instruments of repression at his disposal to their fullest extent. Despite this wealth of repressive resources, the Shah seems to have been reluctant to use them. Some have attributed this to the Shah’s cancer, claiming that his “medication made him depressed and listless.” However, in a series of interviews with military and civilian administrators, Gholam Afkhami found that the Shah was reported to have been similarly reluctant to use excessive force in the crises in 1953 and 1963, long before he was diagnosed with cancer. It seems far more likely that the Shah had deluded himself into believing that he was a popular, constitutional monarch. Khomeini had become aware of this, saying that the “Shah lives in a morbid dream world.” When the demonstrations became increasingly frequent and increasingly diverse, he seems not to have known how to react. Wholly unprepared for the massive demonstrations taking place, he turned to the US for guidance. One of his closest and most reliable advisers, Asadollah Alam, had died in 1977, leaving him surrounded largely by sycophants who bought into the myth of the Shah’s invincibility. The US, however, was already hedging its bets and had opened a dialogue with the opposition. Competing advice from the US ambassador and the national security adviser, Zbigniew Brezsinksi, further complicated the Shah’s decision.

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198 Afkhami, 1985, Thanatos on a National Scale, p94.
199 Ansari, 2003, Modern Iran Since 1921, p250.
making and may be partly responsible for his policy of simultaneous repression and concessions. In fact, when the US did issue a public statement of support for the Shah, this was rather more harmful than helpful, as the “opposition, for its part, considered the Shah a lackey of the United States.”

Thus, Keddie’s model of inverse correlation between a strong government and the growth of ulama power can be successfully applied to the Islamic Revolution as well. In this case, despite the apparent institutional strength of the Pahlavi state, its patrimonial structure, inextricably linked with the person of the Shah, meant that his vulnerability was the state’s vulnerability as well. It has been shown that the Muhammad Reza Pahlavi was not a particularly strong ruler, and that his will to exercise control over Iran was rooted in a self-fabricated myth that he was almost universally loved and respected in his country. When this myth was exposed during the revolution by the participation in the protests of nearly every segment of society, he seems to have lost the will to rule, and as he fell, so did his government.

What distinguishes the Islamic Revolution from the gradual shift in power from the state to the ulama under the declining Qajar state is the aggressive, subjugation of the state. Arjomand cites Weber’s assertion that:

“Whenever hierocratic charisma is stronger than political authority it seeks to degrade it, if it does not appropriate it outright. Since political power claims a competing charisma of its own, it may be made to appear as the work of Satan.”

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Khomeini’s attack on the Shah and the institution of monarchy are unprecedented in modern Iranian history. Many sociologists, such as Theda Skocpol, for example, are dismissive of the impact of individuals in the study of revolutions:

“In the first place, an adequate understanding of social revolutions requires that the analyst take a nonvoluntarist, structural perspective on their causes and processes.”

It is hoped that in the previous chapters it has been sufficiently demonstrated that the Islamic Revolution represents the culmination of important several trends that significantly predate the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, as well as the Pahlavi dynasty altogether. However, while a structuralist approach is certainly useful in identifying the root causes of the revolution, the roles of individuals within them should not be ignored.

In the case of the Islamic Revolution, Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini acted as the catalysts. As has already been discussed, the Shah exacerbated the difficulties already facing the institution of monarchy in Iran and, by discarding what little support remained for him, essentially united the nation against himself. However, due to the close identification of the state with the monarchy and the Shah’s own personality, even this assertion does not contradict an emphasis on the structuralist approach; the Shah was a structure unto himself.

Khomeini’s role is perhaps more controversial. Ervand Abrahamian, for example, credits Ali Shari’ati as the “ideologue” of the revolution. However, Shari’ati had died shortly after the revolutionary movement began to gain momentum and long before it reached its zenith. As was explored in Chapter 4, Islam was uniquely positioned to organize and to

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204Skocpol, 1979, States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China, p14.
lead the protests against the Shah. It could, therefore, be argued that Khomeini simply represented the personification of the institution. According to Mehdi Bazargan, the interim Prime Minister in the provisional government set up by Khomeini following the success of the Revolution, the “vilification of the Shah and his regime were more important than the glorification of Khomeini. For every slogan for Khomeini, there were probably two or more against the Shah.”

However, Khomeini’s strident criticism of the Shah had furnished him with a legitimate claim to the leadership of the movement that no one else could match, while his uncompromising stance (matched by the Shah) ensured that the movement would end only with the removal of the Shah or the destruction of the protesters. Based on Khomeini’s assertion that the Shah “lives in a morbid dreamworld,” it does not seem unreasonable to think that he would have calculated that the Shah would effectively concede defeat once he became aware of the scale of discontent among the population. Khomeini is generally recognized as having been incredibly politically astute.

Khomeini plays an important part in notion concept introduced by Kurzman of “viability” in the movement. He was not only fearless in denouncing the Shah, as well as able to mobilize massive crowds against him, but he seemed to be capable of leading the country beyond the removal of the Shah; This is evidenced by the considerable support for the Islamic Republic in the referendum of 1979. Furthermore, the roles of Ha’eri and Borujerdi should not be dismissed.

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Keddie’s model, based on a review of relations between the state and the *ulama* under the Qajar dynasty, continues to apply in 20th century. However, this period is marked first by the revival of a strong government under Reza Shah, and only later by another government that, while structurally strong, was in fact only strong as long as the Shah was perceived to be strong. If one also assumes that Khomeini is representative of the *ulama*, then Keddie’s paradigm accurately predicts this dynamic.

Moreover, while a structuralist approach to the Islamic Revolution is particularly useful - as a study of the revolution is thoroughly incomplete without it - a review of the actors is also instructive: not only of the Shah or Ayatollah Khomeini, but Ali Shari’ati and others as well. The Shah’s reticence, for example, and the role of Shari’ati in synthesizing Islamist and socialist discourses should not be dismissed. Khomeini, however, as a persistent and vocal critic of the Shah for many years, commanded the respect not only of the Islamists, but of most of the opposition movement as well. The fact that Khomeini had been forced into exile lent him even further credibility.

So, while structurally Iran may have been predisposed to a revolution, the actions taken by individuals, primarily Khomeini and the Shah, accelerated the trend of growing *ulama* power and declining state power, and reaching its zenith in the establishment of the Islamic Republic.
Conclusions

Five trends and their role in the Iran’s Islamic Revolution

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to attempt to offer an explanation for Iran’s Islamic Revolution that takes into account the country’s history and culture, as well as the development of political trends. We have identified five main trends that offer some level of explanation for the events of 1977 to 1979: the decline of the Qajar government; following on from this are the penetration of Iran by Great Britain and Russia (and later, the United States), and the growing power of the ulama and their emergence as a voice of political opposition; the overall growth of political consciousness; and, finally, the rise of nationalism as the dominant political discourse in Iran. In many ways, these processes can be understood as products of one another, and while some would, in all likelihood, occur independently of the other process, they are still shaped by each other to some extent.

The weakness of the Qajar dynasty created a power vacuum which, according to Keddie, was filled by the ulama. However, the concurrent penetration and exploitation of Iran by Russia and Great Britain suggests that Keddie’s model is incomplete, because it does not acknowledge that these also filled that vacuum. Furthermore, her model does not account for the incentive of the ulama to fill this vacuum. The growth of political consciousness, meanwhile, can, at least in part, be attributed to the penetration by the West in two ways: the physical exposure to the foreign presence and the visibility of its exploitation of the country and the resultant dislocation of some parts of society, as well as the exposure to Western ideas, including constitutionalism, liberalism, and, most importantly, nationalism. It is also likely that the political activity of the Shi’a ulama would
have raised political awareness to some degree. Meanwhile, the exposure to the concept of nationalism must have been exacerbated by the simultaneous exploitation of Iran, to which it became the prevailing response. The defiance of and submission to foreign powers became integral parts of political debate, as claims of the former were made by those seeking power, while charges of the latter were leveled against political rivals. The pursuit of this narrative dominated Iranian politics in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Chapters 1 through 7 have sought to reveal aspects of Iranian and Shi’a culture and history that put the events and developments preceding the Islamic Revolution into a proper context. In chapter 1, the exclusive nature of legitimate political authority in the Shi’a conception was discussed. It was also revealed that this conception had been strengthened by persistent and often violent harassment of the sect throughout Islam’s early years. The emergence of the Safavid state was then reviewed. It was suggested that the creation of the Safavid dynasty was a watershed moment not only in the history of the Shi’a branch of Islam, but in Iran’s history as well. The rise of the Safavid state produced a complete and serious revision of the Shi’a conception of authority. It was noted that the new conception closely mirrored the traditional view of the Sunnis, in that as long as the state provided security for the Shi’a and advanced the faith, it would have the support of the ulama, on whom it depended for legitimacy. Furthermore, this also represents the first and perhaps only precedent for the arrangements which Ayatollahs Ha’eri and Borujerdi are believed to have come to with successive Pahlavi shahs in the 20th century.
In chapter 2, we examined the historical role of the Shi’a clergy as a voice of opposition in Iran during the 19th and 20th centuries. Grand Ayatollah Mirza Shirazi’s fatwa that prohibited the use of tobacco as a response to the issuance by the Qajar king Naser al-Din Shah, of a concession on its harvest, production, and sale to an Englishman represents the first significant instance of the clergy’s defiance of the declining Qajar government. In the early 20th century, a movement for the institutionalization of a constitution in Iran began to gather momentum. This movement was largely supported by the ulama who sought to circumscribe the powers of the Shah and prevent the further exploitation of Iran by foreign powers, and most prominent among these was Ayatollah Khorasani. It was also pointed out, however, that some other clerics were vehemently opposed to the constitutional movement, if not to the limitations it placed on the Shah’s power. Among these clerics, Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri was most prominent. He had sought to limit the impact of the Constitutional Revolution and to replace the newly established parliament with a council of mujtahids who would act as consultants to the monarchy and have the right to veto policy and legislation which they felt abrogated the sacred laws of Islam. It was also observed that both Khorasani and Nuri had studied under Ayatollah Shirazi, evidence of the independence the ulama were able to exercise in coming to a decision on certain matters and to the heterogeneity of Shi’a political thought. It was then recorded that, during the oil nationalization crisis in Iran in the early 1950s, Ayatollah Kashani had initially supported Mossadegh’s initiative, and had even issued a fatwa exhorting his followers to support the program as well. One of them went so far as to assassinate the Prime Minister Haj Ali Razmara, who was largely held to be ineffective and unwilling to stand against Britain’s exploitation of Iran. Finally, the clerical
response to the Shah’s reform program known as the ‘White Revolution, and the 1964 Status of Forces Agreement with the United States were discussed. Easily the most prominent critic of the Shah and opponent of these policies was Ayatollah Khomeini, whose political thought is explored in greater depth in the next chapter. However, the political thought of Ahmad Naraqi is considered first. Naraqi is considered one of the pioneers of the concept of *vilayat-i faqih*, whose primary contribution is the development of a doctrine which affords the Shi’a *fuqaha* an even greater freedom to speculate on the meaning of religious texts and traditions.

Chapter 3 reviewed Khomeini’s most famous and most important work, *Islamic Government*. It considered Khomeini’s conception of the structure of an Islamic government, or the absence of such a conception. Khomeini’s argument in favor of the implementation of his vision was considered, and was found to be based on three main arguments: the Prophet and the Imams stipulated that the clerics should assume their functions after them; in order for a Muslim king to rule in accordance with the laws of Islam, he must consult those most learned in Islamic law, the *fuqaha* - therefore, the power is, in fact, already vested in the *fuqaha* and ought to devolve to them officially; finally, and perhaps most importantly, Khomeini cites the current political plight of Iran and of the Muslim world at large and makes two claims important to the trends which are discussed in this dissertation: that foreign powers are exploiting Iran, economically as well as politically, and that the rulers of Muslim countries are complicit in this. His thinly veiled reference to the Shah and to current patterns of activity in the country, such as the exploitation of Iran’s natural resources, suggest that *Islamic Government* is not based purely on theory, but is instead a response to the political realities of Iran and the
rest of the Muslim world, and that the institutionalization of the *vilayat-i faqih* is not only a matter of principle, but rather necessary in order to protect Iran and Islam.

While chapters 1 through 3 seek to explain how Shi’a Islam in Iran came to adopt such an assertive posture in the late 20th century, chapter 4 seeks to explain why it was so successful and why it enjoyed such popular support. In considering numerous theories, each was found useful but incomplete in rationalizing the success of the Islamists during the revolutionary movement. Some of the theories that were put forward include: the unique ability of Islam to serve as an alternative source of identity during the Cold War and the North-South conflict and its function as a source of continuity that transcends ideological conflicts, as well as conflicts between new and traditional values and actors. To emphasize this point, the shortcomings of other ideologies in the Iranian context were discussed, particularly in light of the prevalence of nationalism and the inevitable association of ideologies such as socialism and constitutionalism with East and West, respectively. As a result of Islam’s position as an alternate source of identification, Benard and Khalilzad observe the “radicalization of tradition” (see chapter 4), which provides for the synthesis of new and old political philosophies in so far as they do not contradict each other. One of the products they see resulting from this process is the emergence of “religious nationalism.” It was also argued that Shari’ati’s political thought is a reflection of this process as well. The need to synthesize political ideas and movements seems also to have occurred to Khomeini, it is observed, as his concept of an Islamic government gradually transformed into an Islamic republic, with all its popular connotations. One of the responses of the Third World to the aggressive penetration by foreign powers was to use that foreign encroachment as a catalyst for collective action.
and internal alliances against the outside enemy. Another argument which was considered was that the rise of nationalism made a rejection of Islam, which might have otherwise been seen as backward or conservative, impossible, as Islam was perhaps the only local, organic political force or ideology. Furthermore, Shi’a Islam in Iran held a position that was unique relative to other Muslim countries. Shi’a Islam was and is by far the smaller of the two primary branches of Islam, and Iran had effectively become the center of the Shi’a world under the Safavid dynasty. Therefore, Shi’a nationalism was particularly Iranian, and also modern in a way that Sunni Islam never could be, because it was felt that Shi’a Islam belonged to Iran, the modern nation-state. The argument that Shi’a Islam’s independence from the state also played a role in its ability to assert itself politically during the revolution was also discussed. It was argued, on the one hand, that the institutional independence from the state meant that the Shi’a were not reliant on the state for funds, and therefore had a greater freedom of action. Furthermore, Arjomand also argued that this independence may have induced a negative evaluation of the state on the part of some within the ulama. This independence also meant that as the ulama sought public support they could legitimately claim that they were morally stronger because they had no political power and could therefore not be corrupted. It also manifested itself in a relative freedom from state scrutiny and repression. The extensive network of mosques over which the ulama presided also facilitated their ability to organize successfully and mobilize their followers. This efficient communications infrastructure may have also led other groups, who did not possess such mechanisms or whose tools of communication had been destroyed, to the ulama. Institutions of Shi’a culture also played an important role in the perpetuation of the protest movement that
led to the revolution. The politicization of the 40th-day mourning ceremonies is perhaps the best example of this. The availability of pre-existing Shi’a narratives of suffering and injustice, such as what Fischer calls the “Karbala paradigm” were also of considerable use to the Islamists, who were able to imbue the revolutionary movement with an Islamic vocabulary and an Islamic context. This is also evident in the model of the *marja-e tqaqlid*, or source of emulation. Shi’a Islam encourages each individual to select for him- or herself a *marja* whose rulings on all matters are binding for his followers. So, the clergy had an existing following, whom they had only to urge to join the protests, though it should be pointed out that such drastic measures would not *always* have been so willingly followed. It has also been observed that the religious institutions and popular religious leaders escaped the state’s repressive measures largely unscathed, and so, their movement never suffered from a loss of momentum the way others might have.

Perhaps the most important features of political Shi’a Islam, however, were its history as a voice of opposition and criticism in modern Iranian history, and the fact that it did not yet have a political ideology or platform of its own. The *ulama* were remembered as the only political entity to have openly opposed the granting of the Tobacco Concession in 1890 and were also known to have been integral to the success of the Constitutional Revolution. Their immediate opposition to the ‘White Revolution’ - although arguably mostly out of self-interest - was also not forgotten by the public, most of whom were eventually disappointed by the series of reforms. The clergy, and Khomeini in particular, therefore had credentials as an opposition group which no other faction could claim, which perhaps also explains why these groups largely aligned themselves with the *ulama* and not vice versa. It is also argued here that due to the absence of a developed
political platform, the Islamist movement was able to seize the initiative and tailor its narrative and platform to the popular grievances of the Iranian nation. As Abrahamian noted, that platform was based primarily on opposition to the Shah, the only political objective that could be considered nearly universal, and closely reflects the populism found in Third World Latin American countries.

Chapter 5 reviewed the relationship between Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the United States of America and the perception of the nature of that relationship in Iran, as well as the vulnerability of the Shah’s claims to legitimacy. The origins of the Pahlavi dynasty were examined, as well as those of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s reign itself. The role of foreign powers in bringing both to fruition severely undermined the Pahlavi dynasty’s ability to claim legitimacy, as it had been redefined during the Safavid era: the protection and advancement of the nation and of the faith. So, from the outset, the younger Pahlavi Shah would have to contend with challenges to his legitimacy and his nationalist credentials. US involvement in the coup that removed the popular Prime Minister, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, and restored greater powers to the Shah would only further undermine his rule. The idea for the ‘White Revolution’ launched by the Shah in 1963 was largely believed to have come from Washington, while the Status of Forces Agreement of the next year that granted immunity to all US personnel in Iran provoked widespread outrage, articulated most forcefully by Ayatollah Khomeini, who was forced into exile. All of this served, however, to confirm the perception that the Shah was subservient to the US. It was also explored how the Shah sought to claim the title of nationalist by spurring a rise in the price of oil per barrel by OPEC at an already difficult time for the US economy. However, his mismanagement of these financial
resources led to a spike in inflation that caused a recession and led to the emergence of protests. Additionally, as discussed briefly in chapter 2, the Shah had to contend with an Iranian paranoia that ascribed every political action to the machinations of foreign powers; this belief is rooted in the actual interference in Iran by those same powers, though it is also certainly exaggerated. This exaggeration manifested itself in the reluctance of the Iranian public to recognize the leverage the Shah was able to exercise with the US after 1953. Regardless, “Iranians believed the central direction for the Shah’s policies originated in Washington.” Moreover, the younger Pahlavi also had to contend with an increasingly educated and politically conscious population, due, in no small part, to the reforms instituted by his father and which he dutifully continued.

In chapter 6, the focus changes from the cultural and historical structures that made the Islamic Revolution possible to the actual events that led to the abolition of the monarchy and its replacement by the Islamic Republic. This is done in the context of Keddie’s paradigm of the inverse correlation between strong government and ulama power. It is argued that under Reza Shah, the Pahlavi dynasty reversed the decline of the Iranian state, resulting in the loss of ulama power, despite that group’s marginalization by him. Reza Shah was able to strengthen the military, improve the state’s infrastructure, and establish a functioning bureaucracy. It was observed that his program of modernization suffered from three flaws, however: it was carried out too quickly to be as effective as possible; it was often superficial, even cosmetic; and, the state was built around the Shah himself. His own strength was reflected in the state; however, the occupation by the Allied forces during World War II exposed the relative weakness of Iran. The Shah

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was forced to abdicate to his son, who, after more than a decade of relative negligence, began to consolidate power in much the same way his father had. However, his progressive alienation of every one of his traditional bases of power, and his failure to successfully acquire any new ones weakened his position. He was able to maintain his position, however, insulated by a powerful military and police, as well as revenues from the state-controlled oil industry. The concurrence of the election of Jimmy Carter, and the pressure felt by the Shah to relax political pressure as a result, and the recession in Iran, gradually exposed the Shah’s weakness, which manifested itself in the state as well. The Shah’s desire to rule was rooted in his self-deluded belief that he was widely loved and respected, rather than feared. As the revolution gained momentum and participation became almost universal, this myth seems to have collapsed, and the Shah effectively gave up. As Ansari has argued, the success of the revolution was “dependent ultimately on the actions and inactions of the one man who, by his own volition, formed the lynchpin of the Pahlavi state.”208 The role of Khomeini as a catalyst for the revolution and his ability to take advantage of processes and developments set in motion long before, is also discussed.

The Iranian Revolution, therefore, marks the culmination of each of the trends which the dissertation has sought to explore and to address. Set into motion by the weakness of the declining Qajar dynasty, the simultaneous growth of ulama power and the incursion into Iran by foreign powers resulted in a conflict over who was to fill the power vacuum created by the weakened government. The latter, meanwhile, generated a nationalism

that came to dominate Iranian politics through the present. The rise of the Iranian political consciousness, meanwhile, constituted a new political pressure on the Iranian monarchy which could be harnessed by other political actors. Populist nationalism appears to have been the most effective way of mobilizing the newly politically conscious public.

Shi’a Islam, largely claimed by Iran as its own, was exceptionally well positioned to do so. Its status as a cultural institution protected it from state interference and repression, and its place in the structure and hierarchy of society meant that it was exceptionally well suited to lead a mass movement. Other political ideologies were too specific and could not command the broad support which Islam, with an exceptional political leader such as Khomeini, was able to. The ongoing perception that the Iranian state was being manipulated by foreign powers - not without an element of truth - thoroughly undermined the monarchy’s legitimacy. This is not to suggest that the Islamic Revolution, or indeed any revolution, in Iran was inevitable. Rather, it is hoped that a clear idea has emerged of the extraordinary coincidence of circumstances, including these trends and the catalysts in the form of the Shah, Ayatollah Khomeini, and the economic and political conditions at the time, and how these reflect historical and political developments without which it is unlikely that Iran’s Islamic Revolution would have occurred at all.
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