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**THE FROZEN CONFLICT BETWEEN THE  
UNITED STATES AND IRAN: CAUSAL  
PATTERNS PRIOR TO THE COUP D'ÉTAT OF  
1953 AND CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES OF  
HOSTILITY**

**A THESIS**

**Presented to the Faculty**

**of**

**The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy**

**by**

**NILS JORDET**

**In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the**

**Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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# **ABSTRACT**

**Title:**

***The Frozen Conflict Between the United States and Iran: Causal Patterns Prior to the Coup D'état of 1953 and Contemporary Attitudes of Hostility***

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The scope is to explain the enduring conflict between the United States and Iran. The research design consists of four main components: (1) a theoretical framework, (2) models to guide the inquiry, (3) a narrative of historical processes, and (4) analysis and interpretation of the causal chain. The principal source of information has been the existing literature; however, my findings have been heavily influenced by field research in Iran.

The argument advanced in this study is that a certain number of recurring patterns in Iran's history account for the immense hostility toward the United States. A comprehensive survey of Iran's history identifies seven distinct patterns: (1) the legitimacy of the absolute ruler, (2) the territorial legacy of the Persian empire, (3) the never-ending conflicts with a string of world powers, (4) the legacy of foreign domination of Iran, (5) the ancient and exceptionally strong relationship between state and religion, (6) Iran's lack of social cohesion, rampant factionalism, and the constant threat of political disintegration, and (7) the extraordinary resilience of Iranian culture and national identity. The dissertation argues that the best way to understand Iran's current standoff with the United States, and to predict the future of U.S.-Iranian relations

with a higher degree of certainty, is to look for the historical motives that drive decision-making.

This dissertation arrives at the overall conclusion that the clash between Iran's great imperial past and the global power currently assumed by the United States is the root source of the conflict. America's short involvement with Iran fits a historical pattern of powerful external enemies who not only entered the regional spheres of Iranian influence but also attempted to alter the internal institutions and culture of its societies. The United States got entangled in Iran's factional struggle over what constitutes a legitimate social contract, which continues today between Shi'i absolutism and social forces with aspirations to some sort of Iranian-style democracy. The very survival of the theocratic regime rests on maintaining the image of the United States as the external hegemon that stands in the way of Iran's historical aspirations.

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<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>I</b>
1. <i>The Research Problem.....</i>	<i>iii</i>
2. <i>Propositions and Findings.....</i>	<i>xv</i>
3. <i>Why is the Conflict between Iran and the United States so Important? .....</i>	<i>xxxv</i>
4. <i>The Literature on U.S.-Iranian Relations .....</i>	<i>xxxix</i>
5. <i>Roadmap to the Dissertation .....</i>	<i>lv</i>
<b>CHAPTER I:     THEORY AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1. <i>The Theoretical Framework .....</i>	<i>1</i>
2. <i>Complementary and Competing Analytical Frameworks.....</i>	<i>23</i>
3. <i>Measures of the Important Variables in the Theoretical Explanation .....</i>	<i>37</i>
4. <i>The Research Design, the Research Methods, and the Scope of Work.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<b>CHAPTER II:    THE GREAT PERSIAN EMPIRE .....</b>	<b>55</b>
1. <i>The Achaemenian Empire: 550-330 B.C. ....</i>	<i>59</i>
2. <i>Alexander the Great and the Seleucid Dynasty: 330-129 B.C.....</i>	<i>71</i>
3. <i>The Parthian Empire: 247 B.C.-A.D. 224 .....</i>	<i>80</i>
4. <i>The Sasanian Empire: A.D. 224-651 .....</i>	<i>93</i>
<b>CHAPTER III:   THE DISSOLUTION OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE.....</b>	<b>117</b>
1. <i>Iran's Conversion to Islam .....</i>	<i>120</i>
2. <i>The Arab Invasion.....</i>	<i>142</i>
3. <i>The Iranian Intermezzo .....</i>	<i>156</i>
4. <i>Turkish and Mongol Rule.....</i>	<i>165</i>

<b>CHAPTER IV: THE REBIRTH OF IRANIAN IMPERIALISM.....</b>	<b>177</b>
1. <i>Shi'i Absolutism and Iranian Imperialism.....</i>	<i>178</i>
2. <i>Factionalism and Horizontal Stratification of Political Structures.....</i>	<i>193</i>
3. <i>The Ottoman Archenemy: The Wars of 1514-1745 .....</i>	<i>198</i>
<b>CHAPTER V: THE LEGACY OF EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM.....</b>	<b>228</b>
1. <i>Qajar Irredentism and the Disparity Between Ends and Means .....</i>	<i>230</i>
2. <i>Iran's Subjugation to the Will of Russia and Great Britain .....</i>	<i>252</i>
3. <i>Religious Influence on Foreign Policy in the Qajar Period.....</i>	<i>272</i>
<b>CHAPTER VI: SOCIAL CHANGE AND WORLD POLITICS .....</b>	<b>289</b>
1. <i>The Constitutional Revolution: 1905-1911.....</i>	<i>290</i>
2. <i>World War I and Foreign Occupation.....</i>	<i>302</i>
3. <i>Reza Shah and the Revival of Iranian Nationalism .....</i>	<i>314</i>
<b>CHAPTER VII: U.S.-IRANIAN RELATIONS AFTER THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION .....</b>	<b>334</b>
1. <i>U.S. Responses to Iranian Threats.....</i>	<i>334</i>
2. <i>Containment of Iran by Different U.S. Administrations .....</i>	<i>353</i>
3. <i>The Détente that Never Took Place .....</i>	<i>365</i>
4. <i>The Axis of Evil.....</i>	<i>370</i>
5. <i>An Assessment of the Future of U.S-Iranian Relations.....</i>	<i>373</i>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>377</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>386</b>

MODEL 1: CAUSAL CHAIN, 1800-2000.....	4
MODEL 2: PATTERN MODEL OF THE U.S.-IRANIAN CONFLICT .....	5
MODEL 3: COMPARATIVE MODEL OF PATRON-CLIENT CONFLICTS INVOLVING THE UNITED STATES .....	6
MODEL 4: CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF RESEARCH DESIGN .....	48
TABLE 1: IRAN, SUBSTANTIVE VERSUS EMOTIONAL ISSUES OF CONFLICT.....	19
TABLE 2: THE UNITED STATES, SUBSTANTIVE VERSUS EMOTIONAL ISSUES OF CONFLICT..	20
TABLE 3: TIMELINE OF IRAN'S RULING DYNASTIES, 550 B.C.-A.D. 2001 .....	58
TABLE 4: THE RULING DYNASTIES OF IRAN: 500-1600 .....	118
TABLE 5: IRAN'S HISTORICAL PATTERNS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE CONFLICT WITH THE UNITED STATE .....	381
MAP 1: THE ACHAEMENIAN EMPIRE IN THE 6 <sup>TH</sup> AND 5 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES B.C.....	62
MAP 2: EMPIRE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT .....	74
MAP 3: THE HELLENISTIC WORLD C. 188 B.C.....	78
MAP 4: THE PARTHIAN EMPIRE IN THE 1ST CENTURY B.C. ....	81
MAP 5: THE SASANIAN EMPIRE AT THE TIME OF SHAPUR I: 241-272. ....	96
MAP 6: MODERN IRAN. ....	119
MAP 7: THE SAFAVID EMPIRE IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES. ....	201
MAP 8: RUSSIAN AND BRITISH EXPANSION IN ASIA .....	263
MAP 9: WORLD WAR I IN THE MIDDLE EAST.....	306
PICTURE 1: THE SURRENDER OF THE EMPEROR VALERIAN TO SHAPUR I.....	97
PICTURE 2: BANNER AT THE FRIDAY PRAYER. ....	131
PICTURE 3: IMAM KHOMEINI SQUARE AND MASJED-E JAME MOSQUE. ....	192
PICTURE 4: MEMBERS OF THE BASIJ MILITIA AT THE FRIDAY PRAYER.....	197
PICTURE 5: PORTRAIT OF NADIR SHAH . ....	226
PICTURE 6: FATH ALI SHAH . ....	234
PICTURE 7: THE PERSIAN ENVOY QAZVINI BEING RECEIVED BY NAPOLEON IN 1807.....	241
PICTURE 8: REZA SHAH SELF-CROWNED, APRIL 1926.....	325

## **INTRODUCTION**

What are the macro-historical patterns that led to the long-term hostility between the United States and Iran? This dissertation seeks to explain the enduring conflict between the United States and Iran. The scope of work is to describe Iran's long historical processes and to apply these to contemporary political circumstances. It is unfortunate that the long-term hostility between Iran and the United States has come to be seen in the oversimplified and narrowly defined terms of Islamic fundamentalism, which largely ignores other important historical patterns. The conflict is repeatedly framed within an incomplete theoretical framework, and a potential solution to the conflict suffers accordingly. Academia and policymakers need to better incorporate historical and emotional factors, and to revise the common Western comprehension of rationality and what constitutes rational political action.

This dissertation investigates an expanded historical approach for understanding the ongoing tension between the two nations. External processes—such as British and Russian imperialism, the Cold War, the revival of Islamic fundamentalism, the Middle East peace process, and the world's supply and demand for petroleum—have to an extraordinary degree influenced modern Iranian history. Though external factors in the 20<sup>th</sup> century partly explain Iran's standoff with the United States, the root-cause of the conflict lies in the legacies of Iran's long and violent history, and its influence on the foreign relations of the Islamic Republic. In short, the time has come to demystify the conflict between Iran and the United States.

Because day-to-day decision-making within the Islamic Republic has been so difficult to fully comprehend, even for inside observers, this study focuses on a number of macro-historical patterns in Iran's great but troubled history. The recent past offers few clues about the future of U.S.-Iranian relations. This dissertation therefore argues that the best way to understand Iran's current standoff with the United States is to look for the historical motives that drive decision-making. Through a comprehensive survey of Iran's recorded history, this study identifies seven recurring patterns that describe the fundamental sources of the Islamic Republic's animosity toward the United States. These historical patterns also provide us with a tool that can predict the future of U.S.-Iranian relations with a higher degree of certainty.

Conflicts that exceed our expectations offer critical opportunities to expand our understanding of violent inter-state conflicts in world affairs. The enduring hostility between the United States and Iran provides such a case, which suggests strongly that our understanding of the sources of conflict can be expanded. Through close evaluation of history, international relations, and international relations theory, this dissertation attempts to weave a more expansive understanding of the human experience that informs international conflict into the realist paradigm. Its goal is to use the U.S.-Iranian case as the basis to propose a policy-relevant theory that increases our understanding of unexplained long-term hostility between nation states.

## **1. The Research Problem**

The conflict between Iran and the United States is in the scholarly literature too often explained by solely referring to the frameworks of Islamic fundamentalism or anti-imperialist/anti-western uprisings in the Third World. One ramification of this common, but sometimes preconceived ideological construct is the difficulty it causes in answering a very important historical question: How do we theoretically and factually explain the long-term hostility between the United States and Iran? Value-laden interpretations of social upheavals do not provide a factual understanding of inter-state conflicts, of which U.S.-Iranian hostility is a very prominent case.

There are several aspects of the conflict that have not been satisfactorily explained. For instance, how do we explain the long-term hostility between the United States and Iran when the tangible sources of conflict do not measure up to the ferocity and longevity of the conflict itself? Today there is a visible mismatch between the substantive issues of disagreement between the United States and Iran that still remain unresolved and the hostile rhetoric on both sides of the conflict. Purely ideological differences, of course, have the capacity to set nations apart, but in the history of international relations cases of long-term conflict devoid of material interests are extremely rare.

Why is Iran so angry at the United States? In spite of the undisputable fact that the United States unlawfully interfered in Iranian domestic affairs in 1953, the truth remains that no great foreign power in the diplomatic history of Iran has treated the country better than the United States. The United States lent moral support to Iran in its desperate

struggle against Great Britain and Russia in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the United States saved Iran from becoming a Soviet satellite after World War II. In the 1950s and 60s, the United States poured in massive economic and military aid; still, the United States came to be blamed for nearly everything that was wrong in Iran. In Iran today, there is a widely held belief across the political spectrum that the country was the victim of injustice and that the U.S. is guilty of some sort of moral wrongdoing.

The official history writing of the Islamic Republic has labeled the Iranian Revolution an anti-imperialist uprising; but, was the Iranian Revolution in actual fact an anti-imperialist revolution? After all, Persia invented the concept of an empire 2,500 years ago and Nadir Shah—the last great Asian conqueror and empire builder in the 18<sup>th</sup> century—is still a much-celebrated hero among Iranians. One can effectively argue that the goal of Khomeini's revolution, like that of the Safavids, was to restore the old Persian empire where spiritual and temporal power were united within one single supreme ruler. One can also make a case that the Islamic Republic has not relinquished Iran's historical claim to be the hegemonic power of the Middle East. In conclusion, there is ample reason to look beyond the stereotypes that prevail if one wants to find a valid explanation of the conflict.

We can observe a pattern of long-term external enemies in the history of both Iran and the United States. Since 1981, Iran and the United States have found themselves incapable of reformulating their bilateral relationship. This inability or unwillingness raises the following questions: Which issues are truly unique to this conflict? Which aspects of the conflict should be attributed to the historical behavioral patterns of both the United State and Iran that are not directly correlated with the activities of the respective

antagonists of this specific conflict? In a scholarly terminology we need to separate between systemic behavior and unit level behavior.

The Iranian Revolution and the events that followed the clergy's consolidation of power were a fertile ground for conflicts with outside powers. The Shah's and his patron-client relationship with the United States had certainly created great resentment among many Iranians, but the conflict with the United States was in no way a given outcome of Iran's social revolution. The quintessential question is why the revolutionary government in Tehran and successive American administrations were either unable or unwilling to reformulate their relationship peacefully after the "divorce" was an undeniable fact? What were the reasons why Khomeini's revolutionary regime, without much delay, chose confrontation rather than pragmatic accommodation? Revolutionary Shi'ism is only a part of the answer since Khomeini, through his long political career, repeatedly demonstrated that religious ideology always had to defer to the interest of the state. Could American decision-makers in hindsight have altered the outcome if they had better understood the underlying dynamics of social change in Iranian society?

#### **GENERAL OBSERVATIONS**

Since Ayatollah Khomeini denounced the United States as the "Great Satan" and approved the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran in November 1979, the U.S. has treated the Islamic Republic of Iran as one of the most extreme, irrational, and dangerous governments in the world. Anthony Lake, President Clinton's national security advisor, declared Iran a "backlash" state and concluded: "[Iran's] revolutionary and militant messages are openly hostile to the United States and its core interests. This basic political

reality will shape relations for the foreseeable future” (Lake 1994, 51). The Clinton Administration then called for a policy of “dual containment” of Iran and Iraq, which culminated in the *Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996*. On 27 July 2001, the U.S. Senate voted to extend sanctions against Iran and Libya for another five years. The new Bush-administration did not find sufficient incentive to oppose the sanction policy despite the administration’s close connections to “big-oil.” In the wake of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, “big-terrorism” might provide the U.S. administration with a reason to put old grievances aside and to launch a fresh initiative to unlock the frozen dialogue with Tehran. However, this window-of-opportunity may not prove strong enough to overcome factional struggles inside Iran.

The unpredictable words and deeds of the Islamic Republic of Iran clearly fit a pattern of erratic post-revolutionary state-behavior. That is not to say the post-revolutionary states are inherently aggressive or expansionist. On the contrary, revolutionary regimes saber-rattle but the historical record shows that they are primarily focused on consolidating revolutionary dogmas at home. Iran was no exception; still, the new regime in Tehran was never capable of creating a hierarchical and monolithic state like Lenin and Stalin did. In fact, post-revolutionary Iran has been torn by factionalism and horizontal stratification of power.

Today, the collision between Iran and the United States is directly linked to Iran’s involvement in international terrorism and Iran’s program for acquisition of weapons of mass destruction. The dispute is indirectly connected to parallel conflicts in the region, above all to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The United States and Iran have come to see several contested military and political issues in an entirely different light. The United States

considers Iran's effort to strengthen its military capability as destabilizing to the region. There is widespread agreement in the United States that Iran intends to acquire nuclear weapons. Iran's program for acquisition of weapons of mass destruction is of great concern not only to the United States and Israel, but also to countries in Europe. However, Iran is nearly completely surrounded by countries with nuclear, chemical, or bacteriological capabilities. The eight-year war with Iraq taught Iran an extremely costly lesson never to fight another war without access to unconventional military capabilities.

Moreover, Iran is geographically located within a conventional regional security environment that is extremely unstable. The region has seen three major wars over the last two decades: the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the never-ending war in Afghanistan, in addition to the nuclear build-up between Pakistan and India. The region has in the same period experienced numerous smaller wars and armed conflicts in places like Tajikistan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia, Chechnya, Kashmir, and Kurdistan.

Iran's persistent resistance to a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement particularly infuriates the United States. In Iran, however, an overwhelming majority of the population is deeply offended by the perception that their country is not allowed, as a sovereign state, to express its rightful opinion about a highly contested area of great emotional concern to Iranians. The conflict in southern Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah is particularly illuminating with regard to the United States and Iran's diametrical perception of the same disputed issues. The United States has branded the Hezbollah a terrorist organization, while Tehran sincerely considers the militia to be freedom fighters worthy of military and ideological support.

Paradoxically, Iran and the United States share several vital interests. America's activist role in the world since the end of the Cold War has dramatically improved Iran's strategic situation and made the country militarily much more secure. Both countries wanted to get rid of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and they have a common interest in replacing Saddam Hussein's regime in Baghdad with a new government that adheres to the core values and principles which underlie the modern international system of peaceful coexistence and political stability. Washington and Tehran are almost perfectly synchronized when it comes to fighting international drug trafficking. Both parties also share many of the same concerns with regard to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The essential interests of neither the United States nor the Islamic Republic are being served by the low-intensity nuclear, biological, and chemical arms race in the Middle East and in Southwest Asia.

Both Tehran and Washington want regional stability. While America's long-term objective is the spread of liberal democracy around the globe, Iran is experimenting with a unique form of Islamic democracy that has relatively clear criteria for succession of power. Yet, the tragedy is that pride and hurt feelings have prevented both countries from even contemplating that a common ground in fact does exist.

### **TERRORISM**

Iran has beyond any reasonable doubt sponsored international terrorism regardless of the debate over what constitutes a legitimate armed struggle. Assassination of dissidents abroad and death squad style killings of liberal intellectuals at home in the 1990s were clearly actions coordinated by central elements of the Iranian government.

Inside the Islamic Republic, “conducting ‘rogue operations,’ or otherwise acting without civilian approval, is rare to nonexistent” (Byman et al. 2001, xiv-xv). In 1997, a German court ruled that Iran was directly linked to the killing of Kurdish-Iranian dissidents in a Berlin restaurant. The court concluded that the assassinations were ordered and approved by the Committee for Special Operations whose members included, among others, President Hashemi Rafsanjani, the country’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and Iran’s foreign minister at the time. Furthermore, Iran is strongly believed to have sponsored the assassination of foreign nationals associated with publishing Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. Iran’s prolonged involvement in international terrorism has cemented its international pariah status.

However, Iran’s involvement in international terrorism has subsided after 1996, and what remains is for the most part targeted against the Mujahedin-e Khalq, which the U.S. itself has put on the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations.<sup>1</sup> The Iranian leadership desperately needed to improve the economy. During President Khatami’s tenure the Iranian leadership has therefore sought to improve its international reputation. Continued sponsorship of international terrorism would clearly compromise Iranian efforts to court the Europeans and the Gulf states. Still, the moderate hand appears incapable of reining in what the militant one wants to do.

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. State Department now lists the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO) as a terrorist organization. The organization was formed in the 1960s with a mixed Marxist and Islamic ideology. Its original goal was to counter what it perceived as excessive Western influence in the Shah’s regime. During the 1970s, the Mujahedin-e Khalq attacked and killed several U.S. military personnel and civilians working on defense projects in Tehran. The Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization supported the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran in 1979 (U.S. Department of State 2001).

The international community should never condone acts of violence against illegitimate targets. At the same time, one cannot deny Iran the right to self-defense or its lawful entitlement to pursue legitimate national interests. Therefore, if one condones Israel's assassinations of Palestinian terrorists all over the world, then one should grant Iran the same leniency in its dealing with the Mujahedin-e Khalq terrorist organization based in Iraq.

Lately, there is mounting evidence that Iran again is turning to international terrorism as a tool of its foreign policy. Iran's direct involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict has for several years been limited to its military support for Hezbollah in Lebanon. The outbreak of the second *intifada* in September of 2000 provided Iran's militant factions with enough justification to turn away from compromise and self-restraint. The Iranian government is said to have formed an alliance with the Palestinian authorities. The Iranians are now directly backing militant Palestinian groups, ostensibly only nominally under Yasser Arafat's control. Sources within the U.S. intelligence community also claim that Iran is providing sanctuary for Al Qaeda members expelled from Afghanistan (Frantz and Risen 2002). These developments clearly signify an escalation of the U.S.-Iranian conflict.

#### **PRUDENCE WITH ONE NOTABLE EXCEPTION**

Despite the extremely ideological and hostile rhetoric that has come out of Iran after the Revolution, the argument can be made that Iran's foreign policy since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini has been predominantly pragmatic and above all rooted in

*realpolitik* dictated by economic, demographic, and legitimate security concerns.<sup>2</sup> However, the Islamic Republic has not been able—like the Safavid empire—to move away from the original ideology that brought them to power and toward a political platform that could far better serve its core interests.<sup>3</sup>

Iran has repeatedly squandered diplomatic opportunities. President Rafsanjani's diplomatic thaw in the early 1990s fell short of expectations and was after some time largely ignored by Washington. As a result, U.S. foreign policy toward Iran was paradoxically more uncompromising than at any time since the Hostage Crisis one year into the second Clinton Administration. In the late 1990s, President Khatami's "dialog between civilizations" came to nothing. There is reason to believe that the United States thinks that no substantial change in attitude was likely to take place within the ruling Shi'i clergy, and that both Rafsanjani's and Khatami's gestures were essential superficial and self-serving.

The Islamic Republic has moderated its foreign policy across the board with two prominent exceptions: Iran's refusal to normalize relations with the United States, and its

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<sup>2</sup> Iran's close relationship with Russia is probably the best example of Tehran's pragmatism. Despite Iran's traumatic experience with Russian imperialism and territories lost to the Russian empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Iran has carefully avoided any serious criticism of Russia's harsh repression of fellow Muslims in Chechnya. Iranian leaders have over and over again referred to the two wars in Chechnya as an "internal Russian matter." Yet, the Russians on their side do not harbor many illusions about the sincerity of Iran's friendliness.

<sup>3</sup> Olivier Roy observes with regard to Iran's foreign policy: "The impact of the Iranian revolution is thus largely an optical illusion, revealing what already existed but hardly changing the actual situation. The real changes took place between 1960 and 1978, not between 1978 and 1980. . . . There is no middle ground between pure Shi'ite revolutionarism and a nationalist, pragmatic policy. Prisoner of its own symbolism and its revolutionary legitimacy, Iran was unable to make the strategic choices that would have restored it to its place as a great regional power" (Roy 1994, 185 and 193).

categorical rejection of the state of Israel. Iran's foreign relations have shifted toward prudence in nearly all other aspects. From being a revolutionary menace, the Islamic government now consistently supports the *status quo* in the region. Iran no longer seeks to overthrow internationally recognized governments and Tehran has significantly curtailed its support for Shi'ite insurrection groups and subversion of secular governments in the region. Iran's conventional armed forces do not pose a direct threat to any of its neighbors, and the regime has deliberately kept a low profile on its weapons of mass destruction program. Yet, when it comes to the United States, cold and clear-headed material interests still do not guide Iran's foreign policy. The overriding goal for the revolutionary leadership is to stay in power at nearly any cost and red tape remains in place on issues that are perceived to betray the revolutionary legacy.

#### **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND RADICAL ISLAM**

The current conflict between the United States and Iran has its immediate historical roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Iran declined into a semi-colonial state under British and Russian dominance. The diplomatic record shows that the United States was nearly completely uninterested in Iranian affairs up to the outbreak of World War II. After 1941, however, the United States assisted Great Britain and the Soviet Union when they occupied Iran to counter German influence and to secure supply routes to the Soviet war effort against Nazi Germany.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the United States was instrumental in compelling Stalin to leave Iran in 1946, which also signaled the start of the Cold War. Iran became ground zero in U.S. containment of the Soviet Union. In 1953 the C.I.A. and

the S.I.S.—the British intelligence service—were the catalysts behind a military *coup d'état* that removed Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq from power. Mosaddeq had nationalized British oil interests, and the Western powers began to see him as a potential ally of communist Russia. To counter Soviet influence in Iran during the 1950s and 1960s, the United States poured in massive economic and military aid under the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Iran regained for a short while in the 1970s its 2,500 years old claim to regional hegemony. Iran became the U.S. sponsored strong-man against international communism in the Middle East as a result of the British military pull-out of the region in the early 1970s and President Nixon's doctrine on increased military self-reliance of its allies. The Iranian Revolution was therefore a severe blow to U.S. strategic interest in the Cold War against the Soviets. Furthermore, speculation around the strategic intentions behind the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan made things look extremely bleak in 1979-80.

Yet, Iran was by no means the only case of an Islamic fundamentalist uprising against the political *status quo*. Khomeini's Islamic Revolution must be seen as an integral part of a global pattern of radical Islamic movements challenging the power of secularized and Western educated ruling establishments. The Six Day War of June 1967—reconfirmed by the 1990-91 Gulf War—spelled the end of the grand idea of secular pan-Arab nationalism (Ajami 1997, 135). Since then, a ferocious struggle has taken place all over the Muslim World between westernized ruling elites and radical Islamic opposition groups. As a result, radical Islamic regimes came to power in Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Sudan. In Algeria and Egypt, however, the old secular order been able to cling to power.

Algeria's military nomenklatura, formed during the French liberation war, has been fighting an extremely nasty civil war against a number of Islamic groups. The Algerian establishment was caught by surprise by the success of the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut* or *FIS*) in the first round of the December 1991 elections. The governing elite lost the first round of the elections and would in all likelihood have lost the second round as well. The army therefore intervened in January 1992, postponed the second round of legislative elections indefinitely, and banned the Islamic Salvation Front.

The Egyptian government, on the other hand, has more successfully balanced the requirements of maintaining the autocracy in power, buying off or co-opting radical Islam into mainstream political life, and at the same time pretending to deliver on the economic demands of an impoverished population. The ruling regime is trying to survive in the tight spot of public dissatisfaction and avoiding displeasing its American beneficiary. The Egyptian government, however, is playing with fire in its flirtation with the forces of radicalized Islam. Egypt is walking on a tightrope between long-term economic development and the slippery slope of accommodating the popular appeal of radical Islam. Following President Sadat's assassination, and learning from the Shah's demise in Iran, the regime has sought to appease Islamic militancy by reintroducing elements of the Holy Law of Islam, the *Sharia*.

However, one can argue that religious laws are incompatible with the pillars sustaining Western-style democracies. Within Islam, conservative and radical Muslims alike do not accept the notion that the will of the people (as measured in free and democratic elections) can override the *Sharia*. Furthermore, laws that are free of religious

doctrines govern the global market economy and subsequently the modern economic order. In this sense, radical Islam is incompatible with economic empowerment of the Muslim world vis-à-vis the rest of the world. The global wave of radical Islam is still very much alive, but there are several signs that the movement is losing some of its momentum because radical Islam has not been able to provide a viable alternative to the existing political order.

## **2. Propositions and Findings**

This study began with the proposition that seven macro-historical patterns in Iran's exceptionally long recorded history explain its long-term hostility toward the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that these patterns operate in the present day within the realm of enduring human emotions. The identified patterns are:

- 1) The legitimacy of the absolute ruler;
- 2) The territorial legacy of the Persian empire;
- 3) The never-ending conflicts with a string of world powers;
- 4) The legacy of foreign domination of Iran;
- 5) The ancient and exceptionally strong relationship between state and religion;
- 6) Iran's lack of social cohesion, rampant factionalism, and the constant threat of political disintegration;
- 7) The extraordinary resilience of Iranian culture and national identity.

These patterns, of course, operate through an emotional mechanism passed down through generations, as well as through the more obvious political causality that is

identified. The combination of historical processes is unique to Iran and a few other former imperial powers in world history. The argument advanced in this study is that the seven macro-historical patterns, and their internal contradictions, account for the erratic state behavior of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and consequently that they also explain Iran's long-term hostility toward the United States.<sup>4</sup>

This dissertation arrives at the overall conclusion that the root source of the U.S.-Iranian conflict is the clash between the legacy of Iran's great imperial past and the global power assumed by the United States after World War II. Iranians across the political spectrum want to see Iran restored as the major regional power. Regaining great power status is intrinsic to the imperial character of Iran's Perso-Islamic national identity. For Iran the United States served a useful role in throwing off the yoke of Anglo-Russian imperialism, but for those who dreamed of a magnificent revival of Iran's former pride and prestige in the Muslim world and on the international arena, the United States soon became an obstacle rather than an instrument for reaching the ultimate goal. Today, Iran's great power ambitions are conspicuously out of touch with both military and economic realities, which makes normalization of the troubled relationship with the

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Tayler makes a similar argument that Russia's current destructive behavior has everything to do with the legacies of its thousand-year long history. He argues that the internal contradictions of these legacies "have destined it to shrink demographically, weaken economically, and, possibly, disintegrate territorially." At the very center of Russia's dysfunctionality is the widely accepted concept of the omnipotent and absolute state—endorsed by everybody from the communists to the nationalists and the Orthodox Church—intermixed with a widespread pessimistic perception and fatalistic belief in the future of the country among ordinary people. Regaining superpower status is paramount to the messianic character of Russia's national identity. Russia's superpower ambitions are of course out of touch with both military and economic realities. History suggests, in Tayler's analysis, that Putin's effort to strengthen state power will "guarantee corruption, abuse of power, violence, curtailment of liberties, and instability" and "there appears to be no end in sight to the country's decay" (Tayler 2001).

United States even more difficult. The very survival of the theocratic regime rests on maintaining the image of the United States as a powerful external enemy that stands in the way of Iran's historical aspirations.

#### **THE LINKAGE BETWEEN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES AND IRAN'S HISTORICAL LEGACY**

The United States has, since it entered the Persian Gulf after World War II, defined its core interest relative to the immense petroleum resources of the Middle East, and accordingly, there has been a considerable degree of continuity in U.S. foreign policy toward the Persian Gulf region. In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, the United States has pursued six main foreign policy objectives vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic. The United States has repeatedly made it clear that it will under no circumstances compromise on Iran's involvement in international terrorism and its efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. government assumes that comprehensive economic sanctions will over time moderate Iran's unacceptable behavior. Furthermore, the United States believes the best way to meet its objectives is to deny Iran the financial revenues from its petroleum resources. However, U.S. containment of Iran seems to have had little effect on the Iranian theocracy's overall behavior.

In fact, the implementation of U.S. foreign policy objectives falls well short of expectations. The American policy has by no means been a failure, but there is considerable room for improvement. This dissertation argues that the effectiveness of U.S. policies toward Iran could improve if some fundamental assumptions were held up against empirical historical evidence.

The United States has successfully achieved its objective of assuring the world access to oil from the Persian Gulf at reasonable prices. The United States has proven beyond a doubt that it can militarily defend the oil fields of the Middle East against external aggression; yet, the United States has been unable to deprive Iran of its oil revenues. The structural problems that give rise to the region's political instability persist. In the long run, safeguarding the flow of oil from the Middle East also means questioning the political legitimacy of some of America's closest allies in the region.

U.S. foreign policy did not deter Iran from trying to impose revolutionary Islam on countries friendly to the United States. It now seems clear that the real motive behind Iran's efforts to export the Islamic Revolution was to validate Shi'i absolutism at home. By gaining recognition internationally, the regime believed it could cement the legitimacy of absolute religious rule at home. However, the Islamic Revolution soon lost much of its appeal both at home and abroad. Iranian efforts to subvert American allies therefore failed mainly because of homegrown economic problems. Since the mid-1990s, the ruling clergy has largely abandoned its revolutionary goal of creating pro-Iranian Islamic states across the Middle East.

Iran has also discontinued—at least for now—its political objective of seeking regional hegemony in the Persian Gulf. Tehran has subsequently stopped threatening the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Though America's military might has been instrumental in convincing Iran to change its belligerent behavior, other important concerns have also helped tip the scale in favor of moderation. The power of Iran's ruling elite is directly threatened by the hard realities of a failed economy, and under these circumstances the regime simply cannot afford to alienate potential trade partners.

Moreover, Iran's political leadership has understood that instigating social unrest in the Middle East or Central Asia can easily spill over to Iran itself. However, Iran's historical patterns provide evidence that Iran will not indefinitely accept the massive U.S. regional military presence. It is therefore likely that Iran will continue to pursue political and military objectives that one day can enable the country to expel the United States from the Persian Gulf region.

U.S. containment of Iran has had no discernable effect on Iran's intense opposition to the Middle East Peace Process. The United States openly acknowledges that Iran has been extraordinarily successful in derailing any accommodation between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Iran's violent obstruction of U.S. efforts to sponsor a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East is the single most important obstacle blocking normalization of U.S.-Iranian relations. There are, however, several deep historical and emotional reasons why Tehran basically wants to dismantle the entire state of Israel.

First, the religious legitimacy of the theocracy is heavily invested in denying Israel the right to exist. The regime's adherence to its own political ideology is for the most part measured by its rejection of both the United States and Israel. Second, there is a clear linkage between Iran's traumatic experience with Anglo-Russian colonialism and what Iran perceives as American imperialism. The Islamic Revolution portrayed Israel as the extension of Western colonialism. Lastly, Iran has for the last five centuries sought the leadership of Muslims worldwide in spite of the limited appeal of Twelver Shi'ism. Iran believes it can enhance its standing and credibility in the Muslim world by showing that it is the only Muslim country that truly supports the Palestinian political cause by demonstrating that it can stand up to the United States.

Iran's involvement in international terrorism continues unabated according to the U.S. State Department. Iran's top leadership has in the past been directly linked to terrorist operations in Europe, Lebanon, and in the Persian Gulf region. Since 1996, however, Iran has largely forsaken its involvement in international terrorism for the benefit of economic prosperity at home. Yet, when it comes to the Middle East conflict, the Iranian government continues its support for groups listed as terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department for both opportunistic and ideological reasons. Iran fervently insists that it has the legitimate right to oppose Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Iran does not consider groups such as Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), or Lebanese Hezbollah as terrorist organizations despite the indisputable fact that these organizations target civilian non-combatants.

The United States wants to deny Iran access to sophisticated defense technologies and weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, the United States openly acknowledges that Iran's weapons of mass destruction program and missiles to deliver them must be assessed in a regional security context where Iran needs to feel secure. Because political stability in the Persian Gulf region has not improved, Iran's acquisition of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and long-range missile capability to deliver them continues despite U.S. unilateral sanctions.

At the same time, Iran also seeks weapons of mass destruction for reasons that are unrelated to regional military threats. Nuclear capabilities will increase its political standing among countries in the Muslim world enormously. The Iranian leadership is emotionally obsessed with being perceived as an equal player in its ongoing standoff with

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the United States despite the fact that Iran's great power ambitions are plainly out of touch with both military and economic realities. Weapons of mass destruction promise a cheap and quick equalizer that narrows the military gap between Iran and its foremost Western enemies: the United States and Israel. Recent history also informs the leadership in Tehran that if you want to stand up to the world's sole superpower, you better have weapons of mass destruction. In the end, promoting an image of the United States as the hegemonic external enemy that stands in the way of Iran's historical aspirations benefits the theocratic regime hold on power.

#### **THE CAUSAL CHAIN**

This study identifies a relatively clear causal chain that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which led to the conflict between Iran and the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Model 1: Causal chain, 1800-2000, page 4). The causal chain can be traced back to Qajar-Iran's expansionist foreign policy in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In that period, Qajar-Iran suffered five military defeats in its quest for regional hegemony. Consequently, Iran was coerced into granting extensive diplomatic capitulations before the hostilities were terminated. These diplomatic capitulations, coupled with fear of Russia's rapid colonial expansion in Central Asia and the voraciousness of Qajar-rule, generated senseless commercial concessions to foreign economic interests. The commercial concessions, in concert with the Anglo-Russian colonial Great Game in South-west Asia, stifled economic development in Iran.

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, popular dissatisfaction with corrupt and wasteful governance, inspired by a global pattern of social revolts against arbitrary

despotism, gathered enough momentum to seriously challenge the power of the absolute monarchy. However, Great Britain and Russia effectively shut down the Iranian Constitutional Revolution as they made preparations for the World War I. During World War I, Iran became the extended battleground of the great European powers, which caused severe social dislocations and political disintegration. The weakening of central authority and inept politicians paved the way for the Pahlavi dictatorship and Iran's love affair with Nazi Germany. As a result, British and Soviet forces occupied Iran during World War II. During the aftermath of that conflagration, the Cold War was set in motion when U.S. diplomatic pressure compelled Stalin to pull Soviet troops out from Iranian-Azerbaijan in 1946. A few years later, the U.S. government became increasingly concerned with Prime Minister Mosaddeq and his unpredictable nationalist policies, and the perception that he was moving too close to Iran's Tudeh communist party. The Eisenhower administration therefore decided to interfere directly in Iran's internal affairs in 1953 by co-instigating a *coup d'état* with the British government and its commercial interests who most Iranians had deeply resented since the Tobacco Revolt of 1890-1892 .

During the 1950s and 1960s, America's economic and military patronage of Iran enabled Muhammad Reza Shah to resist pressure for social, economic, and political change from across the political spectrum. Because the Shah's policies increasingly lacked societal constraint and religious legitimacy, the motley opposition groups were gradually radicalized. Then, in the late 1970s, all the major political factions of the opposition rallied around Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership, which precipitated the Iranian Revolution and the bitter hostility toward the United States that followed in its

footsteps. In short, the U.S.-Iranian conflict is the product of an iterative process between internal and external processes.

#### **IRAN'S IMPERIAL LEGACY**

The causal chain, of course, did not begin with Qajar-Iran's irredentism. We need to see Iran's conflict with the United States in the context of an extremely long sequence of great powers competing with Iran for political, cultural and spiritual hegemony in the Middle East. It has been Iran's foreign policy objective for 2,500 years to hold regional hegemony in South-west Asia. Iran's history contains a distinct imperial pattern of state behavior, and Iran's *raison d'état* has in many ways not changed much since ancient times.

The Achaemenian dynasty, founders of the first great Persian empire, was the sole superpower and the ultimate powerbroker of the ancient world. After the Seleucid dynasty, an offspring of Alexander the Great, was driven from power, Rome replaced Athens as the permanent enemy of the Persian empire. For nearly three centuries, Iran's Parthian empire stood its ground extremely well in battles against a militarily far superior enemy. Its successor, the Sasanian empire, was completely consumed by wars against the Roman empire and its heir, the Byzantine empire. A nearly perpetual state-of-hostility persisted for more than 400 years, only interrupted by two extended periods of peace, before the last of Iran's three classic empires was annihilated by a new great power, the Muslim Arab caliphate.

When the Persian empire reemerged 800 years later in 1501, Safavid-Iran fought the Ottoman empire for the better part of the next 250 years. The Safavid dynasty (1501-

1722) reawakened the ancient Persian empire's quest for regional supremacy after centuries of political turmoil and territorial fragmentation. But Iran was again plunged into civil wars and utter decay after Nadir Shah, the last great Asian conqueror and Iranian folk hero, was murdered in 1747. From the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Qajar monarchy actively sought to reincorporate territories once part of the Persian empire by waging futile irredentist wars against Iran's neighbors in the Caucasus, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Afghanistan. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, Iran was defeated or occupied on several occasions in conflicts with Russia and Great Britain.

Reza Shah was in the inter-war period single-mindedly focused on restoring the glory of ancient Persia and the country's power and standing on the world scene by reforming Iran into a modern quasi-Western nation-state. Reza Shah's rule is tremendously significant for later political developments since his son, Muhammad Reza Shah, spent his lifetime imitating his towering father. The United States enters the scene during World War II as a friendly nation, but after Washington actively interfered in the domestic political struggle in 1953, the United States quickly became just another foreign great power meddling in Iran's exclusive sphere of interest. In conclusion, the longevity of U.S.-Iranian hostility fits a persistent historical pattern.

The overarching goal of the Islamic Republic is to restore Iran to the standing of a great power, but Iran's power ambitions are unfortunately out of touch with both military and economic realities. Regaining great power status is paramount to the messianic character of Iran's national identity. Ayatollah Khomeini always denounced the legacy of the Persian kings, but in the war against Iraq he could not prevent himself from acting like a genuine shah. The Iran-Iraq war was ostensibly a border dispute, but the conflict

was really for regional supremacy between two absolute rulers, indistinguishable from the innumerable wars Persian dynasties have fought over Mesopotamia. Like Shah Ismail, Khomeini used the war against the ungodly Saddam Hussein to consolidate his internal hold on power. But after 1982, Khomeini's objectives swelled to establishing a Perso-Islamic empire in the Middle East. The Islamic Republic, however, lost the war against Iraq and Shi'i absolutism was bereaved of its political legitimacy among the vast majority of Iranians who had so passionately brought the Shi'ite clergy to power. Today it seems virtually impossible for the ruling theocracy to replicate the revolutionary frenzy of the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

#### **FOREIGN DOMINATION AND EURO-AMERICAN IMPERIALISM**

There is a direct causal linkage between Iran's traumatic experience with Anglo-Russian imperialism and Iran's current conflict with the United States. Iran's national revival hit a high point during Mosaddeq's premiership, which the infamous military coup of 1953 abruptly terminated. The direct leverage the U.S. and British governments had on the Iranian military and its execution of the *coup d'état* was relatively small, but the long-term impact of U.S. interference in Iran's internal affairs was massive. Iran's domestic opposition—religious activists, Marxists, and secular nationalist—came to see the United States' presence in Iran after World War II as the direct extension of Anglo-Russian colonialism. In 1964 Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed that the Shi'ite clergy would not permit Iran to be the slave of Great Britain one day and America the next. In an Iranian nationalistic perspective, the Iranian Revolution therefore inaugurated the first

period in nearly two hundred years where Iran was allowed to stake out its own destiny free from foreign conspiracies.

From an Iranian viewpoint, nearly two centuries of Euro-American dominance falls into a historical pattern of three previous periods of foreign domination from which Iran's national identity has emerged remarkably unaffected. From this viewpoint, the Iranian Revolution marked the end of the fourth prolonged period of external domination. By comparing the Hellenistic, Arab, and Turko-Mongolian periods of occupation with the Euro-American epoch, a certain pattern surfaces. Iran has repeatedly embraced the customs of foreign conquerors and powerful adversaries for a while, and then in due course rejected nearly every aspect of their culture. The resilience of Iran's culture and national identity is one remarkable and consistent pattern in Iran's history in the face of extended periods of foreign rule. There is ample reason to believe that Iran's record of outliving every past foreign intruder informs the ruling clergy in Tehran, both consciously and unconsciously, in its ongoing standoff with the United States.

#### **TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL POWER**

Dynastic absolutism, Islamic totalitarianism, and Iranians' historical sense of being destined to rule an empire are closely intertwined. The absolute temporal power of the supreme religious ruler is the single most important domestic variable that explains much of Iran's state behavior and its conflict with the United States. Iran's national unity has since ancient times been held together by the legitimacy of the absolute ruler. The ancient Persian concept of an absolute dynastic ruler has been a key pillar of Iranian political culture for more than 2,500 years. The Achaemenian empire united spiritual and

temporal power in one single governing body. The legitimacy of the absolute monarch was in practical terms the only thing that could overcome Iran's lack of social cohesion. The advent of Islam neither significantly altered the preexisting social order nor did the new religion strengthen social cohesion. To the contrary, no single Iranian dynasty was able to re-unite the great Persian empire until the coming of the Safavid empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The personal prestige and standing of the Iranian monarch has always been measured against the greatness of Iran's ancient past. Every Iranian dynasty has dreamt of reincorporating the frontiers of the mythical Persian empire, or even territories beyond those of Cyrus the Great, as was the case with Nadir Shah. The Islamic republic formally abolished the monarchy and radical Islam has on ideological grounds denounced Iran's pre-Islamic history, but one can successfully argue that the clergy in practical politics has never removed itself from Iran's dynastic tradition.<sup>5</sup> The ayatollahs of the Islamic Revolution now fully embrace the notion that Iran's awareness of national dignity is intrinsically linked to the legacy of the pre-Islamic Persian empires.<sup>6</sup> Keeping alive an image of the United States as the hegemonic world power bent on preventing Iran from returning to its historical position as a the major regional power, ensures the continued survival of the religious autocracy.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Friedman of the New York Times argued that Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was increasingly behaving in the fashion of a Persian shah (Friedman 2000). His article did not go down well with the ruling clergy. The Iranian reaction to the Friedman's piece of writing was to deny New York Times journalists entry visas for a while.

<sup>6</sup> The Bolsheviks renounced every symbol associated with Tsarist Russia while reintegrating much of its imperial structures. The Chinese revolutionaries followed a similar pattern.

In Islam, religious principles are often portrayed as having been carved in stone and as taking absolute precedence over all worldly concerns; however, history shows that religious doctrines have frequently been altered to fit changing political circumstances. Iran's history provides ample cases of pragmatic accommodation of power and interests overriding religious dogmas. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Umayyad caliphs explicitly acknowledged that state affairs had to come before theological coherence. The same thing can be said about Ayatollah Khomeini who was a cunning politician with a keen appreciation for the necessities of practical politics. In 1988 Khomeini went so far as to declare the preference of the state over the *Sharia*, which was later codified in a constitutional amendment. He clearly understood ideological compromises that had to be made on the road to success.

Khomeini's spiritual orientation was always tempered by his desire for temporal power. He constantly assessed political events in light of their usefulness for consolidating power. He behaved more often than not as a genuine *real*-politician. The Hostage Crisis is a prime example. When hundreds of students climbed the walls of the U.S. embassy compound, Khomeini's first reaction was to "get them the hell out of there," but he quickly changed his mind when he saw how popular the hostage takers were with the general public. Khomeini then opportunistically announced that the seizure of the embassy was "the second revolution, greater than the first." Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is no different. The necessities of maintaining himself in power go a long way in explaining Tehran's intransigent behavior toward the United States.

## THE CONFLICT AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

International relations theories such as Marxist theories on imperialism, economic causes of conflict, or the North-South paradigm do not explain the conflict between Iran and the United States. Tehran continues to portray Iran as the innocent victim of European colonialism and American imperialism, but studying Iran's long history informs us that the Iranian Revolution was not an anti-imperialist revolution as many scholars have led us to believe. The Iranian Revolution, and the Islamic Republic itself, is anti-imperialist only in the sense that Iran shares the same historical experience as many other countries in the Third World. The Iranian Revolution involved important Marxist elements, but the upheaval defies the narrow conceptual framework of a socialist revolution. Furthermore, the Iranian Revolution was not a unique social upheaval but part of a much larger global trend during the 1970s and 1980s that swept aside totalitarian regimes of all colors in East Asia, Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe.

The conflict between Iran and the United States is partly the fall-out of Iran's domestic political process toward a stable social contract. Demand for social and political change started with the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911). Iran's progression toward representative governance was sidetracked by Reza Shah's dictatorship, but regained momentum in the 1940s. The reign of Muhammad Reza Shah and his cliency relationship with the United States again put democratic development in a state of arrested development. The U.S. patronage of Muhammad Reza Shah therefore obstructed an unfinished evolutionary process.

The conflict also reflects a popular nationalistic desire to restore Iran's standing to a strong, proud and independent regional great power. A theoretical framework that holds Iran as an intrinsic hegemonic power implies that its conflict with the U.S. was inescapable because the United States assumed regional supremacy in the Persian Gulf. This framework also helps explain why Iran's recent historical experience as a semi-colony does not discourage the government in Tehran from meddling all over the world in other countries' internal affairs. In short, a theory that assumes that Iran intrinsically seeks great power status helps us better explain the behavior of the Islamic Republic.

On a comparative level of analysis, the conflict with the United States fits the pattern of a number of other long-term enemies in American diplomatic history with a colonial or semi-colonial past. Iran falls into a particular category of Third World countries that have vivid historical memories of a great imperial past. The collective trauma of severe infringement imposed on sovereignty or having to totally subjugate to the will of foreign powers have noticeably defined the politics of these countries in the post-colonial era.<sup>7</sup>

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most Third World countries were "neo-colonies" in the sense that they had formal political independence, but for a complex variety of reasons they found themselves in continued economic and military dependency either on their former colonial masters or a new and powerful patron. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States each built up a network of client states. This particular mixture of memories of western imperialism, post-colonial

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<sup>7</sup> Other examples would be China and Mexico. Turkey, however, seems to have come to terms with the loss of its imperial past.

defenselessness, economic dependency, and superpower rivalry was ripe for local corruption and repression. When violent protests against the local authoritarian regime erupted, it was a revolt not only against the native autocracy, kleptocracy or mafocracy, but also against the global power hierarchy and the international economic order, epitomized by an all-mighty foreign patron, the United States of America.

#### **THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS AND IMAGES**

The conflict between Iran and the United States cannot be understood solely by examining factual history. The analysis needs to consider the way the parties to the conflict have emotionally chosen to remember events in the past. An accurate historical examination of the sources of conflict between Iran and the United States has to distinguish between the factual historical events and the often not-so-factual historical grievances. I contend that the prolonged conflict between the two states is significantly out of balance with the relatively few substantive sources of conflict between them. I suggest that we must examine the realm of psychological variables at play in both states that have added undue weight to historical events, and only then combine these findings with the realist paradigm of international relations.

In other words, on its own the theoretical assumption of rational pursuit of interests and power by both parties to the conflict does not explain the enduring hostility between Iran and the United States. Works on U.S.-Iranian relations have so far failed to systematically explain the relationship between the emotions, passions, and perceptions among people on both sides of the conflict—pride, dignity, respect, arrogance, insult, humiliation, and fear—and the actual historical events that took place. With particular

emphasis on the Islamic Republic of Iran, we need to revisit psycho-anthropological approaches to national behavior.

Iran's historical grievances, victim mentality, and sense of inferiority have shaped the entire conflict. External enemies have relentlessly been used as scapegoats and excuses for the accomplishments that never took place. According to the dogmas of radical Islam, the success of the West has been achieved by looting the Muslim world.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, many Western scholars have bought into the idea that Iran was the innocent victim of Western exploitation. Historical facts, however, show that Iran's ruling elite—shahs, ayatollahs, and secular politicians—more often than not were culpable for the country's problems. Iran's troubles are mainly homegrown and they are definitely not caused by concerted foreign conspiracies. There is no evidence to support the common belief that the United States, the Soviet Union/Russia, and/or Great Britain ever worked out long-term strategies for conspiring against Iran. They only improvised tactical plans to manipulate the political situation.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Iran suffered greatly as the pawn in the vicious game of great power rivalry. Yet, countries elsewhere in the world have recovered successfully from far worse fortunes. Iran's self-proclaimed status as the

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<sup>8</sup> In a 1997 interview with CNN's Peter Arnett, Osama bin Laden said: "As for oil, it is a commodity that will be subject to the price of the market according to supply and demand. We believe that the current prices are not realistic due to the Saudi regime playing the role of a U.S. agent and the pressures exercised by the U.S. on the Saudi regime to increase production and flooding the market that caused a sharp decrease in oil prices" (CNN.com./Lawcenter 1997). The "realistic" price should be \$144/barrel (it is not know how one arrives at this specific number). From this line of reasoning, it follows that the United States is guilty of "the biggest theft in history." The U.S. looting of the Muslim world now accumulates to \$36 trillion, which means that the United States owe every single Muslim approximately \$30,000 in lost oil revenues according to Mr. bin Laden.

continued victim of European and American imperialism is thus mainly a psychological cover-up for the embarrassment of the country's failed achievements.

The emotional sources of Iran's resentment are therefore at the center of the conflict. The Islamic Republic is frustrated with the noticeable contradiction between the proclaimed superiority of the Perso-Islamic culture and the irrefutable reality of Iran's inferior power and standing in the international system. The central theme of the global movement of radical political Islam in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is essentially how Muslim societies can revive the magic spirit of early Islam and regain worldly respect and political standing. A common denominator among every radical Islamic movement since the 1970s has been the belief that a return to the "uncorrupted" fundamentals of early Islam is the "silver bullet" that will empower the Muslim World relative to the might of the West. Religious fundamentals have unfortunately neither restored Iran to great power status nor have they produced satisfactory answers to Iran's immense social problems.

The conflict between Iran and the United States must be seen in the psychological light of a proud ancient empire; impotent, humiliated, and overpowered by new hegemony on the international arena—Russia, Great Britain, and later the United States. For example, the Treaty of Turkmanchai of 1828 has gone down in Iran's national history as the most unjust and humiliating treaty ever signed with a foreign power despite the historical fact Iran itself caused the defeat by being the aggressor. Nevertheless, Ayatollah Khomeini cleverly exploited the psychological effects of the foreign capitulations that flowed from the Treaty of Turkmanchai when he equated the American military presence in the 1960s with Iran's humiliation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, Ali Khamenei is obsessed with the idea of not talking to the United States from a position of perceived inferiority, but it has unfortunately escaped the Supreme Leader that today's interdependent and globalized world is dramatically different from the heydays of European colonialism. It also seems to have escaped the circle around Khamenei that the United States lost most of its incentive to meddle in Iranian affairs after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The old mental map is clearly obsolete, but it serves the purpose of hiding inferiority behind blame.

The United States has consistently misjudged the American historical experience vis-à-vis the Muslim world. During the Cold War, America's positive self-image and immense self-confidence hampered collection of good intelligence and ignored an objective assessment of the emotional impact of U.S. policies on Iranian public sentiments. Successive American administrations saw no resemblance between the activist role adopted by the United States in the 1950s and 1960s and that of the British empire in the century prior to the last world war. Because the United States has always rejected imperialism, American policy-makers did not see that their benign efforts to modernize Iran could be perceived as overbearing and arrogant.

But many Iranians deeply resented the American government's paternalistic interference in Iran's domestic affairs. They felt the Americans had the same condescending attitude as the British by looking down on Iran and Iranian culture as weak and backward. This all came to a fore during the Hostage Crisis when ordinary Americans simply could not comprehend the anger and hatred directed at the United States for no tangible reason. Americans asked themselves what they had done to cause such hatred: How could the Iranians do this to us after all we have done for them?

Americans have unfortunately been forced to ask themselves the exact same questions again in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. Again the true answer lies in America's misreading of the Muslim World.

### **3. Why is the Conflict between Iran and the United States so Important?**

The ideology of the dominant forces within the ruling clergy in Iran stands in the way for a peaceful development of human interaction in the Middle East region and beyond. One of the reasons is that the true nature of the current regime in Tehran remains elusive and poorly understood by outside observers. Iran will continue to challenge core American and European objectives in the future for several important reasons. First, the conservative and authoritarian faction within the Iranian theocracy promotes a system of governance that fundamentally contradicts the core values upon which the modern international system of peaceful coexistence was founded. This is particularly true in the realm of basic human rights, such as the systematic use of torture and executions, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion.

Second, it is clearly in the interest of the United States, Europe, and above all the countries in the region to reach a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Iran has made no secret of its strong opposition to the U.S.-sponsored Middle East Peace Process. Since the Iranian Revolution in 1978-79, Iran has actively sought to obstruct any accommodation by the Muslim World of the State of Israel, which it perceives as a continuation of the painful legacy of Western imperialism.

Third, Iran is perhaps second only to Russia in the threat it poses to the to the long-term objectives of the NATO alliance.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore not surprising that there have been a warming of ties between these two historical enemies in the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> If NATO wants to continue to be successful in its second fifty years, it must seek to influence and accommodate Tehran. Iran is the only remaining nation with a common border with a NATO member that has explicitly and repeatedly declared its hostile intentions against at least one of the members of the alliance. During the Cold War, Norway and Turkey were the only two members of the alliance with a shared physical border with the Soviet Union. While the commitment to defend the northern NATO flank in North Norway was a symbolic goal rather than a militarily realistic objective against the largest military complex in the world at that time on the Kola Peninsula; it sent a powerful message that the alliance was 100% committed to defending its territory. The most realistic territorial threat against NATO in the future will come from Turkey's eastern neighbors. With the possible integration of Turkey into the European Union, the Kurdish problem in the east will most likely become a more serious source of instability than in the past since the traditional harsh methods of suppression will not be available to the central Turkish government.

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<sup>9</sup> A dramatic rapprochement is now taking place between NATO and Russia. The United States is conditioning the integration of Russia into by pressuring Moscow to cut its export of weapon technology to Iran.

<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the flamboyant leader of the ultra-nationalistic political faction in the Russian Duma, visited Iran in February of 2001. Mr. Zhirinovsky was so impressed by what he saw that he declared the Iranian Revolution a far greater historical event than Russia's own October-revolution in 1917. More importantly, Mr. Zhirinovsky was quoted as having said that if bilateral relations between Russia and Iran had been better then the structure of the international political system would have been quiet different (Norsk Telegrambyrå - Agence France-Presse 2001).

Fourth, the ongoing dispute over access to scarce water resources—now predominantly controlled by Turkey—will become increasingly contentious as the regional consumption of water is dramatically increased due to extreme high rates of population growth, rapid urbanization, and improved standards of living. Recent research suggests that water scarcity issues by the year 2010 could have an explosive destabilizing effect on the region. Iran has indirectly tremendous leverage over any lasting political settlement over access to scarce water resources because the Islamic Republic has proven that it in the long run has the capacity to disrupt any political accommodation in the region that is contrary to Iran's vital interests. It is clearly in the interest of world peace to reach a comprehensive and lasting accommodation over trans-border water issues in the Middle East involving both the governments in Ankara and in Tehran.

Fifth, Iran is one of the key players in an emerging regional and international nuclear arms race, not so much for its capabilities as for its perceived hostile intentions. Publicly, the United States quotes missile attack from so-called "rogue states," such as Iran, Iraq and North Korea, as the justification for developing and deploying a missile defense system. However, many analysts believe that the system is intended to counter the missile threat from China since Iran, Iraq and North Korea's overall offensive capabilities are disproportionate to the planned U.S. defensive capacity. Moreover, many analysts believe that such a system will have the unintended effect of provoking a large-scale missile build-up. The real question is not whether Iran has the intention or technical will to acquire nuclear weapons or not; it is which strategic variables factor into the Iranian regime's threat-response and cost-benefit analyses. It has surely not escaped the decision-makers in Tehran that deployment of nuclear missiles will almost certainly

intensify the regional arms race, which will of course greatly decrease international stability. If the world intends to prevent a serious build-up of weapons of mass destruction capabilities in this region, it must influence Iran's ever more rational decision-makers by acknowledging Iran's legitimate security concerns.

Sixth, the conflict with Iran will in the future test the internal unity of the trans-Atlantic alliance. The United States perceives the conflicts in the Middle East in the context of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and the flow of oil to the world market. The European Union is increasingly concerned with the influx of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa to Western Europe. Illegal immigration is challenging the core values of all liberal democracies in Europe. Over the last two decades, the far right in nearly every European country has seen a remarkable increase in support by exploiting dark xenophobic undercurrents in the population at large. Newly arrived immigrants in Western Europe have not assimilated over time in the same way as massive immigration has in the United States. European politicians increasingly see illegal immigration as a serious challenge to the social fabric of Europe, and there is growing consensus that future immigration must be seriously curtailed. Iran is a vital player in Europe's immigration woes. Iran has for many years given shelter to the largest refugee population in the world, and has the power to control several regional conflicts that can create massive refugee problems, which would eventually spill over to Europe. For example, if and when Saddam Hussein moves against the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq, this will create a serious problem not only for Iran and Turkey, but also for Western Europe. Rather than deal solely at home with the difficult issues surrounding immigration, Europe and the NATO alliance will be forced to deal with political and

economic conditions which give rise to immigration at the source. Iran's partnership in this process will be critical to its success.

Seventh, Iran has for a long time been the most effective barrier against drug trafficking from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran's share of global seizure of heroin and morphine trafficking rose from 9% in 1987/88 to 42% in 1997/98. "In 1999, seizures of heroin more than doubled, and overall heroin/morphine seizures in Iran grew by a quarter over the 1997/98 average, reflecting the massive increase of opium production in neighboring Afghanistan, the increasing use of Iranian territory by drug trafficking organizations, and the priority given by the Iranian authorities to drug interdiction" (United Nations 2001). Governments in most countries in the West now list the threat from international organized crime as a threat to national security. A change in policy within Iran would effectively undermine the effort to stop the flow of narcotics to the markets in Western Europe and the United States.

Finally, Iran sits on 8.6% of the world's proved oil reserves and the country accounts for 5.2% of the global production. Iran has 15.3% of the world's natural gas reserves, but Iran's produces only 2.5% of world total (British Petroleum).

#### **4. The Literature on U.S.-Iranian Relations**

This dissertation speaks primarily to the debate and literature that take a historical-psychological approach to the conflict between Iran and the United States. Over the years, a number of excellent works have been written on different aspects of the conflict that avoid the trap of structuring the theoretical explanation in a single-disciplinary framework. Efforts to simplify the conflict down to only a small number of

explanatory variables have so far yielded inadequate results. Moreover, one can hardly speak of two opposing sides in the scholarly debate. The research problem is still theoretically under-developed, and consequently competing explanations are scattered all over the academic landscape. The literature is so vast and diverse that space does not allow a detailed account of the origins, evolution, and controversies in the literature; however, I have selected a sample of scholarly works that I believe represents the “state of the art” on the subject.

Two reports from the Atlantic Council of the United States—*Thinking Beyond the Stalemate in U.S.-Iranian Relations, Volume I - Policy Review* and *Volume II - Issues and Analysis* (Atlantic Council of the United States 2001)—are some of the best current assessments of the conflict between the United States and Iran. The reports are well researched and contain an excellent analysis of the political stalemate between the two adversaries. The policy papers name the major issues of contention and how they need to be addressed by the United States if bilateral relations are to improve. The reports correctly conclude that the power struggles within Iran can trump any conciliatory initiative from the United States, and that the best the U.S. administration can do is to defuse issues that are counterproductive to U.S. long-term interests, particularly the economic sanctions imposed by successive U.S. administrations. In the end, the working group acknowledges that no substantial improvement can take place between Washington and Tehran if Iran is unwilling to reciprocate the conciliatory moves made by the United States since 1998.

However, the analysis of the background of the current stalemate fails to pin down the roots to why the Islamic Republic is so angry at the United States. If it is a

strategic U.S. objective to improve relations with Iran, the analysis necessarily needs to link the current stalemate to the historical processes that caused the enduring hostility in the first place. The reports focus on Iran's program for acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, but falls short of recognizing Iran's ancient claim to regional supremacy. Though the research panel specifically addresses some of the emotional components of the conflict, the reports do not venture into a comprehensive analysis of how these issues are related to the tangible sources of disagreement, and how to untangle the substantive issues from the emotional issues.

A recent study conducted by RAND's National Defense Research Institute, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era* (Byman et al. 2001), examines the broader sources that drive Iran's foreign policy in view of the fact that Iran's international conduct defies simple explanation. The study argues that the characteristics that explain Iran's domestic politics and foreign relations are a complex combination of religion, nationalism, ethnicity, economics, and geopolitics. Decision-making is often impossible to assess, much less to predict, since Iran's power structures are constantly in flux. Government institutions are weak compared to informal personal networks and real power often shifts according to the fortunes of individual factional leaders. The study concludes that the contemporary foreign policy line followed by the Islamic Republic is much less driven by religious ideology and Iranian nationalism than in the past: "Geopolitics has reasserted its importance, and economics has grown from a foreign policy irrelevance to a leading factor" (Byman et al. 2001, xi). In the last decade, revolutionary principles have carried a reduced amount of weight compared to preserving

regional stability and improving Iran's economy except when it comes to dealing with United States or Israel.

Mark Gasiorowski's work, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Gasiorowski 1991), is one of the most structured and best focused studies of U.S.-Iranian relations in the period 1951-1979. Gasiorowski's theoretical framework is centered on the way the superpowers established international client relationships and how they affected the domestic politics of the client state. He argues that the client relationship enabled the ruling order of the client state to become autonomous to the extent that it could ignore and resist political pressures from domestic societal groups. During the Cold War the United States undertook massive efforts to promote political stability in strategically important countries vulnerable to Soviet pressure, but often it set off destabilizing social change. In Iran, Gasiorowski concludes that U.S. efforts in the long run actually promoted political instability because the Shah became so autonomous that his rule generated popular unrest. The American sponsored *coup d'état* and U.S. assistance to the Shah undermined the power of the National Front, the Tudeh party, and in general the modern middle class that could have provided checks and balances on the Pahlavi monarchy. The Iran strategy of the Eisenhower administration was replicated elsewhere in America's fight against communism in the 1950s and 1960s. The strategy was often successful in the short term, but produced spectacular long-term failures in Iran and South Vietnam. Gasiorowski suggests that the strategy is inherently flawed.

Many scholars with a historical approach to the conflict have pointed out that the foundations for U.S.-Iranian hostility was laid down in the early years of the Cold War. James Goode has written two good books on this period. In his analysis of the formative

historical events of the U.S.-Iranian patron-client relationship during the 1946-51 period, Goode points to the consistency of U.S. policy toward Iran in the years up to the start of the revolution in 1978. When the United States finally assumed leadership from the British in the early 1950s, successive American administrations erroneously came to believe—just like British imperialists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—that royal dictatorship was the only political alternative that could block Russian expansion toward the Persian Gulf. American policy makers rarely questioned this assumption over the next three decades. They actually convinced themselves that Iranians preferred autocratic stability and rising living standards to political freedom because a small democracy could not possibly survive on the perimeter of the Communist empire (Goode 1989, 105).

Public opinion, however, rapidly turned away from the United States as the U.S. administration sided with the Shah's court circles and the British; neither perceived as defenders of liberty. As for Prime Minister Mosaddeq, Goode argues that he fatally miscalculated Anglo-American differences and deluded himself to believe that the world could not survive without Iran's oil resources. For the next 15 years, the United States propped up the shah with arms and money, but by the 1970s the Vietnam War had taken its toll on the American economy. The Shah greatly increased his leverage with Washington since he had become by far the biggest customer of the U.S. arms industry. Goode attributes U.S. policy to a combination of general ignorance about Middle Eastern affairs and excesses of anticommunist sentiments, which is maybe best exemplified by the way the significance of the 1963 riots sponsored by important elements of the Shi'ite clergy completely escaped the Kennedy-administration (Goode 1997, 180).

In the immediate aftermath of the Hostage Crisis, Barry Rubin wrote one of the first accounts of why the intimate relationship between the United States and Iran had been suddenly terminated by the Islamic Revolution. Rubin's *Paved with Good Intentions* begins with asking the question the American public was asking itself at the time: what had the American government done to cause the Iranian masses to hold the United States in such utter contempt, to equate United States with European imperialists, to take American diplomats hostage, and to blame the United States for all the sins of the Pahlavi shah? Before Rubin answers the question, he warns against the assumption that national behavior is purely a product of a rational pursuit of objective national interests. In Rubin's analysis, the way a country conducts itself, "is the result of the interaction of the collective historical experience of the nation with the individual life experiences of its citizens. The former creates a nation's political course the latter shapes its political consciousness" (Rubin 1980, x).

Rubin offers the explanation that United States' failure in Iran in large part can be traced back to the single-minded pursuit of one overarching strategic objective at the exclusion of all other political goals: to defeat the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Iran was not the only place where this strategy backfired. Like John Lewis Gaddis, Barry Rubin observes that the perceived Soviet threat had been allowed to confuse U.S. interests and the administration's assessment of political realities in Iran under the Shah. U.S. foreign policy was the unfortunate combination of well-meaning intentions and exceptionally bad judgment. Rubin argues that U.S.-Iranian relations collapsed because the U.S. administration failed to understand the currents of change in Iran and the Middle East. Rubin correctly establishes that nothing can be learned from the events of 1978-79 if one

knows nothing of what came to pass in 1953; nevertheless, Rubin offers only a cursory summary of the historical processes prior to Mosaddeq's demise.

Elaine Sciolino makes it clear from the very beginning that she has no answers or predictions for the future of U.S.-Iranian relations; yet, *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* is one of the best contextual analysis of the Islamic Revolution, the massive contradictions of the Islamic Republic, and the never-ending authority of Iran's imperial legacy. The book brilliantly combines a deep understanding of political, religious, cultural, and psychological issues at play in Iran with its troubled relationship with the United States. Sciolino explains how the Islamic Republic—like Khomeini—is too often perceived by the West as fierce, inflexible, and single-mindedly driven by religious ideology, when the truth is that nearly everything concedes to the survival of the state.

Sciolino contextualizes how every ruler of Iran has deferred to the legacy of the great Persian empire: the center of the universe. The Iranian soul and sense of national dignity has deep roots in something older than Islam. Khomeini, however, argued fervently all his life that the Persian monarchical legacy was inauthentic and that Islam was the only true identity of Iran. In 1985 he was quoted: "One cannot find a single reasonable king during all the monarchical dynasties." Khomeini later softened the position by acknowledging the "cruel greatness" of Persia's dark imperial past. Rafsanjani completed the metamorphosis in 1991 when he visited Persepolis: "Standing in the middle of these wonderful centuries-old ruins, I felt the nation's dignity was all-important and must be strengthened. Our people must know that they are not without a history" (Sciolino 2000, 164).

Rouhollah Ramazani concludes in his 1982 study, *The United States and Iran: The Patterns of Influence*, that the patron-client relationship between the United States and Iran was not as one-sided as many observers had previously concluded. The vast differentials in nominal power did not translate into the same ratio of actual influence. The Shah deliberately used the United States' strategic consideration to consolidate domestic power, and in the 1970s Iran had substantial leverage over the United States due to America's debacle in Vietnam. In Ramazani's observation, U.S. policy toward Iran failed because of a combination of three factors. The United States was almost single-mindedly focused on winning the Cold War and everything else had second priority. Since the struggle against the Soviet Union was framed within a Marxist paradigm, U.S. administration over-emphasized the importance of economic development and the rate of economic growth at the expense of understanding the cultural variables of Iran's domestic politics. As a result, the United States failed to understand the intangible factors driving political behavior in Iran. Ramazani argues that the United States should have more adequately taken into account "the deeper, more mysterious, more contradictory, more intangible, and more paradoxical psychological and spiritual factors underlying the Iranian political behavior" (Ramazani 1982, 156).

In particular, Ramazani fails outside observers for not seeing Iran's historical tendency toward aggrandizement. The Shah's vision was to transform Iran into one of the five strongest conventional military powers of the world. Iran in the 1970s was the single largest customer for U.S. arms and military training. In the wake of the British departure from the Persian Gulf, Pahlavi-Iran became the U.S. deputy in the Middle East while the United States was bogged down in Vietnam. But the Shah had even higher ambitions. He

dreamed that his strong military could project Iranian power and civilization to the borders of Cyrus the Great's empire. Ramazani also draws attention to the similarities in behavioral patterns between Muhammad Reza Shah and Ruhollah Khomeini.

In 1988, Richard Cottam asked the question why Iranians' hatred of the United States was so enduring that nearly ten years after the revolution crowds continued to shout "Death to America"? His study, *Iran and the United States: A Cold War Case Study*, investigates the nature of the U.S.-Iranian relations and how the relationship could generate feelings of such extraordinary intensity. He also examines the impact of "the American moment in Iran" on Iran's history. Cottam proposes that the collapse of U.S.-Iranian relations was the product of American Cold War behavior. He observes that after World War II the U.S. policy toward Iran began closely to resemble the patterns of European imperialism. External interventions in the internal affairs of Iran during the Cold War resembled closely those of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1978, many Iranians viewed the United States as the number one imperial power in the world, and that the revolution was directed against imperial control of Iran. Though Cottam accepts the proposition that external factors have had a major impact, he refutes the conspiratorial theory of foreign manipulation of Iranian politics. Instead Cottam argues: "U.S. policy has been largely uninformed and almost totally lacking in long-term strategy" (Cottam 1988, 16). Cottam concludes that the prime U.S. motive for being in Iran was to defend the West against a perceived threat from the Soviet Union. The strategic importance of Iran was so great that successive U.S. administrations, including Jimmy Carter, had no stomach for pressing the autocrat for real democratic reforms. The

same pattern of U.S. policy could be seen in much of the Third World, according to Cottam.

*The Cambridge History of Iran*, volume 1-7, has been an invaluable source of information when identifying and describing Iran's historical patterns. The series is regarded by many historians—both inside and outside Iran—as the state-of-the-art on Iranian history. This dissertation has also referred to numerous other well-renowned historical works. In addition, the study has made use of a copious number of articles in scholarly journals and in the media, of which a selection has been cited in the bibliography.

See also my discussion of the literature on: *The Role of Emotions in Long-term Hostility*, Page 8; *Emotion Applied on the U.S.-Iranian Conflict*, page 12; and *Complementary and Competing Analytical Frameworks*, page 23.

#### **DEFICIENCIES IN THE LITERATURE**

Over the years a number of excellent scholarly works have analyzed the conflict between Iran and the United States, however, there are several academic shortcomings that need to be rectified. The problem with the existing literature is not so much a gap in empirical knowledge as it is an unwillingness to see the conflict in a broader macro-causal or macro-historical context.

The majority of the literature on U.S.-Iranian relations does not satisfactorily explain what factually caused the long and extremely bitter conflict between Iran and the United States. There are several reasons why this is the case. Ideological bias toward one of the parties to the conflict is clearly the most obvious reason for the shortcomings. The

political platform of many writers too often influences the methodological approach to the research problem. In science, confirmatory research nearly always contradicts insight. The analytical map in these writings rarely matches the factual political terrain. In short, the causal chain leading up to the conflict needs to be explored more rigorously.

My study is distinct from the majority of the scholarly literature on political relations between the United States and Iran, which observes the conflict in rather narrowly defined terms. Similarly, it is a departure from the debate in policy journals and in other serious forms of media, which focus predominantly on unique events and too often is a repetition of politically charged arguments that do not approach a better understanding of the core issues at play in U.S.-Iranian relations. Unique events are fundamental in our understanding of the conflict but they cannot by themselves explain the larger puzzle. Social science research should attempt to look beyond isolated historical events. On the other hand, social science research that draws conclusions about classes of outcomes or processes without addressing the impact of highly idiosyncratic events in the course of history is only marginally useful.

Emotion has had a powerful influence on relations between Iran and the United States; yet, the role of emotion and passion is generally overlooked in the international relations literature. There is hardly any international relations literature on emotion, and very few studies in the field of political science. The role of vengeance, contempt, honor, contrition, apology, insult, pride in causes and prevention of war and conflict has not been developed sufficiently. Similarly, works on the U.S.-Iranian conflict have made very little effort to study the role of emotion systematically. There is reason to believe that the impasse is kept alive because both sides are practicing the politics of humiliation.

This study specifically addresses emotional variables such as pride, dignity, respect, arrogance, humiliation, and inferiority. This approach has higher explanatory power because it explains the motives behind the current behavior of the Islamic Republic.

This study rejects some specific theoretical frameworks. First, many studies have traced the origins of the Islamic Revolution and the hostility toward the United States to widespread poverty and economic inequality in the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah. However, the material standard of living improved substantially for a vast majority of Iran's population from 1953 to 1978. The Shah had successfully introduced Atatürk-style reforms such as the land program, rapid industrialization, and modernized education with very little protest since the early 1960s. The relatively mild economic recession in the mid-1970s may have partly precipitated the revolution, but there is little evidence to support that a worsening of economic conditions was not the dominant cause. Another strain of the same argument contends that rapid economic growth, urbanization, and social dislocation caused the revolution, but this proposition does not hold up to scrutiny when one compares the Iranian case with similar cases.

Second, numerous scholars explain the conflict solely within the framework of Islamic fundamentalism and the unique ability of the radical Shi'i clergy to mobilize the Iranian masses. But a number of senior students of Iranian politics have established that Khomeini was smiled on by circumstance, and that he was never the brilliant revolutionary doctrinaire on par with Vladimir Ilich Lenin, Mao Zedong, or Mohandas Gandhi. Khomeini should more properly be compared to Stalin, who also possessed a mastermind in consolidating power with a limited intellect. Before the revolution Iranians from all walks of life had been searching for ways to rid themselves of Pahlavi

despotism. They were soon shocked by the brutal methods by which the revolutionary ayatollahs usurped power; but by then it was too late. Mehdi Bazargan, Iranian nationalist and devout Muslim, bitterly blamed himself for not seeing the writings on the wall. In short, the ability of the radical Shi'i clergy to hijack the revolution is not a primary cause behind the conflict with the United States.

Third, a whole generation of intellectuals in the West has explained the conflict as a confrontation between the First World and the Third World. The underlying premise is Western guilt for the sad state-of-affairs in the Third World. This school of thought implicitly presumes that the material, political, and human success of the West in some way came at the expense of the Third World, and not as a result of a centuries-old evolutionary process. The theory assumes that European imperialism and colonialism is principally to blame for the conditions that created the Islamic Revolution and the hatred of the United States. However, a close examination of Iranian history over the last 200 years provides a quite different picture. Anglo-Russian imperialism had an indisputably negative impact on Iranian affairs for many, many years, but that does not support the "white man's guilt" paradigm. Euro-American dominance in Iran's history is gone, but Iran's structural problems that preceded Western imperialism persist. Shelby Steele observes: "Today the First World is dealing with an embarrassed Third World that is driven to save face against the anguish of an inferiority that is less and less blamable on others" (Steele 2001). Distortion of historical facts neither redeems Western wrongdoings nor uplifts the Third World.

In the introduction to *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, James Bill promises to answer a set of very important questions about what

caused the U.S.-Iranian conflict; however, the reader has to search long and hard to find out what conclusions the author finally arrives at. Findings like, “the tragedy of America and Iran is that each side—the large numbers of Iranians committed to the Islamic Republic and most patriotic Americans—has failed to understand the other’s point of view” or “the governments of both countries develop their foreign policy in an atmosphere of paranoia, hatred, ignorance, and emotion,” do not expand our understanding of the causal relationships (Bill 1988, 314). As the author himself makes perfectly clear, James Bill possesses considerable first hand knowledge on Iran and Iranians. Bill attributes his deep understanding to the hospitality and warmth of the Iranian people, and he admits explicitly that his analysis has been subject to his personal biases. However, Barry Rubin warns against “the temptation to see the history of United States-Iranian relations as a story of heroes and villains, of a few missed opportunities, of colorful incidents and obvious lessons should be avoided” (Rubin 1980, ix-x). I am afraid that this is exactly what the watchful reader may take away from James Bill’s analysis.

Throughout the book, Bill makes several questionable assumptions. For example, in 1988 when the world was preoccupied with rectifying the excesses of social revolutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bill asks the question, “what does it [the tragic history of Iranian-American relations] indicate about the future of the United States in a world caught in the midst of revolutionary change?” Moreover, the reader is left with a general impression that the United States ultimately bears responsibility for the misgovernment of Muhammad Reza Shah, but strictly speaking, the United States is not accountable for the fortunes of Iran and Iranians because of the way the international system has been organized.

Despite some obvious shortcomings in the methodological approach to the research puzzle, Bill provides a keen insight into the finer details of U.S.-Iranian relations. He draws attention to Iranians' uninformed opinions about the true nature of Washington's foreign policy, and the propensity to see the United States as either the savior or satan. Another observation, shared by scholars on U.S. intelligence, deduces that policy decisions at the very highest level of the American administration were often made with supreme, uninformed confidence without consulting readily available expertise at the lower levels. Moreover, James Bill, like several other scholars, points to the crucial link between Anglo-Russian imperialism and the overpowering role the United States assumed in Iranian affairs during the Cold War.

Two studies by Geoffrey Kemp—*Forever enemies?: American policy and the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Kemp 1994) and *America and Iran: Road Maps and Realism* (Kemp 1998)—seek to answer important questions about the nature of U.S.-Iranian relations. The studies are factually well researched; however, the analysis rarely moves beyond providing a laundry list of disputed issues. Kemp offers a comprehensive survey of the symptoms without delivering a structured investigation of what caused the disease in the first place. The reader is therefore left in the dark whether the United States and Iran will actually remain “forever enemies.” My main criticism of the Kemp's work is that the study is largely detached from the historical chain of causality. There is no effort to systematically link the last 20 years of Iran's history to an overall causal pattern. For example, Kemp describes a list of mutual historical grievances. Unfortunately, the studies make scant attempts to categorize and differentiate between the different grievances. There is not enough focus on examining the root source of Iranian resentment and to

draw conclusions based on persistent behavioral patterns on both side of the conflict. In short, if one does not know where one is coming from in the past, it is exceedingly difficult to predict accurate road maps for the future.

Paula A. DeSutter's *Denial and Jeopardy: Deterring Iranian Use of NBC Weapons* could easily fall into the category of paid polemicists. DeSutter recommends: "[U.S.] regional deterrence should be based on critical analysis of deterrence requirements, which should be based in large part on examination of the strategic personality of the states we seek to deter. Thus, deterrence strategies must be tailored to the strategic calculations those states are likely to make and the national context within which decisions will be made." But the DeSutter's study is regrettably based on sweeping and inaccurate generalizations of Iran and Iranians: "Iran is a religious state whose political leadership is guided by religious leaders who emphasize the most violent aspects of its religious tradition" or "the religious fervor of the leadership and the majority of the population raises the specter of 'true believers' who would die for the cause and gain paradise" (DeSutter 1997, 10). Furthermore, she argues, "[the Iranian] leadership's commitment to its religious and revolutionary ideology and its risk tolerance indicate that Iran is a state that more closely resembles the early Bolshevik state than the tired Soviet Union the United States deterred and ultimately defeated in the Cold War," which is simply incorrect (DeSutter 1997, 11). It could look as if the political objectives of DeSutter's research institution, the National Defense University, have been allowed to obscure an objective and detached approach to the research problem.

## **5. Roadmap to the Dissertation**

Chapter I provides the theoretical approach and descriptive research models for solving the particular research problems of this dissertation. This study specifically addresses the role of emotion in world politics as a research tool in addition to several complementary theoretical frameworks. Though the dissertation is a single case study, the research problem is nevertheless framed in a comparative context. The chapter shows how the research design and the research methods have been selected. Lastly, Chapter I lists a number of research questions and specifies the scope-of-work.

Chapter II details the legacy of the great imperial epoch in Iran's history: the Achaemenian, Parthian, Sasanian empires from 550 B.C. to A.D. 642. The chapter focuses on the ruling dynasties and their sense of being destined to rule others. The chapter describes in some detail Iran's wars with the Greek city-states, the Roman empire, and the Byzantine empire. The chapter explicitly focuses on the way Iranians have repeatedly resisted foreign dominance. Chapter II also describes the close relationship between the state and religion prior to Iran's conversion to Islam.

Chapter III offers a narrative of demise of the Persian empire. It describes and evaluates the impact of Iran's conversion to Islam and how the Arab conquest factors in to today's political situation. The 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century merged Islam with the ancient Iranian civilization to a distinct Perso-Islamic culture. Today's rulers in Iran both reject and embrace these historical events. The 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a brief renaissance of Persian rule, but the former empire disintegrated completely after several

Turkish and Mongol invasions. Chapter III links the events of this period and their influence on current conditions.

Chapter IV analyzes the immense influence of the Safavid empire on Iran as a nation-state in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter describes how the Safavid period laid the premises for the conflict with the United States nearly 500 years later. The chapter describes the foundation for Shi'i absolutism, criteria for religious legitimacy, and the roots of institutionalized factionalism. Chapter IV provides a detailed chronology of Iran's endless wars with the Ottoman empire.

Chapter V presents a detail narrative of the first half of the causal chain that led to Iran's conflict with the United States. The first part of the chapter describes Iranian imperialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The second part analyzes how British and Russian imperialism defeated Iran in the last half of the same century. The third section describes how the Shi'i religious establishment influenced Iran's domestic and foreign policy in this period.

Chapter VI is an account of the crucial interaction between great power politics and social change in Iran in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This period was immediately followed by the U.S. patronage of Iran from 1953 to 1979, which set the stage for the Islamic Revolution. Iran's national aspirations and historical grievances were also extensively molded in this period. The first section recapitulates the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911). The second segment is a summary of Iran's encounter with the Great European War or World War I. The last part is an essay on the reign of Reza Shah and how this period shaped modern Iranian nationalism and political awareness. Chapter

VI argues that the rule of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi—the son of Reza Shah and U.S. client—simply was the extension of his father’s ambitions.

Chapter VII studies the American responses to Iranian threats after the Islamic Revolution, and U.S. containment of Iran by different American administrations. It explains why a *détente* never took place between the two antagonist, and how President Bush’ “axis of evil” will affected the conflict between the two nations. Finally, the chapter provides an assessment of the future of U.S. Iranian relations.

# **Chapter I: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY**

## **1. The Theoretical Framework**

### **DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH MODELS**

I have developed three macro-historical models in order to give an explanation to my research problem. Every aspect of international relations is infinitely complex and connected in some way to preceding historical events and to parallel conflicts in world affairs. A complete detailed description and explanation of the conflict between Iran and the United States, its direct and indirect linkages to a variety of issues in the history of international relations, is unobtainable since it would involve more variables than one could possibly measure in a single valid piece of research. The challenge is to develop a simple methodology that truly represents the complexity of the phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> I will make the argument that the failure to satisfactorily explain the long-term hostility between the United States and Iran stems from the difficulties scholars face when trying to reduce the overwhelming accounts of historical events and processes down to manageable components. Unfortunately, scientific simplification of the research problem leaves the researcher vulnerable to criticism from other quarters of the public debate for overgeneralization and failure to address some specific aspects of the research problem.

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<sup>11</sup> King, Keohane, and Verba argue: "The perceived complexity of a situation depends on part on how well we can simplify reality, and our capacity to simplify depends on whether we can specify outcomes and explanatory variables in a coherent way" (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 10 and 42). The essence of a good descriptive research model is therefore to make valid descriptive inferences about history without getting lost in a sea of historical details. A sound research design needs to develop simplified models rooted in a limited number of variables with high explanatory power.

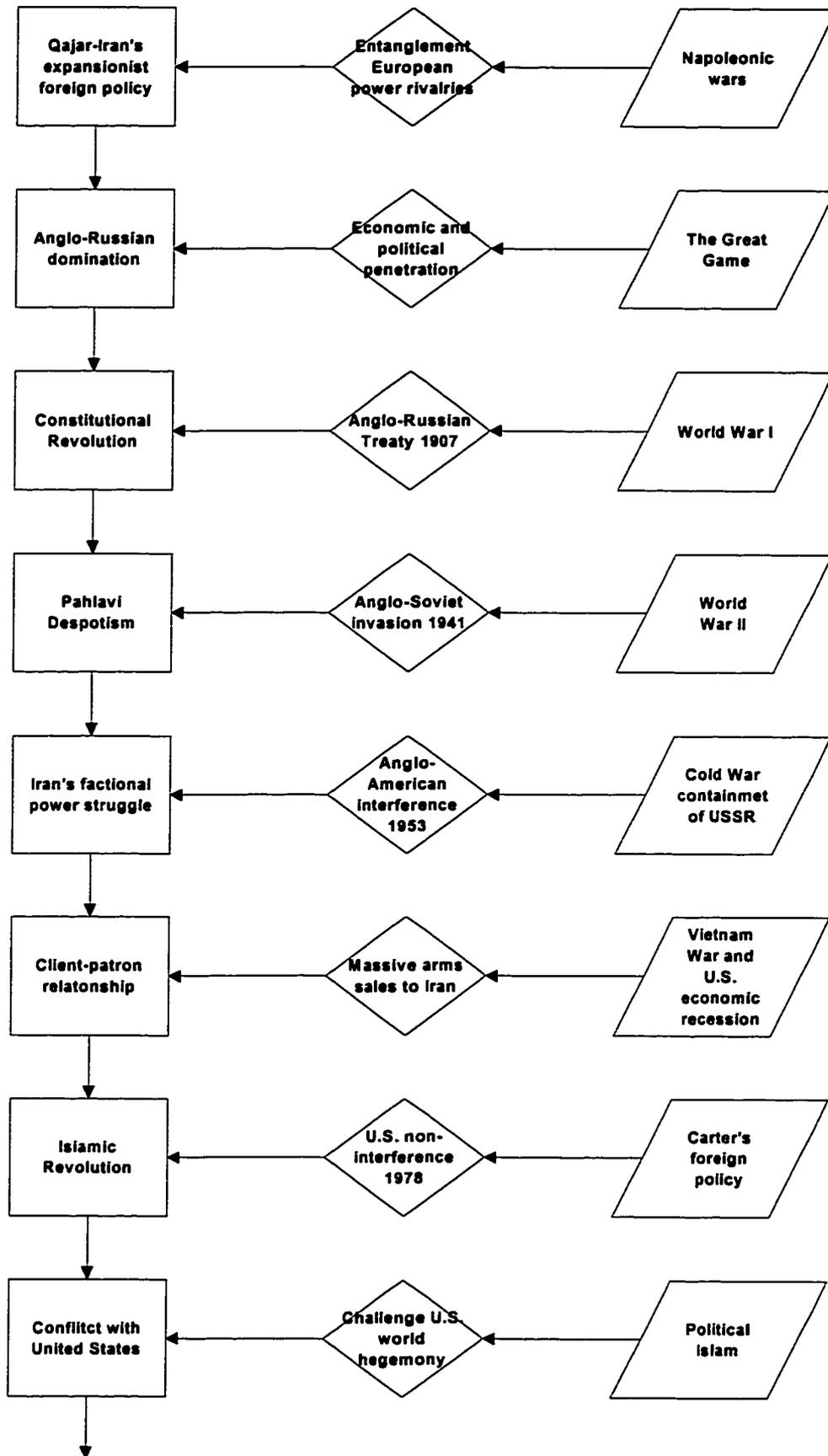
Model 1: Causal chain, 1800-2000 on page 4 is a simplified description of the causal chain of Iranian history that led to the conflict with the United States, starting with Iran's aggressive foreign policy at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and ending with Iran's revolutionary Islamic regime challenging America's global power after 1979. Model 2: Pattern model of the U.S.-Iranian conflict on page 5, however, is a complex description of how the United States fits into a consistent pattern of long-term enemies in Iran's long recorded history. Model 2 consists of four main aggregated independent variables—(1) legacies of Iran's national history, (2) Western imperialism, (3) Iran's domestic power struggle, and (4) Iran's patron-client relationship with the United States—that led to the dependent variable: U.S.-Iranian hostility. The models merely depict the overall chain of causality with any degree of certainty. The direction of causality among the sub-independent variables is obviously not unambiguous, and there is good reason to believe that reciprocal causation exists. The variables are strictly speaking neither “dependent” nor “independent,” at least until they have been rigorously tested. The descriptive models do not pretend to be more than a conceptual analysis or an effort to develop working hypotheses with regard to the research problem (see also Model 4: Criteria for selection of research design, page 48).

The models' core independent variable is time. Time—which properties most of us can agree about—“anchors” the causal chain.<sup>12</sup> History's flow through time is rarely a smooth and continuous process but more often a course of events characterized by abrupt

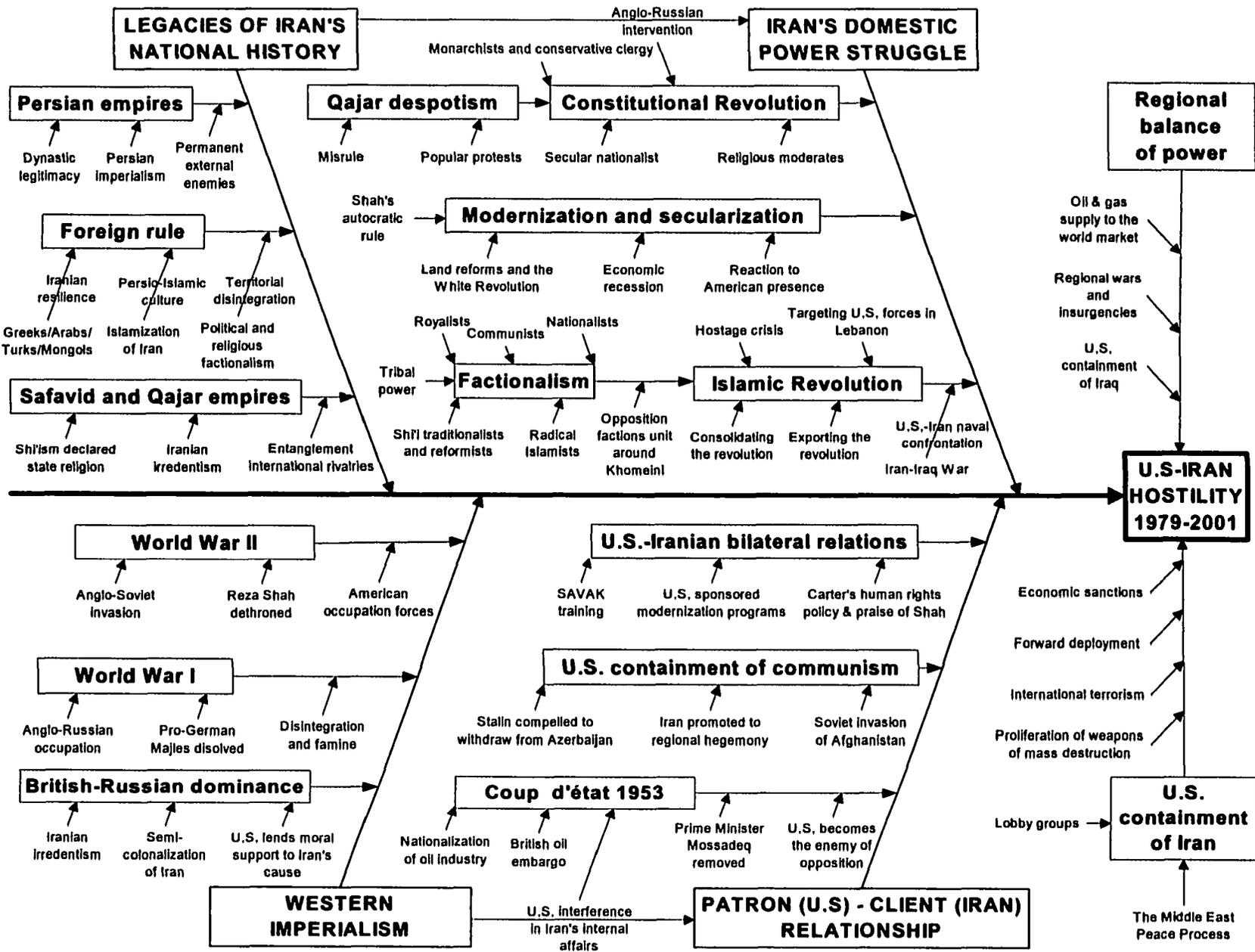
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<sup>12</sup> When selecting between different explanatory models, Blalock and Blalock's advice is to integrate a timeline into the model: “If researchers can infer time sequences among key variables, as well as correlations between them, they are in a better position to choose among alternative explanations of the data” (Blalock and Blalock 1982, 22).

shifts and discontinuities. Model 3: Comparative model of patron-client conflicts involving the United States on page 6 contains certain “trigger” or “decision”-points along the horizontal timeline where the course of history abruptly takes a seemingly unexpected direction. Snyder and Diesing have termed the factors that trigger a conspicuous change of events for “precipitants” (Snyder and Diesing 1977). Furthermore, we frequently distinguish between general and specific precipitants, and we also separate between internal and external precipitants.

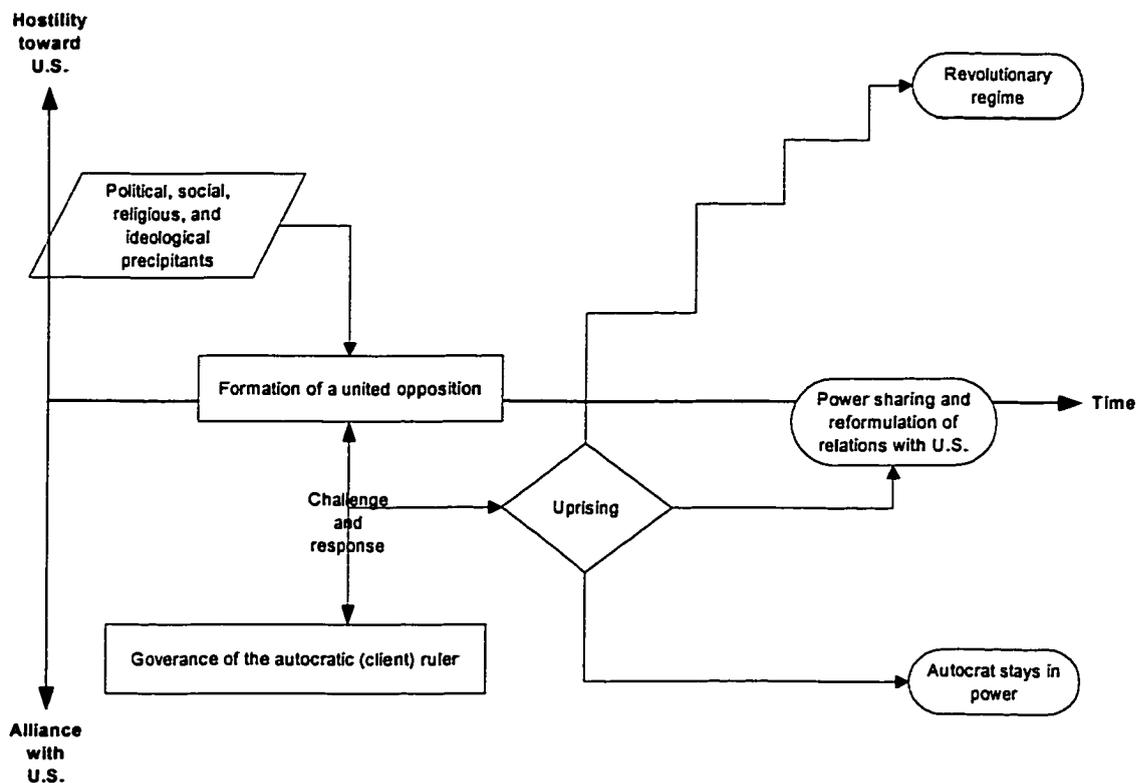


Model 1: Causal chain, 1800-2000



Model 2: Pattern model of the U.S.-Iranian conflict

The conflict between Iran and the United States must also be seen in context of similar conflicts in world history. In American diplomatic history, there are not only a significant number of cases of long-term hostility, but there are also several bilateral relationships with characteristics comparable to that of U.S.-Iranian relations prior to the Iranian revolution. One important task is therefore to answer the question why some countries were able to reformulate their relationship with the United States after a social upheaval took place without going through a long period of hostility?<sup>13</sup>



Model 3: Comparative model of patron-client conflicts involving the United States

<sup>13</sup> The “counterfactual” chain of events did of course not take place in Iran after 1978-79. Nevertheless, several observations indicate that a peaceful reformulation of bilateral relations between the United States and Iran could in fact have taken place if the necessities of the revolution had been slightly different.

In Model 3, the precipitants that paved the way for the formation of a strong and united domestic opposition against the local autocrat—who also was the Cold War ally of the United States—were a specific combination of internal and external factors such as the client state's history of foreign domination, authoritarian and repressive governments, corruption and illegitimacy, social and economic inequalities, larger ideological movements, and great power rivalries. Together these factors furnished a number of disparate opposition groups with enough grievances to unite under a common cause. As a general rule, the coalition of domestic oppositions was only able to seriously challenge the autocratic ruler after several failed attempts. In nearly all the historical cases, the autocrat resisted the challenge by violent means.<sup>14</sup> In most cases, the United States was on the whole supportive of the autocrat up to the transition point. As the challenge from the united opposition front unfolded, the United States had to decide whether to continue support from the regime in power or to distance itself from the incumbent.

Historical events typically developed along three distinct causal patterns: (1) the authoritarian regime successfully suppressed the challenge and stayed in power; (2) a power sharing arrangement was negotiated as an integral part of a peace settlement, and the new government redefined its relationship with the United States without breaking the hostility threshold; and (3) a revolutionary regime came to power, broke through the hostility threshold, and stayed hostile to the United States for many years. Political developments after World War II in countries like Turkey, Indonesia, South Korea, Chile, and Taiwan are outcomes of Causal Pattern (1). These countries have all made the

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<sup>14</sup> The overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos' autocratic regime in the Philippines in 1986 is one of the very few non-violent transitions of power in a former client state of the United States. This would most likely not have happened without political pressure from the U.S. government.

transition from autocracy to some form of semi-democracy. The Philippines and El Salvador are countries that represent Causal Pattern (2). Iran, Cuba, China, Nicaragua, and Vietnam are all cases of a former U.S. client where a revolutionary regime seized power and the new regime aggressively turned against its previous patron. Mexico is to some extent also a case of Causal Pattern (3).

### **THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN LONG-TERM HOSTILITY**

The conflict between the United States and Iran has psychological components that need to be addressed. Psychology on the individual and collective has played a prominent role in shaping the conflict between the United States and Iran. I suggest that on one level of analysis the prolonged conflict between the United States and Iran is fundamentally about entrenched emotional issues. Neta C. Crawford has written a good conceptual evaluation of the relationship between emotions and foreign policy together with a review of the literature in the field. Crawford argues that in world politics, “perceptions of others and the attribution of their motives will depend on actors’ preexisting emotions, and emotional relationships among actors” (Crawford 2000, 119). She shows how emotion is already an integral part of theories of world politics such as realism and liberalism; however, the role of emotion is usually implicit and under-theorized.

Emotions have generally received very little attention in the scholarly literature. International relations theory is conspicuously devoid of rigorous research on the impact of human emotions on world politics. The field of political science has examined the impact of passion on world politics only rudimentary. There are several reasons why this has been the case. Human feelings have been unfashionable not only in the domains of

international relations and political science, but in many related disciplines of academia as well. Scholarship focusing on the causal relationship between human emotions and historical events has received very little respect. Furthermore, there is an ancient tradition dating back to Aristotle of regarding emotions as irrational and unworthy of scientific attention. The masters of the European Enlightenment, such as Descartes and Kant, considered emotions separate and counterproductive to reason. Psycho-anthropological variables' influence on state behavior received considerable attention between the world wars, but the rational actor paradigm displaced competing explanations in the nuclear era. Another explanation is that emotions are methodologically so difficult to model and measure that students of international relations have concentrated their energy on research problems with ostensibly higher likelihood of being resolved. There are in fact hardly any theories on emotions in the international relations literature.

Emotions are generally looked at as distinct from, and usually contradictory to reason. I suggest that emotions are not separate from rationality, but an integral part of the causal relationship between human objectives and action. Classic realist theory defines fear as the root variable in theories on international affairs. Neo-realists, however, seem to have factored out the emotional motivation for self-interest and self-help, and they habitually view passion as irrational and irrelevant to systemic theories. However, Jonathan Mercer elegantly refutes these sweeping assumptions: "Emotion interferes with rationality, but without emotion we have neither motivation nor direction nor creativity. A purely rational person would choose to have emotion, which is tantamount to saying that a person would rationally choose to be irrational. If it is rational to be irrational, then that irrationality is no longer irrational, but rational" (Mercer 1996, 22). The point is not

that emotions override objective cognition or the traditional understanding of rationality, but that passion is fundamentally involved when people set rational objectives.<sup>15</sup> In this perspective, a fixed distinction between rational and so-called irrational behavior is nonsense. In short, emotion is an integral part of reason.

The literature on the relationship between international relations, emotion, and rationality can be divided into roughly four categories. The first school of thought regards emotion as a secondary phenomenon to rational pursuit of personal objectives. Emotion is rational as long as it serves the cool utilitarian calculation of goals. The second branch views emotion as interfering with rationality. In the field of international relations, scholars in the 1970s started to apply cognitive psychology on national behavior. Scholars began with the proposition that decision makers on the highest level make the exact same cognitive errors as ordinary people (Jervis 1968) and (Jervis 1970). Research was published on the role of emotional stress in decision-making. Later, psychological variables have been used to study the effectiveness deterrence in power rivalries (Jervis, Lebow, and Stein 1985) and the role of reputation in world politics (Mercer 1996).

Herbert Kelman argues that the nature of international conflict is comprised of psychological processes at the individual and collective levels, which constitute and mediate much of the behavior of nations. Historical, geopolitical, and structural factors provide the context and set the constraints for the operation of psychological factors, but the real conflict is a product of misperception and misunderstanding. Herbert Kelman has

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<sup>15</sup> One need only look at the faces of those actively involved in “national movements” such as the *intifada* to see the role of emotion.

done extensive work on emotional entrapment, both personal and national, in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Kelman 1997).

A common theme in the second category of this literature is the proposition that emotion is secondary to cognition and that unwanted feelings can sometimes distort proper perception of the political situation. Emotion is never addressed as a root cause. The third variety of scholarship, however, sees emotion as a strategic choice and for that reason occasionally rational. The idea is that emotion unconsciously puts off short-term needs for long-term interests, which explicitly suggest that emotion sometimes is the solution to the problem rather than interfering with optimal goal seeking.

The fourth approach to emotion breaks with the others by looking at emotion as essential to rationality. This school often argues that rationality, defined as acting to maximize one's self-interest, is subordinate to a person's emotion. The logic is that we would have no desire without emotion and therefore no incentive to act rationally. Moderate "emotionalists" view human feelings as essentially an imperfect system for allocation of resources. The crucial role of emotion becomes apparent in research and development of artificial intelligence. Some emotionalist cleverly bridge the gap to the traditional rational actor paradigm by pointing to the fact that the *Prisoner's Dilemma*—the prime model of rational actor behavior—is steeped in human emotions such as fear, anxiety, loathing, horror, envy, resentment, and hatred.

Moreover, nobody would deny that the brutality of military battle can only be sustained by mobilizing a set of emotions, and that nationalism brings up immensely strong feelings that can harness a nation for military action. Nevertheless, emotionalism can easily overreach to the extent of being exempt from being proven false. Sober

application of emotional variables, however, suggests that cognition and affect interact interdependently, and that much of what we normally view as rational action is possible only because of human emotion (Mercer 1996, 27).

#### **EMOTION APPLIED ON THE U.S.-IRANIAN CONFLICT**

We can theoretically apply emotions to different levels of analysis in international relations. Emotions are clearly independent variables on a systemic level of analysis.<sup>16</sup> The dispute over what constitutes acceptable societal norms increasingly plays an important role in the landscape of international conflicts. Norms are often no more than unquantifiable beliefs about what is right and what is wrong held by a majority of the population in a specific society within certain time frame. People react emotionally when norms are either followed or violated. At the center of Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, is the unavoidable confrontation between universal Western values—as codified by the United Nations—and normative standards practiced by competing civilizations throughout the rest of the world (Huntington 1996).

On the national level of analysis, emotions have always played a crucial role when groups are competing for power. Group behavior is loaded with passion. Modern nationalism deliberately targets emotions and passions to persuade each individual citizen to make the required sacrifices for the common good. A scholarly consensus generally lists seven components that define an ethnic group. Four of these components are

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<sup>16</sup> One of the greatest historians of all time, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), developed a general historical-political theory that explains with magnificent insight the inherent power potential in movements like that of the Prophet Muhammad. In his scholarly masterpiece, the *Muqaddimah* ("Introduction to History"), Ibn Khaldun lays out a method for understanding macro-historical processes. A central theme in Ibn Khaldun's analysis is the concept of *asabiyah*, or "social cohesion."

predominantly either mythological or emotional, rather than factual: a belief in a common ancestry; shared historical memories of a common past; a feeling of common culture community; and, a sense of solidarity (Hutchinson and Smith 1996, 6-7). If we remove emotion and passion from nationalism and ethnicity, we are left with a sterile academic concept that does not make any sense on the ground in places like the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and, of course, Israel/Palestine. Because of its own founding history, the United States has generated its own creation myth to justify itself.

However, there is no one-to-one relationship between psychological aspects individual behavior and group behavior. The psychology of individuals does not directly materialize into collective actions. We still have a long way to go before we understand how feelings on the individual level accumulate to the level of national self-esteem, pride, humiliation, grievances, or hatred.

Another aspect is how we assess other countries. Attribution theory seeks to comprehend how people tend to explain other people's behavior, or how governments assess other governments. There is an ongoing debate about how much is predisposed or situational. At the center of the debate are the biases of the observer. Political actions should ideally be motivated solely by what one can factually deduct from a given situation, but more often than not, decision-makers are informed by the human psychological predisposition to see things in mental patterns that are emotionally familiar to them. I propose that these processes are at the core of U.S.-Iranian hostility. The solution to the conflict must therefore involve efforts to disentangle the concrete substantive disputes from the deep emotional issues. In other words, a rational resolution

of the hostility between Iran and the United States requires an emotional approach to the root cause of the problem.

As a general rule, the psychological nature of man is deeply drawn toward making sense of uncertainties and apparent chaos by often uncritically attributing systematic properties to nearly every single event in international affairs. The probabilistic worldview challenges people's sense of security and anxiety of the unknown, and people tend to overcompensate accordingly. There is a well-known human propensity of seeing regularities and patterns despite contradictory evidence that the events are often idiosyncratic or generated by processes not directly related to the actual phenomenon in question.

The cult of conspiracy theories in Iran is an extreme example of this propensity. Iran prides itself rightfully on being one of the most ancient cultures in the world. At the same time, Iranians have come to suffer from a deep sense of insecurity and vulnerability due to repeated conquests by foreigners. For instance, many Iranians to this day seriously believe that Khomeini was the deliberate creation of either the United States or Great Britain.<sup>17</sup> Nikki Keddie remarks, "for every strange-seeming character trait, as with 'mistrust' or 'paranoia,' one can nearly always find partially explanatory causes in Iranian history. In both the British and American cases, however exaggerated and paranoid some charges by some Iranians may be, suspiciousness and hostility have their root in real and important occurrences; chiefly, participation in the overthrow of popular

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<sup>17</sup> On the propensity for conspiracy theories in Iran, see (Fuller 1991, 21), (Keddie and Richard 1981, 254), or (Roy 1994, 19).

revolutionary movements and support for unpopular governments” (Keddie and Richard 1981, 275-76).

Most Iranian conspiracy theories presume that foreign powers have both had the motive and the ability to orchestrate or to manipulate major political events in Iran’s modern history. The truth of the matter is that the major powers—Russia, Great Britain, and the United States—largely exhibited only a superficial understanding of, “the deeper, more mysterious, more contradictory, more intangible, and more paradoxical psychological and spiritual factors underlying the Iranian political behavior,” and subsequently, they were only able to influence decision-making at the highest levels (Ramazani 1982, 156). There is no evidence to support that the great powers ever developed coherent long-term strategies with regard to Iran.

Unfortunately, the paranoid fear of foreign conspiracies and Iranians’ self-imposed ignorance about the nature of international relations paradoxically plays into hands of the regime. The regime uses systematic torture of dissidents to extract public confessions of their crimes. In the 1980s, forced public confessions—that actually began under the last Shah—surpassed even the impressive records of Stalin and Mao (Abrahamian 1999). The regime still believes that people will accept for face value these public admissions of guilt. Moreover, as long as ordinary Iranians indulge in far-fetched conspiracy theories, it makes it more difficult to hold the regime accountable for the crimes that have been factually committed by government agencies.

In Iran, the official rhetoric does not match ordinary peoples feelings toward the West. On some issue it is possible to understand anti-American resentment; yet, anti-foreign propaganda is too often used by the regime to deliberately explain away

homegrown problems. In spite of the crude and relentless official rhetoric of the Islamic regime, one hardly encounters ordinary people in Iran voicing a strong general dislike or hatred for the United States or the West. On the other hand, people from all walks of life eagerly express their intense contempt for the rule of the mullahs. Khatami's landslide victory in the last presidential election again conveyed the message that scapegoating has lost its effect on the electorate. An extremely young population with no memories of the revolution is fed up with ideological sloganeering. People simply want to see practical improvements in their lives such as meaningful jobs and freedom of speech.

In the West, stereotypes of Muslim societies and of Islamic fundamentalism have been allowed to dominate the news media. Gary Sick argues: "The mirror image of Iranian depictions of the U.S. as the 'Great Satan'—had its effects on the media, on the U.S. Congress, on the public and in the attitudes of lower-level bureaucrats" (Sick 1998, 6). Cultural stereotyping has also found its way to the academic literature in the West. Paula DeSutter suggests that, "[Iran's] political, religious, and military leadership has fostered a cult of martyrdom and death that could be used to strengthen its ability to conduct war and to accept casualties" (DeSutter 1997, 10). This is clearly not the case in today's Iran. Young Iranians have absolutely no desire to die for mullahs.

I will argue the psychological issues on both sides of the conflict have often taken on a life of their own, frequently completely detached from the actual events that defined them in the first place. As an example, recent research suggests that the American role in the successful *coup d'état* against Prime Minister Mosaddeq in 1953 was less prominent

than previously believed.<sup>18</sup> General Fazlollah Zahedi and the Iranian military did nearly all of the “heavy lifting.” Furthermore, major clerical figures such as Ayatollahs Behbehani, Borujerdi, and Kashani seem to have been far less principled in their opposition to the Shah than what many Iranians would like to believe (Gasiorowski).

What counts, however, is the shared belief among Iranians that foreign powers have frequently conspired to overthrow legitimate governments in Iran. The *coup d'état* of 1953 dramatically changed the course of modern Iranian history and remains in the collective Iranian memory a deep-seated injustice committed by foreign powers. In short, the conflict between the United States and Iran is as much inside people's heads as it is an external and tangible phenomenon.

#### **SUBSTANTIVE VERSUS EMOTIONAL ISSUES**

It is therefore necessary to clearly distinguish between the factual transactions and the psychological aspects of the conflict, and to carefully describe their reciprocal

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<sup>18</sup> On 16 April 2000, The New York Times ran a special report on the American involvement in the 1953 coup d'état at Prime Minister Mosaddeq:

[A] copy of the agency's secret history of the coup has surfaced, revealing the inner workings of a plot that set the stage for the Islamic revolution in 1979, and for a generation of anti-American hatred in one of the Middle East's most powerful countries.

The secret history, written by the C.I.A.'s chief coup planner and obtained by The New York Times, says the operation's success was mostly a matter of chance. The document shows that the agency had almost complete contempt for the man it was empowering, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, whom it derided as a vacillating coward.

The operation, code-named TP-Ajax, was the blueprint for a succession of C.I.A. plots to foment coups and destabilize governments during the cold war—including the agency's successful coup in Guatemala in 1954 and the disastrous Cuban intervention known as the Bay of Pigs in 1961. In more than one instance, such operations led to the same kind of long-term animosity toward the United States that occurred in Iran (Risen 2000, A1).

interaction. To illustrate my point, the two tables below summarize the most controversial issues that separate Iran and the United States. I have divided the various issues of contention, which the parties to the conflict believe constitute the problem, into two separate categories: (1) substantive issues and (2) emotional issues. If the parties to the conflict really want to defuse the standoff, they need to carefully look into each sub-conflict issue to determine the actual substance of the contention, similar to a fact-finding task force or a truth commission.

My main argument is that the substantive issues do not measure up to the degree of observed hostility between the two antagonists according to mainstream theories of international relations. I propose that the causal explanation, and subsequently the resolution of the conflict, is to be found in psychological and emotional issues that only partially relate to factual historical events. I assume that there is a reciprocal relationship between emotions and passions on the individual and the collective level, and the conflict on the national level. However, I also acknowledge that scientific evidence of causality is still unclear, at best.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Scholars from several related disciplines have argued forever about the main categories of emotions and passions. Philosophers have different categories than psychiatrists who have different categories than psychoanalysts who have different categories than sociologists, and so on. A simple synthesis of the debate is that there are five basic feelings—mad, bad, sad, glad, scared—and that all other emotions and passions are just reflections of this five common denominators—and that all other emotions and passions are just reflections of this five common denominators. Neta Crawford suggests love, fear, anger, joy, sadness, and shame (Crawford 2000, 124).

At this stage of the research, I believe that it is prudent to stick to the most basic concepts of emotions and passion since proper theoretical understanding of causality in international relations has not progressed very far. In my study, the basic category of “mad” transforms into historical grievances, retribution for wrongdoing, social injustice, cultural alienation, and restoration of religious and moral values. Similarly, “bad” refers to humiliation and dishonor.

IRAN:	
Substantive issues:	Emotional issues:
<p>[The text in this column is extremely faint and illegible due to the low contrast of the scan.]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. involvement in the coup against Prime Minister Mosaddeq in 1953</li> <li>• U.S. support for the Shah's autocratic and repressive rule.</li> <li>• U.S. indirect support for Iraq in the "imposed" war of 1980-88</li> <li>• U.S.-Iranian naval confrontation: 1987-1988</li> <li>• USS Vincennes: downing of an Iranian A300 Airbus killing 290 in 1988.<sup>22</sup></li> <li>• Ignoring Iran's "good will" during the Gulf War</li> <li>• U.S. worldwide power arrogance</li> <li>• U.S. insensitivity to Iran's cultural and religious values.</li> <li>• Naming Iran a "rogue state" on an "axis of evil."</li> </ul>

Table 1: Iran, substantive versus emotional issues of conflict

<sup>20</sup> The amount is according to Iran Daily (Iran Daily 2001).

<sup>21</sup> It is clear that the state of Israel plays a dominant role in the conflict between the United States and Iran. As far back as 1963, opposition to the Jewish state was a crucial component in Khomeini's ideological fundament.

<sup>22</sup> In 1996, the United States agreed with Iran to pay \$300,000 for each wage-earning Iranian victim and \$150,000 for each non-wage-earning victim from the downing of the airliner. The settlement was in line with an offer of voluntary payment made after the incident by President Ronald Reagan. Still, the United States maintains its position that the Vincennes was taking "appropriate defensive measures" when it shot down the Airbus (Gulf/2000 Project). In 1998, President Khatami said: "Even if we [Iran] accept that the shooting was accidental, the decoration of the commander of the American naval vessel responsible for the tragedy was indeed adding insult to injury" (CNN 1998).

THE UNITED STATES:	
Substantive issues:	Emotional issues:
<p>[The text in this column is extremely faint and illegible due to high contrast and noise in the original image.]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iranians' lack of appreciation for U.S. political, economic and military support against Soviet aggression during the Cold War.<sup>23</sup></li> <li>• The insulting official rhetoric naming the United States "the world arrogance" and "the Great Satan."</li> <li>• The Iranian regime's nearly total disrespect for the American way of life and moral norms.</li> <li>• Extreme humiliation of U.S. prestige during the Hostage Crisis, 1979-1981</li> <li>• Iran's complicity in the taking and killing of U.S. hostages in Lebanon in the 1980s.</li> <li>• Blaming the United States for nearly all of Iran's home-grown problems.</li> </ul>

Table 2: The United States, substantive versus emotional issues of conflict

<sup>23</sup> At a news conference on 21 June 2001, Attorney General John Ashcroft said that an Iranian military officer, "inspired, supported and supervised members of Saudi Hezbollah" in their attack against American service at the Khobar Towers apartment building in Saudi Arabia. The official indictment makes dozens of references to Iran, which demonstrates that American investigators are convinced that Iran was behind the attack. Nevertheless, the indictment stops deliberately short of directly implicating the government in Tehran (Johnston 2001).

<sup>24</sup> On the Soviet design on Iranian Azerbaijan, see (Zubok and Pleshakov 1996).

In its editorial on 17 August 2000, The Tehran Times quoted the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic:

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on Tuesday received the Iranian diplomats posted abroad along with Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi. Referring to a unipolar world system advocated by the United States following the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the Leader stressed that the U.S. government lacks political, moral and ideological competence to lead the world through the establishment of a unipolar world order. In response to some in the country who favor holding negotiations with Washington, Ayatollah Khamenei stressed that dialog and relations with the U.S. would solve no problems, as the main goal of the U.S. in proposing a dialog to Iran is to impose its stances on this country. The Leader also made it clear that there is no common point between Tehran and Washington. A clear instance of the divergence of views between the two countries is the issue of Palestine. The United States has been extending its total support to the usurper Zionist regime for the past half a century, while the Islamic Republic has been a vocal advocate of the cause of the oppressed Palestinians and liberation of the holy Qods [Jerusalem] from the clutches of the Zionist occupiers" (Tehran Times 2000).

#### **"UNOBSERVABLE" CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES**

A proper analysis of the conflict between Iran and the United States must make use of theoretical concepts and descriptive definitions that are strictly speaking unobservable or unquantifiable according to the terminology of proper scientific inference. The use of abstract and unobservable concepts related to issues of cultural and religious values, social norms, political legitimacy, national pride, collective memory and/or historical grievances is normally discouraged in political science. Nevertheless, I strongly disagree with Fred Kerlinger's position that "scientific problems are not moral

and ethical questions” since “there is no way to test value questions scientifically” (Kerlinger 1973). The matter of fact is that understanding the hostility between the United States and Iran is of great importance to the rest of the world, and consequently it is a question that should be subject to scientific inquiry. Unsurprisingly, this particular research problem raises a number of important questions rooted in irreducible and subjective human values. In fact, the history of U.S.-Iranian relations can never be represented as a mathematical algorithm since science is still unable to understand human behavior in computational terms. Because we cannot represent the conflict in the most desirable scientific format, this does not in any way imply that research problem is a mystery that is off-limits for a serious and rigorous scientific inquiry.

As scientists, we cannot run away from a research problem because the causality does not lend itself very well to an algorithmic representation. We cannot abolish a whole field of research because observation is difficult. The challenge to social science is on one level of analysis to understand how each actor perceives himself and his adversary. In case of U.S.-Iranian relations, the use of the specific concepts of pride, honor, dignity, arrogance, humiliation, revenge or retribution is imperative to our understanding of the conflict. In the field of psychology, where data are fundamentally “unobservable,” there are well proven techniques to confront seemingly un-testable theories and hypotheses. Julian Simon insists, “the empirical researcher must transform the vague, the unspecified, the abstract, into the specified and concrete, even though precision is hard work and all of us are lazy” (Simon 1969, 22). As an example, it would be absurd to attempt to explain U.S. escalation of the Vietnam War 1965 without having a good understanding of the inner workings of President Lyndon B. Johnson.

## 2. Complementary and Competing Analytical Frameworks

### REALISM AND LONG-TERM HOSTILITY

The overall theoretical framework of the realist paradigm of international relations best expresses the fundamentals of the conflict between the United States and Iran; however, some of the basic assumptions of realist theory contradict empirical historical observations. Classic realist theory describes a hierarchy of interests that drives the actors in the international system. At the bottom of the interest pyramid we find the basic need for self-preservation. Survival always takes precedence over “higher” needs. Each contender is first and foremost driven by fear of annihilation or extinction. The international system is one characterized by scarcity and anarchy. Scarce resources are negotiated through politics, which is defined as the struggle for power, in both a domestic and international political setting.<sup>25</sup> The raw struggle for power is a brutal acknowledgement of human nature. It is a pessimistic and deterministic worldview. Competitors are fundamentally untrustworthy and survival in the system is only possible through self-help.

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<sup>25</sup> Carl von Clausewitz did not distinguish between peaceful distribution of goods and institutionalized violence: “War is merely the continuation of policy by other means. . . . The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.” Also, Clausewitz’ understanding of the relationship between war and emotions is highly revealing: “Consequently, it would be an obvious fallacy to imagine war between civilized peoples as resulting merely from a rational act on the part of their government and to conceive of war as gradually ridding itself from passion, so that in the end one would never really need to use physical impact of the fighting force—comparative figures of their strength would be enough. That would be a kind of war by algebra. . . . If war is an act of force, the emotions cannot fail to be involved” (Clausewitz, Howard, and Paret 1984, 76 and 87).

In modern times and particularly after World War II, realist theory has come to rest on six main assumptions: (1) the international system is composed of nation-states as the key actors; (2) the main characteristic of international politics is anarchy and conflict; (3) the international order operates within a nominal system of legal sovereignty, but there are greater and lesser states as actors; (4) nation-states are unitary actors and domestic politics can be theoretically separated from foreign policy; (5) states are rational actors that seek to maximize the national interest; and (6) power is the single most important independent variable in explaining and predicting state behavior (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff 1997, 58). Each unitary actor has essentially only two alternatives in its pursuit of interests and power: competition or alignment of interests with other contenders. Cooperation or alliance can only take place when the participants in the power struggle find that their interests are coinciding. In an international system composed of independent nation-states, the survival of both the polity and the whole system depends on the rational pursuit of the national interests combined with a realistic assessment of national strength. In short, rivalry, competition, and conflict result from conflicting needs and interests.

Mainstream realist thought assumes a rational cost-benefit analysis of the national interest detached from emotional influences. This has clearly not been the case in U.S.-Iranian relations. Though arguable, the foreign policy of Iran after the death of Khomeini has been conducted increasingly within a *realpolitik* paradigm. This has been particularly true in Iran's bilateral relationship with Russia where ideological and emotional issues have been put on the back burner for the benefit of a cynical calculation of hard-core national interests. In the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh

and during the civil war in Tajikistan, Iran has taken positions in line with the classical principles of balance-of-power (Roy 1994, 184).

The systemic neo-realist approach to explaining state behavior in the international system deliberately downplays the influence of sub-unit level actors and processes such as factional domestic politics, religion, and historical memory. As a matter of fact, sub-unit level interest groups have been able to influence national policies in both Iran and the United States to an extraordinary degree. Iran's foreign policy toward the United States seems to contradict a cool and clear-headed calculation of national interests. Iran's attachment to state sponsored international terrorism would clearly not pass a prudent cost-benefit analysis from a Western perspective. Furthermore, Iran's fierce resistance to a comprehensive Middle East Process, which secures the right of the state of Israel to exist, cannot be understood within the realist paradigm. An accurate appraisal of Iran's foreign policy will need to account for the way Iran's historical experience affects the formulation of its foreign policy objectives. The same can clearly be said about the conduct of U.S. foreign policy. Thus, when searching for an explanation of the enduring hostility between the United States and Iran, we need to go beyond the traditional understanding of a rational actor.

#### **REVOLUTIONARY STATES**

The Iranian Revolution falls under the proposition that revolutionary states cause conflict and war for a number of reasons. There is a close correlation between major social revolutions and the new regime fighting a war against one of its neighbors shortly after coming to power. Social revolutions are also a major source of instability to the balance-of-power in the international system by creating windows-of-opportunity. Just

when the Shah's autocratic regime was about to be swept away by the united forces behind the revolution, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on 25 December 1979. It was widely believed at the time that the Kremlin had seized the opportunity to revive its old design on the Persian Gulf and access to the Indian Ocean. On 22 September 1980, after a series of mutual provocations, Iraq invaded Iran. Saddam Hussein gravely miscalculated the cohesion of the Iranian state and the ability of Iran's armed force to repulse the invasion. In fact, Iraq's adventurism cemented the revolution in favor of the radical clergy. Preceding the Iraqi invasion, vigilante groups under the nominal control of Khomeini had seized the American Embassy and had been holding the embassy staff hostage for nearly one year. In front of the rest of the world, the new regime in Tehran had humiliated the United States, arguably more than any single event since the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Stephen Walt argues that revolutions cause war by increasing the perceived level of threats between the new regime and its adversaries because both parties consider preemptive or preventive use of force as the best solution to the perceived increase in external threats (Walt 1992, 342-360). Social revolutions confuse the traditional measures of balance-of-power, which in turn make grave miscalculation more prevalent. Both sides exaggerate the hostile intentions from its alleged enemy causing the threat-response cycle to spiral. Both sides tend to simultaneously overemphasize their own vulnerability and the other side's weaknesses. Yet, the paradox is that the perceived increase of threats and vulnerability are not real since most empirical evidence suggests that social revolutions neither spread easily to other countries nor can they be simply overturned by external forces once the victorious faction is firmly in power. In short, social revolutions create a

security environment of increased threats and open illusory windows-of-opportunity to both the new regime and foreign powers with regional interests.

Theories on revolutions and war go a long way to explain how hostility between the United States and Iran came about. However, they do not explain the particular longevity of hostile relations between revolutionary regimes and United States. France and Great Britain came to terms with the new regimes in Russia, China, and Iran much faster than the United States. The theory correctly predicts that revolutionary states cause conflict and war because the revolutionary ideology commands the followers to export the rebellion to other countries. Yet, all modern revolutions experience a rapid fading away of revolutionary fervor when ideological intoxication gives away to less romantic economic problems. In the case of Iran, the country had to fight an extremely bloody and financially devastating war against Iraq between 1980 and 1988. One would intuitively assume that the overwhelming problems facing Iran in 1988 would have made the regime more amenable to pragmatically revise its uncompromising hostility toward the United States. Yet, we have seen few genuine signs that the hard-line ruling clergy in Tehran is in fact mellowing.

Similarly, during and after the Gulf War, one can argue that a rational calculation of U.S. interest in the Persian Gulf region should have encouraged a *détente* with the theocracy in Tehran. Despite unambiguous signals from both President Bush and President Rafsanjani, rapprochement did not take place; rather, the Clinton administration passed the comprehensive *Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996*, which in many respects

formalized the hostility between the two countries.<sup>26</sup> I will argue that the solution to this puzzle is to be found in the continued ideological legitimacy and political survival of the Iranian regime, together with the bid for reelection of successive U.S. administrations.<sup>27</sup> In short, both governments find themselves in a political and ideological entrapment imposed by domestic constituencies.

### DOMESTIC POLITICS

Theories on domestic interest groups' influence on the formulation and implementation of foreign policy objectives need to be consulted when seeking an explanation to U.S.-Iranian antagonism. The conduct of diplomacy and foreign policy changed dramatically around World War I for two separate reasons. First, the new and powerful role assumed by the printed press as an inter-mediator between foreign policy officials and the electorate in democratic societies blurred the line between foreign and domestic policy. Gone were the days of secret diplomacy, which above all emphasized compromise, mutual advantage, and lasting interests. The conduct of foreign policy was increasingly aimed at pleasing domestic constituencies and interest groups. Second, the coming of ideological-based totalitarian regimes signaled a significant break with the

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<sup>26</sup> In his inauguration speech on 20 January 1989, President George Bush specifically addressed the Iranian leadership by conveying: "Good will begets good will." To the great disappointment of Iran's leadership, the restraint showed by Tehran during Desert Storm was not rewarded in any tangible or symbolic way.

<sup>27</sup> As early as 1947, George Kennan observed that the hostility of Soviet foreign policy was to be found "not in the realities of foreign antagonism but in the necessity of explaining away maintenance of dictatorial authority at home" (Kennan 1997, 159). John Lewis Gaddis concluded that the U.S. policy of containing the Soviet Union was, not so much about what the Russians actually did, but more about of internal forces in the United States (Gaddis 1982). Later, Gaddis criticized the political analysis during the Cold War because "it tended to overlook ideas—what people believed, or wanted to believe." Furthermore, he concluded, "there was no military defeat or economic crash; but there was a collapse of legitimacy" (Gaddis 1997, 282-83).

past. These new revolutionary regimes deliberately did not honor established diplomatic conduct and they generally did respect international law. Confrontation, rather than accommodation, became the new name of the game.

The advent of the Islamic Republic of Iran falls squarely into this pattern. The international behavior of Iran after the revolution proved to be more outrageous than early Bolshevik foreign policy. The radical clergy showed little respect for diplomatic immunity and the principle of extraterritoriality. The regime in Tehran adopted an extreme aggressive and offensive form of diplomacy with the aim of scoring propaganda victories rather than serving the long-term interest of Iran. In retrospect, it is apparent that the conduct of Iranian foreign policy in the early period of the Islamic Republic primarily targeted a domestic audience (Hiro 1987, 136-163) and (Keddie and Richard 1981, 262). This approach soon backfired and Iran became isolated even within the Islamic World.<sup>28</sup> Today, very few within the current Iranian establishment—or even among those who participated themselves in the excesses of this period—defend these actions. Still, the hollow anti-American and anti-Western slogans persist in official rhetoric despite the fact that the public sentiment is unmistakably sick and tired of Iran's self-inflicted isolationism and international pariah status.

It is important to consider, and often under-appreciated, how much the policy of containing Iran has been strongly influenced by U.S. domestic politics and the interest of certain lobby groups. As a result, one year into the second Clinton Administration, U.S. foreign policy toward Iran was paradoxically more hostile than at any time since the

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<sup>28</sup> The Iranian regime also misread how much its quest for leadership in the Muslim world was handicapped by being Persian and not Arab.

Hostage Crisis despite the arguable fact that the real threat from Iran had subsided. Systemic theories such as neorealist balance-of-power and deterrence theories often deliberately downplay the impact from sub-unit-level actors (Waltz 1979). As a matter of fact, very little work has been done to incorporate the domestic politics variable into a causal description or causal explanation of post-Cold War deterrence: “As a discipline, international relations is nowhere near understanding these aspects of deterrence in a coherent and theoretically rigorous manner” (Achen and Snidal 1989, 155). U.S. containment of Iran clearly has a domestic component.

#### **DETERRENCE AND CONTAINMENT**

The conflict between Iran and the United States can be partly explained within the framework of traditional containment of a “non-*status quo* challenger.” Deterrence is the “handmaiden of containment” (George and Smoke 1974, 4). The fundamental principles of deterrence center on: national interests and objectives; some form of rationality in the government decision-making process; the deterrer targets what the adversary values most; deterrer communicates clearly intent and commitment; and above all the credibility of threat to retaliate. Deterrence theory is intimately related to the realist paradigm of international relations theory and its emphasis on the concept of interests and power. At heart, deterrence is a strategy under which one power uses the threat of reprisal effectively to preclude an attack from an adversary power. Protecting one’s interests requires military, political, diplomatic, and economic capabilities and willingness to exercise these capabilities to credibly discourage the adversary from undertaking specific actions by threatening to harm what the adversary values most. The U.S. policy of containing Iran presumes an overall deterrent purpose based on U.S. value judgments; i.e.

a threat to national interests. George F. Kennan—the father of the modern concept of containment—assumed a combination of diplomatic, political, and economic instruments to make containment successful.

U.S. containment of Iran has clearly been modeled on America's Cold War experience. In his well-renowned study, John Lewis Gaddis concluded that the perceived Soviet threats had been allowed to determine U.S. interests, rather than the other way around. Gaddis also found an incoherent relationship between U.S. interests and commitments, and between political ends and applied means (Gaddis 1982). In the case of Iran, Gary Sick concludes correspondingly: "The [dual-containment] policy lost sight of its objectives and became an end in itself" (Sick 1998, 227). However, despite the obvious similarities between the current conflict with Iran and containment of Soviet military and ideological expansionism, there are considerable differences. Keith Payne points to the apparent differences between major-power Cold War deterrence and regional post-Cold War deterrence in an entirely new context where nuclear weapons will not necessarily deter reliably and predictably as was the case during the Cold War within an Assured Vulnerability framework (Payne 1998, 227). More importantly, the essential characteristics of U.S.-Iranian antagonism have changed significantly during the period 1979 to 1997.

In a general analysis of deterrence, one differentiates between general and immediate deterrence. Yet, Raymond Aron argues that "there is no deterrent in a general or abstract sense; it is a case of knowing who can deter whom, from what, in what circumstances, by what means." In Aron's analysis, deterrence must always be assessed carefully in case-specific and concrete terms. What deters one government might not

deter another. What succeeds in one geographical-cultural context might fail in another (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff 1997, 393-93). George and Smoke distinguish between three levels of deterrence: strategic thermonuclear; limited war; and crisis and crisis-preventive diplomacy (George and Smoke 1974, 38). Since the Islamic Revolution, U.S. efforts to deter Iran have moved from crisis diplomacy (Hostage Crisis), through limited war (the Iran-Iraq war), to the first stages of strategic deterrence (denying Iran weapons of mass destruction). In parallel, the focus of U.S. containment of Iran has shifted from immediate to general deterrence.

There are two major competing schools of deterrence: the abstract-deductive school and the historical-comparative school. At the center of the debate is the dispute over how to represent rationality in decision-making. On the one side of the spectrum we find Sidney Verba's procedural rationality performed as a cool and clearheaded end-means calculation. On the other side of the spectrum, we find historical approaches and with Robert Jervis' emphasis on emotions and perceptions in the actual decision-making process accused by critics of providing no more than a list of variables. In-between the two, Frank Zagare claims that there is a crucial "difference between the [procedural] rational actor model and the assumption of [instrumental] rational choices. . . . An instrumentally rational actor makes simple decisions based on preferred outcomes involving misperceptions or other deficiencies of human cognition" (Zagare 1990, 238). In Frank Zagare's analysis, the best way to understand Hitler or Khomeini (or Saddam Hussein for that sake) is simply to understand their "irrational" goals. Unfortunately, Cold War deterrence literature came to draw heavily on rational behavioral expectations leaving little room for competing explanations.

## POLITICAL ISLAM, THIRD WORLD'ISM, AND THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

Marxist theories and economic causes of international conflict should be consulted—obviously not for the accuracy of their predictions—but because of the influence these theories have had on the formulation of various revolutionary ideologies, the formative years of certain decision-makers, and consequently, nation-state behavior. The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic of Iran were distinct breaks with the past, but the Western media erroneously explained within the stereotypical framework of Islamic fundamentalism. “‘The Republic of Ayatollahs’ is a journalistic invention” (Roy 1994, 180). In fact, the Iranian revolution had very little support from among the traditionalist faction of Shi’ite clergy. Though the Iranian Revolution was a natural continuation of the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), the Iranian Revolution was nevertheless a highly idiosyncratic blend of Shi’ism, Marxism, and Iranian nationalism.

In Western discourse, however, the focus has primarily been on the religious and anti-imperialist elements of the revolution. In Olivier Roy’s observations, “the other tendency, more recent and therefore more difficult to see, is that of anti-colonialism, of anti-imperialism, which today has simply become anti-Western—from Cairo to Tehran, the crowds that in the 1950s demonstrated red or national flag now march beneath the green banner” (Roy 1994, 4). Prior to the revolution there was a cozy relationship between Marxist groups and radical Islamists. In Val Moghadan’s analysis: “The revolution that ushered in the Islamic Republic has been inaccurately labeled the ‘Islamic Revolution.’ It is more properly a populist, anti-imperialist social revolution” (Moghadan 1989, 149). Some even compare Khomeini’s revolution to Gandhi’s grass root movement

in India. In my analysis, this framework completely ignores the ancient Iranian imperial legacy.

Was really Khomeini's revolution a morally principled uprising like Gandhi's strictly non-violent struggle against the British? Did post-revolutionary Iran denounce political and territorial expansionism (i.e. imperialism)? Clearly not. Khomeini's revolutionary form of Shi'ism had universal political ambitions exactly like the Safaviyya movement in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Islamic Republic is anti-imperialist only in the sense that it opposes foreign (Western) influence in the Middle East because Iran wants to regain regional supremacy for itself. The Iranian Revolution was simply a popular reaction against foreign dominance.<sup>29</sup> As soon as Khomeini had consolidated enough power, he turned on his former allies.

Structural theories of international relations deliberately downplay the role of "culture" and "civilizations." Samuel Huntington tried to bridge the gap between the traditional realist concept of power and interest and the clash between the shared normative values of different civilizations. With regard to Islam, Huntington argued: "The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power" (Huntington 1996, 217).<sup>30</sup> According to the editors of Foreign Affairs, Huntington's first article triggered an academic debate

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<sup>29</sup> The Euro-American period of foreign dominance falls into a historical pattern of three previous periods of foreign domination: the Hellenistic, Arab, and Turko-Mongolian periods.

<sup>30</sup> People in the Muslim world (and many Europeans) would turn Huntington's argument upside down: The problem is not Islam. It is the United States, a country whose people are convinced of the superiority of their moral values and are obsessed with their military might and the inferiority of their history.

more heated than had been seen since the 1940s. Yet, Huntington's initiative received unexpected support from very distant quarters within the academic community. The well-renowned Islamic scholar, Bassam Tibi, came partly to Huntington's defense:

Indeed, the recent debate over the "clash of civilizations" provoked by the Harvard scholar Samuel P. Huntington indicates—despite its deplorable shortcomings—a welcome change in perspective among many in the international relations community. In this context I have suggested that we might view fundamentalism as an ideology contributing to what I have called the "War of Civilizations" (Tibi 1998, 16).

There is a fundamental difference between Islamist thought in the Arab World and how the similar ideas have been implemented in Iran. Understanding the conflict between Iran and the United States requires a keen appreciation of the fact that the Islamic state in Iran is very different from any other Muslim polity in the world. Political Islam outside Iran has essentially failed because these ideologies have made no room for a politically secular space. Politics is strictly based on the "moral virtues" of the individual believer and the society as a whole. Individualism and moral pluralism have no place in political Islam. Kari Vogt observes that Islamists reject the western democratic model because they believe that democracy inevitably decays into capitalistic exploitation, imperialism, and moral anarchy (Vogt 1993, 224). Non-utopians, however, know that "moral virtue" is in short supply anywhere in world. Political Islam has therefore only been able to pinpoint to the obvious shortcomings of the political *status quo* in the Third World without offering a sustainable alternative.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> In the West we can observe the same phenomenon among extreme radical environmentalist groups, so-called "eco-terrorists" and militant opponents of globe free trade.

In Iran, however, the principles of the revolution take precedence over Islamic utopianism. “Imam Khomeini always imposed revolutionary logic, represented in the guide’s will, if need be over the Sharia,” according to Olivier Roy. In his analysis, Iran is theoretically a secular country:

Iran has been able to find a political space, beyond Islamist and revolutionary rhetoric, that does not depend on the impossible virtue of its members, but rather functions on the basis of institutions that survive in the absence of the divine word. We are dealing here with a modern configuration, in which the state is the source of law and the source of its own legitimacy. The Iranian model is in fact a “secular” model, in the sense that it is the state that defines the place of the clergy and not the clergy who define the place of politics” (Roy 1994, 177).

Still, the founding principles of Iran’s state-ideology contain unbridgeable internal contradictions.

### **3. Measures of the Important Variables in the Theoretical Explanation**

Though I have chosen a single-case study as my research design, I nonetheless strongly believe that the inquiry should be framed as if it were a comparative study: What is the U.S.-Iranian conflict a case of? Within the social sciences a scholarly debate has been running for several years over which objects of scientific investigation are similar enough, or separate enough, for structured comparison. The debate has produced very little agreement except on the principle that we need to strive for greater clarity in what we mean by “case” and differentiate its various meanings (Ragin and Becker 1992, 4).

I propose that Iran is a case of a former great imperial power that had declined to absolute inferiority—like China and Turkey—locked in a humiliating patron-client relationship with the United States, the new international hegemon. However unlike Turkey, also a former great Muslim power, a social revolution in Iran brought a new regime to power with extreme hostility toward its former patron, the United States. The Iranian Revolution brought down the despised client-regime with the promise of restoring the international standing of the country. The only thing that stood in the way of a great national revival—according to the forces behind the revolution—was the United States.

#### **DEFINITION OF LONG-TERM HOSTILITY**

In this study, long-term hostility is defined as a protracted conflict between two parties short of war. The definition of the dependent variable, long-term hostility, has four separate components: diplomatic, economic, political, and military. The diplomatic component refers to formal diplomatic relations, bilateral informal diplomatic exchange

between the two countries, and multilateral diplomacy performed by both parties to the conflict. The economic component is predominantly concerned with U.S. unilateral economic sanctions and a wider international effort of the United States to discourage economic activity in Iran. For example, the *Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996* specifically targets Iran's revenues from its oil and gas resources, which are believed to be the cornerstone in sustaining its program for weapons of mass destruction and providing the financial means for Iran's support for international terrorist groups. The political component consists mainly of domestic politics in both the United States and Iran, and the way in which different interest groups influence the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. The military component of long-term hostility is made up of the conventional military confrontation between the United States and Iran, U.S. forward deployment in the Persian Gulf, Iran's program for acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, and Iran's direct and indirect involvement in international terrorism.

#### **CATEGORIES OF LONG-TERM ENEMIES IN U.S. DIPLOMATIC HISTORY**

Despite the passing away of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, U.S.-Iranian relations have remained virtually frozen for two decades. In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1978-79, Iran became in due course the permanent enemy of the United States. The 19<sup>th</sup> century British foreign secretary and prime minister, Lord Palmerston, famously proclaimed "Great Britain has no permanent friends; she has only permanent interests." Correspondingly, one needs to ask why the United States—the most powerful and prosperous nation of the 20th century—acquired a number of "permanent enemies."

For the sake of this analysis, we can distinguish between four separate groups of long-term enemies in U.S. diplomatic history: (1) Revolutionary states; (2) Countries in

the Muslim World; (3) Countries in the Western Hemisphere; and (4) Strongly nationalistic states. Moreover, under each main category we find several important subcategories with separate structural and historical characteristics that are very significant for a causal description of the research problem. Some enemies of the United States match the criteria of more than one category; in fact, Iran satisfies the main characteristics of three categories. I suggest that high scores in several categories correlate positively with long-term hostility.

The enduring hostility between the United States and Iran is not an exceptional case in modern American diplomatic history. Contrary to other great powers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Great Britain and France, it seems to take the United States a much longer time to formally accept some of the more undesirable outcomes of history. During 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States became involved in several bilateral relations characterized by protracted antagonism short of war.

The phenomenon of long-term hostility must also be seen in the context of the America's role as an "offshore balancer." From its undisputed position as the regional hegemon of the Western Hemisphere, the United States today seeks to project power to three regions of the world: Europe, the Persian Gulf, and Northeast Asia. In other words, the main foreign policy objective of the United States has been to prevent any single state from becoming too dominant in any one of the three regions. This policy, of course, puts the United States on direct collision course with "imperial" Iran.

Within the group of truly revolutionary states, we find the most prominent enemies of the United States throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Soviet Union, the People's

Republic of China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Iran.<sup>32</sup> The United States was the last major power to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. The U.S. Government refused for 16 years to recognize the USSR on the grounds that the communist regime routinely violated accepted norms of international behavior. The United States only very reluctantly came to terms with the *de facto* realities of the Bolshevik Revolution. Nearly immediately after the end of World War II, the two countries engaged in a Cold War that divided the world into two separate spheres along an Iron Curtain. In a lecture at the National War College in 1947, George Kennan expressed the predominant psychological character in both the Soviet threat and the desired U.S. response: "It is the shadows rather than the substance of things that move the hearts, and sway the deeds, of statesmen" (Gaddis 1982, 35). The Cold War symbolically came to an end with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, but the after-effects linger on.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union built up an impressive number of vassal states, which could at times be more belligerent than the USSR itself. However, as soon as the Bolshevik vessel was about to sink, the satellite states all promptly abandoned the communist ship with only three very significant exceptions: Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba. The United States committed its own troops to fight communist expansionism in Korea (1950-53) and Vietnam (1965-73) with massive loss of American lives. The apparent paradox is that these two countries, beside Cuba, are the only remaining states in

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<sup>32</sup> I have partly borrowed the definition of revolutionary states from Stephen Walt: "A revolution is the destruction of an independent state by members of its own society and its replacement of by a regime based on new political principles. . . . A revolution is more than just the a rearrangement of the administrative apparatus or replacement of old elite." However, I have chosen to include cases of colonial liberation. Walt also acknowledges the many similarities between national liberation movements and revolutionary organizations, see (Walt 1992, 323-24).

the world that still cling to the original communist dogma. In fact, the same argument could indeed be made about Cuba, since the U.S. during the Missile Crisis was willing to fight an all out war, including a land invasion of Cuba itself. Cuba became during the Cold War arguably the most extreme case of ideological entrapment. Just before leaving office in early 1960, President Eisenhower broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba, and they have not since been reestablished.

The “loss of China” to the communist revolutionaries under Mao tormented American domestic politics and foreign policy for more than two decades. The People’s Republic of China came into being in 1949 but it took the United States until 1972 to establish diplomatic relations with the new regime. The United States and China fought an undeclared war in Korea, and the perceived threat from Communist-China to a considerable degree motivated U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and the way the war was conducted.

The American involvement in Vietnam came to symbolize the limits of U.S. military and moral power. Many argued that George Kennan’s original concept of selectively containing Soviet expansionism had been turned into an indiscriminate crusade against communism anywhere, which the United States clearly could never win. The nation has still to come to terms with its failed policy in South-east Asia 25 years after the fall of Saigon. Though the United States and North Vietnam reached a peace accord in 1973, diplomatic relations with the united Vietnam was not established until 5 August 1995, more than two decades after the Vietnam War ended. This repetitive pattern of long-term animosity toward revolutionary regimes in U.S. diplomatic history needs to be carefully considered when analyzing U.S.-Iranian relations.

After World War II, the United States in due course acquired a number of outspoken enemies within the Muslim World. This phenomenon is most strongly correlated with U.S. support for the state of Israel—particularly after 1967—and the subsequent rise of the different ideologies of radical political Islam. The secular and spiritual ideologies of Pan-Islamism, Pan-Arabism, and political Islam have one central underlying theme in common: How to explain colonial subjugation to Western powers and the striking economic, technological, and military weaknesses of Islamic societies relative to the “inferior infidels” in the West.<sup>33</sup>

Iran belongs to a subcategory of politically ambitious countries with long memories of a great imperial past. As the sole western superpower, and now debatably the unipolar hegemon, the United States has come to epitomize to Iran a much needed external enemy, which could explain away homegrown problem, such as corruption, nepotism, and lack of democratic institutions. This is not to say that the United States has not acted to the detriment of legitimate interests of Muslim countries on several occasions. Yet, the extreme hostility toward the United States cannot be explained by U.S. behavior alone; rather, it is explained by what the United States emotionally represents. In short, the answer to the question of Iranian hostility to the United States is

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<sup>33</sup> I prefer to use the terms political, radical, or militant Islam as opposed to Islamic fundamentalism. Political, radical, or militant is a break with the past, while Islamic fundamentalism as practiced in Saudi Arabia is the exact opposite. All brands of Islamic fundamentalism, however, claim legitimacy by referring to the pure and uncorrupted societies of early Islam. Yet, so-called fundamentalist countries differ so significantly in its ideological approach on how to deal with modernity that an undifferentiated comparison would completely miss the point. As an example, Iran and the Taliban-regime in Afghanistan nearly went to war over political differences. The ruling clergy in Iran showed only utter contempt for the Taliban’s Stone Age version of Islam. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan do have a shared belief in the five pillars of Islam, but apparently they have very little else in common, not even a shared hatred for the United States.

not to be found in an analysis restricted to tangible national interests but in an examination of the emotional relationship between historical grievances and current political ambitions.

The United States had an extraordinarily ambivalent relationship with countries in the Western Hemisphere throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, few countries are directly hostile to the United States on the diplomatic level; however, on the popular level, we can observe widespread dislike among people in all walks of life of the dominant role the U.S. government has played in the hemisphere. At same time, we can observe a love for American culture and values. Mexico is probably the best example of this type of ambivalent bipolar relationship. Lately, the democratically elected president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, has made anti-American slur an integral part of his popular support.

This resentment has its historical roots in the power politics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though it was adopted very reluctantly and the government was too weak to effectively enforce it for many years, the Monroe doctrine became the cornerstone of U.S. *realpolitik* in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>34</sup> The doctrine unilaterally declared all of the Americas within the exclusive U.S. sphere of interest with the exception of existing European colonies in the Western Hemisphere. With the emergence of the United States as a world power in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States declared its right to intervene in the internal affairs of Latin American countries due to “wrongdoings” or “mismanagement.” These guiding principles of U.S. foreign policy were somewhat modified during Franklin

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<sup>34</sup> For an excellent account of how domestic American politics have influenced American foreign policy, see (May 1975).

Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor" policy. Yet, the United States has in practice retained its right to act unilaterally when needed. Despite its declared good intentions, the Monroe doctrine has by many countries in Latin America come to symbolize the semi-colonial status of the continent.

Lastly, a diverse group of highly nationalistic countries have over the years continued to have tense relationships with the United States. France, Japan, and Greece are nominally close allies of the United States but within some fora they act as if they were the adversaries of the United States. These countries have a strong internal sense of common ethnic ancestry, clearly defined historical memories, and distinct emphasis on common cultural values such as language, customs, or religion. In the academic literature, high score on these independent variables correlates positively with the strongest form of nationalism: ethno-nationalism.<sup>35</sup> A somewhat simplistic synthesis of the argument predicts that if people have a strong sense of belonging to an "in-group," they will also find it intuitively much easier to dislike competing "out-groups."

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<sup>35</sup> See, (Hutchinson and Smith 1994) or (Hutchinson and Smith 1996). For a more detailed analysis of ethnic groups and conflict, see (Horowitz 1985).

#### **4. The Research Design, the Research Methods, and the Scope of Work**

The research design consists of four main components:

- (1) A theoretical framework and associated pattern-models to guide the inquiry
- (2) Detailed research questions for structured data collection
- (3) Narrative description of the independent variables and the dependant variable
- (4) A macro-causal or macro-historical analysis and interpretation of the causal chain

A proper research design should be selected according to the characteristics of the research problem. The rigorous hypothesis-testing methodology can turn out to be a serious drawback when applied to a research problem that is theoretically under-developed. Consequently, I have chosen a narrative, in-depth, single-case study as my research format. Nevertheless, the research design is intentionally tailored to fit a larger comparative research design in future research.

A descriptive research problem does not usually have a set of clearly defined dependent and independent variables. As Julian Simon points out, “the absence of a limited number of well-defined variables distinguishes descriptive research from other types of research” (Simon 1969, 53). Description or descriptive inference is far from a clear-cut task since it entails selection from an infinite number of observations. The researcher should, if possible, have a detailed plan that shows how empirical data have

been collected according to a set of hypotheses/propositions and detailed research questions.<sup>36</sup>

#### CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF RESEARCH DESIGN

Proper causal inference is not the primary goal of my research project. Though causal models are extremely useful for clarifying our thinking, quasi-mathematical models in international relations have thus far rarely made accurate predictions about the real world. Our theoretical understanding of causality in international relations has not progressed far enough to justify the use of the mathematical and statistical tools that come with formal causality. U.S.-Iranian hostility is conceptually still so poorly understood that we are in fact unable to reliably test the validity of our theoretical propositions. Even so, my research methodology will to the extent possible imitate the standards of causal inference because further research into the research puzzle will

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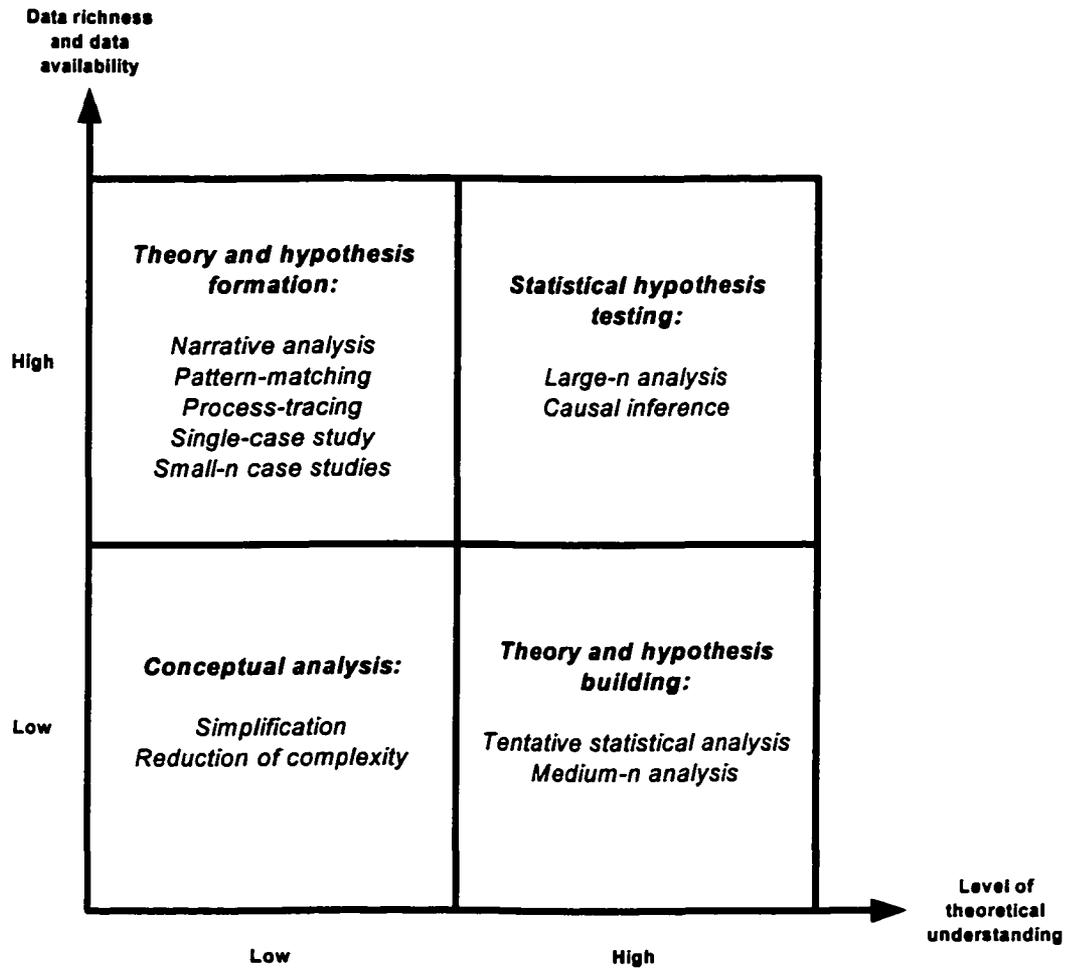
<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, there is very little agreement in the scientific literature on a concise definition of neither "theory" nor "hypothesis," or on the consistent use of the same terminology. The terminology is often used interchangeably. According to Simon, "a hypothesis is not the same as theory, though many writers use the two terms interchangeably." "A hypothesis is a single statement that attempts to explain or to predict a single phenomenon, whereas a theory is an entire system of thought that refers to many phenomena and whose parts can be related to one another in deductive logical form" (Simon 1969, 37). Fred Kerlinger comes in my view closest to a concise and practical definition: "A theory is a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena. . . . A hypothesis is a conjectural statement, a tentative proposition, about the relation between two or more observed (sometimes unobservable, especially in psychology and education) phenomena or variables. . . . [H]ypothesis statements contain two or more variables that are measurable or potentially measurable and that they specify how the variables are related. . . . A hypothesis is a prediction" (Kerlinger 1973, 11, 14, 20, and 28). In my study, a hypothesis is the operationalization of my theoretical model in the form of propositions about specific relationships between the independent and dependent variables, phrased in such a way that these propositions can be empirical measured and tested, if possible.

benefit greatly from such an approach. In short, a too rigorous quasi-mathematical theoretical framework is an inappropriate approach to my particular research problem.

There is unfortunately a wide scientific gap between a purely historical description of historical events and the academic school of quasi-statistical hypothesis testing that needs to be resolved. Historical description usually involves contextual causality, which has been fervently detested by the hypothesis-testing school of international relations. Yet, James Mahoney concludes that a scholarly consensus has emerged that a narrative analysis of the research problem can be a useful tool for assessing causality in situations where “temporal sequencing, particular events, and path dependence must be taken into account” (Mahoney 1999, 1164).

The hypothesis-testing approach has in my view been allowed to dominate research designs in the social sciences to the exclusion of alternative strategies that are more appropriate to the research problem at hand. Many scholars strongly object to the effort to squeeze all research under the hypothesis-testing straightjacket. Kendall and Lazarsfeld believe that “our thinking is rarely far enough progressed to enable us to start out with a sharply formulated hypothesis.” Roberts argues, “hypotheses are likely to be no more than hunches as to where to look for sharper hypotheses” (Simon 1969, 63-64). Kirk and Miller make the point that “hypothesis testing is not the only research activity in any scientific discipline. Indeed, the most dramatic discoveries necessarily come about some other way, because in order to test a hypothesis, the investigator must already know what it is he or she is going to discover” (Kirk and Miller 1986, 17). In George and McKeown’s analysis, “the orthodox logic is of little use when one lacks the ingredients upon which its success depends—a reasonably explicit and well developed theory, and

enough data to test the theory using standard statistical methods” (George and McKeown 1985, 54).



Model 4: Criteria for selection of research design<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Theory and hypothesis formation: Skocpol’s impressive work on social revolutions has probably been scrutinized more than any other scholarly work in social science. A majority of critics have criticized the unclear and subjective criteria for selection of historical case—Russia, France, and China (Skocpol 1979).

Theory and hypothesis building: Paul Huth and Bruce Russett’s work on general deterrence between enduring rivals from 1993 is an example of what I would like to call “methodological over-kill.” Unfortunately, the study is of meager value to anybody in the policy world. Through a series of sophisticated regression analysis, the authors arrive at the following conclusion: “The results of a pooled time-series probit analysis indicate that each model includes important elements of truth” (Huth and Russett 1993).

## VALIDITY

A single-case study cannot prove scientific inference. *Large-n* studies should always yield more reliable estimates of the dependant variable in question. A majority of social scientists have traditionally regarded single-case and *small-n* case studies the weakest scientific methods. Yet, the *large-n* approach in the social sciences has serious drawbacks. Van Evera argues convincingly, “large-n provides little or no new insight into the causal process that comprises the hypothesis’ explanation, nor does it generate data that could be used to infer or test explanations of the process” (Van Evera 1997, 55) and (Bennett 1997). George and McKeown draw attention to what is lost in what they call traditional quasi-experimental research when each case is reduced to a single data point. They argue that the “naked” value of the final outcome of the dependent variable cannot by itself explain the phenomenon. The explanation of the puzzle must also account for the stream of behavior leading up to the final outcome. The *large-n* research design fails to benefit from the fine and important historical details derived from within-case analysis, and is particularly ill suited for an exploratory research design and for theory creation (George and McKeown 1985). In short, the researcher can easily make the mistake of

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Statistical hypothesis testing: Ted Gurr’s large research project on ethno-political conflicts is an example that highlights the vulnerability the quantitative approach to problems in social science (Gurr and Harff 1994). From 233 cases of ethno-political conflict, the study deduces that: “Communal conflicts across fault lines between civilizations and religious traditions are more intense than others but have not increased in relative frequency or severity since the end of the Cold War.” However, the collection of empirical data stopped before the horrible genocide in Rwanda. It is reason to believe that the scientific conclusions would be significantly altered if we had included the Rwanda-case to the selection frame. Also, one also needs to question the classification criteria. In addition, I will argue that major conflicts—such as Yugoslavia, Angola, Afghanistan, and the recent conflict in the Congo—also fall into several other categories of conflict clearly outside the paradigm of ethno-political conflicts. I do not in any way question the overall validity of the study; I merely draw attention to how statistically vulnerable the quasi-mathematical approach to social conflict is.

comparing “apples” with “oranges” if the finer contextual aspects of causal patterns are not deeply understood.

#### **NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE CAUSAL CHAIN**

Descriptive research is usually the jumping-off point for the study of new areas in social sciences or new approaches to long-standing research problems that have not been adequately explained. Descriptive research is separate from other types of research by the fact that the research problem has not been reduced to a limited number of well-specified variables. Within descriptive research, King, Keohane, and Verba distinguish between description—the collection of facts or summarizing of historical details—from descriptive inference, which is defined as “the process of understanding an unobserved phenomenon on the basis of a set of observations” (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 55). Despite the fact that we have made numerous observations of the hostility between the Iran and the United States since 1979, the theoretical explanation of the phenomenon is so poorly understood that we in fact have not measured the true nature of hostility between the United States and Iran with any degree of certainty. In this sense the long-term hostility between the United States and Iran is an “unobserved phenomenon.”

The goal of descriptive research is to distinguish between the systematic components and the nonsystematic components of phenomena. The systematic component, as the term suggest, has a much higher probability of occurring in similar causal chains or patterns than the non-systematic or idiosyncratic features of one particular phenomenon. Yet, it is absolutely necessary to bear in mind that the systematic component is not inherently more important than the non-systematic in explaining the phenomenon. Furthermore, how does one in practice distinguish the systematic from

nonsystematic events? For example, was the *coup d'état* of 1953 against Prime Minister Mosaddeq an inevitable by-product of the Cold War or a product of exceptional Iranian circumstances? Was the taking of U.S. hostages in Tehran in 1979 a completely unique event in the history of U.S.-Iranian relations or was it a predictable outcome of the Iranian Revolution? Was the Iranian Revolution truly the first Islamic revolution in history or was it just another violent reaction to foreign economic, political and cultural dominance?

#### HISTORICAL PROCESS-TRACING

George and McKeown suggest a separate but closely related methodology to historical description—the process-tracing procedure—to deal with the difficulties associated with unobserved contextual variables (George 1979) and (George and McKeown 1985). In George and McKeown's analytical framework, process-tracing entails an attempt to reconstruct both Iran's and United States' perception and misperception of the events that were supposed to have taken place. It is also an attempt to develop a theory of how and why the actors conduct themselves the way that they did. Consequently, the process-tracing procedure differs sharply with *large-n* analysis in two important ways. First, a well-developed theory is not a required prerequisite. Second, the emphasis is not on testing causal hypothesis but on mapping actual behavioral patterns. Thus, the process-tracing procedure reduces the difficulties associated with unobserved contextual variables when analyzing human decision-making. In short, the focus of this study is predominantly on mapping the historical sequence of the causal chain.

This study is very different from a quasi-statistical research design where each case is represented as a single data point. In contrast, the construction of a spider web is a

proper visual analogy of how process-tracing attempts to capture temporal “stream of behavior” by building up a sequential network. “The researcher assembles bits and pieces of evidence into a pattern; whether a piece is to be changed or added depends on whether the change fits with what already has been constructed, and whether it strengthens the web’s structure” (George and McKeown 1985, 36). As the procedure’s name implies, one of the objectives of process-tracing is to capture the causal chain and decision-making process by examining how various initial conditions are translated into actions taken by each actor. “The process-tracing approach attempts to uncover what stimuli the actors attend to; the decision process that makes use of these stimuli to arrive at decisions; the actual behavior that then occurs; the effect of various institutional arrangements on attention, processing, and behavior; and the effect of other variables of interest on attention, processing, and behavior” (George and McKeown 1985, 36).

#### **COUNTER-FACTUALS**

In my study, I have implicitly made use of counterfactuals, which is a methodology that effectively complements a narrative description and pattern-matching across historical cases. Counterfactuals are usually framed in the form of “if not (x) then (z)” statements. As an example, despite the vilification of the Islamic Republic of Iran, some scholars argue that the foreign policy of a secular government in Teheran during the same period would not have differed significantly from the policy of the current regime with the exception of the prevailing policy on terrorism and Israel’s right to exist, i.e. if not (Iranian Revolution) then (Iranian foreign policy almost the same) (Chubin 1993, 79). Similarly, one could speculate about the directions of history if Moscow had seriously wanted to incorporate Iran into the Soviet block in 1946, or if the die-hard revolutionary

Mehdi Hashemi had not told the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Shiraa* that Robert MacFarlane and Oliver North had paid Tehran a secret visit in May of 1986 (Herrman and Fischerkeller 1996). Tetlock and Belkin have suggest that there are five ideal style methodologies and six criteria for evaluating counterfactual thought experiments in world politics, of which the ideographic and mental-simulation techniques are most applicable for this study (Tetlock and Belkin 1996).

#### COLLECTION OF RESEARCH DATA

The principal source of information in my research is the existing literature on Iranian history and U.S.-Iranian diplomatic relations. Julian Simon argues: “Classification research is different from other types of research in that one does not usually go out and collect new data for a classification study. Rather one is likely to work with existing data, sorting it into a classification that makes sense of it” (Simon 1969, 57). I have, where needed, consulted primary sources. For example, the Iranian government decided in 1963-64 to grant legal immunity to American military personnel on Iran soil. This was a crucial turning point in unifying the opposition against the Shah. Ayatollah Khomeini seized the opportunity to deliver a speech on 26 October 1964 in Qom. He equated the treaty with the humiliating capitulation bills imposed by Western colonial powers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century though the actual bill was in fact a near blueprint of a standardized legal arrangement that was widely used within the NATO alliance. In this case, and with similar historical precipitant, I have consulted primary sources to determine the actual intent of the actors. Furthermore, field research in Iran has been an important element in my research design. During my stay in Iran in August-September of

2000, I interviewed a significant number of individuals: scholars, intellectuals, officials, and foreign diplomats.

#### **SCOPE OF WORK**

The analysis and interpretation of my research project is in the end essentially one of macro-historical pattern matching. Pattern identification and matching, although primarily descriptive in nature, serves an explanatory function because it helps bring a complex and multidimensional process into perspective. Herbert Kritzer argues, “the core of the analytical process in qualitative research revolves around pattern identification and pattern matching. . . . Pattern matching involves checking for regularities in the data, with the analyst trying to determine whether a hypothesized pattern is in fact present” (Kritzer 1994, 701). The purpose of pattern matching is therefore to confirm the regularities that the analyst believes to be present are in fact present. In social science, categorizing the phenomenon into a small number of typologies usually precedes translating the research problem into a quasi-mathematical causal representation of the phenomenon, which will be the scope of future research. The historical description ends with Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941. U.S. forces later joined the two imperial powers’ occupation of Iran, and thus the United States was for the first time linked to Iran’s traditional enemies.

## **Chapter II: THE GREAT PERSIAN EMPIRE**

### **THE LEGACY OF IRAN'S NATIONAL HISTORY**

In the context of this dissertation, the term “Iran’s national history” means the official history writing sponsored by the authorities and/or the way in which common Iranians have chosen to interpret their own history. In a country like Iran, with severe restrictions on social discourse, what scholars can factually deduct from historical sources is most of the time far less important to history’s impact on current affairs than what the regime makes people believe or simply what the common man wants to remember about things past. I make the assumption that each individual decision maker’s interpretation of history together with the shared collective memory are deeply embedded in the conduct of a country’s foreign policy. Certain conflicts may not be remembered, but many of the fundamental variables seem to have been transferred from one ruling dynasty to another.

In the case of Iran, very few primary historical sources have actually survived. It is nevertheless possible in many instances to say what in fact did happen but nearly impossible to determine why actors behaved in the manner that they did. We are usually left guessing what was the intent behind certain events. Iran’s national history is therefore partly factual, partly fictional, partly mythical, but always doctored by whichever regime is in power.

The conflict between Iran and the United States is closely linked to Iran’s national history. I suggest that the weight of Iran’s historical legacies to a large extent has determined the outcome of U.S.-Iranian relations after World War II. Today, hard-felt emotions, passions, and perceptions among people on both sides of the conflict clearly

drive the conflict. Psychological concepts such as pride, dignity, arrogance, humiliation, insecurity, justice, and morality have in Iran been shaped by nearly 3,000 years of recorded history. I propose that these emotional variables often carry more weight than the same the psychological concepts at play in the United States. In short, we need to see Iran's conflict with the United States in the context of a long sequence of major powers competing with Iran for political, cultural and spiritual hegemony in the Middle East.

There are several reasons why Iran's long history is so important for an understanding of the conflict between Iran and the United States. First, there are certain patterns of state behavior that recur throughout Iran's history. In many ways Iran's *raison d'état* has not changed much since ancient times. Second, Iran's religious and cultural heritage has shaped every single ruling dynasty. The formal legitimacy of the ruling order plays has always played a crucial role in the politics of Iran, and the Islamic Republic is no exception. Third, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the grandeur of Iran's imperial past was deliberately used to forge a sense of national pride and a common accord on what constitutes Iran's national identity. Iran today strongly believes—rightly or wrongly—that it should play a larger role on the international arena. In sum, there is good reason to believe that Iran's historical experience informs the ruling clergy in Tehran that the struggle with the United States is just another conflict against a long string of powerful external enemies.

To facilitate my analysis, the history of Iran may be divided into four separate periods: (1) The prehistoric period; (2) The great imperial epoch of the Achaemenian, Parthian, and Sasanian empires from 550 B.C. to A.D. 642; (3) The dark period of foreign domination—the Arab, Turkish, and Mongol conquests—in the period between

642 to 1501; and, (4) Iran's modern history during the reigns of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722/36), the Qajar dynasty (1779-1925), the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-79), and the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979-present).

<b>Achaemenian empire</b>	550	330	
<b>Greek rule</b>	330	129	
<b>Parthian empire</b>	247 BC	AD 224	
<b>Sasanian empire</b>	224	651	
<b>Arab caliphates</b>	636	945	
<b>Iranian 'Intermezzo'</b>	821	1055	
<b>Turkish/Mongol rule</b>	1044	1508	
<b>Safavid dynasty</b>	1501	1736	
<b>Qajar dynasty</b>	1779	1925	
<b>Pahlavi dynasty</b>	1925	1979	
<b>Islamic Republic</b>	1979	present	

Table 3: Timeline of Iran's ruling dynasties, 550 B.C.-A.D. 2001

## **1. The Achaemenian Empire: 550-330 B.C.**

### **THE UNIPOLAR HEGEMON OF THE ANCIENT WORLD: CONQUEST AND LEGITIMACY**

The Achaemenian dynasty founded the first Persian empire, which was the first and largest empire in the world of its kind until the coming of the Chinese and Roman empires. In the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., a stable “international” system had developed in the ancient civilized world of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East after Assyria’s hegemony had been broken. The four major regional powers of this period—Lydia, Media, Babylon, and Egypt—all played by rules of classical balance-of-power politics. The intense rivalry, however, allowed a minor contender from Fars, the Achaemenian dynasty, to challenge the political *status quo*. The Achaemenian dynasty became the undisputed hegemon of the ancient world in the period between 550-525 B.C. Cyrus the Great (reigned 558-529) was able to unite a constellation of various Persian and Iranian groups under his leadership. The alliance eventually enabled Cyrus to overthrow the powerful Median kingdom in 550, to subdue Lydia about 545, and to capture Babylon in 539.

In the last decade of his reign, Cyrus continued to expand and consolidate his conquests, though the Achaemenian empire became increasingly bogged down with inconclusive warfare against the tribes from Central Asia. Evidence suggests that Cyrus lost his life in 529 fighting nomadic warriors somewhere in the historical region of

Transoxania.<sup>38</sup> Further expansion of the empire was therefore left to Cyrus' son, Cambyses II. Cambyses II, who reigned 529-522, led the conquest and occupation of Egypt in 525 B.C. but the campaigns that he launched from Egypt all failed miserably.

The legitimacy of the ruler has always been an extremely important concept in the politics of Iran. In the Perso-Iranian tradition, the king's rule was formally legitimate if it satisfied three separate criteria. First, and in accordance with Iranian tribal practice, the genealogy of the potential monarch was critical. Cyrus derived his legitimacy as a descendant of Achaemenes, the legendary Persian icon and king of ancient Anshan. Royal lineage (or lineage from Imam Ali in Islamic times) has always been a critical component in the Iranian concept of divine right kingship. The royal Iranian title, "king of kings," is often thought to signify a supreme king overseeing lesser provincial kings. The title, however, could also signify descent from a line of proper kings (Daniel 2000, 37).

Second, the regent ruled by divine right. The king was in the Near Eastern tradition delegated absolute power by the grace of god. This gave the monarch's legitimacy an aura of heavenly fairness and justice. Darius, in particular, seems to have earned himself a distinguished reputation for fighting oppression and injustice.

Third, the king had to prove himself in battle. The Achaemenian ruler relied first and foremost on family bonds in military matters. Persians made up the core of the elite standing army unit, the Ten Thousand Immortals. In general, kinship and ethnicity

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<sup>38</sup> Transoxania, also called Turkistan, is an area in Central Asia located east of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) and west of the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya), roughly corresponding to present-day Uzbekistan and parts of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Warring nomadic peoples from Central Asia have repeatedly invaded Iran.

appears to have carried much more weight than social class in the administration of the empire. The Achaemenian state structure was in many important aspects modeled on a tribal social order rather than the sedentary political tradition of the Near East.

A very significant, but unprecedented aspect of Cyrus' rule was his tolerance of the various religious practices of the conquered nations. It was a common practice among empire builders of that time to affirm their control over new territories by violently suppressing indigenous religious rituals. Cyrus, however, not only allowed his new subjects to continue to freely worship their gods, but he also restored the rights of previously suppressed communities. The most famous example of this policy, of course, is that Cyrus returned the Jews to Israel that had been held captive at Babylon. Cyrus' historical legacy, therefore, became that of an enlightened conqueror who built an unprecedented empire without making unnecessary enemies.

Darius I (reigned 522-485 B.C.) was the ruler who engineered the great Persian empire. He continued the energetic and expansionist foreign policy of his predecessors. Successful campaigns to the east added substantial areas of the northern Indian subcontinent to the growing Persian empire. From available historical sources it seems as if permanent Persian rule did not extend far beyond the river Indus (Gershevitch 1985, 250).

The Persian empire expanded rapidly despite severe internal instability. Darius crushed all together eleven major revolts, which led him to design and perfect administrative institutions and transparent systems that could preserve his vast empire. Darius divided the Achaemenian empire into twenty provinces each headed by a *satrap* who was appointed by the king. Darius placed important checks and balances on the



## **THE PERSIAN-GREEK CONFLICT: 492-330 B.C.**

Expansion to the far west of the Achaemenian homelands began around 516 with an incursion into the Balkans. Darius himself led an army into Europe across a boat bridge over the Bosphorus. It is often assumed that the primary motive of the Persian invasion of Europe was to launch a rear attack against the nomadic Scythians north of the river Danube. Some has also argued that the ultimate strategic objective of Darius' campaign was to cut trading routes with between Greece proper and the Greek city-states along the Black Sea littoral, which supplied a large share of the grain consumption in Greece self.

Greek sources want us to believe that the Scythians nearly defeated the Persian, but there is little evidence to support that this in fact was the case (Cook 1983, 63). It is more likely that the Scythians wisely evaded any forced encounter with the Persians to the great dismay of Darius. Darius seems to have returned to Asia over the Hellespont (Dardanelles) clearly frustrated that his campaign came to no avail. The first Persian military campaign into Europe was therefore only a precursor to Darius' ultimate design on Greece, which was not conceived of before the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

What came to known as the Persian wars started in 492. Athens had in Darius' mind humiliated Persian pride to such an extent that he publicly committed himself to severely punish the Greek city-state. Despite the military might at Darius' disposal, a small Persian expeditionary force was routed at the Battle of Marathon in 490. The first major military encounter with Athens on the Greek mainland sent an unambiguous message back to Persia that conquering this part of the world would require a massive and coordinated military effort. However, a revolt in Egypt drew Persian resources away

from the pending encounter on the Greek peninsula. Darius also died in 486 before the Persians were ready for the ultimate show-down with the Greek world.

Darius' son, Xerxes I (reigned 486-465), was therefore entrusted with the task to subdue Greece. The Achaemenian empire was for several years completely consumed by the preparations for the next war, according to Herodotus. The Persians launched their grand invasion in the summer of 480, which initially resulted in the sacking of Athens and the burning of the Acropolis. Still, the massive Persian offensive came to a halt after a series of military setbacks of which the Battle of Plataea and the Battle of Mycale were the most decisive. Xerxes' political leadership had alienated his allies to an extent that the Persian defeat became inevitable.

Xerxes for the most part lost interest in foreign policy after his historical failure, and he turned his attention to religious matters where he appears to have been a zealot. Harem intrigues, which led to his assassination in 465, would little by little eat away the strength and vitality of the Achaemenian empire. The death of Xerxes came to signify a crucial turning point in Achaemenian history. Intermittent moments of political and military greatness took place under some of Xerxes' successors, but they were unfortunately too few and far between to save the empire from a steady decline.

A recurring theme in Iranian military history has been a noticeable disparity between expectations and capabilities; last observed during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88. The Persians generally took the war effort extremely seriously. In John Manuel Cook's observation, "conquest was a matter of royal and national honour; and it was axiomatic that Persian arms must prevail" (Cook 1983, 125). Yet, a pattern emerged in the years that followed the first major military encounter between Greek and Persian forces. The

less organized and less disciplined Persian units often collapsed when strong leadership was not forthcoming in battles against heavily armed and disciplined Greek foot soldiers, the *hoplites*, who fought in close phalanx formations. The Persians apparently came to recognize that Greek soldiers were among the best in the world since they increasingly came to rely on Greek mercenaries for the defense of the empire.

Imperial overstretch is, of course, not a unique Iranian phenomenon. In world history there exists a natural propensity among conquerors to extend their conquests beyond reasonable expectations, and often uncorrelated with worldly greed. The sheer lust for power is in Andrew Robert Burn's analysis often unrelated to other expressions of the human character:

Most men love power for its own sake, and in any man who has attained a position of great power against opposition—any man who, therefore, “has what it takes” to do such a thing—the desire to extend that power may be taken for granted. The desires to build, to construct, to tidy things up, or to direct other people for their own good (the manifestation of a paternal instinct) are often supposed to be put forward as mere rationalisations of the lust for power; but this is often probably unfair. The passion to construct or arrange, equally normal in *homo faber* and found often in the most disinterested forms, as in artists and poets, is, rather, found *along with* the lust for power quite as normally as without it. The man who enjoys exercising power, even ruthlessly, while alleging like Darius that he is doing God service, is not always a hypocrite (Burn 1962, 127).

## **REALPOLITIK AND IMPERIAL DECLINE**

In the years that followed the Persian-Greek war, the Achaemenians scaled down their military ambitions in the west, and they by-and-large avoided embroilment in the Peloponnesian War. The Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens was intermittently in progress from 460 to 404. The Persians skillfully played to their own advantage the two major antagonists against each other by first bribing one Greek city-state and then another. The Achaemenians shamelessly interfered in Greek internal affairs like any true hegemon. Initially the Persians encouraged Athens against Sparta. Then after the catastrophic Athenian campaign against Syracuse in 413, the Persians intervened on Sparta's side. In the end, Achaemenian gold coins and Spartan armed forces sealed Athens' fate in 404. The Persians, however, did not reap the ultimate rewards of their political intrigues.

The Achaemenian empire continued to play the role of the ancient world's superpower during the long reign of Artaxerxes II (reigned 404-359). Despite Persia's superior standing in the ancient world, the forty-six years reign of Artaxerxes was an uninterrupted weakening of imperial authority. The most memorable event of his lengthy rule was the war with Sparta from 400 B.C. over who should control the Greek cities in Asia Minor. Sparta's main tactic was to scheme various Achaemenian *satraps* (governors) in Asia Minor against each other and the central government. The Persian counterstrategy was to finance rebellions within Sparta's sphere of influence. In the long run the Persian policy prevailed and Sparta was forced on the defensive.

The Achaemenian empire finally put its weight behind a revived Athens. The Persians were able to impose some sort of balance-of-power within the bitterly divided

Greek civilization in the eastern Mediterranean. On the request of the Greeks themselves, Artaxerxes was given the mandate to dictate the so-called King's Peace of 387-386, whereby the conflict was terminated on conditions favorable to Persian interests. The Greek antagonists concluded the conflict by renouncing any future territorial claims in Asia Minor in addition to freezing the *status quo* in Greece itself.

In the following years Persia's attention was again drawn away from Greek affairs. In the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., the Achaemenians were again busy restoring control over their imperial possessions in Egypt, which had *de facto* been lost since 405. Egypt was finally re-conquered after numerous attempts in 343. But in the reign of Artaxerxes III (reigned 359-337) succession disputes reached astronomical proportions. Plot and counterplot, harem intrigues, and political assassination threatened to destroy the empire.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Achaemenian foreign policy failed to deal with the rising threat of a new Greek contender, which ultimately led to the downfall of the whole Persian empire. The Persian initially turned down Athens' request for military assistance against the rising power of Philip II, king of Macedonia. As a result, Philip expanded his supremacy to all of Greece. In 340 Philip of Macedon broke an uneasy non-aggression pact with the Persians. He later declared an all-out war against Persia in a session of the Congress of Corinth. This time the Persians found themselves fighting in Thrace without a local Greek ally. Real disaster followed when Alexander the Great, Philip's son, defeated a large Persian army near the Sea of Marmara in May of 334. The Macedonians then marched on to conquer Persepolis in 330 B.C. The last Achaemenian emperor was imprisoned and murdered by one of his own *satraps* while fleeing the Greek invaders.

## **SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE EMPIRE**

History writing has always been the prerogative of the vanquisher. Our historical sources are mostly of Greek origin, and they often exhibit unveiled prejudice against the Persians in general. When it comes to providing an accurate picture of the Achaemenians, John Manuel Cook claims that Thucydides' accounts of the Persian are "a source of confusion rather than enlightenment" (Cook 1983, 20). Herodotus, however, stands out as a diligent and reasonably reliable source of information, and it appears that Herodotus must have based some of his accounts on Persian primary sources. Nevertheless, he almost certainly never traveled as far as the central provinces of the Achaemenian empire.

It is true that the latter part of the Achaemenian empire was plagued by rebellions, intrigues at the court, countless murders of members of the royal family, weak kings trapped in the harem, missed opportunities, and foolish policies. Yet, no imperial rule could have lasted so long, with so much success, in face of so many obstacles as the Achaemenians, without some inherent and first-class qualities. Despite some of its apparent shortcomings, the Achaemenian empire came to serve as a brilliant model for successive world empires on how to govern a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious empire to the mutual advantage of the ruler and his subjects.

The Achaemenian empire has had a lasting influence on Iranian politics and culture. Succession to the throne was fairly well organized in Achaemenian times. In accordance with the prevailing customs, the nobility of the warrior class elected the king from a designated family. The king was sacred with a royal cult attached to his persona. At the court, the "king of kings" surrounded himself with a group of powerful hereditary

landholders, the higher echelons of the armed forces, a sizable harem, religious dignitaries, and a bureaucracy that kept the whole business together. A smaller version of the court accompanied the shah when he traveled in the various provinces of the empire. The preferred model of organizing, monitoring, and controlling the empire evolved naturally with the changing political and military circumstances of the ancient world, and the Persians easily adopted social and political ideas from the peoples they conquered. In fact, the original Achaemenian concept of a Persian monarchical order survived and has inspired every single ruling Iranian dynasty for more than 2,500 years. When Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi crowned himself Shah of Iran in extraordinary extravagant ceremony, it was also an effort to associate himself with the great Achaemenian kings.

The Achaemenians ruled with unprecedented creative tolerance over a large geographic area encompassing a highly heterogeneous mix of people. The Achaemenian dynasty succeeded in leaving behind a lasting historical legacy on how to run a vast centralized multi-ethnic empire. Still Achaemenian authority was generally applied quite lightly on its citizen. It was the deliberate policy of Cyrus and Darius to allow conquered nations to hold on to their own religion, customs, and their methods of doing business. In some instances, occupied nations were even permitted to retain their form of government.

The rule of law played a vital role in the administration of the empire. Historical accounts of the Persian justice system are plentiful in Greek sources. Darius, in particular, wanted to be remembered as the great lawgiver. In hindsight, some historians argue that Achaemenian rule—particularly in the last decades of the dynasty's life span—was too lenient in their dealings with insubordination among its subject peoples. Disobedience

was too often pardoned and not cruelly punished in agreement with the prevail custom of this period.

The Islamic Republic exhibits some tolerant features and inclusive rule reminiscent of Achaemenian governance; yet, many other important aspects of Achaemenian governance have clearly been lost to today's ruling clergy in Tehran.<sup>39</sup> The Islamic republic formally abolished the monarchy, and radical Islam has on ideological grounds denounced Iran's pre-Islamic history. Yet, one can argue that the clergy in practice has never removed itself from the ancient Achaemenian monarchical principles of uniting spiritual and temporal power in one single governing body. The legacy of the Achaemenian empire has in several important aspects served as the root model for Iran as a nation state. Iran has experienced numerous and devastating setbacks but its imperial inheritance has endured to this day. Iran has never renounced its ambition of being the undisputed power in the region between the Levant and Central Asia. Today, Iran is once again seeking to reassert its historical position as the pivotal power in the politics of the Middle East and Central Asia.

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<sup>39</sup> Achaemenid customs or traditional Islamic thought such as the concept *Ahl al-Kitab* or "People of the Book," have not prevented the Islamic Republic from trying to eliminate the Jewish and Baha'i communities.

## **2. Alexander the Great and the Seleucid Dynasty: 330-129 B.C.**

### **FOREIGN DOMINATION AND IRANIAN RESILIENCE: PARALLELS TO MODERN IRANIAN**

#### **HISTORY**

The introduction of Greek culture, or Hellenism, in Persia has many historical parallels to Westernization of Iran in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Iranians had not only lost their political independence in the wake of Alexander the Great's conquest of the Achaemenian empire, but they had also been deprived of their symbols, traditions and institutions associated with Achaemenian state authority. Only a few decades after the Achaemenian state had vanished, Iran's social elite actively embraced Greek customs, language, state procedures, and urbanized way of living (Yarshater 1983, xxiv).

The lower stratum of society, however, did not welcome Greek rule and they instead, "turned to the local authorities for guidance and gave their allegiance to them" (Frye 1963, 130). In this situation, the general population went back to the extended family, the clan, or the tribe for cultural identity. These decentralized institutions of power had no imperial pretensions. The military authority of Alexander's successor state was therefore never seriously challenged. Only when the Arsacid dynasty merged a strong sense of tribal identity with the desire for imperial power, were the days of Greek rule numbered.

The historical sources do not provide us with much information on the psychological aspects of the Greek conquest of Iran. Huge holes in our knowledge base make a logical and well-organized narrative nearly impossible. However, a few records

have survived and together with some circumstantial evidence they give us with a tiny bit of insight into these aspects of the foreign occupation. Together these sources point to the confusion and profound distress among ordinary people caused by the rapid fall of the immense physical posture of the Achaemenian state.

Psychologically, one can clearly imagine how the defeat must have had a tremendous impact on the minds of Iranians who had thought of themselves as the masters of the world. The collective trauma of suddenly being subjected to foreign rule is best captured in the Zoroastrian Pahlavi literature, which portrays Alexander as, “the destroyer of fire-temples, the burner of the holy scriptures, and the murderer of the magi” (Yarshater 1983). Sasanian-era history writing accuses Alexander for having introduced the “petty kings system” and for having caused the disunity of Iran. Yet, it is still an open question how much of this was a majority opinion at the time of the Greek occupation, or how much was the creative work of Persian scribes with a yearning for their former prestige and influence.

#### **ALEXANDER'S OCCUPATION POLICIES**

Alexander the Great set out to subdue the entire Achaemenian empire in 336 B.C., but by the time he had completed his conquest in 325 his notion of imperial rule had changed radically. The Achaemenians had since the expansionist policies of Xerxes enjoyed a long period of relative peace. During this period the Persian military seems to have become weak and complacent. In fact, the Achaemenian army that attempted to repulse Alexander's invasion force was composed of a substantial contingent of Greek mercenaries. The Persian cavalry was still superior but these units were too few in numbers to tilt the scale in favor of the Achaemenians.

In three separate battles—the Granicus river crossing (334), Issus (333), and Gaugamela (331)—the fate of the Persian empire was sealed. The burning of the splendid royal palace at Persepolis in 330 symbolized the passing of the old Indo-Iranian political order and the introduction of Greek civilization into this part of the world. It also signaled the end of a period of imperial greatness and the coming of an era of foreign dominance and Iranian disunity. Though Greek and Macedonian soldiers were encouraged to settle in large numbers throughout Mesopotamia and on the Iranian plateau, Alexander's occupation policies soon changed from forced colonization to voluntary incorporation.

Unlike most great conquerors in world history, Alexander quickly managed to unite and unify the conqueror and the vanquished. His generosity greatly helped to reconcile the resentment that naturally existed among the Iranian elite after the fall of the empire. Alexander was well versed in the relatively tolerant mode of governance by which the Achaemenians had successfully maintained unity and stability within their multi-ethnic empire. But Alexander went one step further by actually relying on the conquered people, a policy the Achaemenian empire had never adopted (Ghirshman 1954, 216).

The farther to the east his conquest advanced, the more Alexander entrusted his new subjects with the responsibility to run the empire. The military necessity of his eastern campaign in part compelled Alexander to incorporate Persian elements into his army. Alexander crossed the almost impenetrable Hindu Kush mountain range in the spring of 327. When his army finally reached the banks of the river Indus, only one out of four among his men were Macedonian or Greek. The rest of Alexander's manpower was now ethnically Persian or former subjects of the Persian empire.



Map 2: Empire of Alexander the Great (Smitha).

Long before Alexander had completed his conquest of the Achaemenian empire, he was forced to address one major problem of utmost importance to the future of his empire: how to interact with the regional Iranian kings and the powerful Achaemenian aristocracy? We know that many of the Achaemenian nobility joined Alexander's camp after the battle at Gaugamela. Alexander had apparently a genuine admiration for the Persian aristocracy, particularly the eastern nobility that had fought him so hard and so long. More importantly, the Iranian aristocracy controlled enormous properties and wielded immense political power over the general population. Replacing the old and ingrained power structure with something new and untested could create a dangerous

power vacuum, which of course would be detrimental to Alexander's enormous political ambitions.

In addition to Alexander's fondness for the Iranian aristocracy, he shrewdly understood that the power of the Achaemenian elite could be harnessed to his own advantage. Alexander therefore deliberated at length with an assembly of Iranian nobles. To convince the old Persian power elite of his sincerity, he married Roxana, the daughter of the Bactrian monarch, Oxyartes, whom he had recently subjugated. Alexander even compelled thousands of his fellow Greek and Macedonian soldiers to marry Iranian women (Arberry 1953, 21).

Alexander's eccentric goal was to unite the two civilizations, the Hellenistic and the Oriental, in one single and unprecedented world empire. His effort to bridge the gap between the different nationalities of his empire was increasingly done with a sincere and principled conviction that this was the right thing to do. Alexander envisioned an empire of different ethnic communities coexisting on equal terms, which was rather different from the benign Achaemenian concept of victors and vanquished. This goes a long way to explain why many Iranians—at least among the powerful elite that directly benefited from Alexander's conciliatory occupation policies—"did not feel themselves a conquered nation governed by a foreigner, but remained masters of their country" (Ghirshman 1954, 217).

Alexander transformed his farsightedness into practical policies. He gave prominent Iranians, among them the last emperor's brother, access to the inner Greek circles of power. He appointed and even reinstated Persians as *satraps*. He oversaw that Greek teachers educated thirty thousand young men of the best Iranian families. These

young Iranians were steeped in Greek culture as well as in Greek military science. Still, his ambitious concept was from the very beginning a hybrid, which was resented by the vast majority of the lower Iranian classes that were supposed to form the backbone of the new empire.

Alexander's determination to integrate the Persian elite on equal terms in the army and in the civil administration of the provinces was also bitterly resented by his fellow Macedonians. His Greek and Macedonian compatriots saw the favors Alexander granted to the Persians in a fixed-pie framework, i.e. any appeasement towards the Persians would come at the direct expense of the interests of the Greek soldiers. It would also be fair to say that they intuitively objected to Alexander's conciliatory policies because the Persians had for so long been dehumanized in the official Greek propaganda. As a result, several conspiracies and revolts were unleashed against Alexander: in 330 in Drangiana, in 328 at Maracanda (Samarqand), in 327 in Bactria, and in 324 at Opis.

Alexander was surprisingly not deterred by the violent and potential deadly opposition against his project to fuse different races and civilizations in one entity. He vigorously pursued his aim to the very end. When his military campaigns finally ceased, Alexander dedicated his remaining energy to implement his new vision of an empire. During these last months of his life, Alexander's political philosophy was significantly colored by the ideas of the great Achaemenian kings (Ghirshman 1954, 217). Alexander died only 33 years old in 323 B.C. and much too young to have been able to accomplish the grand goals that he had envisioned for his Greco-Persian empire.

## THE SELEUCID EMPIRE

Alexander left no designated heir to the throne, and as well could be expected, the following period was a period of intermittent but prolonged warfare among Alexander's Macedonian generals. One of Alexander's trusted generals, Seleucus I Nicator, entered Babylon in 312 B.C., which signaled the start of the Seleucid epoch in Iranian history. In the period between 311 and 302, Seleucus was capable of wiping out all the other contenders for the empire. He seized control over a territory that was geographically almost identical to the boundaries of the Achaemenian empire, if one excludes Egypt and Palestine, which was claimed by another of Alexander's Macedonian generals, Ptolemy I Soter. Syria became the center-of-gravity of Seleucus' empire, but to some extent also western Iran.

In his lifetime, Seleucus was able to forge loyalty to himself and his dynasty, which remained strong among the Greek population for long after his death. He set up a network of Greek military settlements, or strongholds, across the empire, which indicates a sense of siege mentality. This is perhaps the most characteristic feature of Seleucid authority compared to other foreign invaders controlling Iran. In the second half of Seleucid rule, central authority seems to have been weakening and local "petty kings" appear to have gained substantial autonomy. Despite all this, the Seleucid dynasty remained a potent force in the region until 129 when the its last great ruler, Antiochus VII Sidetes, was killed by the Parthians and the empire quickly vanished into obscurity.

The Seleucids proved incompetent or even unwilling to forge bonds with the indigenous population of the Persian empire. They introduced discriminatory pro-Macedonian policies in stark contrast to the conciliatory and pragmatic principles of

Alexander's rule. The Greeks never attempted to forcefully hellenize their Iranian subjects; still, Seleucus and his successors foolishly believed with supreme confidence that the Iranians in the end would simply freely convert to the superior Greek way of life. More importantly, the Seleucids were convinced that the Greeks and Macedonians were a superior race and the carriers of a higher civilization than that of the Iranians.



Map 3: The Hellenistic world c. 188 B.C. (Encyclopædia Britannica 1999)

### THE RESILIENCE OF IRANIAN CULTURE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

One remarkable and consistent pattern in Iran's long history has been the strength and durability of Iranian culture and Iranian national identity. Despite long periods of foreign rule, several of fundamental aspects of Iran's antique national character and

political outlook have remained intact to this day. Under Seleucid rule a silent majority must have lived a rather miserable life longing for somebody to restore their material wealth and social standing. We have unfortunately very few historical records that describe how life was organized in Iran outside the immediate Greek sphere of influence. Still, we find some evidence in the apocalyptic literature that grew out of this period. This literature—most prominently some of the original Zoroastrian texts—discusses the final savior of the world, the *Soshyant*, who will come and cleanse all souls, including those of the corrupted, and bestow eternal perfection on their bodies. These texts shed some light on the fact that Iran and Iranians have outlived every foreign occupier and reemerged seemingly unaffected.

Despite Hellenism's apparent appeal, particularly among members of the social elite who went out of their way to adopt Greek customs and culture, Greek ideas had little impact on Iran beyond its exterior forms. In Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt, Hellenism had a profound and lasting impact, which produced a new form of culture. In Iran, however, Greek ideas were only a strong but largely passing influence on its cultural legacy. The spiritual character and general outlook of Hellenism proved in the end too unfamiliar to and incompatible with the Iranian concept of living. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., when Greco-Macedonian immigration to Iran dried up, Persian culture and the Persian vernacular regained much of its dominant position. The reversal was so total that it is sometimes difficult to imagine that Iran in fact lived through 200 years of Greek and Macedonian supremacy (Yarshater 1983, xxviii). In conclusion, Greek rule did not change Iran's fundamental identity. Iran soon pulled away from Western influences.

### **3. The Parthian Empire: 247 B.C.-A.D. 224<sup>40</sup>**

#### **THE PERMANENT ENEMY OF ROME**

The most significant aspect of the Parthian empire, with regard to this dissertation, was its perpetual struggle with the Roman empire over regional hegemony in the Near East. Rome replaced Greece as the permanent enemy of the Iranian empire. After the founders of the Parthian empire, the Arsacid dynasty, had consolidated its position as the dominant power in the region between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, five separate periods of war with the Roman empire came to pass: (1) 53-20 B.C., (2) A.D. 54-63, (3) A.D. 114-117, (4) A.D. 161-165, and (5) A.D. 216-217. In addition to these prolonged periods of armed conflict, Rome also invaded Parthia for a brief period in A.D. 197.

Though the Parthians lacked the organization skills and the enormous resources available to Roman commanders, they stood their ground amazingly well in military encounters against a superior enemy. What proved to be the most serious threat to the Parthian empire was not an external enemy but its own internal disunity. In short, the Parthian empire revived the grandeur of the Achaemenian empire, and the Arsacid

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<sup>40</sup> The historical sources from the Parthian period are scant and scattered at best. Very little originates from authentic Parthian sources. Almost all detailed accounts of historical events are derived from chronicles of classical writers written in either Greek or Latin. The patrons of these historians were frequently at war with the Parthians and it would therefore be reasonable to expect that their narratives are generally biased and not in favor of the Iranian kingdom. War and hostilities of course made an in-depth, accurate, and objective observation of Parthia and Parthian society nearly impossible under the duress of military campaigns. Moreover, the chronology of Parthian rulers has been somewhat altered after the discovery of a previously unknown king Artabanus I (Bivar 1983, 98-99). I have, however, stayed with the old chronology until the new chronology is more firmly established.

dynasty successfully repulsed Rome's quest for expanding its world hegemony beyond Iran to India.



Map 4: The Parthian empire in the 1st century B.C. (Encyclopædia Britannica 1999).

#### FROM TRIBE TO EMPIRE

The Arsacid dynasty dates its official history back to 247 B.C., which is most likely the date when the dynasty stopped paying tribute to the Seleucids. The Parthians were of recent tribal origin. The Parni tribe migrated into Parthia—the ancient land corresponding roughly to the northeastern province of Khorasan in present-day Iran—shortly after the death of Alexander the Great. According to Greek sources, Parni

tribesmen had earned themselves a distinguished reputation for their breeding of fine horses, for their effectiveness as cavalymen, and for their exceptionally skilled mounted archers. Their vernacular was closely related to Scythian and Median.

The Parthians invaded Mesopotamia in 141 but in the course of the next decade they found themselves in a position of great danger. Tribal wars in western China had set off a chain-reaction whereby Saka tribes threatened to overrun the Parthians in the east. To the west the Seleucid king, Antiochus VII, had issued an ultimatum that the Parthian ruler, Phraates II (reigned 139-128 B.C.), could not possibly accept. In the spring of 129, Parthian agents stirred up an uprising among the civil population in Media against a large Seleucid force that had wintered there (Bivar 1983, 39). Phraates soon thereafter seized the initiative to attack and completely annihilate the large Seleucid army. From then on the Parthians were the masters of the region until the Sasanians overthrew them in A.D. 224.

The Arsacid dynasty rested its legitimacy on a dual tribal and imperial legacy. The core structure of Parthian state never relinquished the basic traditions of a patriarchal tribal organization. It is quite surprising that the Arsacid dynasty never severed its close links with its popular base, not even after the dynasty claimed imperial fame. As a result, the Arsacid rulers could frequently turn to their subjects for help in time of great danger.

Despite its impeccable tribal credentials, the Arsacid dynasty understood that imperial power required major changes to the narrow tribal code. The Arsacids must have had a keen and opportunistic understanding that acquiring the legitimacy of the ancient Persian monarchical order and divine right kingship would strengthen their power-base substantially. The Arsacids therefore claimed that the dynasty descended from the

Achaemenian king Artaxerxes II, and subsequently the Parthian monarchs added “king of kings” to their titles. It was during the era that historians like to call the phil-Hellenistic period (ca. 171 B.C.- A.D. 10) that the Parthian empire reached the zenith of its power and “worldwide” territorial expansion. This period was characterized by a strong Hellenistic cultural and artistic influence most noticeably displayed in the widespread use of the Greek language. Though the Parthians borrowed heavily from Achaemenian and Hellenistic imperial rule, their indigenous traditions were by no means abandoned.

#### **THE 1<sup>ST</sup> PERIOD OF CONFLICT WITH ROME: 53-20 B.C.**

War was destined to break out sooner or later due to the expansionist policies of both the Roman and Parthian empires. An uneasy balance-of-power had prevailed during the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. despite the apparent tension. The rule of Mithradates II (reigned 123-88 B.C.) represents one of the most celebrated chapters of Parthian history when vast territories were added to the empire both east and west. It was during the reign of Phraates III (reigned ca. 80-58/57 B.C.) that Roman and Parthian imperialism started to impinge on each other. The two contenders concluded a first tentative settlement despite the tense political situation, whereby the river Euphrates separated their spheres of influence. The two contenders signed a formal treaty in 66 B.C. that reiterated the previous understanding that the river Euphrates was the common frontier between the two empires. However, no final agreement was reached on the political and territorial status of Armenia over which numerous wars would be fought during the next centuries.

Rome regarded the treaty as a tactical stepping-stone to its ultimate goal, which was to outperform Alexander the Great’s conquest of the Middle East and India. The next

move in Rome's design on the Parthian empire was to create a line of submissive vassal states from the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf in preparation for the final military onslaught. Crassus, who had formed a triumvirate with Julius Caesar and Pompey in the last years of the Roman Republic, used Rome's disapproval over the succession to the Parthian throne as a pretext to attack the Parthian empire with at least 36,000 men in 54 B.C. (Bivar 1983, 52). Crassus' campaign was unpopular at home and militarily ill conceived from the very beginning. The next year near Crassus was killed and his seven legions were annihilated in the main battle near Carrhae in Mesopotamia.

The Romans had grossly underestimated the Parthian cavalry in two important aspects.<sup>41</sup> First, Roman military intelligence must have been ignorant about the Parthian compound bow, which could penetrate the legionary's armor. Second, the Roman commanders did not recognize the value of the Parthian camel train's capacity to bring forward a steady supply of arrows to the battlefield. In the end, twenty thousand Roman soldiers were killed and another ten thousand were taken prisoners of war. In the aftermath of their great victory, the Parthians then went on the offensive in 52-50, but with meager results because they neither possessed the military skills necessary to organize extended campaigns nor the art of siege-warfare.

The Battle of Carrhae is one of the most celebrated events in Iran's national history. Parthia emerged from the battle as a world power on equal terms with Rome. Rome's ambitions in Iran were dealt a crushing blow and its dream of conquering India would never materialize. Crassus' defeat had also serious repercussions on political life

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<sup>41</sup> Neilson Debevoise also draws attention to a general observation "proving the superiority of the Parthian intelligence service over the Roman, which seems to have been notoriously bad in the East" (Debevoise 1938, 82).

in Rome itself. For quite some time Rome's taste for adventurism to the east of the empire was so watered down that the Euphrates became not only a political but also a spiritual line of demarcation.

Parthia for the most part stayed out of the Roman civil war that followed. When Caesar became sole emperor, he started elaborate preparations to avenge Crassus' humiliating defeat. Mark Antony continued the build-up after Caesar was murdered in 44 B.C. The Parthian prince Pacorus, however, preempted the Roman attack. In an alliance with the rebellious Roman general, Quintus Labienus, they conquered all of Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine in 40. A joint Jewish and Parthian force captured Jerusalem.<sup>42</sup> The success of the Parthians was so shocking that it was rumored in Rome that the Parthians were preparing to invade Italian mainland. Yet, the Parthian success proved short-lived when Mark Antony in 39 sent an army to expel the Parthians after hostilities between Labienus and Pacorus had sufficiently weakened their combined strength. The Romans defeated and killed both commanders in separate battles thus ending the high point of Parthian supremacy in the Middle East.

Three years later, Mark Antony finally put Caesar's plan for revenge into action. Mark Antony invaded Azerbaijan with an army of possibly as many as 100,000 soldiers, a truly colossal force of the time (Bivar 1983, 59). The force brought with them an eighty-foot tall siege ram, which was destroyed together with ten thousand troops when the Parthian cavalry launched a rear attack. Rome's plan for invading Parthia soon fell utterly short of its original objectives. Mark Antony was forced to withdraw with the loss

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<sup>42</sup> The longevity and friendliness of Jewish-Parthian bilateral relations are mentioned in the Talmud.

of approximately 35,000 men (Debevoise 1938, 131). Mark Antony's retreat nearly ended in a disaster on the same scale that befell Crassus. In the years that followed, the national humiliation of Crassus and Antony's defeats developed into a trauma. It became a Roman obsession to avenge the military disasters, which gave life to numerous Roman invasions of Parthia in the course of the next two centuries.

Octavian, who took the name Augustus in 31 B.C., became the sole emperor inaugurating the imperial period in the history of Rome. Augustus had for a quite some time unsuccessfully sent diplomatic signals to Phraates IV (reigned ca. 37-2 B.C.) communicating that he would be willing to sign a peace treaty on equal terms. Rome acknowledged that the Parthian empire was now a regional great power. Thus Augustus wanted to establish political relations based on mutual respect and understanding. An end to hostilities would also allow the return of the Roman prisoners of war and the military insignia of Crassus' conquered legions.

It took, however, dramatic and wide-ranging Roman interference in Parthia's domestic affairs to convince Phraates that a peace treaty was desirable. With Rome's close support, the Arsacid prince, Tiridates II, rose up against Phraates IV who was then forced to go into exile among the Scythians. With Scythian assistance, Phraates returned the following year and expelled Tiridates who had to seek refuge in Rome. Tiridates again returned to Parthia in charge of an army sponsored by Rome, but this time around he was unable to depose Phraates from the throne.

In 20 B.C. time was finally ripe for Rome and Parthia to sign a comprehensive peace accord. Rome officially renounced its imperial ambitions in the east whereby the river the Euphrates was once again recognized as the frontier between the two imperial

powers. Yet, the Armenian-question remained a lingering obstacle to a durable peace since the treaty recognized Armenia as a Roman dependency. The geographic location of Armenia (not to be confused with the location of present-day Armenia) had the greatest strategic significance to both parties. If Rome controlled Armenia, it could use it as a staging-ground for penetration into Parthia. If controlled by Parthia, it would present Parthia with an outlet to the Black Sea, which of course were waters firmly within Rome's sphere of interest. Despite the signing of the peace treaty, Armenia would remain a hotly contested issue and a latent source of instability that would erupt several times over the next centuries.

#### **THE 2<sup>ND</sup> PERIOD OF CONFLICT WITH ROME: A.D. 54-63**

Artabanus III (reigned ca. A.D. 12-38) was determined to drive Rome out of the former Achaemenian territories in Asia Minor. Parthian irredentism was, however, tempered by the prospect of a confrontation with the most effectively organized military power of the ancient world. The two antagonists reached an agreement at a high-level summit in A.D. 37 that once again reconfirmed the upper Euphrates as the line of demarcation. More importantly, the parties were for the first time able to hammer out some sort of acceptable compromise on the status of Armenia.

The treaty gave Artabanus a much-needed breathing space to focus his energy on domestic political reforms. Centralizing of power had the highest priority. Despite Artabanus' efforts to reform the system, further weakening and fragmentation of central authority into several smaller semi-autonomous kingdoms took place during the period historians have named the anti-Hellenistic period in Parthian history (ca. A.D. 12-162).

The anti-Hellenistic period also coincides with the accelerated decline of the Parthian empire.

A second period of warfare began when Parthia violated the *status quo* on Armenia. Vologeses I (reigned A.D. 51-77/78)—a passionate anti-Roman monarch—installed his son Tiridates on the Armenian throne, which provoked Rome to oppose Vologeses' political maneuver with military force. Parthia's efforts to expand its regional hegemony to include Armenia led to a new long-drawn-out war with Rome from A.D. 54-63. Vologeses' military position was weakened by recurring attacks by various nomadic tribes. A comprehensive agreement was finally reached in 66 on the terms that a Parthian prince, Tiridates, was recognized as the Roman client king of Armenia. To cement the agreement, Tiridates traveled to Rome with his whole family accompanied by an entourage of no less than 3,000 Parthian nobles. In Rome, emperor Nero crowned Tiridates king of Armenia by. The symbolic closing of the doors to the Temple of Janus marked the official end to hostilities.

#### **DOMESTIC REACTION TO FOREIGN INFLUENCE**

The first century and a half of the first millennium A.D. was in Parthia characterized by a strong cultural rejection of Greek and Roman influences. Historians often refer to this period as the anti-Hellenistic phase in Iran's history. This period was also a period of dynastic conflicts and weakening of central state authority. The anti-Hellenistic period involved an outspoken hostility to all things foreign and an effort to revive the indigenous Parthian culture.

The anti-Hellenistic epoch also witnessed a period of conflict within the domestic elite; between the home-based Parthian nobility and elements of the ruling class that had been exposed to foreign influences. Foreign ideas and customs had penetrated life in Parthian society with Arsacid princes returning from stays abroad, mainly in Rome. Vonones, the son of Phraates IV, was the most prominent example. He returned from Rome to ascend to the throne upon the death of Orodes III who reigned shortly between A.D. 4-7. The Parthian nobility, with strong cultural ties to its tribal ancestry, was disgusted by Vonones' alien manners and dependence on everything Roman, and he was driven from power in A.D. 11. Vonones' downfall was a historical precipitant that signaled a sharp change in the direction of Iran's history whereby the traditionalist became the dominant force in every aspect of public affairs.

The Parthian nobility chose Artabanus III to succeed Vonones on the Parthian throne, mainly because of his anti-Roman credentials. During Artabanus' rule efforts were made to reengineer the political legitimacy of the ruling dynasty. The Arsacids fashioned a genealogical diagram that provided shady evidence that the dynasty was indeed of royal Achaemenian descent. Vologeses I, a fervent anti-Hellenist who reigned A.D. 51-80, sponsored the compilation of the sacred book of Zoroastrianism, *Avesta*, containing its cosmogony, law, and liturgy, and the teachings of the prophet Zarathushtra. Coins were for the first time imprinted with Pahlavi characters in the anti-Hellenistic period.<sup>43</sup> In short, Parthia either rejected the cultural influences of its adversaries or

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<sup>43</sup> Pahlavi was the first written Persian language. Pahlavi characters were adopted from the Aramaic alphabet. Aramaic, a Semitic language, was the lingua franca of the Middle East in the latter half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. The Arabs banned the use of Pahlavi characters in 697. When the written Persian language reemerged two centuries later under the Samanid dynasty, the alphabet was Arabic.

reinterpreted Roman customs in a Parthian fashion.

In the second half of Parthian rule we can observe a general weakening of national unity; however, the Parthian state could still sporadically rise to the occasion and unite in times when the whole state was seriously threatened by external powers. The landed nobility had gradually gained immense power and influence due to its growing control of agricultural and pastoral land and its peasant population. The aristocracy increasingly challenged the crown by refusing to pay levies and failed to quickly answer the call to arms that had traditionally been Parthia's "secret" source of power. The upper classes began to consider themselves on equal terms with the ruling Arsacid dynasty, and they did not shy away from open disobedience whenever their privileges were threatened. In addition, the highest positions in the army and in the civil administration had gradually become hereditary. In the distant provinces of the empire real power was completely in the hands of the nobles.<sup>44</sup>

To make things worse, the royal family could not reconcile their internal differences over who should succeed to the throne. Succession disputes frequently ended in murder and infighting, which, of course, further weakened the dynasty. Rome constantly interfered in the domestic power struggle by supporting various pretenders to the throne. Factional differences and political fragmentation also paved the way for several Roman military incursions into Parthia.

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<sup>44</sup> Neilson Debevoise compares the decline of the Parthian empire with the decay of the medieval feudal states in Europe: "During much of the period before the Christian era the royal power was supreme; but after that time the nobles, then firmly rooted and grown wealthy from lands and war, began to usurp more and more authority (Debevoise 1938, xxxviii).

#### **THE FOUR LAST PERIODS OF WAR WITH ROME: A.D. 114-117, 161-165, 197, AND 216-217**

Increased Parthian domestic instability convinced the Roman emperor Trajan that time was ripe for invading Armenia in 114. From Armenia, Trajan and his army marched on Mesopotamia and the capital at Ctesiphon. The capital fell to the invaders in 116 without resistance, whereupon the Parthian king's daughter and the golden throne were carted off to Rome. Rome's ultimate objective was in sight. "For an incredible moment a Roman emperor stood on the shores of the Persian Gulf, and dreamed, like Alexander, of new worlds to conquer" (Bivar 1983, 90).

However, faced with the prospect of utter destruction, the Parthians, in the past so exceptionally divided by internal rivalry, were able to unite against the aggressor. Through a string of military setbacks, Trajan's invasion force found itself in a nearly impossible military situation. Trajan called off the whole campaign in 117, and he died in Cilicia on his retreat to Rome (Debevoise 1938, 236). Emperor Hadrian, Trajan's successor, reversed Roman foreign policy radically. Like Augustus, he renounced Rome's imperial design on Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria whereby more than forty years of peace ensued with the Parthians.

In 161 the Parthian ruler Vologeses III (reigned A.D. 148-192) considered himself strong enough to invade Armenia and Syria. The Romans assessed the military situation to be so serious that they dispatched their very best generals and transferred heavy military reinforcements from the frontiers on the Danube and on the Rhine to counter the Parthian initiative (Debevoise 1938, 247). Rome repelled the Parthian invasion with an expeditionary force into Armenia in 163, and another military expedition invaded Mesopotamia in 164. The following year Roman legions stormed and burnt the capital at

Ctesiphon and destroyed palace of Vologeses, apparently with little resistance from Parthian forces.

It appears that Parthia had been hit by a severe epidemic of smallpox, a disease that was literally unknown in Europe. Needless to say, Roman soldiers caught the disease, and the entire invading army fell ill and was forced to retreat in confusion. Those who survived brought the epidemic back to the Roman empire where approximately one quarter of the entire population perished. It has been argued that the first smallpox epidemic in Europe was the single most important cause behind the decline of the Roman empire.

Roman forces invaded Parthia two more times before the second classic Persian empire came to an end. Rome invaded Mesopotamia in 197 and captured and sacked Ctesiphon for the third time in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. A few years later, the Roman emperor Caracalla sought to fulfill his obsessive dream of replicating Alexander's eastern empire, but his only "achievement" was to ravage large parts of Media in 216. The Parthians returned from their hideout in the mountains and defeated the Romans near Nisibis in 217. Rome then sued for peace, which was accepted after Rome had pledged to pay the Parthians a large financial compensation.

Parthia did not succumb to the force of Roman arms, but from a contending local dynasty from Fars, the Sasanians. In spite of the fact that the Parthians had stood their ground so well against the Romans, after nearly half a millennium in power, the Arsacid dynasty finally succumbed to its internal weaknesses leaving unfulfilled its great imperial ambition to recover the western provinces of the Achaemenian empire. The Parthian

empire at last came to an end when Ardashir, a lesser prince of Persis (Fars), defeated the Parthians in battle and killed the last Arsacid king, Artabanus V, in 224.

#### **4. The Sasanian Empire: A.D. 224-651**

##### **THE EPIC GEOPOLITICAL STRUGGLE AGAINST BYZANTIUM: 224-628**

The external relations of the Sasanian empire were completely overshadowed by the armed conflicts with the Roman empire and its successor empire at Byzantium. A nearly perpetual state of war existed between these two empires only interrupted by two extended periods of peace. The Sasanian empire fought ten major wars with Rome/Byzantium and countless skirmishes, but with none of the parties ever able to score the final decisive victory. A military frontier region developed on the upper Euphrates and Tigris with the traditional Armenian homelands as the center of contention. The conflict had an enormous impact on world history since a majority of scholars believe that the physical exhaustion of both the Byzantine and the Persian empire was what made the victory of Islam possible.

The Sasanians held the belief that their dynasty was divinely destined to rule the ancient territories of the Achaemenian empire. The Sasanian dynasty inherited from the Parthian empire a legacy of more than two centuries of armed conflict with the Roman empire. It was therefore nearly unavoidable that the previous state of warfare between the two hegemonies would continue. Though both the Sasanians and the Romans increasingly had to contend with hostile and militarily ever more sophisticated tribes on their long borders; yet, the only commendable enemy of each empire was the other. Only between

rulers of equal standing could proper treaties be made and international affairs satisfactorily regulated. In Richard Frye's words, "the Persians and the Romans regarded each other as different from the rest of the world, which was somehow barbarian" (Frye 1983, 173).<sup>45</sup>

The Persian-Roman rivalry took on a distinct international character in the latter part of the Sasanian empire reminiscent of the inflexible U.S.-Soviet perception of power and interests during the Cold War. As opposed to the Parthians, the Sasanians were more often than not on the offensive against Rome and Byzantium. The conflict, however, had by the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century produced a military stalemate along the heavily fortified front on the upper Tigris and Euphrates. The conflict was therefore carried to the adjacent regions with each contender seeking alliances with third parties that could be brought into the fight. Both Byzantine and Sasanian diplomats courted Arabs, Turks, Ethiopians, Kushans, Hephthalites, and Avars among others. Thus, the conflict had become a sort of World War I battle of attrition.

The Sasanian kings institutionalized the theocratic state model. The Zoroastrian clergy gained immense power over state affairs, the judiciary, and people's lives in general. The Sasanian dynasty ruled its empire through a system of insurmountable social barriers sanctioned by law and religion. Similar to Hinduism, Zoroastrianism prescribed a

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<sup>45</sup> Evidence of a certain continuity of the royal Achaemenian legacy can be found on coins struck by local ruler of Fars (Persis) predating the Sasanians. "Although there is no evidence that Ardashir had any detailed and clear knowledge of the Achaemenians, the fact that he and his son Shapur carved rock reliefs near their Achaemenian counterparts at Naqsh-e Rostam indicates a policy of cultural as well as political aggrandizement in imitation of the past. Several Roman historians assert that Ardashir consciously planned to re-establish the Achaemenian empire, and there is no reason to doubt the intention of the founder of the dynasty to create a vast empire" (Frye 1983, 120).

hereditary social order and prohibited social interaction with members of other “castes.” The Sasanian empire developed early on into a religious autocracy where the clergy and the aristocracy had a mutual interest in preserving this peculiar social arrangement. Islam’s victory in the 7<sup>th</sup> century must therefore be seen in the context of popular demand for social justice.<sup>46</sup>

The reign of Shapur I (reigned 241-272) saw great achievements on the battlefield and substantial territorial advances against the Romans. His father, Ardashir, who had assumed the ancient Iranian imperial title of “king of kings of Iran,” had abdicated the throne in favor of his son soon before his death. Shapur carried on warfare against Rome that his father had already embarked on. In 230, Ardashir laid siege to Hatra, an ancient city between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in present-day northern Iraq, but he failed to overrun the fortifications. Hatra then appealed for Roman assistance, and in 232 the Roman emperor Severus Alexander launched a campaign that temporarily brought Ardashir’s advances to a standstill. After the passing away of Severus Alexander in 235, the Sasanians again seized the initiative and in all probability Hatra was completely demolished in early 240.

Shapur then advanced deep into the territory of modern-day Turkey and Syria. The Roman emperor Gordian III counteracted the Sasanian momentum in 243 when he led a large army of Goth and German mercenaries against Shapur. The Romans offensive was successful and Shapur was decisively defeated at Resaina (now in modern Turkey).

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<sup>46</sup> There is evidence that a substantial number of Persians had joined forces with the Arabs from the early battles in Mesopotamia, before the Arab caliphate launched its major invasion of the Sasanian empire. By the time the Arabs reached the Oxus River at least a quarter of the army was composed of Persians.

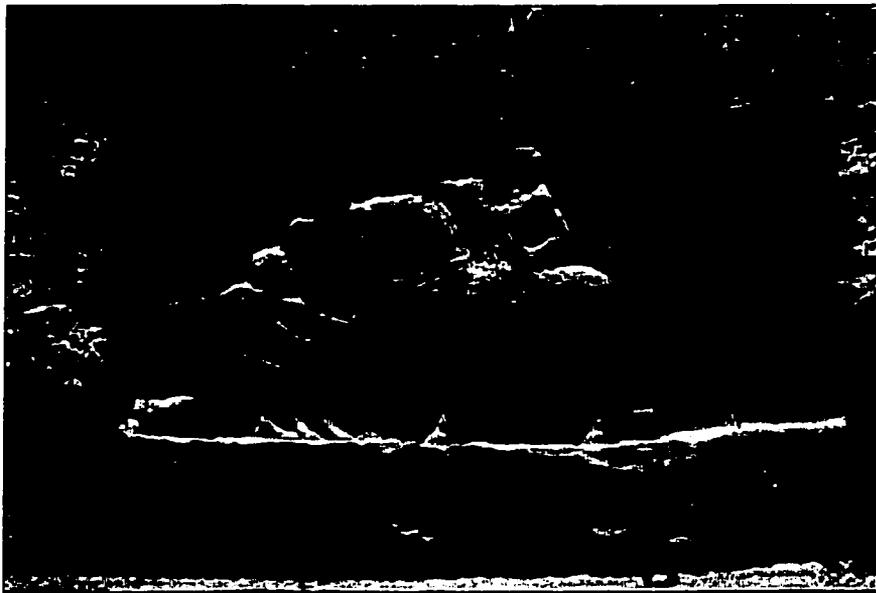
Shapur was nevertheless somehow able to turn things around, and the next year he had cleverly maneuvered himself into a position where he was able to conclude a favorable peace treaty with the new Roman emperor, Philip the Arabian.



Map 5: The Sasanian empire at the time of Shapur I: 241-272 (Encyclopædia Britannica 1999).

Several years later—either in 253 or 256—Shapur felt the moment was ripe to exploit the internal chaos that was wreaking havoc on the Roman empire. Shapur once again invaded Syria, Anatolia, and Armenia. Shapur’s army sacked Antioch but was then forced back by the Roman emperor Valerian. In the next encounter between the two emperors—sometimes between 258 and 260—Shapur crushed a Roman military force under Valerian’s command and took the Roman emperor prisoner of war. Valerian stayed

a captive of the Sasanians for the remainder of his life, and this particular historical event became a much-favored portrait in Sasanian rock carvings. Shapur was after his great victory no longer content with simply being addressed as “King of Kings of Iran” (*Shahanshah Eran*), which had been his father’s title. He took up the title that he felt more properly reflected his standing: “King of Kings of Iran and non-Iran” (*Shahanshah Eran ud Aneran*).



Picture 1: Massive rock relief located at Naqsh-i Rostam north of Persepolis in the province of Fars, Iran, depicting the surrender of the emperor Valerian to the Persian king, Shapur I (Iran Airia Travel).

Another phase of intensified Persian-Roman warfare came to pass before the two archenemies entered into a long period of peaceful coexistence. New wars repeatedly broke out between the two imperial powers over Armenia and the disputed provinces in Mesopotamia. The last remnants of the Arsacid dynasty had found a safe haven in Armenia as an allied of the Roman emperor. Peace had lasted from 273 to 283, when the

Roman emperor Carus, or Marcus Aurelius, invaded Mesopotamia. Carus was allowed to advance unchallenged as far as the capital at Ctesiphon, mainly because the eastern part of Sasanian empire was in rebellion. However, the invading Roman army was forced to withdraw subsequent to Carus' unexpected death.

In 296, the Sasanian ruler Narseh (reigned 293-302) occupied parts of Armenia after having defeat a Roman force. His initial success was soon reversed in a military encounter where his entire harem was taken captive. Narseh therefore sued for peace and a treaty was concluded that again gave Rome suzerainty over Armenia and northern Mesopotamia. Persians armed forces were also obliged to withdraw from the disputed western regions of the empire, whereupon an uninterrupted period of peace lasted for 40 years.

#### **RELIGION AND FOREIGN POLICY IN THE REIGN OF SHAPUR II: 309-379**

From the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the conflict between the Sasanian empire and Rome/Byzantium took on a distinct religious dimension. Constantine the Great (reigned 306-337) was the first Roman emperor to profess nominal adherence to Christianity. He initiated the gradual conversion of the Roman empire from a polytheistic society to a hierarchical monotheistic Christian state.

The loyalty of the Christian population of the Sasanian empire was consequently put to a serious test. On the one hand, the Christian subjects of the Persian empire were naturally drawn toward the spiritual affiliation with their religious brothers and sisters in the west, but, on the other, the Christian community was clearly aware of the mistrust such connections would draw from the Sasanian authorities. The Persian empire had after all been locked in a deadly struggle with Rome for several centuries. To make things

worse, the kingdom of Armenia had adopted the Christian faith as its state religion as early as 314.

As a result, the Sasanian authorities felt the need to strengthen ties between temporal and spiritual power; i.e. state and the religious order. Measures were taken to manifest Zoroastrianism as the state bearing religion, compulsory applicable to all citizens of the entire empire. Deviation from official religious practices was made a capital crime. Thus, one of the primary duties of the Persian monarch became to uphold the despotic position of the Zoroastrian faith, and in the lifespan of the Sasanian empire religion and state developed into an inseparable entity. Persecution of religious practices contrary to the accepted Zoroastrian belief began, and Christians were chiefly singled out for harassment. After 339, in particular, the Christians minority of the Sasanian empire experienced severe persecutions at the order of Shapur II and his immediate successors.<sup>47</sup>

A new period of hostilities between the two empires began when the Sasanian shah decided to recover the territories that had been lost to the Romans in the previous settlement. Shapur II set the war in motion in 337, the same year Constantine the Great died. The first war lasted from 337 to 350, mostly with the Sasanians on the offensive since the Roman emperor Constantinus (reigned 337-361) conducted the war with little vigor. The Persians put the Roman fortress at the city of Nisibis under siege all together three times, but with little success.

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<sup>47</sup> Shapur II became infamous for his persecutions of not only Christians but also Jews and Manichaeans. Shapur is said to have doubled the taxes for Christian to raise revenues for his wars against Rome. Despite heavy maltreatment, large Christian communities survived in various regions of Iran long after the Sasanian dynasty had ceased to exist.

Shapur II was prevented from scoring a decisive victory largely because Persia was attacked on its eastern frontier by a new and powerful nomadic constellation, the Chionites or the Huns. After a long-drawn-out campaign against the Huns, 353-358, Shapur II was allowed to return to the Mesopotamian frontier. In 359, Shapur II once again invaded the territory of his principal enemy but again with limited territorial gains. After a long and bloody siege with the support of Chionite auxiliaries, the Sasanians finally captured the Roman fortress at Amida on the upper Tigris.

Then in 363 the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate dramatically escalated what had been a limited armed conflict. Emperor Julian had succumbed to the persistent temptation of Roman emperors to seek the ultimate military glory of replicating Alexander's legendary conquest of the entire Persian empire. Despite stern advice from his military and political advisors against a major campaign in the east, Julian assembled one of the largest Roman armies ever to attack Persia: 100,000 men strong and backed by a river flotilla (Sykes 1930, 418-19).

Driven by his grandiose desire to reassert Greco-Roman preeminence in the East, Julian's enormous army advanced as far as the walls of Ctesiphon. In front of the Sasanian capital, however, the Romans lost their momentum. The sheer incompetence among Julian's commanders—amplified by harsh desert conditions, food shortage, and treason—played into the hands of the defenders. The Persians once again emerged triumphant from another large-scale Roman invasion of their territory. In the confusion Emperor Julian was wounded and died under unclear circumstances during the catastrophic retreat from Ctesiphon.

Julian's successor, Jovian, who reigned briefly between 363-364, was forced to give up several key Roman fortifications and other possessions on the Tigris. More importantly, Rome once more renounced suzerainty over Armenia, which became a Persian province for the remainder of the conflict with the exception of a tiny Roman controlled enclave around Mount Ararat.

#### **DÉTENTE IN THE 5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

The 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. was a period of unprecedented tranquility between the two archrivals. Nonetheless, the survival of the Sasanian empire was endangered by the nomadic Hephthalites in the east.<sup>48</sup> In Europe the Byzantines were fighting off a similar threat from the Huns. In 441 Attila advanced to the vicinity of Constantinople. This to a large extent explains the absence of conflict between the great empires.

Under these circumstances the two archrivals could for the first time actually cooperate in face of the common threat from the east. One example is that Rome shared the financial expenses for the upkeep of the fortified defense line against warring nomads at the narrow pass at Derbent (on the western Caspian shore in present-day Dagestan).

The few Persian-Byzantine conflicts of this century were in part attributed to mounting differences on treatment of religious minorities. Yazdgird I (reigned 399-420) stopped the persecution of Christians and Jews to the great dismay of the nobility. He was according to Byzantine sources a highly intelligent ruler who promoted peace and friendship with the Roman empire. The rapprochement was formally codified in an

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<sup>48</sup> The Hephthalites are sometimes called White Huns, but the actual relationship with the Huns who invaded Europe is still unclear.

agreement in the year of 409. Yazdgird I, however, tried in vain to curtail the power of the nobles, and it appears that he was murdered somewhere in Khorasan.

His son, Bahram V (reigned 420-438), resumed full-scale persecution of Christians. As a result, many fled to the Byzantine empire. Bahram soon thereafter initiated a short but unsuccessful war against Byzantium (421-422). The outcome of the war was that he forced to sue for peace on the terms that Christians could worship freely. Yazdgird II (reigned 438-457) initially tolerated religious minorities though he earned the reputation of a zealous Zoroastrian. Mounting extremism, particularly among the Christian community, persuaded him to renew the persecution of both Christians and Jews. He also entered into a short war with Byzantium in 442.

The Hephthalites were a constant and deadly threat to Sasanian empire for more than one hundred years before the stranglehold was finally broken by one of the greatest Sasanian kings, Khusrau I (reigned 531-579). Bahram V crossed the river Oxus and defeated the Hephthalites in battle. However, the threat did not go away, and in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century the very existence of the empire was at risk. Recurring attacks from the Hephthalites started to take a very heavy toll on the Sasanians. The Persian empire was forced to pay tribute to the Hephthalites during the reigns of Yazdgird II (reigned 438-457), Peroz (reigned 459-484), and Balash (reigned 484-488). The Hephthalites even began to play a decisive role in the internal affairs of the empire. They promoted Peroz to the throne and they twice helped Kavad I (reigned 488-496 and 498-531) in his efforts to become king. In 484 the Hephthalites annihilated an entire Sasanian army together with the emperor Peroz. Thus, by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century the Sasanian empire was in serious distress.

## FAR-REACHING HOSTILITIES IN THE 6<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Kavad I restored law and order within the Sasanian empire. The Hephthalites had abducted Kavad when he was a boy and he had spent his formative years among the warring nomads. The experience endowed Kavad with an invaluable understanding of the Hephthalite society and its military strengths and weaknesses. These years provided him with important personal connections that he put to excellent use later in life.

Major wars with Byzantium resumed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. In Kavad's reign a war with Byzantium broke out in 502 that lasted until 506. Another war began in 527, but as usual their common border remained virtually unchanged when it ended in 531. Kavad also cracked down hard on the Mazdakite sect in the last years of his reign.

The 6<sup>th</sup> century witnessed social discontent among the empire's underprivileged population. The Mazdakites—a kind of pre-modern communist movement—had gathered a widespread following. Mazdak's message was simple. The movement demanded social reforms that would improve the living conditions for the rural poor and release the “proletariat” from the tyrannical privileges of the landed nobility.

The social order of the Sasanian empire was rigidly organized in a semi-caste like structure. There was a concerted effort among the elite to concentrate nearly all wealth and status within a few aristocratic families. Ranks and associated privileges were meticulously defined by the Sasanian social contract. The pecking order was codified in detailed rules that regulated dress convention, acceptable behavior, gender relations, and who could own property. Intermarriage between nobles and commoners was strictly forbidden, but at the same time the Zoroastrian clergy sanctioned next-of-kin marriages.

The Zoroastrian clergy played a pivotal role in the triangular relationship between monarchy-clergy-aristocracy. The Sasanian monarch generally sought to co-opt rather than to fight the nobility by handing out titles and privileges. However, the alliance between clergy and aristocracy gradually eroded the king's real power. Mazdak's ideology, which called for severe curtailment of the vested interests of the aristocracy and clergy, scared the upper classes to take dramatic actions. The nobility and Zoroastrian clergy believed that their position of power was threatened to such an extent that they convinced the king to execute Mazdak and thousands of his followers.

Maybe the greatest of all Sasanian kings, Khusrau I, ruled from 531 to 579. In 540 he invaded in search of plunder. After a long period of intermittent and inconclusive fighting, the parties finally signed a peace treaty in 561 that was intended to last for fifty years. On the eastern frontier, Khusrau joined forces with the nomadic Turks who had just recently emerged as new and potent power in Central Asia. Together they decisively crushed the Hephthalites in 554 with the result that they never again reemerged as a military threat. For a short while, the eastern Sasanian frontier extended as far as to the old Achaemenian border on the Oxus River (Amu Darya). The Turks, as one could reasonably expect, saw no particular reason why they should faithfully serve the Sasanians. Consequently, the Turks frequently fought on the side of Byzantium when this served their interests. The Turks, of course, would later in history have a monumental impact, not only the destiny of Iran, but on entire Middle East. By that time the Sasanian empire was relinquished to the history books.

The Byzantine emperor Justin II came to power in 565 and he soon challenged the terms of the 561-peace treaty. He went so far as to withhold the financial payment to the

Sasanians that was sanctioned by the agreement. In 571 Persian-controlled Armenia rose in rebellion when the Sasanian governor made serious attempts to forcefully impose Zoroastrianism on the fervently independent-minded Christian Armenian population. The revolt was brutally crushed, but it provided Julian with a *casus belli*. The following year Justin's forces invaded Sasanian territory and laid siege to Nisibis. Yet, the Byzantine invasion force was soon forced to break off the siege and retreated in disarray as a result of quarrels among its commanders. The Persians immediately followed pursuit and chased Justin's army far into Byzantine-controlled territory. The Sasanians captured a number of important cities. Byzantium then sued for peace, which was accepted upon payment of a large sum of money.

Hostilities resumed in 575, this time mainly for geopolitical reasons. The Persians had scored two important victories. First, they had defeated the Turkic Khazars who ruled what is today's southern Russia. Second, the Sasanians had simultaneously expelled the Ethiopians from Yemen and incorporated the southern parts of the Arabian peninsula into the Persian empire. The combined effect of these advances was to cut off Byzantine trade routes to East Asia overland and by sea. This is the most likely reason why Byzantium broke the peace treaty and renewed the war (Daniel 2000, 63).

Khusrau I became famous for his attention to just and good governance. In the course of his long reign, the Sasanians expanded their sphere of influence to the shores of the Black Sea. His military successes were to a large extent the fruits of profound reforms and skillful reorganizations of the chain of command of the armed forces. Khusrau reasserted Zoroastrian orthodoxy but persecution of Christian communities was comparatively light and occurred for the most part during periods of strained relations

with Byzantium. Khusrau addressed some of the common man's grievances, and he certainly did not restore the full privileges to the aristocracy had enjoyed before the Mazdakite insurrection. The empire stood at its peak of power when he died in 579.

After his death, the religious establishment sanctioned the re-imposition of the rigid caste-like class structure and soon the Sasanian social order began to show serious signs of failing. The lower classes became even more impoverished, and a general sentiment of pessimism and decadence spread throughout the empire. In hindsight, the seeds were sown for the ultimate downfall of the empire.

Peace with Byzantium lasted only briefly in 579 whereby the intractable wars carried on for another decade. Maurice, an extremely capable general, reversed the Byzantine fortunes of war. He invaded Persia in 579 and ravaged the northwestern provinces of the Sasanian empire. For the next ten years offensives and counter-offensives were launched across the Mesopotamian theatre of operation with none of the combatants ever able to score a decisive victory. The never-ending conflict now threatened to completely exhaust the resources of both empires. As a result, Arabs, Turks, Slavs, Avars, Lombards, and several other constellations took advantage of the situation and raided deep into Sasanian and Byzantine territories.

The Sasanian empire showed signs of buckling under the combined stress of internal and external pressure. A period of destructive domestic turmoil prevailed until Khusrau II the Victorious (reigned 590-628) restored respect for the absolute power of the monarchy. Byzantine arms helped Khusrau II to regain the throne from a pretender. Bahram Chobin, who was of Parthian descent, represented the growing dissatisfaction of the eastern military nobility. It took Khusrau II until 601 before he had restored respect

for his authority. In exchange for the military favors granted to him by Maurice—who had become emperor in 582—Khusrau returned the city of Dara which had been held by the Persians since they repulsed Justin's incursion in 573. For the first time in twenty years the two empires entered a period of peace; however, when Maurice was murdered in 602 the stage was set for the *grand finale* in the epic struggle between the two empires.

#### **TOTAL WAR WITH BYZANTIUM: 602-628**

In the reign of Khusrau II the Sasanian empire reached its greatest territorial extension; yet, his victories proved hollow since the final downfall of the Sasanian dynasty just round the corner. In the last epoch of the Sasanian empire the conflict with Byzantium escalated to an extent that the two main warring parties were left completely exhausted. When the fighting was over, history presented the recently united Arab tribes of the Hejaz with a golden window-of-opportunity. The armies of Islam conquered the whole Sasanian empire between 636 and 651. The Byzantine empire lost all its possessions in the Levant to the Caliphate, and could barely hold on to Anatolia against several Arab campaigns.

In 602 Khusrau II used one of the many violent Byzantine succession dispute that followed the murder Maurice as the pretext to invade Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria, and central Anatolia in 604-606. The new Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, was therefore desperate to sue for peace in 610. A second Persian invasion wave captured of Antioch in 611, Damascus in 613, and Jerusalem in 614. In 616 Alexandria fell to the Persians, and the rest of Egypt and Libya was occupied in 619. In 617 Khusrau's army successfully completed a long siege of Chalcedon—modern day Kadiköy on the Asian side of the

Bosporus—at the same time as the Avars approached the walls of Byzantium on the European side. Khusrau had finally accomplished what had eluded Ardashir's four hundred years earlier: the restoration of the Achaemenian empire.

Heraclius was now faced with the nearly impossible task of recover all the territory that had been lost to the Sasanians. Yet, the Persian tide of conquest was nearly completely reversed by Byzantium between 622 and 627. The previous so invincible Persian armies were defeated everywhere. A coordinated last attack by the Persians and the Avars from two separate directions failed in front of the walls of Constantinople in 626. In 627-628, Heraclius advanced—first by sea and then by land—basically unopposed as far as the vicinity of the capital at Ctesiphon. Here the Byzantine army plundered the enormous treasures of Dastagird, burned the royal palace, and then swiftly, but prudently withdrew from the scene. Byzantium then dictated a humiliating peace treaty whereby the Persians agreed to withdraw all troops to the pre-war boundaries.

The Sasanian empire had in the end overextended itself—militarily, financially, politically and spiritually—in its quest for “world” hegemony. In the last decades of the empire, a noticeable mismatch developed between Sasanian political ambitions, the socio-economic order, and the empire's military priorities. Khusrau's *raison d'être* was to revive the imperial grandeur of the Achaemenian empire, but he came to believe that he was destined to rule the world. He surrounded himself with conspicuous consumption and luxury. The mismatch in turn was the product of a long process characterized by religious orthodoxy, class rigidity, and a general weakening of the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty. As a result, the internal strength of the empire was almost gone before the battles against the Arabs at Qadisiyya and Nehavand.

## THE ARAB CONQUEST OF THE SASANIAN EMPIRE

Khusrau's prestige was now so shattered after the military defeat that a major revolt broke out within the extended royal family. Khusrau II and his youngest son and heir to the throne were both viciously executed. In the aftermath of Khusrau's bloody downfall near-anarchy prevailed. Respect for the institution of divine right kingship broke down across the empire. The aristocracy and Zoroastrian clergy promoted and demoted a rapid succession of marionette rulers. The last emperor, Yazdgird III, ascended the throne in 632, the same year the prophet Muhammad died. He was briefly able to restore law and order.

The recklessness of Khusrau's foreign adventures had dramatically reduced the might of the empire, which made the amazing conquest of the Arabs possible. In the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Arab tribes did not possess the necessary military muscles—numerical strength, sophisticated military skills, military hardware, and/or a strong economic base—that could have enabled them to seriously challenge the typical strength of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires. Adding to its self-inflicted wounds, the Sasanian empire was hard hit by natural disasters right before the former Arab vassals realized that their historical moment had arrived.

One might ask the question why the Sasanian empire did not survive the Arab onslaught and why the Byzantine empire did? After all, the two archrivals constantly mirrored each other's strengths and weaknesses. One specific precipitant to the downfall of the Sasanians occurred when Khusrau II removed a strategic defensive barrier against the warring tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. A long-standing policy of the Sasanian empire had been to maintain friendly buffer states against Arab nomads. The

Lakhmids—an Arab vassal dynasty that was strategically located at al-Hirah on the fringes of the Arabian desert—had been a strong and absolutely loyal ally of the Sasanians. Around 602, Khusrau II ended the rule of the Lakhmids, apparently because their leader had converted to Christendom.

The Lakhmids, however, had presided over a well-established political order system where they could closely monitor and control the movements of the warring tribes roaming in the dessert. The Persian installed a rival tribal chieftain next to a Sasanian governor. In the new political landscape, the old checks and balances were removed, and the Arab *bedouins* now felt free to raid the settle population in today's Iraq.

The next three decades witnessed the coming together of several historical processes that would bring down the Sasanian empire. A unified Arab tribal force defeated the Persians at Dhu-Qar sometime between 604 and 611. The significance of this battle was mostly psychological. The victory revealed the actual weaknesses of the Sasanian military, but more importantly Arab military success brought to light what the nomadic tribes could potentially accomplish when they were united.

Muhammad united the tribes of the Arabian peninsula between 622 and 630 while the Sasanians lost the “great war” against Byzantium. The first caliph, Abu Bakr, sent his legendary general, Khalid ibn al-Walid, north to conquer Iraq, Palestine and Syria. He captured al-Hirah from the Sasanians in 633, and in 636 his army destroyed a large Byzantine army at Yarmuk River. These events opened the floodgate for the Islamic victory.

The destiny of the Sasanian empire was finally sealed between the year 636 and 642. After a number of minor and inconclusive military encounters, the Sasanians lost the

decisive battle of al-Qadisiyya in 636/637 on one of the Euphrates canals. The Arabs went on to sack Ctesiphon. Yazdgird III was forced to flee to the Sasanian province of Media in Persia's interior (which is broadly speaking today's regions of Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and parts of Kermanshah). The Sasanians formally requested military assistance from the Chinese in 638 who most likely deemed a military rescue expedition unfeasible.

In Media Yazdgird and his generals managed to assemble a new large Persian army. However, the Battle of Nehavand in 642 south of Hamadan shattered all hopes of a resurrection of Sasanian power. The last Sasanian army was defeated in an allegedly extremely bloody battle.<sup>49</sup> The battle removed the last obstacles for the Arab conquest of the entire Sasanian empire. The defeat is among modern-day Iranians an extremely ambivalent turning point in the imperial history of Iran. The last great Persian empire came to an end, but the Arab conquest also led to the Islamization of Iran.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> At Nehavand some 30,000 Arab soldiers clashed with a claimed number of an astonishing 150,000 Sasanian troops. The Sasanian army was positioned in entrenched and strongly fortified position. Following inconclusive skirmishes, the Arab commander Nu'man faked in the traditional manner of nomadic warfare to have been beaten and the Arabs began to retreat from the battleground. Firuzan, the Sasanian commander-in-chief, then apparently misjudged the situation and charged from his well-fortified position to hunt down the enemy. Nu'man's retreat proved, as it turned out, to be a brilliant tactical deception maneuver whereby the Sasanian army was forced to fight from an extremely undesirable position caught in between two mountain passes. The Arab force then massacred the massive Sasanian army. The Sasanian casualties alone are said to have numbered 100,000 dead (Sykes 1930, 500).

<sup>50</sup> The Arab view is that Iranians converted to Islam because of its spiritual appeal. This is also the official line of the Islamic Republic; however, with a nationalistic spin: "After the advent of Islam, the Iranians ardently embraced it. The blend of Iranian talents and the sublime Islamic teachings was a miracle. Without intending to deny the share of other nations in the formation of the Islamic civilization, I [President Mohammad Khatami] believe the great Iranian civilization had a major role in developing and promoting the Islamic system" (CNN 1998). Nevertheless, many Zoroastrians fled to India around 720.

Despite the Arab victories in 636 and 642, Iran proved a difficult conquest. The Arabs had to muster all their forces for an extended low-intensity campaign before they finally could claim the remaining provinces of the former Sasanian empire. It was not until approximately the year 700 that just about all of Iran was firmly under the caliph's authority.<sup>51</sup>

Iran was in due course thoroughly Islamized mainly because the military state apparatus that had backed up the Zoroastrian religious establishment had simply ceased to exist. In all likelihood the heterogeneous population of the Sasanian empire did not really care whether they were ruled by Persians, Greeks or Arabs, "provided they were secure, at peace and reasonably taxed," according to Albert Hourani. Hourani also suggests that the various religious minorities that had been persecuted by the Zoroastrian state religion (or the Byzantine government) most likely welcomed the Arabs since they treated other religions with benign indifference (Hourani 1991, 23). Later, of course, the discriminatory policies of the Umayyad caliphate provided a clear incentive to convert to Islam in order to avoid special taxes paid by non-Muslims.

#### **STATE ORGANIZATION AND RELIGION UNDER THE SASANIANS**

The Sasanian dynasty firmly shaped Iran's national character. The Sasanian empire was far better organized than the Parthian empire, which to a large degree helps to explain its great military achievements. Despite the fact that the Sasanian empire was geographically significantly larger than its predecessor, the empire was nevertheless

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<sup>51</sup> After the battle of Nehavand, Yazdgird sought safe haven in one province after another until one of his many hosts, an Iranian noble, murdered him in 651 with the assistance of a group of Hephthalites. This happened in eastern Iran, near Merv, an ancient city now situated in Turkmenistan, where the Sasanians had never been very popular.

tightly centralized with effective control over the provinces. The royal family appointed officials who were directly accountable to the throne. These officials delegated authority down to a large number of provincial officials whose positions in the bureaucratic structure were accurately defined, thereby generating an overall administrative efficiency.

The effectiveness of Sasanian rule undoubtedly owed much to a genuine and widespread acceptance of its dynastic legitimacy. Loyalty was given to the institution of the royal house rather than to each individual monarch much in the same way as the Ottoman family. One prince could swiftly be removed and replaced by somebody more desirable. Still, it turned out to be practically impossible for a contender less than blue-blooded to usurp the throne. As a matter of fact, it only happened once when Bahram VI Chobin declared himself king in 590, but his reign ended typically already the following year.

The Sasanians adhered strictly to the Persian tradition of dynastic legitimacy. They characteristically traced their lineage back to the glorified ancient Achaemenian kings. The Sasanian monarchy was also elevated to a semi-divine institution, and they particularly stressed the king's intimate bond with the divine world. The king was believed to carry a visible aura of royal glory (*farr*). However, the Sasanians to a large extent abolished the Arsacid system of autonomous and hereditary local dynasties and petty kings.

Sasanian theory on statecraft emphasized above all stability and justice. The ideal way to rule an empire was a strong centralized government. The clearest divergence from Parthian rule was the Sasanians' revived the emphasis on the divine and absolute monarchy. Sasanian society consisted of four major social classes: priests, soldiers,

scholars, and artisans. Association was based on birth, but sometimes it was possible for gifted individuals to move up the ladder. The king was the ultimate arbiter of justice among the different classes. His task was to oversee that each class stayed within its prescribed limits and that the privileged class did not exploit the less fortunate. Yet, the Madzakite revolt gave evidence that the king's determination, or ability, to protect the underprivileged was mostly a hypothetical construct.

The rule of Khusrau I and his prime minister, Bozorgmehr, came closest to the idealized notion of royal justice and wise government. Khusrau is said to have recorded the following maxims: "Fear God; be trustworthy and loyal; seek the advice of wise men; honor scholars, the nobles, and the officials; supervise judges and tax collectors strictly; check on the condition of prisoners; assure the safety of roads and markets; punish the guilty according to their crime; provision the army; respect the family; defend the borders; and watch government officials closely to remove the disloyal and incompetent." He is also attributed of having said: "The throne depends on the army, the army on revenue, revenue on agriculture, and agriculture on justice" (Daniel 2000, 58 and 63). It is a paradox that later Iranian dynasties—always so eager to emulate the glorious classic Persian empires—seem to have largely ignored Khusrau's example.

Contrary to Christianity, priesthood was hereditary in Zoroastrian times. The ecclesiastical organization was organized in a strict hierarchical structure similar to that of the state. Every local district of any significance had its own *mobed*, or chief of magi, who was in charge of all Zoroastrian priests and functionaries of lower standing. At the top of the pyramid stood the *mobedan mobed*, or "priest of priests," clearly modeled on the title *shahanshah* ("king of kings"). In addition to his purely religious authority, the

*mobedan mobed* seems to have had a decisive voice in the selection of the “king of kings” and in other important matters of state affairs, particularly toward the end of empire.<sup>52</sup>

The Zoroastrian clergy became extremely powerful under Sasanian rule. The first Sasanian kings made a concerted attempt to cement their legitimacy in divine terms. The logical outcome of this effort was, of course, to make Zoroastrianism the official state religion. The Zoroastrian church was from the 4<sup>th</sup> century fully integrated into the conduct of state affairs, but the clergy had at the same time a separate and independent social space of its own. The law was based solidly on the religious principles and the judiciary appears to have been largely in the hands of the Zoroastrian clergy. A well-organized religious establishment in concert with self-confident nobility soon contested the heavy-handed dealings of the first Sasanian monarchs in both temporal and spiritual questions. A similar pattern of development took place during the reign of Safavid dynasty (1501-1722).

The Sasanian-Zoroastrian state singled out specific religious beliefs for ill treatment and discrimination on various occasions. The spiritual tolerance of the

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<sup>52</sup> Beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a recasting of a similar hierarchical structure took place within Twelver Shi’ism in Iran. The highest religious leadership, the ayatollahs (“sign of God”), wanted to centralize and to uniformalize the power of the *mujtahid* (expert in Islamic law). A few selected ayatollahs were appointed *marja’-i taqlid* (“source of authority”). *Taqlid* means literally “blind adherence” and the rulings a *marja’-i taqlid* is theoretically compulsory for the faithful Shi’ite follower. The *marja’-i taqlid*—although he is neither infallible nor directly appointed by the Twelfth Imam—is popularly regarded by the Shi’ite community as the deputy of Twelfth Imam. Unfortunately, as Abdulaziz Sachedina points out, the *marja’-i taqlid* tends to live “in a limited and narrow social-cultural environment to grasp the critical need to understand the problems of modernity, and provide adequate guidance for maintaining faith” (Sachedina). The institution has lost most of its day-to-day relevance for solving the pressing problems of modern life. Both Ayatollah Taleqani and Ayatollah Khomeini saw the need for the *marja’-i taqlid* to go beyond the confines of traditional Islamic jurisprudence.

Achaemenians and the religious indifference of the Arsacid dynasty, so characteristic of the two first Iranian empires, were gradually replaced by religious extremism and persecution under Sasanian rule. Religious persecution was often linked Iran's foreign relations. Iranian Christians were by and large left free to worship their God while the Roman empire remained pagan. After emperor Constantine the Great (reigned 306-337) imposed Christianity on the Roman empire everything changed. It became in due course the duty of the faithful Zoroastrian believer to fight and destroy nonbelievers and heresy in line with the official propaganda. On the other hand, the Christian themselves demonstrated very little tolerance toward other religious minorities such as the Manichaeans and the Gnostic believers.

The first harassment of Christians in Iran began as early as 334, and after 339 the whole Christian population of the Sasanian empire was singled out for relentless persecution. A treaty with the government in 422 halted the state-sponsored violence against the Christian community. After approximately 485, the Nestorian church openly distanced itself from the spiritual authority of Byzantium to the great satisfaction of the Sasanian government. The Zoroastrian clergy nevertheless continued to endorse maltreatment of the Christian citizens of the empire.

### **Chapter III: THE DISSOLUTION OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE**

Iran's history from the year 650 to 1500 is far too complex to discuss here in any great detail; however, there are certain overarching themes that need to be addressed that have had a significant impact on Iran's modern history. On a macro-historical level of analysis there are two processes that took place during this historical period which have had a lasting influence on Iran's political and religious landscape. First, Iran's conversion to Islam led to the creation of a unique Perso-Islamic culture, which combines the politico-religious principles of Islam with the ancient Persian imperial traditions. Second, the re-tribalization of Iranian society that took place in the last part of this period produced strong in-faction loyalties at the expense of state authority that led to the territorial disintegration of Iran in the 13<sup>th</sup> through the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Two major nomadic cultures—the Arab clans from the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula and the Turkish/Mongol tribes from the pastoral steps of Central Asia—imposed on Iran their customs and traditions. The Arab conquest of Iran was relatively quickly molded into something that resembled the Sasanian empire. The Saljuq invasion of Iran in 1040, however, altered people's sense of loyalty to the monarchy for centuries to come.

Present day Iran has inherited several of the conflicting interests that were created in this period such as the politico-religious legitimacy of the sovereign, factionalism, horizontal versus vertical stratification of political structures, lack of social cohesion, the constant threat of territorial disintegration, and flawed civil-military relations. In short, the historical legacies of this period offer an invaluable insight into Iran as a modern nation-state and why Iran behaves the way it does.

<b>Year</b>	<b>South Iraq (Mesopotamia, Khuzestan)</b>	<b>South-central Iran (Fars, Isfahan)</b>	<b>North-west Iran (Azerbaijan, Hamadan)</b>	<b>North-east Iran (Khorasan)</b>
<b>500</b>	<b>Sasanian Empire (224-636)</b>	<b>Sasanian Empire (224-642)</b>	<b>Sasanian Empire (224-642)</b>	<b>Sasanian Empire (224-642)</b>
<b>600</b>	<b>“Perfect caliphs” (636-661) Umayyad Caliphate (661-750)</b>	<b>“Perfect caliphs” (642-661) Umayyad Caliphate (661-750)</b>	<b>“Perfect caliphs” (642-661) Umayyad Caliphate (661-750)</b>	<b>“Perfect caliphs” (642-661) Umayyad Caliphate (661-750)</b>
<b>700</b>	<b>Abbasid Caliphate (750-945)</b>	<b>Abbasid Caliphate (750-934)</b>	<b>Abbasid Caliphate (750-934)</b>	<b>Abbasid Caliphate (750-821)</b>
<b>800</b>	<b>Abbasid Caliphate</b>	<b>Abbasid Caliphate Saffarids (869-900)</b>	<b>Abbasid Caliphate</b>	<b>Tahirids (821-873) Saffarids (873-900)</b>
<b>900</b>	<b>Buyids (945-1055)</b>	<b>Buyids (934-1040)</b>	<b>Buyids (934-1040)</b>	<b>Samanids (900-999)</b>
<b>1000</b>	<b>Buyids Saljuqs (1055-1194)</b>	<b>Buyids Saljuqs (1044-1194)</b>	<b>Buyids Ghaznavids Saljuqs (1044-1194)</b>	<b>Ghaznavids (999-1040) Saljuqs (1040-1157)</b>
<b>1100</b>	<b>Saljuqs</b>	<b>Saljuqs</b>	<b>Saljuqs</b>	<b>Saljuqs</b>
<b>1200</b>	<b>Khwarazm-Shahs (1200-1221) Mongol invasions (1220 &amp; 1256) Il-Khans (1258-1335)</b>	<b>Khwarazm-Shahs (1200-1221) Mongol invasions (1220 &amp; 1256) Il-Khans (1258-1335)</b>	<b>Khwarazm-Shahs (1200-1221) Mongol invasions (1220 &amp; 1256) Il-Khans (1258-1335)</b>	<b>Khwarazm-Shahs (1200-1221) Mongol invasions (1220 &amp; 1256) Il-Khans (1256-1335)</b>
<b>1300</b>	<b>Jalayirids (1336-1410) Timur’s invasions (on/off 1393-1405)</b>	<b>Muzaffarids (1356-1393) Timurids (1393-1453)</b>	<b>Jalayirids (1336-1390) Timur’s invasions (on/off 1400-1406)</b>	<b>Kartids  Timurids</b>
<b>1400</b>	<b>Qara Qyunlu (1410-1468) Aq Qyunlu (1468-1508)</b>	<b>Qara Qyunlu 1453-1468 Aq Qyunlu (1468-1503)</b>	<b>Qara Qyunlu 1390-1468 Aq Qyunlu (1468-1501)</b>	<b>Timurids (1383-1506)</b>
<b>1500</b>	<b>Safavid Empire (1508-1722)</b>	<b>Safavid Empire (1503-1722)</b>	<b>Safavid Empire (1501-1722)</b>	<b>Safavid Empire (1510-1722)</b>

Table 4: The ruling dynasties of Iran: 500-1600



## 1. Iran's Conversion to Islam

Iran's conversion to Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century forever changed the criteria for legitimate political rule. Temporal and spiritual authority are by definition inseparable in a Muslim state, yet history shows that religious doctrines have frequently been altered to fit the changing political circumstances. This development is without doubt one of the root causes behind the way the conflict with the United States took shape in the 1960s, but not in the simplistic way the conflict is often portrayed in the literature.

Common wisdom holds that the United States' close relationship with the secularized regime of Muhammad Reza Shah nearly automatically brought the Americans into conflict with Khomeini's revolutionary regime. On the face of it this assessment is seemingly accurate, but a closer evaluation of the events that preceded the revolution reveals that the American role was less prominent than the internal dynamics of Iran's domestic power struggle. The counterfactual outcome—Iran and the United States peacefully reformulated their bilateral relationship after the revolution without entering into long-term hostility—could have taken place if the variables on the Iranian side of the equation had been slightly different. Iran's history provides ample evidence of cases where pragmatic accommodation of power and interests took place at the expense of religious concerns.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The Buyid dynasty—recent converts to Shi'ism—fought their fellow Shi'ites in Egypt in defense of the Sunni caliphate. The Safavid movement allied itself with the Sunni Aq Quyunlu ("White Sheep") tribal federation against the Shi'ite Kara Quyunlu ("Black Sheep") dynasty. In recent times, Iran showed tremendous hostility toward the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that governed according to strict Islamic principles. With its strong stance against the Taliban, Iran in

Muhammad left no detail guidance for the establishment of a well-defined political system. During Islam's "virtuous" formative years, the first four caliphs—"the rightly guided" or "perfect caliphs"—were supposedly invested with absolute spiritual, legislative, judicial, and executive/military power as the Prophet's deputies on earth. But Islam's formative years were hardly perfect, but tainted by rampant factionalism and civil war. Today, the Iranian theocracy is struggling with many of the same insurmountable problems as the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, to which it seems to have no sustainable solution.<sup>54</sup>

The combined powers of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran are said to have been modeled on the Prophet's original concept of the Islamic sovereign. This is a false impression. The Supreme Leader of Iran is rather the combination the ancient Persian divine right to kingship, the Turkish sultan, and relatively recent developments within Twelver Shi'ism. The Supreme Leader does not have prophetic powers; rather, he is the best substitute until the Hidden Imam returns. The Supreme Leader and the President of the Islamic Republic mimics the caliph-sultan relationship instituted during the Saljuq era, but with the power now completely tilted in favor of the Shi'ite "caliph."

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reality sided with Russia and the United States. Furthermore, Iran backed Armenia against their ethnic and religious relatives in Azerbaijan. Lastly, Tehran has generally turned a blind eye to the cause of Muslim fighters both in Chechnya and Kashmir.

<sup>54</sup> The political philosophy of Islam has never been able to define stable criteria for power succession (the Ottoman Empire, of course, was the exception mainly because it relied heavily on the pre-Islamic Turkish political tradition). Today, the reality is that every single Muslim country in the world—maybe with the exception of modern Turkey—is governed by totalitarian or quasi-democratic regimes. In this respect, Iran stands out as one of the Muslim countries with the strongest democratic institutions.

The theocratic state is hardly something that begun with the Arab caliphate. Sasanian rule was in many important aspects also a theocracy since the Zoroastrian clergy gained immense power over state affairs. Nevertheless, the clergy desperately wants to distance itself from Iran's pre-Islamic legacy. The two Pahlavi shahs sought to bolster their standing among ordinary Iranians by reviving the heritage of the Achaemenian kings. The ruling Shi'ite clergy, in contrast, has shored up its legitimacy by fabricating evidence of its long and principled opposition to the Persian monarchy. Nevertheless, a lot of evidence undermines the myths surrounding the Islamic Revolution and its image of historical uniqueness. Studying the fundamental principles of Islam is therefore a prerequisite for understanding Iran's state behavior.

#### **THE FUNDAMENTAL SOURCES OF ISLAM**

There are essentially two separate approaches to Islamic fundamentalism. First, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a movement within Islam called for a reappraisal of religious practices by consulting the early fundamentals of Islam before the rules for a Muslim life was carved in stone in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. This movement wanted to consult the way the Prophet dealt with the problems of his time and pragmatically apply his approach to the immense challenges of industrialized and secular nation-states.

Second, in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a school of thought began to argue that a literal implementation of the Prophet legacy would provide clear answers to the contemporary difficulties facing the Muslim community. What worked for the Prophet's community would automatically work also in a modern world. A common denominator among Islamic fundamentalist movements, and in particular since the 1970s, has been the stern belief that a strict return to the uncorrupted fundamentals of early Islam is the

“silver bullet” to empowerment of the Muslim World relative to the overwhelming power of the West. This is not to say that fundamentalism is confined to Islam. On the contrary, radical and powerful fundamentalist movements are found in every major religion all over the world in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Marty and Appleby 1991).

Among Muslims there is no disagreement over the core assumption that the Holy Law provides all the fundamental guidelines for a just Islamic society; however, the actual implementation of the Holy Law of Islam in a modern society is hotly disputed. There are, for example, innumerable interpretations of what the exact wording of the Koran prescribes with regard to the nature of modern political rule and the legal requirements that flow from the emergence of modern nationalism. Today Islam is going through a crisis of adjustment to the complex realities created by the technological advancements of the last two centuries. The religious leadership is struggling with providing realistic guidance in religious and moral questions that are adequate to meet the diversity of modern life. Moreover, Islam needs to come up with effective solutions to modern social, economic and political institutions that are compatible with the fundamentals of the faith. In short, studying the fundamental sources of Islam offers, from a political science point of view, an invaluable insight into the emotional aspects of Iran’s foreign policy that often transcends the “rational” pursuit of interest.

In general, Islam’s moral standards, code of human behavior, law, and political philosophy are all based upon only four distinct sources and fundamental principles: (1) God’s revelations submitted through the text of the Koran; (2) The traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*) and the community (*sunna*); (3) The consensus of the community (*ijma*); and, (4) The right to individual reasoning and interpretation (*ijtihad*).

While the orthodox Muslim community developed a technique for determining the legal basis for what constitutes Muslim Law, significant sectarian differences developed, of which the Sunni-Shi'i cleavage is just the tip of the iceberg. Moreover, Islam was superimposed upon the pre-existing vernacular culture when it spread from the Arabian Peninsula. Over time, regional religious practices have developed within Islam, some of them almost certainly very different from originally concept envisioned by the Prophet himself. Secular political developments are probably the most important factor since they historically have had the effect of driving the various Muslim constituencies apart.

In American public discourse people commonly refer to the Judean-Christian cultural tradition of the West. It would historically be more to the point to refer to a common spiritual and cultural Judean-Christian-Islamic monotheistic heritage. Muhammad is the last and final prophet in a sequence of monotheistic prophets, which includes among others, Adam, Noah, and Jesus. In the Islamic belief system, Allah's message to Muhammad completes, but at the same time abrogates, the revelations of earlier prophets dispatched to earth by God.

Islamic theology has no concept similar to the Christian doctrine of original sin, or man's need to seek eternal salvation. The Koran states explicitly that human beings are ultimately responsible—both on an individual and collective level—for their own deeds. Numerous passages proclaim that human beings are endowed with free will, which could suggest that Islam subscribes to a probabilistic approach to destiny. Then, other chapters (*surahs*) speak of God's ultimate control over the course of history, which have led many followers to believe in a deterministic worldview.

The fundamental sources of Islam do not condone forced conversions; rather, the Koran states that a genuine Muslim simply accepts God's commandments voluntarily.<sup>55</sup> Yet, the Islamic Republic of Iran blatantly violates freedom of religion. The Iranian Constitution declares that, "the official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." The constitution accords other Islamic denominations full freedom of worship. Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are all permitted to perform their religious activities, "within the limits of the law." The Iranian Government, however, does not recognize the Baha'i community. According to the *International Religious Freedom Report* released by the U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor: "Members of Iran's religious minorities—including Baha'is, Jews, Christians, and Sufi Muslims—reported imprisonment, harassment, and/or intimidation based on their religious beliefs. . . . The Government fuels anti-Baha'i and anti-Jewish sentiment in the country for political purposes" (U.S. Department of State 2001).

The Koran is universally regarded as a unique, original, consistent, and uniform religious text within the Islamic world as opposed to the Bible, which a majority of religious scholars recognize as a cut-and-paste document that originating out of a historical process of extensive religious and political deliberations. The Koran is divided into 114 chapters, or *surahs*, of fairly uneven length. The first *surahs* revealed during the Muhammad's stay at Mecca deal with the ethical and spiritual aspects of human life

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<sup>55</sup> In the literal Arabic meaning of the word Islam is "to surrender." In the religious terminology of the Koran, Islam entails to voluntarily surrender to the will or law of God. The simple logic is as follows: if man listens to the revelation of God's message (the Koran), then "good and evil have become distinct," and God has thereby provided man with two explicit alternatives so he can follow whichever alternative he may prefer.

revealing the all-encompassing nature of the Islamic project. The *surahs* revealed during the important years at Medina are concerned with the legal and practical aspects of God's divine will; the politico-moral principles of organizing a Muslim civil society and the detailed codification of acceptable human social behavior.

God's revelations to Muhammad were in the early days probably memorized by a small group of followers since the Prophet himself was not a literate person. The literal meaning of the word Koran (or Qur'an) is therefore quite appropriate "reading" or "recitation" of the speech of God. The Koran was in actual fact not compiled in its present authoritative form before the reign of the third caliph, Uthman (reigned 644-656), although some verses were recorded during the latter period of Muhammad's life on earth. Some scholars therefore suggested that the Koran to some extent is a product of human processes. The question of whether the Koran is the work of God or the product of a human interpretation of God's message was settled for the most part in the classic period of Islamic history in favor of the uncreated vision: the book is God's word.

Accordingly, the Koran is the ultimate and infallible foundation of authority in every aspect of human affairs. This conviction is held so strongly that an overwhelming majority of Muslims unconditionally rejects any earthly source of the Koran. Since the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a literal interpretation of the Koranic text has been allowed to dominate religious life in the Muslim World. Needless to say, the prevalent theological interpretation of the holy text makes it difficult for Muslims to reproduce the historical context so that the Koran can be applied more widely. Unfortunately, a literal interpretation of the Koran does not provide much insight into the pressing realities of today's global culture and global economy.

The *hadith* also provides guidelines for moral standards and acceptable human behavior in a Muslim society. Islam was super-imposed on the cultural traditions and religious practices of the Arabian tribes of Hejaz. The word *sunna* (“the well-trodden path”) used to denote tribal or common law in pre-Islamic times. In Islam, however, the *sunna* largely came to mean the traditions of the Prophet. The words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad were soon after his death elevated to a principal source of moral guidance that any good Muslim could possibly aspire to. The virtuous example of the Prophet is also the most important source of Islamic religious law. The idealized accounts of Muhammad’s righteous character and his exemplary personal conduct were recorded in compilations known as the *hadith*. Six collections are regarded as especially authoritative by the followers of Sunni Islam. With regard to Iran, one should carefully make note of the fact that the Shi’ite Imams have all been elevated to nearly the same infallibility as the Prophet, and that their sayings have been compiled in documents called *akhbars*.

The earliest *hadith* was compiled in its current authoritative form during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Islamic century (9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.). Up to that point in time, the *hadith* had been orally transmitted for nearly three centuries by a relative small group of followers. The Koran, in contrast, had been memorized, bits and pieces, by the entire Muslim for a much shorter period of time. Not surprisingly, recent research suggests that many of the statements that have been attributed to Muhammad cannot be traced back to the Prophet himself. These *hadiths* are more likely the opinion religious scribes, but most Muslims do not accept this finding.

In Islam, pluralism—the freedom of the individual believer to think for himself—is best captured in the legal concept of *ijtihad*, which translates from Arabic into English as “to endeavor” or “to exert effort.” The right to *ijtihad* allowed for a plethora of conflicting opinions in the early days of Islam, just like in Christianity before the Council of Nicaea. In the first century after the death of Muhammad, every sufficiently qualified member of the community had the right to exercise independent interpretation and personal judgment of problems not specifically covered by the Koran, the *hadith*, or any other established consensus among Muslim scholars. The individual believer that endeavored to exercise original thinking was named *mujtahid*, a terminology that would later take on a very significant meaning within the Shi’ite community.<sup>56</sup> However, during Islam’s consolidation phase there was little room for individual opinions.

During the reign of the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) four legal schools emerged over time that would virtually claim monopoly on religious interpretation. The doctrine of consensus within the Muslim community, *ijma*, was introduced in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.H. (8th century A.D.) in order to standardize legal theory and practice, but also to overcome individual and regional differences of opinion. In the third Islamic century, the Sunni legal schools succeeded in replacing *ijtihad* with a highly formal procedure of deduction

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<sup>56</sup> In the early period of Qajar dynasty that ruled Iran from 1779 to 1925, a religious dispute was brought to a conclusion that would have a very significant impact on later political developments. The Usuli-school of Shi’ism prevailed over its rival, the Akhbari-school. Akhbari Shi’ism gained strength in the reign of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722) partly because it opposed the unrestricted power of the *mujtahids*. The Akhbaris argued that the traditional reports (*akhbar*) about the Twelve Imams constituted the fundamental and self-sufficient source of guidance for the Shi’ite community. The reports were to be understood and interpreted literally, and they were not subject to *ijtihad* on which the authority of the *mujtahids* rested. The Usulis, on the other hand, maintained that religious doctrines needed rational confirmation and constant reinterpretation, which could only be supplied by trained and capable religious scholars.

known as “reasoning by strict analogy,” which effectively closed the “gate of *ijtihad*.”<sup>57</sup> As a result, the once so dynamic, innovative and prosperous Islamic civilization became gradually became dogmatic and stifled. This religious development may explain why progress in the fields of science, technology, and philosophy declined in the centuries that followed.

Shi’ism never formally accepted the closure of *ijtihad* or the decree that scholars of Islam could never again qualify as *mujtahid*. Ayatollah Khomeini will probably go down as one of the most significant *mujtahids* in the history of Islam.<sup>58</sup> Today in the city of Qom (the religious capital of Iran) highly controversial opinions on very sensitive religious and political issues are openly exchanged between religious students with little or no possibility for the ruling clergy to censor the discourse. Shi’ite mullahs are deliberately trained to argue. In practice, however, the legal rulings of the dominant Shi’ite clergy in Iran do not show more concern, if any, for pluralism, tolerance, or difference of opinion than Sunni dogmatism. The Supreme Leader, in concert with the Council of Guardians, is reactionary and represents an elitist approach to religious knowledge.

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<sup>57</sup> A similar process had taken place within the Christian church. Constantine I convened the first ecumenical council of the Christian church at Nicaea in 325. The council’s mandate was to unify the Christian doctrines. Constantine was particularly troubled with the teaching of Arius of Alexandria. Arianism argued that Christ is not divine but a created being.

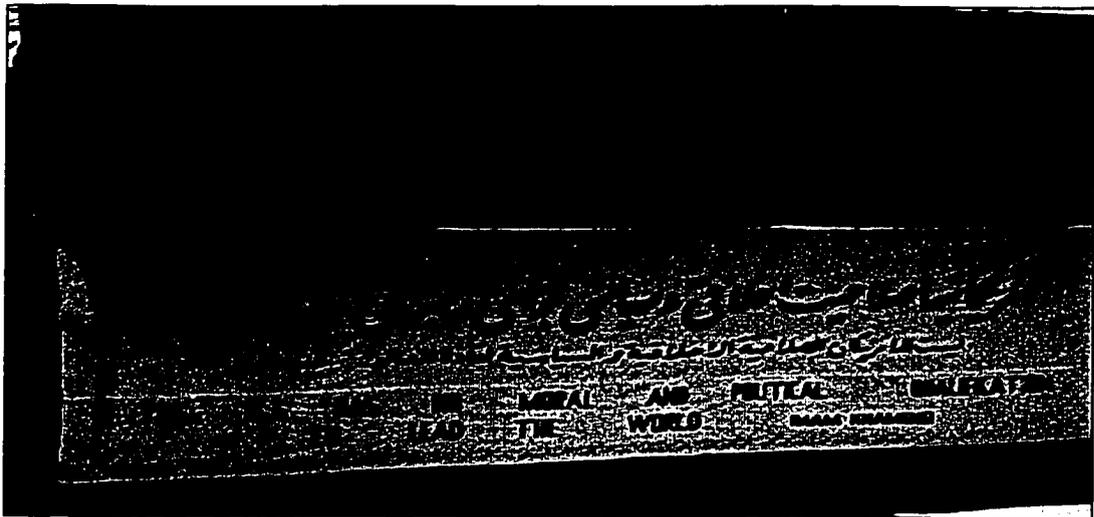
<sup>58</sup> After the Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini took up the title of Imam, which had not been used since the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam, sometime between A.D. 868 and 878.

## PRIDE AND ARROGANCE

Pride and arrogance are human psychological concepts that occupy a vital space in Islamic doctrines. In Islamic theology man is the only being that holds the choice to obey or disobey God, while everything else in the universe is designed to automatically observe God's will. Whereas every creature in the natural world unconditionally acknowledges its inherent shortcomings and constraints, Islam speaks of man's character as disobedient and full of pride. In Islamic theology man's *raison d'être* is service and submission to God's will. Nevertheless, man is arrogant and frequently believes that he is self-reliant. Pride is therefore the cardinal sin because self-importance suggests a belief that man should have an influence on God's divine will. The Koran also depicts the general human character as weak, wavering, and pitiful: "Man is by nature timid; when evil befalls him, he panics, but when good things come to him he prevents them from reaching others."

Monotheism generally scorns individuality that manifests itself in self-pride and self-promotion. Islam has more than Judaism and Christianity a deep-seated disdain for the person who indulges in pride or arrogance. This position stands out against the Hellenistic human ideals that are now held in high esteem in the West. In the classic world, pride was encouraged within the limits of what people saw as reasonable or justifiable self-respect short of self-aggrandizement. Arrogance, however, denotes a perception of superiority manifested in an overbearing attitude or presumptuous behavior. In Islam, the contempt for pride and arrogance is closely linked to the deep-rooted belief in Satan's existence—first described in the Old Testament—and man's fundamental moral duty to always fight what is deemed evil.

In this context, it becomes easier to understand the official sloganeering of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The United States is over and over again referred to as “the world arrogance” or “the Great Satan.” The official propaganda always emphasizes the essential moral purpose of the Iranian Revolution such as “the Islamic Revolution was a revolution of values” or “U.S. imposition of Western values.”<sup>59</sup>



Picture 2: Banner at the Friday prayer, Tehran University, August 2000.

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<sup>59</sup> Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei elaborated on “arrogance” in a speech delivered on 9 December 1997 to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Eighth Summit:

In our culture, arrogance refers to a power clique which relies on its political, military, scientific, and economic power and is inspired by a discriminatory outlook toward mankind in order to exert pressure on and exploit large groups of human beings, namely nations, governments, and countries through exertion of bullying and contemptuous domination, to interfere and intervene in their affairs, to plunder their assets and wealth, to bully governments, to oppress the nations, and to insult their cultures and traditions. Salient examples are colonialism, neo-colonialism, and recently the extensive and all-out political, economic, publicity, and even military invasion by former colonizers and their heirs” (Khamenei 1997).

## JIHAD

*Jihad* (“fight”, “holy struggle”, and/or “holy war”) holds a central position in Islam. Islam differentiates between four separate ways of fulfilling the obligation of *jihad*: by the heart, the tongue, the hand, and the sword. The first three approaches are non-violent and consist primarily of spiritual purification of one’s heart, by supporting what is right and rectify what is wrong. The fourth alternative is a physical armed struggle against infidels and enemies of Islam. In its modern interpretation, moderate Islam nearly always calls for non-violent *jihad* by waging “war” against one’s own inner demons.

Armed *jihad* is only permissible in mainstream Islam as a defensive measure when the integrity of the entire Muslim community is at risk. The armed resistance against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is a perfect example of a violent *jihad* implemented according to a moderate Islamic logic.<sup>60</sup> The object of *jihad* in the Afghani case was not re-conversion of people to Islam, but the militant re-imposition of Islamic principles for political and spiritual control of the Muslim community. As a matter of fact, passages in the Koran clearly state that conversions by force are strictly forbidden. The Koran also strictly prohibits wars conducted for the sake of acquiring worldly glory, influence, and/or supremacy. This clause is extremely important in the context of Iran’s historical legacy since it collides head on with Iran’s 2,500 years old imperial ambitions.

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<sup>60</sup> For a detailed analysis of the concept of jihad and the Soviet war in Afghanistan, see (Rubin 1995).

## **THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD AND HIS POLITICO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT**

The astonishing success of Muhammad's politico-religious movement is often attributed to the synthesis of two nearly unrelated historical processes: the unification of Arabian tribes within a common religious framework (622-632) and the great war between the two super powers of the time (602-628). Muhammad's preaching met initially with very little success in Mecca where he came from. Muhammad therefore left for Medina in 622, and soon after he held both temporal and spiritual authority in the capacity of being recognized as both a lawmaker and prophet. Muhammad's religious message produced an unprecedented social cohesion among a number of competing tribes and clans, which in turn unleashed a great military potential.

However, the overwhelming military success of the Arabs could in no way have been accomplished the unification of the Arab tribes had not coincided with a nearly completely unrelated historical event: a power-vacuum in the region that stemmed from the long and devastating wars between the Roman/Byzantine and Sasanian empires, which in its last stage had been raging nearly uninterruptedly for 26 years (602-628). As a result, Muhammad's newly formed confederation of Arab tribes was given a historical opportunity to conquer large parts of the civilized world. Less than 20 years after the Prophet's death in 632, his politico-religious movement had in battle decisively defeated the Byzantine empire and completely annihilated the armies of the Sasanian empire. Within only a century, the Arab Muslim empire stretched from Spain to Central Asia and India.

What is most impressive about Muslim achievements is the way in which it molded pre-existing religious convictions and cultural traditions into something that was

totally new. It simultaneously combined extreme militancy with a believable religious message. Institutionalized violence was merged with a call for tolerance, respect, and love in one single politico-religious body. The central theme of religious teaching was God's kindness and omnipotence. It promoted an egalitarian social agenda emphasizing man's responsibility to embrace generosity and justice in every aspect of human relations. Key elements from Judaism, Christianity, and Arab pagan traditions were cleverly co-opted by Muhammad. One of the five pillars of Islam—the pilgrimage and the Ka'bah shrine—was absorbed from pre-Islamic Arab rituals and modified to fit the new context. The political genius of this movement was that it created a brand-new state and religion that revolutionized conventional wisdom, but at the same time the message also verified pre-existing traditions.

#### **SOCIAL COHESION AND THE RISE AND FALL OF WORLD EMPIRES**

One of the greatest historians of all time, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), developed a general historical-political theory that explains with magnificent insight the inherent power potential in movements like that of Islam. In his scholarly masterpiece, the *Muqaddimah* ("Introduction to History"), Ibn Khaldun lays out a method for understanding macro-historical processes. A central theme in Ibn Khaldun's analysis is the concept of *asabiyah*, or "social cohesion." Social cohesion develops spontaneously on a micro-level within extended family groups or among members of a tribal federation. The power of communal cohesion at the lower societal level can be immensely magnified by a religious or ideological message. This concept has repeatedly elevated insignificant populations or ethnic communities to masters of empires.

Ambitious and unscrupulous individuals in history have always endeavored to harness this potential to their own advantage. Yet, once a challenger is firmly in power the strength of the social forces that propelled the new prince to power inescapably deteriorates because of a complex interaction of psychological, sociological, economic, and political factors. The weakening of the ruling regime signals the coming of a new dynasty supported by a novel combination of cohesive forces. In short, Ibn Khaldun's brilliant analysis explains the endless sequence of the rise and fall of great powers in world history. Ibn Khaldun believed that the process was fundamentally aimless except for one single mega-trend that he could deduct from history: a steady but long-term evolution from primitive to more civilized societies.

The so-called Islamic fundamentalism of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is primarily about how Muslim societies can revive the magic spirit of early Islam to regain worldly respect and political standing in the international system. The work of Ibn Khaldun has paradoxically received very little attention or recognition among followers of political Islam. One reason for the indifference could be that Ibn Khaldun's theory implicitly acknowledges that social cohesion in one particular historical setting is nearly impossible to replicate in another cultural context. His analysis therefore contradicts the teaching of radical Islam nearly 1,400 years after "the rightly guided caliphs."

Ibn Khaldun's theory explains how systemic processes and non-systemic events interact in a pattern that defines history and social change. His theory accommodates for the way in which highly idiosyncratic events can completely change the course of history. Ibn Khaldun witnessed first-hand how the Black Death so profoundly changed the make-up of not only Islamic societies but also human civilization at large. He clearly

understood the Mongol invasions' severe and long-lasting structural impact on Middle Eastern societies. There is even some evidence that Ibn Khaldun anticipated the rise of Europe by observing the emerging merchant navies of Portugal, Spain, and the Italian city-states. Applied to this dissertation, Ibn Khaldun's theory explains why the revolutionary fervor of 1978-79 has faded away in Iran. His thesis also draws attention to the long-term impact of the Hostage Crisis, which has shaped the U.S.-Iranian conflict to an extraordinary degree.

#### **FACTIONALISM AND SUCCESSION DISPUTES: THE BIRTH OF SHI'ISM**

Despite the sense of social cohesion that the Prophet had instilled in his crowd of followers, the early Muslim community was immediately torn apart by personal and factional differences when he died in June of 632. The struggle for leadership of the Muslim confederation eventually led to the most important sectarian differences within Islam that has never been resolved. The split between Sunni and Shi'i Islam has in the course of history been idealized into an epic ideological struggle over what constitutes the legitimate spiritual and political leadership of the Muslim community. At the time, however, the dispute had seemingly more to do with clan and tribal affiliation, noble ancestry, economic standing, and a sense of geographic patriotism than theology.

Clan membership was the single most important variable in the rise and consolidation of the Arab-Muslim empire. Muhammad belonged to Quraysh tribe, but more importantly, he was a member of the Hashim clan. The Quraysh tribe contained nine other main clans beside the Prophet's clan. The first caliph, Abu Bakr, who was in power 632-634, came from the Taim al-Lat clan. The second caliph, Umar (reigned 634-

644), belonged to the Adi clan. The third caliph, Uthman (reigned 644-656), was from the Umayya clan, which, of course, founded the Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus.

Ali, who was the son of one of the leaders of the Hashim clan, was the last of the “four rightly guided” or “perfect caliphs,” the *Rasidhuns*. He was also Muhammad’s son-in-law. His troubled reign, 656-661, marked the end to the form of theocracy that had been institutionalized by Muhammad. The *Rasidhun*-period is among many Muslims today looked upon as the only truly Islamic rule in history, despite the fact that the period was stained by corruption and vicious succession disputes.

The problems surrounding successions of power have never really been satisfactorily resolved in the political culture of Islam. Muhammad had made no provisions for succession according to the Sunni, or the traditionalist faction. It was subsequently up to the *ummah* to select an appropriate successor. Ali’s faction, or what later came to be known as the Shia or the party of Ali, claimed that the Prophet had made no secret that he personally preferred that the father of his only surviving grandsons should succeed him. Nevertheless, a meeting was convened upon the death of Muhammad to settle the succession question.

An assembly of Muhammad’s lieutenants and clan leaders chose a compromise candidate, Abu Bakr, as the Prophet’s *caliph* or successor. The choice was first and foremost motivated by the majority’s desire to preserve unity within the *ummah*. Ali’s faction deferred to the majority decision. During his short time in power, Abu Bakr violently suppressed political and spiritual opponents, and reasserted central control during what came to be known as the war of the *riddah* (“apostasy”). Abu Bakr revived

social cohesion by focusing on military expansion to Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt. Here the Arabs ran up against the vital interests of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires.

During the reign of the second caliph, Umar, factional differences temporarily subsided. Byzantine and Sasanian armies were defeated whereby the insignificant Arabian principality was propelled to world power status. A Persian slave assassinated Umar and factional tension resurfaced again under his successor. The third caliph, Uthman of the Umayya clan, lacked his predecessor's sense of justice. Blatant nepotism under Uthman's leadership aroused widespread opposition, which led to his murder by Egyptian soldiers. The elite of Medina then proclaimed Ali the fourth caliph, but soon after Uthman's clan started to challenge Ali's leadership since it threatened Umayya commercial interests.

During Ali's reign as caliph, 656-661, the succession disputes erupted into open warfare. It was the duty of the new leader of the Umayya clan, Mu'awiya, to see to that the murder of Uthman was avenged. Ali allegedly ignored apprehending and punishing the men who had slain Uthman. Mu'awiya therefore proclaimed Ali to be an accomplice to the murder of Uthman and publicly disputed Ali's position as caliphate. The first of four civil wars within the Muslim community was then set in motion.

The most important schism in Islam—between Shi'i "legitimists" and Sunni "traditionalists"—has its direct historical underpinnings in the armed conflict between troops loyal to Ali and the tribal factions united under the umbrella of the Umayya chieftain, Mu'awiya. Their dispute reached a climax at the Battle of Siffin in 657, which did not produce a conclusive victory. The parties then agreed to submit their conflict to arbitration. Ali lost the arbitration when the mediators declined to declare him the

legitimate caliph. The first civil war ended in 661, when his former allies, the Kharijites, murdered Ali in his own city of Kufa. Mu'awiya then unopposed took up the office of caliph, which inaugurated the rule of the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750).

The Ali-Mu'awiya conflict is often portrayed as an ideological struggle between the ideological "legitimists"-faction and strictly "traditionalists"-faction. Ali paradoxically did not belong to either of these two extremes. His ultimate undoing was that he accepted mediation efforts to seek a middle ground between the warring factions. Ali's quarrel with Mu'awiya was really over political power since the irreconcilable Sunni-Shi'i differences in religious matters did not crystallize until much later in time. Shi'ism ("the party of Ali") in the following centuries evolved into a major religious belief that Ali and his offspring were divinely chosen to succeed Muhammad as the supreme leaders of the Muslim World.

#### **THE FIRST ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS: THE KHARIJITES**

The Kharijite-dogma, which holds that there is no precedence in Islam except that of virtue, reemerged with political Islam in the 1970s. Though the Kharijites were completely destroyed before the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.H., they left a lasting legacy to generations of Islamic reform movements. The religious and political message of the Kharijites has important bearings on today's turmoil in the Muslim world. Accounts of their strong commitment to justice and on egalitarian principles remain a source of inspiration. Their ideological interpretation of Islam has time again inspired radical reform movements within the Islamic world.

The Kharijites—one of Ali's original constituencies—turned against Ali when he agreed to submit his dispute with Mu'awiya to arbitration. The Kharijites vehemently declined to take a softer position on the fundamental principle that God's will could be subject to human judgment or human mediation. They therefore rejected the legitimacy of both Ali and Mu'awiya's claim to power. Ali defeated the Kharijites in the Battle of Nahrawan in 658 and killed their leader, Ibn Wahb, together with a large number of his followers. In spite of this crushing defeat, the Kharijites who survived the battle reorganized and later assassinated Ali.

The centerpiece of Kharijite ideology is in essence democracy and meritocracy; however, the intolerance by which they sought to achieve their goals bear resemblance to the totalitarian ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kharijite ideology rested on two central dogmas: (1) a person or a group ceases to be Muslim if the profession of faith is not followed up by the necessary deeds; and, (2) the means to achieve the Islamic ideal state are perpetual *jihad*.

The first dogma of Kharijite theology states that the only basis of legitimate leadership is the virtuous character of any Muslim irrespective of race, color, and sex. They claimed that even a black slave could in theory be elected caliph. The elected ruler should immediately be removed from power if he failed to conduct himself with religious piety and moral purity. The Kharijites themselves practiced a puritanical form of life that negated material lavishness, music, and entertainment.

The second Kharijite dogma prescribes active struggle or rebellion against any form of government that is considered immoral. The Kharijites were actively engaged in various forms of physical harassment and terrorism. The combined effect of the

Kharijites' stringent and uncompromising reading of the Koran was that the group became extremely intolerant of almost any established political authority that did not confirm to their strict interpretation of Islam. The Kharijites made so many enemies that they did not survive history. Their philosophy, however, lives on and continues to inspire opposition groups within the world of Islam.

The Kharijites emphasis on egalitarian (or democratic) principles to guide political rule in a Muslim state resurfaced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Kharijites over and over again referred to the *surah* that holds that, "judgment belongs to God alone" (Koran 6:57). This implies in matters of leadership and succession that God's will can only be properly expressed if the whole Muslim community can freely choose its leader. The Kharijite-position on what constitutes a legitimate Islamic rule therefore conflicts with both Sunni and Shi'i principles.<sup>61</sup>

Many Muslims have since the 7<sup>th</sup> century strongly identified with the simplicity of Kharijite-ideology. The proposition that honesty and moral integrity are the only personal qualification necessary for a Muslim to hold office is universal popular. These are paradoxically exactly the same qualities Americans look for in their political candidates. Political Islam preaches the simple message today that the Holy Law of Islam is the only source of legitimate rule and that the virtuous religious leader will produce the day-to-day details. However, radical Islamists have so far provided few sustainable guidelines for practical governance when the supreme leader is not behaving like a virtuous man.

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<sup>61</sup> The original Sunni concept holds that the elite of the Prophet's tribe, the Quraysh, selects the most accomplished to become the head of state. Shi'i theology prescribes that the ruler should descend directly from the Prophet himself, or in the absence of a direct descendant, the faithful should seek the guidance from those who are best trained in the Holy Law of Islam (the Shi'i version).

Islamic civilization has in the past adjusted to changing political circumstances by rewriting the doctrines that describes legitimate rule. The Abbasid caliphs were strongly influenced by the Sasanian-Persian monarchical order. Autocratic leadership grew stronger with the Turkish invasions from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, Islam also spread to new regions populated by people with very different political traditions. Over the last two hundred years, Iran has experienced tremendous problems in developing an effective modern political system. The United States made things worse when it interfered in a political process that was slowly pulling Iran away from centuries of authoritarianism. America's support for totalitarian rule under Mohammad Reza Shah is at the center of today's hostility between the two nations.

## **2. The Arab Invasion**

Reza Shah Pahlavi argued in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the Islamic period in Iran's history was merely an accidental intermission. His regime portrayed Iran a single unified and continuous imperial entity since times of the Achaemenians. One needs to question if Reza Shah really believed in such an erroneous assessment of history. The Arab invasion of the Sasanian empire forever changed Iran. Quite different from the effects of Alexander the Great's invasion and 200 years of Seleucid rule, the Arab conquest had a profound and lasting impact on Iran's historical destiny. The advent of Islam forever altered Iranians' perceptions of what constitutes a legitimate political rule.

Arab military supremacy put aside, the cultural and political influences were definitely not one-sided. Iran's imperial institutions soon molded the Arab caliphate into

a traditional oriental monarchy. The sophisticated culture of Iran greatly inspired the Umayyad caliphs at Damascus and exerted immense influence on the Abbasid Caliphate at Baghdad. The Umayyad dynasty was defeated by a coalition that originated in the Iranian province of Khorasan. Later in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries a distinct Persian-Islamic political culture took root on the Iranian plateau.

It was Islam and not Arab rule that so profoundly changed the direction of Iran's history. One of the reasons why Iranians converted so easily to Islam is that the egalitarian principles of Islam promised to offer something better for the common man than the caste-like society of Sasanian-Zoroastrianism. However, the Arab caliphate was quickly transformed into an oriental empire that generally did not care much for the underprivileged. A number of popular revolts in Iran against the Arab caliphate bear witness that many Iranians were unhappy with the way Islamic rule turned out.

Firm Arab rule in Iran lonely lasted for a hundred some years. The Umayyad Caliphate at Damascus did not establish solid full control of the former Sasanian provinces before around year 700. By 821 the first *de facto* independent Perso-Islamic dynasty came to power. In between the Abbasid revolution (750) and the establishment of the Tahirid dynasty (821), a number of major revolts broke out in Iran. In short, the Arab caliphs ruled Iran for a relative short period of time, and the Arab way of life made little impact on Iranians.

The Arab caliphate could not dominate the new Perso-Islamic dynasties on the Iranian plateau. The decline of the Arab empire can be attributed to two main causes. First, the universal message of Islam's founding ideas meant that an exclusive ethnic Arab rule was increasingly perceived as un-Islamic (or unjust) and aimed at worldly

satisfaction. Second, and probably the most important reason for the undoing of an Arab empire, was the fact that running an increasingly cosmopolitan caliphate gradually forced the Arab rulers to borrow institutions from earlier Eurasian empires. The most significant of these borrowed practices was the employment of slave armies.

The creation of a slave army had fatal repercussions for the Caliphate. As opposed to the devoted Muslim warriors that conquered the world in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the new alien slave army of mainly Turkish origin was barely Muslim. History shows that mercenary soldiers are notoriously unreliable. Sure enough, by the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century Turkish officers had usurped complete control over the office of the caliph. Violent intrigues and civil wars threatened to bring down the whole empire.

America's involvement in Iran after World War II also upset the internal equilibrium. The U.S. effort to build up a modern military force for Iran under the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah misread the history and culture of Iran as an Islamic society. The Shah's "slave" army enabled him to Westernize society by force. The Iranian population, however, expected the new army to protect the functioning of an Islamic society, to war against the outside threat, and not to facilitate the growth of an alternative civilized order.

#### **THE UMAYYAD CALIPHATE OF DAMASCUS: 661-750**

The Arab empire expanded so fast that it quickly outgrew the political traditions of the Hejaz. The Umayyads soon faced the multifaceted problems of governing a great heterogeneous empire. It became increasingly clear to the Umayyads that their founding political philosophy was not compatible with imperial rule.

By the end of the seventh century, the Muslim conquest had pushed as far west as the Atlantic coast of Morocco and in 711 Arab forces crossed the straits of Gibraltar to conquer Spain. On the eastern extreme of the empire, the conquest of Islam had advanced to the Oxus valley and northwestern India. The Arabs, however, did not encourage their new subjects to convert to Islam by.

The rapid growth of the Arab empire worked against the Umayyads. A different offshoot of the Umayyad clan moved the capital of the empire to Damascus after a second period of civil war within the Muslim community. However, the strategic importance of Syria had become severely weakened since the Arabs were largely unsuccessful in their design on seizing Asia Minor from the Byzantine empire. As a result old trade routes were cut off.

The future of the Islamic empire lay farther to the west in the provinces of the former Sasanian empire. The fertile irrigated agriculture of Mesopotamia could better support the political ambitions of the new Arab land-owning class. Moreover, a symbiosis was taking place, particularly in eastern Iran, between the Arab occupiers and the former Iranian ruling class that had regained some of its previous power as government officials and tax collectors. The religious and ethnic unity that had brought the Quraysh merchant class imperial fame was slowly fading away.

The Umayyads solved the problems of imperial rule with autocracy rather than legitimacy. The caliph's office became for all practical purposes hereditary under the Umayyads. Official state procedures and political ceremonies came gradually to resemble that of either Byzantine emperors or Iranian kings. A contemporary view holds that Umayyad caliphate was corrupt and that its government was intended for purely worldly

needs. Critics have claimed in hindsight that Umayyad rule was self-serving and that the Umayyad caliphs never had Islam's best interests in mind like the "four rightly guided caliphs" did. This position is only partly correct. A more nuanced historical account argues that the Umayyads became a firmly urbanized and highly pragmatic governing elite after they moved to Damascus.

The lasting historical legacy of the Umayyad period was the conflict between spiritual and temporal power. The Umayyad caliphs developed an aversion for religious limitations on temporal power. "You are putting relationship before religion," declared the first Umayyad governor of Mesopotamia (Hourani 1991, 26). This statement does not necessarily imply disrespect for religious ideals, but rather a clear acknowledgment that state affairs had to come before spiritual considerations. The same thing can be said about Ayatollah Khomeini. He was a cunning politician who always showed a keen appreciation for the necessities of practical politics. Khomeini clearly understood that ideological compromises had to be made along the road to success.

The Umayyads had for a long period of time successfully suppressed all political opposition to their hold on power. Resistance to the dynasty's policies had more often to do with personal ambitions, local grievances, and factional differences than with a struggle along religious lines. Ethnic and tribal affiliations were most of the time higher on the conflict agenda than religious sentiments. In fact, religious opposition groups never seriously threatened Umayyad power. In the early years of the dynasty's reign the Umayyads brutally suppressed opposition from the Kharijites, who did not stir up more trouble until after the Abbasid caliphs took office. The Shi'ites were substantial in numbers but they lacked potent leadership.

What did surface as the most serious challenge to Umayyad rule was widespread resentment of the discriminatory economic policies against the non-Arab majority population. A tiny Arab elite enjoined extensive economic and political privileges purely based on their ethnic origin. In the occupied territories, these policies—palpably in disagreement with the intent of Muhammad’s revelations—increasingly flew in the face of new converts to Islam as the glamour of the Arab conquest gradually faded away.

Opposition to Arab elitism grew particularly strong in the Iranian province of Khorasan. In Khorasan, a remarkable assimilation had taken place between Arab colonizers and the old Iranian landed elite, who had by-and-large kept their material possessions after the conquest. This political constellation had produced a particularly exploitive system of taxation. Abu Muslim, a man of little known origin—most likely of Iranian ancestry—was capable of rallying many dissimilar opposition groups in a united front against the Umayyads. Discontent was targeted at barrier put in place by the Umayyads against conversion to Islam, but “legitimists” also attacked the fact that the Umayyads were not from the Prophet’s family.

The Abbasid clan took advantage of the dissatisfaction that was building up in Khorasan. The Abbasids used their family bonds to the Prophet as vehicle to get to power. The Abbasid dynasty derived its name from the Prophet’s uncle, al-‘Abbas (died c. 653), who was a prominent member of the powerful Hashim clan in Mecca. From the Abbasid stronghold on the fringes of the Syrian desert, the clan sent emissaries to Khorasan to stir up the revolt that erupted in 747 against Umayyad rule. Their chief confidant, Abu Muslim, organized a strong fighting force that defeated the Umayyads in a series of battles in 749 and 750. The last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II, was chased all to

the way to Egypt where he was killed. Thus, the Abbasid revolution had swept aside the “illegitimate” rule of the Umayyads; however, the new dynasty moved the Islamic empire farther away from its spiritual and ideological origin.

#### THE ABBASID CALIPHATE AT BAGHDAD: 750-1258

The Abbasid dynasty transformed the Muslim empire into a traditional oriental empire. With the Abbasid caliphs at the helm, Muhammad’s Islamic revolution had in little more than a century come full circle to where the original protest movement began; but, the big difference was that the Arabs were now at the top of the power pyramid. From their secluded palaces in Baghdad, the Abbasid caliphs exercised power almost identical to the ancient Persian kings. In many ways it was quite natural for the Abbasids to imitate imperial Sasanian traditions since much of their power base was now derived from Persian converts to Islam. As a result, the Abbasids did away with many of the privileges granted to ethnic Arabs and they instead emphasized membership to a universal community of Muslims irrespective of ethnic origin.

The Abbasid dynasty faced the same inescapable problems as the Umayyads did: how to combine the adherence to religious principles and the necessities of *realpolitik* in one stable and lasting regime that could bridge factional differences. Before such a daunting task could be undertaken, the Abbasids swiftly killed Abu Muslim and others who had brought them to power. The Abbasids set out to legitimize their rule in less ambiguous Islamic terms than the Umayyads. They systematically sought to justify their rule in divine terms as direct descendants of the Prophet. Since the caliph now increasingly ruled in the manner of traditional monarchical absolutism, the Abbasids

deemed it even more necessary to package their rule in religious symbolism in order to win over the moral support of their subjects.

The Abbasids also completed a much-needed geographic, economic, and political reorientation of the empire. The Abbasid Caliphate moved the Muslim empire's center-of-gravity from Syria to the former Sasanian heartlands in Mesopotamia. The newly founded capital at Baghdad grew to an astonishing 500,000 inhabitants in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The irrigated agriculture of southern Iraq could provide a large enough food surplus to sustain such an enormous urban population. The empire was politically also firmly located within the former Sasanian territories. Political events in Fars, Khorasan and Transoxania were followed more closely than developments in other parts of the empire.

Persian culture and individuals influenced the Abbasid caliphate heavily. The Persian influence manifested itself in the military, the bureaucracy, and among the intellectual establishment. Sasanian institutions and practices were re-shaped to fit the Islamic context. Sasanian literature and works on political philosophy were translated into Arabic. "Persianization" of state affairs increased dramatically as a result of the succession disputes that followed after Harun al-Rashid reign (786-809) came to an end.

In the civil war that broke out in 811, Persian troops installed al-Ma'mun as caliph at the expense of his brother al-Amin. In his short reign, al-Amin had emphasized traditionalism and Arab culture, whereas al-Ma'mun had come under the influence of politico-religious figures from the eastern Iranian provinces. Al-Ma'mun rewarded Tahir ibn al-Husain, the Persian general that deposed and killed his brother, with the semi-independent governorship of Khorasan.

Caliph al-Ma'mun (reigned 813-833) tried to impose a single rational interpretation of Islam on his subjects that met with very little lasting success. Al-Ma'mun had early on been drawn to the Mu'tazilah-movement. The Mu'tazilah school of Islam had over time developed a rationalist method of reasoning that borrowed heavily from ancient Greek philosophers. This school of speculative theology flourished in Basra and Baghdad between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Mu'tazilah doctrine rested on three main pillars of religious interpretation: (1) a strictly simplified concept of divinity, (2) strong confidence in free will of man, and (3) full human accountability. The centerpiece of Mu'tazilah theology is that God wants only the best for mankind; however, man has been accorded the free will to choose between good and evil, and he thus becomes ultimately responsible for his own actions.

The Mu'tazilites believed that religious certainty could be reached by applying reason to the Koranic revelations. A central doctrine held that God is pure essence without human or physical properties. The Mu'tazilites also argued that the Koran was created and not eternal. The basis for this doctrine was the proposition that the eternal character of the Koran gave the impression of another god beside Allah. It therefore flows from the Mu'tazilah line of reasoning: if God has no human attributes then the Koran could not possibly represent God directly. Consequently, the Koran does not have an absolute and divine communication with man.

The Mu'tazilah religious doctrine would weaken the importance of a large and increasingly traditionalist religious establishment. The Mu'tazilite propositions challenged strong vested interests. Moreover, the doctrine called for extraordinary moral and spiritual qualities of the caliph. The doctrine went so far as to legitimize revolt

against an evil supreme ruler, which explains why the Mu'tazilah principles found scores of adherents among Shi'ite sympathizers. Elements of Mu'tazilah teaching have played an important role in the development of Shi'i theology.

Trouble started when Caliph al-Ma'mun declared the doctrine of the created Koran as the state dogma in 827. The strict Sunni traditionalists, of course, rejected the promulgation off hand but the caliph "persuaded" nearly everybody to go along with the new doctrine. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the founder of the most orthodox of Sunni Islam's four legal schools, was virtually the only person that stood up against the caliph. He fiercely denounced the decree and insisted a literally interpretation of the Koran and the *hadith* (the behavior of the Prophet) offered sufficient guidance in all questions.<sup>62</sup> In 833 a tribunal was established to persecute those who called into question the doctrine that stated that reasoning was equal to revelation as a mean to reach religious truth. The inquisition continued until approximately 848, when caliph al-Mutawakkil (reigned 847-861) completely reversed the edict by making support for the Mu'tazilah dogma of a created Koran punishable by death. The lasting legacy of this religious dispute serves to explain the traditionalist orientation of Sunni Islam.

The battle between caliph al-Ma'mun and Ahmad ibn Hanbal was in essence a dispute over the principles that guide separation of power. The battle was fought in the context of who should have the ultimate authority to interpret the Koran. Al-Ma'mun decree would give the caliph extraordinary spiritual and political power. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, on the other hand, contended that the only source of Islamic religious obligations

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<sup>62</sup> Basically same dispute came to a head within Twelver Shi'ism nearly one thousand years later with the exact opposite outcome, see *The Role of the Mujtahids*, page 273.

was the fundamental texts and not the pronouncements made by the caliph. Religious interpretations, if necessary, rested solely with the upper clergy, the *ulama*. Hanbal's position entailed that the caliphate was merely the executive office of the Islamic community, and that the source of spiritual understanding belonged to a separate religious/political body.

The *ulama* emerged victorious in the end, and irreparable damage had been done to the caliphates' authority. The caliphate remained the symbol of Islamic unity but the spiritual ties to grass root religious communities had been severed. The caliph would act for the administrative and executive interests of high-Islam while the scholars and Sufis took care of the day-to-day affairs of folk-Islam. In practice, this was another example of how the Muslim community was unable to fully Islamize the state.

Caliph al-Ma'mun in vain also tried to bridge the gap between Sunni and Shi'i Islam. Acting on the advice of his all-powerful Iranian vizier, al-Fadl ibn Sahl, the caliph sought to broaden his religious appeal by approaching the Shi'ite minority with an invitation to participate in government. Al-Ma'mun even went so far as to designate the Eighth Shi'i Imam, Ali al-Rida, as his rightful successor. The move turned out to be a political disaster since both the Sunnites and Shi'ites rose in rebellion. Al-Ma'mun extracted himself from this mess when he had the vizier. The Eighth Imam also met a sudden death (he was poisoned according to some accounts). When al-Ma'mun died in 833, autonomous Perso-Islamic principalities in eastern Iran had already been established. In the century that followed the political power of the Sunni caliphate declined rapidly.

After al-Ma'mun's death, Turkish "slave" soldiers began to replace Persians in the Abbasid administration. The introduction of Turkish "slave" soldiers into Abbasid armed forces forever changed the political landscape of the whole Muslim world. A vicious cycle of civil war and decline began with caliph Harun's death in 809. Intermittent civil wars erupted and it became difficult for the caliph to retain loyalty among his soldiers, particularly those from Khorasan by whom the Abbasids had come to power. The eighth Abbasid caliph, Caliph al-Mu'tasim (reigned 833-842), solved the problem temporarily by purchasing non-Muslim slave mercenaries of Berber, Slav, but mainly Turkish ethnic origin.<sup>63</sup> The military slave system saved Islamic civilization from outside pressure, but it was a grave mistake in hindsight since these elite "slave" soldiers would within only a few decades usurp power.

The new Turkish military aristocracy quickly split the governing institutions of the Muslim community when they introduced the institution of the sultanate. From this point on, Turkish troops only nominally converted to Islam took charge of the politics of the Muslim community. Arabs or Iranians were hardly ever again recruited to senior military positions but they retained their hold on religious and administrative positions. In fact, this peculiar form of separation-of-power between recently converted Turks and the rest of society would result in the establishment empires that would last for many centuries in Iran and in the Middle East. In Safavid Iran this arrangement played a significant role in the formation of modern Iran.

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<sup>63</sup> The Persian Samanid dynasty made a fortune from supplying the caliph's personal army with Turkish-speaking pastoral tribesmen from the Central Asian frontier.

Almost all of the distant provinces of the Abbasid Empire became effectively self-governing in the course of the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century. Syria, Egypt, and the Iranian territories in the east broke away from Abbasid control and became *de facto* independent. In the period 861-870, the central province in Mesopotamia was plunged into sustained anarchy and civil war. Turkish military officers assumed complete control of what remained of state affairs in this period. Civil war eventually subsided, and law and order was restored for a while but the chaos had done irreversible damage to the Abbasid empire.

The political anarchy was accompanied by a general breakdown of the economic base that had sustained several empires. The decline of the Abbasid caliphate was partly brought on by the Turkish mercenaries' excessive demand for compensation. The Turkish military officers were increasingly paid for by the right to collect tax revenues from land directly assigned to them. This inevitably led to extortion of the peasant population for short-term economic gain.<sup>64</sup>

Agriculture in the lands southern Mesopotamia had always required long-term strategic investments and frequent maintenance of the elaborate irrigation infrastructure.

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<sup>64</sup> The caliphate institutionalized a system called *iqta*. The cash-strapped caliph had to come up with ways to pay his military machine. *Iqta* is the right to collect taxes from certain taxpaying units granted to army officials for limited periods in lieu of a regular pay. The land, however, remained in the hands of the state as the representative of God, but the *iqta* gave the officer right to collect taxes from the cultivators. The officer was expected to forward some of the revenues to the state coffer and to keep the balance as his personal salary in exchange for military service. The officers, however, often pocketed everything for themselves, which further strained state finances. The *iqta*-system was designed for oppression. The officer, as a general rule, lived in a city far away from his land tenure, and he showed very little interest in the land or the well being of its cultivators.

By the late Saljuq period the *iqta*-system had proliferated radically, and in many instances the grants had become hereditary. These land grants in turn became the basis out of which petty principalities surfaced at the expense of central authority. Though the central ruler seems to have had more control over feudal lords than in Europe, the *iqta*-system nevertheless gradually merged local administration and local military power, which to large extent contributed to the weakening of the Abbasid empire (Noreng 1997, 80).

The finest of the ancient irrigation works of central Iraq, the Nahrawan canal, was deliberately breached to slow down a military invasion in 935, never to be repaired. The accumulative effect of mismanagement and destruction was that settled farming came to an end in vast areas of Mesopotamia, and depopulation followed. The devastation of the irrigation works undercut the source of wealth that had supported an old civilization for centuries. Moreover, a large and protracted uprising of black slaves in the sugar plantations and salt marshes of southern Iraq—the revolt of the Zanj (868-83)—further undermined the economic foundations of the empire.

In the end the political, military and economic underpinnings of the urban Muslim state and society were weakened to such an extent that an upstart Iranian dynasty, the Buyids, could enter Baghdad in 945 virtually unopposed. The caliph was presented with an ultimatum by which the Buyids were recognized as the legitimate political authority of what remained of the empire. In the century that followed the empire was ruled as a loose military federation of local sovereigns. In 1055 the Saljuqs terminated the political arrangement between the caliph and Buyids, and the Saljuq sultan seized what little temporal power was still vested in the caliph. The Saljuqs nevertheless agreed on paper to fully respect the authority of the Abbasid caliph in religious matters while holding the title of sultan (political leader of the Muslim community). Two centuries later, in 1258, the caliphate finally came to an end as an institution when the great Mongol general, Hülegü, sacked Baghdad, and killed the last Abbasid caliph.

### **3. The Iranian Intermezzo**

The period 821-1055 is often called the Iranian intermezzo. Several Persian dynasties gained political independence and the period saw an extremely important cultural renaissance in the history of Iran. Literary works resurrected the memories of pre-Islamic Persian patriotism and the grandeur of the Persian empire. More importantly, these dynasties created a distinct Perso-Turkish version of Islamic civilization that merged Islam with the grandeur of the former Persian empire.

#### **THE TAHIRID DYNASTY: 821-873**

Long before the Turko-Mongol invasions, the Tahirid dynasty of Khorasan contributed to a modest resurgence in Perso-Islamic culture. Tahir ibn al-Husain, a Persian general in the service of the Abbasid caliph, founded a political dynasty based on the Iranian plateau. Tahir played a dominant role in the civil war that followed caliph Harun al-Rashid's death in 809. Harun's two sons, al-Amin and his half-brother al-Ma'mun (whose mother was a Persian slave girl), fought a merciless war over succession to the caliphate at Baghdad. Forces under Tahir's command defeated al-Amin's army and the new caliph, al-Ma'mun, later rewarded his general with the land of Khorasan.

Tahir came from an Iranian family that had played a prominent role in the Abbasid revolution. Tahir—unlike Abu Moslem—did not make the mistake of becoming too intimate with the caliph's power circles. Instead, he requested and was granted the governorship of Khorasan in 821, which gave him authority over all Abbasid provinces east of Mesopotamia. The real motive behind al-Ma'mun's decision to grant Tahir independence may not have been so "altruistic" after all. A strategic appraisal of the

whole security environment may have shown that the best way to defend Islam's eastern borders was to delegate the whole task to a great semi-autonomous commander. Tahir was of ethnic Iranian origin, but he rose through the ranks of the Abbasid military establishment. He remained loyal to the legitimacy of the Arab caliphate throughout his life.

Tahir was no enemy of the Abbasids; yet, Tahir is said to have dropped references to the caliph's name in the Friday prayer and caliph al-Ma'mun's name is positively not found on the coins Tahir minted. Tahir's historical significance was that he carved out the first *de facto* independent Iranian dynasty since the Arab conquest, which the caliphs were either unable or unwilling to contest. In this sense the Tahirid dynasty marks the rebirth of the Persian polity under Islam (Bosworth 1975, 90).

Tahirid rule has been characterized as enlightened absolutism. The dynasty restored law and order in eastern Iran in the wake of the political and religious upheavals that followed the Abbasid revolution. After the Tahirids a number of Persian dynasties emerged that were more independent-minded, both politically and culturally. These dynasties were ethnically Iranian, but their spiritual orientation was completely Islamic, which suggests that by this time a majority of Iran's population had converted to Islam.

#### **THE SAFFARID DYNASTY: 873-900**

The Saffarid dynasty continued the Iranian resurgence. The dynasty emerged out of the province of Sistan where its founder, Ya'qub bin al-Laith, had won political control around 866. Ya'qub, a coppersmith turned warlord, rapidly extended his domain by means of a disciplined army. In Sistan, Kharijites from Mesopotamia had sought refuge from persecution since early Umayyad times, and their emphasis on egalitarianism

had attracted many Persians (Daftary 1992). The Saffarid dynasty, however, suppressed the Kharijite rebels and ended their military importance as a sectarian rebel movement

The Saffarid army was distinctly different from contemporary armed forces since the soldiers pledged loyalty solely to the commander and not to any religious or doctrinal concept. By 869 the Saffarids controlled the southern parts of present day Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Ya'qub's forces drove the Tahirids out of Khorasan in 873. Ya'qub then advanced on Baghdad in 876 but its defenders successfully stopped the assault on the Abbasid capital by deliberately bursting the dikes. The lasting legacy of the Saffarids is not their military achievements, but that they were the first rulers to revive the written Persian language after the Arab conquest of Iran. Ya'qub therefore remains to this day a popular folk-hero in Iran's national history.

In the end the Abbasid caliph strategically outmaneuvered the Saffarids. Baghdad for a while reluctantly recognized Ya'qub's brother and successor, Amr, as governor of Fars, Isfahan, Sistan, Sind and Khorasan. Amr was for some time useful to Baghdad because he could fill the dangerous power vacuum that had been created in the entire eastern sphere of the empire from the time of the fall of the Tahirids in Khorasan. The Samanids, a Persian based government in Transoxania, had indirectly paid tribute to the Abbasid caliph as the vassal of the Tahirids. When Amr demanded from the caliph to be given tutelage over the Samanids, the Caliph cunningly accepted Amr's demand. The caliph correctly anticipated that the Saffarids and Samanids would fight each other. The Samanids defeated the Saffarids near Balkh (close to Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan) in 900. Shortly thereafter, Amr was brought to Baghdad and executed in 902.

## THE SAMANID DYNASTY: 900-999

The Perso-Islamic cultural renaissance came into full flowering during the reign of the Samanid dynasty. Bukhara under the Samanids for a while competed with Baghdad for cultural supremacy in the Muslim world. The Umayyads had banned the use of Pahlavi (Middle Persian) lettering in 697. The Persian written language reemerged under the Samanids, but put to paper in Arabic characters. Ferdowsi, the great Persian poet combined Middle Persian, Arabic script and vocabulary to create Iran's national epos, the *Shah-nameh* ("Book of Kings") The *Shah-nameh* was largely based on a previous chronicle of the kings of Persia, the *Khvatay-namak*, written in Pahlavi. The *Khvatay-namak* was a history of the kings of Persia from Iran's mythological forefathers to the reign of Khusrau II (reigned 590-628). Ferdowsi rewrote the chronicle and added the downfall of the Sasanian empire to the legend. Ferdowsi's saga has remained one of the most admired literary masterpieces in the Farsi-speaking cultural sphere. The *Shah-nameh* symbolically signifies the resurrection of Iranian patriotism and grandeur in the era of Islam.

The rule of the Samanids is a classical case of *realpolitik*: a pragmatic political understanding between two obvious enemies—the Samanid principality of Transoxania and its nominal master in Baghdad, the Abbasid caliphate—that came to serve the vital religious, economic and security interests of both parties. The Samanid dynasty claimed to be descendants of the legendary Sasanian general Bahram Chubin.<sup>65</sup> Caliph al-Ma'mun

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<sup>65</sup> On this point the historical sources are ambiguous (Frye 1975, 136). One source claims that the dynasty was of nomadic Turkish origin, but this could have been confused with the fact that Bahram Chubin's family is said to originate from the Parthians. It should be remembered that

rewarded the Samanid family for its loyal service to the Abbasid empire by bestowing the dynasty with autonomy in the regions surrounding Samarqand, Farghana, and Herat. Slowly but surely the Samanids gained control over the Tahirid and Saffarid territories thereby putting themselves completely in charge of all affairs in the eastern domains of the Abbasid empire. On the face of it, the caliph in Baghdad had lost control over one of the most important provinces of the empire. In reality, however, the deal was a clever and pragmatic political arrangement whereby both parties achieved a lot more by accommodation than by confrontation.

Transoxania and Khorasan were provinces of tremendous importance to the Abbasid empire primarily for three separate reasons. First, the region was economically as important as the central provinces in Mesopotamia to the Arab caliphate. The international trade routes from China and India all crossed the region, producing major tax revenues for the state coffer. The Samanids paid a regular and substantial tribute to the Abbasid caliph in exchange for a legal stamp of approval from the legitimate spiritual authority in Baghdad. This arrangement partly solved the problem for the caliph in Baghdad of widespread resentment against direct taxation, which in the past had brought down the Umayyad dynasty at Damascus. Moreover, the Samanids provided Baghdad with a steady flow of valuable and much-needed Turkish slaves.

Second, Transoxania and Khorasan had for centuries been the staging ground for nomadic invasions of Iran proper. The survival of Abbasid caliphate depended on

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Bahram Chubin was the only usurper of power during the Sasanian Empire that was not related to the dynasty family by blood.

forward positioning in the region of a strong military detachment that could effectively contain migration across the Oxus River (today's Syr Darya in Kazakhstan).

Third, the district was instrumental in preserving the religious integrity of the regime in Baghdad. The Samanids endorsed Sunni orthodoxy in spite of a certain affinity for Shi'i religious ideology, particularly its Ismaili brand (Sevener Shi'ism). In the early period of their rule, the Samanids for a while considered switching allegiance to the Fatimid caliphate in Egypt. The Samanids, however, suppressed Ismaili Shi'ism in the latter part of their reign, but they in general tolerated the less radical Twelver Shi'ism. The Samanids characteristically put their weight behind the Hanafi school of Sunni law, which "downgraded" the use of Arabic to religious purposes.

The Samanids were in many ways more significant than both the Saffarids and the Buyids in the development of a distinct Perso-Islamic civilization. The Samanids institutionalized the use of written Persian and gave the language respectability vis-à-vis Arabic. Revival of the Persian national character under the Samanids is well captured in an official religious decree authorizing the use of Persian: "here, in this region, the language is Persian, and the kings of this realm are Persian kings" (Daniel 2000, 74). The Samanid rulers also lavishly sponsored all other forms of arts and scholarship, and they gained a reputation for running an effective and just administration. The chief contribution of the Samanids to Iran's cultural renaissance was that the dynasty proved the compatibility of ancient imperial Iranian culture and Islam (Frye 1975, 160).

## THE BUYID DYNASTY: 945-1055

The major achievement of the Buyid dynasty was that it seized temporal power from the Abbasid caliphate. The Iranian Buyids succeeded where the Saffarids failed when they entered Baghdad in 945. They stripped the Abbasid caliph of what remained of his temporal political power, thereby reducing the Arab caliph to merely a spiritual puppet. The caliph had for quite some time been at the complete mercy of his Turkish generals. The Buyids therefore simply institutionalized the facts on the ground that the Arab caliph had no real political power. The Buyid's political take-over initiated a significant Iranianization of state affairs. The caliph acknowledged the *fait accompli* by bestowing the three Buyid brothers—Ahmad, Ali, and Hasan—with the title *ad-Dawlah* signifying that the Buyids were now the legitimate defenders of the Muslim *dawlah*, or state. For a century, the Buyids ruled present-day Iran and southern Mesopotamia, with the exception of the eastern province of Khorasan.

The Buyid dynasty, like the Achaemenian and the Sasanian dynasties before them, made Fars its center-of-gravity despite the fact that the family were Dailamites from the Elburz mountains in northern Iran. The Umayyads and Abbasids were never able to conquer the Sasanian provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran north of the mighty Elburz Mountains on the Caspian littoral. Several dynasties resisted the onslaught of Islam for several centuries. When Dailamites finally converted to the new faith it was voluntarily and under the guidance of Shi'ite dignitaries who had taken refuge in the region from Sunni persecution. The Buyids therefore introduced the religious politics of Shi'ism to the rest of Iran.

The Buyid state was essentially a military dictatorship (Busse 1975, 251). The Buyid brothers took advantage of the political chaos and anarchy that had prevailed at Baghdad for a long time. They seized control over the Iranian plateau during the decade prior to their entry of the Abbasid capital. The Buyids characteristically revived the grandeur of the pre-Islamic Iranian empires since they now controlled the nucleus of what used to be the Achaemenian, Parthian, and Sasanian empires. To that end they reintroduced the old Achaemenian title of *shahanshah* (“king of kings”) that confirmed where the Buyids’ cultural affinity belonged.

The Buyids also became known for their religious pragmatism. Throughout the entire reign of the Buyids religious sentiments always played second violin relative to secular political ambitions. Power and interests had clear priority over spiritual affiliation. Buyid policies were first and foremost realistic and aimed at solving practical problems. In general, the Buyids carefully avoided discriminatory policies that could foment sectarian strife, which could have an adverse effect on the stability of the empire. The Buyids maintained the religious institution of the Sunni caliphate because they understood that the spiritual legitimacy of the caliphate had a stabilizing effect on the Muslim population as whole.

The political deal the Buyids made with the caliph— which had reduced the caliph’s authority to merely religious matters—paradoxically helped the Sunni caliphate at Baghdad to survive for another 300 hundred years. Contrary to what one intuitively would expect, the Buyids were willing to defend the Sunni caliphate against their fellow Shi’ite brethren in Egypt. The Fatimids had denounced the legitimacy of the Abbasid caliphate and established their own Shi’i caliphate in Cairo. Still they promoted their

Shi'i credentials through Buyid support of public religious ceremonies. They, for example, introduced the popular, but extraordinarily passionate annual commemoration of the death of Ali's son, Hussein, at Karbala at the hands of the Umayyads. The Buyids also encouraged pilgrimage to the Shi'ite holy shrines at Najaf and Karbala in southern Iraq.

Factionalism soon weakened the Buyids' authority. The dynasty's power reached its zenith during the reign of Adud as-Dawlah (reigned 949-983) when the empire was at its greatest territorial extension. After as-Dawlah Buyid fortunes went steadily down hill. There was no formalized procedure for succession to power whereby armed rivalry usually determined which candidate would succeed to the throne. Centralized authority disintegrated among family members, factions within the dynasty, or the various provinces of the empire. The decline can also be attributed to a serious weakening of the economy mainly because of a shift in international trade and long-term neglect of Iraq's irrigation works. In addition, a slow breakdown of discipline within the army contributed to the general decline.

Sectarian strife between Sunnites and Shi'ites became increasingly violent. The later Buyid rulers could hardly control Baghdad that had collapsed into gangs resorting to kidnapping and extortion. The population had decreased significantly and Mesopotamia had lost its position as the richest region of the Middle East never to be reclaimed again. In the end, the Buyid dynasty was so undermined by its internal shortcomings that the Abbasid caliph simply replaced them with the Turkish Saljuqs as the temporal upholders of Islam without having to resort to force.

#### **4. Turkish and Mongol Rule**

Turkish and/or Mongol dynasties ruled Iran in the period 1055 to 1501. In fact, both the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722) and the Qajar dynasty (1779-1925) were also of Turkish origin, but they much in the classic Persian tradition and they are therefore frequently listed as Persian dynasties. The impact of Turkish and Mongol invasions made it extremely difficult to revive Iran as a truly great regional power. The Safavid and Qajar dynasties both experienced tremendous difficulties in controlling the military power of tribal units only nominally under the control of the central government. Problems related to urban-tribal relations and succession disputes repeatedly disrupted the political unity and territorial integrity of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran is therefore extremely sensitive to minority issues that can threaten Iran's national unity.

Power in Iran during the Turko-Persian era was legitimized according to three separate criteria. First, the rule was legitimized in Islamic terms. The Sultan was theoretically a subordinate to the caliph; however, all executive power was vested in the sultan. He was supposed to uphold Islamic justice and education, patronize the *ulama*, and protect the Muslim community against external threats. Second, the ruling regime identified closely with the persona of the ruler. In the official propaganda the state functioned as a result of the wisdom and personal virtues of the sovereign. The ruler was elevated to the perfection of a semi-divine human being much in the same way as the ancient Persian kings. The infallibility of the monarch guaranteed the fulfillment of Islamic ideals. Third, the ruling dynasty was legitimate because of the royal family's lineage to some distant Persian or Turkish king. For obvious reasons, the sultan lavishly

sponsored historical research that could trace his genealogical back to a preferred forefather.

The Turkish influence on modern Iran is enormous and the legacies of Turkish rule show up in several important aspects on today's political landscape. The Saljuqs brought with them a distinct pattern for distribution of power and wealth. The power of the sultan was based upon the support of a military slave aristocracy. The sultan in turn patronized his most prominent supporters by widely distributing over-lordship to the land. The entry into Iran of large numbers of nomads not controlled directly by the state increased Iran's problems with factionalism. The tribal institutions of power did not meet the minimum requirements for a lasting political order. Violent disputes among competing members of the ruling family, the military aristocracy, and tribal warlords tended to destabilize central authority. Grants that gave given the military elite the personal right to collect taxes from the cultivators of the land further increased the potential for political disorder.

#### **THE SALJUQ DYNASTY: 1040-1194**

When the first Saljuq sultan, Toghril Beg, marched into Baghdad in December of 1055 and took the place of the Buyids, it marked the end of the Iranian Intermezzo. The Saljuqs had written to the caliph and offered him to protect the Sunni caliphate in return for political leadership. The caliph accepted the offer and this act split off the political role of defending Islam from the office of the caliph. Thereafter the caliph's power declined rapidly as his office became merely the symbol of a once politically unified Islam.

By the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Saljuqs ruled a vast Middle Eastern empire, but the Saljuq dynasty, like most dynasties of recent tribal origin, had no suitable procedures for succession of power like the urban and agricultural regions of Eurasia. The Saljuqs' way of organizing succession reflected tribal practices that employed warfare among male members of the ruling family as a means of selecting the most qualified heir to the throne. If the selection process produced an infant ruler, the Saljuqs entrusted his education to a powerful military figure. The Saljuq political culture had institutionalized a system whereby officers or notables were entrusted with the responsibility to function as surrogate fathers, guardians, and tutors for infant Saljuq princes.

The structure of the Saljuq political order made a long-lasting empire nearly impossible. Power shifted quickly away from the Saljuq family to numerous local military chieftains, or *atabegs*. The Saljuq dynasty was never quite capable of curbing the excesses of the *atabegs* who in time usurped *de facto* independence. The Saljuq empire in Iran therefore fragmented in the course of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and when Saljuq authority finally ceased to exist, Iran disintegrated into rivaling petty principalities.

The Saljuqs left Iran with a mixed legacy. The military traditions that the Saljuqs brought with them forever changed the political and cultural landscape of the Islamic world. Within Sunni Islam in particular, the Saljuqs have been credited with reinstating Muslim institutions and Sunni dignity. The Saljuqs instituted a system of Islamic schools, *madrasas*, with the objective to give Muslims a standardized education. With respect to Iranian history, the most important development was that Farsi replaced Arabic as the administrative and cultural language all over the Iranian plateau. The Saljuqs were recent converts to Islam with no literary tradition of their own to support the administration of

their vast military empire. The Saljuq sultans therefore turned to their Persian tutors for help, and in doing so New Persian regained much of the ground lost to written Arabic.

The Saljuq sultan and the Abbasid caliph reformulated Islam to fit the political reality. They had to explain to the *ummah* why the realms of spiritual and temporal authority had been separated. Muslim jurists had previously attempted to revise Islamic political theory to reflect the facts on the ground after the Buyids occupied Baghdad. Theorists proposed that there is an interdependent relationship between the spiritual and secular leader that secures the legitimacy of both parties. The military power of the sultan safeguarded the defenseless caliph's capacity to protect and enlarge Islam. The sultan in turn had to pay tribute to the caliph since his assistance was the human symbol of the state's commitment to the application of the Holy Law of Islam and to the moral and spiritual defense of Islam. The caliph's spiritual-legal authority thus legitimized the sultan's political government.

In practice, however, the arrangement clearly tilted in favor of the Saljuq sultan who had the actual power to appoint the caliph. The Saljuqs, who became strict adherents to Sunni orthodoxy, were clearly happy with the whole arrangement. In short, the arrangement was a marriage whereby the caliph—representing the spiritual unity of Islam—saved face and the sultan legitimized the power of a new political order (Turko-Muslim) over an increasingly segmented Muslim world.

#### **MONGOL RULE: 1220-1335**

The end of Saljuq rule inaugurated the absolute darkest period in Iran's history when the authority of a central state administration repeatedly ceased to exist during a

period of 300 years. Chaos prevailed as the *atabegs* scrambled for power in the final days of the Saljuq empire. In the turmoil the Khwarazm-Shahs emerged victorious and this dynasty reigned supreme in the two decades before the Mongol invasion in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Though the *atabegs* recognized the suzerainty of the Khwarazm-Shah dynasty, peace and stability did not ensue. The Khwarazm-Shahs did not control the tribal units they had enlisted. Particularly the Kipchaks, pastoral warriors from the Russian step, brought devastation to urban and agricultural regions everywhere they moved. Unfortunately, a lot more was still to come.

Wars had been raging since 1211 on the eastern frontier of the Iran between the Khwarazm Shahs and another tribal constellations. This conflict had in effect shut down the lucrative trade arteries from China to the West. The Khwarazm Shahs had in addition executed the leaders of two peaceful Mongol missions sent by Genghis Khan, the greatest of all Mongol rulers, who occupied Peking in 1215. The first mission was a group of trade representative and the second was a diplomatic mission. The Khwarazm-Shahs snubbed Genghis Khan's demand for financial reparations. In 1220 the stage was therefore set for the first of two Mongol invasions.

The Mongol invasions brought devastation and destruction on an unprecedented scale. Though it can be certainly argued that the Mongol invasion would have taken place in any event, the first Mongol campaign came as a direct result of the reckless leadership of the Khwarazm-Shahs. Genghis Khan singled out the Khwarazm dynasty for merciless retaliation. Mongol forces, according to Muslim sources, besieged, demolished, and massacred the entire population of one city after another in Transoxania, Khorasan, and northern Iran—Bukhara, Samarqand, Herat, Balkh, Tus, Nishapur, and Rey. The wars of

1220 and 1221 witnessed unparalleled terror and total destruction on a magnitude probably previously never experienced in world history. The Mongols at last withdrew in 1223 though some forces remained in a few districts. Law and order in Iran broke down in the years that followed as the central government simply ceased to exist.

At first, it is hard to grasp what the Mongols thought they would achieve by destroying nearly every urban center they came across in Iran. Yet, by looking at the cultural context that Genghis Khan had emerged from, it is possible to explain the seemingly incomprehensible pattern of destruction. Genghis Khan and his nomadic warriors had not yet developed a keen appreciation for what possession or control of urbanized population centers signified in terms of political and military power before they embarked on their Iranian campaign. Therefore, razing whole cities did not represent a lost opportunity in the Mongol cost-benefit analysis.

Spreading fear and terror through the most appalling atrocities was certainly not unique to the Mongols. Many people have attributed the military accomplishments of the Mongols solely to their barbaric mercilessness. It is probably fair to say that all military operations of the time were undertaken with extreme brutality, and that the Mongols merely outperformed their foes in savagery. In the military literature, however, the Mongols have been credited with running highly complex military organizations with extreme mobility under very difficult physical conditions. Psychological warfare was an integral part of the Mongols' overall military strategy whereby "mediators" conveyed to the besieged cities that any resistance would lead to the systematic annihilation of the whole population. In some instances, like Balkh, even total surrender did not spare the population from being butchered.

Many historians are of the opinion that the second Mongol invasion was the single most destructive event for the medieval cultures of Iran and eastern Islam. In 1256 Genghis Khan's grandson, Hülegü, led the second Mongol invasion of Iran and Mesopotamia. Hülegü's forces destroyed during the first campaign season the headquarters of the Assassins at Alamut to the great pleasure of the Sunni caliph at Baghdad.

In 1258, however, it was the caliphate's turn to feel the wrath of the Mongols. After Hülegü laid siege to Baghdad, the Abbasid caliph was not capable of assembling sufficient forces to defend the city and to prevent disaster that followed. The religious and cultural capital of classical Islamic civilization was burned, plundered, and the dikes and irrigation works were demolished. The caliph was executed together with large numbers of Baghdad's inhabitants. The Mongols made several failed attempts to expand their empire to the Mediterranean Sea. Hülegü eventually settled in the province of Azerbaijan whereby Iran's political center-of-gravity moved to the northwest for the next century.

In the end, the Mongols settled for a less ambitious empire and consolidated their conquest into autonomous khanates under the suzerainty of the Great Khan in China. In Iran the rulers came to be known as the Il-Khans. The Il-Khanid dynasty soon lost all contact with its overlord in China, and wars regularly broke out with its sister khanates—the Chagatai and the Golden Horde—but also against the Mamluks in Egypt. The Il-Khanid dynasty blossomed for a short period of time under Mahmud of Ghaza's (reigned 1295-1304) accomplished rule. Though Mahmud of Ghaza converted from Buddhism to Islam, the Il-Khans gained a reputation for far-reaching religious tolerance. The Il-Khan

monarchs oscillated in their adherence between Sunni Islam and Shi'ism; yet, it is safe to say that these rulers had a general fondness for the mysticism and millennialism of Shi'ism. The Il-Khans seem to have made a concerted effort to prop up the legitimacy of their rule by portraying themselves as the legitimate inheritors of the dual-legacy of the Arab caliphs and the great Iranian kings. Still, the Il-Khans proved incompetent in sustaining their rule, which broke down after 1335.

The Il-Khans faced several systemic problems to which they found no satisfactory solution. After a period of sustained disorder in the wake of Hülegü's campaign, the Il-Khans set out to reestablish the rule of law and to rebuild Iran's economic infrastructure. Iran's economy had been severely devastated, not only by the two Mongol invasions but also from centuries of neglect. For this daunting task the Il-Khans turned to the skills of the native Iranian bureaucrats just like all conquerors of Iran before them. It took the Farsi-speaking administration quite some time to restore a rudimentary administrative system, and Iran in reality did not regain executive stability before Mahmud acceded to the high office in 1295. Thus, Iran had been without a responsible government for more than one hundred years.

During Mahmud's reign serious efforts were undertaken to reconstruct civil society with the same enthusiasm as the Mongols had demolished Iranian civilization a few decades earlier. Yet, reconstruction was hampered by structural difficulties such as the absence of a legal system. The rule of law had totally collapsed in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions, and what emerged as a legal system was a hybrid of Islamic law (*Sharia*) and Mongol tribal law (*Yasa*). A byproduct of the legal confusion was over-taxation of economic activity. Taxes levied on economic activity pursuant to *Yasa*

regulations were added on top of taxes previously sanctioned by the *Sharia*, which of course was unsustainable to an economy that had barely begun to recover. The accumulated effect was that the Il-Khanid dynasty ran into acute financial difficulties.

The legacy of the Turkish/Mongol military-civil order made it extremely difficult to revive Iran as a truly great regional power. The Safavid and Qajar dynasties both experienced major difficulties in controlling the military power of tribal entities only nominally under the control of the central government.

The most lasting legacies the Il-Khan Mongols left to Iran's political culture was the way the Turks and Mongols made a clear distinction between military and civilian affairs. In fact, the Mongols went so far as to define the whole civil administration as one single military unit in the service of the supreme military chieftain, the khan. The Mongols conceptualized society as consisting of only two separate classes: the army (*asker*) and the herd (*ra'iyah*). The *asker* was composed of the Mongol military establishment together with the non-Turkic elements in the civilian administration. The *ra'iyah* was consequently made up of the remainder of the population. Furthermore, the Mongols did not respect the property rights of the conquered populations and their military aristocracy could therefore expropriate private property at will without compensation. Scholars have termed this peculiar arrangement as "a military patronage state," which contributed imperfectly to Iran's economic recovery.

#### **TERRITORIAL AND POLITICAL DISINTEGRATION OF IRAN: 1335-1500**

Iran again disintegrated into minor regional principalities when the Il-Khanid state-formation unraveled in 1335. For some time the provincial sovereigns ruled nominally in the name of Il-Khanid puppets much in the same way as the *atabegs* did

during the break-up of the Saljuq Empire. Timur's armies defeated the local dynasties of Iran between 1380 and 1394; however, Timur's hold on power was tenuous and revolts sprang up as soon as he left for new adventures.

Timur left a confused legacy to Iran's history. Timur's territorial conquests seem to have lacked an overall plan, and his sons inherited a poorly assembled empire that proved nearly impossible to hold together as a single integrated political entity. However, Timur's dynasty at Samarqand produced extraordinary cultural accomplishments. Timur himself was known to possess an open, inquisitive, but somewhat mystical frame-of-mind. He was an enthusiastic patron of the arts and sciences. Timurid culture strongly influenced all of Iran, even regions that were mostly outside the military reach of the dynasty. Still, Timur is mostly remembered for mass killings and destruction that followed in the path of his conquests. He ruled more in line with the Eurasian nomadic traditions than the urban and agricultural practices of Islamic civilization.

Timur improved the military strategies of Genghis Khan to perfection. He brilliantly combined military and diplomatic tactics with ruthlessness. The sophistication of Mongol military operations is too often under-appreciated. Timur and his generals actively gathered intelligence about the enemy's political, economic, or military weaknesses before considering using armed force to further their objectives. The Timurids dispatched intelligence agents to enemy territory who carefully spread well-crafted rumors among the military ranks and the civilian population. Deception, treachery, intrigues, and shifting alliances paved the way for Timur's conquests. His administration conducted multilateral negotiations with every significant power that have been recorded in the diplomatic archives of countries in both Europe and Asia. Yet, when

push came to shove, speed, mobility, and the superb military skills of Timur's mounted archers ultimately brought home victory.

While Timur's dream of a "world conquering" empire never materialized, he did contribute to another revival of Persian culture. Timurid monarchs patronized an exceptional renaissance in Iran's cultural and intellectual life. At the Timurid court, artistic and academic pursuits—especially literature, historiography, architecture, and miniature painting—thrived under the direct sponsorship of the Timurid rulers themselves. The Timurids also successfully restored economic life throughout Iran, and they repaired the material damages from Timur's invasions. The city of Herat became the cultural and economic capital of the entire region.

Timurid supremacy was for the most part limited to eastern Iran in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Succession disputes broke out upon Shah Rokh's death (reigned 1405-1447). Infighting consumed much of the dynasty's energy that was clearly needed elsewhere. In western Iran, the period between 1449-69 was marred by the never-ending conflict between two separate Türkmen tribal confederations: the Qara Qyunlu ("Black Sheep") and Aq Qyunlu ("White Sheep"). After 1469, the Aq Qyunlu confederation gained supremacy in all of Iran except for Khorasan where the Timurids retreated when their ruler, Abu Sa'id, was killed in battle against Aq Qyunlu forces. An Uzbek army eventually expelled the Timurids of Herat in 1506; however, one branch of the family moved on to form the great Mughal empire in India in 1526.

Many historians regard the rule of the Qara Qyunlu federation as the low point of Iranian history in the era of nomadic invasions. The rule of the Aq Qyunlu dynasty is generally looked upon as less tumultuous than that of the Qara Qyunlu. The success of

the Aq Quyunlu, however, was short-lived because the traditional Anatolian opponent of dynasties based in Iran, the Ottomans, had regained much of their previous strength after their crushing defeat against Timur near Ankara in July of 1402.

From the perspective of this dissertation, the Aq Quyunlu federation was the first ruling dynasty in Iran in several centuries to get entangled in the power politics of Europe. The Aq Quyunlu believed that an attack from the Ottomans would come sooner or later. Uzun Hasan, the most famous of the Aq Quyunlu rulers, forged a number of partnerships to secure his western frontier against the Ottomans. The Aq Quyunlu approached the Venetians as early as 1464. Venice was one of the principle opponents of the Ottomans in the eastern Mediterranean and Europe. Uzun Hasan also engaged in diplomatic intercourse with Muscovy, Burgundy, Poland, and Egypt. He entered into a treaty with the Christian emperor of Trebizond in 1458 when he married his daughter. Uzun Hasan was therefore obliged to come to the rescue of the last Byzantine ruler when the Ottomans moved against the last remaining independent Christian enclave on the Black Sea after their conquest of Constantinople in 1453. In the end, the Venetians never fulfilled their promise to open a second front against the Ottomans (Lockhart 1986, 377). The Ottomans soundly defeated the Aq Quyunlu forces in 1473.

The Aq Quyunlu state ran into fiscal difficulties in the later part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The government sought to legitimize increased taxation by reinterpreting religious principles in Sunni Islam. This move not only damaged the reputation of the Aq Quyunlu dynasty, but infuriated people of other religious persuasions and other vested interests. The stage was therefore set for the Safaviyya movement's rise to power.

## **Chapter IV: THE REBIRTH OF IRANIAN IMPERIALISM**

The Safavid dynasty (1501-1722) not only put Persians in touch with their imperial past but also furnished modern Iran with its most important foundations. The impact of the Safavid era on Iran of today cannot be underestimated. The Safavids reinstated a strong centralized monarchy after Iran had endured political and territorial fragmentation and very long periods of foreign rule since the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The Safavids established Shi'ism as Iran's official state religion and every Iranian regime has since the time of the Safavids had to contend with popular religious sentiments and the power of the Shi'i clergy. The Safavid empire reawakened the ancient Persian quest for regional supremacy and the dynasty fought many wars against the Ottoman empire. The historical significance of the Safavid empire is by no means restricted to Iran's national history but had a significant impact on world history. The Safavid-Ottoman rivalry became an integral part of the Ottomans' wars in Europe and the conflict coincides closely with the rise of Western European naval power in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The legacy of Safavid foreign relations is clearly discernable in Iran's contemporary approach to world affairs. The Safavid policy of seeking alliance with European powers and Iran's entanglement in international power rivalries has too often been overlooked when analyzing the crucial events of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Safavids' overarching goal of restoring Iran's spiritual and political hegemony in the Middle East contained inconsistent and irreconcilable sub-objectives. The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic exhibits many of the same inconsistencies. Moreover, intractable domestic problems such as civil-military relations and vertical versus horizontal

stratification of political power have still not found a satisfactory solution. In short, the history of the Safavid empire provides us with a much deeper understanding of the processes that led to the conflict between the United States and Iran.

## 1. Shi'i Absolutism and Iranian Imperialism

### SAFAVIYYA FUNDAMENTALISM

The Safavid movement began as a puritanical Sunni-Sufi reaction against the perceived corruption of Islamic values under foreign rule. The Safaviyya religious order gained regional prominence under Sheikh Safi al-Din Ishaq's (1252-1334) leadership. The title *Safi al-Din* means literally "purity of the faith." Sheikh Safi was the first in a string of Safavid Sufi masters denouncing the illegitimacy of the temporal Mongol and Turkish rulers. The lifespan of Shaikh Safi al-Din Ishaq closely coincides with that of the Il-Khanid dynasty (1258-1335) when the very survival of Islam was at stake after the Mongols had destroyed the caliphate in Baghdad in 1258. This era saw a renaissance of mystic folk Islam where the division between Sunni and Shi'i Islam became blurred.

The Safavids adapted the basic elements of learned Twelver Shi'ism sometime in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. The exact reason for the Safavids conversion to Shi'i Islam is still being debated among historians; however, it seems highly plausible that the Safavids' major reason for converting to Shi'ism was to distance themselves politically from their overpowering western neighbor, the Ottoman empire.<sup>66</sup> The Safavids blended their

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<sup>66</sup> The Safavid propaganda machine systematically destroyed all evidence that in any shape or form could suggest that Sheikh Safi most likely was a nominal Sunni Muslim. To this end the official scribes fabricated farcical accounts of Sheikh Safi's life (Savory 1970, 394).

version of Shi'i Islam with millenarian and revolutionary ideologies.

The Safavid state revived a fierce awareness of Persian consciousness and identity. Conversion to Shi'i Islam empowered the Safavids with a distinct sense of Perso-Islamic unity quite similar to the application of the modern notion of nationalism (Savory 1989, 176). In 1978-80, Khomeini's faction in the Iranian Revolution seized absolute power, both spiritual and temporal, by harnessing the religious and nationalistic fervor that was unleashed by the revolution. The Islamic Revolution was therefore not a unique event in the history of Iran as many contemporary political observers have come to believe.

Moreover, the Safaviyya movement and the Safavid dynasty's restoration of the Persian empire as a Shi'i theocracy furnished Imam Khomeini with a historical model to guide his modern Islamic fundamentalist revolution. The Iranian Revolution of 1978-79 was above all a true religious revolution involving Shi'ism. Khomeini and his lieutenants first attacked Shi'i traditionalism. Shi'i orthodoxy did not only preach the separation between spiritual authority and temporal power but the traditionalists also pointed out the non-sacred nature of the political order. There is also a long tradition in Shi'ism of rejecting the legitimacy of any secular government as a violation of the divine rights of the *mujtahids* to interpret all problems not specifically covered by the Koran.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> In Islamic law, a selected few are entrusted with the authority to perform independent or original interpretations, called *ijtihad*, of problems not specifically covered by the Koran, the *hadith* (traditions concerning the Prophet's life and utterances), and *ijma* (scholarly consensus). In the first centuries after Muhammad's death, every adequately qualified jurist had the right to exercise such original thinking. These men were called *mujtahids*. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century of the Islamic calendar, Sunni jurists closed the "gates of *ijtihad*." Shi'ism, however, never acknowledged the Sunni decree and this is the reason why some mullahs are permitted to challenge the ruling clergy in Tehran today. In practice, however, Shi'i religious law is as inflexible as Sunni jurisprudence.

Khomeini, therefore, is a distinct break with the past. He had to revolutionize Shi'i political ideology—whereby his usurpation of absolute power would be perceived as legitimate—prior to seizing temporal power and imposing absolute clerical rule. Khomeini's revolutionary interpretation of Shi'i principles aimed at establishing the basis for a 20<sup>th</sup> century versions of divine right to kingship in Shi'i clothing reached a climax with the constitutional amendments of 1989 that formally instituted “the Absolute Mandate of the Jurist” (*vilāyat-i mutlaqa-yi faqīh*) (Arjomand 1988, 178-203).

Puritanical movements challenging the power of an (perceived) illegitimate regime has been a recurring theme in the history of Islam. The rise of the Safavids obviously falls into this category but the dynasty nevertheless represents a unique mixture of spiritual extremism, secular ambitions, and ethnic identities that was a distinct break with the past. “The Safavids combined the forces of their religious devotees and *uymaq* clients to establish a dynasty and an empire representing a new constellation of imperial, religious, and tribal forces” (Lapidus 1988, 286). At the same time, there is a historical continuity in the intertwining of political and religious leadership from the Prophet Muhammad, through Sheikh Safi, to Ayatollah Khomeini. “Sheikh Safi is portrayed as a paradoxical personality in which the miracle worker and man of God combined with a sober, practical politician and a cunning merchant” (Roemer 1986, 191). Sheikh Safi's personality combined the seemingly incompatible characteristics of asceticism, piety, meditative reclusiveness, self-confidence, enterprise, acquisitiveness and militant

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The Council of Guardians now acts as the sole *mujtahid* of the Islamic Republic and the council has distinguished itself by actively repressing real democratic discourse in Iran.

activism. Ayatollah Khomeini displayed a similar and unique combination of personal traits, which took the rest of the world by complete surprise in 1978-79.

#### LEGITIMACY BUILDING

The Safavid family made an extraordinary effort to cement the spiritual and moral legitimacy of its rule. The rule of the Safavid dynasty represents the happy marriage between the ancient Persian empire and Shi'i Islam.<sup>68</sup> In the Turkish-Muslim tradition, to which the Safavids belonged, the ruler attains firm political legitimacy by simultaneously satisfying three separate criteria: (1) direct ancestry or close affiliation to (pre-Islamic) Persian or Turkish royal dynasties; (2) a personal reputation of the ruler for outstanding personal virtues; and (3) impeccable Muslim religious credentials. Having satisfied the two first criteria, the Safavid dynasty felt compelled to cement their religious legitimacy.

Muslim jurists had long since approved the legitimate powers of the temporal ruler on theological ground. The Buyid kings (945-1055), who also adhered to Shi'ism, had satisfied themselves with the nominal preeminence of the Abbasid caliph. The Safavids, however, believed it was necessary to prove, beyond any credible doubt, that their rule satisfied all the essential requirements for a legitimate Muslim sovereign.

Why was it so important for the Safavids to legitimize their rule in religious terms further than just being pious Muslims who had seized power by military means? The answer, according to Roger Savory, is to be found in the political culture of Shi'ism (Savory 1989, 171). Safavid Iran was the first significant Shi'i state since the Buyids

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<sup>68</sup> Roger Savory points to three distinct pillars upon which Safavid rule rested: (1) the ancient pre-Islamic legacy of the divine right of Persian kings; (2) the claim that the Safavid family was *sayyids*, or descendants of Ali; (3) the hereditary masters, or *mursid-i kamil*, of the Safavid Sufi order since 1301 (Savory 1989, 169).

ruled Iran and the Fatimids' Sevenser Shi'i caliphate in Egypt (909-1171) challenged the Sunni caliphate in Baghdad. Sunni orthodoxy had prevailed over numerous enemies for more than 850 years and its long-established legitimacy and dominant position seems to have been the prime motivation for the Safavids to devote so much time and energy to validate the dynasty's religious authority.

Though the Safavids sought to legitimize their claim to absolute power in unmistakable Islamic terms, the demand was nevertheless deeply rooted in the legacy of Iran's pre-Islamic history. Shah Ismail's proclamation that he was the human manifestation of God on earth follows an ancient Iranian pre-Islamic historical pattern. The divine character of "the king of kings" was an integral part of the Achaemenian imperial order and Parthian and Sasanian emperors further solidified the concept. Thus, one can argue that the Safavid shahs merely continuation the ancient Persian tradition of combining spiritual and temporal authority in one single divine ruler. Hence, the constitutional power of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic—the *vilāyat-i faqīh*—is also rooted in the pre-Islamic Persian monarchical order.

Ismail, the first Safavid shah of Iran, established a theocracy with himself as the supreme god-king with such modest titles as "the Absolute Agent of God" and "the Shadow of God on Earth" among others. The Safavid family made the dubious claim that they were descendants of Musa al-Kazim, the Seventh Imam in Shi'i genealogy.<sup>69</sup> As the

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<sup>69</sup> The highest religious scholars during the later period of the dynasty would again challenge the claim that the Safavid shahs ruled rightfully on behalf of Imam Ali. In recent times the claim has been deemed a forgery by Persian and non-Persian scholars alike. However, this does not imply that Ismail sincerely believed that he descended from Ali, at least in his early carrier.

descendant of the Seventh Imam, Ismail's authority was therefore absolute and not to be questioned.

The Shi'ite clergy, however, was of another opinion. In Shi'i theology, ancestry to the Prophet does not automatically provide the aspiring leader with the necessary religious legality. The Shi'i doctrine of divine appointment, or *nass*, by the latest Imam in office or his deputies on earth, is what really matters.<sup>70</sup> At the very center of Shi'i legitimacy is the "sinlessness" and "infallibility" of the Imam. In his absence, the highest Shi'i establishment, the *mujtahids*, has declared that they are the only authority qualified to interpret the will of the Twelfth Imam in his absence. They are the sole link between the *mahdi* (messiah) and the entire Shi'ite community.

Since neither the Safavid family nor the *mujtahids* had been directly appointed by the Twelfth Imam, it became imperative to the Safavids to convince the general population that their claim was at least as valid as that of the *mujtahids*. What tipped the scale in favor of the Safavids was the relentless work of their propaganda machine. For two hundred years prior to their military victory against the Aq Qyunlu, the Safavid revolutionary movement had spread its message all over the Middle East from its spiritual center at Ardabil near the Caspian coast.

After the Safavids came to power, they launched a dual policy of violently persecuting competing Islamic practices at the same time actively co-opting popular

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<sup>70</sup> The validity of Hojatolislam Sayyid Ali Khamenei's appointment to succeed Ayatollah Khomeini as the Supreme Leader has been seriously put into question (Buchta 2000). In an emergency session on 4 June 1989, the Assembly of Experts promoted Hojatolislam Khamenei to the absolute leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran simultaneously raising his credential to the status of ayatollah within the religious hierarchy. Several murky issues—such as the authenticity of the actual letter from Khomeini himself—surround Khomeini's demotion of Ayatollah HussainAli Montazeri as his designated heir.

elements of all other religious beliefs present in Iran. In the reign of the Safavids, Shi'ism was made a complete and coherent religious alternative to Sunni Islam under the administrative and spiritual authority of the Safavid shah. It is important to bear in mind that the learned religious practices of Twelver Shi'ism prior to becoming the state religion of Iran, was very different from the militant version the Safavids created (Keddie and Richard 1981, 9). The new rulers successfully pursued the goal of forcefully converting a predominantly Sunni population to the Safavids' peculiar form of Twelver Shi'ism. As Ira M. Lapidus remarks, "Twelver-Shi'ism was imposed by a wave of persecutions which has little or no parallel in other Muslim regions" (Lapidus 1988, 296).<sup>71</sup>

The Safavids also persecuted and forcibly converted non-Muslim communities such as Jews and Zoroastrians. In the latter part of the Safavid era, the Shi'i clergy reasserted its position vis-à-vis the shahs by violently rooting out what the mullahs deemed as heresy. Jews and Christians who chose to convert to Islam could by law claim the property of their relatives. The Safavids were less intolerant in their dealings with the Armenian minority mainly for two separate reasons. First, the Safavids and Armenian shared a common hatred for the Ottoman Empire. Second, the Armenian and Georgian population was the source of highly qualified recruits for Shah Abbas' new military

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<sup>71</sup> Ali A. Mazrui argues in an article in *Foreign Affairs*: "The Muslim world has never yet given rise to systematic fascism and its organized brutalities" (Mazrui 1997, 127). This is factually simply not correct. The Safavids' forceful imposition of Shi'ism in Iran and the large-scale brutalities committed against minorities and dissidents by both sides of the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry clearly contradict Mazrui's proposition. There are also a number of contemporary cases where Islamic ideologies have been used to justify mass murder of religious and political opponents.

establishment and his mercantile enterprises in Isfahan.<sup>72</sup> Yet, in spite of heavy-handed religious policies, Twelver-Shi'ism amassed a remarkable popular appeal.

#### **SAFAVID ABSOLUTISM AND EMPIRE BUILDING**

During its lifespan, the spirit and character of the Safavid state changed dramatically from grass root religious egalitarianism to dynastic and despotic absolutism. As Nikki Keddie observes, the "Safavid rulers soon turned their doctrine, which they may not have known was different from learned Twelver Shi'ism, from one suitable for popular, enthusiastic, egalitarian revolt and conquest into one suitable for stable, conservative rule" (Keddie and Richard 1981, 11). The metamorphosis was completed during Shah Abbas' reign when the Safavids had unmistakably moved away from Shah Ismail's theocracy.

Still, Abbas carefully upheld his religious credentials by vastly expanding the Shi'i shrines within the territory of the empire. A proof of the great importance Shah Abbas I attached to his religious credentials was his legendary pilgrimage on foot from Isfahan to Mashhad, which took 28 days. During Shah Abbas' reign, the distance nevertheless increased significantly between the state apparatus and the ordinary Shi'ite community.

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<sup>72</sup> The Armenian Church was during this period in intense opposition to the Greek Orthodox church whose headquarters resided within the Ottoman Empire. In Iran today there exists an unofficial alliance—at least on the folk-theory level—between Iran, Greece, and Armenia against Turkey. Iran has expressed its dissatisfaction with Turkey's alliance with Israel by drawing closer to Syria. Tehran has also expanded its relations with the traditional enemies of Turkey, such as Greece, Armenia, and Georgia (Byman et al. 2001, 66). However, Ankara drew the red line when Iran increased its support for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). In July 1999, Turkey launched an attack against a regular detachment of the Iranian army, whereby Tehran was forced to back down and to refrain from escalating the conflict. Also, Iran did for all practical purposes side with the Armenians in their war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, 1988-94.

The Safavids' combined stress upon divine legitimacy and hereditary monarchical succession under the mantle of Shi'i Islam was the glue that restored the Persian empire. The Safavid dynasty was capable of solidifying its legitimacy by reviving the grandness of the pre-Islamic Persian empires. Shi'i political rhetoric still overshadowed official propaganda but during the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the will of the monarch was what really mattered and he ruled without much interference of the clergy. The state that Shah Abbas and his successors presided over became absolute to an extraordinary degree and "secular monarchical absolutism rather than Shi'ism was the dominant feature of the state" (Ramazani 1966, 18). Thus, what had been a puritanical and revolutionary religious movement had been transformed into a hereditary absolute monarchy that technically maintained its religious authority.

#### **DIVINE DESPOTISM IN SAFAVID IRAN AND EUROPE**

Safavid rule was relatively benign by eastern standards. The common man was mostly free from individual repression and he was rarely brutalized by the state. For the masses, a strong shah was paradoxically usually a guarantee against arbitrary rule and exploitation. Contrary to common belief, the higher classes—the nobility, the army officers, the military governors, the ranking officials of the bureaucracy, and members of the clergy—were more often the victims of the shah's arbitrary execution of power and his cruelty.

Safavid despotism was not more tyrannical than its European contemporaries. "Oriental despotism" was standard governance around the world whereby hereditary or semi-hereditary sovereigns were empowered with the privilege to make and enforce laws

as he or she wished. In practice, however, every despot had to accommodate various domestic constituencies to a variable degree. In that sense, the Bourbon and Habsburg monarchs were clearly more absolute than any Safavid shah, maybe with the exception of Abbas I. In general, the degree of absolute power at the disposal of the monarchs of Austria, France, Portugal, Spain, or England did not differ noticeably from the Safavids or the Ottomans.

What did set the Safavids apart from their European counterparts was the deep theocratic foundation of their ruling order. Both the Safavid shahs and European monarchs ruled according to a divine entitlement granted to the king by God. All monarchies instilled in their subjects a sense of unquestioned higher spiritual duty to obey and serve the king. The Safavid shah, however, was also the supreme spiritual leader of the dominant religious Safaviyya order. In addition, the shah claimed to be the earthly representative of the Hidden Imam. Niccolò Machiavelli remarked that the Ottoman empire—and consequently also the Safavid dynasty who generally imitated the sultans—was unlike all other European principalities and that the Ottoman ruling order had much in common with the Papacy in Rome (Machiavelli 1985, 82).

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century things began to slowly change in Western Europe. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, we observe a distinct differentiation in the power base of the sovereigns in Western Europe and Iran. In Europe, ruling monarchies became increasingly accountable to the people—not out of any benign desire to care for the common man—but from the necessities that had been created by the immense cost of prolonged warfare and the rapid rise of the mercantile class. In Turkey and Iran, however, the ruling dynasties remained dependent on the military establishment and its firm control over agricultural production.

The two Muslim empires never developed independent commercial enterprises that could balance the power of the divine sovereign.

#### **RELIGION AND STATE POWER**

The Safavids came to power on a wave of religious fervor but their revolutionary ideology collided with the necessities of stable imperial governance. The Safavids faced the multi-faceted problems of integrating their Turkic-speaking nomads with the Farsi speaking population, their militant Türkmen tribesmen with the ancient Persian bureaucracy, and their messianic religious ideology with the exigencies of running a heterogeneous empire. The Safavid dynasty, therefore, was forced to modify the relationship between spiritual and temporal power. For this reason its original religious doctrines became subordinated to the expediencies of consolidating imperial power.

The Safavid dynasty constantly altered its religious policies to fit changing political circumstances. The new regime turned against its own militant followers, and religious passions detrimental to absolute political power were vigorously suppressed. The Safavid movement had deep roots in Sufism—a philosophical rejection of all worldly and material values. In the formative years of the dynasty a Safavid dignitary had declared that, “true Sufism is Shi’ism Sufism” (Nasr 1989, 166). Nevertheless, Shah Abbas I vigorously put to death practitioners of Sufi Islam, whom the regime sometimes accused of collaborating with the Ottoman archenemy.

The real motive behind the persecution of Sufi dignitaries is found in their criticism of the Safavid dynasty. The Safavid shahs had lost much of the spiritual discipline and moral strictness of the early Safaviyya order. Absolute power had slowly,

but surely detached the Safavid kings from their Sufi background. In the eyes of conservative Sufis, the ruling dynasty had been corrupted by worldly elements and they consequently refused to associate themselves with Shah Ismail's new state structure. A schism developed between the state-authorized Shi'i clergy and the traditional Sufi orders. In the late Safavid period the hostility between official Shi'ism and Sufism became so tense that practitioners of Sufism were banned from all Shi'i centers of learning. This situation has prevailed in Najaf and Qom to this very day.

The Safavids created a loyal state-sponsored religious establishment that served to uphold the political and spiritual legitimacy of the dynasty. As Ira Lapidus observes, "Iran was virtually unique among Muslim societies in the degree to which the state controlled the religious establishment and in the extent to which it absorbed all religious tendencies found within the Muslim spectrum" (Lapidus 1988, 302). The goal was to make Iranian Shi'ism a comprehensive, coherent, and competing alternative to Sunni Islam. This development came at the expense of the traditional doctrines of learned Twelver Shi'ism. The religious establishment, the *ulama*, had virtually no other choice than to keep its mouth shut, but on the other side, many clergymen willingly played the subservient role in exchange for substantial personal power.

In the late Safavid era, during the reigns of weak and incompetent shahs, the Shi'i *ulama* pulled away from its subordination to state institutions. In the reigns of Safi II (reigned 1666-1694) and Sultan Husain (reigned 1694-1722), the *mujtahids* fully reasserted their spiritual independence in religious matters. More importantly, they repudiated the claim put forward by the Safavid dynasty of being the rightful earthly representatives of the Twelfth Imam. The *mujtahids* also prevailed against more dogmatic

opponents within the religious establishment. The immense power of the *mujtahids* played, of course, a crucial role during the political upheavals in Iran in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### IMPERIAL DECLINE

The Safavid empire created the fissures that caused its own collapse owing to the mismatch between its dogmatic founding principles, its imperial ambitions, its internal power structure, and its weak economic base. Nevertheless, the state survived for nearly 250 years mainly because of the fact that Ismail and his successors were quickly able to move, like the Ottomans, away from its founding revolutionary principles and toward a form of legitimacy that was more conducive to stable imperial rule. As early as the late reign of Shah Ismail, we can observe clear signs that the Safavid dynasty had already begun to move away from the theocratic state. Ismail appointed non-Türkmens to the highest military command to the utter dismay of the Qizilbash chieftains. Ismail's successor, Shah Tahmasp (reigned 1524-76) continued the process of curtailing Qizilbash power and during the rule of the great Shah Abbas I (reigned 1587-1629) the Safavid ruler dramatically reduced the power of religious leaders and local military chieftains.

Under Shah Abbas I, the Safavid monarchy also reached the height of its political and military power. He founded a splendid new capital in Isfahan, which became one of the most beautiful cities in the world. He revived the power and prestige of Persian bureaucracy, which oversaw the maintenance of roads and collection of taxes. Shah Abbas also established a state controlled monopoly on the manufacturing and sales of luxury goods such as silk and carpets. Historians often compare Abbas to the great

monarchs of this period—Elizabeth I, Charles V, Süleyman the Magnificent and Akbar, the Mughal emperor.

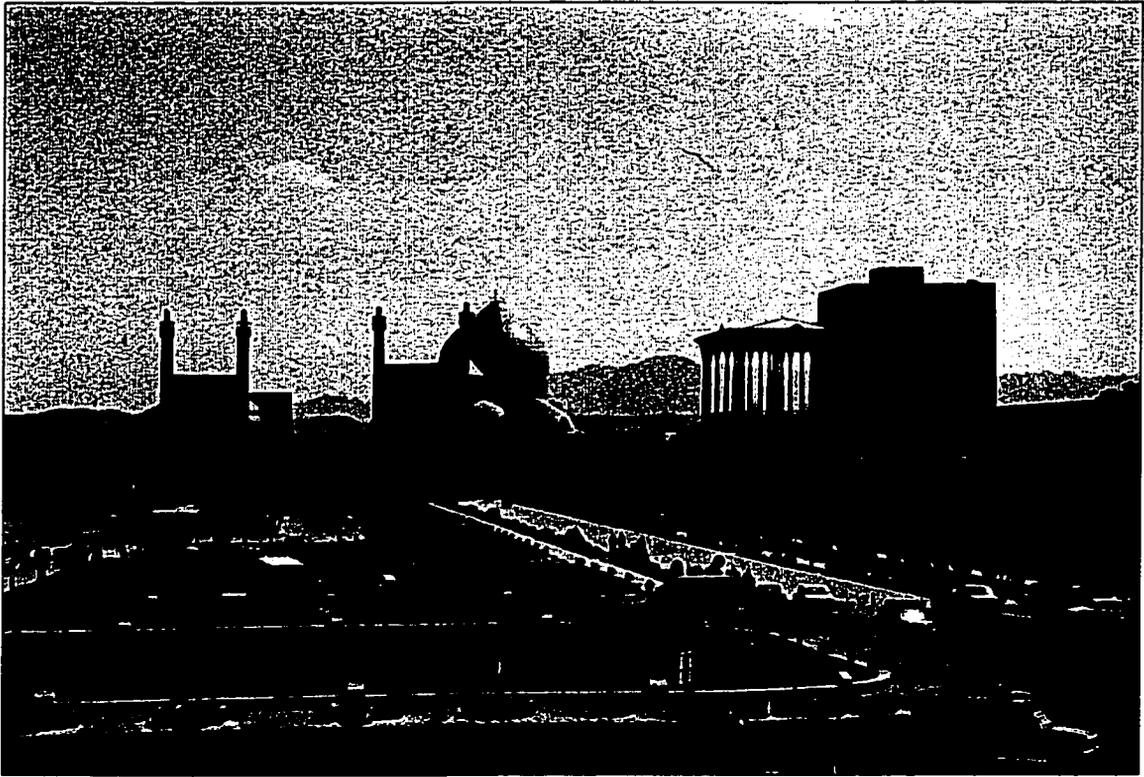
Shah Abbas was never able to reintroduce as Sasanian-style centralized government and tax collection. Abbas relied in time of peace on converting “state” provinces into “crown” provinces. This procedure solved the immediate problem of paying for his standing army of newly converted Christian slave soldiers.<sup>73</sup> Abbas was not powerful enough to reintroduce an effective central state administration and tax collection. Shah Abbas was in never in the position were he could strike a healthy balance between strengthening central tax collection, limiting the redistribution of land to prominent Qizilbash individuals, preserving a loyal base of military support, and at the same time promoting real economic activity that could finance his imperial ambitions. In the end, the Safavids state’s internal momentum slowed down and a transition to a higher level of development did not take place, as was the case in Europe.

The Safavid empire never achieved the great power status its ruler always dreamt of. When its inevitable decline materialized, it appeared in the form of ineffective rulers, harem conspiracies, never-ending rivalries among the Qizilbash tribes, mal-administration of state lands, over-taxation of the general population, and a deteriorating

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<sup>73</sup> When faced with the task of reconstructing an imperial army, the Shah Abbas reverted to the Abbasid tradition of recruiting armies of non-Muslim military slaves to combat both internal and external enemies. Abbas’ clear goal was to reduce the political and military power of the Türkmen chieftains. He complemented his standing army with Circassian, Georgian, and Armenian military slaves loyal only to the person of the shah. Shah Abbas also organized up-to-date musket and artillery units providing the monarch with firepower equivalent to that of the Ottoman Janissaries.

military.<sup>74</sup> In addition, the opening of the Atlantic trade and the subsequent decline in international trade over land through Iran accelerated the process.



Picture 3: Imam Khomeini Square with the magnificent Masjed-e Jame mosque—now officially called Masjed-e Imam but previously also known as Masjed-e Shah. To the right is the Ali Ghapu Palace with a pavilion from where the Safavid rulers could watch the activities in the square below (Isfahan, Iran, August 2000).

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<sup>74</sup> Western observers—steeped in the Enlightenment literary tradition—often attributed Iran’s politics of decline to quite simplistic explanation. Sir John Chardin, for example, a Huguenot jeweler and one of the most astute Western eyewitnesses of the Safavid state, observed that the *haram* constituted the Shah’s privy council. The *haram* was made up of the shah’s mother, the chief eunuchs, and the shah’s principal mistresses. This council, according to Chardin “prevails over everything, and lays down the law in all matters” (Savory 1980, 238).

## **2. Factionalism and Horizontal Stratification of Political Structures**

The pre-Islamic Iranian heritage of monarchical and hereditary rule would repeatedly come to clash with the Turko-Mongolian political traditions based upon competition among military chieftains. The Safavids experienced major difficulties in controlling the military power of tribal units only nominally under the control of the central government. Problems related to civil-military relations and succession disputes repeatedly threatened to destroy the political and territorial integrity of the empire.

Numerous invasions of nomadic people from Central Asia brought the political concept of *uymaq*, or "household state", to Iran. In the Turko-Mongolian tradition, the successful leader obtained authority and legitimacy through triumph in battle, and power was only maintained by fighting off opponents in a continuous Hobbesian struggle for survival. The *uymaq* was the primary unit of power in the Turko-Mongolian political order. The *uymaq* was a military organization physically attached to the extended household of the tribal chieftain. The size of the territory under effective control of the *uymaq*-chieftain control was limited to the farthest points that could be reached in a single campaign season. Each chieftainship stayed alive within a highly fluid framework of lesser and greater warlords where power was distributed through subtle negotiations or extracted through warfare.

From his local citadel or fortress, the chieftain used his military strength to extort taxes from the local population within his domain. The Türkmen chieftains rarely contributed much financially to the state's coffer, which in itself was a good enough reason for the shah to curtail their influence. Power was most commonly seized by force,

but authority could also be given to the chieftains by imperial promotion to an official position within the state bureaucracy that *pro forma* gave him the right to collect taxes. The *uymaq* system was extraordinarily unstable since survival always hinged on the warlords personal ability to prevail in a Darwinian environment where outsiders constantly challenged allegiance and authority. As a result, the Safavid shahs' hold on power was often tenuous.

### THE QIZILBASH

The young Safavid nation owed most of its standing in the international system to the Qizilbash tribal federation, a highly effective fighting force of Türkmen tribesmen. The Safavid movement began as a spiritual grass root protest against the abuse of the Turkish and Mongol chieftains. During the fourteen hundreds, the Safavid movement would enlist whole warring tribes on its road to success. The most prominent tribes were the Ustajlu, Shamlu, Rumlu, Takkalu, Dulghadir, Qajar, Afshar, and Turkman.<sup>75</sup> These followers of the Safavid sheikh, whom they regarded as both saint and king, were called Qizilbash after their distinctive red headgear, which signified their status as zealous followers and holy warriors.<sup>76</sup> By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the movement had developed into a distinct Shi'i Islamic uprising with explicit political and military goals.

The Ottomans defeated the Safavids at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514. The loss had great repercussions on the domestic balance of power in Safavid Iran. The defeat not

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<sup>75</sup> Türkmen or Turkoman is a generic term for nomadic or semi-pastoral Turkish speaking tribes. Turkman is one specific Türkmen tribe.

<sup>76</sup> Sheikh Haidar, the fifth successor of Sheikh Safi, is said to have seen Imam Ali in a dream. The twelve red gores of the "Haidar cap" supposedly symbolized the twelve Shi'i Imams (Amoretti 1986, 629-634).

only devastated Ismail's belief in his own invincibility, but Chaldiran also shattered the Qizilbash' confidence in the Safavid shah as the supreme and divine authority figure.

After the smashing at Chaldiran, Ismail's leverage over the Qizilbash chieftains was dangerously weakened. The Qizilbash chieftains had been the ultimate guarantors of the Safavid theocracy, and since the infallibility of Ismail was now in question, the Safavid dynasty could no longer rely exclusively on theocratic model of governance to keep itself in power. During the reigns of Ismail and Tahmasp, but most successfully during Abbas' rule, efforts were therefore made to rein in the power of the Qizilbash *amirs* ("military commanders"). One specific remedial action in this direction was to appoint non-Türkmen Iranian notables to the highest military command, which was usually violently detested by the Türkmen chieftains.

Nepotism—favoritism based on kinship or tribal affiliation—is intrinsically an unstable system of governance, particularly when the nominal supreme ruler does not have the necessary military means at his disposal to enforce his will. In Safavid Iran, the tribal chieftains' thirst for power generated complicated a complicated network of political arrangements, loose alliances, and vicious intrigues. The power struggle between various tribal dignitaries and their associated tribal kinsmen produced countless enmities and assassinations. The victorious Qizilbash *amir* would immediately do his utmost to appoint as many as possible of his own kinsmen and allied tribesmen to the most influential offices in the central administration and in the provinces—of course at the expense of the defeated factions. The frequent fall from power of individual Qizilbash *amirs* over and over again sent shock waves throughout the political system that too often

threatened the entire internal stability of the Safavid state. It is not hard to imagine how detrimental the selfish maneuverings of the tribal factions were to good governance.

Although playing off one tribe against another had proved successful on several occasions, it became increasingly clear to the shahs that fundamental reforms would have to exclude the hard-line tribal dignitaries from the most influential governmental offices. Yet, the military and administrative policies aimed at breaking the power of the local Türkmen chieftains never achieved its final objective. In some cases the central administration confiscated land from local Türkmen warlords, but more often, the Safavids tried to out-maneuver one particular powerful chieftain by allying themselves with a lesser chieftain. The total effect, however, too often amounted to recycling one chieftain with another, which obviously had no structural impact on the system as a whole. In the end, the pre-Safavid political system of power distributed among local rural chieftains proved stronger than imperial governance.

Qizilbash *amirs* ruled *de facto* Iran in the two decades between 1524-1533 and 1578-1588. Immediately after Shah Ismail's death in 1524, unrestrained tribal factionalism amounting to civil war broke out within the Qizilbash federation. From the spring of 1526, regular battles took place between the competing tribes. In the beginning these armed conflicts were mostly confined to the Türkmen homelands in northwest of Iran, but increasingly other parts of the country were also dragged into the turmoil. This created an untenable internal political situation that was utterly incompatible with effective imperial rule. This problem would to a variable degree remain an integral part of Safavid domestic politics.

Tribal rivalries had a devastating effect on Iran's position in the international political system as well. On numerous occasions, tribal infighting undermined the deterrent effect that the Qizilbash fighting force was supposed to have on Iran's external enemies. The internal anarchy created tempting windows-of-opportunity for military adventures against the Safavid empire from mighty antagonist such as the Ottomans, the Uzbeks, and the Mughals of India. Until Reza Shah in the 1920s and 1930s was finally able to break the back bone of tribal power, the course of Iran's history has to a considerable degree been determined by the struggle between powerful local khans and royal authority. Not even the celebrated reign of Shah Abbas I succeeded in establishing a truly centralized regime characteristic of a great power.



Picture 4: Members of the basij militia at the Friday prayer, Tehran University, 18 August 2000.

In their design on Iran, foreign powers, and in particular Great Britain and Russia, would skillfully employ the brutal services the local tribal chieftains were so willing to offer. During his reign, Muhammad Reza Shah, despite his modern American-sponsored army, was unable to command absolute power reminiscent of Shah Abbas and the ancient Persian emperors whom he loved to compare himself with. Moreover, the post-revolutionary politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran appears to have brought back the old unstable system of highly autonomous centers of power whose leaders are often barely accountable to the Supreme Leader. Iran's military defeat in the 1980-88 war with Iraq, together with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, seem to have increased fragmentation of central authority and political factionalism. Historical reasoning suggests that Iran's current political stalemate with the standoff between the "hard-liners" and the "reformers" are secular rather than religious in nature.

### **3. The Ottoman Archenemy: The Wars of 1514-1745**

With regard to the scope of work of this dissertation—the enduring hostility between Iran and the United States—there are important lessons to be learned from the long-term rivalry between the Safavid and Ottoman empires. For roughly 150 years, a near continuous state-of-war prevailed between these two empires. From these events we can deduct certain historical patterns that enables us to better understand Iran's current conflict with the United States. First, the historical accounts show that the conflict was a contest over territorial hegemony and political dominance rather than the religious conviction that the wartime propaganda gave an impression of. Second, the Ottomans were predominantly the aggressor against the economically weaker Safavid empire;

however, that does not imply that Safavid shahs did not have expansionist goals, which they clearly had under Shah Abbas I and Nadir Shah. Third, the intensity of the conflict was primarily dictated by the Ottoman campaigns in Europe. Fourth, the antagonist framed their hostility in ideological/religious terms to enlist domestic support for the war effort.

Iran was at war with the Ottoman empire from the time the Safavids came to power in 1501 until the signing of the Treaty of Zuhab on 17 May 1639 which concluded a lasting peace settlement (also called The Treaty of Qasr-i Shirin). The perpetual state-of-war was only interrupted by two periods of peace: 1555-1578 and 1590-1602. In the first war, Shah Ismail Qizilbash forces were decisively defeated Sultan Selim I in 1514. Süleyman the Magnificent launched three major campaigns against Safavid Iran—1534-35, 1548-49, 1554-55—when his war efforts in Europe permitted him to commit forces to the eastern frontier. The Ottomans resumed warfare between 1578-90 when Iran again fell into domestic turmoil. Shah Abbas fought several victorious wars against the Ottoman in the period between 1602-1612, in 1616 and 1618, with a last triumphant Safavid offensive in 1623-24. His successor, Shah Safi, unsuccessfully continued the wars against the Ottomans. Sultan Murad IV eventually forced the Safavids to conclude a comprehensive and lasting peace settlement with the Sublime Porte in 1639.

In 1723, the Ottomans launched a major onslaught against the Safavids and captured all of western Iran at a time when the Safavid dynasty for all practical purposes had ceased to exist. Still, Nadir Shah was able to completely reverse Iran's fortunes of war whereby the last Ottoman soldier was driven from Iranian territory in 1735. The last Safavid-Ottoman war was fought in 1743-45. The never-ending conflict had now come

full circle. The peace treaties of 1746-47 reestablished the borders to that had prevailed after 1514. In parallel with the Ottoman wars, the Safavids fought numerous wars against the Uzbeks in Khorasan in addition to several military encounters with the Mughals in India over the city of Kandahar.

#### IMPERIAL AMBITIONS UNDER SHAH ISMAIL: 1494-1524

The Safavids goal—like Muhammad’s politico-religious movement in the 7th century—was a worldwide religious empire (Ramazani 1966, 14). Three successive Safavid leaders had been killed before Ismail was declared the supreme master of the Safaviyya movement, only seven years of age. In the five years period between 1494 and 1499, a committee of seven selected men was entrusted with the task of preparing the final stages of the revolution under the titular leadership of Ismail. However, in the summer of 1501, Ismail, at that time just 14 years old, led his band of Qizilbash devotees to victory in a major battle against an army of the ruling Türkmen Aq Qyunlu dynasty.<sup>77</sup> Thereupon, Ismail entered the capital at Tabriz and took the ancient Persian title of shah.

Ismail’s forces conquered Baghdad in 1508 and later that same year they defeated the Uzbeks. By 1510 the Safavids had re-conquered large areas of what used to be the Sasanian Empire. However, the Ottoman Janissaries checked Ismail’s imperial ambitions at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514. After the battle, the Qizilbash seems to have lost their

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<sup>77</sup> In the past the Safavids had allied themselves with the Aq Qyunlu (“White Sheep”) tribal federation when this federation in 1468 dislodged the Kara Qyunlu (“Black Sheep”) dynasty as the hegemonic power in the Persian homelands. The Safavids should “logically” have sided with their fellow Shi’ite brethren of the Kara Qyunlu nation but *realpolitik*-interests seem already then to have had clear preference over spiritual affiliation. With the Kara Qyunlu dynasty out of the contest, the Safavids and the Aq Qyunlu federation in due course turned on each other.

taste for death in battle against the enemies of the Safavid shah and Shi'ism. When his young son, Tahmasp, was finally able to wrest power from the Türkmen *amirs*, the revolutionary zeal of the Qizilbash tribesmen was almost gone.



Map 7: The Safavid empire in the 16th and 17th centuries (St. Mary's College of Maryland).<sup>78</sup>

Ismail's conflict with the Ottomans was primarily a political contest over territorial supremacy rather than a theological dispute over spiritual issues. Tension had been building up for several years between the Ottomans and the Safavids before Selim I (reigned 1512-20) launched a major military campaign against Iran. In 1514, the two armies finally engaged in decisive battle at Chaldiran. The extremely militant Qizilbash had for some time infiltrated eastern Ottoman eastern Anatolia where their revolutionary

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<sup>78</sup> The area in yellow shows the region of Persia securely held by the Safavids in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The striped areas represent regions that were less secure; particularly Khorasan, Mesopotamia, Easter Anatolia/Western Iran, Azerbaijan, and the Transcaucasus with Dagestan.

messages resonated with the Türkmen population. The Türkmen nomads, who vehemently resisted the sultan's central government, soon rose in rebellion. The Ottoman sultans took the threat extremely seriously and a major expeditionary force was sent to suppress the revolt in both 1502-03 and 1511. Two large-scale Ottoman attacks on the followers of Shi'ism preceded the final military encounter between Selim and Ismail at Chaldiran. The first mass execution took place in 1511 and a second, and larger one, followed in 1514 when 40,000 out of an estimated 70,000 Shi'ites were killed (Sykes 1930, 162) and (Ramazani 1966, 17). In an insulting letter to Ismail, Selim wrote that it was every Muslim's sacred duty to kill the blasphemous, sinful, and heretical followers of Shi'ism.<sup>79</sup>

Selim I declared that the campaign was a war against heretics who were corrupting Islam. On 23 August 1514, on the eastern bank of the river Euphrates near Chaldiran the Ottomans succeeded in drawing Ismail's army within the range of their artillery.<sup>80</sup> The Ottomans won an overwhelming victory, and as a result they gained full control of eastern Anatolia. Selim I went on to capture the capital at Tabriz. However, he was forced to withdraw shortly thereafter because the unrest that he had feared for quite some time did indeed break out among the Janissaries. The Ottoman sultan was therefore prevented from fully reaping the benefits of his great victory. No peace was concluded and minor skirmishes continued for years for years to come. After the battle, Ismail lost

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<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, Selim I wrote his letters in Farsi while Ismail's native tongue was Azeri-Turkish. This was deliberately done to show the high level of Ottoman culture vis-à-vis the low abilities of the Turkoman Safavids.

<sup>80</sup> Chaldiran is a town in present day Turkey geographically located northeast of Lake Van in eastern Anatolia.

most of his appetite for military adventurism, apparently confining himself to hunting and drinking according to some historians.

The Ottoman sultans worried about Shi'ism for a variety of reasons well before Ismail rose to power, but the messianic objectives of the Safavid state under Ismail's leadership were a direct ideological, political and military threat to the Ottoman empire. The sultan believed, for good reasons, that the Safavids' militant and expansionist form of Shi'ism threatened to undermine his core domestic power base, the Janissaries. The Sultan's elite force, the Janissaries (*Yeni Çeri*), had become an extraordinarily influential and independent center of power within the Ottoman empire, owing to their outstanding military merits in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Selim's decision to launch the campaign of 1514 was partly motivated by the fact that he feared rebellion among his Janissary units if he delayed the inevitable confrontation with the Safavids further.<sup>81</sup>

The Janissaries originated within the ranks of the heterodox Bektashis dervishes, a prominent Sufi fraternity. Hajji Bektash Wali, who was a native of the eastern Iranian province of Khorasan, had founded the Bektashi order but it is most likely that he had nothing to do with the formation of Janissary corps (Moosa 1987, 11). The mystical teaching of Haji Bektash combined freely elements of Christianity and Islam and his message seems to have had a particular strong appeal among the Christian boy recruits to the sultan's elite unit. Though originally Sunni, the Bektashi order had adopted some of

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<sup>81</sup> In the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli: "I except the Turk [Selim I] from this, since he always keeps around him twelve thousand infantry and fifteen thousand horse on whom the security and strength of his kingdom depend; and it is necessary for that lord to put off every other consideration and keep them his friends. Similarly, since the kingdom of the sultan is in the hands of the soldiers, he also is required to keep them his friends, without respect for the people" (Machiavelli 1985, 81-82).

the spiritual features specific to the doctrine of Shi'ism. There is interestingly a very close connection between the Bektashis and the Qizilbash. Some writers even maintain that Bektashis and Qizilbash are two separate names for the same religious group (Amoretti 1986, 632) and (Moosa 1987, 37).

Maybe even more importantly, the Ottomans had for quite some time been planning to conquer the Levant and to pocket the immense treasures of Egypt. A potent Safavid state to the east—possibly in an alliance with Christian European powers—could lay open the defenses against the eastern enemies of the empire as the main Ottoman military units thrust southwards. In 1516-17, Selim's forces defeat the Mamluk armies of Egypt whereby the entire Levant became an Ottoman possession. In a symbolic act, the Sharif of Mecca handed over to Selim the keys to Islam's holiest city, thus acknowledging the Sultan as the legitimate spiritual leader of the Muslim world. This, of course, would raise the ante even higher in the political dispute between the two religious antagonists.

#### **SHAH TAHMASP: 1524-1576**

Historians' judgment of Shah Tahmasp (reigned 1524-76) has generally speaking been somewhat unfavorable, not so much for his political and military achievements, but mainly because of some of his less flattering character traits. However, Shah Tahmasp's reign must be assessed in the proper historical context, which shows that his achievements were considerable in the face of colossal internal and external threats. Tahmasp exhibited considerable courage and tactical skills when he defended the Safavid empire against five Uzbek and three Ottoman attacks, from which both Tahmasp and the

dynasty emerged relatively unscathed. In short, Shah Tahmasp's greatest achievement was his defense of Iran's territorial integrity against external enemies, and that he upheld the dominant position of the Safavid dynasty against ruthless internal opponents.

The widely held perception that Tahmasp for purely religious reasons refused to ally Safavid Iran with the Christian powers of Europe against the Ottoman empire lacks historical evidence (Roemer 1986, 248). There are in fact enough facts to suggest that Tahmasp would have to enter into any alliance that could have strengthened his hand against the Ottomans and the Uzbeks. The most plausible explanation why the diplomatic efforts of several European powers to enlist the Safavids in a united front against the Ottomans did not succeed is the long and extremely poor lines of communication.

Shah Tahmasp was only 10 years old when he ascended to the throne and he was therefore in no position to prevent the Qizilbash from plunging the country into civil war. The anarchy that prevailed was an open invitation to Iran's enemies to invade the country, but the Ottomans were too busy fighting on the Hungarian frontier to show any interest in exploiting the internal chaos in Iran.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The turmoil that followed from the Christian Reformation opened a window-of-opportunity for Sultan Süleyman to expand the Ottoman possessions in Europe. As a result, the Ottomans captured Belgrade in 1521 and completely annihilated a Hungarian army at the Battle of Mohács in 1526. The Turks drove the Habsburgs out of Hungary and laid siege to Vienna in 1529; an effort that eventually failed, partly because of logistical constraints since supplies had to be kept in Istanbul in case a campaign had to be fought against the Safavids. Süleyman's second Austrian campaign of 1532 produced no decisive encounter with the main Habsburg army. The peace of 1533 formalized Ottoman suzerainty over Hungary and the Habsburg ruler agreed to pay tribute to the sultan. Süleyman's hands were now free to pursue plans to conquer the Safavid empire.

Instead the Uzbeks of Bukhara seized the opportunity and attacked Iran five times in period between 1524-1537.<sup>83</sup> The first of these major invasions occurred the year following Tahmasp's succession to the throne. While the Qizilbash *amirs* were busy squabbling over power, the great martial Uzbek ruler, Ubaid-Allah Khan, laid siege to Herat during the winter of 1525-26, calculating with good reasons that no relief would be forthcoming from the quarters of the shah because of the internal strife. The first Uzbeks attack against Khorasan and Herat failed, but shortly after, in 1528, Ubaid-Allah Khan's armies conquered the cities of Mashhad and Astrabad (Gorgan) and besieged the citadel of Herat for seven months. This time Tahmasp personally led a rescue campaign and defeated the Uzbeks at the battle of Jam on 24 September 1528. Like the Safavids at Chaldiran in 1514, the Uzbeks were completely unprepared to counteract the use of artillery; yet, the Safavids let the Uzbek main fighting force escape the battle scene intact.<sup>84</sup>

The Safavids were prevented from harvesting the fruits of their victory because Tahmasp felt compelled to hurry his army back to Baghdad to quell a revolt, which he at

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<sup>83</sup> The military conflict with the Uzbeks was for the most part a limited a conflict over who controlled the province of Khorasan. Though Khorasan was just a remote part of the Safavid empire, nevertheless, the province had in the past repeatedly produced dangerous centrifugal forces that had swept across the whole region. Khorasan was in those days composed of what is today's Iranian province by the same name along with the province of Herat in present day Afghanistan. Khorasan was connected to the central Safavid provinces only by a tiny corridor between the southern slopes of the Elburz mountain range and the northern perimeter of the immense Dasht-e Kavir salt desert. Thus, the military campaigns of the Uzbeks could relatively easily, from a strategic military point of view, be confined to the province of Khorasan without much chance that the conflict would spill over to the central regions of the Safavid state.

<sup>84</sup> It has been said that the Safavids, like the Mamluks, deeply resented the use of firearms and artillery, which they considered to be unmanly and unchivalrous. Contemporary accounts—particularly those of the English Sherley brothers—stating that the Safavids were ignorant of gunpowder technology, must be dismissed since the Aq Quyunlu had made use of artillery a hundred years earlier (Savory 1970, 400).

that time strongly believed had been activated by the Ottomans in a greater design on the empire. On the contrary, Süleyman the Magnificent had conquered Hungary two years earlier and he was almost certainly completely focused on preparing his next campaign against the big prize, the Habsburg capital of Vienna, which his armies besieged unsuccessfully between 27 September and 15 October 1529. In hindsight, this should have been clear to Tahmasp, but given the era's general poor access to recent and reliable intelligence, one can hardly blame Tahmasp for preempting an attack from the Ottoman archenemy.

Shah Tahmasp always regarded the Ottomans as a far greater danger than the Uzbeks, not only because of their obvious military strength, but also from more subtle strategic considerations. Historical records do not provide us with reliable information on how well the Safavids in actual fact were able to assess the military might of the Ottomans or to the extent of the Sultans' deep involvement in European power politics were known to them. We have no evidence that suggest that neither the Ottomans nor the Uzbeks considered a two front alliance against the Safavids (Roemer 1986, 238). What we do know is that Shah Tahmasp attached greater strategic importance to defend the fertile provinces of Azerbaijan than to prevent the annual Uzbek raids into the remote province of Khorasan. Despite extremely unfavorable odds, Shah Tahmasp fought three partly successful wars against the Ottoman empire during his long period in power.

The Safavid empire was never the prime objective of Ottoman expansionism. In the twenty-years period between the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514 and the next major Ottoman invasion of Safavid territory in 1534, the Ottoman sultans focused their energy entirely on conquering richer lands in the Balkans and seizing territorial possessions

along the Mediterranean littoral. When the campaign on the Austrian frontier came to a halt in 1533, the Ottomans were suddenly free to pursue their intractable enemy in the east. Süleyman the Magnificent must have considered the Safavid empire to his rear to be a serious strategic threat to the Ottomans' imperial objectives elsewhere since he chose to devote so much time and resources to subdue Shah Tahmasp.

Mutiny within the ranks of the Qizilbash presented the Sultan with a golden opportunity to strike at the enemy from inside. A Takkalu tribal chieftain, Ulama Sultan, who had chosen to take refuge in the Ottoman camp, provided Süleyman with invaluable information on the chaotic domestic situation within Iran and the incredible shaky position of the shah. In addition, Sam Mirza—Shah Tahmasp's brother and governor-general of Khorasan—had aligned himself with some particularly rebellious tribal chieftains who also had been in intimate contact with the Ottomans.<sup>85</sup> The Ottomans offered to recognize Sam Mirza as the new shah in exchange for Azerbaijan. Taking advantage of these conditions, which Süleyman judged as very favorable, an Ottoman army in July of 1534 marched east on Iran. Süleyman's forces occupied Tabriz, Hamadan, and Baghdad. Baghdad would, with the exception of a brief intermission in the sixteen hundreds, be permanently lost to Iran. Despite mutiny within his own ranks, Shah Tahmasp was capable of reversing most of the Ottoman territorial conquest when Süleyman's army withdrew to their winter quarters in Baghdad.

Süleyman resumed his campaign in the spring of 1535 but Tahmasp wisely evaded any direct military encounter with the Ottoman main force. The Safavids

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<sup>85</sup> The name *Mirza* after a personal name means "prince"; when it prefaces a name, it is simply an honorific.

instead—taking advantage of the harsh climate and extended lines of communication—ceaselessly harassed the Ottoman rear guards in minor skirmishes thereby putting a severe strain on the logistical capacity of Süleyman’s campaign. Tahmasp also made extensive use of scorched earth tactics depriving the Ottoman mule trains of green pastures. As a result, Süleyman the Magnificent was forced to return to Constantinople with rather limited territorial gains, but with Tahmasp’s internal political position markedly strengthened. The Ottomans had thus clearly failed to achieve their main objective, which was to eliminate the strategic threat of wars on two fronts simultaneously, since they evidently feared an alliance between the Safavids, Habsburgs and Hungarians.

The events that paved the way for the second war with the Ottoman Empire in the reign of Tahmasp were virtually a sequel of the first war. Alqas Mirza—another brother of Shah Tahmasp and the governor of Shirvan—had sought asylum in Constantinople after an unsuccessful rebellion against the shah. A new peace treaty with the Habsburgs of Austria again allowed the Ottomans to focus their energy on the rival in the east. Süleyman the Magnificent launched his second military campaign against the Safavid Empire in the spring of 1548. Though Tabriz was captured briefly for a few days, the campaign failed to achieve its military and political objectives. With the blessing of the sultan, Alqas Mirza led a dismal campaign of his own against Isfahan and other Iranian towns. He was soon captured, imprisoned, and most likely experienced a very slow and painful death at the hands of his brother’s executioner. Süleyman’s army was forced to return empty-handed to its winter camp at Aleppo while Tahmasp revenged the attack by ravaging vast areas of eastern Anatolia.

In the following campaign season of 1549 the Ottomans avoided a direct confrontation with Tahmasp before ending another inconclusive two-year campaign. Soon after Süleyman's withdrawal, the Safavids themselves went on the offensive. Tahmasp's second son, Ismail Mirza, led an invasion of eastern Anatolia.<sup>86</sup> He captured several towns and defeated a local defense force before the gates of the provincial capital at Erzurum. In summary, Süleyman's second attempt to subdue Tahmasp tilted the balance-of-power slightly in favor of the Safavids.

The third Ottoman-Safavid war again strengthened Tahmasp's hold on power at the expense of the sultan's imperial ambitions. Süleyman decided to embark on a third major attempt to subjugate the Safavids in 1554. The sultan's decision was chiefly motivated by the fact that armed units from within the Safavid empire had repeatedly raided deep into Ottoman territory. The Ottoman campaign took off in May of 1554 but lost momentum after minor inconsequential military encounters with the Safavid defense forces. Diplomatic negotiations followed and the first official peace treaty between the Ottoman and Safavid empires was signed on 29 May 1555.

The Peace Treaty of Amasya signified for the first time that both parties to the conflict had reached the same conclusion that termination of hostilities would benefit their national interests. Tahmasp had lost important territorial possessions: Mesopotamia

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<sup>86</sup> Tahmasp rewarded his son's military accomplishments against the Turks with throwing him in prison. When he finally emerged from captivity to succeed his father as Ismail II (r. 1576-77), his mental stability gave the impression of having been ravaged by constant use of opium during his long time in captivity. Ismail II went on to kill all of his brothers except for one. He also attempted to introduce Sunni Islam, possibly as a reaction to the extraordinary powerful position of the higher echelons of the Shi'ite clergy. Not surprisingly, Ismail was almost certainly murdered. By one account, poison was inserted in his daily intake of narcotics (Savory 1970, 410).

with Baghdad, the impregnable fortress of Van, and particularly Georgia that even today retains a significant emotional value to many Iranians. Despite the territorial losses, Tahmasp had nevertheless prevented any further loss of territory to the far superior Ottoman military machinery. Tahmasp had above all successfully safeguarded the territorial integrity of the fertile provinces of Azerbaijan. Yet, three decades of internal strife and eight wars with the Ottomans and the Uzbeks had left the Safavid economy in a devastated condition.

The reign of Tahmasp was followed by a twelve-year period of confusion, conspiracy, and disintegration until Shah Abbas I came to power in 1587. Muhammad Khudabanda, Tahmasp's oldest son, was not only weak and incompetent but he was so completely indifferent to state affairs that some foreign powers were apparently unaware of his existence and their diplomats actually believed that Hamza Mirza was the Safavid shah, which he in reality was for some time. Hamza Mirza is said to have been a man of exceptional physical courage. However he was hard headed and lacked prudent judgment in critical situations.

The general theme of this period was the infighting between Qizilbash *amirs* that on numerous occasions amounted to civil war. The *amirs* were completely blind to the overall interests of the Safavid empire, even when the state's very existence was at stake. Tribal interest always took priority over national unity against external enemies. This of course had serious repercussions on Iran's foreign relations.

The internal turmoil presented Sultan Murad III with an irresistible temptation to invade Iran. When the Habsburg monarch again agreed to pay tribute to the Sultan, the Ottomans launched the Turko-Persian wars of 1578-90. The Turks were initially

successful but a decisive victory was not forthcoming. The Ottomans renewed their onslaught in 1584. Tabriz fell to the Ottomans despite considerable Persian valor on the battlefield because the Qizilbash units abandoned the shah's cause. A fellow Iranian assassinated Prince Hamza Mirza in his camp on 6 December 1586 that paved the way for Abbas' accession to the throne. This event dramatically changed the course of Iran's history.

#### **SHAH ABBAS: 1587-1629**

From the first days of his rule, the overarching objective of Abbas' foreign policy was the restoration of the lost provinces to Safavid sovereignty. Shah Abbas concluded in 1590 a comprehensive peace settlement with the Sublime Porte in Constantinople in exchange for several unusually harsh concessions. First, Shah Abbas agreed to permanently cede the territories of Azerbaijan with the old Safavid capital at Tabriz in addition to Shirvan, Dagestan, Georgia, Mesopotamia with Baghdad, and parts of Luristan and Kurdistan. Second, the Safavids pledged to refrain from their most inflammatory rhetoric of cursing the first three caliphs.<sup>87</sup> The practice of cursing the "Sunni" caliphs had come to symbolize the long-term hostility between Sunni Ottomans and Shi'i Safavids. Shah Abbas' symbolic, but extremely humiliating concession, for a

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<sup>87</sup> The cursing of the first three Islamic caliphs had become a standardized ritual since the days of Ismail. In the Sunni version of Islam, Abu Bakr and his three immediate successors are regarded as the "perfect" or "rightly guided" caliphs, as opposed to the following 14 caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty. In early Islam, the caliph was both the temporal and spiritual ruler. During the Abbasid dynasty, the caliph's power was reduced to a strictly spiritual role after Turkish military slaves put themselves in charge of the politics of the empire. In Shi'i theology, however, no caliph is legitimate unless he is in a direct lineage to the Prophet himself. Ali—the son-in-law of the Prophet and the fourth caliph of the Muslim community—is therefore the first in a string of 12 Shi'i Imams with absolute spiritual authority.

while served as an important conciliatory gesture in defusing tension between the two antagonists.

Abbas' concession was a public acknowledgment of a political process that had been under way since the time of Ismail. Iran's *raison d'état* had moved away from the rigid ideological symbolism of the Safaviyya movement to a pragmatic calculation of state interests. Thus, with Shah Abbas, we observe a shift in foreign policy from a pattern justified by religious ideology to a strategy rooted in *realpolitik*, where success or failure was measured in territorial gains.

Shah Abbas' concessions was also a publicly admission of the acute political weakness of the Safavid state. The sweeping concessions made to the Ottoman empire in 1589-90 were largely motivated by strategic military considerations. The Ottomans to the west posed the main threat but the Uzbek khanates had made large territorial inroads into Iran. For decades the Safavids had essentially been fighting a war on two fronts simultaneously. Abbas was temporarily forced to accept the Ottoman occupation of western Iran since he wisely acknowledged the Ottomans' military superiority vis-à-vis the Safavids.

In exchange, Abbas could now focus his entire strength on rebuilding a strong and reliable army that could halt the annual Uzbek raids from Central Asia. It took, however, Shah Abbas ten years to create a potent modern standing army. Meanwhile the empire suffered further loss of territory to both the Uzbeks and to the Mughals of India. In 1598 Shah Abbas rebuilt army finally moved against the Uzbeks and defeated the enemy decisively. The Safavids regained full control over Khorasan, which had been lost for 10 years.

When Shah Abbas resumed warfare against the Ottomans in 1602, the nature of the Iranian state and its foreign policy objectives had changed dramatically. Policies like *shāhīsavanī*, or “those loyal to the king,” were introduced to strengthen state unity at the expense of tribal loyalty. Abbas had largely succeeded in breaking the iron grip of the Türkmen chieftains on state affairs. Still, Abbas had to carefully balance further loss of Qizilbash military striking power against the slow process of building a new army independent of the Türkmen *amirs*.

The new army was paid directly out of the royal chest, which, of course, raised the question of how to appropriate the necessary funds. The solution was to turn “state” lands into “crown” lands. This policy, however, had some unintended side effects that accelerated the decline of the empire. The royal tax collectors showed minimal interest in the general prosperity of the “crown” provinces from which they collected taxes.

Tabriz was re-captured by the Safavids in 1603 whereupon the new Ottoman sultan decided to organize a major campaign against Abbas. The two armies met near Lake Urmia, where the Persians not only scored a major victory, but they also regained the provinces of Azerbaijan, Nakhichevan, and Yerevan. By July of 1607, Shah Abbas had re-conquered all the territory that had been lost since the peace of Amasya. It should be noted that inflammatory religious propaganda again ran high on both sides during this period of the conflict. After lengthy negotiations, a peace treaty was concluded in 1612. The Turks again unsuccessfully opted for a military solution to the conflict in both 1616 and 1618. The parties finally agreed to a settlement on the terms that the borders established by Selim and Ismail some hundred years earlier should be observed. In 1623-24, a Safavid campaign reinstated Iranian control over Baghdad and territories as far west

as Diyarbakır. In conclusion, the wars of Abbas the Great against the Ottoman empire were the first in which the Safavids clearly had the upper hand.

The great Persian empire was for a short while revived under Shah Abbas who consistently worked towards centralizing the state. Shah Abbas' reign significantly reversed the horizontal stratification of political structures that had prevailed since the time of Arab and Turkish rulers. There is no way to understand modern Iran without a keen appreciation of Shah Abbas' achievements and shortcomings (Roemer 1986, 272). Shah Abbas cut back the power of the local chieftains, build up an independent and loyal army along early modern principles, centralized the administrative power, and revived a stagnant economic base; however, he always carefully maintained the religious legitimacy of his regime. Shah Abbas repulsed powerful external enemies such as the Ottomans, the Uzbeks and the Mughals. Simultaneously, he intimately courted the rising powers of Europe. He also showed remarkable tolerance towards Jews and Christians. Shah Abbas expanded the Safavid empire to its greatest territorial extension—if one excludes Nadir Shah from the Safavid family tree—whereby Iran would steadily shrink in the following centuries to its current size.

Yet, one can argue that the dark sides of Shah Abbas' rule ushered in the decline of the empire. He never really overcame the traumatic experience of his formative years when he was nearly put to death by Ismail II. He subsequently developed a paranoid fear of conspiracies. He stubbornly stuck to the Turkish notion of authority and succession. As a result, he either killed or blinded his brothers and sons.<sup>88</sup> Shah Abbas succumbed to

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<sup>88</sup> In the Islamic tradition a blind prince is barred from succession to the throne. Abbas blinded his own father and he ordered the killing of his popular eldest son whom he suspected to have conspired against him. The murder took place in Rasht in 1615. Evidence suggests that he

the same mistake as the Ottomans, which proved to be the beginning of the end of Safavid dynasty. Abbas instituted a policy whereby all princes were effectively prohibited from receiving proper training in state affairs. Safavid princes were specifically forbidden to have any contact with leading members of the aristocracy or high officers of the armed forces. Their lives were confined to the women's quarters of the harem and subject to unrelenting scheming among eunuchs and concubines. The result was that the later heirs to the throne were utterly unprepared to perform their official duties and generally indifferent to the welfare of the state. In the reign of Shah Safi II (reigned 1666-94) the eunuchs assumed nearly full control over the Shah's executive powers.

#### **THE COLLAPSE OF THE SAFAVID EMPIRE**

Shah Safi (reigned 1629-42) continued the foreign policy line of Abbas and he concluded a peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire that would outlast the Safavid dynasty. A nearly constant state-of-war prevailed between the two archenemies in the reign of Shah Safi. In 1630 the last martial sultan of the Ottoman family, Murad IV (reigned 1623-40), oversaw the capture of Hamadan and the massacre of every citizen of the ancient city of Media. The Ottomans, however, failed in their attempt to capture Baghdad that same year. The Sultan directed the two next military campaigns in person. In 1635 the Ottomans completely destroyed Tabriz and in 1638 the Turks finally recaptured Baghdad. Peace was concluded the following year based on the actual

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was innocent, similar to the conclusion Abbas seems to have reached himself. Memories of this heinous crime apparently haunted him the rest of his life but obviously not hard enough to prevent him from further killing or to blinding several other members of the royal family.

positions of the armed forces on the ground with the result that Iranian control over Mesopotamia and Baghdad was lost forever. It can be said that the Treaty of Zuhab of 1639 (“the treaty of peace and frontiers”) was on the part of the Persian emperor considerably motivated by the territorial realities that flowed from the military defeats in the wars of 1630-38. The treaty in effect subordinated the opposing religious doctrines of Sunni Islam and Safavid Shi’ism to the principle of territorial integrity, comparable to the European Peace of Westphalia of 1648.

In the reigns of Shah Safi II (reigned 1666-94) and Shah Sultan Husain (reigned 1694-1722), the Safavid dynasty declined to such a degree that Iran’s neighbors all plotted to dismember the empire. Shah Safi was most of the time stoned on opium or drunk with wine. Shah Sultan Husain was not only one of the cruelest kings Iran has ever known but also completely uninterested in state affairs. He submerged himself in eschatology and astrology, and left worldly affairs to the eunuchs. When reports of advanced internal decay started to leak to the outside world, the Ottomans, but particularly the Russians began preparing detailed plans for how to capture of Persian empire. It was, however, the Ghalzai tribe of Kandahar under its leader Mahmud who first seized the initiative and laid siege to Isfahan on 8 March 1722. At least 80,000 of Isfahan’s inhabitants are said to have died from starvation or disease before the city’s unconditional surrendered on 12 October the same year. Shah Sultan Husain abdicated in favor of Mahmud and his life was spared, but Husain was murdered when Mahmud’s successor, Ashraf, withdrew from Isfahan. Afghan rule, which was confined to Isfahan, Shiraz and southeastern Iran, lasted for only seven years until they were driven out by the last great Iranian conqueror, Nadir Shah.

## EARLY EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM

Peter the Great of Russia had for several years explored the idea of conquering Safavid Iran.<sup>89</sup> In 1715, the Russian Tsar dispatched an ambassador, Artemii Petrovich Volynsky, to Shah Sultan Husain's court with the official, but deceptive mission to conclude a commercial treaty with Iran. The primary motive, however, was to collect as much intelligence on the political, economic, and military situation in the Safavid empire. Volynsky reported back to St. Petersburg that a small Russian army could easily conquer Iran due to the confused and demoralized state of Iran's internal affairs. Volynsky was then appointed the governor of Astrakhan with the mandate to closely monitor developments within Iran. Russian military officers were sent to survey detailed access routes through the lush forests along Iran's Caspian coasts.

When Tsar Peter finally decided to attack Iran in July of 1722, Russia's *casus belli* was two incidents involving Russian nationals in Iran that were clearly outside the reach of the Safavid government. The type of excuse used by the Russians to interfere in the internal affairs of Iran would steadfastly be employed by foreign powers over the next two hundred years to extract concessions from the shah. While the Afghans besieged Isfahan, a huge Russian army of 61,000 men left Astrakhan by boat. The army landed on

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<sup>89</sup> In his political testament, Peter the Great made it clear that the divine moment had come for the Russian people to reoccupy the role of the Roman people as the dominant race in Europe. With regard to Turkey and Iran he had this to say: "To approach as near as possible to Constantinople and India. Whoever governs there will be the true sovereign of the world. Consequently excite continual wars, not only in Turkey, but in Persia. Establish dockyards on the Black Sea, seize upon little pieces near this sea as well as on the Baltic, which is doubly necessary for the attainment of our project. And in the decadence of Persia, penetrate as far as the Persian Gulf, re-establish if it be possible the ancient commerce with the Levant, advance as far as India, which is the depot of the world. Arrived at this point, we shall have no longer need of England's gold" (Sykes 1930, 245).

the western shores of the Caspian and marched 150 miles south to capture the city of Derbent in Dagestan. The campaign proved extremely costly in terms of loss of life. 36,664 of the original force did not return to Russia mainly due to disease (Kazemzadeh 1985, 321).

The Russian invasion of Iran gravely alarmed the Ottomans. Peter the Great's advance on the Transcaucasus was perceived as a direct encroachment on Constantinople's exclusive sphere of interest. The Black Sea was an Ottoman lake in 1722. The Ottomans reacted swiftly, but instead of attacking Russia, they declared war on Iran in 1723. The Ottomans marched troops into Georgia and later into Iran itself.

Meanwhile, Shah Tahmasp II (reigned 1722-1732) had managed to escape the siege of Isfahan. His strategy was to persuade both the Russians and the Ottomans to recognize him as the sole legitimate ruler of Iran in his struggle against the Afghans. To this end he sent diplomatic delegations to both Constantinople and St. Petersburg. Tahmasp formally requested the Ottoman sultan to help him to drive out the Afghans from Iran. The Grand Vizier snubbed Tahmasp with the reply that he had to cede several important provinces if help would be forthcoming from the sultan.

The Ottoman demand was clearly unacceptable to the Iranian side, nevertheless, in September of 1723, Tahmasp agreed to cede to Russia the same territories the Ottomans had demanded from the shah: the towns of Derbent and Baku together with the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran, and Astrabad. In exchange Iran would receive arms supplies and the Russians promised to help Tahmasp evict the Afghans from Iran. When the Porte learned about these negotiations, the Ottomans threatened to break off their bilateral negotiations with the Russians and go to war.

France offered for the second time to mediate in the Russian-Ottoman dispute. War was averted and the Tsar and the Sultan signed a treaty on 24 June 1724, where the terms for dismemberment of western Iran were laid down. However, the death of Peter the Great in 1725 put Russian expansionism on hold whereby its territorial design on Iran was temporarily reversed.

#### **OTTOMAN OCCUPATION**

The Ottomans had respected the terms of the Treaty of Zuhab of 1639. Sultan Ahmed III (reigned 1703-1730) had based his foreign policy towards the Safavid empire mutual non-interference and peaceful coexistence. However, in the latter part of the Safavid era, when the Shi'i clergy had reasserted its independence, things began to change. The clergy had become increasingly militant and had resumed persecution of religious minorities. Maltreatment of the Sunni population in Iran, particularly in Shirvan and Dagestan, put the Sultan under increasing domestic pressure to come to the aid of his Sunni brethren across the border.

In addition, the Ottomans had lost vast territories in the Balkans following the Treaty of Carlowitz in 1699 and the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718, which terminated the 1716-18 war against Austria and Venice. The prospects of a renewed westward expansion by the Ottomans in Europe looked extremely unlikely at this in time. In Constantinople the chaos in Iran must have presented a golden opportunity for the Empire to compensate for its territorial losses in the Europe and to regain some of its former prestige on the international arena. The Russian attack on Iran in 1722 brush aside all doubts in Constantinople.

The Ottomans conquered much of Western Iran in 1724-25. The agreement reached with the Russians gave the Sultan a free hand to incorporate into the empire the territory the treaty had allotted to him. Iranian forces, however, fiercely resisted the Ottoman advance despite the chaotic situation that prevailed in the country. During a three months' siege of the fortress at Yerevan, the Turkish army lost 20,000 men in four separate assaults before the Persian garrison fell to the invaders. The Ottomans also laid siege to Tabriz, but lifted the siege in September of 1724. A Turkish army of 70,000 men resumed the siege the following year, again with the loss of 20,000 men. The Safavid defense displayed immense courage with the loss of 30,000 men before the city surrendered with the honors of war. After these costly military operations, the Ottomans wrapped up the partition of Safavid Iran.

The Ottomans came closer in 1727 to fully subjugate Iran to Turkish rule than during more than two centuries of Ottoman-Safavid hostility. The same year, the Ottomans recognized Ashraf, the Afghan warlord that controlled much of south-east Iran, as the semi-independent Shah of Persia after having lost a major military encounter. Iran's territorial integrity was now lost to Ottoman, Russian, and Afghan occupation forces. The country was no longer a politically independent state. In hindsight, Iran could have suffered the same permanent dismemberment as Poland (1772, 1793, and 1795) if chance had not been on the side of the Iranians.

#### **THE BRIEF RESURRECTION OF IRAN AS A REGIONAL GREAT POWER**

The resurrection of Persia as a great regional power under Nadir Shah (reigned 1736-1747) was therefore a nearly miraculous event the history of Iran. Nadir Shah, or Nadir Qoli Beg—a most celebrated national hero among common Iranians today—rose

from a humble background as a shepherd in Khorasan to become a conqueror *on par* with Timur Lenk. His family belonged to the small Kirklu tribe, a sub-tribe to the Afshar tribe, which used to play a significant role within the Qizilbash federation. Nadir Qoli Beg showed considerable talent for leadership in charge of a band of robbers in the service of the Afshar chieftain. Nadir soon deposed and killed his master and mentor. As the head of the of the Afshar tribe, he joined forces with the Shah Tahmasp II in 1726. Nadir quickly revitalized the Shah's military forces, and in series of battles, the Ghalzai Afghans were completely routed from Iran in 1729-30. Shah Tahmasp was nominally restored to the throne but the real ruler of Iran was now Nadir.

Nadir now faced the colossal task of expelling both the Ottomans and the Russian from Safavid territory. In 1730, the challenge was in fact far more daunting than the immense obstacles Shah Abbas I faced in 1587. Nadir's first campaign against the Ottoman occupation forces in Western Iran was nevertheless a great success. An Ottoman army was defeated near Hamadan whereby the Safavid forces regained control over Mesopotamia and Azerbaijan. Nadir's forces besieged the fortress at Yerevan but Nadir was forced to lift the siege to rush some 1,400 miles to Khorasan to quell a rebellion.

Meanwhile, Shah Tahmasp II initiated his own disastrous siege of Yerevan in 1731 with the result that all of Nadir's territorial gains from the previous year were lost. To make things worse, Tahmasp entered into a treaty with the Ottomans on such unfavorable conditions that Nadir used these concessions as a pretext to dethrone him. However, Nadir did not feel that time was ripe to straightforwardly usurp the Safavid throne; instead, he installed an infant puppet prince, Abbas III (1732-36), with himself as the confirmed regent.

The following events testify to Nadir's extraordinary ability to rally men to his cause. Nadir's second campaign against the Ottomans in 1733 ended in utter defeat after one of the fiercest battles ever fought between the two archenemies. Nadir's position could not have been worse. His tattered army was in disorder and his men were completely demoralized. In spite of this, Nadir had raised a fresh and well-equipped army in less than three months that vanquished the same Ottoman army that had dealt him such a crushing blow. The Ottomans were completely routed and their general, Topal Osman, was killed. Nadir's victory, however, was partly possible because vicious intrigues in Constantinople had denied the Ottoman garrison fresh reinforcements and pay for its soldiers.

Nadir now made peace with the Ottoman governor of Baghdad, but the treaty was later repudiated by Constantinople. Conditions were therefore ripe for Nadir to push for a general engagement with the Sultan's imperial army. At Baghavand in 1735, Nadir's numerical inferior force completely defeated an Ottoman army of 80,000 men, whereby the Sultan was forced to adhere to the terms of the Peace of Baghdad signed two years earlier.

The Russians had abandoned their expansionist foreign policy toward Iran upon the death of Peter the Great. Nevertheless, they wanted to hold on to their conquest of the Iran's Caspian provinces. A number of external events, however, persuaded empress Anna (reigned 1730-40) to pull back Russian troops from Safavid territory. The Treaty of Rasht in 1732 restored full Safavid control over the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran and Astrabad.

In 1735, war between Russia and the Ottoman empire again loomed large on the horizon.<sup>90</sup> European great power rivalries thus presented Nadir with an opportunity that he took full advantage of. In a diplomatic dispatch, Nadir threatened to support the Ottomans against Russia unless Baku and Derbent were promptly returned to Iran. Russia was forced to yield to Nadir's ultimatum. The Treaty of Ganja surrendered the last of Peter the Great's conquests. However, the Ottomans were permanently denied access to the Caspian Sea to the great pleasure of Russia.

The next ten years would mark the last heydays of Persian imperialism. In 1738-39, in his most celebrated adventure, Nadir invaded the Mughal empire in India. Delhi and Lahore were sacked and immense riches, including the Koh-i-noor diamond and the Peacock Throne, were brought back to Iran. Rioters in Delhi killed a number of Persian soldiers, and to avenge their deaths, Nadir ordered a general massacre of thousands of citizens in the neighborhoods where the bodies of Persian soldiers had been recovered. Nadir Shah also conquered vast territories in Central Asia, including Bukhara and Khiva, and he seized several possessions on the Arabian Peninsula. At the zenith of his power, Nadir Shah ruled the greatest Persian empire since the Sasanian kingdom.

Nadir Shah at long last formally ascended to the Persian throne in 1736. A group of Persian dignitaries unanimously "requested" Nadir to become the new shah. Nadir "accepted" the appeal on the conditions that preparations were made to abolish Shi'ism as Iran's state religion. Nadir Shah's scheme for abolishing Shi'ism must be seen in the

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<sup>90</sup> A four-year war broke out in 1735 between Russia and Austria in alliance against Turkey. Russia once again challenged Ottoman control of the northern Black Sea region. Austria joined the fight in 1737 but was forced to sue for peace separately after military failures. As a result, the Russians achieved almost nothing in the Treaty of Belgrade, 18 September 1739.

wider context of his comprehensive plans to lay the groundwork for uniting the Safavid and the Ottoman empires in one single Islamic state with himself as the greatest of all Muslim emperors in history. In defense of his grand project Nadir Shah wrote: "Since the Shi'i schism has prevailed, this land has been constantly in disorder. Let us all become Sunnis and this will cease" (Sykes 1930, 254). To further his objectives, Nadir Shah introduced a new fifth legal orthodox school of Islam, the *Ja'fari* sect. The most prominent Shi'i *mujtahid* advised the Shah to refrain from interfering in spiritual matters, but his abrupt death convinced his fellow *mujtahids* to go along with the Nadir's proposal.<sup>91</sup>

When the Ottoman sultan vehemently refused to recognize Nadir's Jafari-sect, and instead issued an edict that it was permissible to imprison or kill every Iranian unbeliever, the last Turko-Iranian war of 1743-1745 was set in motion. Nadir Shah had utterly failed to convince either Sunnis abroad or Shi'ites at home of his new religious concept. On the battlefield, however, the Persians scored their last major victory against the Ottomans in 1745. A huge Turkish army of one hundred thousand cavalry and forty thousand infantry, under Yakan Mohamed Pasha's command, was defeated in a four-day long battle. Nadir's army gained a most decisive victory. The parties to the conflict then

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<sup>91</sup> Nadir promulgated that all Shi'ites, as a matter of fact, were adherents to a fifth orthodox school of Islam. Orthodox Sunni Islam recognizes four separate legal interpretations of Islamic law (*Sharia*): the Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools. Nadir's fifth school took the name Ja'fari after the sixth Shi'i Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq. Ja'far al-Sadiq, or Ja'far ibn Muhammad (ca. 701-765) was an astute politician who stayed out of trouble with the powerful Umayyad caliphs at Damascus. He was a gifted intellectual as well, who gathered around himself students such as Abu Hanifah and Malik ibn Anas, founders of two of the Sunni legal schools, and Wasil ibn Ata, the founder of the rationalist and highly controversial Mu'tazili school of thought. Nadir seems to have been chosen Ja'far al-Sadiq as some sort of compromise figure that would neither offend Sunnis nor Sevenser Shi'ites.

entered into negotiations. Peace was concluded on terms that Nadir Shah scrapped his pretensions to religious and political hegemony, and that the western border was restored to what it had been since the Peace of Zuhab of 1639; i.e. before the Afghan invasion. The treaty put a final end to Turko-Iranian hostilities.



Picture 5: Portrait of Nadir Shah (Avery, Hambly, and Melville 1985, 936 plate 5).

The Safavid empire fell apart upon the death of Nadir Shah, the last great Asian conqueror. Officers from his own personal guard assassinated Nadir Shah in 1747 during a military expedition against rebellious Kurds. His death was followed by a period of relative tranquility and prosperity in Iran during the Zand dynasty. Though external

events on the international scene saved Iran from outright foreign occupation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the empire disintegrated into petty tribal principalities, until the Qajar tribe emerged victorious from a vicious civil war in 1795. The Qajar dynasty (1794-1925) restored the political and territorial integrity of Iran, but British and Russian imperialism would in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century reduce the political status of Iran to that of a quasi-colony.

## Chapter V: THE LEGACY OF EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM

There is a direct causal linkage between Iran's experience with European imperialism and the U.S.-Iranian conflict. Iran's domestic opposition—religious activists, Marxists, and secular nationalists alike—came to see the United States' presence in Iran after World War II as the direct extension of Anglo-Russian colonialism.<sup>92</sup> In their eyes, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was the client and puppet of the United States. It did not matter that Iran's relationship with the United States was completely different from the

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<sup>92</sup> Grand ayatollah, Ruhollah Khomeini, gave a speech at his home in Qom on 26 October 1964:

If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit this nation to be slaves of Britain one day, and America the next. If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit Israel to take over the Iranian economy; they will not permit Israeli goods to be sold in Iran—in fact, to be sold duty-free! If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit the government to impose arbitrarily such a heavy loan on the Iranian nation. If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit such misuse to be made of the public treasury. If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit any government to do whatever it wants, whatever is against the interests of the nation. If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit the Parliament to come to such a miserable state as this; they will not permit the Parliament to be formed at bayonet-point, with the ignominious results that we see. If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit girls and boys to wrestle together, as recently happened in Shiraz. If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit people's innocent daughters to be under the tutelage of young men at school; they will not permit women to teach at boys' schools and men to teach at girls' schools, with the resulting corruption. If the religious leaders have influence, they will strike this government in the mouth; they will strike this Parliament in the mouth and chase these deputies out of both its houses! If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit a handful of individuals to be imposed on the nation as deputies and determine the destiny of the country. If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit some agent of America [the Shah] to carry out these scandalous deeds; they will throw him out of Iran (Institute for the Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeini 1995, 224).

semi-colonial subjugation that Russia and Great Britain had gradually imposed on Iran since the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the time of the Constitutional Revolution, many Iranians had higher ambitions than simply to restore Iran's sovereignty and to reclaim Iran's right to self-determination. Iran's great imperial past loomed large on the horizon. For those who dreamed of a magnificent revival of Iran's former pride and prestige in the Muslim world and on the international arena, the United States had become an obstacle rather than an instrument to reach their goal.

Yet, blaming the United States for all of Iran's misfortunes has no support in historical facts. It is factually correct that Russia and Great Britain—and to some extent the United States—cynically exploited Iran for almost 150 years, and that the United States instigated the violent overthrow of Iran's legitimate prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq; nevertheless, the historical facts from this period inform us that a small and corrupt political elite misruled Iran. Qajar despotism was a sad story of pomposity, extravagance, and corruption. The Shi'ite clergy was more often than not preoccupied with its authority rather than alleviating the desperate poverty among a vast majority of the Iran's population. The power abuse could only take place through the complacency of ordinary citizens. Still, European imperialism and U.S. patronage of the Shah became the scapegoat and excuse for fundamental social reforms that never took place in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Iran's historical grievances are real but putting the blame squarely on foreign conspiracies is doing the country a grave disservice.

## **1. Qajar Irredentism and the Disparity Between Ends and Means**

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Iran's foreign policy was detached from the political reality. The shah's irredentist objectives were clearly out of touch with the facts on the ground. However, it took the Qajar monarchy more than fifty years to realize the disparity between Iran's political ambitions and its military capabilities. Qajar-Iran's aggressive foreign policy exposed the deep structural weaknesses of Persia for the rest of the world to see. It became all too obvious that Iran was economically and militarily far too weak to participate in the vicious game of international power politics. Iran quite frankly fell victim to its own unrealistic territorial ambitions.

The Qajar kings persistently pursued foreign policy objectives beyond their capabilities. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Qajar shah ruled over a vast territory and the country was at peace with both its traditional enemies, the Ottoman and Russian empires. When Fath Ali Shah (reigned 1797-1834) ascended the throne, the country enjoyed nearly complete freedom from foreign encroachment. However, the foreign policies of Fath Ali Shah and his successors would rapidly reduce Iran's power. In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Qajar-Iran had sought to gain the upper hand against Russia in the contest over the Caucasus region. The Qajars believed that Iran could exploit the Napoleonic wars in Europe to their own advantage. Thus, Iran entered into foreign alliances to further its irredentist objectives. In the reign of Fath Ali Shah—the second monarch of the Qajar dynasty—Iran fell into the European quagmire of deceitful diplomacy, dishonest alliances, and deadly power rivalries. The result was that the great

imperial powers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century—France, Russia and Great Britain—would cynically exploit the opportunities offered to them as all hegemonic powers in history had done before them. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Iran was forced to completely submit to the will of foreign powers.

#### **DYNASTIC ABSOLUTISM IN THE QAJAR PERIOD**

Iran's national unity has since ancient times been held together by the legitimacy of the absolute monarchy. The Zoroastrian clergy had codified the social pecking order in early Sasanian times, and the fundamental features of the hierarchy still prevailed under the Qajar dynasty. The Persian society ranked men and women into caste-like social groups with the "king-of-kings" at the top of the pyramid. Zoroastrianism was the glue that kept the whole system tightly together. Religion, of course, continued to play a crucial role in Iran after the fall of the Sasanian empire.

Under Qajar rule, Islam did not hold a more prominent position in state affairs than Zoroastrianism did in the classic Persian empires. The advent of Islam neither altered the preexisting social order nor did the new religion significantly strengthen social cohesion. To the contrary, no single Iranian dynasty was able to unite the old empire after the Abbasid caliphate folded in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, under the banner of Shi'ism, the Safavid dynasty for a while forged a new awareness of Iranian national unity; however, wars with the Ottoman empire soon sapped the strength of the newfound internal harmony. As the religious fervor of Safavid Shi'ism wore off, each group—ethnic, tribal, linguistic, or religious—again returned to its indigenous institutions of authority. When the Qajar dynasty once more reunited Iran as a national entity, the

legacy of the Persian empire rather than Islam defined Iran as a polity. Thus, the legitimacy of the absolute monarch was in practical terms the only thing that could overcome Iran's lack of social cohesion.

When the Qajar dynasty came to power, the extreme heterogeneous character of Iranian society was a serious source of political instability and military weakness vis-à-vis Iran's external competitors. The political customs and social divisions that Arab, Turkish, and Mongol invaders had imposed on Iran made uniform governance extremely difficult. Tribal criteria for succession to the throne (or rather lack of procedures) repeatedly took the country to the brink of full-scale civil war. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century—like all centuries after the fall of the Sasanian empire—the king's death signaled with high probability a period of violent chaos and disorder.

In the reign of the Qajar family, the endemic factionalism of Iran again threatened to dismember the country completely. Factional infighting put the political and territorial integrity of the country in jeopardy in the absence of a ruler who had the determination and the means at his disposal to safeguard Iran's vital interests. Different contenders to the throne rose up in arms after the deaths of Agha Muhammad Shah in 1797, Fath Ali Shah in 1834, and Muhammad Shah in 1848. Paradoxically, the succession disputes in both 1834 and 1848 were settled because Great Britain and/or Russia put their weight behind one particular candidate. Thus the traditional civil wars were prevented. In this perspective, many Iranians rightfully came to see the Qajar shahs as mere puppets of foreign powers and therefore illegitimate rulers.

As long as the shah managed to stay physically alive, the objectives of the state matched that of the Qajar king. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as in all previous centuries in the

history of Iran, the destiny of Iran was intimately linked to the aptitude and strength of the absolute monarch. The Shah's personal goals were the goals of the country, and his decisions were absolute and final. In Sir John Malcolm's first-hand observations of Fath Ali Shah:

The Monarch of Persia has been pronounced to be one of the most absolute in the world; and it has been shewn that there is reason to believe his condition has been the same from the earliest ages. His word has ever been deemed a law; and he has probably never had any further restraint upon the free exercise of his vast authority, than has arisen from his regard for religion, his respect for established usages, his desire of reputation, and his fear of exciting an opposition that might be dangerous to his power or to his life. There is no assembly of nobles, no popular representation, no ecclesiastical council of Oulamâh, in Persia. It is a maxim that the king can do what he chooses, and is completely exempt from responsibility. He can appoint and dismiss ministers, judges, and officers of all ranks. He can also take away the property or the life of any of his subjects; and it would be considered as treason to affirm that he is controuled by any checks, except such as may be imposed by his prudence, his wisdom, or his conscience. The exact limitations to which he is liable, cannot easily be defined: for they are equally dependent upon his personal disposition, and upon the character and situation of his subjects; particularly of that part of them who, from their condition, are the most exempt from the effects of arbitrary power (Malcolm 1829, vol. II, 303-304).

Though Sir John Malcolm gave a quite favorable characteristic of Fath Ali Shah, monarchs of Shah Abbas' caliber were nevertheless in short supply in the Qajar period. In the absence of a strong-willed, capable, and prudent monarch, Iran repeatedly slipped into disorder, isolationism, or ill-conceived foreign adventures.



Picture 6: Fath Ali Shah (History of the Qajar (Kadjar) Dynasty of Persia).

Fath Ali Shah—in contrast to the austere Agha Muhammad Khan—became famous for the opulence and extravaganza of his court. Court historians produced splendid accounts of Fath Ali Shah's ancient royal lineage. Sasanian-style stone reliefs were carved in testimony of the continuity of the Persian monarchical institution. Court painters depicted the Qajar shah walking over dead Russian bodies while surviving

Russian soldiers fled in terror at the mere sight of him. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Fath Ali Shah took the task of creating a royal family of possible successors to the throne extremely seriously. He is said to have fathered over a hundred children from a harem of several hundred wives, maybe in an attempt to compensate for his uncle and first Qajar shah, Agha Mohammad Khan, who had been castrated at the age of six by his enemies. Despite the material splendor and sexual potency of his reign, Fath Ali Shah is first and foremost remembered for his failed attempts to recreate the great Persian empire.

#### **WAR AS THE CONTINUATION OF QAJAR POLITICS BY DIFFERENT MEANS**

If the Qajar monarchs had pursued a less aggressive foreign policy in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Iran's fortunes might have looked very differently today. At the turn of the century, Iran enjoyed nearly complete freedom of action. Iran had not seen foreign invasions since the time of Nadir Shah, and the country had still not been exposed to European imperialism. As soon as the Qajar dynasty had consolidated power at home, Iran embarked on territorial expansion. However, Iran was financially and militarily weak since the country's internal development had been neglected for most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the Qajar monarchs had an extraordinary incomplete grasp of how inferior the strength of Iran was vis-à-vis the major European powers. The long absence of external threats in the 18<sup>th</sup> century deluded the Qajar shahs to pursue irredentist objectives.

The personal prestige and standing of the Iranian monarch has always been measured against the greatness of Iran's ancient past. Every Iranian dynasty has dreamed of reincorporating the frontiers of the mythical Persian empire, or even territories beyond

that of Cyrus the Great, which was the case with Nadir Shah. The legitimacy of the Qajar monarchy relied upon its ability to recover territories that the Persian Empire had lost, but the Qajar shahs also dreamt of recreating the great Persian empire. Indeed, the irredentist predisposition of the Qajar monarchs even went beyond that of Shah Ismail, Shah Tahmasp, Shah Abbas, or Nadir Shah (Ramazani 1966, 49). But in stark contrast to Shah Abbas—who meticulously rebuilt the strength of the empire in the very difficult 1587-1602 period, so he could recover vast territories lost to the Ottomans—the Qajars insisted on recovering Iran’s former territories without any serious assessment of the country’s strength relative to its two new regional opponents: Russia and Great Britain. This of course was a formula for disaster.

Fath Ali Shah, in particular, lived in a world of fantasy. He sought to revive the power and splendor of the ancient Persian empire with a tribal army and a medieval economy. Iran’s internal situation—lacking in national unity due to deep and conflicting interest between tribes, religious groups, and social classes—was incompatible with the Shah’s obsession with Iran’s historical greatness and his thirst for foreign adventures. In his worldview, Fath Ali Shah sincerely believed that the Caucasian khanates belonged to him exclusively (Hambly 1985, 146). The Shah’s claim was rooted in a sense of legitimacy, which completely denied Russia the equal “right” to dominate the Caucasus. In the observation of the British emissary to the Qajar court, Sir John Malcolm, the shah was “weak, proud and deluded” (Daniel 2000, 102). On the other hand, we must understand the shah’s temptation to seek glory through foreign military adventures, since this had always been the well-established way the Iranian ruler bolstered his legitimacy at

home in the absence of social cohesion. In short, Qajar irredentism and imperial ambitions did not match the means available to the shah.

War was usually the preferred means to achieve the shahs' ambitious foreign policy objectives. The Qajar shahs therefore plunged Iran into several wars that the country was utterly unprepared to fight and win. In all these wars—as well as the alliances with various European powers—Iran's sole objective was the recovery of former imperial Persian territories (Ramazani 1966, 49-50). Iran, however, did not possess the military strength to fight these wars, and as a result the country was by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century helplessly caught in the middle of Anglo-Russian power rivalry; the Great Game. The settlement of the second Perso-Russian war gave Russia capitulatory privileges in Iran. These extraterritorial privileges threw the door wide open to other foreign powers' intrusion of Iran's internal affairs. Between 1855 and 1900, 15 states were granted similar privileges, including the United States.

There is therefore a clear causal linkage between the foreign policy line adopted by the first Qajar shahs and European imperialism in Iran. Iran's entanglement in great power rivalries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was virtually caused by one single factor: the Qajar shah. The means and ends of Iran were nearly identical with the personal objectives of the Qajar monarchs since the shah was so closely identified with the state itself. Many authors have uncritically established that Iran was the victim of Western imperialism, but the fact is that the Qajar shahs set off Iran's expansionist wars and they were the true architects behind the foreign alliances.

## IRAN AND THE NAPOLEONIC WARS

Iran's favorable external position changed dramatically when France landed an expeditionary force in Egypt under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte on 1 July 1798. The strategic objective of Napoleon's military expedition was to cut Britain's eastern trade and to use Egypt as a steppingstone to conquer England's possessions in India. Revolutionary France believed that Egypt could at least be used as a bargaining chip in a future peace settlement with Great Britain.

Later, Napoleon Bonaparte and his collaborator in Russia, Tsar Paul I, came up with the idea of invading India together. Tsar Paul was known to possess an unbalanced and unpredictable personality with a strong passion for militarism, but he lacked the tactical genius of Napoleon, which has been so vividly described by Carl von Clausewitz (Clausewitz, Howard, and Paret 1984). Tsar Paul's joint project with Napoleon might well have been inspired by Peter the Great, who believed that India was the ultimate "depot" of the world. The plan was that Russian troops would march through Uzbekistan and descend on the Indus valley. Meanwhile, Napoleon's army would cross the Black Sea, march through Transcaucasus, subdue Iran, and team up with the Russians at the river Indus.

Napoleon's conquest of Egypt prompted the British government to court the Iranian monarch. When the British also learned of the fantastic Franco-Russian plans to invade India, the British East India Company dispatched Captain John Malcolm to Tehran in 1800. French forces had proven their extreme maneuverability when Napoleon successfully commanded an army across the Great St. Bernard Pass in May of 1800 before the snow had even melted. The British, therefore, took the plan quite seriously.

British diplomats skillfully exploited the Persian king's desire to regain territories that one time or another had been a part of the ancient Persian empire. Through generous gifts to the Iranian monarch, coupled with promises of military equipment and technicians in the near future, the two parties signed a treaty in 1801. However, because the alliance between Iran and Great Britain was a direct product of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, the maintenance and adherence to the Anglo-Iranian treaty was also a function of the power politics of Europe. When Great Britain and France signed the Treaty of Amiens on 27 March 1802, which secured 14 months of peace in Europe, the Franco-Russian plan to capture India died immediately.

The main rationale behind the Anglo-Persian treaty had therefore vanished; however, the Anglo-Persian treaty of 1801 had not only addressed the Franco-Russian design on Iran and India but the treaty had also contained a provision for dealing with Iran's and Great Britain's common regional enemy, Afghanistan, and *amir* Zaman Shah Durrani. However, the Afghani threat to Persia and British India slowly faded away after Fath Ali Shah had successfully instigated a revolt against Zaman Shah Durrani, who was imprisoned and blinded in 1800. The vital interests of both parties had therefore changed in a way that rendered the treaty ineffective only one year after its signature. The historical significance of the treaty, however, was that it paved the way for further Iranian entanglement in European power politics as the Qajar shahs continued to pursue their territorial goals.

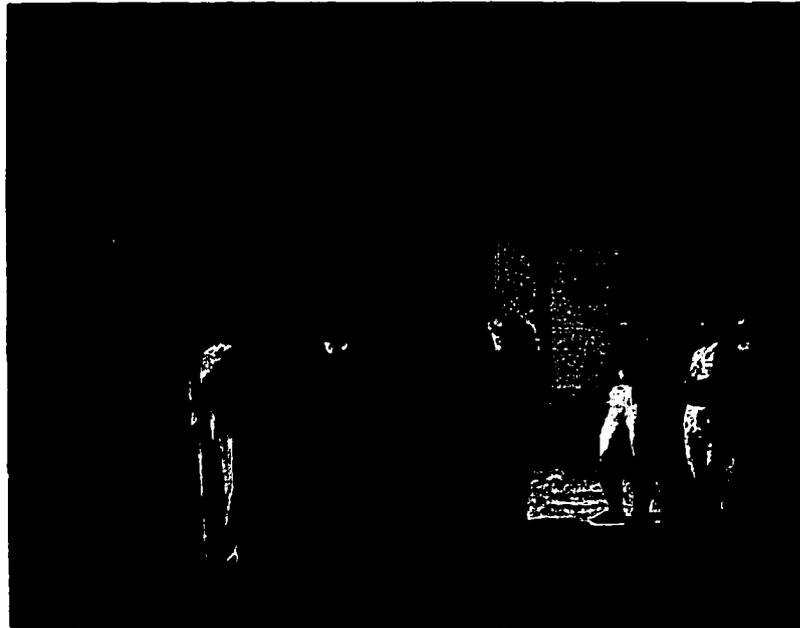
The Qajar dynasty's first war with Russia (1804-1813) lured Persia further into the orbit of great power rivalries. The precipitant was Qajar-Iran's quest for regional hegemony in Georgia and in the rest of the Caucasus. The Georgians, however, did not

share the Qajars' position on Georgian sovereignty. The Georgian monarchs had sought to balance their allegiance between Persia and Russia in the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1795 the first Qajar monarch, Agha Mohammad Khan, led a military campaign into Georgia. The Qajar expedition saw the capture of Tbilisi and the killing of a large number of its citizens. If the Qajar campaign had had the objective of restoring full Iranian suzerainty, then Agha Muhammad Khan's operation had the exact opposite effect. In 1799, the last king of Georgia simply turned over his kingship to the Russian tsar. Georgia became a Russian protectorate with Russian troops stationed in Tbilisi. The brutality of Qajar foreign policy had thus pushed the Georgians firmly into the Russian camp.

Tsar Alexander I continued to pursue an expansionist foreign policy in the Caucasus, and when Russian forces moved on Yerevan in 1804, the first Russo-Persian war was set in motion. The Shah's army was completely unprepared to fight a war against a disciplined European army, and therefore asked for British assistance under the 1801 treaty. Anglo-Russian relations had unfortunately warmed considerably in the period after Britain had signed the treaty with the Qajars. The British government was reluctant to offend the Russians by aiding an insignificant ally like Persia in the face of Napoleon's quest for worldwide hegemony. Fath Ali Shah then turned to France and Napoleon to extract the backing he desperately needed in his war against Russia. France and Iran soon agreed to join forces against Russia and Great Britain.

In the treaty of Finkenstein, signed on 4 May in 1807, the Shah committed Persia to go to war against Great Britain in exchange for considerable military support. Napoleon promised the Qajar shah that France would provide Persia with arms and

French officers in his war against Russia. In return, Persia was to declare war on Britain immediately, and to organize a combined force of Persians and Afghans that could march against the English colonial possessions in India.



Picture 7: The Persian Envoy, Mirza Mohammad-Reza Qazvini being received by Napoleon in 1807, painting by François Mulard (Amini).

Again, military and diplomatic developments completely altered the state of affairs. On 14 June the same year, Napoleon's army defeated the Russians at the battle of Friedland, whereby the Tsar sued for peace at Tilsit. Under the terms of the armistice, France and Russia again became allies whereupon they agreed to divide Europe between themselves. In the Tilsit agreement there was absolutely no mentioning of the status of Persia. Napoleon had quite simply ditched the Qajar shah for his own interests in Europe, which were of course much more important to him. Fath Ali Shah was again forced to

turn to the British, who were more than willing to seize the opportunity to expel French interests from the east.

The second alliance between Qajar-Iran and Great Britain did not save the Shah from losing the war against Russia. In the period immediately following Napoleon's peace with Russia in 1807, France did its best to mediate between Persia and Russia. For a while Russia was willing to negotiate a peaceful settlement, but Fath Ali Shah could not make himself ease his non-negotiable demand that Russia first had to pull out of Georgia all together. French influence with the Shah was now rapidly diminishing, and when the British Foreign Office offered the Qajar monarch financial support and military assistance against Russia, Great Britain and Qajar-Iran once more signed a formal treaty in 1809.

The Russo-Persian war dragged on after mediation failed in 1807. Over the next three years, British military advisors made little progress in shaping up the Persian army before Britain and Russia again became allies in 1812. The Tsar was again able to divert forces to the Caucasus after Napoleon's enormous invasion force of 600,000 men was defeated in Russia. A small Russian detachment launched a surprise attack against the Persian encampment at Aslanduz on the Aras river and inflicted heavy casualties on the Persian force with only minor Russian losses. The British was left to mediate the Treaty of Gulistan, which was signed on 14 October 1813. In the treaty Qajar-Iran gave up its claim to the old Persian provinces in the Caucasus. The treaty also granted Russia exclusive naval presence on the Caspian Sea and a say in the accession of the crown prince to the Qajar throne. In sum, the harsh terms imposed on Iran by the Treaty of Gulistan was caused by Fath Ali Shah's misguided military campaigns in the Caucasus.

The Shah could in retrospect have avoided the humiliating Iranian surrender when he turned down a historical lost opportunity to end hostilities on favorable terms in 1807.

#### **THE LAST WAR WITH THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: 1821-1847**

Some minor unsettled border issues from the time of the Safavid-Ottoman wars came back to haunt Turkish-Iranian relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The quarrel came at a time when the two Muslim countries could have pooled their resources against their common European enemy, Russia. It will be remembered that Safavid-Iran and the Ottoman empire fought long, bloody, but inconclusive wars over Mesopotamia and Eastern Anatolia in the period 1514-1746. Nadir Shah and the Ottoman sultan concluded a lasting peace treaty in 1746, which simply reiterated the Treaty of Zuhab of 1639. Regrettably, like most peace settlements, the Treaty of Zuhab contained several ambiguities with regard to the exact physical boundary between the Ottoman and Safavid empires.

The immediate precipitant for the hostilities that broke out in 1821 was the pastoral rights of two wandering tribes in Eastern Anatolia. The Ottoman governor of Erzurum had incarcerated the envoy the Persian shah had dispatched to present his grievances. Fath Ali Shah believed that his pride had been hurt to such an extent that he ordered his army to attack the Ottomans. Armed clashes continued until 1823 when British mediation succeeded and the parties signed the Treaty of Erzurum. The treaty, however, once again merely reaffirmed the treaties of 1639 and 1746, i.e. the root cause of the dispute was still unresolved. As a result, tension soon resurfaced and hostilities resumed from 1834 to 1840. Several districts on the Iranian side of the border were ravaged by Ottoman troops, and in 1837 the city of Muhammara (Khorramshahr) was

demolished. Members of the Shi'ite community at Karbala were also killed. British diplomats again intervened since the conflict threatened the vital strategic interests of Great Britain.

The British government steadfastly pursued the policy of *status quo* in both Qajar-Iran and Ottoman-Turkey throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British believed that the two ailing royal dynasties were the only viable and stabilizing institution, and that internal disorder in Turkey and Iran could only serve Russia's strategic interests. A war between the two old Muslim archenemies would further accelerated their decline and strengthened the Russian hand vis-à-vis British imperial interests.

Great Britain had both political and commercial interests that were endangered by the war. If the *status quo* was preserved, then Persia and the Ottoman empire could function as buffer states against Russia. The combined landmass of the Ottoman empire and Qajar-Iran served as a barrier between the rapidly expanding Russian empire and the British colonial empire in South Asia. Great Britain's overarching foreign policy objective with regard to Iran throughout the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century was always the maintenance of British imperial interests in India, whether it was external threats from France, Afghanistan, or imperial Russia. In addition, Britain was interested in opening new trade routes through Qajar-Iran and Ottoman-Turkey, thereby linking India closer to the European market. A lasting border settlement between the Shah and the Sultan was therefore tremendously important to the British government.

Persistent British diplomacy succeeded in setting up a multilateral border commission. The findings of the commission's work between 1843 and 1847 became the basis for a new agreement between Qajar-Iran and Ottoman-Turkey signed on 31 May

1847, which established the general principles for their common border. The sultan gave up some territories to the east but gained possession of the city of Muhammara and the eastern bank of the Shatt al-Arab.<sup>93</sup> Another commission of British and Russian surveyors worked relentlessly in St. Petersburg for years until a final set of detailed maps was completed in 1869; yet, the warring parties could not agree to a final settlement. The intransigency adopted by both disputants—coupled with constant political manipulations behind the scenes by both Great Britain and Russia—made compromise virtually impossible. Several border disputes that originate from the Safavid-Ottoman wars are still unsettled.

#### THE SECOND RUSSO-PERSIAN WAR: 1826-1828

No lessons seemed to have been learned from the first Russo-Persian war when Iran attacked Russia in 1826. As matter of fact, the Persian army was in a far inferior position with respect to its Russian opponent than when the first war ended in 1813. This fact—if it were know to the Shah at all—did not deter Fath Ali Shah from seeking revenge from the military defeat 13 years earlier. Qajar-Iran's *casus belli* was the incidence when Russia occupied some disputed but uninhabited border territories in 1825. The Shi'ite clergy had also declared *jihad* against Russia for the physical mistreatment of Muslims in the "occupied" territories in the Transcaucasus. In addition,

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<sup>93</sup> The Shatt al-Arab was the center of contention in the Iran-Iraq war. Saddam Hussein's *casus belli* on 22 September 1980 was to reassert Iraqi control over both sides of the Shatt al-Arab—the confluence of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. He erroneously saw a window-of-opportunity in the apparent chaos that prevailed in Iran in the aftermath of the revolution. Iraq's surprise attack accomplished the capture of Khorramshahr, but the city returned to Iranian control in 1982. The Iranian leadership then made the ill-fated decision to continue the war on Iraqi territory despite a generous offer to settle the conflict.

the Shah apparently again believed that Great Britain would actively support him in a conflict with Russia.

In between the two Russian wars, Qajar-Iran and Great Britain had finalized the Definitive Treaty in 1814, which replaced the 1809 treaty. The treaty established that Britain would provide troops or financial assistance if Persia were attacked by any European power; however, contingent upon the fact that the war was not a result of "aggression on the part of Persia." Qajar-Iran pledged not to permit troops hostile to British interests to cross its territory. Qajar-Iran also promised to help prevent attacks against India originating from within Afghanistan. In exchange, the British agreed to stay out of any dispute between Qajar-Iran and Afghanistan. Thus the Qajar shah must have felt that his rear flanks were firmly covered.

Fath Ali Shah thought the death of Tsar Alexander was a good opportunity to repudiate the terms of Gulistan. Nevertheless, the second war with Russia was a complete military disaster for Qajar-Iran. After initial brief successes on the battlefield, Russian forces overran the Iranian army and occupied Tabriz. Great Britain refused to come to Qajars' assistance since the British government deemed the Shah to be the aggressor. In February of 1828, the war ended when Qajar-Iran was forced to accept the degrading terms of the Treaty of Turkmanchai.

The Treaty of Turkmanchai has gone down in Iran's national history as the most humiliating treaty ever signed with a foreign power. The treaty had immense consequences on later historical developments since it provided the basis for the establishment of a capitulatory regime in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini cleverly exploited the psychological effects of the foreign capitulations when he equated the American military

presence in Iran in the 1960s with the Iran's dishonor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In terms of territorial losses the provisions of the Treaty of Turkmanchai were not as severe as the previous settlement at Gulistan; however, the new treaty gave Russia wide-ranging extraterritorial jurisdiction in Iran.

Hereafter, no Iranian authority was allowed to enter the dwellings of a Russian citizen living inside Iran without the prior consent of Russian officials stationed in Iran. Russian citizens residing within Iran were from now on only accountable to Russian jurisdiction.<sup>94</sup> In addition, Iran agreed to pay Russia the enormous amount of twenty thousand silver rubles in war reparations. The terms imposed upon Iran were truly harsh, but then again, in retrospect the shah should have known that the stakes were high when he launched his attack on Russia. The emotional aspect of the loss of Iran's imperial possessions in the Caucasus is best captured by the fact that Iran more than 90 years later sought to reclaim these territories at Paris Peace Conference after World War I.

#### **WARS WITH GREAT BRITAIN: 1836-1838 and 1856-1857**

It took two additional wars before Qajar-Iran finally gave up its claim to former Persian territories. This time Iran became entangled in hostilities over Afghanistan with its actual ally, Great Britain. After Qajar-Iran's humiliating defeats against Russia, the Russian envoys lobbied the Qajar shah to restore Persia's military pride by compensating for the territories lost in the Caucasus with expansion to the east in the direction of India. Iranian kings have historically ruled Western Afghanistan. The Safavids fought numerous

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<sup>94</sup> The prime reason for this was that Islamic law, the *Sharia*, discriminates between Muslims and non-Muslims; i.e. foreign powers believed their subjects were not equal before the law.

wars with the Uzbeks over this region. Even though it was an Afghan ruler who deposed the last Safavid shah, Nadir Shah nevertheless for a short while restored the great Safavid empire in Afghanistan and conquered territories as far as northern India. Iran's control over Afghanistan eventually slipped away in the chaos that ensued after Nadir Shah was murdered by his own officers.

Muhammad Shah (reigned 1834-1848) followed in the irredentist footsteps of his predecessors. He demanded absolute obedience from the ruler of Herat just as his forerunners had sought to subdue the independent-minded Georgian monarchs. Qajar-Iran's efforts to re-impose Persian hegemony in Afghanistan was unfortunately a sad replay of the disaster that befell the Qajars in Georgia. Iran's design on Herat brought it into in direct conflict with Great Britain. Muhammad Shah made the mistake of coupling his territorial claims with a tendency of favoring Russia over Great Britain. In the British mindset this meant that Russia could gain a huge strategic advantage in the Great Game since the British for a long time had recognized Herat's historical role as the staging ground for military invasions of India. For these reasons the British government opposed Qajar-Iran's plan to annex Herat.

British objections, however, did not deter the Shah from attempting to capture Herat in 1837. In violation of the terms of the Definitive Treaty, British officers helped organize the defense of Herat. The Afghan swordsmen repulsed the Persian army's attack on the city. The British emissary failed to persuade the Shah to call off the siege, whereby Great Britain landed forces on Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf. The Shah had apparently listened more closely to the advice given to him by the Russian envoy. The Russians had

urged the Shah to endure British diplomatic and military pressure, but when Great Britain threatened to go to war unless the shah withdrew his forces, the siege was lifted.

The failure of the Shah's military adventure had been exposed for the whole world to see. Iran had once again been humiliated by a European power. The British did not remove their forces from Kharg Island before 1842 when all outstanding issues were resolved to their satisfaction. The same year, the Qajar shah again nearly went to with the Ottoman empire over the same entrenched border disputes, this time on the ground that the Ottomans' had renewed their persecution of Shi'ites at Karbala. Qajar-Iran had by now lost four wars against three major powers. Still, the Shah's political ambitions had yet not been adjusted to match his military capabilities.

In 1856, Nasir al-Din Shah (reigned 1848-1896) fought the last of Iran's irredentist wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Qajars thought it was a good idea to exploit the first major war in Europe between the signatories to the Concert of Europe, the Crimean War, which took place between October 1853 and February 1856. Unfortunately, Nasir al-Din Shah's political gamble of once again getting Iran involved in European affairs brought no successes but major losses.

The clash was once again over Afghanistan. The war was most likely instigated by the Shah's prime minister, Mirza Agha Khan Nuri. The British were of the opinion that Mr. Nuri, and subsequently also the Iranian government, had *de facto* supported the Russian side during the Crimean War. In addition, the British ambassador to Iran, Mr. Murray, also believed that Mr. Nuri was behind rumors that the ambassador had engaged in an intimate relationship with the Shah's sister-in-law. When the British broke off diplomatic relations and withdrew the British mission, Prime Minister Nuri decided that

time was opportune to throw his weight behind the Shah's long-time desire to reclaim Herat for the Persian throne.

Nasir al-Din Shah simply could not control his longing for completing the conquest that had eluded both his father and his grandfather (Amanat 1997, 225). After all, the Qajars thought they had a perfectly legitimate claim to Herat. The Safavids had conquered the city in 1510; however, recapturing the city would be in strict violation of the treaty Iran had signed with Britain in 1853. Iranian forces nevertheless marched on Herat and entered the city unopposed in October of 1856.

The British Government promptly declared war on Iran, which British forces conducted from the Persian Gulf rather than fighting a land war in Afghanistan. Kharg Island was again occupied and land forces went ashore at Bushire in January 1857. British force overwhelmed the Iranian army but the British government had no desire to bring down the Qajar dynasty for the geopolitical reasons mentioned already. The Treaty of Paris, which was mediated by Napoleon III and signed in 1857, was therefore unusually mild compared to the treaties of Gulistan and Turkmanchai. Nevertheless, Iran had to give up all future claims to Herat and any other part of Afghanistan, but no war reparations were imposed on the country.

By 1860, the Qajar shah finally seems to have understood the gravity of Persia's internal and external situation. Iran had lost five wars in less than half-a-century, and the future of the country looked extremely bleak. All through the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but especially in the 1860s, Russia captured the remaining independent khanates of Central Asia, one after the other (see map page 263). These events, coupled with the

horrible famine of 1870-71, must have inflicted upon the Shah a sense of soberness in his dealings with international affairs.<sup>95</sup>

The irrefutable fact was that the Qajar dynasty's objectives had not matched Iran's capabilities. The Qajar monarch could no longer engage in foreign military adventures if he cared for his own personal survival, which he of course did. In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we can therefore observe a distinct adjustment in the foreign relations of Iran. War was no longer available as a tool of foreign policy. Iranian irredentism was dead for more than a century until the leadership of the Islamic Republic got carried away during the war with Iraq in 1982.

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<sup>95</sup> The famine of 1870-71 is said to have caused the death of as many as 10% of the entire population of Iran. The famine was caused by a combination of a number of factors: several years of drought, conversion of lands to opium cultivation away from food production, export of foods for better prices abroad, and widespread speculation by the wealthy elite—including members of the Qajar court and the Muslim ulama (Keddie 1985, 186).

## **2. Iran's Subjugation to the Will of Russia and Great Britain**

Iran's foreign policy in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century shifted markedly away from territorial expansionism to simply staving off Russian and British efforts to colonize the country. European penetration of Iran was made easy by the political nature of Qajar despotism and the economic policy of the absolute ruler. In Ervand Abrahamian's analysis: "[The] 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" (Abrahamian 1982, 52). European imperialism in Iran coincides with the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (reigned 1848-1896). Though he was the ablest of all the Qajar monarchs, he did far too little to save his country from becoming a semi-colony. Under Nasir al-Din Shah only a few half-hearted attempts were made to reform and modernize Iran's economy. Basically no attempts were made to improve Iran's political institutions. As a result, Iran had no effective armed forces that could stand up to Russia's and Great Britain's strangling of Persia.

The Shah's attempts to reform Iran's economy failed mainly for four separate reasons. First, the policy of granting foreign nationals sweeping economic concession was misguided in the sense that the reform-politicians naively believed that economic improvement could be achieved by simply trusting the good intentions of foreign capitalists. These policies also assumed that top-down reforms would work on a medieval economy that was utterly unprepared for market capitalism. Second, deep-seated vested interests on behalf of Qajar-Iran's societal elite effectively blocked much-needed radical

structural reforms. Third, foreign intrigues put Iran's economy in a state of arrested development. Russian plots and British counter-plots, and *vice versa*, had the effect of canceling out any meaningful direct foreign investment. Fourth, the shahs' economic policies were often motivated by personal greed. Muzaffar al-Din Shah (reigned 1896-1907) brought Iran to a state of near bankruptcy. He floated two major loans in Russia—mainly to pay for his extravagant travels to Europe—that had the effect of subjecting Iran to serfdom. The first Russian Revolution in 1905, however, presented Iran with a golden opportunity to take matters into its own hands, but soon high-politics in Europe derailed a political development toward representative government. The great European war, World War I, brought major devastation and dislocations on Iran.

#### MYTH AND REALITY

Iran's current conflict with the United States is closely linked to the political events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most Iranians, but also a sizeable portion of people in the West, believe that Iran was the innocent victim of Western imperialism. But was really Iran the blameless prey of Russian and British colonialism? Is there no causal correlation between Qajar rule, international developments, and Iran's misfortunes? Mehran Kamrava asserts: "The country fell victim to a series of international developments over which it had little or no control" (Kamrava 1992, 8). I will argue that is factually more correct to say that the governing elite of Qajar-Iran, through a series of unwise and misguided decisions, brought the country in a position where it fell prey to stronger players on the international arena. Qajar-Iran was in essence also an imperialist power itself. In sum, the conflict with the United should be seen in the psychological light of a

proud ancient empire, impotent, humiliated, and overpowered by the new hegemons on the international arena: Russia, Great Britain, and later the United States.

Understanding the conflict between Iran and the United States requires that we are able to detach contemporary value judgments from the international political norms of the post-World War II era. When analyzing the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the historical facts inform us that the responsibility for Iran's suffering has to be distributed differently than what has been the mainstream school of thought for the last decades. We have already seen that the irredentist objectives of the Qajar shahs in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century embroiled Iran in wars that it could not possibly win. Similarly, it can be said that in the second half of the century the Shah, together with his trusted politicians and courtiers, misgoverned the country with the result that Iran became economically and politically subordinated to the will of foreign powers. The blame has too often been put squarely on the shoulders of British and Russian imperialists and capitalists; but, it takes two to tango. The Qajar elite squandered Iran's future by not introducing self-strengthening measures. In hindsight it is historically inaccurate to declare foreign interests morally guilty of exploiting the political and economic opportunities offered to them in the international climate of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Passing value judgments about historical events that came to pass more than one hundred years ago do not expand our understanding of the factual events and causal processes that did take place. It also deprives us of the most important tool that enable us to understand the current conflict with the United States.

The economic importance of Iran around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been wildly exaggerated in the official historiography of the Islamic Republic:

Iran's strategic importance; its access to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf; the fertility and vastness of the land; the varying climate; the population of the country; the discovery of great oil resources and underground mines and Iran's common border with Tsarist Russia, first of all, and then later with the Soviet Union, were some of the factors which drew the covetous eyes of the new powers to this region. However, the deep religious belief and sentiments of the Iranian people were always the chief obstacle in the path of the hegemonical powers (Institute for the Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeini 1995, xxvii).

Many Western observers have unfortunately over the years fallen into the trap of making the same presumptions. It is, on the other hand, true that Iran did play a prominent role in the minds of foreign policy officials in London, Moscow, and later Washington. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the printed press in the West devoted an enormous amount of attention to the Great Game in Asia. Yet, this does not imply that the great powers were drawn to Iran because of the "fertility" of the country's material and human resources which were, to put in bluntly, not very impressive when Iran entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There has always been a strong predisposition among Iranians to see the country as "the center of the universe" (Fuller 1991, 1). Lately, several scholars from the region have made an effort to put the importance of the Persian Gulf region in a more appropriate perspective (Rajaei 2000). One source of misunderstanding is the economic significance of Iran in the 19<sup>th</sup> century vis-à-vis the colonial powers. Students of Iranian affairs frequently make the erroneous assumption that Great Britain and Russia were drawn to Iran for economic reasons.

As a matter of fact, the overall level direct foreign investment in this period was far lower in Iran than in the neighboring states and in a number of countries comparable

to Iran in other parts of the world. The numbers show that foreign economic penetration by European countries relative to overall foreign trade was much stronger elsewhere. Foreign trade (exports and imports) in Iran was \$10 per capita in 1913 as compared to \$15 in Turkey, \$24 in Egypt, and \$4 in India. However, accumulated foreign capital investments amounted to approximately \$150 million in Iran compared to over \$1,000 million in both Egypt and Turkey, and close to \$2,000 million in India. Other economic indicators such as the number of modern factories or the total length of railways show that Iran had nowhere near the economic activity of foreigners in countries like Turkey, Egypt, and India. Correspondingly, the social and cultural impact of foreigners—the number of alien residents, foreign schools, books and newspapers published, or films shown—was negligible compared to other regions of European domination (Issawi 1985, 590-91).

The numbers, therefore, suggest that we need to search for alternative explanations to Iranians' fierce resistance to foreign economic activities on Iranian soil in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1970s, the American economic presence in Iran reached the same level as that of the Europeans in Turkey, Egypt, and India in the previous century. We know that widespread resentment to the Mohammad Reza Shah's policy of subcontracting vital areas of the Iran's economy to foreigners was a major factor behind his downfall.

A few structural reasons explain why Iran in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not the big colonial prize, measured in economic terms, as some authors have led us to believe. First, Iran had become geographically isolated from international trade after the Portuguese opened the Eastern sea trade. Iran in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was hundred of miles away from

any of the world's commercial centers or major trade routes. In addition, Iranian rulers had since the time of the great Safavid shahs neglected the building of roads and transportation infrastructure. Second, the geographic features of Iran did not lend themselves very well to international commerce. Iran's few fertile provinces were all located away from the open ocean and the major commercial sea-lanes. The extremely arid and rugged terrain made all sort of communication very difficult. Third, the domestic political turmoil of the 18<sup>th</sup> century had left Iran economically impoverished. The country produced no substantial economic surplus that could sustain foreign trade. Fourth, the Qajar dynasty had on the whole done very little after it came to power to strengthen the central government's control over the provinces or to emulate the institutions of the economic revolution in the West. For these reasons, Iran was weak and unprepared in its encounter with European colonial powers and the outcome was to a large extent given by the political climate of the days.

The numbers also inform us that European imperialists focused for the most part their time and resources on countries in other parts of the world, which usually fared better than Iran. The national Iranian trauma that is rooted Western imperialism is therefore more closely associated with the emotional aspects of foreign domination and subjugation rather than the actual extent to which foreigners exploited the country and its population. Nikki Keddie observes that the long reign of Nasir al-Din Shah contained, "far fewer self-strengthening measures or steps to promote economic and social development than were to be found in nineteenth century Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, or Tunisia, and though this, partly due to the strength of decentralizing, traditional forces in Iran was also in part due to the character of the Qajar rulers" (Keddie and Richard 1981,

61). Since European imperialism was at least as influential elsewhere, she therefore concludes that the dissimilarity between the fortunes of Iran and other Third World countries cannot be blamed in full on pressure from the Europeans. This leaves the door open for the alternative explanation that the Qajar monarchy's mismanagement of the country was maybe the most significant cause of Iran's hard luck.

Charles Issawi also draws attention to the social factors in Iran. Unlike other Muslim countries in the Middle East, Iran did not have large non-Muslim minorities when it was challenged by the progress Europe had made in the fields of political institutions, economic organizations, and technological innovations. In other countries, these minorities served as a bridgehead into Western culture since members of these communities more readily obtained European education and a deeper understanding of the modern industrial economy (Issawi 1985, 590). The domestic elite in Iran was generally uninformed with regard to new developments in science and technology. The Qajars wanted the power of the West; however, they were generally unwilling to make the painful but necessary structural changes that could enable Iran to take full advantage of Western technology.

Iran's suffering was a complex combination of internal and external factors, of which European imperialism is only one; nonetheless, the character of the Qajar rule must take the bulk of the blame for Iran's near complete reliance on foreign powers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Qajar monarchs' ability to weaken Iran's power vis-à-vis its opponents was far superior to any concerted foreign conspiracy. The Qajar shahs and their courtiers squandered away Iran's self-determination and political future for want of military prestige and material luxury. Many also acknowledge that the economic and

political misery of Iran was to a large extent the product of the shahs' acquisitiveness. The shahs deliberately secured foreign loans in order to finance their European voyages and palace excesses. Observers from all over the political spectrum—even some scholars favorable to the Iranian victim mentally—conclude that Iran's misery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century cannot be blamed exclusively on European imperialism.

The shahs' political advisors did not improve the situation. The reform-minded faction apparently believed that they could fast-forward Iran's economic development by handing out overly generous economic concessions to the Europeans. The reactionary elements of the Qajar elite refused to contribute to meaningful reforms that could in any way curtail their privileges. In sum, the Qajar administration was for a large part responsible for Iran's inability to repulse European imperialism and the semi-colonial status of the country.

Another particular destructive feature of Qajar rule was the practice of selling public offices to the highest bidder. In Qajar times, the governorship of a province was sold off at an almost annual auction. The man who paid the most for the public office could in turn sell the rights to tax-collection to other individuals. It does not take much imagination to see how detrimental this system was to overall economic development, but the system persisted because it gave the shah (or the highest bidder for governor) a direct infusion of cash. Institutionalized tax-farming in the Qajar period provided the individuals who actually took up the office of governor with an irresistible incentive to extract as much taxes as they possibly could since they might not be in office the next year.

Yet, to hold the Qajar dynasty solely responsible for Iran's suffering would be mistaken. There is no doubt that the Anglo-Russian rivalry paralyzed economic development, and that the Great Game obstructed a natural evolution of modern political institutions that could otherwise have taken place in Iran. Iran, unfortunately, turned out to be more vulnerable to foreign manipulation than other 3<sup>rd</sup> World countries. The decadence of Qajar rule provided the great powers with very easy access to Iran's core decision-making process. This was made possible because the overriding objective driving the Qajar administration was to find access to fresh financial funds that could secure the dynasty's political survival and fuel its conspicuous consumption at the court. Both Great Britain and Russia cynically exploited this miserable state of affairs with little or no concern for Iran's overall economic development that could benefit ordinary citizens.

The two great powers had different motives for interfering in Iran's internal affairs. British colonial history has always had a prevailing monetary theme. Yet, the British were to a far lesser extent than the Russians motivated by classic colonialism, which is usually defined as finding markets for surplus capital and cheap manufactured goods. The general economic backwardness of Iran in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not present the British with much of an economic incentive to face Russian interests head-on. This of course changed dramatically when the Anglo-Persian Oil Company found oil in 1908 as the major powers of Europe were preparing for the Great War. Before oil was found, the British were for the most part present in Iran to preempt any proxy design on British India. For most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British government was committed to the political *status quo* in Iran, which meant supporting Qajar despotism. The British believed above

all that internal instability was advantageous to Russian interests. In short, the British did not care much what was going on in Iran as long as the Russians were not allowed full entry.

Russia, on the other hand, had straightforward territorial imperial objectives with regard to Iran as a sovereign state. Many Russians believed that it was simply a matter of time before Persia would cease to exist as a self-governing state. “They argued that the country was tired and that the entire population of Persia looked to Russia for change” (Kazemzadeh 1968, 387). Paradoxically, popular unrest in Iran was nearly exclusively targeted at British interests—such as the Reuter-protests and the famous Tobacco Revolt—even though Russian influence was much more dangerous to Iranian sovereignty (Fuller 1991, 143). By 1900, Russia had cleverly out-maneuvered the British and assumed a dominant position of influence on Iran’s domestic affairs. It is therefore all the more surprising that Iran’s contemporary political mythology holds Great Britain nearly solely responsible for Iran’s inferior position before World War II.

#### **IRAN AND ANGLO-RUSSIAN RIVALRY**

Around 1880, the political establishment of Qajar-Iran was gravely alarmed by Russia’s rapid territorial expansion into Central Asia. The territorial advances of imperial Russia had reached Khorasan, Iran’s northeastern province, in only two decades. No exact state border had ever existed between Khorasan and the nomadic tribes in Turkistan, which, of course, gave the Russians numerous excuses to press their advance farther to the south. The Qajars and the British were wildly speculating about where the Russians would stop, quite similar to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December

1979 when neither Washington nor Tehran with any degree of certainty could determine what was the ultimate object behind the Soviet decision to break the *détente* of the 1970s (Fuller 1991, 136). The British for a while believed that the Russians were trying to circumvent the traditional invasion route to India, the road from Kabul through the Khyber pass. London speculated that the Russians planned to proceed through the Iranian provinces of Khorasan and enter India by Herat and Kandahar; thus, the Iranian province of Sistan gained the utmost strategic importance in the Great Game. In retrospect, Qajar-Iran had no reason to believe that the Russians would halt their onslaught in Turkmenistan.<sup>96</sup>

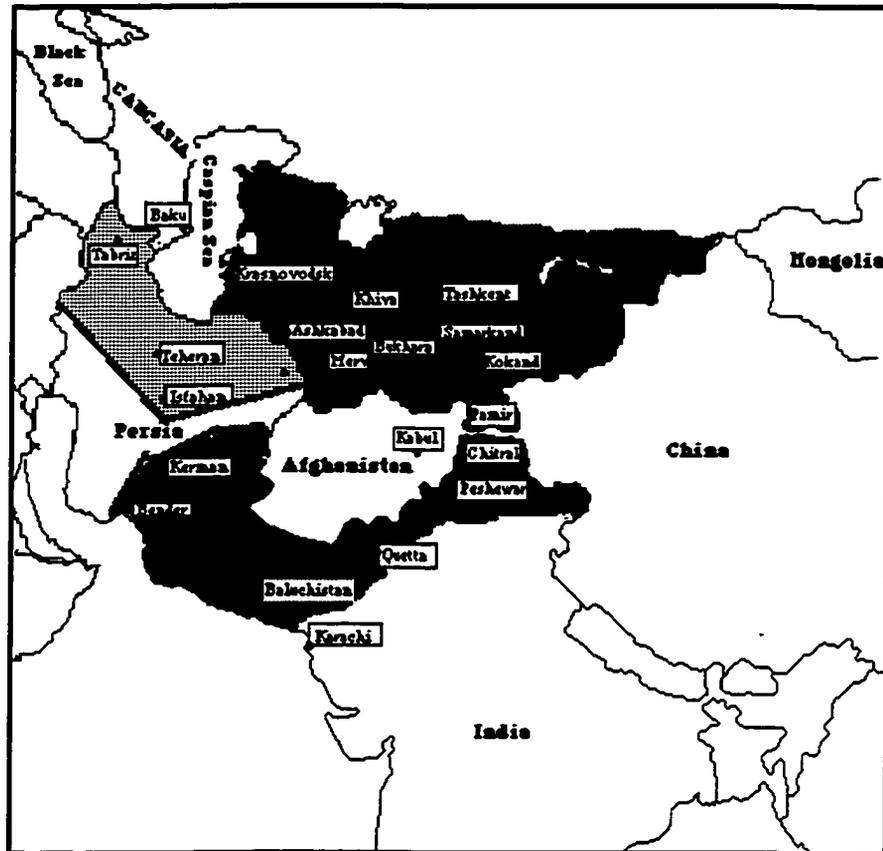
In this situation, Qajar-Iran believed that it had no other choice than to actively encourage stronger British involvement that could balance the Russian threat. The result, however, was that the Anglo-Russian rivalry over Iran only intensified in the following decades. It is fair to say that the Anglo-Russian competition to a considerable degree exacerbated Iran's preexisting and largely homegrown problems. Iran's economy in the late 1860s was seriously depressed as a result of a combination of several factors. During this period, the Qajar authorities not only had to deal with severe food shortages, but external military threats as well. The direct effect of the Anglo-Persian rivalry was that the modest economic activities in Iran suddenly received considerable attention from all foreign parties with strategic interests in the region. But economic development in Iran in latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not benefit from the newfound awareness of foreign

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<sup>96</sup> Historians today still debate the primary motives and exact objectives driving Russia's conquest of Central Asia.

governments and investors, instead commercial activity was put in a state of arrested development.

### RUSSIAN AND BRITISH EXPANSION IN CENTRAL ASIA 1865-1907



Areas of Russian Expansion  
 Russian Sphere of Influence

Areas of British Expansion  
 British Sphere of Influence

**TERRITORIES AND TOWNS UNDER**

**RUSSIAN CONTROL:**

- |                   |                                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Tashkent--1865    | Merv--1884                          |
| Samarkand--1868   | Femir--1895                         |
| Krasnovodsk--1869 | Sphere of Influence in Persia--1907 |
| Kokand--1871      |                                     |
| Khiva--1873       |                                     |
| Bukhara--1876     |                                     |
| Ashkebad--1881    |                                     |

**TERRITORIES AND TOWNS UNDER**

**BRITISH CONTROL:**

- |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|
| Baluchistan --1876                  |
| Quetta--1880                        |
| Peshawar--1891                      |
| Chital--1895                        |
| Sphere of Influence in Persia--1907 |

Map 8: Russian and British expansion in Asia (Sam Houston State University).

During his short term in office, the great Iranian reformer, Prime Minister Amir Kabir, emphasized self-reliance and the need to balance the influence of Russia and Great Britain with advisors from other countries, such as Austria and Italy. Yet, vested interests conspired against Amir Kabir, and the young Nasir al-Din Shah unexpectedly dismissed him in November of 1851 and soon after had him brutally murdered. With the death of Amir Kabir, essential structural reforms were never again really put on the agenda. The new prime minister, Mirza Agha Khan Nuri, who was both reactionary and corrupt, returned the privileges to the *ulama* and the social elite. The Shah dismissed Nuri in 1858, but the central government did not achieve anything in terms of social and administrative reforms until 1870.

In 1871 the Shah again appointed a reformist prime minister. Mirza Husain Khan was very different from Amir Kabir since he came to believe that it would be smart to involve Great Britain as heavily as possible in Iran's domestic affairs. In his analysis, the British needed to be given proper inducements to offset the Russian advances into Central Asia. Kabir sincerely believed that British economic interests could be save Iran from Russia. Even with the advantage of hindsight, his decision cannot simply be dismissed as a naïve comprehension of the laws of international relations. The Russian threat in the early 1870s was real, Iran was weak, and its territorial integrity was at risk. The ultimate failure of Mirza Khan's policy was that he could not, despite several attempts, secure a guarantee from the British government that it would respect Iran's sovereignty. In conclusion, the economic concession policy of the 1870s and 1880s must be seen in context of a deep-seated anxiety on the Iranian side that the country would loose its independence if dramatic measures were not undertaken.

## ECONOMIC CONCESSIONS AND FOREIGN LOANS

The concession policy had serious unwanted side effects that further undermined Iran's independence. What Mirza Husain Khan did not foresee was that the first major concession granted to British interests—the legendary Reuter Concession—opened a can of worms. Mirza Husain Khan persuaded the Shah to sign the sweeping concession in 1872. However, strong resistance from entrenched domestic interest groups, popular dissatisfaction, intense Russian disapproval, and unenthusiastic official British support for the project resulted in the cancellation of the Reuter Concession. The cancellation also signaled the political downfall of the prime minister.

Despite Mirza Khan's failed fortunes, wealthy individuals and influential government officials immediately soon understood the personal economic benefits that could be extracted from foreign concessions. They began lobbying for the granting of a series of concessions to a number of European capitalists; for the most part with little or no concern for the general prosperity of Iran in mind. Concession money fanned the flames of endemic factionalism—the never-ending curse that had haunted Iran for centuries—since granting a specific concession to British nationals immediately triggered Russian demands that their citizens be given an equivalent concession. The result was that commercial projects that could have benefited the general prosperity of Iran were cancelled because the opposite great power was not given a similar project that could satisfy its interests. The net effect was that little genuine economic activity came out of the foreign concessions, and that objections from Great Britain and Russia stalled sound economic development that otherwise could have taken place. In less than two decades, Iran found itself in deep economic dependency and political subordination.

The failed economic policy of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century has in several important aspects shaped the politics of Iran in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Opposition to the Reuter Concession, but more prominently the Tobacco Concession in 1890, set the pattern for popular opposition movements in Iran. A number of extraordinarily dissimilar religious and secular groups came together to fight a perceived common enemy.<sup>97</sup> The Reuter Concession laid the groundwork for the political developments that followed.

First, the scope of the concession was absolutely astonishing. There are in fact extremely few cases in world history similar to the Reuter Concession where the whole economic future of an entire country has been auctioned off to a foreign individual. If Mirza Husain Khan seriously believed that the Reuter Concession would serve the long-term interests of his country, then he must have been truly naïve about the true nature of market capitalism. The history of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company testifies to the fact that any (foreign) corporation—by default—will try to extract as much profit as possible at the expense of the concession-granting country's tax revenues if the detailed contractual terms have not been sufficiently negotiated.

Many observers have been inclined to pass across-the-board moral judgments on the activities of multinational companies in Iran instead of trying to understand the built in drive in any commercial enterprise to generate as much profit as possible. This is not to say that unprincipled profit-maximization is desirable. The point is that the combination of Oriental despotism and 19<sup>th</sup> century Occidental capitalism had a

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<sup>97</sup> A central theme of this dissertation is the way in which images of internal and external enemies have gained legitimacy among the Iranian populace. The collective perception of what constitutes a common enemy has clearly been shaped by Iran's historical legacy, but these psychological processes have received only rudimentary attention among scholars. The domestic political events in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s are, of course, the prime case.

devastating effect on the common people of Iran. It is also necessary to point out that early industrialization in the West also produced tremendous social dislocation to traditional agrarian economies. In short, human dislocation and suffering was not unique to Iran in this historical period.

Second, the British government did not behave as a monolith. From the very beginning the British Foreign Office resented the Reuter Concession project since it would almost certainly infuriate the Russians. Less flattering is the fact that British bureaucrats evidently despised Baron Julius von Reuter since he was a foreigner (German-born), and in particular because he was of Jewish heritage (it obviously did not matter that he had become a Christian as early as in 1844).

Third, in a country like Iran that has always been torn by internal factionalism, the apparent paradox was that a coalition of evidently deadly enemies managed to come together to oppose a “common” external enemy. The Shah’s favorite wife and circles close to the court hated Mirza Khan’s leverage over Nadir al-Din Shah. The vested financial interests feared for their economic privileges if the playing field were opened up for foreign competition. The Muslim *ulama* was afraid that foreign infidels working on Baron Reuter’s industrial project would bring with them social ideas that could undermine its spiritual sway over Iranians in general. To this cause religious leaders passed around a false document which stated that the Reuter railway would pass directly through the shrine of Shahzada Abd al-Azim near Tehran, which of course infuriated

ordinary men of religious inclination (Keddie 1985, 188). Some, of course, understood that the concession was not in the patriotic interest of Iran.<sup>98</sup>

In conclusion, the various groups that opposed the Reuter Concession had basically nothing in common except for the dislike of foreigners and foreign interests. The lowest common denominator that united people against foreign concessions seems to have been general xenophobia (Kamrava 1992, 8). The real significance of the Reuter controversy was that for the first time a loose coalition of representatives of the social elite, Muslim dignitaries, and ordinary people had come together to fight for a common cause.

In the 1890s, Russia gained the upper on Great Britain in the Great Game over Persia. Between 1900 and 1902, the Shah's personal life style brought Iran in complete financial indebtedness to Russia. Muzaffar al-Din Shah (reigned 1896-1907) needed money for his pleasure tours and medical treatment. Two loans were floated in Russia totaling £4 million. In exchange, Iran agreed to pay off its British loans and not to incur any additional debt from financial source other than Russia for the next 12 years. The Russian government guaranteed the loans with security in Iran's customs revenues. The second loan had the effect of drastically lowering duties on goods imported from Russia

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<sup>98</sup> Khomeini employed similar tactics in the early 1960s against the American military presence in Iran, and the diplomatic immunity granted to American military, see (Issawi 1985, 211-220). On 9 December 1964, Iran's Imperial Ministry of Foreign Affairs formally informed the Embassy of the United States of America and that the Iranian Government had passed a law on 13 October 1964: "The said law empowers the government to allow the chief and members of military advisory missions of the United States of America in Iran, whose services are engaged by the Imperial Government, in accordance with the appropriate agreements, to enjoy the privileges and immunities specified by the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations of 1961, for members of the administrative and technical staff described in Article 1 of the Convention" (Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe). The agreement enraged the Iranian opposition. In substance, however, this agreement is no different than similar mutual legal agreements between the members of the NATO alliance.

and raising tariffs on British products correspondingly. The Shah spent the money at his disposal on three lavishly expensive trips to Europe.

Russian loans and *de facto* control of Iran's foreign trade brought Iran closer than ever of becoming a Russian colony. Iran was now firmly in the grip of the Russian government. External events, however, saved Iran from outright becoming a province under the Tsar. Russia lost the war that broke out against Japan in 1904, and the first Russian Revolution that followed in 1905 dramatically altered the political equation on the world scene. In Iran, these events inspired opponents of Qajar despotism to successfully challenge the absolute power of the monarchy and its arbitrary, wasteful, and corrupt mode of governance. In Europe the policy of shifting alliances prior to World War I eventually persuaded Great Britain and Russia to settle their differences in Iran and to reinstate the Qajar dynasty to power.

#### **THE D'ARCY OIL CONCESSION AND THE ROYAL BRITISH NAVY**

On 26 May 1901, Muzaffar al-Din Shah signed an agreement that gave William Knox D'Arcy the exclusive right to oil and gas exploration in all of Iran except for the five northern provinces next to Russia. The D'Arcy oil concession provides the first crucial historical linkage between British and Russian influence and the U.S. role in Iran following the allies' victory in World War II. More than 50 years after this particular concession was awarded, the D'Arcy oil concession connected the United States directly to European imperialists in the minds of many Iranians.

Antoine Kitabgi, an influential Iranian with a personal friendship with the prime minister and excellent standing in court circles, initiated direct negotiations with the Shah and his ministers. The negotiations were long-drawn-out, but the British finally prevailed

and secured the deal with some personal financial inducements to the Shah (Ferrier 1985, 640). At the time of the negotiations, the Anglo-Russian rivalry was in its most intense stage, and the five northern provinces bordering Russia were therefore left out of the concession area. When the Russians became aware of the concession, they simply did not know what to make of it, and for that reason they did not obstruct the deal before it was too late.

The concession was granted for 60 years in exchange for 16% royalty of the profits. However, the nature of the whole business operation would change dramatically within only a few years, which rendered the terms of the initial agreement difficult to administer. By 1919 the British oil company and Iranian government quarreled over how to interpret the wording of the original agreement with regard to new technical and commercial developments not envisaged in 1901-concession. In particular, the Iranian government complained about British accounting practices and unsatisfactory employment of Iranian citizens. The parties to the agreement would continue to squabble over contractual interpretations until Prime Minister Mosaddeq elevated the dispute to the international level in the early 1950s. With the Cold War turned hot in Korea, the Eisenhower administration sided with British oil interests. Thus, the United States became directly embroiled in Iran's century-long domestic power struggle.

Seepages of oil had been located in Iran since Achaemenian times, but Dutch and British companies had all failed in finding an oil field of commercial viability prior to the D'Arcy concession. William D'Arcy had in his young days emigrated to Queensland, Australia, where he made a fortune in the Mount Morgan goldfield. Though Mr. D'Arcy possessed the financial means and the technical expertise, his project was in fact a

tremendously speculative gamble from the very beginning. Oil drilling under extreme weather conditions thousand of miles away from modern industrial infrastructure proved very costly. By 1905, D'Arcy was near bankruptcy, and though the company struck oil on 26 May 1908, the project still threatened to go belly up. Financial respite eventually came from the Burmah Oil Company. In 1909, the Burmah Oil Company established an entirely new company, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC). D'Arcy retired nearly immediately thereafter.

The daring project of William D'Arcy coincided with the British-German naval arms race before World War I. In 1912 the Royal British navy made the historical decision to convert its principal propellant from coal to oil. Winston Churchill feared that the two dominant oil companies in the world, Shell and Standard Oil, would be loyal only to their shareholders and could not be trusted in a war situation. He successfully delivered a speech to the British Parliament attacking Shell's lack of patriotism:

It is their policy—what is the good of blinking at it—to acquire control of the sources and means of supply, and then to regulate the production and the market price. ... We have no quarrel with Shell. We have always found them courteous, considerate, ready to oblige, anxious to serve the Admiralty and to promote the interests of the British Navy and the British Empire—at a price (Sampson 1975, 51).

As a result, the British government acquired a majority shareholding in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. From then on the Iranian government regarded the company with genuine justification as the instrument of British imperial interests, and the oil company's operations came increasing under intense scrutiny by Tehran.

The British exercised *de facto* control in southern Iran similar to that held by Russia in the north of the country. When D'Arcy started to drill for oil he was forced to

accommodate the most powerful Arab tribal leader and the actual ruler of Khuzestan, Shaikh Khazal. D'Arcy's oil company also struck deals with other local rulers, such as the agreement of 15 November 1905, with the Bakhtiyari khans, without whose approval field operations would have been absolutely impossible. The Iranian government came to resent these arrangements. Reza Shah voiced suspicion that APOC was opposing his efforts to extend central authority to all of Iran by supporting local warlords. Some British government officials made no secret that they were quite sympathetic to local rulers like Shaikh Khazal and the Bakhtiyari khans. Eventually, APOC understood that its future was best served by a strong central government, but the allegations that the British oil company was deliberately undermining Iranian sovereignty never went away.

### **3. Religious Influence on Foreign Policy in the Qajar Period**

Shi'ism in the Qajar-period profoundly influenced some of the most important political events of this period. This experience laid the groundwork for radical political change in Iran. Developments in religious doctrines in the early Qajar period led to the socio-political expression of Shi'ism in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Algar 1985, 711). The conflict between Iran and the United States is intrinsically linked to these events. In modern Shi'i symbolism, the United States came to signify the antithesis to Islam. Not so much what the United States specifically did, or did not do, but because of the spiritual and moral threat to traditional Muslim values. Politicized Islam has projected all its anger

and frustration on the United States because of the undisputed American leadership of the Western world.<sup>99</sup>

#### THE ROLE OF THE MUJTAHIDS

A seemingly esoteric theological debate came to a head in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The focus of the dispute was the religious authority of the *mujtahids* (high-ranking religious scholars) and their privilege to interpret the fundamental principles of Islam (*ijtihad*). At the very center of the struggle was the doctrine of *taqlid*, which says that every Muslim is obliged to submit to the directives of the highest religious dignitaries in matters of religious law without even questioning the rationale behind the decision. The dispute took place within the Islamic theological discipline called *fiqh*, a codified system of duties and obligations that is in force for all Muslims.

The Usuli-school—the pro-*mujtahid* faction that supported the right of interpretation—defeated its dogmatic rival, the Akhbari-school. The Akhbaris had rejected both *ijtihad* and *taqlid*, arguing that the Muslim community—religious scholars and layman alike—should conduct itself only according to what was specifically

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<sup>99</sup> It can be said that the dispute between the United States and Iran is fundamentally about morality. Moral issues are always at the front of political discourse in the United States. However, Western Christian societies have resigned to the acknowledgment that the debate over what is morally right or what is morally wrong can never be resolved. Civil society in the West is therefore governed by laws passed by the legislative assembly—democratically elected by the people without intermediary interference—irrespective of the moral implications on religious doctrines. Most religious societies in the West, however, have only reluctantly accepted the fact that people can freely engage in what they deem immoral or sinful behavior—such as adultery, pornography, premarital sex, homosexuality, lying, cheating, substance abuse, etc.—as long as it does not violate the law. Moreover, many religious groups do not respect the law when it comes to exceptionally sensitive issues such as abortion. Within Islam, conservative and radical Muslims alike do not in any way accept the notion that the will of the people (as measured in free and democratic elections) can override the religious laws, the *Sharia*. In this sense, Islam and Western-style democracy are incompatible.

mentioned in the Koran or the guidelines established by the twelve Shi'i Imams. The Akhbaris argued that the essential sources of Islam had already been identified, compiled, and codified by earlier Shi'ite scholars. The fundamental sources were to be understood and interpreted literally; i.e. there was no need for *ijtihad* upon which the authority of the *mujtahids* rested. In sum, the position of the Akhbari-school was therefore that the fundamentals of Islam were effectively fixed, at least until the return of the Twelfth Imam, and that the opinions of the *mujtahids* were uncalled for.

The Usuli-school, on the other hand, declared that every Muslim was obligated to follow the decrees of the highest trained religious scholars. It follows from the Usuli-school of reasoning that society is divided into religious scholars, who are authorized to practice *ijtihad* (interpretation religious doctrines), and the rest of the population that must follow the instructions of the top echelon of the religious hierarchy. The Islamic Republic is basically the blueprint of the theocracy that the Usuli-school championed. Ayatollah Khomeini is perhaps the most radical *mujtahid* in the history of Islam.

The dispute between the Akhbari and Usuli schools is rooted in the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam, Muhammad al Mahdi, who went into hiding sometime between A.D. 868 and 878 (the actual year varies significantly among different historical sources). Little can be said of him with any degree of certainty. The brother of the Eleventh Imam, Jafar, denied the existence of any heir and he therefore claimed the Imamate for himself. Official Twelver Shi'ism, however, asserts that the birth of Muhammad al Mahdi was kept secret because of the intense persecution of Shi'ites in that period. The Twelfth Imam is said to have disappeared down a well at the age of six, but that he continued to stay in contact with the Shi'ite community through intermediaries until A.D. 941. This

period is known as the Lesser Occultation. Shi'i religious doctrine has established that God has concealed the Imam, but that he will return at the Last Judgment as the *mahdi*, or messianic deliverer. In the Greater Occultation there has been no earthly expression of the Imamate; but, the Shi'ites maintain that their imams still indirectly guide the Shi'ite community. There are considerable scholarly differences over how the invisible imams communicate with their followers.

As long as the Shi'i Imam had an earthly presence, he was the sole authority of religious interpretation and legal guidance. His disappearance, however, left the Shi'ite community with a puzzle: who would provide the community with the legitimate religious opinions and give the society clear direction in search of religious truth in the future? For some the Imam's occultation did not represent much of a problem since the Imam had left behind a wealth of sayings and traditions (*akhbars*). The job was simply to assemble a proper document that could guide the community until the Imam returned. Over time this approach crystallized into the Akhbari religious school.

Religious scholars with a more practical inclination understood that the community needed tight institutional guidance. They came to believe that the Twelfth Imam had delegated his authority to a few highly qualified individuals, the *mujtahids*. The Usuli-Akhbari disagreement is a typical historical case of a long drawn out theological dispute that over time is watered down to some sort of compromise that all factions can live with. Ayatollah Khomeini's doctrine of absolute power in both religious and political matters is in this perspective quite remarkable. The *vilāyat-i faqīh* or "the governance of the Islamic jurist" is—if truth were told—the unlikely outcome of the theological dispute.

The theological dispute did not gain much significance as long as Shi'ism was a minority religion in Iran. Even after the Safavids rose to power, the debate was muted mainly because the Safavids themselves claimed to be descendants of the Twelfth Imam. However, that is not to say that the Safavid shahs could ignore the prestige and influence of the *mujtahids*. But with the weakening and fall of the Safavid empire, the debate for the first time acquired real political importance. The controversy between the Akhbari and Usuli teachings became sharpened and increasingly bitter, as the potential gains grew bigger.

The Qajar monarchy, like the Safavid dynasty before them, owed their power exclusively to the force of arms. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, Shi'ism was the means rather than the goal by which the Safavid kings sought to fulfill their territorial objectives. However, both dynasties harnessed their legitimacy by showing a genuine sense of religious piety. When the Safavid empire crumbled, the link between state and religion weakened until the Qajars reunited Iran 1796. Meanwhile, the *ulama* increased their political connections and prestige in society and it seems impossible that the Qajars could not have usurped religious legitimacy like the Safavids did. Therefore, the Qajar dynasty had to defer considerable authority to the Shi'ite clergy, and the Qajar shahs prudently respected the vested interests of the religious leadership.

#### **A MUJTAHID DECLARED HOLY WAR ON RUSSIA IN 1826**

In 1826, political tension again boiled over between Iran and Russia. The Treaty of Gulistan had left several border issues unresolved. Moreover, Russian military rule in the Caucasus had caused a large numbers of Muslims to flee for Iran. The Russian commander-in-chief in the Caucasus, General A.P. Ermolov, was portrayed as being

arrogant, tyrannical, and utterly contemptuous of “Asiatics” (Kazemzadeh 1985, 335). Russian misgovernment and punitive military expeditions are even said to have driven Georgian Christians into exile in Iran. In this political climate, the Shi’ite clergy pressed for holy war against Russia.

The *ulama* fanned a wave of anti-Russian feeling throughout the country. In the words of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Iranian historian, Hasan-e Fasa’i:

The Russian troops who were occupying the provinces of Ganja, Karabagh and Shirvan, raped some Moslem women. By mediation of the theologians of that region this affair was reported to Mojtabeh Aqa Seiyed Mohammad, son of the late mojtabeh from Esfahan, Aqa Seiyed Ali, who was living in the Holy Places (of Mesopotamia). The aforementioned mojtabeh considered the Holy War with the Russians a duty incumbent upon the Moslems according to the laws of the Sharia. Realizing that the shah was inclined to conclude a peace treaty and an agreement with the Russians, he sent at the beginning (of that year) the theologian Molla Reza-ye Khoiyi Mohammad one of his confidants and an eloquent man, to the court with the order to wage the Holy War. The shah consented to the order and sent Mohammad Reza back to Aqa Seiyed Mohammad, assuring the latter of his benevolence. At the beginning of Shavval of that year [early May 1826], Aqa Seiyed Mohammad arrived in Tehran with a group of theologians. They were highly honored by the shah, the emirs, and the nobles. Then the shah ordered letters to be addressed to all the mojtabehs of the Islamic countries, summoning all the Moslems to the Holy War. In addition to the ordinary expenditure for the army, the shah assigned the sum of 300,000 toman to be spent on the Holy War and appointed Abdollah Khan Amin od-Doula, who at that time was being removed from the vizierate, mehmāndār [host] to Aqa Seiyed Mohammad and the other theologians (Fasa’i and Busse 1972, 174).

In stark contrast to their field commander, the Russian government in St. Petersburg generally preferred a cautious approach to expansion in the Caucasus. The new Tsar, Nicholas I, dispatched Prince A.S. Menshikov to Iran with the mandate to explore the possibility of reaching an accommodation with Fath Ali Shah. Prince Menshikov reached Iran in June 1826. Though it was not expected that the Russian envoy would give away substantial concessions in the forthcoming negotiations, his mission was nevertheless doomed to fail from the very beginning. Agha Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani had already issued a *fatwa* declaring that opposition to the *jihad* against Russia would be a sign of unbelief, thus the Shah's hands were tied.

Though the *mujtahids* were instrumental in compelling Fath Ali Shah, it must be said that the Fath Ali Shah and his son Abbas Mirza Shah were not forced to wage war with Russia against their own judgment (Algar 1985, 715). In fact, they had for quite some time been considering the idea of repudiating the Treaty of Gulistan. Gavin Hambly argues, "the immediate causes of this conflict were Abbas Mirza's need to restore a reputation tarnished by earlier defeat at the hands of the infidels" (Hambly 1985, 166). Father and son appear to have placed particularly high expectations on the usefulness of the Anglo-Persian treaty of 1814, which, among other things, assured British military or financial support if Iran were to be attacked by a European power. But the treaty specifically spelled out that British intervention would not be forthcoming if the Qajars were the aggressors. It appears like the Iranians had not learned the lessons of the previous war of 1804-13. Their preparations for war involved no sober assessment of the immense disparity between the combined economic, demographic and technological resources of Russia and the resources at the disposal of the Qajar shah. As could have

been easily predicted, the second Perso-Russian therefore ended up being an even bigger disaster for Qajar-Iran than the previous war.

#### THE ATTACK ON THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY IN 1829

A very prominent *mujtahid* in Tehran, Mirsah Masih, nearly triggered the third Russo-Persian war in 1829. The events that nearly precipitated this war owed much to the outrageous behavior of the Russian minister to Tehran, Aleksandr Griboedov. The Treaty of Turkmanchai was only one year in being and the wounds inflicted on Persian pride and passion could have hardly been healed. Against this backdrop, Griboedov began to aggressively implement the full wording of the Treaty of Turkmanchai, in particular Article 13:

All prisoners of war made in one way or another, whether in the course of the last War, or before, as well as the subjects of the Governments reciprocally fallen into captivity, at no matter what time, will be freed within a period of four months and, after having been provided with food and other necessary objects, they will be directed to Abbas Abbad in order to be turned over there into the hands of the Commissioners, respectively charged with receiving them and to decide upon their eventual return to their homes....The two Governments reserve expressly the unlimited right to reclaim them (i.e., those who have not been freed within the four months mentioned above) at no matter what time, and they obligate themselves to restore them mutually in the measure that they may present themselves for that purpose, or in the measure that they may reclaim them (Fasa'i and Busse 1972, 188).

The Russian minister to Tehran not only sought to repatriate Caucasian captives who wanted to go home, but he also actively pushed for the return of individuals who had no desire to go back to the Caucasus. A significant number of Georgians and Armenians

had forcefully been brought to Iran from 1795 and onwards. However, many of these captives had converted to Islam and married Persian women. A few had even risen to influential offices at the Qajar court or in the government. Forceful repatriation of these individuals would necessarily entail entering Muslim households without permission, which is in strict violation of Islamic law. This obstacle did not deter Griboedov's resolve to put the treaty into practice.

Since his arrival, Minister Griboedov had gained a horrible reputation for his lack of diplomatic conduct. He insulted his Persian hosts by violating basic court procedures, such entering the Shah's presence with his boots on and by remaining seated in his chair during the audiences (Kazemzadeh 1985, 339-40). Again in the words of Hasan-e Fasa'i:

Because of the great honors which were shown him and which are part of the courtesy befitting a guest, he became arrogant, addressing high and low without their titles and talking in an unfriendly manner. The ministers answered his insolence with softness in order to turn his thought from disdain and abusive talk, but without success. Since the treaty included articles concerning the exchange of old and new prisoners on both sides, he claimed with excessive arrogance the release of the Georgian and Armenian prisoners who were serving since time immemorial in the royal harem and had acquired high ranks and founded families (Fasa'i and Busse 1972, 187-88).

The events that followed will probably never be entirely clear. What is known is that Griboedov gave sanctuary in the premises of the Russian legation to one of the Shah's eunuchs, Ya'qub Markanian. Griboedov had also forcefully taken two Armenian women into custody from the harem of the former prime minister, Allahyar Khan Asaf al-Daula, who was well known for his anti-Russian feelings. Mujtahid Mirsah Masih now circulated words that Ya'qub and the Georgian women had renounced Islam. Mirza

Masih fanned the flames of disaster when he reminded the crowd that the penalty for apostates was death. On 11 February 1829, the Tehran bazaar closed in protest and a huge mob gathered outside the Russian legation. The crowd broke into the embassy and killed the entire staff except for one. Russia was at war with the Ottoman empire and the Russian government could not strike back immediately. A high-ranking Iranian mission later traveled to St. Petersburg to deliver a formal apology for this most unfortunate incidence, which the Tsar accepted on 24 August 1829.

#### **THE TOBACCO REVOLT OF 1890-1892**

The events surrounding the Tobacco Revolt of 1890 have been thoroughly covered in the scholarly literature. I will therefore only touch upon these events briefly with some comments directly relevant to this dissertation. Western and Iranian scholars alike look at the Tobacco Revolt as the first significant event in Iran's development toward a modern nation-state. The British tobacco concession was the precipitant that triggered the first popular protest movement in Iran. The commercial terms of the concession had a direct and immediate impact on all classes in the country since tobacco was so widely grown and consumed in Iran. People were enraged when the news finally trickled out from the Qajar court: the Shah had given away a concession on outrageously generous terms to a foreign individual at the direct expense of the ordinary citizens of Iran. The news also nourished dormant xenophobic feelings.

The Tobacco Revolt of 1891-92 contains interesting elements of politico-religious leadership, pan-Islamic ideology, great power manipulation of popular discontent, and a growing sense of Iranian nationalism. The Tobacco Rebellion signaled the coming of later protest movements in terms of its composition, organization, tactics, and methods.

The Tobacco Rebellion takes up center stage in the modern nationalist mythology of Iran mainly because of the concerted and pivotal role the clergy supposedly played in bringing down a nearly universally unpopular concession granted foreign to economic interests. Popular accounts of this affair often put the clergy at the helm of a populist coalition representing all segments of society against the corrupt Qajar government and foreign imperialist powers (just as the clergy is also supposed have done during the Constitutional Revolution, the Mosaddeq affair, and the second Iranian Revolution according to this school of history writing).

The real picture, however, had more nuances and was less flattering to all parties involved. The Shi'ite clergy did not work in concert as a unified faction. As in later upheavals, many important religious figures did not support the protest at all. Many activists were motivated by self-interests rather than a principled stance against the larger political issue of wholesale economic concessions to foreigners. Moreover, straightforward xenophobia seems to have been as prevalent among the masses as a genuine feeling of Iranian nationalism. A good indicator of these claims is the fact that the protest movement vanished completely as soon as the Shah caved in to the protestor's demands.

The Tobacco Revolt has come to symbolize how the Iranian grass root managed to repulse European economic imperialism. In 1890 Nasir al-Din Shah granted an all-encompassing concession to Major G. Talbot, a British national, for a period of fifty years. Talbot's company, the Imperial Tobacco Corporation was given the exclusive right to the sale and export of tobacco, cigars, cigarettes, and snuff. In exchange for the Shah's give-away, Nasir al-Din Shah was to receive the fixed amount of £15,000 in cash per

annum. In addition, Mr. Talbot's would pay the Shah 25% of his yearly net profit. The concession was driven by Nasir al-Din's ceaseless need for money, which had been greatly intensify after his costly third trip to Europe in 1889. The Shah left the concession negotiations entirely in the hands of his trusted prime minister, Mirza Ali Asghar Khan Amin al-Sultan. When the Shah and his minister were eventually forced to back down, the British tobacco company extracted £500,000 in indemnity compensation. The Iranian treasury did not have enough money and had to borrow from a British bank at high interest rate.

Russia cleverly exploited the clumsy British concession to its own great advantage. The foreign policy line of the British government toward Iran in 1888-1890 favored the use of economic concessions to gain influence. The British minister to Tehran, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, implemented the policy with special energy. He was instrumental in encouraging Mr. Talbot's participation in the tobacco concession; however, the whole strategy backfired since the tobacco movement had the effect of strengthening Russian influence at the expense of British interests.

The rebellion demonstrated how Russia could pursue the battle for political and economic control through Persian proxies. Historical evidence shows extensive Russian encouragement of the resistance movement through contacts with both al-Afghani and Mirza Hasan Shirazi, and their associates in Tehran and Tabriz. As Elton Daniel points out, "the fact that it was this particular concession, and not the grant of concessions in general, that inspired the rebellion strongly suggests Russian involvement in instigating or directing it" (Daniel 2000, 117). The immediate effect that flowed from the collapse of the concession was that Amin al-Sultan, in order to salvage his own political career,

personally promised the Russians that they would be favored in the future. Political developments over the next ten years bear witness that he kept his promise. By 1905, Russia seemed to have practically outmaneuvered British interests in Iran.

There is no doubt that prominent members of the Shi'ite clergy led the Tobacco protest; however, the *ulama's* genuine dedication to challenge Qajar despotism remains murky. The first unrest broke out in Shiraz, the center of the tobacco trade, in the spring of 1901. Ali Akbar Falasiri, a local cleric, stirred up further trouble and called for holy war. Leaflets were widely circulated by Jamal al-Afghani and his follower whereby the protests spread to other cities around the country. The authorities reacted by exiling both Afghani and Falasiri to Iraq. The leading Shi'ite jurist of the time (and also Falasiri's father-in-law), Mirza Hasan Shirazi, wrote a letter to the Shah complaining about the concession and the mistreatment of Falasiri. The Shah simply ignored the letter and the follow-up correspondence from Shirazi.

In December 1891, a *fatwa* was promulgated prohibiting the use of tobacco. For a long time Shirazi was believed to have issued the decree, particularly since he never renounced it, but the *fatwa* is now generally thought to have been faked (Daniel 2000, 116). Nevertheless, the decree had an astonishing effect and a nation-wide boycott of tobacco went into effect. Increasingly violent rioting persuaded the Shah to cancel the whole concession in early 1892. Shirazi responded by a telegraphed statement ending the boycott.

There are important lessons to be learned from the tobacco protest. The movement clearly demonstrated the clergy's capacity to sway public opinion and its ability to make use of modern communication technology such as the telegraph and

printed pamphlets.<sup>100</sup> The revolt also revealed Russia's ability to manipulate popular feelings. The British government learned a bitter lesson, but they carefully took notice of what had happened. In the years that followed the British increased their efforts to win over members of the clergy. The first stage of the Constitutional Revolution showed that British influence among the religious elite had improved considerably.

The Tobacco Revolt also demonstrated the ability of self-styled Muslim agitators to project power across national borders. Jamal al-Afghani—international man of mystery but now generally believed to be of solid Shi'ite Iranian descent—developed a life-long hatred for everything British during a stay in India as a young man. A man of considerable intellectual capacity, he spent his life traveling all over the world campaigning against European colonialism and advocating the political concept of pan-Islamism. His work significantly influenced the development of Muslim thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Afghani reappeared in Iran around the Tobacco debacle, and his activities made Nasir al-Din Shah extremely suspicious of him and his following. Afghani was deported in 1892 because of his role in instigating violent opposition to Qajar ruler. His only significant political success came in 1896 when he seems to have successfully orchestrated the murder of Nasir al-Din Shah from Constantinople (Keddie 1985, 197).

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<sup>100</sup> Khomeini's protest movement in exile made extensive use of audiocassettes to disseminate information inside Iran.

## THE SHI'ITE CLERGY AND CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Members of the Muslim *ulama* became, nearly by default, the official leaders of the Constitutional Revolution despite the fact that the traditional middle class and the landowning aristocracy controlled more tangible power in the coalition against Qajar rule (Abrahamian 1982, 80-86).<sup>101</sup> In the mental framework of ordinary citizens who actively supported the protests of 1905-1906, leadership could only come from the *ulama*. The *ulama* was not perceived as less corrupt than other groups with power, but they were psychologically more recognizable to the common man than westernized intellectuals. Moreover, the *ulama* had always commanded more respect than the bazaaris.

Early on the liberal intellectuals of the *anjomans* understood their limitations, and they therefore deferred the leadership to the *ulama*. Social change had to be explained within an Islamic framework since the reality was that Iranians in general had no conception of Western constitutionalism and the ideological constructs upon which representative governments rest. Even so-called intellectuals showed no sign of having developed a comprehensive and coherent ideological framework.

There is no evidence that supports that the *ulama* envisioned radical political change. The *ulama* was by no means exploring new ideologies or seeking a true social

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<sup>101</sup> A similar popular coalition, the National Front, was behind Mohammad Mosaddeq's rise to power in 1951. Mohammad Mosaddeq was born into the wealthy Iranian landowning elite and received a doctor of law degree from the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. He entered public service in 1914 but was later silenced by Reza Shah. He became Iran's prime minister as the *de facto* leader of the National Front. The National Front was a wide coalition of interest groups and political parties centered on the urban middle and lower classes. The backbone of the National Front was composed of left-leaning anti-Soviet Iranian nationalists. The only major opposition group not affiliated with the National Front was the Moscow-oriented Tudeh communist party and a radical Islamic group called Fida'iyān-i Islam.

revolution. The *ulama* did not demand the abolishment of the Qajar monarchy but merely the restoration of a “virtuous” and “just” government in Islamic terminology. The Constitutional movement was the product of basically two “unrelated” factors: the misgovernment of Iran by the despotic Qajar dynasty, and foreign powers interfering in the internal affairs of the country.<sup>102</sup> People were primarily drawn to the movement because they felt intuitively that they were acting as virtuous Muslims by opposing misrule (“enjoining the good and forbidding the evil”). To many activists they were simply carrying out their duty as Muslims and might not have thought of Western-style democracy at all. Since the objectives of the movement were both consciously and unconsciously framed in Islamic terminology, the leadership would therefore naturally come from the clergy.

The Constitutional Revolution was a mismatch of purposes from the very beginning. The movement searched for religious and secular objectives at the same time, which were too often incompatible with each other. Some of the more advanced liberal intellectuals understood this, but they deliberately did not challenge the *ulama* on these issues before the revolt began to fall apart. The *ulama* saw the benefits that came with constitutional governments, but there was no desire to adopt all the complete set of reforms that comes with constitutionalism. Ann Lambton sums up the intentions of the clergy:

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<sup>102</sup> The two factors are of course related. Great Britain and Russia had for decades served as the foreign patrons of the Qajar dynasty. However, the Qajars’ ability to mismanage Iran is unrelated to the phenomenon of European imperialism. The Russians, with British assistance, also enlisted Bakhtiari tribal forces to put down the Constitutional Revolution.

Their aim was not the adoption of western civilization, but only of its techniques, in order to establish the supremacy of the law, which they interpreted to be the *sharia*, and to prevent foreign encroachment. And some among them saw modern science and enlightenment as the same thing as traditional rationalism, believing that the origins of Western thought and all modern ideas were to be found in the Qur'an (Lambton 1988, 299-300).

This to a large extent explains why the support of the clergy withered away after the initial successes of the constitutional movement. However, this does not suggest that the Shi'ite clergy brought down the Constitutional Revolution. The Shi'i establishment was clearly tired of Qajar rule, but it was divided on how to balance social conservatism with constitutionalism. Like the rich urban absentee landlords, they had ambivalent feelings about how constitutionalism would affect their power base. In the end, Great Britain and Russia decided the fate of the revolution.

## **Chapter VI: SOCIAL CHANGE AND WORLD POLITICS**

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century set the stage for the U.S. involvement in Iranian affairs after World War II. Iran's historical memories from this period strongly influenced the domestic political developments in the 1950s and 1960s. U.S. Cold War political objectives made the mistake of associating the United States too closely with the activities of Iran's most recent archenemy, Great Britain.

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Iran's Constitutional Revolution gave rise to irreversible political aspirations among a majority of the population, but the imperial interests of Great Britain and Russia squashed Iran's political transformation from despotism to constitutionalism. In the inter-war period, Iranians imprudently allowed Qajar absolutism to be replaced with Pahlavi totalitarianism and national aggrandizement. Reza Shah Pahlavi enjoyed popular support in his efforts to revive Iran's great historical past; however, Great Britain and the Soviet Union continued to block Iranian ambitions. It was therefore only natural that Iran was drawn to Nazi Germany when the United States declined Iranian offers to offset British leverage of Iran's internal affairs. When Prime Minister Mosaddeq became prime minister in 1951, he represented both Iranians' democratic aspirations and their sense of agitated nationalism. Thus, the CIA-instigated *coup d'état* in 1953 put the United States firmly in the company of Iran's previous enemies in the minds of ordinary Iranians.

## 1. The Constitutional Revolution: 1905-1911

Iran's Constitutional Revolution was not a genuine social revolution like the French, Soviet, or Chinese revolutions. The first Iranian Revolution was primarily a popular uprising against Qajar misgovernment and a demand to end institutionalized corruption. Reform-minded politicians had achieved very little in terms of comprehensive structural reorganization of Iran during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike Turkey, Iran had no proper standing army to spearhead reforms that could save the country from becoming a colony. Support for the revolution came from an incredibly diverse mixture of government officials, journalists, intellectuals, religious dissidents, clerics, businessmen, ordinary people, and even some of the rich urban absentee landlords.<sup>103</sup>

The protesters, however, had various motives for join joining the revolution. Many participated out of a sense of social obligation. But many also entered the movement out of pure self-interest, and they therefore frequently shifted allegiance as a matter of political expediency. In the beginning, the constitutional movement had no coherent ideological platform. The constitutional political agenda seems to have developed out of the revolution and rather than the other way around. The expression—*Enghelab-e Mashruteh* or “Constitutional Revolution”—was apparently coined long after the events took place (Kamrava 1992, 8). In short, Iran's first revolution never intended to overthrow the monarchy but merely demanded an end to authoritarian misrule.

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<sup>103</sup> It was generally in the interest of the landowning elite, residing in the urban centers, that the central government was weak so they could control and tax the rural population without too much interference from government officials.

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution was part of a larger global pattern of revolts against arbitrary despotism: Russia (1905), Iran (1906), and Turkey (1908). Movements for social change had been in the making in several countries for quite some time. In Iran, however, a Qajar equivalent of the *Tanzimat* in Turkey had never taken place, and the intellectual underpinnings for constitutionalism were therefore much shallower. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, some activists in Iran considered a constitutional government as a cure-all-solution for every conceivable social problem. Japan's defeat of imperial Russia in 1904-1905 sent shockwaves around the world. The Meiji Restoration had in the eyes of many outside observers propelled Japan to great power status in only a few decades simply by dismantling the old feudal regime. If Japan could get rid of unequal treaties that gave foreign powers judicial and economic privileges, so could Iran who had also been a great imperial power in the past. What many Iranians failed to understand was the immense scope and depth of Japan's radical change—political, economic, social, and cultural.

The course of events followed a typical challenge-and-response pattern with Russia and Great Britain as the foreign patrons (see Model 3: Comparative model of patron-client conflicts involving the United States, page 6). The precipitant that united the domestic opposition was the arbitrary and corrupt rule of the Qajar dynasty. Power changed hands several times during the revolutionary period of 1905-1911, but in the end Russia intervened militarily on the side of the Qajar monarchy, which decisively defeated the constitutional movement.

**THE OPPOSITION UNITS BEHIND A MUSLIM LEADERSHIP AND CHALLENGES THE SHAH:  
DECEMBER 1905-OCTOBER 1906**

In the first phase of the Iran's Constitutional Revolution, a number of disparate opposition groups were able to unite around a common cause. Inspired by the Japanese miracle, numerous secret or semi-secret political societies (*anjomans*) were calling for a constitutional government throughout 1904 and 1905. Valuable lessons had been learned from the Tobacco Rebellion, and consequently the *anjomans* approached some reform-minded members of the *ulama* for leadership. Sayyid Mohammad Tabatabai and Abdallah Bihbahani, two high-ranking clerics, agreed in November of 1905 to serve as the public face of the protest movement.

The start of the revolution is usually dated as 12 December 1905, when the governor of Tehran had two prominent bazaaris bastinadoed for having failed to comply with the governor's decree to lower the price of sugar. This was the precipitant the opposition had been waiting for. Tabatabai and Bihbahani led a group of about 2,000 people to take *bast* for 25 days at the shrine of Shahzada Abd al-Azim after protesters had been beaten up and thrown out of the Royal Mosque in Tehran.<sup>104</sup>

In July of 1906, another incident sparked public outcry. A young *sayyid* was killed by one of the Shah's officers while protesting that a popular cleric was being exiled from Tehran. Tabatabai and Bihbahani then organized another *bast* composed of clerics

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<sup>104</sup> *Bast* is the Iranian name for the custom of granting sanctuary and protection against arrest to anyone taking refuge in a religious building. The tradition is not restricted to Islam. The Norwegian Lutheran Church has in the 1990s sheltered a large number of political asylum seekers who were under threat of being expelled by the immigration authorities.

and religious students in Qom. Concurrently, on 20 July 1906, bazaaris in Tehran organized *bast* in solidarity with the clerics in Qom, but this time on the grounds of the British Legation in Tehran. Bihbahani had for a long time been on very good terms with the British charge d'affaires, Evelyn Grant Duff. The Tehran-*bast* grew in the following week to somewhere between 12,000 and 14,000 people from all walks of life joining in. The movement had now taken on a national character demanding the election of a national consultative assembly (*majlis*). The Shah's prime minister, Ain al-Daula, resigned on 29 July, and on 10 August the Shah accepted the opposition's main demands. The first stage of the revolution was thus brought to an end, but the Qajar autocracy would regroup and soon resist the challenge.

#### **THE SHAH STRIKES BACK: OCTOBER 1906-JUNE 1908**

Iran had made unexpectedly speedy progress toward the construction of a democratic and pluralistic society without spilling much blood in the first stage of the revolution. The Majlis met for the first time on 7 October. The assembly drafted a basic constitution and by the end of the year the Fundamental Laws were in place. Muzaffar al-Din Shah literally signed the Fundamental Laws on his deathbed on 30 December 1906. The new shah, Muhammad Ali Shah, was forced to sign the complementary part of constitutional laws, the Supplementary Fundamental Laws, in October of 1907. Both documents were based primarily on the Belgian constitution, and they actually served as the Iranian constitution until the coming of the Islamic Republic in 1979. However, the Iranian Constitution of 1906-1907 was breached more frequently than it was observed. The Pahlavi autocracy paid only token respect for upholding the integrity of constitutional rule.

The intent of the Fundamental Laws was to establish a constitutional monarchy with clear checks on the power of the shah. The Majlis was supposed to have the final say in all the important matters such as foreign loans, concessions, and treaties. Moreover, Iran would be governed by the rule of law and not by the whims of the shah and his courtiers. Equality before the law was extended to Iran's religious minorities, which the *ulama* protested as rightfully being anti-Islamic. Iran had in a very short period of time made tremendous progress toward a modern society, but the initial success would unfortunately prove too good to be true.

What should have been the consolidation phase of the revolution fell apart for basically three separate reasons, of which only one was a foreign conspiracy. First, the loosely knit opposition front began to implode. The rift within the constitutionalist movement was primarily along the line of secular nationalists and conservative clerics. The Tabriz-*anjoman* in particular pushed a truly progressive agenda. The Tabriz faction had been successful in approving measures like popular sovereignty, independent judiciary, religious equality, compulsory education under state supervision, and freedom of the press, which were reflected in the Supplementary Laws.

Needless to say, these measures, if implemented, would pull the rug under the pillars of religious power. Members of the Shi'ite clergy within the movement began to have second thoughts about the wisdom of Western-style reforms. Shaikh Fazl-Allah Nuri had to be sure switched side and become a fervent enemy of the whole reform movement. As the leader of the religious conservatives, he drafted a legal proposal that would require all laws passed by the Majlis to be approved by a committee of clerics, which is precisely the power the Council of Guardians has in today's Iran. Nuri was of

the opinion that all legislation should be in conformity with the *Sharia*, and that freedom of expression should be limited to what was permissible within an Islamic framework; i.e. conceptual thinking was the exclusive domain of the *mujtahids*.

Second, the new Shah had regained posture and he refused to sign the Supplementary Laws. Mohammad Ali Shah had none of the benign personal traits of his father. He was cruel, autocratic, and unwavering in his opposition to radical reforms and constitutionalism in general. On 31 August 1907, Amin al-Sultan Atabak, the Shah's long-reigning prime minister and legendary Qajar power broker, was assassinated under unclear circumstances. Huge crowds in the streets celebrated the death of this particularly hated representative of Qajar despotism. The demonstrations so intimidated the Shah that they compelled him to sign the Supplementary Laws on 7 October 1907 with their secular and liberal intent mainly intact. By this time, Great Britain and Russia began to worry that the constitutionalist would completely defeat the Shah, which would make their game of colonial divide-and-rule increasingly difficult. More troublesome was the fact that the reformist had sent diplomatic overtures to Germany.

Third, the same day as the prime minister was murdered the infamous Anglo-Russian Treaty was signed. The rationale behind the treaty was to settle British and Russian differences in Tibet, Afghanistan, and Iran, and to pool their resources against Germany in Europe. Russia had from the very beginning showed considerable hostility toward Iran's constitutional assembly. With the Anglo-Russian treaty in place, the constitutionalists could now no longer count on British objections against direct Russian intervention on the side of the Shah. The Anglo-Russian Treaty divided Iran into three spheres: (1) northern and central Iran—including Tehran and Isfahan—went to Russia;

(2) south-east Iran was allotted Great Britain; but (3) south-central Iran, where oil was found in 1908, was strange as it may seem declared a neutral zone (see map page 263). The two imperial powers did neither consult nor inform the Persian authorities prior to signing the agreement. The event speaks volumes on the complete disregard the two great powers had for Iran's sovereignty and the Iranian people's right to self-determination.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, the Anglo-Russian treaty was made possible partly because the Iranian tribes were so willing to implement instructions from London and Moscow.

Four almost separate processes now finally came together: (1) domestic factionalism; (2) European imperialism; (3) international great power rivalries; and, (4) the perseverance of the Qajar autocracy. After having failed in his first attempt, the Shah staged a successful coup on 23 June 1908 with the help of the Russian-led Cossack Brigade. The Cossack Brigade shelled the Majlis building, overran its defenders, and permanently shut down the assembly. Many of the constitutionalist leaders were either rounded up and summarily executed or thrown in jail.

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<sup>105</sup> The wording of the treaty's introductory paragraph is illustrative:

The Governments of Great Britain and Russia having mutually engaged to respect the integrity and independence of Persia, and sincerely desiring the preservation of order throughout that country and its peaceful development, as well as the permanent establishment of equal advantages for the trade and industry of all other nations;

Considering that each of them has, for geographical and economic reasons, a special interest in the maintenance of peace and order in certain provinces of Persia adjoining, or in the neighborhood of, the Russian frontier on the one hand, and the frontiers of Afghanistan and Baluchistan on the other hand; and being desirous of avoiding all cause of conflict between their respective interests in the above-mentioned provinces of Persia;

Have agreed on the following terms: [treaty continues] (Avalon Project at the Yale Law School).

## ARMED RESISTANCE: JUNE 1908-JULY 1909

The *coup d'état* of June 1908 was the beginning of the period known as the "lesser despotism." In the capital, Shaikh Nuri now hailed the Qajar monarchy and proclaimed that constitutionalism was contrary to Islam. Though the Shah had militarily defeated his opponents in Tehran, the battle for Iran was by no means won in view of the fact that opposition to the Qajar regime was still strong in the provinces. The Bakhtiari tribal leaders declared their continued allegiance to the Majlis and took control of Isfahan.<sup>106</sup>

In Tabriz, a constitutional militia put up fierce armed resistance against government troops and withstood a ten-months siege. By February 1909, the population of Tabriz was facing severe hunger. Respite came paradoxically from a completely unforeseen direction. The Russians, who the defenders of Tabriz constantly feared would actively enter the side of the royalists, instructed Mohammad Ali Shah to declare a cease-fire and to restore the constitution. Russian troops then entered Tabriz on 29 April 1909 allowing food supplies to reach its starving citizens. Historians have thus far been unable to pin down the exact motive behind Russia's unexpected decision to interfere the way it did. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the Russians did not lift the siege out of altruistic compassion for Tabriz' hungry inhabitants.

The constitutional militiamen now slipped out of Tabriz and soon joined a revolutionary coup under way in the city Rasht on the Caspian littoral. Meanwhile, a

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<sup>106</sup> The Bakhtiari tribal leaders had mixed motives for supporting the Constitutional Revolution; some just wanted to settle old scores with the Qajars, some were genuinely reform minded, and some agreed to march on Tehran so they could take over the central government for themselves (Keddie and Richard 1981, 76).

Bakhtiyari tribal army was marching northward from Isfahan in the direction of Tehran. The two rebel armies entered the capital simultaneously on 13 July, whereby Mohammad-Ali Shah decided it was time to go into exile in Russia. With the approval of both the Russians and the British, the adolescent son of Shah Mohammad Ali, Ahmad, was proclaimed shah with an appointed regent by his side. A special tribunal was set up to prosecute enemies of the Constitutional Revolution. The tribunal found Shaikh Nuri guilty of treason and he was promptly hanged.

#### **THE REVOLUTION SQUASHED BY RUSSIA AND GREAT BRITAIN: 1911-1912**

The Second Majlis convened on 15 December 1909. The new assembly staked out a political course quite different from the First Majlis mainly because the makeup of delegates had changed. New electoral laws, which had broadened the composition of the parliament, resulted in the political center of gravity shifting away from Tehran to the provinces. The shift had the effect of diminishing the influence of the radicals, who had dominated the First Majlis, and restoring the power of the traditional elite. The power establishment—the rich absentee landowners, the tribal chieftains, and the wealthy urban elite—had under the new electoral laws more effective methods of bringing out voter support for their hand-picked candidates.

The discord between the moderate and radical faction of the Majlis became extremely bitter during year of 1910. Bihbahani, now in the moderate camp, was assassinated on 15 July. The effect was that the leader of the radical Democrat Party was expelled from the Majlis and forced into exile in Istanbul though historians still disagree on who was actually behind the murder.

Iran's overshadowing problem still remained the economy. The turmoil created by the constitutional struggle had shut down tax collection in the provinces. A young American financial expert, Morgan Shuster, was hired to oversee a complete overhaul of Iran's state finances, and to set up a tax-collecting gendarmerie. The Iranian government chose Morgan Shuster because an American citizen was perceived as being unbiased and unconnected to British and Russians interests. The United States was held in the highest esteem. Ironically, Iran's high regard for the United States stemmed mainly from the American government's inflexible unwillingness to become involved in any foreign entanglement (Yeselson 1956, 18).

Morgan Shuster, however, proved an exceptionally controversial figure. He worked closely with the reformist elements, and established a reputation among the Russians for being far too intrusive and successful in revealing what was actually going on behind the scenes. The British did not like him either, probably for the same reasons. When Muhammad Ali Shah attempted a come back in 1911, Shuster made available a reward for his capture and facilitated the financing of an army that quickly defeated the former shah. Shuster finally exposed the dirty dealings of Russia and Great Britain in an article in the London Times to the great embarrassment of both governments, which effectively secured his dismissal:

The London Times published an editorial on my open letter, accusing me at the end of having "thrown in my lot" with the Persian Nationalists. I am unable to understand with whom the Times thought I should have thrown in my lot while I was working in the service of the Constitutional Government. It was about this time that my letter to the Times was printed in Persian, in the form of a pamphlet, and circulated quite widely. A local newspaper, *Tamadun*, publicly admitted having

printed and circulated this pamphlet as soon as I was charged with having done so—which I had not.

By 11 November the Persian Cabinet, having been thoroughly frightened by the extensive preparations which Russia was evidently making for occupying Northern Persia, consulted the British Government as to what course should be pursued. Sir Edward Grey promptly cabled his advice to accept the Russian ultimatum, and apologize as was demanded (Shuster 1912, 161).

The Shuster incident stirred up public interest for Iran in the United States for the first time. In U.S. public opinion Iran surfaced as the innocent but brave victim of Europe's immoral colonial politics. Americans denounced Great Britain, but Russia in particular, for their brutal strangling of Persia. Morgan Shuster was the hero of the day, and the U.S. State Department was heavily criticized for not coming to Mr. Shuster's rescue. In the words of Abraham Yeselson, "Persia made an ideal appearance before an American audience indulging itself in sympathy for an underdog and in the pleasures of denouncing European decadence and criticizing the government at home" (Yeselson 1956, 128).

Ironically, the Russian government invoked the Anglo-Russian Treaty when it easily convinced the British government that Shuster had to go. The Russians would frankly not allow any interference in their exclusive sphere of interest, particularly by a nose "Jew" like Mr. Shuster (Alexander and Nanes 1980, 13). The British government could not agree more. The British actually came up with an idea for how the Russians approached the crisis that unfolded.

In November of 1911, after the American government had renounced any desire to intervene on behalf of its national, Mr. Shuster, the Russians proceeded with issuing an

ultimatum to the Iranian government calling for the swift removal of Morgan Shuster. The Russians simultaneously moved troops into Rasht. The ultimatum demanded that Iran would pledge never again to hire foreign advisors without the prior consent of Great Britain and Russia, and, believe it or not, the Iranians would agree to compensate the Russians for the cost of having invaded Iranian territory.

The Majlis could not possibly accept a public humiliation and insult like this, which was in all likelihood the Russian intention in the first place. When the Majlis rejected the ultimatum on 1 December, it provided the Russian side with a *casus belli*. Russian forces brutally suppressed and massacred the opposition in Rasht and Tabriz while the British were saber rattling in the south. Faced with an imminent invasion of the capital, the Iranian government tried to compel the Majlis to accept a revised ultimatum, which the assembly denied. Backed by a police force, the cabinet declared the Majlis dissolved on 24 December 1911. Though the shutdown of the Majlis had no constitutional basis, it nevertheless marked the end of the Second Majlis, and the Constitutional Revolution thus came to an end. Resistance to foreign occupation continued in the provinces for several months, but evaporated after the Russians in March of 1912 shelled the holiest of Shi'i shrines on Iranian soil, the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad.

In conclusion, the events surrounding the Constitutional Revolution must have left every Iranian with an extremely bitter memory. Though the Shah's reactionary government could not reverse many of the political and social reforms, it was nevertheless crystal clear that Great Britain and Russia had no interest in allowing Iran to develop an accountable government independent of European colonial interests.

## **2. World War I and Foreign Occupation**

World War I and Iran's wartime experience with foreign interventions, loss of life, and material destruction painted an unpleasant picture of the sad state of Iranian affairs. In the analysis of George Lenczowski, there were three root causes of Iran's misfortunes during the Great War of 1914-18: (1) Qajar-Iran was militarily so weak that foreign powers could penetrate the country with virtual impunity without the central government being able to put up any meaningful armed resistance; (2) Iran's neutrality was misguided in the sense that the geopolitical importance of Iran was so great that the country could not avoid being sucked into great power rivalries in one way or another; and, (3) "[Iran's] ruling classes presented a picture of moral confusion, greed and poor credibility as to the pledges they gave to one or other belligerent power" (Lenczowski 1983, 89).

### **DISLOCATION AND DISINTEGRATION**

Though Iran was not a belligerent party in the war, World War I brought military combat with the loss of civilian life, material destruction, economic disruption, food shortages, and terrible famine in 1918-19.<sup>107</sup> Iran was hit hard in spite of the fact that the country had no direct stake in the issues over which the war was fought. The northwestern and western regions where Russian and Ottoman troops engaged in combat (later also German and British units) were severely affected.

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<sup>107</sup> The U.S. government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided substantial aid to the victims of the famine.

The war caused general disruption and widespread social dislocation. Many Iranian non-combatants were killed as the country became the extended battlefield for the world's great powers. Farmlands were ruined by invading armies or the cultivators were forced to leave the fields fallow. Land tenants were forcefully taken from the fields to work on military installations. Iran's irrigation works—that have always required rigorous maintenance work—were not looked after or even sometimes destroyed. In short, the war caused major disruptions to urban economic activity and rural food cultivation.

In addition to the economic hardship, Iran once more disintegrated politically. The breakdown was mainly caused by the presence of foreign troops and their activities on Iranian soil, but indigenous separatist groups clearly contributed to the anarchy and that the central government's already tenuous control over the provinces slipped away. The Islamic Union (*Ettehad-e Eslam*) guerilla movement, commonly called the *Jangalis* (or "Foresters"), was the most important of Iran's homegrown rebel movements. From their hideouts in the lush Caspian forests, the *Jangali*-movement seized control over the Gilan province in 1917. World War I triggered the Russian Revolution and for some time the *Jangali*-movement leader Kouчек Khan interacted with the Bolsheviks. It can be said that revolutionary feelings in Iran were greatly inspired by the tumultuous events in Russia between February and October of 1917.

In the south of the country the British government was actively fomenting tribal unrest to further British strategic interests, but all over the country tribal chieftains had strengthened their power base and reasserted their independence vis-à-vis the central government. At the center, the Iranian government was not functioning properly. The

Shah was emotionally unbalanced and politically indecisive. Remnants of the Majlis were torn by unbridled factionalism. The leading nationalists were often completely out of touch with political realities and they displayed a misguided sense of Iran's role in the Great War. The result was a string of short-lived cabinets, and that the reach of the central government's authority was reduced to the absolute minimum.

#### **BATTLEGROUND**

Azerbaijan, Iran's northwestern province, became a main theater of operation between Russian and Ottoman forces. In December of 1914, the Ottoman army launched an offensive against the Russians along their Armenian border. The Turks also extended their push into Iranian territory and captured Tabriz on 8 January 1915; however, Russian forces soon after drove the Turks out of the city. Russia landed troops in May of 1915 near Rasht on the Caspian coast and marched on to Qazvin near Tehran. From December 1915 through January 1916, the Russians advanced steadily along the Qazvin-Hamadan-Kermanshah road from until they reached the border to today's east-central Iraq.

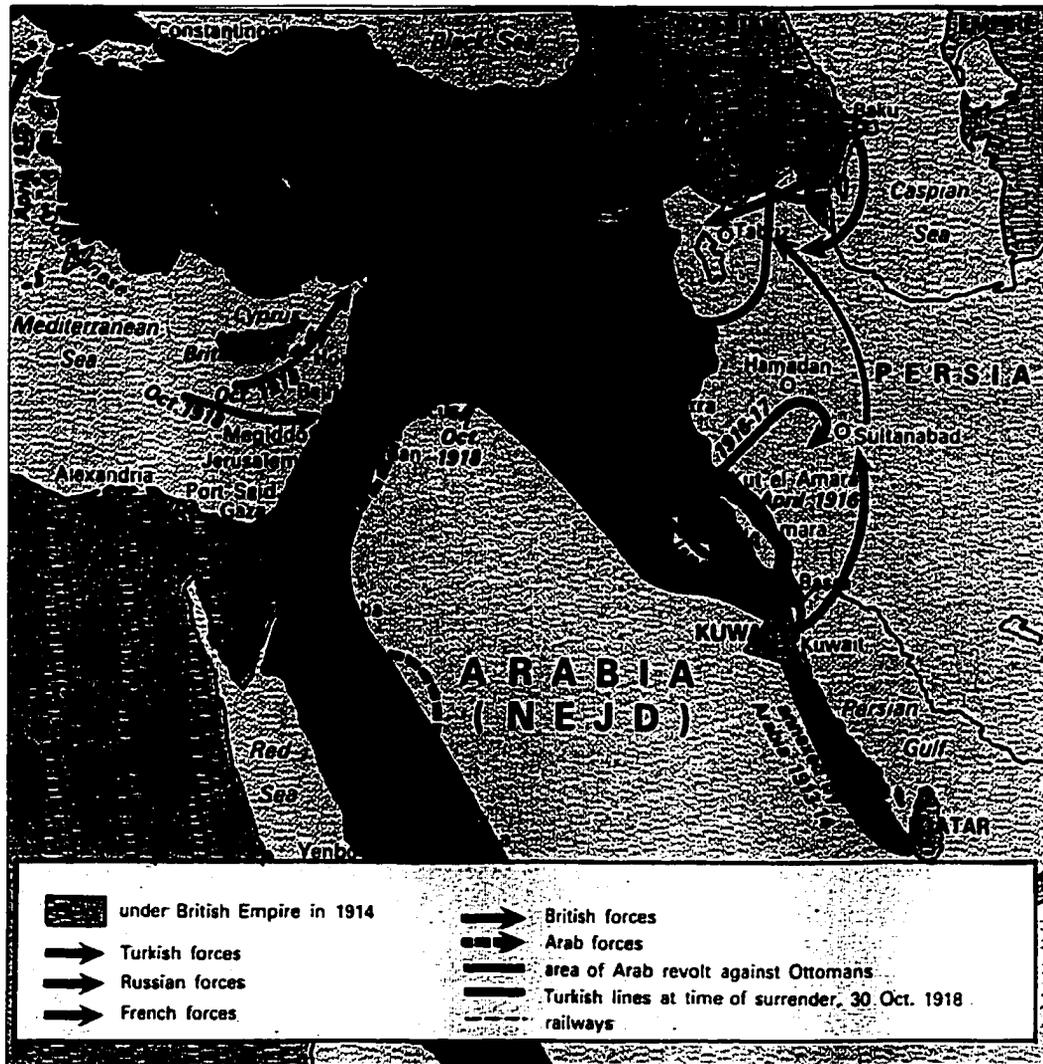
In early May 1916, Russian troops entered Ottoman-Iraq. Simultaneously, the British suffered a major setback on the southern Iraqi front. The Ottoman defenders then pushed the Russians out of Mesopotamia and the Ottoman-Turks later retook Kermanshah in the fall of 1916 and held the city until late February 1917. From the same month, internal events in Tsarist Russia gradually brought the Russian war effort to a complete halt on 26 November 1917.

The British landed forces near Basra on 6 November 1914, the day after the Ottoman empire entered the war. The British military operation was undertaken to

prevent the Anglo-Persian oil installations from falling into the hands of the Central Powers. The initial campaign was strategically well founded, but the following military expedition north toward Baghdad proved disastrous. The British fought a fruitless battle with Ottoman forces outside Ctesiphon (the old Sasanian capital) on 22 November 1915 whereby they were forced to retreat to al-Kut. From 7 December 1915 to 29 April 1916, British units fought behind entrenchments at al-Kut until 13,000 British troops laid down their arms and surrendered to the Ottomans. Nevertheless, fresh British troops recruited in India retook al-Kut on 17 February 1917 and captured Baghdad on 11 March. This victory had an instrumental impact on the whole theater of operations. The British victory recast the entire strategic situation in Iran whereby German and Ottoman forces withdrew completely before British and Russian units met in northern Iraq.

Fighting also took place in other parts of Iran. German agents stirred up trouble and persuaded tribal forces to fight the British. The British responded by forming a local militia in 1916, the South Persia Rifles, under the command of the famous Sir Percy Sykes.

When the Russians moved into northern Iran, they also forced the dissolution of the newly elected Third Majlis. The nationalist faction in the Majlis was pro-German and anti-Russian. Many of these representatives escaped to Qom where they formed a provisional government. When the Russians moved into that area as well, the provisional government fled to Kermanshah and later into exile. The Iranian nationalists continued to work from Istanbul and Berlin.



Map 9: World War I in the Middle East (Parker 1993).

By 1915-16 Iran had for all practical purposes ceased to exist as a genuine sovereign state (Fromkin 1989, 209). In late 1917, British and Russian troops occupied nearly all of Iran; still, the British continued to fight Qashqa'i tribal forces well into 1918. In 1918, Britain sent a major military expedition through Iran to the Transcaucasus, in addition to several smaller detachments to eastern Iran and Turkistan, to fill the vacuum after the retreating Russian army.

## FAILED NEUTRALITY POLICY

Iran's policy of neutrality turned out to be an absolute disaster for the country. At the outset of the war Iran was technically a neutral and nonbelligerent state. However, when the Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, it should have been clear that Iran could not expect that trouble would simply pass by. Iran's policy of neutrality failed for three separate reasons: (1) the unprotected strategic location of Iran; (2) the British Navy's reliance on oil supplies; and, (3) most Iranian politicians did not understand what strict neutrality really meant.

Iran became the extended battlefield of four great powers: Russia, Ottoman-Turkey, Great Britain, and Germany. The Iranian government's policy of neutrality was a disaster, as Rouhollah Ramazani points out, because none of the parties involved really wanted Iran to stay neutral (Ramazani 1966, 138). The Entente Powers and the Central Powers both wanted Iran on their side for basically the same reasons. But more importantly, Iran's politicians did not seem to desire neutrality either. The various factions sided with both alliances in the Great War. The major tribes—the Bakhtiyari, the Qashqa'i, the Baluchi, the Hazara, and the Khamsa—all actively fought with one or the other warring alliance. The Fighters of Azerbaijan sided with the Ottomans, and the Jangali-movement of Gilan fought the British. Many deputies of the Majlis openly sided with the Central Powers. The Iranian government constantly oscillated between the two major alliances since the numerous cabinets could never make up their minds.

Iran's foreign policy during the war demonstrated the indecisiveness and self-centeredness of much of the ruling elite in times when the nation was in great danger. The inconsistency of Iran's governing establishment made the four powers anxious, and

they all actively sought to preempt the other side from getting the upper hand in Iranian affairs. Furthermore, Iran had no effective military means to enforce its neutrality. The Iranian government had only the Cossack Brigade (about 8,000 men) and the Gendarmerie (about 7,000 men) at its disposal. Iran's striking inability and powerlessness to do anything to prevent foreign powers from violating Iran's territorial integrity was an embarrassment. In short, the failure of Iran's neutrality police was primarily caused by the country's internal disunity that prompted the great powers to violate Iran's sovereignty.

The Iranians' wartime sympathy tilted in favor of Germany for obvious reasons. Many politicians tried to persuade Ahmad Shah to join the Ottoman empire and to fight on the German side of the war. One can hardly fault Qajar-Iran for being emotionally drawn to the German side of the war given the country's historical experience with Great Britain and Russia throughout the preceding century. However, the nationalist politicians must be faulted for eventually not having Iran's best interest in mind for the duration of the war. The new generation of politicians that grew out of the Constitutional Revolution was single-mindedly guided by nationalistic dogmas. The new political elite was driven by a passionate hatred of Great Britain and Russia rather than a cool and clear-headed assessment of the political realities. Some even held the belief that Germany would be able to help Qajar-Iran against Great Britain and Russia. When joining the Central Powers was not desirable option, the only realistic alternative should have been at the outset of the war to maximize Iran's interests by coming to a political understanding with the Entente Powers given the fact that Iran was clearly incapable of enforcing a policy of neutrality against external aggression.

## GERMANY, BRITAIN, AND RUSSIA

Germany, of course, played on the anti-British and anti-Russian sentiments in the Iranian population. The Kaiser presented himself as the champion of all Muslims. His position as the self-styled guardian of Islam seems to have been correlated with his desire to wrest control of India from Great Britain. On 30 July 1914—on the brink of the war—the Kaiser wrote:

Our consuls and agents in Turkey and India must inflame the whole Mohammedan world into a wild rebellion against this hated, lying, unscrupulous nation of shopkeepers; for even if we must bleed to death, then at least England shall lose India (Joll 1984, 194).

The British, however, recognized that Germany could never threaten India the way Russia was positioned to do. They therefore did not take the Kaiser too seriously on this matter; but, when Russia in 1911 withdrew its objections to the Berlin-Baghdad Railway in exchange for a side branch that would connect Tehran to what could possibly become a strategically very important transportation system, Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, awakened the longstanding British uneasiness about the future of its Indian colonial crown jewel:

It would be a very serious matter if Germany obtained any control of this branch. For in times of Pan-Islamic excitement, it might be used to mobilize German-trained Mussulman forces. Germany, who held no Mussulman subjects, was not embarrassed by Pan-Islamism, but it might be very serious to Russia and England (Joll 1984, 194).

As it turned out, Germany met with very little success in rallying the world's Muslim against Great Britain and its allies. Even the Ottoman sultan's appeal to all Muslims in Iran to wage holy war against the Allies went largely unnoticed. German

agents, however, were quite successful in inciting trouble for the British in both Iran and Afghanistan. In southern Iran, Konsul Wilhelm Wassmuss—nicknamed *der Deutsche Lawrence*—organized a very effective tribal revolt against the British in Fars. For some time Wilhelm Wassmuss actually threatened the British Consulate and communication station at Bandar-e Bushehr. As mentioned before, the British response was to organize an obedient local militia, the South Persia Rifles, and strengthen ties to local clients, such as the Bakhtiari tribe in Fars and the Arab tribes under Sheikh Khazal in Khuzistan. Still, Great Britain did not regain full control over Iran's southern province before the very end of the war.

Great Britain wartime efforts in Iran had one single overriding objective: to protect the vitally important oil installations and operations of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in Khuzistan. Britain was pushing Russia for a new partition of Iran even before the war broke out. The British government had come to bitterly resent the fact that it had let Khuzistan, with British oil interests, fall into the neutral zone when Great Britain and Russia practically partitioned Iran in 1907.

Great Britain was therefore poised to obtain the political formalities that would give it complete freedom of action in Iran's southern provinces. Great Britain and Russia therefore secretly signed the inter-Allied Constantinople Agreement of 18 March 1915. The treaty was a watershed in British foreign policy since Britain now promised the Russian tsar post-war control of Istanbul and the Straits, abandoning the fundamental principle that had guided British foreign policy in the Middle East for more than a century.

The terms of the agreement gave Britain full and exclusive control over the neutral zone that had been established by the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907. In exchange, the initial Russian zone was expanded to include the districts adjacent to Isfahan and Yazd. The Russians were, of course, also given full freedom of action in their expanded zone. The treaty brought about a *de facto* annexation of Iran since there was no clause—unlike the 1907 accord—that specifically referred to Iran as an independent and sovereign nation-state.

Yet, the end of World War I witnessed the complete collapse of Russian imperial interests in Iran. The implosion imperial Russia presented Great Britain with a golden window-of-opportunity that it nevertheless turned out to be difficult to take full advantage of. Russian forces ceased all offensive military actions in November of 1917, and all Russian troops were pulled out from Iranian territory in accordance with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of March 1918. Ottoman forces were still active in Azerbaijan and the Caucasus, and, to fill the empty space left behind by the retreating Russian troops, the British decided to send several military expedition into various parts of northern Iran. These military operations ended up being a mixed experience. British forces got bruised in the Russian civil war that raged in the Baku region, and the Jangalis inflicted heavy casualties when the British tried to meddle in what amounted to a full-scale armed rebellion in Gilan.

Shortly after the war ended, in June of 1919, the Bolsheviks unilaterally terminated all unequal treaties, special privileges, unfair loans and concessions (except the lucrative Caspian fisheries) that Tsarist Russia had extorted from Iran during the previous century. The Soviet decision to renounce Russia's iron-grip signaled the total

absence of Russian influence over Iranian affairs for some years to come. The power vacuum seemingly left Great Britain in an unprecedented and extremely favorable position with no imperial competitor, but paradoxically, the outcome was that France and the United States increasingly began to scrutinize the British activities in Iran, which to some extent made Reza Shah's rise to power possible. Meanwhile, the Soviet leadership undertook an ideological adjustment of Marxism-Leninism to accommodate Russia's imperial past with the result that Soviet pressure on Iran increased steadily as the world was heading for World War II.

#### **HUMILIATION AND RESENTMENT**

World War I must have left every Iranian with a bitter memory of yet again having been humiliated by foreign powers. Iran had once more been the pawn in great power rivalries. This was only partly true since Iran's foolish domestic power struggle for the most part was to blame for the misery. Following the defeat of the Central Powers, Iran's national pride was further injured.

First, the Iranian government wished to attend the Versailles Peace Conference because the country wanted to receive economic compensation for its wartime sufferings. High on the Iranian agenda was also the return of the territories that were ceded to Russia in 1813 and 1828 (Alexander and Nanes 1980, 15). Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, however, had all declared independence from Russia in the closing days of the World War I. In retrospect, it would have looked odd if the conference—in the Wilsonian spirit of national self-determination—had allotted the newly independent Caucasian nation-states to a former imperial power like Qajar-Iran; particularly if one takes Iran's tainted

wartime record into consideration. At the intervention of the British delegation, the Paris Peace Conference ignored Iran's request for representation stating that the country had not been a belligerent party in the war. Iran had formally requested U.S. assistance to secure representation at the conference, but this appeal seems to have been virtually lost among the overwhelming problems that confronted the American delegation at the peace conference (Yeselson 1956, 154).

Second, Britain moved to consolidate formal control over Iran during the period 1918-1921. The British government, and in particular its Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, wished to impose full British control over Iran by means of a "mutual" treaty. In Lord Curzon's vision, control over Iran would be quite useful within three separate spheres of British interests: access to cheap oil; containment of Bolshevik Russia; and finally, Iran was the missing piece in England's colonial jig-saw puzzle stretching from South Africa to East Asia.

In 1919, the British government therefore negotiated and signed the Anglo-Persian Treaty with the Persian government, which made Britain the exclusive provider of foreign advisors, officers, arms, communications equipment, transportation machinery, and financial loans. The treaty revised Iranian custom tariffs to accommodate British needs. The British government secured the agreement by granting the Iranian government a loan of two million pounds sterling, and by simply bribing the prime minister and his cabinet ministers. The Anglo-Persian Treaty was widely perceived as an attempt to establish a full-fledged British protectorate in Iran.

### **3. Reza Shah and the Revival of Iranian Nationalism**

Reza Shah's rule is tremendously significant for later political developments since his son, Muhammad Reza Shah, spent his lifetime imitating his towering father. Reza Shah Pahlavi has to be placed among the most remarkable figures in Iranian history, not necessarily for his accomplishments, but for his sheer strength of will and force of personality. Reza Shah had one single-minded goal as the absolute ruler of Iran: to revive the glory of ancient Persia by reforming Iran into a modern nation-state. Ervand Abrahamian succinctly sums up the ambitions of Reza Shah's New Order:

Having undisputed political power, Reza Shah initiated a number of social reforms. Although Reza Shah never formulated a systematic blueprint for modernization—writing no major thesis, delivering no grand speeches, and leaving behind no last testaments—he implemented reforms that, however unsystematic, indicated that he was striving for an Iran which, on one hand, would be free of clerical influence, foreign intrigue, nomadic uprisings, and ethnic differences; and, on the other hand, would contain European-styled education institutions, Westernized women active outside the home, and modern economic structures with state factories, communication networks, investment banks, and department stores. His long-range goal was to rebuild Iran in the image of the West—or, at any rate, in his own image of the West. His means for attaining this final aim were secularism, antitribalism, nationalism, educational development, and state capitalism (Abrahamian 1982, 140).

Reza Shah clearly fits a global pattern in the interwar period of the self-proclaimed progressive dictators such as Benito Mussolini in Italy, Miguel Primo de Rivera and Francisco Franco in Spain, Miklós Horthy in Hungary, and, of course, the rise

of Adolf Hitler in Germany. He was heavily influenced by the example of Turkey's dictator, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Reza Shah and Kemal Atatürk were both transitional political figures whose social upheavals had destroyed the traditional centers of imperial Islamic power in Iran and Turkey. Kemal Atatürk and Reza Shah both vigorously advocated extreme nationalism. They both imposed a strictly unitarian nation-state that excluded competing ethnic, regional, and religious identities.

Reza Shah was in many ways the mirror image of the new political self-awareness of many Iranians: pushy, impatient, and completely lacking in a pluralistic mindset. In Ann Lambton's analysis: "Riza Shah was the price Persia had to pay for undue delay in making the political and social adjustments which were implied in her incorporation as a national state into Western Society" (Hambly 1985, 243). Reza Shah was Iran's imprudent choice of an implementer of social change. Reza Shah came into prominence because of British efforts to consolidate power in Iran. The Russian civil war was raging, and the British government and the Iranian elite feared that the Bolshevik revolution could spill over to Iran when the British occupation forces from World War I left the country. Still, Reza Shah's ability to seize and hold absolute power was for the most part the outcome of Iran's chaotic domestic power struggle.

Reza Shah left behind an extremely ambivalent legacy. For a while, he provided Iranians with a sense of optimism. His social reforms made a deep impression on people who remembered what Qajar-Iran was like before the Constitutional Revolution. They gave Reza Shah high marks for centralizing the state, pacifying the tribes, penalizing the Shi'ite clergy, unveiling women, abolishing aristocratic titles, introducing general conscription, diminishing the power of the feudal nobility, seeking to unify the multi-

ethnic population, and founding modern schools, cities, and industries. In the eyes of many Iranians, the greatest achievement of Reza Shah was that he firmly stood up against Great Britain's bullying of Iran.

However, his rule became increasingly brutal, acquisitive, and corrupt. A deep sense of insecurity made him tyrannical when he encountered voices of opposition. Many resented him because he completely ignored the integrity of the constitution, that he killed a number intellectuals and clerics, that he accumulated a vast private fortune by expropriating land and property, and that the already immense gap between the haves and the have-nots widening in his reign. The younger generation, with weak memories of Qajar despotism, found little to admire in Reza Shah. Young people were inclined to view Reza Shah as a self-serving autocrat, installed by the British and allied with the rich upper class of absentee landowners.<sup>108</sup>

#### RISE TO POWER

If one wants to understand Reza Shah's rule— not only his personality but also the way Iran behaved as national entity in between the two world wars—one needs to delve into the historical events that defined his formative years. Iran's subordination to foreign interests, rampant factionalism, material poverty, and lawlessness during the late Qajar-period left a deep imprint on his personality.

Reza Khan was born into economic hardship on 16 March 1878 in Elasht, a small village in the Elburz Mountains. His mother decided to move back to her former

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<sup>108</sup> Reza Shah, in actual fact, stripped the land-owning class of much of their privileges.

hometown in Tehran when her husband died shortly after Reza was born.<sup>109</sup> Reza's uncle was a member of the Cossack Brigade, and he was instrumental when Reza signed up only 15 years of age. Reza Khan was able to teach himself to read and write when the literacy rate in Iran was exceptionally low. He soon displayed exceptional abilities as a soldier, and he moved steadily through the ranks.

As a young man, Reza Khan witnessed how the whim of foreign powers could dramatically alter the destiny of Iran. Successive Russian intervention, the infamous Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907, the demise of the Constitutional Revolution, and foreign occupation of Iran during World War I led Reza Khan to the conclusion that Iran would never escape being the hostage of Western colonial powers before it started behaving like a European nation-state itself. On 21 February 1921, Colonel Reza Khan marched a contingent of the Cossack Brigade into Tehran, seized control of government offices, declared martial law, and booted out the incompetent civilian leadership. Reza Khan was a self-made man, exceptionally strong willed, brutal, and ruthless. In the years that followed, Reza Khan proved that he could stand his ground against the slyest of opponents.

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<sup>109</sup> The poverty of Reza Shah's childhood might explain the kleptocratic nature of his rule. Reza Shah became by far the biggest landowner in Iran. He is said to have acquired a gigantic personal fortune and to have salted away as much as £30 million in British banks at a time when the total royalties from the Anglo Persian Oil Company was no more than £1 million a year (Daniel 2000, 139).

The historiography of the Islamic Republic has determined that the British installed Reza Shah in 1921. There is some truth to the allegation, but historical evidence does not support the full reach of this claim.<sup>110</sup>

According to historical documents and the confessions of leaders of the Pahlavi regime, Riza Khan's coup d'état on February 21, 1921, (Esfand 2, 1299 AHS) was organised by the British. The result was the enforcement of one of the most dictatorial forms of government on the people of Iran. The dictated, public policy of Riza Khan was to copy Ataturk in the area of secularism and westernisation. The decree prohibiting religious ceremonies and enforcing the removal of the *hijab* of women {forcing the women to remove their veils} was formally issued and implemented and stood as a symbol of westernisation and the dependence of the new government (Institute for the Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeini 1995, xxvii).

Historians have studied the events that precipitated the coup in great detail. Though their conclusions vary significantly, it seems that British officials in Iran at most played an influential role in instigating the *coup d'état*. Some scholars argue that the British had only limited influence on the process that put Reza Khan in charge of the army (Hambly 1985, 219-20). The two main British officials on the scene—General Ironside and Herbert Norman, the British minister—seem to have been acting for the most part on their own initiative. The evidence shows that the Foreign Ministry in London was mostly unaware of what was actually going on (Hambly 1985, 219-20).

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<sup>110</sup> Reza Shah inherited the reputation from the last Qajar kings. He was clearly a strong ruler in his own right. The second Pahlavi monarch, however, Mohammad Reza Shah, was widely believed to be the creation of Great Britain and the United States, and the claim can be backed up with a wealth of evidence. The perception that foreign powers have the ability to install unpopular rulers at will has sadly taken on superstitious proportions among Iranians today. No factual evidence can be produced that supports the allegation that the C.I.A. was behind Khomeini's rise to power, but people nevertheless hold steadfastly on to the myth.

Others, however, insist that the British played a crucial role in Reza Shah's rise to power (Cronin 1997, 68-89). Reza Shah seems to have conceived the idea of a military coup a couple of years before he came in direct contact with British officials. The British were trying to implement the Anglo-Persian Agreement of August 1919 at the same time as they were preparing to pull out their troops scheduled for the spring of 1921. When the Majlis refused to ratify the agreement, the British began to look for other ways to assert their control over Iranian affairs. The British government threatened Iranian authorities to immediately withdraw the British force (Norperforce), and to end funding for the Cossack Division. The British proceeded with forcing the resignation of the Russian commander of the Cossack Division, Colonel Starroselsky, and then lobbied for their candidate, Reza Khan, to be appointed second-in-command. In February 1921, General Ironside and Lieutenant-Colonel Smyth provided Reza Khan with an excuse to march on Tehran from the Cossack barracks in Qazvin.

The idea of a military *coup d'état* had been taking hold among many Iranians since June 1920. The *coup d'état* of February 1921 was therefore the confluence of the interests of three separate power spheres: Iranian politicians opposed to the Shah and his courtiers, Iranian officers in the Cossack Division, and British officials conspiring to further Great Britain's political objectives (Cronin 1997, 86). Though the British involvement was crucial, it is nevertheless historically incorrect to claim that the British organized the *coup d'état*. The official Iranian history writing finds it convenient to overemphasize the British role in the coup since it relieves numerous Iranian elements of responsibility.

The proposition that Reza Shah was a British puppet finds no support in the historical record. It runs counter to the foreign policy line he consistently followed throughout his reign. Reza Shah's all-consuming objective was to recover Iran's independence from foreign powers, to revive a sense of Iranian national pride, and, to restore the country's standing and respect on the world scene.

Reza Khan wasted no time confronting foreign interference in Iran's internal affairs. Only five days after the *coup d'état*, on 26 February 1921, he signed the Soviet-Iranian Friendship Treaty. He unilaterally annulled the unfavorable Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919. He moved against the British puppet in the south of the country, Sheikh Khazal, and confronted head-on British intrigues and dealings with the Bakhtiari chieftains. He soaked up into the army what was left of the South Persia Rifles—the British-led irregular militia dating back to World War I—despite concerted efforts by the British to make this as problematic as possible. He hired an independent American financial advisor, Arthur C. Millspaugh, to get Iran's financial practices on a sound footing. Lastly, in 1928, he abrogated the probably most humiliating aspect of Iran's decline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Capitulations, which had exempted foreign nationals from the jurisdiction of Iran's Islamic courts. In short, Reza Shah's reign witnessed an indisputable reduction of British (and Russian) influence over Iran's domestic affairs.

#### **BREAKING TRIBAL POWER**

Reza Khan rebuilt the might of the Iranian armed forces to a strength not seen since the time of Nadir Shah. By the 1930s, Iran had a standing army of 100,000 men supported by mechanized transportation, navy, and air force. Reza Khan's plan was not to

embark on foreign military adventures like the Qajars did. His focus was once and for all to break the power of the tribal chieftains, and to reclaim undisputed and absolute power like the Sasanian monarchs had one time enjoyed. The tribes and other local groups that defied the crown were harshly suppressed in Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, Fars, Mazandaran, Luristan, Gorgan, Khorasan, and Baluchistan.

Reza Khan's determination was put to the test in 1924 when he led an expedition against Sheikh Khazal's stronghold at Mohammara in Khuzistan. Sheikh Ahmad Khazal had for some time refused to pay taxes. It was also rumored that he was plotting with the British to have Khuzistan incorporated into Great Britain's mandate in Iraq. The British government tried to deter Reza Khan by sending warships to the Persian Gulf, but Reza Khan called the British bluff. The British only cared for their Iranian oil installations and the property of the Anglo Persian Oil Company. They quickly ditched Sheikh Khazal in favor of an unwavering Reza Khan. This event elevated Reza Khan's standing among all Iranians to that of a hero.

The methods used by Reza Shah to pacify the tribes were indeed brutal, but it must be remembered what a menace the tribal warlords had been to the prosperity of Iran for more than a millennium. Since the days of Shah Tahmasp, the tribal chieftains had often served as the fifth column of Iran's external enemies. The goal was to disarm the tribes and to integrate the nomadic population into bureaucratic and administrative structure of the state so the government could collect taxes from their economic activities. Whole population groups were sometimes forcefully resettled to areas with unfavorable climate. During the 1930s, Reza Shah's regime imprisoned, exiled or killed every tribal leader.

Gavin Hambly considers Reza Shah's treatment of the tribes as the blackest page in the history of Pahlavi Iran (Hambly 1985, 225-28). Other scholars believe that Hambly's position is rooted in the romantic myth of the noble savage. The settled rural population was nevertheless more than thankful to see the end to the annual tribal raids. With tribal power diminished, Reza Shah could reassert Iran's foreign policy vis-à-vis Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

#### **POLITICAL SUPPORT AND OPPOSITION**

Reza Shah not only suppressed tribal power, but he could not in general accept any challenge to his authority, real or imagined. Mohammad Mosaddeq, who spoke up when Reza Khan became shah, was imprisoned and completely excluded from public life. There was considerable domestic opposition to Reza Shah's vision of a modernized Iran. His sweeping social reforms met particularly strong resistance from the religious leadership, which argued that his secular government was contrary to Islam.

Reza Shah's most significant social reform was the emancipation of women. He sincerely believed that women should have the same basic rights as men such access to education and admission to the workplace. Needless to say, these reforms met with stiff opposition from the Shi'ite clergy. Reza Shah's role model was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as in so many other areas. Yet, his social restructuring of Iranian society never went as far as Atatürk's all-encompassing top-down reforms.

Reza Shah was in no way universally unpopular among Iranians despite the corruption among his officials and the brutality of his armed forces. Regardless of his heavy-handed and autocratic leadership, many intellectuals, secular nationalists, and radicals preferred Reza Shah to the old Qajar order. Islam to them was a foreign Arab

religion with an anti-nationalist perspective that they blamed for the material inferiority of Iran vis-à-vis the West. The progressive faction acutely remembered the role the conservative clergy played in bring down the Constitutional Revolution. The reformists were therefore by and large anti-clerical and secularist in their political approach.

In 1923 the Fifth Majlis gathered. Liberals, reformists, seculars nationalists dominated the assembly. They for the most part supported Reza Khan and his reform agenda. The Revival Party (*Hezb-e Tajaddod*) swiftly lend a hand to the Majlis approval of Reza Khan's proposal for compulsory military service. Mandatory draft was jointly opposed by the conservative land-owning class and the clergy, but for unrelated reasons.<sup>111</sup> Reza Shah was able to convince many that that social, cultural, and political reforms could not be achieved without political absolutism.

However, the initial support for Reza Khan's transformation of Iran slowly withered away, partly because he neglected to maintain the backing of the secular intelligentsia. In the latter part of his reign, he ruled without the collaboration of an organized populist political party like the one that always backed Mustafa Kemal's political agenda. Reza Shah was in the end nearly universally unpopular, which eventually made it extremely easy for Great Britain and the Soviet Union to dislodge him from power.

Some sort of institutionalized dictatorship always appealed to Reza Khan. in the beginning of 1924, an seemingly spontaneous movement began floating the idea of abolishing the whole Qajar monarch in favor of a republican constitution. The Shi'ite

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<sup>111</sup> The feudal landlords lost their most valuable segment of the workforce, and the clergy intuitively understood effectiveness of boot camp in indoctrinating naïve young men about the New Order.

clergy vehemently detested the proposal. Reza Khan's military successes against Sheikh Khazal, Britain's Arab client in Khuzistan, the same year increased his prestige and political standing to such an extent that he was basically free to do whatever he wanted to do. The downfall of the British puppet enhanced Reza Khan's patriotic credentials across the political spectrum like no other event in Reza Shah's political career. Nevertheless, he went through the spectacle of "offering" his resignation, then "bowing" to the expected public pressure to stay in office, before finally assumed absolute power, just like Nadir Shah did. On 12 December 1925 the Constituent Assembly amended the constitution to bestow the title of *Shahanshah* to Reza Khan and his descendants. Three days later Reza Shah swore to respect the Fundamental Laws of the Constitution, to safeguard Iran's independence and territorial integrity, and to uphold the Shi'i faith. In the end, he paradoxically only succeeded in preserving Shi'ism as Iran's state religion.

#### NATIONALISM AND ISLAM

Reza Shah's effort to construct a sense of a common Iranian national identity was the most obscure part of his political agenda. To this end, the state launched an elaborate program. Iran's pre-Islamic empires were glorified. Ferdowsi, the Persian author of the national epic *Shah-nameh* ("Book of Kings"), received enormous attention from the new generation of Iranian nationalists. The Persian language was promoted at the expense of minority languages like Kurdish and Turkish, and Farsi was officially purged of Arabic words and grammar. Archaeological works were initiated. Textbooks were rewritten to prove the myth of an unbroken historical continuum of Iran as a national entity, which is a massive falsification of historical facts (See Chapter III: The Dissolution of the Persian Empire, page 117).



Picture 8: Reza Shah self-crowned, April 1926  
(Iran Lovers' Home page).

The new regime's recreation of Persian nationalism was noticeably incoherent. Cultural and ethnic chauvinism was combined with an unbalanced admiration for everything that represented Western modernity. The authorities rejected the recent past, but at the same time glorified Iran's pre-Islamic Persian empires. People's emotional desire to see an end to foreign domination and national humiliation appears to have been much stronger than their willingness to question the dubious historical claims put forward by the regime's propaganda machine. The Pahlavi government established a Society of Public Guidance—fashioned after propaganda machines in Fascist-Italy and Nazi-Ger-

many—to infuse through journals, pamphlets, newspapers, textbooks, and radio broadcasts a sense national consciousness into the population (Abrahamian 1982, 143).

The nationalist sentiment also took hold in Iran's economic life. Reza Shah seems to have had a predilection for *étatisme* similar to the fascists and national socialists in Europe; yet, it should be remembered that there was no entrepreneurial class that could jump-start Iran's medieval economy. Key industries, in his vision, were to be controlled by the state, a policy that was continued under Mohammad Reza Shah and the Islamic Republic. The government set up state monopolies and industries rather than encouraging private entrepreneurship. Critics have noticed that Reza Shah's economic policies had more to do with boosting national pride than with creating a real economic surplus.

Contemporary claims that Reza Shah opposed the practice of Islam, and that his rule specifically targeted the Muslim clergy, are factually not correct. Hamid Ansari declares, "the domestic policies of Reza Shah centered around three points: 'rough and tough police and military rule,' 'all-inclusive fight against religion and the clergy,' and 'westernization'" (Ansari 1995, 30). Reza Shah's approach to organized religion was in fact very different from Kemal Atatürk's secular iron fist. There is no evidence that suggests that he even considered dealing with the *ulama* like his mentor in Turkey did. Reza Shah's vision of Islam's role within his concept of a modern Iran was actually quite tolerant. It appears that he did not discriminate between clerical and secular opponents to his rule, whom he dealt with equally harshly. Reza Shah's understanding of the connection between state and religion is best understood by recalling the structure of the Safavid state, or even the Sasanian traditions of bonding religion and state tightly

together. Reza Shah believed like Jean-Jacques Rousseau that “whatever breaks up social unity is worthless” (Rousseau and Cress 1987, 223).

Though it is highly unlikely that Reza Shah ever read Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he nevertheless clearly understood that nothing could replace Twelver Shi’ism in Iran.<sup>112</sup> Reza Shah explicitly pointed out Islam’s fundamental role in ensuring national unity. Like Shah Abbas, who was acutely aware of the connection between Shi’ism and political power, Reza Shah saw religion simply as the servant of the state’s interest, and not the other way around. For that reason he encouraged the expansion of the holy city of Qom as a center of religious studies. During his period in power, a system was institutionalized for licensing, certificating, and a formal ranking of religious scholars.

However, Reza Shah did not tolerate clerics who opposed his educational and judicial reforms, which of course poached on the Shi’ite clergy’s preserves. His regime did not shy away from murdering its opponents within the Shi’ite clergy.<sup>113</sup> With regard to the current conflict with the United States, it is important to bear in mind that the

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<sup>112</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau had specifically this to say about Islam and Persia:

Mohammad had very sound opinions. He tied his political system together very well, and so long as the form of his government subsisted under his successors, the caliphs, this government was utterly unified, and for that reason it was good. But as the Arabs became prosperous, lettered, polished, soft and cowardly, they were subjugated by barbarians. Then the division between the two powers began again. Although it is less apparent among the Mohammedans than among the Christians, it is there all the same, especially in the sect of Ali; and there are states, such as Persia, where it never ceases to be felt (Rousseau and Cress 1987, 222).

<sup>113</sup> The most outspoken and influential clerical opponent of Reza Shah was Sayyid Hasan Mudarris. Mudarris represented the same school of liberal clerics that supported the Constitutional Revolution. He was the dominant politician of the Fourth Majlis of 1921. He saw the imminent danger of totalitarianism, and he was one of only five deputies who voted against Reza Khan’s accession to the throne. He continued as a charismatic and fearless critic of the regime until he was imprisoned in 1929 and murdered eight years later in 1937.

formative years of Ruhollah Khomeini (born approximately 1900) coincided with Reza Shah's reign, when the prestige and authority of the Shi'ite *ulama* was substantially diminished.

#### OIL AND THE UNITED STATES

Reza Shah's decision to challenge British oil interests in southern Iran met with mixed results. He first cancelled the whole D'Arcy concession on 26 November 1932, but later he had to backpedal when he was faced with the realities of Iran's inferior bargaining position.<sup>114</sup> The renamed Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) angered Reza Shah and the Iranian public bitterly for a number of reasons. They resented the fact that the Iranian authorities were prevented from insight into the company's shoddy accounting practices. In 1932, the company conspicuously paid only twice as much in royalties to the Iranian state as in 1917 even though production had increased ten times (the Great Depression had taken its toll on the global oil industry as well).

The Iranian government took the complaint to the World Court under the auspices of the League of Nations. As a result, the parties renegotiated the contractual terms and signed a new concession on 29 April 1933. The terms of the new contract was only marginally better than the original D'Arcy concession. This has led some scholars to conclude that Reza Shah was forced to give in (Abrahamian 1982, 144), but the

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<sup>114</sup> Prime Minister Mosaddeq's nationalization of British oil interests in 1953 was a replay of Reza Shah's effort to wrest control of Iran's single most important natural resource from foreign interests. The British stubbornly clung to contractual terms that were outdated, and they engaged in business practices that enraged the public opinion in Iran. Mosaddeq, on the other hand, showed little appreciation for the fact that Iran was just the producer of a raw material, crude oil, and that Iran had no control over profit generating activities "down-stream" in the world market.

agreement was most likely the best Iran could get given its generally weak bargaining position. It must be remembered that the “Seven Sisters” in the 1930s completely ruled the world’s production and sales of petroleum products.<sup>115</sup> The fact that the British felt they “had been pretty well plucked” supports the argument (Yergin 1991, 271).

The Iranian government and public opinion in generally had for a long time resented the British arrogance and the manner by which they operated within their enclaves in southern Iran. The upper management was exclusively reserved for British nationals while Iranians staffed the middle- and low-ranking positions. In Tehran a gnawing perception developed that Khuzistan a *de facto* British colony. The murky accounting practices of AIOC increasingly made Iranians feel that they were being robbed of their rightful property.

Adding to Iranian bitterness was the cost of Reza Shah’s modernization program that had to be paid nearly exclusively by the common taxpayer. The Oil Agreement of 1933 was a painful reminder of the limitations that was imposed on Iran’s freedom of action, which further fueled widespread xenophobic tendencies among the general populace. Shared dislike of foreigners united Iranians behind Reza Shah’s regime, and the British became the obvious targets (Hambly 1985, 220).<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Anthony Sampson coined the term “the Seven Sister” in his groundbreaking book with the same title (Sampson 1975). An oligarchy of seven oil companies—Exxon, Gulf, Texaco, Mobil, Socal, British Petroleum, and Shell—five American, one British company, and one Anglo-Dutch company dominated the world’s oil market from the time the oil industry was born in Pennsylvania and Baku in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. OPEC finally broke the strangle hold in the early 1970s, and captured the position of being able to dictate the price of petroleum products to consumers all over the world. The price of oil is one of only a small number of commodities that is (partly) exempt from the economic laws of gravity since the Saudi royal family controls nearly all of the world’s spare production capacity.

<sup>116</sup> Reza Shah’s annulment of the D’Arcy oil concession must also be seen in context of renewed irredentism on the part of Iran. In 1934-36, Iran revived its claims to Bahrain and full

The United States presented itself to the ministers of the Iranian government as the perfect alternative that could balance the influence of Great Britain and the Soviet Union. The Americans had emerged from World War I stronger and richer than the powers of Europe, but strangely enough with little taste for colonialism. Immediately after Reza Shah's coup in 1921, the Iranian government approached the United States' government. Iranian diplomats in Washington conveyed to the American government Iran's willingness to grant American companies oil concessions in exchange for much-needed American loans. Iran's strategy was to establish a physical American presence in the country that would dissuade Great Britain and the Soviet Union from renewing their imperial design.

Iran's expectations may have been inflated when both France and the United States raised objections to the Anglo-Iranian Agreement of 1919. The two countries feared that Great Britain was about to close the Open Door Policy in Iran. Yet, the United States government had no desire to push the issue any further. In face stiff British opposition and Soviet aversion, the negotiations were terminated in a manner that left Reza Shah extremely bitter. He was again reminded that London and Moscow had the ultimate say in Iranian affairs. What Reza Shah and his ministers failed to come to grips with was that the Americans had no real incentive to intrude into what the British government made perfectly clear was its sole domain. The correlation between Iranian and American interests was simply too weak, and coupled with a growing American

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control over Shat al-Arab. The British, for obvious reasons, showed no inclination to accept Iranian demands, which did not go down well with the Iranian public.

sentiment of isolationism, there was no way the United States could be persuaded to get entangled in Iranian affairs.

The Millspaugh-mission was a meager consolation for Iran's disappointment. The pre-war experience with Morgan Shuster, who had boldly challenged British and Russian exploitation of Iran, had not been forgotten. In 1922, the United States provided a financial advisor, A.C. Millspaugh, who was appointed Administrator-General of Finances. Between 1922 and 1927, Mr. Millspaugh accomplished a great deal in reorganizing Iran's finances. Yet, Reza Shah dismissed him in 1927 because of Mr. Millspaugh's powerlessness in delivering what he most wanted: American oil investments and loans. It must be said, however, that what Reza Shah demanded from Millspaugh was nearly impossible to deliver faced with stiff opposition from the British, Soviet objections, and a lukewarm American government at home. Reza Shah, as a result, turned quite naturally to his spiritual associates in Europe. Iran and Nazi Germany developed extensive political and economic bonds in the 1930s.

#### **IRAN, NAZI GERMANY, AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

Germany was a natural ally for Iran. Iran had developed close ties with Germany during World War I. The Third Majlis that was elected in 1914, and forcefully dissolved by the Russians in 1915, had been deeply nationalistic and pro-German. The remnant of the Third Majlis formed a provisional government in Qom, but was forced to retreat to Kermanshah before going into exile.

Nazi Germany and Iran was a perfect match. Germany was one of the world's leading industrial nations but had no colonial history in the Middle East. Nazi Germany was politically and ideologically a bitter rival of both Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

Iran's oil resources could from a German perspective support its war machinery and Hitler's ultimate quest for world hegemony. Iran offered good business opportunities with low financial risk in a short-term perspective. As a result, Iran and Germany developed extensive trade relations and by the late 1930s Germany accounted for approximately 50% of Iran's foreign trade.

Iran's fate was sealed when Nazi Germany invaded Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Iran had since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century always been the pawn when British and Russian interests coincided on the world scene. In 1941, both Great Britain and the Soviet Union were about to be annihilated by the Third Reich, and there was no way that the two powers could have allowed Reza Shah to continue to challenge their vital interests. The notorious Ribbentrop-Molotov non-aggression pact of 1939 meant that British oil interests in Iran were completely at the mercy of Reza Shah. For the first time since the reign of Fath Ali Shah, the British government was desperately currying favor with the Shah; reflected in a large loan and increased oil royalties. With Germany advancing deep into Soviet territory in the summer of 1941, Great Britain seriously began to fear for the safety of its oil fields in Mesopotamia. Great Britain could under no circumstances allow the oil fields of Khuzistan and Iraq to fall under German influence, particularly when the German U-boat blockade of the British Isles was so successful.

Reza Shah can in hindsight hardly be blamed for putting his bets on Hitler at a time when it took German forces only six weeks to capture Minsk. However, he erred gravely in his intransigent refusal to accommodate any of the British and Russian requests. Prudent assessment of the whole situation could have kept Iran out of the war, but pride and overconfidence appear to have blurred Reza Shah's judgment. British and

Soviet diplomats demanded—first on 19 July and then again on 16 August—that the Iranian government should immediately introduce serious measures to curtail all German activities in Iran. Reza Shah rejected the ultimatum on both occasions by simply reaffirming Iran's neutrality. He also declined a offer to join the Allied camp against Germany. More specifically, he refused to expel the large number of German nationals living in Iran.

Reza Shah—like Iranian politicians during World War I—erred in his assessment of Germany's ability to project power as far as the Persian Gulf. Reza Shah's most serious misjudgment was, however, that he foolishly denied Soviet Union permission to use the Trans-Iranian railway for transporting Allied war-materials. On 25 August 1941 British and Russian forces therefore invaded Iran with the large Iranian army only putting up token resistance. The Anglo-Soviet invasion also happened because Reza Shah had become so unpopular that British and Soviet intelligence feared that pro-Nazi officers might stage a *coup d'état*.

The old pattern of Anglo-Russian rapprochement had once again humiliated Iran's national pride. After the war, it must also have been a source of great national embarrassment to have sacrificed so much for the sake of pleasing a criminal regime like Nazi Germany. Reza Shah's inflexibility in 1941 must also to a large extent have been motivated by the sheer pleasure of defying his two archenemies, which, of course, is no reason to squander your own political career and the future of your country. Reza Shah abdicated on 16 September 1941 in favor of his son, Muhammad Reza. He was then put aboard a British warship and taken to Mauritius. He died in South Africa in 1944.

## **Chapter VII: U.S.-IRANIAN RELATIONS AFTER THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION**

### **1. U.S. Responses to Iranian Threats**

Since World War II, the United States has regarded the security and stability of the Persian Gulf region as a vital national interest. The strategic importance of the Persian Gulf originated from its immense petroleum resources and its strategic location on the southern rim of the Soviet Union. The United States responded to Soviet pressure on Turkey and Iran by forming the 1955 Baghdad Pact, later called the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO<sup>117</sup>. When the British permanently withdrew from the Persian Gulf in 1971, the United States consciously remained the sole Western power in the region. The oil crisis of 1973 led President Nixon to declare affordable access to Persian Gulf oil a vital national interest. Later, Zbigniew Brzezinski believed the Soviets were preparing to exploit the conflicts on what he called “the arc of crisis” between Egypt and Pakistan. The Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 25 December 1979 thus confirmed his dark worldview of a massive Soviet conspiracy in the Gulf region. President Carter therefore, in his State of the Union address in January 1980, declared that any attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf would be considered an attack on the vital interests of the United States. No U.S. president since Jimmy Carter has deviated significantly from this foreign policy line.

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<sup>117</sup> *Pact of Mutual Cooperation Between the Kingdom of Iraq, the Republic of Turkey, the United Kingdom, the Dominion of Pakistan, and the Kingdom of Iran (Baghdad Pact), February 24, 1955.*

Since the declaration of the Carter doctrine, the United States has essentially pursued six separate, but interlinked objectives in its dealings with the Islamic Republic of Iran:

- 1) Deter Iran from threatening the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to the world markets;
- 2) Contain Iran's intention to export its Shi'ite version of radical and militant Islam, and Iran's efforts to destabilize countries friendly to the United States;
- 3) Oppose Iranian irredentism and stop Iran's threatening behavior against the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council<sup>118</sup>;
- 4) Isolate any country, including Iran, who actively obstructs the U.S. sponsored efforts to reach a comprehensive and durable peace in the Middle East;
- 5) Stop Iran's involvement in international terrorism and subversion of internationally recognized governments around the world; and,
- 6) Deny Iran access to sophisticated defense technologies and weaponry, particularly weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them.

The United States believes that the best way to fulfill these objectives is to deny Iran the financial revenues from its petroleum resources and to impose comprehensive economic sanctions.

In addition, the United States wants to hold Iran accountable for its role in the 1983 bombing of U.S. Marines in Beirut, the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996,

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<sup>118</sup> In response to the Iran-Iraq War, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates established the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in March of 1981 to coordinate their economic and military policies.

and other acts of terrorism committed against the United States. The United States wants to bring those responsible to justice; even if that means the Iranian leadership itself. The United States also seeks some form of moral retribution for the 1979-1981 occupation of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the mistreatment of American hostages.

U.S. containment of the Islamic Republic has been more vigilant than the containment of communist Russia during the Cold War. However, there are serious questions about how successful the policy has been. U.S. containment of Iran over the last two decades has been based on several fixed assumptions. First, the United States has come to view its commitment to assure security and stability in the Persian Gulf as one of its global duties, which the United States will have to perform in its current form indefinitely. Second, there are no moderates in the Iranian power structure wielding real power. Therefore, Iran will not in the foreseeable future voluntarily moderate its unacceptable behavior. Third, no real improvement in the U.S.-Iranian relationship will ever take place unless Tehran shows a genuine willingness to reciprocate U.S. initiatives. Fourth, Iran's ability to engage in terrorism, to subvert foreign governments, and to acquire weapons of mass destruction derives from Iran's substantial oil revenues. Fifth, economic sanctions will moderate Iran's behavior and help the United States achieve its stated foreign policy objectives with regard to the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. There is, however, evidence that several of these assumptions are based on flawed premises.

The obvious proof of deficiencies in the U.S. policy toward Iran is the fact that several U.S. foreign policy objectives with regard to the Persian Gulf have not been achieved over the last twenty years. The United States openly acknowledges that it has

not substantially changed Iran's behavior on the issues of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and Tehran's belligerent obstruction of the Arab-Israeli peace process. U.S. foreign policy has clearly not diminished the popular appeal of radical and militant Islam across the Muslim world. The United States has been unable to deprive Iran of its oil revenues, and U.S. economic sanctions seem to have had little effect on the theocracy's overall behavior. Iran has been above all extraordinarily successful in derailing any accommodation between the Israelis and the Palestinians. If anything, Tehran has proven that peace in the Middle East is inextricably tied to U.S.-Iranian relations. Yet, in my view, these shortcomings do not imply that the U.S. policy of containing Iran has been a failure; they simply suggest that there is considerable room for improvement, and that designing and implementing smart policies to advance vital U.S. interests are exceptionally difficult in this part of the world.

**DETER IRAN FROM THREATENING THE FLOW OF OIL FROM THE PERSIAN GULF TO THE  
WORLD MARKETS.**

Over the last two decades, the United States has successfully achieved its objective of assuring the world access to oil from the Persian Gulf at reasonable prices; however, the structural problems that give rise to the region's political instability persist. During the Iran-Iraq War, the United States actively balanced the two antagonists against each other, with the aim of protecting Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. From mid-July 1987 to the end of Iran-Iraq War the following year, the United States protected Kuwaiti ships from Iranian attacks in what was known as the "Tanker War." Though the perceived Soviet design on the region ended with the Cold War in 1989, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait the next year again reminded average Americans that access to Persian Gulf oil

was still at risk. Since then, the United States has committed itself to simultaneously containing the threats from both Iran and Iraq. As a result, the United States established a substantial permanent military presence in the region.

However, only for a very brief period during the Iran-Iraq War did Iran seriously contemplate curtailing the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz. Iran had much more to lose than to gain from interdicting oil shipments. In general, Iran has no interest in stopping the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf. The economic numbers have been consistently clear on this point. At present, petroleum products make up 85% of Iran's total export revenues. More importantly, the legitimacy of the theocracy is increasingly measured against what it can deliver economically. In short, Iran and the United States have a common interest in securing a steady flow of oil to the world markets. The two countries also share an interest in putting limits on the Saudi royal family's ability to manipulate the world's price of oil.

The United States has gradually become the world's self-appointed energy police in the Persian Gulf by assuming full responsibility for protecting the world economy from another oil shock originating from the Middle East. However, the premise that the U.S. is directly dependent on oil supplies from the Persian Gulf is factually incorrect. During 2001, Saudi Arabia's share of total U.S. oil imports was approximately 18%. Saudi Arabia's dominant position in the U.S. market is now being challenged by Canada, Venezuela, and Mexico. Other oil producing regions such as West Africa, Russia, and the Caspian Sea Basin are all eager to capture take market shares. The reason why the Persian Gulf remains so important is because the Saudis are the world's *swing producer*, and they can therefore largely dictate global oil prices. A price hike in one central area

immediately ripples through the system since the world oil market is completely integrated. In America, there has been paradoxically no serious challenge to the financial costs associated with the American military presence in the Gulf. The September 11 attacks showed that the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf has made America the target of local dissident groups.

The most pressing problem with regard to the world's energy security is long-term political stability in Saudi Arabia. A Western myth portrays all Saudis as filthy rich, but the average income has declined by more than 50% in the last ten years. The Saudi standard of living is steadily declining, and Saudi Arabia now ranks only as number 68 of 162 nations on the UNDP development index with a GDP of PPP \$10,815 per capita (United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2001). At the same time, the Saudi population is increasing at an alarming rate of 3.0-3.5% annually. Unemployment is therefore also rapidly on the rise. The Saudi government is playing with fire in managing the forces of radicalized Islam. The royal family has so far bought off or co-opted Islamic militancy, but Saudi Arabia is walking on a tightrope between long-term economic development and the slippery slope of accommodating the popular appeal of radical Islam.

The United States has proven beyond a doubt that it can defend the oil fields of the Middle East against external aggression, but historical lessons, such as the Shah's fall from the peacock throne, have demonstrated that the U.S. is ill-equipped to deal with the political legitimacy of its allies. U.S. efforts to deny Iran revenues from its petroleum industry remind many Iranians of how Great Britain and Russia strangled Iran economically during much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**CONTAIN ISLAMIC MILITANCY AND IRAN'S EFFORTS TO DESTABILIZE COUNTRIES  
FRIENDLY TO THE UNITED STATES.**

Iran has for all practical purposes abandoned its revolutionary goal of creating pro-Iranian Islamic states across the Middle East, although the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Yahya Rahim Safavi, declared in June 1998: “The IRGC has no geographical border. The Islamic revolution is the border of the IRGC” (Byman et al. 2001, 54). U.S. containment has had only limited impact on Iran’s decision to scale back its efforts to export the revolution to the rest of the Muslim world. Iran has instigated and supported Shi’ite revolutionaries in Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Tehran branded Muslim countries with good ties to the United States as *un-Islamic* (or “unjust”), directly challenging the legitimacy of these governments. However, Persian Shi’ite militancy—a hard sell in the Muslim world in the first place—has lost much of its international popularity, both at home and abroad, because the Islamic Revolution has failed to deliver on its promises.

The revolutionary leadership has wasted a lot of political capital on foolish adventurism, fomenting violence and subversion all over the Middle East. The religious leadership wanted to prove its political legitimacy in the initial euphoria after the Islamic revolution when Iran pursued ill-conceived “Islamic” objectives in its foreign policy. However, the motive behind Iran’s efforts to export the revolution abroad was largely the desire to cement the legitimacy of absolute religious rule at home. “Iran’s leadership touted the country’s revolutionary credentials to impress sympathizers abroad and, in turn, used its resulting influence abroad to validate its leadership at home” (Byman et al.

2001, 8). The theocracy also believes it can preserve the intimate relationship between state and religion at home by destabilizing countries friendly to the United States.

Iran's rejection of the *status quo* and deliberate efforts to destabilize other Muslim countries caused the country to become an international pariah. Iran was economically devastated after the Iran-Iraq war, but the country had no friends to turn to for support. Iran could not afford splendid revolutionary isolationism with a rapidly growing population. Since the mid-90s, Iran has, therefore, made a concerted effort to improve political and economic relations with all its neighbors at the expense of revolutionary principles.

Iran's efforts to destabilize U.S. allies in the region have stopped for other domestic reasons that are largely unrelated to America's containment policy. Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of absolute religious rule did not leave much room for political discourse other than political separatism. The Islamic regime pursued ethnic policies after the revolution that have come back to haunt the regime. Perhaps as many as 20,000 Kurds were killed when Khomeini squashed their aspiration for more autonomy (Byman et al. 2001, 15). Khomeini's brutal treatment of the Kurds sent a clear message to the remaining ethnic minorities about the true nature of the Islamic regime. As a result, the loyalty of Iran's ethnic minorities cannot be taken for granted. Iran is ethnically a very diverse country where Farsi is spoken only among 51% of the population.<sup>119</sup> The non-Farsi speaking segments of the population live predominantly in Iran's border areas with

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<sup>119</sup> The rest of Iran's population is composed of Azeri 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7%, Arab 3%, Lur 2%, Baluch 2%, Turkmen 2%, other 1%. Iran is overwhelmingly Muslim—Shi'ite 89% and Sunni 10%—the rest are Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i 1%.

the majority of their ethnic brethren on the opposite side of the state line. These facts constantly raise questions about Iran's social cohesion in the long-term, which seems to cause Tehran permanent anxieties. Iran's political leadership has therefore, understood that instigating social unrest in its own geopolitical neighborhood can easily have a boomerang effect. As a result, Iran's ethnic and religious heterogeneity is now the cause of moderation in its foreign policy.

#### **PREVENT THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC FROM SEEKING REGIONAL HEGEMONY**

U.S. military might has successfully contained Iran's aspirations for regional hegemony. In the wake of the revolution, Iran sought to export its militant version of Islam to the Gulf states and beyond. Iran has stopped threatening its neighbors; however, Iran's history strongly suggests that the regime in Tehran believes it can outlast the United States, and that it can reclaim regional hegemony sometime in the future.

In the twenty years that have passed since the revolution, the combination of Shi'ite militancy and Persian nationalism has driven Iran into confrontation with nearly all its neighbors, and of course with the unipolar superpower, the United States. In addition, Iran has had strained relations with a number of fellow Muslim governments and the European Union.

Since 1996, however, Iran has actively sought rapprochement with the Gulf states, particularly with Saudi Arabia. Establishment of cordial relations with the "illegitimate" GCC regimes is very significant, and it illustrates the increasing importance of economics in the Iranian regime's foreign policy. Though foreign adventurism is still a distinct attribute among Iran's ruling elite, the hard realities of a failed economy have substantially moderated Iran's international behavior. However, Tehran is troubled by the

close ties the Gulf states maintain with United States and their support for the American military presence in the region. Bahrain is now the home base of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, and Iran has made no secret of the fact that the presence of U.S. forces in Bahrain is perceived as a direct threat to its national security.

This study identifies a relatively clear causal chain that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which led to the conflict between Iran and the United States in the 20th century. The causal chain did, of course, not stem solely from Qajar-Iran's irredentism. We need to see Iran's conflict with the United States within the context of an extremely long sequence of great power competition with Iran for political, cultural and spiritual hegemony in the Middle East. It has been Iran's foreign policy objective for 2,500 years to hold regional hegemony in Southwest Asia. Iran's history contains a distinct imperial pattern of state behavior, and in many ways Iran's *raison d'état* has not changed much since ancient times. The last Shah meddled in the politics of the region, and Iran seized several islands claimed by the UAE—Abu Musa and the Tunb Islands—a land grab the clerical regime has legitimized. The imperial pattern was most clearly observed in Iran's war with Iraq after 1982 when young martyrs were led to believe that they were marching on Jerusalem. The big question remains whether Iran has permanently renounced irredentism.

Many observers fail to see the continuity in Iran's imperial history. The Islamic Republic desperately wants to be recognized as the preeminent regional power in accordance with the tenet of Iranian nationalism. Iranians across the board believe that Iran's historical significance and its self-declared cultural superiority vis-à-vis its neighbors warrant a specific role for the country throughout the Middle East, a belief that

is, of course, not shared by Iran's neighbors. This dissertation argues that the root cause of the U.S.-Iranian conflict was the clash between the legacy of Iran's great imperial past and the global power assumed by the United States after the World War II. A theoretical framework that holds Iran as an intrinsic hegemonic power in the Middle East implies that the conflict with the U.S. was inescapable as the United States gradually assumed regional supremacy in the Persian Gulf after World War II. Today, there is very little evidence that suggests that Iran will indefinitely accept the massive U.S. regional military presence. As a result, it is likely that in the future, Iran will pursue policies that one day can enable the country to expel the United States from the Persian Gulf region.

Recognition by the international community is crucial to the Iran's national self-esteem. Perso-Islamic nationalism is primarily defined by status and standing in the international system, and the vehicles have traditionally been territorial possessions. However, and at least for now, the ruling clergy adheres to the Islamic principles that moral authority matters more than global political power. The Islamic Republic has not explicitly made territorial claims to areas that one time or another were ruled by the Persian empire: Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Anatolia, Iraq or the Gulf states. It simply seems that Iran wants the rest of the world to pay attention to what it says, and to respect its wishes and interests. Moreover, Iran's nationalism is, to a large extent, fueled by historical grievances caused by foreign interventions, colonial manipulation, and exploitation by the world's great powers. As a result, Shi'ite Iran defines national self-determination and self-reliance to be free from Western cultural influences. In conclusion, Iran's desire for international standing and status will continue

to define its foreign policy and affect relations with the United States in the foreseeable future.

Yet, Iranian nationalism is not entirely expansionistic. Some observers see the more secular strands of Iranian nationalism as, “a source of prudence as well as adventurism” (Byman et al. 2001, 9-10). This segment of Iranian nationalism regards political Islam as an over-extension of Iran’s resources and detrimental to the country’s overall interests. Proponents argue that unlimited ideological commitments in areas of only marginal or indirect importance are too costly. They reject the dogmas of the radical clergy that link Iran’s national interests directly to the world’s Muslim community. Consequently, this group calls for moderation, pragmatism, and prudence in the conduct of Iran’s foreign policy.

#### **IRAN’ S OPPOSITION TO U.S. SPONSORED PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.**

Tehran categorically refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the state of Israel and its right to exist within the pre-1967 borders. The United States blames Iran for actively sabotaging every effort America is undertaking to broker peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, and between Israel and Syria. U.S. containment of Iran has had minimal effect on Iran’s intense opposition to the Middle East Peace Process. Though President Khatami has said that it is up to the Palestinians to decide, Tehran has made it clear through practical politics that a sustainable Arab-Israeli peace agreement needs to look beyond the front-line states of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Iran has virtually assumed veto powers in the conflict. A recent report from the Atlantic Council of the United States concludes that the overall U.S. assessment of Iran’s behavior “has been judged mainly on the basis of its opposition to the peace process and its support for

terrorist groups involved in the conflict against Israel” (Atlantic Council of the United States 2001, 4). Debating the possibility of dialog with the United States is no longer taboo within the most influential power circles in Iran. But even though only a few die-hard revolutionaries sincerely believe in wild Zionist conspiracy theories, continued hostility toward Israel remains a non-negotiable policy as integral part of Ayatollah Khomeini’s towering legacy. Iran’s uncompromising rejection of any accommodation between the Arabs and Israelis stands out as the exception to a general trend toward moderation and pragmatism in its foreign policy.

Iran’s objection to the Middle East peace and the existence of Israel is simple a way for Tehran to demonstrate Iranian power. There are, however, more subtle reasons for why Tehran pursues its uncompromising, but seemingly aimless policy toward the United States and Israel. First, the regime’s commitment to the revolutionary legacy is measured by its rejection of both the United States and Israel. There is a clear linkage between Iran’s traumatic experience with Anglo-Russian colonialism and what Iran perceives as American imperialism. Historically, the creation of the state of Israel was to a considerable degree orchestrated by Great Britain and the United States. In official Iranian propaganda, Israel is therefore often portrayed as an extension of Western colonialism. Ayatollah Khomeini famously declared that he would not allow Iran to be the slave of Great Britain one day and America and Israel the next. Thus, the legitimacy of the theocracy is heavily invested in denying Israel the right to exist.

Second, the Supreme Leader’s anti-Israel reputation is crucial for maintaining his domestic power base. Opposition to the U.S. sponsored Middle East peace process is one of the few things that unites Iranians across the political spectrum. Yet, the utility of

Iran's exceptionally hard-line approach to Israel, and consequently its conflict with the United States, are not shared throughout the elite. The utility of the United States as an enemy, the need, as it were, for a Great Satan, has diminished within Iran.

Third, Iran's involvement in the Palestinian conflict is also a question of what comes first: the chicken or the egg? Iran has made perceived threats from Israel the top issue on its national security agenda. However, Iran has no material interest in Israel/Palestine, and Israel has no genuine designs on Iran. Tehran consistently exaggerates the threat Israel poses to its security. No debate is allowed around the scenario that the state of Israel is here to stay. Iran's unconditional support for the Palestinian cause is particularly odd since many Palestinians are overtly hostile to Iranian Shi'ism and its idiosyncratic leadership. The bonds between Tehran and the major Palestinian organizations opposing Israel are halfhearted at best. The Palestinians harbor few illusions about the sincerity of Iran's commitment, and they ultimately could not care less about Iran's agenda if and when they settle their scores with the Israelis. In conclusion, Iran seems to have deliberately confused ideological threats with national interests.

Fourth, Iran believes it can enhance its standing and credibility in the Muslim world as the only "true" champion of the Palestinian political cause. Iran desperately desires the Muslim leadership, and sees its inflexible rejection of any compromise as a means to garner support among Muslims worldwide beyond its narrowly defined Twelver Shi'ite community. In fact, Iran's fervently rejectionist position on the Palestinian question has earned the country a certain reputation among militant Sunnis. However, the credentials have come at a very high price. Many influential Iranians have begun to ask

why Iran should pay the price of being an international pariah? Why should Iran suffer under American sanctions for the sake of a lukewarm client who actually wants to find some sort of diplomatic settlement to a conflict that has little to do with Iran's security? Thus, the Iranian leadership is increasingly subject to internal pressure of not getting too involved in the Arab-Israeli struggle.

#### **IRAN'S INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM AND SUBVERSION OF INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED GOVERNMENTS**

According to the U.S. State Department, Iran's involvement in terrorism continues unabated. Since 1987, the United States has repeatedly ranked Iran the most active sponsor of international terrorism.<sup>120</sup> Iran strongly believes as a sovereign nation that it has the legitimate right to oppose Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon and the West Bank. President Khatami takes a position diametrically opposite of the U.S. State Department: "Supporting peoples who fight for the liberation of their land is not, in my opinion, supporting terrorism. It is, in fact, supporting those who are engaged in combating state terrorism" (CNN 1998). Iran does not consider groups such as Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-

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<sup>120</sup> "Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism in 2000. Its Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) continued to be involved in the planning and the execution of terrorist acts and continued to support a variety of groups that use terrorism to pursue their goals. Iran's involvement in terrorist-related activities remained focused on support for groups opposed to Israel and peace between Israel and its neighbors. Statements by Iran's leaders demonstrated Iran's unrelenting hostility to Israel. Supreme Leader Khamenei continued to refer to Israel as a 'cancerous tumor' that must be removed; President Khatami, labeling Israel an 'illegal entity,' called for sanctions against Israel during the intifadah; and Expediency Council Secretary Rezai said, 'Iran will continue its campaign against Zionism until Israel is completely eradicated.' Iran has long provided Lebanese Hizballah and the Palestinian rejectionist groups—notably HAMAS, the Palestine Islamic Jihad, and Ahmad Jibril's PFLP-GC—with varying amounts of funding, safehaven, training, and weapons" (U.S. Department of State 2001).

General Command (PFLP-GC), or Lebanese Hezbollah as terrorist organizations.<sup>121</sup> Terrorism for Iran is simply the cheap way to pursue political, cultural, and spiritual hegemony in the Middle East.

Still, Iran has beyond any reasonable doubt committed or sponsored criminal acts in a number of countries, which a vast majority of the international community believes constitute international terrorism. Iran's leadership has been directly linked to terrorist operations in Europe and in the Middle East. In 1995, Norway withdrew its ambassador from Tehran in protest over Iran's involvement in the failed assassination attempt of the Norwegian publisher William Nygaard in October of 1993, who had previously published Salman Rushdie's book: *The Satanic Verses*. In 1997, a German court ruled that a committee of Iran's highest government leaders—Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei, President Rafsanjani, and Intelligence and Foreign Ministers, among others—had authorized the killings of four Kurdish activists at the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin in 1992.

On 21 June 2001, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft announced that 14 people had been indicted in connection with the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers military barracks in Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 U.S. servicemen. Mr. Ashcroft said, "the indictment explains that elements of the Iranian government inspired, supported and supervised members of Saudi Hezbollah. In particular, the indictment alleges that the charged defendants reported their surveillance activities to Iranian officials and were supported and directed in those activities by Iranian officials" (CNN 2001). Iran

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<sup>121</sup> Paradoxically, financial support for these organizations coming from the Arab Gulf states did not draw much U.S. criticism before the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001.

continues categorically to deny any involvement in international terrorism. It seems that the Iranian leadership believes it can continue to deny responsibility by working through proxies who commit the actual terrorist attacks.

Despite persistent assurances from President Khatami, Iran actively supports Palestinian terrorist groups for both opportunistic and ideological reasons.<sup>122</sup> There is overwhelming evidence that Iran is heavily behind the most extreme Palestinian organizations. It is simply not believable that Iranian authorities had nothing to do with the freighter *Karin-A* that was interdicted by the Israeli navy carrying weapons to the Palestinian authorities. It seems clear that President Khatami must have a relatively good understanding of what is going on. Many have argued that the noticeable chaos that characterizes Iran's institutions indicates that hard-line elements can act without oversight. Observations, however, suggest that because of the emphasis being placed on consensus-building at all levels of the decision-making process within the Iranian administration, few actors dare undertake risky operations without at least tacit approval of the upper echelon. "Rogue elements," like the security officials that killed a number of intellectuals in the 1990s, are generally not likely to operate without oversight (Byman et al. 2001, 22). President Khatami is, therefore, probably quite aware of the shady activities; he might not exercise full control over groups under the IRGC umbrella, but he is certainly in the position to influence the overall strategy.

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<sup>122</sup> When pressed by Christiane Amanpour on Iran's role in acts of international terrorism, President Khatami responded angrily: "They [United States] first level unfair and unsubstantiated accusations against you. And when they propose to hold talks, they say that they want to have a dialogue with you about these very unfounded accusations. They are in fact trying to put the other side on trial" (CNN 1998).

**DENY IRAN ACCESS TO SOPHISTICATED CONVENTIONAL ARMAMENT AND WEAPONS  
OF MASS DESTRUCTION.**

The United States has been unable to deter Iran from seeking weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Anthony Cordesman points out; "U.S. pressure and sanctions have confronted Iran with very serious problems in importing arms and dual-use technology for its weapons of mass destruction. Iran's military build-up and arms imports are a fraction of the level Iran planned in the early 1990s, and Iran is experiencing continuing problems in obtaining technology and material for biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons" (Council on Foreign Relations 1999, 20). Still, acquisition of the technology, materials, and assistance necessary to develop nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and long-range missiles capability to deliver them continues despite U.S. sanctions.

Iran has already developed significant chemical and biological weapons capabilities (Cordesman and Hashim 1997, 291-295). Iran has for a long time been working on developing its own nuclear infrastructure in order to design and produce nuclear weapons. This is a strategic goal shared widely within Iran's ruling establishment (Byman et al. 2001, 94-97). Almost everybody among the ruling elite sees the acquisition of state-of-the-art long-range conventional missiles as critical to Iran's national security. Many of the same reasons support the proposition that Iran should arm the missiles with WMD capabilities.

Why is Iran committed to WMD and long-range missiles? Iran seeks these capabilities for mainly three reasons. First, Iran is located within an extremely hostile

geopolitical environment, which justifies the decision to explore the nuclear option.<sup>123</sup> Iraq with Saddam Hussein in power cannot be trusted under any circumstances. Centuries of history suggest that even a post-Saddam Iraqi regime may not be friendly to Iran. Both Pakistan and India are by now declared nuclear powers, and Turkey has indirect access to atomic weapons through its membership in NATO. Russia to the north is, of course, a major nuclear threat. Under these circumstances, it would be unwise for Iran not to make the necessary preparations to give Iran the option to go nuclear on relatively short notice. There are few signs, however, that Iran has made nuclear weapons an urgent short-term priority. Outright non-compliance with the international treaties that Iran has ratified would inevitably accelerate the regional arms race, which of course would be detrimental to Iran's national security. Creating a region-wide regime to regulate weapons of mass destruction could therefore create an incentive for Iran to scrap its nuclear program.<sup>124</sup>

Second, Iran's great power ambitions are today conspicuously out of touch with both military and economic realities, which makes compliance with U.S. demands particularly difficult. Weapons of mass destruction, and above nuclear capabilities, guarantee political standing, particularly among countries in the Muslim world. The Iranian leadership is emotionally obsessed with being perceived as an equal player in its ongoing standoff with the United States. Weapons of mass destruction are therefore

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<sup>123</sup> Martin Indyk: "Clearly, our concern about Iranian WMD and missile development must be considered in a regional context, in which states of the region—including Iran—need to feel secure" (Katzman 2001, 35).

<sup>124</sup> Still, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) can only inspect declared nuclear facilities. Lessons from the United Nations weapons inspection program in Iraq after the Gulf War show the extent to which it is possible to hide extensive WMD programs from non-intrusive inspections.

cheap and quick equalizers that narrow the military gap between weak states such as Iran (and Iraq) and the technologically superior military hardware of the United States and Israel.

Third, the very survival of the theocratic regime rests on maintaining the image of the United States as a powerful external enemy that stands in the way of Iran's historical aspirations. Recent history informs the leadership in Tehran that if you want to stand up to the world's sole superpower, you better have weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. has rightly been criticized for using only sticks, and very few carrots, in convincing Iran to change its behavior on WMD. At the same time, it is difficult to see what will make Iran's Islamic militancy compromise its stands on several non-negotiable issues. In conclusion, Iran has all the necessary incentives to become a full-fledged nuclear power.

## **2. Containment of Iran by Different U.S. Administrations**

### **JIMMY CARTER AND THE HOSTAGE CRISIS**

The Iranian Hostage Crisis is one of the single most humiliating events in U.S. diplomatic history. The Shah's admission to the United States for medical treatment in September of 1979 is often cited as the precursor for the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran. This is most likely a false impression. On 1 November 1979, Zbigniew Brzezinski met in Algiers with leaders of the first revolutionary government, Prime Minister Bazargan and Foreign Minister Yazdi, to work out some sort of modus vivendi. Brzezinski had during the uprising been a vocal supporter of the Shah and had argued for a military solution to Iran's widespread civil unrest. The meeting was shown

on Iranian television. Historical memories of how Russia and Great Britain silenced Iran's Constitutional Revolution in 1911-12 apparently inspired some revolutionary students' decision to occupy the American embassy compound on 4 November. The students, calling themselves *Khat e-Imam* (followers of the Imam) demanded that the Shah be handed over to the revolutionary government in exchange for the American hostages.<sup>125</sup> When Ayatollah Khomeini jumped on the bandwagon, Mehdi Bazargan resigned as prime minister, and with him any Iranian desire for moderation.

President Carter's first reaction to Iran's state-sponsored take-over of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran was to impose limited economic sanctions, which clearly did not persuade Khomeini to release the American hostages. Carter issued Proclamation 4702 of 12 November, which banned the import of Iranian oil into the United States, and on 14 November he issued Executive Order 12170 invoking for the first time the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) blocking all Iranian government property within the reach of U.S. jurisdiction. When President Carter finally decided to sever diplomatic relations with Iran on 7 April 1980, he also set up a limited economic embargo against Iran. On 24 April 1980, the United States launched its infamous failed rescue mission of the hostages. The same year, Iraq invaded Iran and the Shah died from cancer; events that made the Khomeini government more receptive to resolving the

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<sup>125</sup> In an interview with Abbas Abdi—one of the main leaders of the occupation of the American embassy—on 5 September 2000, Mr. Abdi said that the hostage crisis flowed from the built-up historical grievances among Iranians because of nearly two centuries of foreign domination. On the question why the students had directed their anger nearly exclusively at the United States and not against Great Britain or the Soviet Union, who both had caused Iranians much more pain than the United States, Abbas Abdi answered that this was because the United States was the world's leading hegemon at the time. Abbas Abdi categorically denied that Khomeini had ordered the embassy take-over, but that the initial actions were completely a student enterprise.

hostage crisis. After the United States signed the Algiers Accords with Iran on 19 January 1981, President Carter lifted nearly all economic sanctions against Iran with the exception of Executive Order 12170 blocking Iranian government property. The Islamic government rewarded Carter by delaying the release of the remaining hostages to the day of President Reagan's inauguration.

#### **THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION: 1981-1988**

During the 1980s, the United States executed the Persian Gulf security doctrines previously proclaimed by Presidents Nixon and Carter. Yet, the effectiveness of the Reagan administration's policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran was uneven at best. The administration's attempt to kill three birds with one stone—the release of American hostages in Lebanon, improved relations with Khomeini's regime, and the defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua—back-fired to the extent that Ronald Reagan was nearly forced out of office. “The-arms-for-hostages” deal conveyed to the rest of the world that the American administration, despite Reagan's principled rhetoric, was in fact “soft on terrorism.” When Reagan left office in 1988, the Lebanese Hezbollah, a Shi'ite militia armed and financed by Syria and Iran, had killed a large number of American citizens and its power was clearly on the rise. In 2000, the Hezbollah forced Israel to withdraw unilaterally from Lebanon, and as a partial result, Iran's leverage over the entire Middle East conflict is now stronger than ever.

After three years in office, the Reagan administration finally branded Iran a terrorist state and introduced an arms embargo. On 20 January 1984, Secretary of State George Shultz officially put Iran on the list of states sponsoring international terrorism. In

1987, a White Paper from the U.S. State Department ranked Iran the leading state supporter of terrorism in the world. The Reagan administration also launched a policy named Operation Staunch with the aim of denying both belligerents in the Iran-Iraq War, but especially Iran, access to arms. The U.S. actively pressured other countries to do the same. In August of 1986, the administration specifically added a new section to the Arms Export Control Act, which prohibited export of U.S. arms to countries that America had designated sponsors of international terrorism. The Iran-Contras scandal was therefore extremely damaging, not only to the integrity of civil-military relations in the United States, but also to the credibility of U.S. multilateral diplomacy and America's fight against state-sponsored terrorism.

During the Ronald Reagan's two terms in office, U.S. armed forces engaged Iranian units in combat on several occasions. U.S. forces in Lebanon exchanged fire with Iranian volunteers in 1983. From July 1987, the U.S. Navy began escorting Kuwaiti oil tankers out of the Persian Gulf in order to protect them against Iranian attacks. Iran had repeatedly threatened to lay mines in the Strait of Hormuz, disregarding the fact that Iran itself depended heavily on the sea-lanes for its own vital oil exports. By late 1987, a multi-lateral Western naval force protected the flow of oil from the Gulf. The United States also launched offensive operations against Iranian vessels and oil installations in reprisal for Iranian attacks on U.S.-flagged Kuwaiti oil tankers. In the fog-of-war during the last stage of the military confrontation between the United States and Iran, the USS Vincennes' tragically shot down a civilian Iranian A300 Airbus killing all 290 people on board.

The Reagan administration reintroduced economic sanctions to punish Iran for its involvement in terrorism against U.S. targets in Lebanon and the military skirmishes with the United States in the Persian Gulf. President Reagan's Executive Order 12613 of 29 October 1987 prohibited import of all Iranian goods and services into the United States, but the ban exempted Iranian oil products refined in third countries. In 1985, legislation was introduced that mandated withholding of U.S. funding of international organizations proportional to the financial assistance these organizations had provided to Iran. In 1988, U.S. executive directors of multilateral financial institutions were obliged to vote against loans to Iran or any other bilateral foreign assistance to Terrorism List countries. The Reagan administration, however, stopped short of extraterritorial legislation.

#### **GEORGE BUSH SR.: 1989-1992**

When George Bush Sr. took up office in 1989, Iran had just come out of the disastrous war with Iraq. The Bush administration's interaction with the Islamic Republic was therefore generally quite uneventful. In his inaugural address, George Bush reminded the nation, "there are today Americans who are held against their will in foreign lands, and Americans who are unaccounted for." He indirectly promised Tehran that Iranian assistance leading to the release of American hostages in Lebanon would "be long remembered," and Bush in general assured that "good will begets good will. Good faith can be a spiral that endlessly moves on" (Avalon Project at the Yale Law School). The Islamic Republic, therefore, prudently kept a very low profile when Bush' alliance defeated Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait, but it is still unclear how much the regime actually had to do with the return of Americans taken hostage from Lebanon.

The show of good will seems to have been forgotten when the Bush administration introduced additional legislation that targeted Iran. The administration signed into law the Iran-Iraq Arms Non-Proliferation Act on 23 October 1992. The act prohibited the export of missile technology, U.S. government or commercial arms sales, sales of dual-use items, and sales of nuclear material, equipment, or technology to either Iran or Iraq. This legislation was the direct forerunner to the Clinton administration's "Dual Containment" strategy that was introduced just months later. The Iran-Iraq Arms Non-Proliferation Act was the precursor to the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act that was enacted in 1996. The law leveled secondary sanctions against foreign countries that supplied either Iran or Iraq with the prohibited items. The Bush government in reality pioneered the imposition of extraterritorial American laws that stirred up so much diplomatic trouble for the Clinton administration.

#### **THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND DUAL CONTAINMENT: 1993- 2000**

There is a considerable degree of continuity in the U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf region. Shortly after the Clinton moved into the White House, the new administration introduced a seemingly fresh policy for the Middle East. Dual Containment, however, was the natural continuation of several U.S. administrations' approach to dealing with revolutionary Iran. The Clinton administration's Dual Containment policy simply follows in the footsteps of previous American administration. Martin Indyk first articulated the term Dual Containment in a speech he delivered on 15 May 1993 in his capacity of National Security Council Senior Director.

The overriding objective was a foreign policy that could yield comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It was argued that in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War a

severely weakened Iraq could no longer be thought of as a counterweight to Iran. Thus, the United States could no longer follow a policy of tilting toward Iraq or toward Iran depending on the predominance of either country. Instead, both countries had to be contained simultaneously. Dual Containment was clearly modeled on U.S. containment of the Soviet Union. Like George Kennan, the policy spoke of increasing the strains under which Iran must operate, and thereby generate “the break-up or gradual mellowing” of the power of revolutionary Iran. The central assumption was that combined economic, military, diplomatic pressure would convince the religious leadership in Iran to at least moderate its international behavior, and may be to even open itself up to greater democracy at home.

In Martin Indyk’s analysis, the Dual Containment strategy was composed of several critical elements. He summarized the objectives as follows: “A short-hand way of encapsulating the Clinton administration strategy is thus: ‘dual containment’ of Iran and Iraq in the east; promotion of Arab-Israeli peace in the west; backed by energetic efforts to stem the spread of weapons of mass destruction and promote a vision of a more democratic and prosperous region for all the corners of the Middle East” (Katzman 2001, 10). Indyk established that many of America’s vital interests in the region had not changed over the years such as reasonably priced oil, the security of Israel, and peace between Arabs and Israelis. Yet, Indyk warned that the United States could no longer deal with the region in compartments since proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, ballistic missiles to deliver them, and religious extremism to justify their use, were all components of the same equation. Indyk also warned his audience about the reality of

the post-Cold War era where the United States had “reduced military and economic means to influence events.”

Indyk argued strongly that containing the threats emanating in Iran and the U.S. capacity to promote peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors were intrinsically linked to the U.S. ability to contain both Iran and Iraq. He went on to say that containing the threat from Iran was more difficult because of its dangerous combination of intentions and capabilities. In Indyk’s analysis, Iran was challenging the United States and the international community on five separate fronts: 1) the foremost state sponsor of terrorism and assassination; 2) Iran’s concerted effort to undermine peace between Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab states; 3) subversion of friendly governments across the globe; 4) seeking regional hegemony in the Persian Gulf; and 5) Iran’s efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction capability. Martin Indyk acknowledged explicitly that successful containment of Iran would require multilateral efforts because what is needed to build up Iran’s military power is available outside the United States. Moreover, he admitted that Iran’s hostile intentions far outstripped its capabilities; but, “if we fail in our efforts to modify Iranian behavior, five years from now Iran will be much more capable of posing a real threat to Israel, to the Arab world and to Western interests in the Middle East” (Katzman 2001, 12). Nearly ten years later, we can safely conclude that Indyk’s doomsday prophecy did not come through.

At the end of Clinton’s first term in office, the U.S. policies toward Iran were paradoxically more uncompromising than at any time since the revolution despite the apparent mellowing of the Shi’ite regime. This happened because of a confluence of several independent factors. First, the Republicans took over both the House and Senate

in 1994, and under Newt Gingrich's leadership they were primed to make their mark on U.S. foreign policy. Second, renewed efforts to derail the Middle East peace process and bombings in Israel by members of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) again linked Iran to international terrorism. Third, in 1995-96 a series of apparent terrorist attacks took place on American soil: the destruction of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, the inexplicable downing of TWA flight 800 off Long Island, and the bombing at the summer Olympics in Atlanta. During this period, the U.S. media conveyed a message to the general public that Iranian and Syrian sponsored terrorism was about to reach America's own shores. U.S. concerns were dramatically heightened when the Russian government in February of 1995 announced that it had signed a contract for completion of the civilian nuclear power reactor in Bushehr.<sup>126</sup> This political climate was a gift from heaven to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which successfully lobbied its case on Capitol Hill.

AIPAC launched an energetic congressional lobbying campaign. The organization published a detailed report advocating a policy of comprehensive U.S. economic sanctions against Iran. The plan argued for a secondary boycott of foreign companies trading with Iran. The Republican Senator Alphonse D'Amato of New York then introduced the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Act on 25 January 1995 followed by another proposal, the Iran Foreign Sanctions Act, 27 March 1995. The Clinton

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<sup>126</sup> In 1974, the German engineering contractor Siemens began construction of two 1,200-1,300 megawatt electric pressurized water nuclear reactors near Bushehr. The Bushehr I reactor was 85% complete and the Bushehr II reactor was partially complete prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and was due to be completed in 1981 as pressure testing of the containment for the first unit had been completed. After the Shah's fall construction of both reactors were halted. Ayatollah Khomeini declared the project "anti-Islamic," and the government of Mehdi Bazargan soon abandoned the whole project all together.

administration countered the initiative—partly to intercept some of the more extreme aspects of D’Amato’s proposal—by issuing the Executive Order 12957 on 15 March 1995 banning U.S. assistance to petroleum exploration in Iran, and Executive Order 12959 on 6 May 1995 introducing an embargo on trade and investment.

American domestic politics, therefore, played a decisive role in the hardening of U.S. foreign policy toward Iran from early 1995. Notwithstanding, the Iranians had done extremely little to improve their international image and their pariah-behavior on issues central to the U.S. continued unabated. Bill Clinton, like the shrewd politician that he always was, decided to preempt the imminent Republican attack in Congress. “With an eye on domestic politics at the World Jewish Congress,” he declared that he intended to set up a complete economic embargo against Iran (Council on Foreign Relations 1999, 5). Clinton’s move accomplished its intended domestic objectives at the price of improved relations with Tehran.

The Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), passed by Congress in 1996, was thus merely a rubber-stamping of the political horse-trading that had been taking place between Democrats and Republicans throughout the previous two years. The Iran and Libya Sanctions Act was quite unprecedented in its extraterritorial reach. In theory, the bill applies equally to U.S. and foreign companies that invested more than \$20 million per year in the Iranian petroleum sector. Needless to say, the sanction act created uproar in Europe, Japan, and even in friendly Canada. The bill, of course, infuriated Iranians who immediately saw the resemblance between the American embargo and the economic strangling of Persia by Great Britain and Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

When Mohammad Khatami was elected by a landslide victory in May of 1997, U.S. policy toward Iran did not change immediately because President Clinton's hands were tied. In fact, new measures were put in place to further strengthen the economic embargo. President Clinton issued Executive Order 13059 on 19 August 1997 to tighten the re-export prohibitions of U.S. goods. In 1998, however, several efforts were made to bring about a *détente* in the tense relations between the two countries such as waiving the application of ILSA sanctions and modest sanctions liberalization. But late in the second Clinton administration, renewed Iranian violations of basic human rights convinced the American government that significant changes would not take place under President Khatami.

#### **GEORGE W. BUSH AND SEPTEMBER 11, 2002**

U.S-Iranian relations during George W. Bush' ongoing tenure changed dramatically for obvious reasons in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. Before the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Bush administration had somewhat reluctantly administered the well-established Iranian policy line it had inherited from previous administrations. The U.S. oil industry had made no secret of its opposition to unilateral U.S. economic sanctions, which prevent American companies from competing with British, French, Dutch, and Italian oil companies who are now being welcomed back to Iran. However, the Bush administration saw no political benefit in rocking the boat despite its close ties to the U.S. oil industry. George W. Bush, therefore, signed an extension of the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act on 8 August 2001 for another five years; but, the president called for call for frequent review of sanctions to assess their "effectiveness and continued suitability."

For a while, many insiders believed that George W. Bush and his team would not renew the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 when it expired on 5 August 2001, but developments in the Middle East made that impossible. Circumstances began to change when the Palestinians launched their second *intifada* (uprising) in late September 2000. In the violence that ensued, the Palestinian authorities under Yasser Arafat's command allowed terrorist groups to become more active again, such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. In Tehran, Supreme Leader Khamenei encouraged Palestinians to follow the example of Hezbollah in Lebanon by ending the occupation of all Palestinian territories. Khamenei's message, and similar statements coming out of Iran, sent chills down the spine of Jewish organizations in the United States. When AIPAC held its annual congress in March 2001, renewal of ILSA for another five-year period was on the top of the agenda. AIPAC consequently organized an energetic lobbying campaign on the Hill. The drive for five-year ILSA renewal became in fact so popular that the congressional bipartisan sponsorship of the legislation by Senators Schumer and Gordon Smith collected enough support to override a potential veto by President Bush. The Bush administration then proposed a limited two-year extension of ILSA, but was forced to back down again faced with overwhelming opposition in both houses of Congress.

The infamous date of 11 September 2001 marked a sea of change in U.S-Iranian relations. Everything was transformed by the terrorist attacks. There was no way the administration could not directly confront Iran's support of organizations such as the Hezbollah, Hamas, or Islamic Jihad, which have all publicly declared their intention to attack American targets everywhere. After 11 September, no American administration can sit still and wait till these organizations will eventually make good on their promises.

The Bush administration is simply obliged to preempt any possible new terrorist attack. Since evidence has linked Iran to the death of American servicemen in the past, and since Iran has not substantially changed its behavior on terrorism, renewed confrontation between Washington and Tehran is basically unavoidable. However, naming Iran the middle hub on the “axis of evil” does not further American interests.

### **3. The *Détente* that Never Took Place**

#### **KHATAMI'S “DIALOG BETWEEN CIVILIZATION”**

In January of 1998, Mohammad Khatami, then the newly elected president of Iran, proposed in an interview with CNN that a dialog between civilizations serves to ease tension between Iran and the United States. He argued that Iran and the United States are nations founded on same the pillars; “religiosity, liberty, and freedom.” Consequently, a dialog between the two nations was possible. What stood in the way of a fruitful dialog, according to Mr. Khatami, was the legacy of American policies toward Iran since the World War II. He requested an apology from the United States for the flawed policies of domination and for the damage done to deprived and oppressed nations such as Iran. In his view, an unofficial dialog based on mutual respect and dignity would bring down a wall of mutual mistrust before government-to-government talks could take place. Still, Khatami’s statements were for the most part old news. What caught the Clinton administration’s attention, however, was the fact that President Khatami had categorically denounced any form of killing of innocent civilians, regretted the Hostage Crisis, and firmly denied that Iran was seeking nuclear weapons.

## **ALBRIGHT'S "ROADMAP" TO NORMALIZATION**

With Khatami's initiative fresh in mind, Secretary of State Madeline Albright gave a speech to the Asia Society on 17 June 1998 where she proposed a "roadmap" for normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran. The "roadmap speech" was significant because Albright acknowledged the legitimacy of Iran's historical grievances caused by what she called "the exigencies of the Cold War" (Katzman 2001). Albright's speech, nevertheless, called for an official dialogue that would address Iran's "vitriolic and violent" obstruction of the Middle East peace process among other things. She reminded Iran that the United States would under no circumstances compromise on terrorism, human rights violations, long-range missiles, and nuclear weapons. With respect to terrorism, Albright nonetheless made a distinction between the elected civilian government of Iran and organizations such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS). The conciliatory part of Albright's speech offered some symbolic gestures like easing of travel restrictions. She finally asked the Islamic Republic to consider parallel steps. From an Iranian perspective, however, Secretary Albright's initiative promised very little and demanded too much.

Over the next two years, the United States unilaterally pursued Secretary Albright's "roadmap" by introducing very modest sanction liberalizations. In April 1999, the President Clinton approved modification of existing sanctions regulations to allow Iran to import U.S. food and medicine. Just about a year later, in March 2000, the Clinton administration lifted the ban on import of Iranian carpets and certain foodstuffs such as caviar and pistachio nuts. Sanction liberalization was meant to reward the moderate

factions' victory in parliamentary elections the previous month. Policy makers in Washington expected that Iran would reciprocate the U.S. gestures in some sort or fashion, but a positive response was not forthcoming. The violent student demonstration in July of 1999 signaled the start of the conservative crack down on the reform agenda that is still ongoing.

#### **IRAN'S REFUSAL TO ENGAGE GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT TALKS**

The Iranian Government's response to various U.S. propositions has been predictably dogmatic and unimaginative, insisting that the United States has to make certain unilateral concessions before any official dialogue can take place. Iran responded formally to Secretary Albright's proposal when Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazzi gave a speech, also at the Asia Society. Kharazzi, however, generally ignored Albright's concept of developing a common "roadmap" to normal relations. Later, Iran's UN ambassador indicated that Iran was prepared to reciprocate initiatives with "proportionate and positive measures in return" (Atlantic Council of the United States 2001, 3). But positive Iranian "measures" are nowhere to be seen. Iran has stubbornly stuck to its initial position that the country will not engage in government-to-government talks with the United States so long as the major U.S. sanctions remain in place. Iranian officials have repeatedly stated that before an official dialogue can take place, there must be "parity and mutual respect" between the two parties. Tehran considers the American embargo a sign of hostility—inconsistent with good intentions—and they must subsequently be removed before negotiations can take place.

Iran was again hardening its stand toward the United States during 2000. Many analysts, however, were of the opinion that the change was mainly for domestic consumption as the factional struggle within Iran intensified. President Khatami repeated over and over again that the United States had to make a number of substantial unilateral concessions before relations could improve. Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi claimed that since Secretary Albright had confessed America's past sins, Washington therefore has to pay reparations to Iran. Kharrazi also blamed the United States of simultaneously conveying contradictory messages of reconciliation and animosity. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, sure enough, went much farther when he stated that rapprochement with the United States would be "an insult and treason to the Iranian people" (Atlantic Council of the United States 2001, 4). He repeated his old mantra that Iran could not under any circumstance talk to the United States from a position of material inferiority. The United States could otherwise have the leverage to dictate the terms of normalization. There is of course some truth to Khamenei's position, but quite frankly, it could take centuries before Iran could catch up with the West, given its current economic performance. The only "good" news was that Khamenei at least sees the slight possibility of normalized U.S.-Iranian relations.

In 2000, the United States was preparing to roll back sanction liberalizations approved by President Clinton in 1998-99. It seemed that the American government was completely losing faith in the prospect that President Khatami and his reform factions either had the will or the power to change any aspect of Iran's intolerable behavior. In September 2001, 10 Iranian Jews were convicted for spying for Israel in a trial reminiscent of Stalin's Moscow processes in the 1930s. The televised "confessions" were

particularly disturbing.<sup>127</sup> As noted earlier, the judiciary is the domain of the Supreme Leader mainly outside President Khatami's influence.

Secretary Albright had already in March of 2000 warned Iran that the trial could adversely affect the future of U.S.-Iranian relations. When Iran in addition tested Shahab-3 long-range missile in July the same year, the prospects for a *détente* in U.S.-Iranian relations were rapidly diminishing. The Congress began preparations for recanting sanction liberalizations under President Clinton. Yet, the U.S. has very little leverage over developments in Iran since there is basically not much to recant except for again banning the import of carpets, caviar, and pistachio nuts from Iran. Clearly, that is not going to sway Tehran's position on anything.

The parties to the conflict therefore remain locked in a sort of "Catch-22" stalemate of pride and old resentments, unable to move toward common interests. Both antagonists have demanded "deeds as well as words." Both parties demand unilateral concessions from the other party before negotiations can begin. Time is obviously not ripe for resolution of the conflict or restoration of diplomatic relations.

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<sup>127</sup> See, Ervand Abrahamian's *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* for an excellent account of this particular Iranian phenomenon (Abrahamian 1999).

## **4. The Axis of Evil**

### **TRIPLE CONTAINMENT**

On 29 January 2002, George W. Bush gave his first State of the Union Address, most vividly remembered for the term “axis of evil.” The first impression was that President Bush, by branding the Islamic Republic as evil, had dramatically escalated U.S. hostility toward Iran, but closer scrutiny reveals that the speech was only partly exacerbated by the events of September 11. The Bush administration reflects a long-term trend of uncompromising policies toward Tehran that began in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, the President’s address seems to signify that the U.S. objective is now to bring down the ruling regime in Tehran within the next decade or so. After the speech, however, the Bush administration is said to have toned down the rhetoric by sending a clear signal to Tehran through diplomatic back channels that the United States still wants to resolve differences through dialogue.

The factual content of George W. Bush’ speech is mostly old news. The United States has since the early 1990s defined international terrorism as a major threat to national security. In his State of the Union Address, President Bush merely reinforced what the defense establishment has been telling politicians for years: that international terrorism knows no border, and subsequently, America and its allies must view the entire world as a battlefield. America has actively gone after states that sponsored terrorism in the past, and will do so in the future. The U.S. clearly sees the link between international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Bush also repeated a long-standing consensus in the United States that Iran aggressively pursues WMD, long-range missiles, and

supports international terrorism. Finally, Bush reiterated that the justification for a national missile defense system was the threat of sudden attack by long-range missiles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction from Iraq, Iran or North Korea. On this particular night, George W. Bush lumped these three nations into one common moral category called the “axis of evil.” In effect, President Bush expanded Dual Containmentment to “Triple Containmentment.”

What did President Bush say that the U.S. has not said in the past? The conceptual change was clearly the breadth of the scope and the magnitude of the means by which President Bush wants to defeat terrorism. His State of the Union Address is significant because it calls for “vigorous action abroad” with no time limit. He declared that freedom is at stake in the Western democracies if appeasement of nations supporting and harboring terrorists continues. With regard to Iran, President Bush specifically targeted the legitimacy of the Iranian leadership by branding them the “unelected few.” More importantly, George Bush radically expanded America’s long-term objectives with regard to Iran when he said that the “we [United States] seek a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror.” Bush’ criteria for “a just and peaceful world” seem to be his notion of “non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance.” He announced that the United States now has “greater objectives than eliminating threats and containing resentment” in the Islamic world. President Bush ended his speech by declaring that this will be “a decisive decade” (Bush 2002).

## THE IRANIAN RESPONSE

On the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, and exactly five months after the September 11 terrorist attacks, President Khatami addressed a huge crowd in Tehran. Khatami referred to the Bush administration as “immature politicians, who provoke fear among nations and threaten the Islamic Revolution.” He continued his speech by saying, “the threats against Iran stem from the fact that the US or rather a large section of the US officialdom considers itself to be the master of the world.” Khatami made it clear that the Iranian people will unite to defend the Islamic Revolution “despite the differences of opinion among domestic political forces and certain shortfalls.” Khatami suggested that the United States itself is supporting “state terrorism sponsored by Israel.” With direct reference to the state of Israel, Khatami said that “we [Iran] have decided to have extensive ties with all countries of the world, except those which have illegitimate foundations, on the basis of reciprocity.” The President reiterated that Iran’s top priority is the “restoration of the Palestinians’ basic rights” (Iran Daily 2002, front page). In the past this has meant the complete dismantling of the state of Israel.

As well could be expected, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ali Khamenei, used distinctly less conciliatory language in his response to President Bush’ declaration of the “axis of evil.”

The US regime has, for years, conducted the greatest terror operations and has achieved the worst that it hoped to achieve with the independent Asian, African and South American countries, has supported the most reactionary and abortive-oriented regimes, has exported the most deadly weapons all over the world, has dispatched to operating theaters its most dangerous terrorists or those whom it has

trained, has killed the most number of civilians and has looted the most oppressed nation in the world, the Palestinians, from their most basic human rights and has given the most and to the most inhuman regime in the world, the Zionist regime, had helped the repressive Pahlavi regime stay in power for many years and has treated the Iranian nation in the worst possible manner in the economic, military and political arenas; and now, it is accusing the democratic and liberated people of Iran of taking sides with terrorism, of neglecting human rights and of producing and selling arms (IRNA 2002) .

## **5. An Assessment of the Future of U.S-Iranian Relations**

### **TARGETED CONTAINMENT OF IRAN**

U.S. containment of Iran has not produced the desired results. America's foreign policy objectives with regard to Iran and the Middle East have not been met. The Dual Containment policy has exhibited a number of structural shortcomings. Therefore, it is good reason to believe that "Triple Containment" will not fare much better.

Dual Containment has been harshly criticized in the United States. A Council on Foreign Relations report concluded that Dual Containment suffered from rigid implementation, that the concept lacks strategic viability, and that the policy has carried high financial and diplomatic costs (Council on Foreign Relations 1999, 1). The bitter resentment created in the EU, Japan, and Canada against the unilateral and extraterritorial nature of the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act has been a clear indication that the strategy has not been working as effectively it should. America's extraterritorial bullying of its closest allies has generated unnecessary resentments that might backfire on the U.S.'

overall agenda to fight belligerent and totalitarian states across the globe. The U.S. policy has fed nationalist grievances among the segments of the Iranian population that Washington hopes will someday overthrow the religious dictatorship. Many secular nationalists see the U.S. containment policy as posing a direct threat to Iran's cultural, social, and political well-being. Various nationalist groups support the Islamic government and associated revolutionary causes in part because of this resentment. In conclusion, the practical execution of Dual Containment has turned the policy into something of a crude and counterproductive attempt to cordon off the entire Iranian population.

The economic sanctions against Iran have been based on several false premises. First, the basic assumption has been that comprehensive sanctions and embargos are likely to change Iran's behavior.<sup>128</sup> However, empirical evidence from comparable cases disconfirms the hypothesis. The reality is that Tehran has consistently used U.S. sanctions as a justification for stonewalling any attempt by the American side to engage Iran in a government-to-government dialogue. Second, depriving Iran of its financial resources would limit its ability to sponsor terrorism and seek weapons of mass destruction. In the short-term this is, of course, partly true, but in the long run economic sanctions will not affect the regime's resolve. Moreover, most of Iran's financial problems are probably not caused by U.S. sanctions, but stem in all likelihood from the

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<sup>128</sup> Martin Indyk: "Their [sanctions] intent is to deprive Iran of the resources to pursue those activities and to demonstrate to Iran's leaders that pursuing such policies comes at a price." "Iran's efforts to develop WMD and ballistic missiles together with its other ongoing policies of concern are the reason we oppose investment in Iran's petroleum sector, Iran's participation in the development of Caspian resources, multilateral lending to Iran, and Iran's full integration in international economic fora" (Katzman 2001, 30).

regime's foolish economic policy and its ineptness in attracting foreign investments. Third, economic sanctions will create domestic tension that will strengthen the hand of the moderates. This is only partly true since economic sanctions provide the regime with a waterproof excuse for why the superior Islamic model does not deliver a decent standard of living. Fourth, American policy makers have obviously assumed that American unilateral sanctions would work in the absence of multilateral participation. Back in 1993, Martin Indyk, the father of Dual Containment, explicitly acknowledged that the success of sanctions relied heavily on multilateral efforts because what is required to build up Iran's military power is available outside the United States (Katzman 2001). Despite these apparent deficiencies, the United States has gradually strengthened its economic sanctions against Iran.

It seems clear that the threats radiating from Iran have to be contained by specific policy instruments rather than across-the-board measures. The future of Iran's economy is by far the best leverage the United States has to influence the ruling clergy, but the application of economic sanctions must target what the ayatollahs value most. The United States should not furnish the regime with excuses for not delivering on its social responsibilities. Targeted economic sanctions worked well in bringing down the Communist Party in Russia, and there are even fewer reasons why they should not work accordingly well against Shi'ite totalitarianism in Iran. The scope of the economic embargo should chiefly target activities such as acquisition of WMD capabilities, long-range missile components, and dual-use technology. A more nuanced Iran policy has to focus more clearly on meeting America's specific foreign policy objectives at lower costs. Finally, U.S. goals have not been met because the containment policy has often

assumed a distinction between Iran's national security, the regime's revolutionary ideology, and Iran's broader national interests. Evidence, however, indicates that the lines between the fundamental Iranian goals are often blurred in Iran's foreign policy, and that the regime is neither irrational nor does it act like a narrowly defined rational actor. In short, the regime does not think in terms of clearly defined compartments.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has identified seven macro-historical patterns in the history of Iran that help explain more than 20 years of bitter hostility toward the United States. The behavior of the Islamic Republic has deep roots in Iran's 2,500 years old quest for political, cultural and spiritual hegemony in the Middle East. Each period in Iran's long and often troubled history has been characterized by certain overarching themes. I have broken the legacy of Iran's national history down into seven separate but interrelated categories. The identified patterns are:

- 1) The legitimacy of the absolute ruler;
- 2) The territorial legacy of the Persian empire;
- 3) The never-ending conflicts with a string of world powers;
- 4) The legacy of foreign domination of Iran;
- 5) The ancient and exceptionally strong relationship between state and religion;
- 6) Iran's lack of social cohesion, rampant factionalism, and the constant threat of political disintegration;
- 7) The extraordinary resilience of Iranian culture and national identity.

These legacies have been transmitted through the intervening ruling dynasties down to today's governing clergy in Tehran. My major theoretical argument is that these legacies explain Iran's extraordinary hostility toward the United States.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> The validity of the argument is, of course, limited to the range of the research design and the overall explanatory power of a descriptive research model; see Chapter I.

Iran's Historical Patterns:	The U. S.-Iranian Patron-Client Relationship 1945-1978:	The Historical Patterns and the U.S.-Iranian Conflict 1979-2002:
<p><b>1) <i>The Legitimacy of the Absolute Ruler:</i></b> Iran's national unity has since ancient times been held together by the legitimacy of the absolute ruler. The legitimacy of the absolute monarch was in practical terms the only thing that could overcome Iran's lack of ethnic and social cohesion. The <i>vilāyat-i faqīh</i> or "the absolute mandate of the jurist" is rooted in this tradition.</p>	<p>Muhammad Reza Shah's autocratic policies lacked societal constraint and religious legitimacy. America's economic and military patronage of Iran enabled the Shah to completely ignore fundamental demands across the political spectrum. Ayatollah Khomeini's provided the crucial leadership that could temporarily bridge factional differences. The radical clergy, however, hijacked the revolution after the Shah went into exile.</p>	<p>The political legitimacy of the theocracy rests heavily on the religious legacy of Imam Khomeini and the regime is measured by its rejection of the secular power of the U.S. Preserving an image of the U.S. as the hegemonic world power bent on denying Iran its historical role in the region is crucial to the clergy's legitimacy. A dialog with the U.S. would directly undermine the power of the Supreme Leader.</p>
<p><b>2) <i>The Territorial Legacy of the Persian Empire:</i></b> Iran's <i>raison d'état</i> has always been to assume regional hegemony. Iran's Perso-Islamic identity and awareness of national dignity is intrinsically linked to the legacy of the great Persian empires.</p>	<p>The U.S. served a useful role in throwing off the yoke of Anglo-Russian imperialism. When U.S. interests conflicted with Iran's national aspirations, many Iranians came to the conclusion that the U.S. was the obstacle rather than the vehicle for reaching the ultimate goal: to restore Iran as the major independent regional power.</p>	<p>Iran's historical patterns provide evidence that Iran will not indefinitely accept a major U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf. Iran will continue to pursue political and military objectives that one day can enable the country to expel the U.S. from the region.</p>

Iran's Historical Patterns:	The U.S.-Iranian Patron-Client Relationship 1945-1978:	The Historical Patterns and the U.S.-Iranian Conflict 1979-2002:
<p><b>3) <i>Protracted Conflicts with World Powers:</i></b></p> <p>The U.S.-Iranian conflict falls into a long sequence of world powers competing with Iran for political, cultural and spiritual hegemony in the Middle East.</p>	<p>The United States entered the region during World War II. When Washington actively interferes in Iran's domestic political struggle in 1953, the United States quickly became just another great foreign power meddling in Iran's exclusive sphere of interest.</p>	<p>The Iranian leadership is obsessed with being perceived as an equal player in its ongoing standoff with the U.S. despite its inferior power. Weapons of mass destruction and terrorism may promise a cheap and quick equalizer that narrows the military gap.</p>
<p><b>4) <i>The Legacy of Foreign Domination of Iran:</i></b></p> <p>In an Iranian perspective, nearly two centuries of Euro-American dominance falls into a historical pattern of three previous periods of foreign domination. From this viewpoint, the Iranian Revolution marked the end of the fourth prolonged period of external domination.</p>	<p>Iran's domestic opposition—religious activists, Marxists, and secular nationalists—came to see the United States' presence in Iran after World War II as the direct extension of Anglo-Russian colonialism. In 1964 Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed that the Shi'ite clergy would not permit Iran to be the slave of Great Britain one day and America the next.</p>	<p>Iran's historical grievances, victim mentality, and sense of inferiority have shaped the entire conflict. Ali Khamenei is stuck with the idea of not talking to the United States from a position of perceived inferiority. The U.S. has relentlessly been used as a scapegoat for Iran's failed achievements.</p>

Iran's Historical Patterns:	The U.S.-Iranian Patron-Client Relationship 1945-1978:	The Historical Patterns and the U.S.-Iranian Conflict 1979-2002:
<p><b>5) <i>The Ancient Relationship between State and Religion:</i></b></p> <p>State and religion were inseparable already in Iran's pre-Islamic era. Iran has for the last five centuries sought the leadership of the Muslim world in spite of the limited appeal of Twelver Shi'ism. Every Iranian ruler since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century has had to defer political power to the Shi'ite clergy; at least symbolically.</p>	<p>Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi did not heed the "golden" rule. The Shah's rule lacked religious legitimacy and his policies frequently violated the strict social norms upheld by the Shi'ite clergy. The U.S. pushed for social reforms like the White Revolution that threatened to undermine the power of the clergy. The intimate relationship between the Shah and the U.S. made it easy for Ayatollah Khomeini to unite numerous political factions around his anti-American ideological platform.</p>	<p>The theocracy believes it can enhance its standing and credibility in the Muslim world by showing that it can stand up to the U.S. The regime has sought to export the Islamic Revolution abroad in order to validate Shi'i absolutism at home with little success.</p>
<p><b>6) <i>Frail Social Cohesion, Factionalism, and the Threat of Political Disintegration:</i></b></p> <p>Factionalism, tribalism, and warlordism have repeatedly brought anarchy and social devastation on Iran.</p>	<p>U.S. support of the Shah upset the fine balance between various domestic constituencies. The Shah's policies alienated nearly every political faction with the result that they for a short while put their differences aside and united against the autocracy.</p>	<p>Deep concerns over ethnic fragmentation of Iran have intensified the clergy's support of Iran's "Islamic" foreign policy and the state's repression of non-Muslim minorities. At the same time, Iran's political leadership has understood that instigating ethnic and religious unrest in the Middle East and Central Asia can easily spill over to Iran itself.</p>

Iran's Historical Patterns:	The U. S.-Iranian Patron-Client Relationship 1945-1978:	The Historical Patterns and the U.S.-Iranian Conflict 1979-2002:
<p><b>7) <i>The Extraordinary Resilience of Iranian Culture and National Identity:</i></b>                      By comparing the Hellenistic, Arab, and Turko-Mongolian periods of occupation with the Euro-American epoch, a certain pattern surfaces. Iran has repeatedly embraced the customs of foreign conquerors and powerful adversaries for a while, and then in due course reinterpreted alien culture in an Iranian fashion. The resilience of Iran's culture and national identity is one remarkable and consistent pattern in Iran's history in the face of extended periods of foreign rule.</p>	<p>Perso-Islamic pride was at the heart of the Islamic Revolution and the tremendous hostility toward the United States that followed. Under the Shah, successive American administrations did not see that the benign U.S efforts to modernize Iran could actually be perceived as overbearing and arrogant. Many Iranians deeply resented the American government's paternalistic interference in Iran's domestic affairs. They felt the Americans had the same condescending attitude as the British by looking down on Iran and Iranian culture as weak and backward.</p>	<p>There is ample reason to believe that Iran's record of outliving every past foreign intruder informs the ruling clergy in Tehran—both consciously and unconsciously—in its ongoing standoff with the United States. Mainstream Iranians, who generally despise the theocracy, regard Iran as the legitimate regional great power, support the struggle of the Palestinians, and perceive the U.S. as arrogant and contemptuous of the Islamic world. At the same time, their scholars and artists are at work—under very difficult conditions—to shape a modern Iranian identity.</p>

**Table 5: Iran's historical patterns and their relationship to the conflict with the United State**

The U.S.-Iranian conflict is the product of internal and external processes that began 200 years ago with the clash between Iran and European imperialism. America's short involvement with Iran fits a historical pattern of powerful external enemies who not only entered the regional spheres of Iranian influence but also attempted to alter the internal institutions and culture of its societies. After World War II, the United States, in 1953, got entangled in Iran's factional struggle over what constitutes a legitimate and stable social contract in a country lacking in national cohesion. This domestic political upheaval, which began nearly 100 years ago when the leaders of the Constitutional Revolution in 1905 demanded an end to monarchical despotism, continues today between Shi'i absolutism and social forces with aspirations to some sort of Iranian-style democracy.

From the U.S. point of view, the intense hostility between the two nations can be boiled down to few substantive sources of conflict: terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, opposition to a U.S. sponsored Middle East peace, and Iran's human rights violations. But the official U.S. position tends to overlook the historical bases for Iranian opposition to the U.S. stance on foreign and domestic policy issues detailed in this thesis. Thus any attempt to negotiate U.S.-Iranian problems runs the risk of generating deep internal opposition in Iran to dealing with a country that has a record of manipulating Iran's independence. Iran's historical grievances, victim mentality, and sense of inferiority then feed the standoff. The Islamic Republic, like the rest of the Muslim world, is extremely frustrated with the disparity between the professed superiority of Islam and the shame of poverty and weakness. The demagoguery of accusing the West for every conceivable social ill serves the purpose of hiding failed achievements behind

popular prejudices and made-up allegations of foreign conspiracies. Thus the resolution of the conflict therefore needs to understand the historical and emotional sources of contention between the two nations.

Iranians must be allowed to find out for themselves what sort of government they really want. The U.S. policy toward Iran needs to progress from containing the militancy of the Islamic regime to allowing Iranians to get the political process that began with the Constitutional Revolution back on track. The strategy must in my opinion focus on giving the widely unpopular ruling clergy as few opportunities as possibly to blame Iran's massive social problems on the United States. U.S. foreign policy in the region should to the extent possible seek to avoid taking positions that can easily be used to manipulate public opinion against the U.S. administration. As George Kennan argued, the quest for absolute power has as always produced internally its own reaction. Like Soviet communism, Islamic absolutism bears within it the seeds of its own undoing. The decay of the Islamic Republic is already well advanced, and no power in world history has ever faced dissatisfaction indefinitely without eventually adjusting its policies to the political law-of-gravity. The objective of U.S. policy should be to encourage Iranians to deal with the inherent contradictions and shortcomings of the current regime. If the clerical regime is increasingly forced to take full responsibility for Iran's social, economic and political development, the decision to adjust its behavior to the requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will then inevitably fall squarely on the shoulders of the autocracy itself.

Certain aspects of Washington's approach to dealing with the clergy in Tehran are counterproductive with respect to achieving the ultimate U.S. goal of peace and stability in the Middle East. Some U.S. policies in America's standoff with Iran actually reinforce

Iran's historical grievances and subsequently the clergy's ability to maintain its hostile stance toward the United States and the West. The U.S. should rethink its economic embargo of Iran. This policy reminds Iranians of the economic "strangling" of Persia by Russia and Great Britain. Perhaps U.S. economic sanctions against Iran should be targeted as they were against the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

There are other important policy lessons to be learned from the U.S. difficulties with Iran. The Cold War exposed the long-term negative by-products of establishing autocratic patronage states. In Iran, U.S. aid contributed to the modern illegitimacy of Mohammad Reza Shah. The oil industry and U.S. economic and military patronship made it possible for the Shah to resist pressure for social, economic, and political change from across the political spectrum during the 1950s and 1960s. U.S. programs were aimed at propping up Iran's capability to resist Soviet aggression, but revenues from the oil industry and U.S. assistance also vastly improved the Shah's ability to repress the domestic opposition through such instruments as the SAVAK. The Shah grew unresponsive to pressure from all colors of the political spectrum and his policies became disconnected from the larger interests of the Iranian people. America's good intentions to stop the spread of communist totalitarianism had the effect of promoting *divine right kingship* to a degree hitherto unknown in Iran at the very time the Iranians needed to modify their inherited political culture. In the minds of many Iranians, U.S. support for the overthrow of Prime Minister Mosaddeq lumped the United States firmly in the category of the other colonialists. Secular nationalists, socialists and communists, and Shi'i activists increasingly saw the United States as the source of social ills rather than the solution to the problem.

The tragedy was that successive U.S. administrations deceived themselves to believe that unconditional U.S. support for the Shah and Pahlavi despotism was the only viable alternative that could secure political stability in Iran and keep the Soviet Union out of the Persian Gulf. That might have been true in 1953, but this was certainly not the case in the mid 1970s. America's support for the Shah, and consequently also for his domestic policies, radicalized every single opposition group and created social conditions conducive to social revolution. Thus, a policy that was meant to enhance U.S. national security produced a hostile revolutionary regime that continues to challenge U.S. interests worldwide.

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