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The Double Revolution

ON FEBRUARY 1, 1979, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOple scanned the clear, cold sky above Tehran, eagerly searching for the Air France 747 bearing the exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini back to Iran. They already had waited hours while negotiations went on in Paris between Air France officials and Khomeini's entourage. The French expressed the legitimate fear that their aircraft would be shot down by an Iranian air force loyal to Muhammad Reza Shah, and Khomeini's representatives loudly insisted that all Iran awaited the revered ayatollah. The plane had eventually taken off but only half-loaded. If the caretaker government installed when the shah left Iran fifteen days earlier denied permission to land, there would be enough fuel to return to Paris. Now, five hours later, it entered Iranian airspace, approached Tehran, and circled three times while a fragile government made a decision of politics and destiny. Finally, the sleek aircraft began its descent. Below, horns belonging to the hundreds of cars surrounding Mehrabad Airport trumpeted. In Tehran's streets and squares jammed with people the word went out—"*agha amad* (the respectful one) has come."

The big 747 rolled to a stop on the tarmac. Its whining engines shut down. Suddenly the moment was at hand. The seventy-eight-year-old man who had fought Muhammad Reza Shah for a decade and a half appeared at the plane's open door. Wrapped in the cloak of the clergy, crowned by a turban, he slowly descended the wide aluminum

steps on the arm of an Air France steward. At the bottom, he knelt to kiss the ground of Iran. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had returned from exile to reclaim Iran's Islamic identity.

The Iranian Revolution began in early 1978. Following the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 to 1911 and the Nationalist Movement of 1951 to 1953, it was Iran's third popular uprising against absolute monarchy and foreign intervention. Coalescing around the charismatic personality of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the secular descendants of the Constitutionalists and the National Front joined the masses of peasants and laborers inspired to political action by religious leaders who had altered the lower classes' most basic notions about themselves and their roles as citizens of Iran. Together the secularists and the pious drove Muhammad Reza Shah from the throne in January 1979. With the collapse of the centuries-old institution of kingship, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran to complete the revolution. In its initial phases, that revolution reordered Iran's social hierarchy and renounced the alien presence of the West. This was the revolution powered by the political, economic, and social inequities of Pahlavi Iran and driven by nationalism. But another revolution followed. Bridging mid-1979 to mid-1981, Iran's revolution within a revolution pitted group against group in a violent struggle for the right to define the culture of the Iranian state. From that struggle, Iran emerged as the Islamic Republic committed to the preservation of traditional Shia culture, governed by a new elite composed of the Shia clergy, and ultimately ruled by a Shia authority figure—Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

In the years leading up to 1978, Muhammad Reza Shah and his opponents had engaged in sporadic battles beneath the outward luster of Pahlavi Iran. The Tudeh led the challenge from the left. Less visible Islamic groups proved just as effective on the right. One, called Fadaiyan-e Islam, assassinated the shah's court minister in 1949 and the prime minister Ali Razmara in 1951. Beginning in 1971, the opposition to Muhammad Reza Shah escalated its militancy. Both Marxist and Islamic groups sent guerrillas against isolated government targets, and most university students engaged in political protest in what amounted to a rite of passage. The shah's military along with SAVAK clandestinely fought the guerrilla war but the war with the students could not be hidden. In one of the most notorious acts of government repression during the 1970s, security forces in June 1974 invaded Shiraz University, a hotbed of left-wing activism. Men deputized by the shah flailed police batons against the backs and limbs of hundreds of students and hauled both the political agitator and the passive bystander into the bowels of the SAVAK detention system. By the end of 1974, student protests against the incarceration of political prisoners had shut down almost every university in the country and engaged many of the forty thousand Iranian students the shah had sent West to school. In Europe and the United States, the secular leftists freed from the shah's censorship feasted on Western liberal thought and Socialist ideology while devout Muslims consumed the writings of Ali Shariati, Morteza Motahhari, and the other Islamic ideologues. Inside Iran, Marxist and mullah shared the dark, hot cells of Evin Prison, where they plotted the destruction of the Pahlavi throne. As the discontent, anger, and violence built against Muhammad Reza Shah through the last years of the 1970s, the secularists and the pious found a voice in Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the exiled cleric who had led both the 1963 uprising against the shah and the 1964 protest against American privileges in Iran. More than anyone else, Khomeini symbolized opposition to absolute monarchy. Equally, he stood as the great avenger of Iranian nationalism.

Khomeini the nationalist materialized when he denounced the 1964 Status of Forces Agreement, which exempted United States military personnel from Iranian law. In passionate words that captivated the nation and burned the United States with the brand of colonialism, Khomeini declared that the agreement put the Iranian nation under American bondage. A furious Muhammad Reza Shah sent the offending Khomeini into exile in Turkey. Turning expulsion into allegory, the ayatollah summoned images of the Quraysh driving the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca and the evil Umayyad usurper Muawiya denying authority to Ali, the true heir of Muhammad. A month less than a year after he arrived in Turkey, in November 1964, Khomeini moved to Najaf, the great theological center of Shia Islam where tradition holds that Ali, the first imam, died.

Najaf squats on a low ridge above a marshy lowland in south-central Iraq, a hundred miles due south of Baghdad. It is an ugly town of drab stucco buildings set down in a hard, oppressive environment. The summer is hot and humid, the winter cold and dank. In 1965, when Khomeini arrived, mud walls still surrounded the town's few streets and maze of alleys. What little charm Najaf exuded came from wooden lattice windows that projected from the second story of small houses. From what amounted to shuttered porches, sequestered women watched pilgrims from the most distant places of Shiism pass on their

way to the gold-domed shrine of Imam Ali, the man by which the Shia concept of justice is measured. In the shadow of that shrine, at the center of Shia geography, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini took command of the symbols of the faith.

Already sixty-three years old, Khomeini lived simply in a small house with his wife and elder son, Mustafa. Like the Prophet and Ali, he ate a meager diet of yogurt, cheese, lentils, and fruit. He slept on an ordinary rug spread on the floor. Day in and day out for almost thirteen years, he walked for twenty minutes; ate lunch and dinner; taught a small corps of students; received visitors; wrote his correspondence; and went to bed on a precise schedule that never varied. Through this asceticism and regimentation, he held himself aloof from any hint of corruption bred of materialism and worldly power. By the late 1960s, this compelling combination of nationalism and religious imagery had made Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini the model for imitation for thousands of Iranians.

Yet between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s Khomeini lacked the critical mass of followers necessary to change the political structure of Pahlavi Iran. At best, his followers exhibiting a willingness to risk a verbal or physical challenge to the power of the shah concentrated in Qom, in the Tehran bazaar, and a few other old commercial centers scattered around the country. For the rest of his devotees, the bond between the white-bearded ayatollah and themselves existed on a mystical plane. In the context of the Shia psyche, Khomeini's otherworldliness gave him a potent appeal. Because he lived in exile, he was both absent and present—the paradox in which the Shia collective memory remembers its last figure of cosmic authority, the Hidden Imam. This suggested parallel between Khomeini and the Twelfth Imam did not need to be absolute to be compelling. It did not even need articulation. Religious symbolism, on one hand, and social and political realities, on the other, drew numbers of Iranians to the man in Najaf. There, year after year, Khomeini seemed to hover over Pahlavi Iran, an ethereal figure who was absent but present, persecuted but powerful.

Khomeini's influence grew precisely because he lived in exile. From the safety of Iraq, he could speak fiery words with a freedom denied those resident in Pahlavi Iran. In the presence of the security forces, the secular opponents of the shah voiced their protests in symbolic language hidden in poetry and prose. And the Islamic ideologues like Ali Shariati and Morteza Motahhari penned their works within the narrow margins of censorship. But Khomeini, able to pour his

venom and wrath on the shah from his sanctuary in Najaf, became the champion of "justice," the single most important concept in Iranian political culture. Conceived by Cyrus, exemplified by Ali, the ideal of justice had absorbed the Iranians for 2,500 years.

Khomeini attacked the kingship of Muhammad Reza Shah by charging that the king and his government were in a state of armed rebellion against the righteous people of Iran. Raising Islam's concern with justice like a sword, he called the faithful to seek the revenge of the just on the unjust. He also spoke to a nation historically trampled by the alien. Exhibiting the ingrained xenophobia of the Iranians, which always sees foreigners secretly plotting against them, Khomeini identified "the West" as the cause of Iranian suffering in the twentieth century. Employing Jalal Al-e Ahmad's celebrated term, he indicted "Westoxicated" Iranians for cooperating with Western colonialists to rob Iran of its resources and its culture. In so doing, the elite of Pahlavi Iran had denied the religious authorities their historical responsibility to guide government and society toward the perfection demanded by the Prophet. Khomeini warned in terms as dark as the Day of Judgment that at stake in Pahlavi Iran was nothing less than the elimination of Islam as a faith and a way of life.

While Khomeini issued his messages in Iraq, his network delivered them in Iran. The *mujtahids* that the ayatollah helped educate during his years in Qom composed the center of that network. And the thousands of students who had flocked to his famous Thursday class at the Faiziyeh Theological School formed the web. This loose organization of mullahs recruited pious men and women committed to the culture of Shia Islam into the ayatollah's campaign against Muhammad Reza Shah. Like a giant communications system, Khomeini's network received his pronouncements from across the border, mimeographed them on cheap paper, and covertly distributed them through the shrines, mosques, bazaars, and lower-class urban neighborhoods. Those caught proselytizing for Khomeini went to prison, where they gathered more recruits, often among the leftists also imprisoned for political crimes. Bit by bit, an organization built toward 1979.

As early as 1967, Khomeini sensed the possibility of a political revolution against the Pahlavi dynasty. In 1968, he began to prepare his army. He renounced those within the *ulama* who declined to join ranks against the shah and issued an edict designating Morteza Motahhari to collect religious taxes from his followers. In 1969, he called secular and religious Iranian students studying abroad to a "sa-

cred Islamic movement that, God willing, [will] lead to cutting off the hands of the instruments of foreigners, those who advocate colonialism and the Westoxicated."[1] In May 1970, after his confidant, Ayatollah Muhammad Reza Saidi, died in a SAVAK prison, Khomeini at last called for an end to the Pahlavi monarchy. During the Persepolis spectacle in 1971, the ayatollah, wielding authority bestowed by Islam, denied the very legitimacy of the institution of kingship. Muhammad Reza Shah had barely ended the ceremony at the tomb of Cyrus the Great when Khomeini thundered that Iranian monarchy "from the day it started to this very day has been the shame of history."[2]

When the shah began to spend his oil millions in 1973 to create a state stripped of the weight of religion, the aged ayatollah sat cross-legged on a rug before his tiny desk writing letters, issuing edicts, and dispatching telegrams. He stayed alive in the mass consciousness because he possessed a charisma not seen in Iran since Ismail rode out of Gilan in the late fifteenth century and Muhammad Mossadeq strode over the oil fields of Khuzestan in 1951. This force of personality radiated from his impassioned moral commitment and the aura of absolute integrity that surrounded him. Appropriate to the literary tradition of Iran, Khomeini was a master of words. A highly educated man, he could also speak with the tongue of a village mullah. Through language, the ayatollah reached deep into the collective consciousness of his followers to grasp their pain and alienation. And through language, he gave the learned and the unlearned a sense of dignity and self-respect delivered with the promise of a better tomorrow. In the process, he turned their silent anger into an articulate voice of dissent, stamped with God's approval.

By the mid-1970s, Khomeini as cleric and nationalist appealed to a spectrum of ideological persuasions: moderate, conservative, and militant seminarians in Qom and Mashhad; secular and religious students in American and European universities; liberal and radical intellectuals. Without ever moderating his stance against Marxism, Khomeini pulled the divergent opponents of the shah under his clerical robe. There the martyrdom of Hussein transformed into the struggle of the people against the throne. In the Iranians' emotionally charged realm of symbols, the shah stood as evil incarnate.

By now, the audiocassette had outclassed the mimeograph machine as an instrument of revolt. Spools of magnetic tape containing sermons and instructions in Khomeini's own voice came from Iraq, circulated through the ayatollah's underground, and crossed oceans to the student opponents of the shah. In these messages, the absent cleric wove together imagery and tradition to strike at the shah. Khomeini named the conscripts to the shah's army the "soldiers of the Hidden Imam" and prohibited membership in the shah's 1975 National Resurgence party as an act of "forbidding the evil." By 1977, a broad spectrum of Iran's population had retrieved an old Shia saying attributed to the Imam Musa al-Jafar. Prior to his death in 799, he prophesied that "A man will come out from Qom and he will summon people to the right path. There will rally to him people resembling pieces of iron, not to be shaken by violent winds, unsparing and relying on God."[3]

In metaphorical terms, the Iranian revolution of 1979 would pit Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's characterization of Shia Islam against Muhammad Reza Shah's version of Persian kingship. The overture began in October 1977 with the death of Mustafa, Ayatollah Khomeini's elder son. The brilliant forty-nine-year-old cleric died suddenly in Najaf of a reported heart attack less than twenty-four hours after being visited by two men described as "strangers." Immediately whispers implicating SAVAK in another political assassination buzzed among Khomeini's followers. As befitting a culture steeped in martyrdom and death, the traditional Shia memorial service held forty days after Mustafa's death proved a defining moment for the revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini, the father at whose side Mustafa had stood so long, had been the most visible leader of the opposition to Pahlavi rule since 1963. His name and his dramatic image were recognizable to a large percentage of the population. But it was not until rumor, innuendo, and collective experience hung on SAVAK the responsibility for the death of his son that Khomeini finally became the essential symbol around which the disparate elements would gather in revolt against Pahlavi rule.

A revolution that would thrust the power of the spoken word against the might of loaded machine guns began in 1978. In important ways, it joined the 1905–11 Constitutional Revolution and the 1951–53 Nationalist Movement as a revolt against absolute monarchy and the influence of foreign powers. But unlike its predecessors, this revolution engaged every stratum of society and every region of the country. Its preparatory stages had been paved by the secularists, particularly the old National Front and the Marxists. They were followed by Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati, who built crucial bridges between the intellectuals and Islam. But it was the clerical leaders, masters of the art of rhetoric, who disseminated a revolutionary ideology

that placed the spiritual at the center of the political stage and produced the masses that drove the revolution. In its passion and power, politics of the street touched something far deeper than the desire for a more equitable share of Iran's political system and economy.

Khomeini's portrayal of the shah as an illegitimate ruler who had betrayed his hierarchical role by failing to protect the physical and spiritual needs of his people went to the very core of Persian kingship. In essence, Muhammad Reza Shah had lost the *farr*. In terms of Islam, Khomeini rhetorically juxtaposed legitimate religious authority against illegitimate secular authority. Once most of the population accepted this symbolic model, the shah was virtually removed from the Iranian cultural universe. The lines of the poet Saadi echoed across the vast breadth of Iran: "I am not mounted on a camel, nor, like an ass, am I saddled with a load; I am not the lord of subject people, nor am I the slave of my monarch."

Ironically, it was Muhammad Reza Shah himself who lit the fuse of the revolution. On January 7, 1978, a slanderous letter planted in the newspaper *Ettelaat* accused Ayatollah Khomeini of the double sin of homosexuality and serving as a British agent. The next day, a group of *talabehs* in Qom gathered to protest the scurrilous attack on the cleric. Marching toward the hospital crossroads, the exit point from the shrine area to the south, they met the police, who commanded them to disperse. When they refused, the police opened fire. At least twenty died.

Tensions mounted. Less than ten days after Jimmy Carter toasted the stability of Pahlavi Iran, all the pent-up hostilities toward the Pahlavi dynasty ignited. For the next year, the flames of revolution moved toward the Peacock throne, inch by inch.

The students killed at Qom became instant martyrs. Forty days after their deaths, the leading cleric of Tabriz called the people of the city to perform the mourning ritual. As the procession wound through the city, one of the shah's soldiers shot a mourner. Thirty-six hours of rioting followed, in which the enraged mob smashed stocks of liquor stores, burned billboards carrying sexually suggestive advertising, and broke the blue-and-gold emblems of the Iranian monarchy hanging in government offices. The shah's troops stormed the city, killing 19 and injuring 100 by official figures. The opposition claimed 432 dead and 1,500 injured. On the fortieth day, the mourning ceremony held for the martyrs of Tabriz incited more riots that rolled across Iran as the Shia mourning ritual again turned into an act of rebellion.

The shah's security organizations flailed against revolution gathering momentum from the bottom reaches of society. But neither the shah nor his highly touted secret police sensed the power of the movement. The United States, primarily dependent on the shah's elite for its information, remained mystified by the social and political realities of Iran. Despite the escalating violence, the shah and President Carter continued their arms deals as if Iran remained the Iran of 1972. In March 1978, the shah pressed ahead with his plans for a massive naval expansion worth more than $5 billion. And Carter allowed the sale of nearly $600 million worth of American arms to go ahead.

By the end of March, the breadth and depth of the disturbances became obvious. The intellectuals who had originally fed revolutionary ideology centered their revolt in the universities, particularly the University of Tehran, Reza Shah's monument to Western education. There female students wearing hip-fitting blue jeans and T-shirts wrapped themselves in the chador as a banner of national identity. The black drape once banned by Reza Shah as a symbol of Iran's backwardness now "showed that women are chaste; the family's honor is intact. The women are in their traditional place; society has been cleansed of corrupting foreign influence."[4] Outside the campuses, the peasants and the urban poor who had created neither the strategy nor the ideology of the revolution provided gigantic numbers willing to die under the treads of army tanks in defiance of the shah. All the while, the clerics, Friday after Friday, used their sermons as a vehicle of politics. Following the lead of Khomeini, they preached that Karbala was not one day, it is always.

Spring budded in violence in Shiraz, Tehran, and Tabriz. In Qom, three busloads of armed and helmeted commandos arrived on May 10 to quell large demonstrations. Led by their commander, a squad of soldiers burst into the home of Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari. In the presence of the most influential cleric inside Iran, they shot one of his followers dead on the spot. At that moment, Shariatmadari left behind Shia Islam's traditional abhorrence of politics to join the opposition to Pahlavi rule. Most of the religious moderates followed him. For centuries a faith of lament and submission, Shiism had suddenly become the vehicle of ecstasy and rebellion.

On through the summer, demonstrations, strikes, and riots convulsed the country. Sometimes the government reacted with great force, sometimes with unexpected, almost apologetic, conciliation, especially toward Shia Islam. During the year, the shah abolished the imperial calendar commencing with the reign of Cyrus along with the Ministry of Women's Affairs. He closed the casinos and gambling

clubs; began to rid the government of Bahais; and tried to restore some of the royal family's Islamic credentials. Empress Farah went on pilgrimage to Mecca and the shah touted the amount of money he had spent on the beautification of the shrine at Mashhad. As the shah attempted to shore up his throne, the elite kept telling themselves and the Americans that everything would be all right. After all, the shah had the army and the army would never crack. That was before the fire at the Cinema Rex in Abadan.

On August 19, people packed the theater for an Iranian-made film entitled *The Deer*. Without warning, flames engulfed the building. Screams of dying people trapped in the inferno by locked exit doors carried into the street. Those who heard them were rendered helpless by the intensity of the fire. When it finally died, four hundred charred bodies, mostly women and children, lay in the ruins. Fed by the symbolism that August 19 was the anniversary of the American-led coup against Mossadeq, another day of national disaster, rumors raced faster than the fire. Distilled, they all said the same thing. SAVAK had pursued several Islamic militants into the theater. When informed of the situation, the shah personally ordered the burning of the building. Regardless of a history among Muslim militants for torching theaters, thousands upon thousands of Iranians who so far had stayed neutral in a struggle they saw as between the shah and the mullahs suddenly shifted to the opposition.

In the first week in September, the shah imposed martial law after marchers in religious processions at the end of Ramazan shouted for the return of Khomeini. That Friday, September 8, somewhere between five thousand and twenty thousand people moved through south Tehran toward a squad of armed soldiers assembled in a square named Jaleh. Under orders to break up demonstrations, the men of the shah's military pumped round after round of bullets into a defenseless crowd. A dark, sticky red from the dead and wounded covered the square as if the asphalt itself bled. The deaths of innocent people in the cause of justice raised again the potent symbolism of Karbala, turning "Black Friday" into a national outrage. With it, the last remnants of support for the monarchy collapsed and the Pahlavi dynasty teetered on the brink of the abyss.

In October, the resistant shah unsheathed another weapon against his great nemesis, Ayatollah Khomeini. Exerting pressure on Saddam Hussein, Iraq's de facto ruler, the shah forced Khomeini out of Najaf. The cleric with his family and entourage found sanctuary in the Paris suburb of Neauphle-le-Chateau. In the despised West, not far from the

home of Brigitte Bardot, Khomeini resumed his assault on Muhammad Reza Shah. Once more technology aided the battle. Unlike Najaf, France boasted a multitude of international telephone lines, allowing Khomeini's lieutenants to direct-dial the ayatollah's instructions to the combat troops on the ground in Iran. Equally important, Khomeini gained access to the international press. In repeated press conferences, the ayatollah's spokesmen, who were men educated in the West, related in the languages of the West Iranian grievances against Muhammad Reza Shah. Over and over, they insisted that Khomeini himself would not administer post-Pahlavi Iran but rather would guide the state on the path of Islam.

On through October and November, the masses who had failed the Constitutional Revolution and Muhammad Mossadeq rammed against the barricades of Pahlavi rule. The mullahs, bankrolled by the bazaar, urged them on.* The liberal secularists and the Communists joined them. In the escalating revolt, the foot soldiers of the shah's army, the conscripts from the villages and urban slums, stood back and watched. Deprived of shock troops, an increasingly desperate shah grabbed for control. Through government orders and coercion, the doors of schools and universities slammed shut, the presses of the newspapers ground to a halt, a scattering of striking oil workers and government employees trudged back to work, opposition leaders went to jail, and parliament recessed. On December 2, the beginning of Muharram, the holy month in which Hussein was martyred, a curfew descended on all the cities.

But with a thousand men a day defecting from the military, the shah had lost his teeth. During the first few days of Muharram, young men wrapped in white burial shrouds symbolizing a willingness to die paraded by an army unable to stop them. When Ashura dawned, 2 million people running the social gamut from the president of a leading bank to the newest arrival to the slums of Tehran surged through the streets in an eight-hour-long procession that ended at the Shahyad. In the shadow of the monument built in 1971 to celebrate the kingship of Muhammad Reza Shah, an enormous chorus of voices called, *"Allahu akbar, Khomeini rahbar,"* God is great, Khomeini is our leader.

*The *bazaaris* acted from mixed motives. This was the traditional middle class that had always maintained strong ties to the clergy. But they also had a powerful economic motivation. The *bazaaris* had lost status as well as suffered the repercussions of a modernizing economy. They believed a revolutionary government influenced by the clergy would restore the traditional economy and the *bazaaris'* place in it.

To the pious, Khomeini was Ali. To the secularists, he was Mossadeq. The same imagery extended to the goals each group sought in political revolt. The secularists saw an end to Pahlavi kingship and national subjugation as constituting the revolution. But the pious regarded the abolition of kingship and the Western presence in Iran as only the beginning of the revolution of Islam. Nonetheless in that moment at the Shahyad, the secularists and the pious stood together surrounded by a powerful sense of oneness voiced in poetry.

How glorious is our night
when bullets
tattoo it
and cries of "God is Great"
bring together
our hearts
our anxious hearts
from the two sides of the night
when darkness
unites the town.[5]

The country spun toward anarchy. American employees of Bell helicopter wore T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan Keep a Low Profile, underlined with a row of bullet holes. The Iranian rich fled West carrying billions of dollars vital to the Iranian economy. Arms passed out of supposedly impregnable military arsenals into the hands of ragtag militias. Meanwhile strikes so effective that they cut off heat to the shah's palace made everyday life difficult, if not impossible. And always, there was the seemingly incessant sound of marching feet and chanted slogans.

The sycophants hovering around the Peacock throne insisted that the shah hang on. But behind the throne, they growled that Muhammad Reza Shah was instinctively weak, that he lacked the killer instinct of his father, that Ashraf was the only one "with balls." Even American ambassador William Sullivan observed that the shah "was truly not cast to be a leader of men or the nation in times of crisis."[6]

Before the new year of 1979, the shah concluded that he could not survive politically. To his credit, Muhammad Reza Shah refused to sit on a throne floating in the blood of his own people. Regardless of his many mistakes, he understood better than his pompous military commanders, arrogant cabinet, and privileged elite the reality of failed legitimacy. After thirty-eight years on the throne, perhaps the shah finally grasped the true essence of Persian kingship. Now all that was left was the manner of his departure.

Shapur Bakhtiar, a weathered veteran of the National Front, agreed to become prime minister on the condition that the shah hand authority over to a regency council before leaving the country on a "vacation" of undetermined length. The sooner the departure date the better.

January 16, 1979, dawned cloudy and cold. Muhammad Reza Shah had spent the preceding day saying good-bye to his palace staff, the Immortals, his corps of Persian-style bodyguards, and the high-ranking officers of his cherished military establishment. Now it was time to say good-bye to Iran. The fifty-nine-year-old monarch accompanied by a fur-clad Farah told Shapur Bakhtiar and others gathered at Mehrabad Airport, "I am going on vacation because I am feeling tired. I hope the government will be able to make amends for the past and also succeed in laying the foundation for the future."[7] Carrying a small box of Iranian soil in his jacket pocket, the departing shah passed under a Koran held over his head as a wish for a safe journey and walked toward his silver-and-blue Boeing 707. Before he reached the plane, a colonel of the Imperial Guard threw himself at his monarch's feet, kissed his shoes, and pleaded with him to stay. The shah bent down and spoke a few words. When he rose, the face of the King of Kings held the agony of the moment.

Muhammad Reza Shah had been king of Iran since the age of twenty-one. He had dealt with every American president from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Jimmy Carter; sparred with every Soviet leader from Stalin to Brezhnev; talked international affairs with Churchill, de Gaulle, Chiang Kai-shek, Tito, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Anwar Sadat; and dined with Britain's King George VI and Elizabeth II, Princess Grace of Monaco, King Hussein of Jordan, and the Philippines' Imelda Marcos. He knew them all, it seemed, better than he knew his own people. Over the last three decades of his long reign, Muhammad Reza Shah had wanted different things for the Iranians than they wanted for themselves. In a culture where spirituality exceeds materialism as a value, the shah had pursued physical development at the expense of religious heritage. Much like his father, he gave his people infrastructure and his own vision of modern Iran. But he took from those same people their freedom and their faith.

Fifteen years beyond that January day in 1979, I strolled through a date grove in Kerman Province with a man who had marched with one of the Islamic student groups in demonstrations against the shah.

I asked him if, in retrospect, he saw the shah as an evil man. He pondered a moment before replying. "No, not evil. He was corrupt. He was corrupt because he had too much power. I have often thought that without all that power, he might not have been a bad king."

Before the plane in which Muhammad Reza Shah departed Tehran reached its destination of Cairo, the headlines screamed *Shah Raft!*, The Shah Is Gone. Along with the newspapers, a line borrowed from Hafez circulated through the streets—"When the demon departs, the angel shall arrive." But few asked what the angel would bring.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was in a profound sense a work of imagination. The destruction of the Pahlavi dynasty not only meant a sudden radical transformation of the political and economic structures of society. It also created the need to construct a society able to live in peace with itself. But like the Constitutional Revolution, the forces of change had only one thing in common—the destruction of the Pahlavi dynasty. Beyond that, no two groups agreed on the very source of government—legitimacy and authority. The extreme left of the political spectrum wanted communism, the Khomeini right wanted Islamic government. The rest of the Iranians more or less cut the umbilical cord to their monarchical history without contemplating its replacement. What most expected from a revolution laced with the rhetoric of Islam was the creation of some political entity capable of integrating the diverse ideals of freedom and modernization in the context of traditional values and customs.

For the moment, Shapur Bakhtiar headed the caretaker government left by the shah. Probably no one appointed by the Pahlavi king could have survived, but Bakhtiar proved a particularly poor choice. Almost a comic caricature of the "Western struck" dandy lampooned by Iranian literature for three decades, Bakhtiar seemed to mock a revolution carrying the torch of Iranian identity. While the rhetoric of the revolt had spoken powerfully to the great symbolic issues of Iranian civilization—the internal versus the external, hierarchy versus equality—Bakhtiar spoke largely in Western terms—modern versus traditional, democracy versus dictatorship. From the beginning, he and his government were out of sync with a revolution that in many ways had risen from the very soul of the Iranians.

But the preordained failure of the Bakhtiar government also included the Khomeini factor. In reality, only Khomeini could lead Iran. Over a decade and a half, he had grown into a mythical figure of absolute authority ready to receive the Iranian Revolution as an offering

to his indomitable will. Thus, once the shah departed, Khomeini announced his intention to return to Iran. Bakhtiar's fragile government begged for a delay of three months to give order a chance to gel. Khomeini refused. Stalling tactics assisted by a French air controllers' strike and bad weather kept the ayatollah at bay until the end of January. It was then that Khomeini gave notice that he would delay no longer. Boarding his chartered Air France jetliner, he arrived in Tehran in the bitter cold of February 1, 1979.

As soon as the aged Khomeini rose from his poignant act of kissing Iranian soil, a welcoming committee swept him into Mehrabad Airport's special Haj terminal, the departure and arrival point of pilgrims to Mecca. Before several hundred mullahs, the man revered as a tower of strength showed a human weakness—he fainted. Reviving quickly, he climbed into a blue Chevrolet Blazer for the twenty-mile trip to Behesht-e-Zahra Cemetery, where many of the estimated ten thousand to twelve thousand people killed in the course of the revolution are buried. Progress was slow in a car that could barely move through thousands of cheering, weeping followers waving portraits of Khomeini captioned, The Light of Our Life. Recognizing the impossible, the marshals appointed to direct the parade called in a U.S.-made Iranian air force helicopter and put the ayatollah aboard. It landed at Behesht-e-Zahra's plot 17. Rushing admirers engulfed Khomeini, knocking his turban off his bald head. Behind them, women clutching their black chadors close around them sang, "May every drop of martyr's blood turn into a tulip." Finally seated on a podium before a microphone, Khomeini sounded the death knell on the Bakhtiar government. "This parliament and government are illegal. If they continue, we will arrest them. I will shut their mouths. And I will appoint a government with the support of the Iranian people."[8]

Khomeini did appoint his own Provisional Revolutionary Government. During the early days of February, the two governments—one official, the other de facto—played a game of power in which the prize was the shah's once formidable military. On every military base, loyalists of the shah and defectors to the Khomeini government skirmished as orders and counterorders flowed from the two centers of command. In the showdown at Doshan Tappeh Air Force Base, the defectors established dominance as the pride of Pahlavi Iran surrendered to the Provisional Revolutionary Government. At Niavaran Palace, the last remnants of the Imperial Guard, the famed Immortals, stripped to their underwear and piled their gold-encrusted uniforms on a flatbed truck. Shahpur Bakhtiar went into hiding. A few days later, he

boarded a commercial airliner in heavy disguise and flew to exile in Paris.*

The flight of Bakhtiar bore witness to the reality that the revolution as a unified, multiclass movement had reached its conclusion with the fall of Muhammad Reza Shah. Black chadors, mass prayer meetings, and ritual funeral processions were no longer instruments meant to cleanse Iran of economic, social, and political impurities. Instead, they represented the cultural essence of the revolution around which the new state had already begun to organize itself. Secular Iranians who during the drama of the revolution chose to ignore Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's political philosophy laid out in the *Velayat-e Faqih* found themselves face-to-face with the concept of Islamic government.

In "the guardianship of the jurists," Khomeini had carefully constructed an argument for Islamic government led by religious authorities. In the absence of the Hidden Imam, it is they who stand guard against injustice and ungodly rule. But while the *mujtahids* might exercise leadership over the community collectively, ultimate authority is vested in a single jurist superior to all others—the *faqih*, the viceregent for God. Holding absolute religious authority and political power, he is to guide society toward its potential perfection. In Khomeini's words, "If a deserving jurist is endowed with these two qualities [justice and knowledge of Islamic law], then his regency will be the same as enjoyed by the Prophet in the governing of the Islamic community, and it is incumbent on all Moslems to obey him."[9]

Acknowledging the Iranians' twentieth-century expectation of constitutional government, Khomeini postulated that Islamic government is constitutional. But rather than legislating laws according to the will of the majority of the electorate, Islamic government adheres to the standards and demands specified in the Koran and in the traditions of the Prophet. Because of its divine nature, the mandate of Islamic government exceeds that of secular government. Thus the clerical guardians of the community in Khomeini's Islamic government are responsible for the whole society, in contradiction to secular governments, which the ayatollah held are concerned only with the social order. According to Khomeini, secular government leaves an individual alone as long as he is socially harmless. "What he wants to do in the privacy of his home, drinking wine, . . . gambling, or other

*Shahpur Bakhtiar was assassinated in Paris by unknown assailants in August 1991.

such dirty deeds, the government has nothing to do with him. Only if he comes out screaming, then he would be prosecuted, because that disturbs the peace. . . . Islam and divine governments are not like that. These [governments] have commandments for everybody, everywhere, at any place, in any condition. If a person were to commit an immoral dirty deed right next to his house, Islamic governments have business with him."[10]

Except for the few months he spent in France when his opponents claimed that he practiced *taqiyeh* before the Western press, Khomeini made no secret of his goal of establishing Islamic government. The secularists simply did not listen. Khosrow, a Western-educated Iranian of about thirty, was typical of the liberal, democratic center of the revolution who so totally believed in Khomeini. I encountered him at passport control in Kathmandu, Nepal, during the final days of Pahlavi Iran. The line was long and slow, creating an atmosphere in which total strangers drift into conversation. Naturally Khosrow and I talked about Iran. He was enthralled with the unfolding events. I asked him what he thought was going to happen. He happily replied, "The shah is finished. Khomeini did it. He will come back to Iran and make everything right." Somewhat surprised at his enthusiasm, I asked him if he had considered what it would be like to live in a theocracy. He looked startled. "A theocracy? That isn't what this revolution is about. Iranians would never tolerate a theocracy. And Khomeini would never try to establish one." But he was wrong.

For a while after his tumultuous welcome home, Khomeini went back to the simple house at 61 Kuche Yakchal Ghazi in Qom, where he had lived before his exile. On the surface, he seemed content to act as guide or counselor, leaving his handpicked prime minister, Mehdi Bazargan, in charge of the Provisional Revolutionary Government. Below the surface, the polarization process between the left and center, on one side, and Khomeini and his followers on the other had already begun.

Bazargan, a scrupulously religious man, came out of the National Front. One of Iran's Western-educated, he was another of the prerevolutionary writers who had reshaped Marxist ideology in terms of Islam. For him, there was no conflict between the faith and his deeply held belief in the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, basic freedoms, and respect for the individual. Yet all were rooted in Western political thought, which Khomeini viewed as secularism, that despicable cultural import from the imperial West. Vowing to avoid a repeat of the

Constitutional Revolution, Khomeini braced to stop the Western-tainted intelligentsia from pushing the *ulama* aside.

Ignoring his philosophical differences with the ayatollah, the short, balding, and bespectacled Bazargan harnessed his reputation for piety and integrity to the political and economic havoc created by fourteen months of demonstrations and crippling strikes. Unfortunately for the liberals, Bazargan proved too ineffectual and too naive for his time. Void of charisma that bestows authority in Iranian political culture, he could not collect the taxes, utility bills, or even bus fares that Iranians had refused to pay during the shah's final months. What support he commanded came from the educated middle class. Too small and too late to the revolution, it provided him no leverage. Real power resided with the mullahs, who wrote Bazargan off. Benefiting from the collapse of the monarchy and Khomeini's immense popularity, the *ulama* had converted from a decaying institution into a formidable force capable of wielding potent political power.

As the Provisional Revolutionary Government had challenged Bakhtiar's transitional government, the clerics now challenged Bazargan through the Revolutionary Council. With a membership of sixteen to nineteen, the Revolutionary Council was originally organized by Khomeini during his final weeks in France. A secret body, it brought together the ayatollah's most trusted supporters from his years of exile. Although among those in its original membership, Bazargan was a layman within a group dominated by clerics. However, with credentials as a Khomeini revolutionary, he managed to pull the Revolutionary Council and the Provisional Revolutionary Government into tandem for a while. In general, the Revolutionary Council made policy and the Provisional Government carried it out.* But it could not last. Bazargan wanted to govern the nation, the Revolutionary Council wanted to remake society. It was during Bazargan's stewardship of Iran—mid-February to early November 1979—that the political revolution began to give way to the cultural revolution.

The fault lines of the political-cultural contest appeared during the March 30 referendum called to determine the nature of the postrevolutionary state. Pulling together several secular groups as well as a collection of moderate mullahs, Bazargan argued that the electorate should be given a choice between at least two forms of government—secular or religious. Khomeini said no. The voters would vote yes or

*In the interest of clarity, the Provisional Revolutionary Government will be referred to as simply the Provisional Government.

no on whether Iran should become an Islamic republic. Supposedly 90 percent of the voters went to the polls amid charges of voting irregularities to cast their ballots in overwhelming numbers for an Islamic republic. Consequently in the first showdown with the secularists, the Islamic militants had won. Ayatollah Khomeini declared the first day of a government of God. Over the next fifteen months, institutions possessed by the militants ensured that the vote for the Islamic republic turned into reality.

The first of these were the *komitehs* (committees), organized around neighborhood mosques and within groups of students and workers. During 1978, they formed the front lines of the anti-shah strikes and demonstrations. After Khomeini's return, the *komitehs* established themselves as a rival authority to the police. Basically vigilantes determined to prevent a counterrevolution, they arbitrarily arrested men, women, and even children on charges ranging from suspected prostitution to undefined antirevolutionary activities. Although a few came from the political left, the overwhelming number of *komitehs* were Islamic. As guardians of a revolution they saw only in terms of Islam, they invaded private homes to seize Western music, pour out liquor, and confiscate anything that offended their Islamic sensitivities. Loyal to a local mullah, they multiplied like bacteria in a medium of newfound power.

Karim is fortyish, a product of the Iranian middle class who now lives in Los Angeles. "I supported the revolution. After all, being educated but without good connections, I was one of the ones who expected to benefit from the fall of the shah. I even supported Khomeini. I believed all that garbage about the 'just society' freed from American domination. That didn't last long. You know why—the *komitehs*. One night about eleven o'clock some of my friends were at my house. We were having some beers and listening to some music. Someone who had just come in from Europe brought one of those silly 'girlie' magazines. We were just having some laughs. All of a sudden—bam! The front door flew open and here came the bearded fanatics. They took us all to jail. I stayed there for ten days. That's when I decided to leave Iran."

The Revolutionary Guards Corps, the military arm of the Revolutionary Council, constituted the second institution undercutting Bazargan's government. It was born in the aftermath of the May 1979 assassination of Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, the powerful Islamic voice of the revolution. Fearing for their own safety, the militant clerics organized a private army to act as a counterweight to both the reg-

ular army and the parties of the left. Recruitment began immediately through the mosques. It drew zealous volunteers from the poor and the humble empowered by the revolution. As the soldiers of Islam, the men of the Guards wore plain green fatigues without insignia, medals, or ranks. Although they played a crucial role in quelling some of the ethnic uprisings that had erupted against a weakened central government, the Revolutionary Guards belonged to the mullahs, not the state.*

The revolutionary tribunals composed the third institution created and controlled by the Islamic militants. The product of Shia Islam's legal tradition, which entrusts enforcement of the sharia to Islamic judges, these tribunals operated beyond the scope of government. The first convened secretly on February 15, 1979, in the Alawi Girls School in Tehran, where Khomeini set up headquarters immediately after his return. With the approval of the ayatollah, hojjat ol-eslam Sadeq Khalkhali pronounced sentence on four high-ranking commanders in the shah's military. In an act of grim efficiency, lackeys of the court led the condemned to the roof, ordered them to lie down spread-eagle, and shot them through the head. Trials and points of execution spread. By the middle of March maybe seventy people, mostly members of SAVAK, the army, and the cabinet, had faced the firing squad. On April 7, Amir Abbas Hoveyda, the shah's longtime prime minister, was found to be a "doer of mischief on earth" and shot. These executions proceeded from the assumption that if no senior army officers and no political personalities from the old regime remained alive, there could be no counterrevolution. But they also flowed from the fountain of revenge. Hojjat ol-eslam Kermani, a foreign-policy specialist in the Islamic Republic who had spent ten years in the shah's prisons, told me, "After the victory of the revolution, many of the same people who tortured me in prison came begging for favors. The same happened to other clerics. None of us was tolerant of these people who were torturers and executioners. We tried them and we executed them."

Bazargan pleaded for an end to the bloodletting, and Khomeini, the accepted guide of morality, ruled in May 1979 that capital punishment was the exclusive fate of those responsible for actual killing during the shah's rule. But the executions continued unabated and Khomeini remained quiet. During the revolution's first nine months,

*Ethnic uprisings linked to the demand for political autonomy represented a major threat to the new government.

almost six hundred Iranians, ranging from the elite of Pahlavi Iran to prostitutes and brothel managers, went before the firing squad. Although death sentences were pronounced in many places by many clerics, hojjat ol-eslam Khalkhali personified the revolutionary tribunals. A short, fat man with eyes wildly magnified by thick, dirty glasses, he scribbled execution orders on scraps of paper and rushed the firing squad or the hangman to action before anyone in real authority could hear appeals. A man known for the pleasure he took in strangling cats, Khalkhali defended his actions. "There is no room in the Revolutionary Courts for defense lawyers because they keep quoting laws to play for time, and this tries the patience of the people."[11] Khalkhali was tolerated as a convenient tool of militant Islam's political campaign. When he was eventually forced to resign as an Islamic judge, it was because he was unable to account for nearly $14 million collected in drug raids, property confiscations, and fines.

In the months following the shah's departure, these three revolutionary organizations strengthened their positions through edicts from the top of the clerical order and harassment and terror inflicted at the street level by zealots. While Bazargan dueled with a sword lacking a blade, the *komitehs*, the Revolutionary Guards, and the tribunals evolved into a rival state apparatus capable of engaging the Provisional Government in a full-scale power struggle.

In the third week of April 1979, the power exerted by the Revolutionary Council split the ranks of those who had waged the revolution. Karim Sanjabi, one of Mossadeq's disciples in the 1950s and foreign minister in Bazargan's government, quit in protest over "disorders created by government within government."[12] That same week, Mahmoud Taleghani, the prayer leader of Tehran, a philosophical soulmate of Ali Shariati and one of the few clerics with ties to the Marxists, warned that Iran was in danger of slipping back into dictatorship. In response, the Revolutionary Council arrested Taleghani's Marxist sons and drove the father into hiding. Thousands of his followers went into the streets chanting "Taleghani, you are the soul of the revolution. Down with the reactionaries." Suddenly the centrists and leftists glimpsed the possibility of taking charge of the revolution through Taleghani. But they lacked the critical element—Khomeini. Abhorring the "nonbelievers" of the left, Ayatollah Khomeini summoned Ayatollah Taleghani to Qom. There he heaped scorn on the cleric's head before he called in the press. Denying him respect as an ayatollah, Khomeini announced, "Mr. Taleghani is with us and he is sorry for what happened."[13]

In August 1979, the liberals and the leftists chose to stand and fight rather than abandon their place in Iran's new order. Ten thousand protestors massed at the gates of the University of Tehran to protest new restrictions on the press that essentially ended the Prague Spring of the Iranian Revolution. The mullahs' street toughs dispersed them and Khomeini issued a stark warning to his challengers: "When we want we can throw you into the dustbin of death."[14]

Thus as the summer of 1979 ended, Khomeini's version of the revolution took shape. Censorship of "certain things that would lead to the corruption and demoralization of man" was in place; four clerics close to Khomeini, including Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ali Khamenei, joined Bazargan's cabinet; and the Assembly of Experts charged with finalizing the new constitution had been elected.

The Bazargan government had unveiled a draft constitution on June 18. Although paying lip service to an Islamic state, it resembled the 1906 constitution minus the monarch. The document had been approved by the cabinet, the Revolutionary Council, and Khomeini, after he added provisions barring women from the presidency and judgeships. On August 3, an election chose the Assembly of Experts to act as a constituent assembly to finalize the basic law. Debate centered on the role of religion in the Islamic Republic declared by the votes of the masses fulfilling Khomeini's will.

Khomeini charged the militant clerics dominating the assembly to review the draft constitution from an Islamic perspective. According to the ayatollah, "This right belongs to you. It is those knowledgeable in Islam who may express an opinion on the law of Islam. The constitution of the Islamic Republic means the constitution of Islam. Don't sit back while foreignized intellectuals, who have no faith in Islam, give their views and write the things they write."[15] So the battle was joined as the militant clerics dissected the draft constitution article by article. And article by article, the secularists and clerics who recognized Islam as integral to Iran but who opposed fusing religion and the state grappled with Khomeini supporters who wanted only one thing—government defined in the *Velayat-e Faqih*. Unlike their predecessors in 1906, Khomeini's men in the Assembly of Experts suffered from neither an inferiority complex toward the West nor intellectual confusion about government and religion. With no apologies to anyone, they translated Islam into constitutional principles which guaranteed the privileged status of the *ulama* as Iran's new rulers.

The 1979 constitution that emerged from the Assembly of Experts created a Majlis, modeled on that of the 1906 constitution, and a president. Together they formed the legislative and executive wings of government, much like those found in the secular West. But real power resided in the parallel religious branches—the Council of Guardians and the Supreme Jurisprudent or *faqih*. In essence, the constitution created a republic while repudiating popular sovereignty. Although the Majlis passed all legislation, the twelve-man Council of Guardians was empowered to veto all laws—civil, penal, economic, administrative, cultural, military, and political—which failed to meet the exacting laws of Islam. In turn, the Council of Guardians, along with the president and the Majlis, submitted to the authority of the *faqih*. Just as it defined the powers of the executive and legislative branches of government, the constitution recognized the *faqih* as possessing a special mystique and aura of infallibility which sanctified politics and required obedience as a religious obligation. In the Shia tradition, the *faqih* serves as the powerful authority figure who distinguishes good from evil, truth from falsehood.

It came as no surprise that the Assembly of Experts on October 14, 1979, approved Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as the *faqih*—the Supreme Jurisprudent. He also collected command of the armed forces and veto power over all candidates for the Majlis and the presidency. All that remained was the referendum approving Iran's theocracy. A little over a week after he became *faqih*, Khomeini warned his followers about "dissenters" plotting the destruction of the Islamic Republic through the election. Before those alleged dissenters could even vote, they would be disarmed by the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran.

It had been nine months since Muhammad Reza Shah left Iran. He had spent a brief five days in Egypt, then moved on to Morocco, where a nervous King Hassan played reluctant host for two and a half months. On March 30, the day of the referendum on the Islamic Republic, Hassan put the shah and his shrinking entourage on a plane for the Bahamas. Ever since he left Iran in mid-January, the shah had assumed that the United States would welcome him when he chose to come. But on February 14, 1979, militants staged the first attack on the American embassy in Tehran. Although Prime Minister Bazargan succeeded in calling them off, Washington trembled. When the shah expressed his wish to enter the United States in the early summer of 1979, the nervous Carter administration found him refuge in a villa in Cuernavaca, Mexico.

Muhammad Reza Pahlavi was a sick man. In 1974 he had been diagnosed with lymphoma, cancer of the lymphatic system. For five

years, Dr. Georges Flandrin of the Hospital St. Louis in Paris secretly flew into Tehran every five or six weeks to treat the man so many believed indispensable to Iran. Incredibly, the secret stayed within the palace. Despite its ties to the court and all of its CIA agents, the United States remained as ignorant of the shah's health as the Iranians. But now everyone knew.

Henry Kissinger and Chase Manhattan Bank's David Rockefeller led a battalion of the shah's American friends to pound on the doors of the White House, Congress, and the media demanding that the United States honor its commitment to its old ally. Finally, Jimmy Carter, the man the shah accused of throwing him out of Iran like a mouse, caved in. The shah could come to New York for medical treatment and then return to Mexico.

The news flashed to Iran. Immediately the xenophobic fears rooted in 1953 took charge of the Iranian imagination. In popular perception, the deposed shah in New York meant nothing less than the intention of the United States to overthrow the revolution and restore the Pahlavi dynasty. The royal patient had hardly settled into Cornell Medical Center on the East River when some eighty students, mostly from Tehran's Polytechnique University, gathered to formulate a spectacular act of protest over both the shah's presence in the United States and Bazargan's recent contact with President Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski. They began planning a sit-in at the United States embassy, the imposing symbol of American power in Iran.

Occupying twenty-three acres in the heart of downtown Tehran, the property on which the American embassy sat had been purchased in 1928 for sixty thousand dollars from a family forced to sell to pay off a gambling debt. By 1979, the walled compound bordered by Roosevelt and Takht-e Jamshid avenues resembled a small town protected by thirteen U.S. Marines and a handful of Iranian policemen.

At midmorning on November 4, the group calling itself Students Following the Imam's Line sent chador-clad women to parade around the embassy's perimeter. Over and over, they shouted, "Death to America." Ironically, two top U.S. envoys were at the Foreign Ministry at about the same time requesting diplomatic immunity for the embassy's military personnel, the same issue on which Khomeini had attacked the shah in 1964. With the chanting women pulling attention to the street, a second contingent of students, following directions provided by inside information, found a basement window in the main chancery. Slipping inside, they seized every American in the building.

With pistols pointed to their heads, blindfolds covering their eyes, and cords binding their wrists, the Americans were marched out into the open for the world to see. Aware that the embassy had been invaded, staff members in the two adjacent buildings frantically shredded documents. Before they finished, they too were overpowered and herded to the circus outside. The American envoys at the Iranian Foreign Ministry pleaded with the Bazargan government to intervene as it had in February. But it was too late for the Provisional Government.

By the next day, the scene outside the embassy had turned into an orgy of hatred. The students ran a succession of press conferences in which they held up documents found in the "nest of spies" and displayed the latest photographs of bound and blindfolded hostages to crowds roaring their approval. Others wielding cans of spray paint continued to turn the high brick walls surrounding the embassy into billboards for anti-American slogans printed in English and Farsi. During the day, a string of mullahs, including Khomeini's son Ahmed, passed through the barricades to inspect the great prize of the revolution. However once that prize was captured, the militants had no idea how to use it. Khomeini did. An act of outrage against the United States would serve to ensure the adoption of the new constitution.

The ayatollah had not instigated the seizure of the embassy. But once he saw that it played to most Iranians as a high-profile act of nationalism, he embraced it. Khomeini the nationalist and Khomeini the Muslim laid the United States on the rack while Khomeini the politician whipped the fifty-two American hostages to win his definition of the Iranian state. Again Khomeini reached into Shia tradition for the symbol he needed for his revolution within the revolution. In Shiism, it is believed that Satan exerts his influence by acting within a person. Although it may appear that the person is the wrongdoer, it is, in fact, Satan. Khomeini applied the same concept to the United States. Satan dwelled within the global superpower, directing his power against Iran. From this premise of invisible evil exerting its will, America became the Great Satan. According to R. K. Ramazani, the preimminent authority on Iranian foreign policy, "The taking of American hostages was a supreme example of the continuity of past Iranian behavioral patterns, namely, to manipulate foreign powers or their nationals in domestic struggles for power."[16]

Bazargan, stripped of the last shred of his authority, resigned. The Provisional Government went with him, leaving the Revolutionary

Council to take over as the third steward of the state since the revolution.

The Revolutionary Council scheduled the vote on the proposed constitution for the Islamic Republic for the following month. In the intervening weeks, the Islamic radicals used the American hostages and the state's radio and television network to deftly twist together opposition to the constitution as collaboration with the United States. In the final manipulation of Shia symbols, the vote came the day after Ashura in the holy month of Muharram. By a 99.5 percent margin, almost 16 million voters approved the twentieth century's only theocracy. For the moment, Iranians shed their Persian past to become an Islamic society in which the principles of social order and personal life strictly conformed to the limits set in scripture, interpreted by the *ulama*.

While the masses might have approved the idea of the *Velayat-e Faqih*, the secularists did not. However, they proved less a threat than official Shiism. Among six grand ayatollahs, not one totally concurred with Khomeini on the key issues of Islamic government, including the whole theory of the supreme spiritual guide. Opposition within the clergy, centering around the concern over the corrupting effect of political power, dug so deep and sparked so much emotion that followers of rival ayatollahs clashed with supporters of Khomeini in December 1979 and January 1980. In the agitation, it appeared that Ayatollah Shariatmadari, still a revered Shia scholar in Iran, might lead a rival religious movement to that of Khomeini. But never a political man, he faltered. As a result, Khomeini and the political clerics were free to unleash ridicule, intimidation, censorship, and house arrest on their dissenting colleagues.

Perhaps to head off rival clerics, Khomeini as the *faqih* forbade any clerical candidates in Iran's presidential election on January 25, 1980. As a result, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr became the first president of the Islamic Republic. Another of the Western-educated Marxists who created the Islamic alternative to secular socialism, he had joined Khomeini at Neauphle-le Chateau in France. His goals then were no different than his goals as president: equitable distribution of national resources and justice within an Iran free of foreign influence. But Bani-Sadr would fail largely because he did not embrace either the masses or Khomeini's version of Islamic government. Tall, lean, sporting a neat little mustache and European haircut, he looked like what he was—a Westernized Iranian. And like the other reform-minded intellectuals, he neither understood nor communicated with the Iranian masses. Be that as it may, Bani-Sadr's greatest political error was his attempt to hold the state separate from and superior to the mosque. That proved intolerable to the new political elite—the politicized mullahs. Unlike the senior clerics, who generally came out of distinguished families of the Qajar era, the younger clerics were predominantly products of the middle and lower class. Their prestige resulted from political activism rather than scholarly erudition. Having achieved upward social mobility behind Islamic government, they would not tolerate any compromise with secular authority. Even the name of Ali Shariati disappeared from the revolutionary lexicon. Because he had targeted the *ulama* in his writings as a cause of Iran's malaise, the clerics who welcomed his influence in the revolution against the shah now erased it from the Islamic Republic.

With the forces of politicized Islam muddying the field of government, Bani-Sadr was mired in deep political trouble from the beginning. Mistrusted not only by the clerics but by several members of his own liberal coalition, the president never really commanded authority. Instead power resided with the militant clerics clustered in a pseudo-political party called the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), essentially a reconstruction of the Revolutionary Council replaced by the new constitution.

Accepted in popular perception as speaking for Khomeini, the IRP won almost half the seats in the First Majlis election on March 14. Aided by allies, it controlled parliament, the Council of Guardians, and the Revolutionary Guards. Bani-Sadr held the fragile presidency, the dismembered army, and a slice of Iranian culture. Between them huddled the American hostages, pawns in the internal struggle for power. The president urged that the hostages be transferred to government control. The clerics insisted they stay with the students. Khomeini watched and waited for his next opportunity to push his agenda forward. It came when the United States attempted to rescue its citizens.

In the dark of April 24, 1980, eight Sea Stallion RH-53D helicopters lifted off from the elongated deck of the aircraft carrier *Nimitz*, cruising in the Arabian Sea southeast of Iran. Their orders were to fly northwest to a remote landing strip 275 miles from Tehran. There they would rendezvous with six C-130 Hercules transport planes carrying the commandos, vans, and trucks assigned to storm the American embassy in Tehran to rescue the hostages. The helicopters hit a sandstorm that disabled two and sent a third crashing into one

of the C-130s. Both aircraft burst into flames. With eight servicemen dead, the rescue mission ended, leaving the hostages in place and the Iranians convinced that the United States had attempted another 1953-style coup.

Ayatollah Khomeini had long been warning the Iranian people of an impending American attack. When the invasion of Iranian airspace came and so dismally failed, Khomeini credited God. In words alive with political and religious imagery, he said God had thrown sand into the motors of the U.S. helicopters to protect a nation governed by Islam. In the circumstances, Bani-Sadr simply could not compete with God. The way opened for Khomeini and his clerics to launch their final drive for absolute power in what was a cultural as well as a political revolution. The mullahs understood as Muhammad Reza Shah had understood that culture is not politically neutral. Rather it implies who in society wields power and who enjoys legitimacy.

During the week of the ill-fated American rescue mission, supporters of Khomeini's vision of Islamic Iran launched bloody riots at universities in Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz, and Isfahan, bases of secular opposition to the Islamic state. Militant Muslim students attacked the Marxist Fadaiyan-e Khalq (People's Sacrificers) and the Mujahedin-e Khalq (People's Holy Warriors) as well as moderate and liberal organizations judged "counterrevolutionary." (See chapter 11 for a discussion of the Fadaiyan-e Khalq and the Mujahedin-e Khalq.) The Islamic militants won. But the war for the culture consumed all of society, not just the universities. In the early phases of the revolution, mobs in the street had taken it upon themselves to force Islamic dress on women. Now the government imposed *hejab* on the entire female population. In less than half a century, Reza Shah's police, who beat women for wearing the chador, had been replaced by Khomeini's police, who beat women for not wearing the veil. Elsewhere in the new order, neckties, a symbol of the West, disappeared; restrictions on the press imposed prison terms for criticizing Islam; the Center for the Campaign Against Sin banned the sale of records and tapes of "vulgar music" from the West; and ancient punishments for the crime of adultery resurfaced.

In a reversal of the Pahlavis, the new regime tried to eradicate vestiges of Iran's pre-Islamic culture. Ayatollah Khomeini attacked Ferdowsi, discouraged the use of Persian first names, and hinted at an end to the observance of No Ruz by expressing the hope that in the future the only holiday celebrated would be the Prophet's birthday. Others took aim at the physical symbols of Persia. In Shiraz, zealots

set out on the back of bulldozers intent on knocking down the Persian ruins at Persepolis. That group was dissuaded by historical preservationists, but others damaged a wall of the Apadana etched with the image of Ahura Mazda. The large Sassanian reliefs at Biston carved in 250 B.C. survived only because an ingenious guard convinced the crowd that one of the figures in stone represented the man who married the daughter of Hussein.

It is somehow ironic that Muhammad Reza Shah, the man who tried to erase Islam from Iranian culture, died that same summer of 1980. His death occurred on July 27 in Cairo, the first and last stop on a lonely odyssey that had taken him to Egypt, Morocco, the Bahamas, Mexico, the United States, Panama, and back to Egypt. There, in the words of the poet Awhadi, "he ended fearing for his life, on the pinnacle of nothingness." A horse-drawn carriage bore his coffin, covered with the flag of Pahlavi Iran, through the blistering heat of an Egyptian summer to el-Rifai Mosque, to the tomb where Reza Shah was laid to rest in 1944. In the Islamic Republic, Radio Tehran gloated, "Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the bloodsucker of the century, has died at last." The object against which all the disparate elements of the revolution had thrown their rage was gone. But another common enemy poised ready to strike.

On September 22, 1980, Iraq's Saddam Hussein sent his army across the Shatt al-Arab and into Iran. Seeking revenge for the shah's territorial ambitions of 1975 and moving to weaken a revolution that called to his own Shia population, Saddam Hussein staged the second Arab invasion of Iran. Although the war surprised the clerics within the leadership of revolutionary Iran, they embraced it as an opportunity to test the mettle of the nation and affirm the spiritual power of the faith. To the embattled president Bani-Sadr, the war came almost as a blessing. The assault on him mounted by the political clerics paused as nationalism temporarily bonded Iranians even more tightly than during the uprising against the shah. But unity did not last long because the more basic war over the culture still had to be decided.

By the first months of 1981, the word "moderate" carried treasonous overtones for those pushing Iran to the extreme of its Islamic identity. Holding all the power, revolutionary Islam would, in time, destroy the secular president of the Islamic Republic. When the American hostages were released on January 20, 1981, it was Khomeini who made the decision, not Bani-Sadr. It came because 444 days after their seizure, the hostages no longer served a purpose in the contest with secular government. Driven by the need to end Iran's in-

ternational isolation in order to better fight the war with Iraq, Khomeini solved Iran's great external crisis.

In March 1981, the Majlis officially began to restrict the president's powers. At the same time, the militant students began to push him from office by releasing correspondence pieced together from the American embassy files documenting CIA contacts with Bani-Sadr both in Paris and in Tehran. Although there was no proof that he served as an American informer, the dark shadow of the Great Satan fell across Bani-Sadr. More important, the last months of the struggle for power between the secular president and the militant clerics functioning through the Islamic Republican party unfolded against the backdrop of the war with Iraq. Bani-Sadr denounced the IRP as a "greater calamity for the country than the war with Iraq," and the IRP retorted that it was "preferable to lose half of Iran than for Bani-Sadr to become the ruler."[17] Desperate for some leverage against the IRP, the president called for a national referendum to decide the issue of who controlled the government. That constituted Bani-Sadr's final act. In a contest between a Paris-educated intellectual and the clergy, Khomeini would decide the outcome. Responding to a June rally that sent two hundred thousand secularists into Tehran's streets, Khomeini, the *faqih*, thundered, "The day I feel danger to the Islamic Republic, I will cut everybody's hand off. I will do to you what I did to Muhammad Reza [Shah]."[18] Then he stripped Bani-Sadr of the title of commander in chief.* The signal had been sent that the president no longer possessed the ayatollah's backing. On June 21, the Majlis by a vote of 177 to 1 declared Bani-Sadr "politically incompetent" to hold office. Seeing the proverbial writing on the wall, Bani-Sadr had already gone underground. Six weeks later, he escaped to France on an air force plane piloted by the same Captain Behzad Moezzi who had flown the shah out of Iran for the last time. The man who, in the Persian tradition, sought to assimilate the ideas of western democracy into Islam left behind Ayatollah Khomeini and the radical clergy at the center of Iranian politics holding high the Islamic component of Iranian culture. Thus ten years after the celebration at Persepolis, Iran had swung from the excessive emphasis on its Persian identity to the far reaches of its Islamic identity.

*Other demonstrations in support of Bani-Sadr occurred in Qom, Tabriz, Shiraz, Ahwaz, and Bandar Abbas.