
The Anatomy of a Unique Revolution

If the twentieth century were to go down in history as a “revolution century,” Iran should undoubtedly claim a special distinction. In a span of seventy short years—short in terms of Iran’s 2500 years of documented history—the political *status quo* was threatened, tested, or changed by no less than seven different challenges to the incumbent political authority. In 1906, a group of intellectual, enlightened politicians, establishment *ulama*, and *bazaar* merchants rose against the tyrannical absolutism of the Qajar monarchy in favor of a just and free society. In February 1921, a successful coup d’état was launched by the head of the Cossack brigade—Colonel Reza Khan, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty—against the corruption and ineptitude of the last Qajar king, the virtual colonization of Iran by Britain and Russia, and internal anarchy. In 1941, the Allied invasion of Iran, under the pretext of opening a supply route from the Persian Gulf to the Soviet Union, forced Reza Shah’s abdication from the throne, and placed in jeopardy the continuation of the Pahlavi rule. In 1946, the provinces of Azarbaijan and Kurdistan, with Soviet support and encouragement, demanded local autonomy from the central government, but later surrendered to Tehran authority. In 1953, an abortive challenge was made by Mohammad Mossadeq and his followers to Mohammad Reza Shah’s reign and rule regime. In 1962–63, a chain of civil uprisings took place in support of Ayatollah Khomeini against the shah’s so-called “White Revolution” and Western orientation. And in 1978–79, a mass uprising under the ultimate leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini ultimately led to the shah’s overthrow and the establishment of an Islamic republic.

The volcanic political explosion that ended the Pahlavi dynasty in February 1979 is still remembered with astonishment, dismay, and disbelief. Even after more than a decade, the effects of that ominous event are still reverberating through the intelligence community, diplomatic circles, academic conferences, and research centers. The multitude of theories and hypotheses

offered by area specialists, academic experts, accredited diplomats, Middle East correspondents of major world media, Iranian and foreign government officials, and others, bear witness to the intractable character of the event.

There is considerable agreement among Iranologists that the Pahlavi debacle was an uncommon event in the sense that a viable economy, an experienced political leader, and a seemingly solid regime backed by a strong military force were brought down not by a foreign invasion, not by a palace coup, not by an armed uprising, and not by an internal ethnic challenge—but by nationwide labor strikes, protracted public sector slow-downs, massive street demonstrations, guerilla attacks, riots, and sabotage. The historical oddity, if not uniqueness, of the Iranian revolution can be seen in its four salient features: its unforeseen rapid rise; its wide base of urban support; its vague ideological character; and, above all, its ultimate singular objective, to oust the shah.

A SUDDEN TURN OF EVENTS

A salient feature of the 1979 revolution—which enables it to somewhat defy many past historic parallels—has to do with its seemingly spontaneous and largely unexpected emergence. By all appearances, it was not until the last few weeks of the disturbances that most experts in and out of Iran reached the conclusion that Mohammad Reza Shah was not going to make it. Stranger still, neither those Iranian protestors who were calling for *democratic* rule, nor the underground Marxist guerrillas who wanted to change the system to one of their own liking, nor certainly the millions of fence sitters among the rural population and small-city dwellers—who were waiting to see who would win—expected the religious fundamentalists' ultimate triumph over other claimants. Strangest of all, the revolutionaries themselves did not seem to know their own future much less to have any master plan or grand design. Admiral Stansfield Turner, the then CIA director, said in a televised program that Ayatollah Khomeini was perhaps more surprised than anyone else with the regime's swift collapse and his own rise to power.¹ A senior U.S. diplomat in Tehran at the time quotes the deputy prime minister of the provisional government, a week after the revolutionary takeover, as saying: "Victory had come before we were ready to manage it." And, again: "We did not have our government ready to fit into place."² Interestingly enough, foreign observers and analysts who were unaffected by the internal turmoil and could be expected to offer a more detached and objective assessment of forthcoming events were equally confounded.

Prior to 1978, none of the experts on Iran chose to label the opposition as fundamentally religious. Leonard Binder saw the clergy, after 1963, as

traditional “friends and supporters” of the shah despite the monarch’s reservations about “orthodox Shi’ite Islam.”³ James Bill, up to early 1979, considered the middle class to be the main source of opposition to the Pahlavi regime, and even after the revolution he saw “the Shi’ite clergy [as] mentally and emotionally unprepared for the challenge of rebuilding Iran.”⁴ Even Hamid Algar who, as early as 1969, foresaw continued protests in “religious terms” as a positive response to Khomeini’s appeals, did not predict a religious uprising.⁵

At the beginning of 1977, foreign observers were of the opinion that “the monarchy does appear to have the support, albeit passive, of the bulk of the people.” As of mid-1977, virtually no expert, in or out of the country, saw any possibility of the shah’s fall from power. Even some intelligence operatives—subsequently showered with plaudits for having detected the explosiveness of the situation in advance of others—did not reach this conclusion until early 1978.⁶ A quasi-academic study in 1977 devoted to the subject, and highly critical of the shah’s priorities and policies, did not venture to suggest, let alone predict, the regime’s eventual collapse.⁷ One experienced foreign observer, in the midst of Iran’s growing turmoil, was still arguing that “oil revenues are creating a whole new middle class that has every reason for supporting the status quo.”⁸ As late as December 1977, the U.S. Embassy in Tehran was of the opinion that: “the prospects for sustained growth are excellent, given Iran’s low debt, strong financial reserves, reliable future income from oil, increasing industrial capacity, and *political stability*.”⁹ As of April and May 1978 American newspaper correspondents in Tehran were arguing that the shah had “firm control” over the ongoing political turbulence; that he had ample resources to crush any serious challenge to his regime; and that even the dissidents thought their early victory to be rather unlikely.¹⁰

In late August–September of 1978, the U.S. intelligence establishment was still relatively confident that the opposition did not pose a real threat to the regime. The U.S. State Department, for the most part (with the notable exception of the anti-shah group in Washington), believed that while the monarch might be forced to make political concessions to the democratic secularists, he was in no serious danger. It was as late as November 1978—only two months before the shah was forced to leave—that Ambassador William Sullivan concluded that the “end of the regime” had come and that a “revolution” was taking place. A seasoned American analyst with extensive knowledge of Iranian politics and history later summed up the situation by telling a U.S. Congressional committee in 1980 that “most observers would have thought that the actual events of the last twenty-four months were highly unlikely, if not inconceivable.”¹¹

The absence of foresight was typical of almost all governments’ intelligence services, journalists, and academic experts. With the now celebrated

exception of two reports—one by a former Israeli Mossad operative, and the other by a junior intelligence officer in the French Embassy in Tehran early in 1978 (reportedly wondering if the shah could survive “more than two or three years”), no one believed the monarch was in serious trouble until the fatal last few weeks of 1978–79. And while too much is made in retrospect of the extraordinary omniscience shown in those two intelligence reports, the fact remains that neither the French nor Israeli governments, whose interests were going to be markedly affected by the upcoming revolution, thought enough of the reports’ validity to bother to inform the shah about the threat. Nor did they evidently have any contingency planning of their own, or major policy reorientation.¹²

The same was evidently true of the Soviet government and the KGB. For three months prior to February 1979, the Soviet press as an unofficial mirror of the Kremlin’s policy showed no foresight about the direction of events in Iran and the fate of the Pahlavi dynasty. Only in late January 1979 did Moscow decide that the shah was finished, and Ayatollah Khomeini would prevail. As a *New York Times* correspondent reported at the time, the Russians seemed as surprised as the Americans at the explosion of resentment and opposition that drove the shah from the throne. During the 1978 turmoil, the Soviet press treated the shah gingerly, if not respectfully. They abstained from joining his detractors in faulting him for the riots, which they regarded as a passing social phenomenon. It was not until a week after the shah’s departure from Tehran that *Izvestia* denounced him as “a corrupt dictator who had brutally repressed his people.”¹³ Western diplomats in Moscow are also quoted as believing that the Soviets were as concerned as the United States about the chaos in Iran. They had no better idea of what was going to happen than Washington did—and Washington had none.

So scant and shallow seems to have been foreign understanding of the unique nature of the Iranian revolution and its aftermath that the prognosis of future events after the shah’s departure once again missed the target. In its “Man of the Year” cover story in January 1980—a year after Khomeini’s accession to power—*Time* magazine warned its readers of ominous threats and dangers in near apocalyptic terms. The Iranian revolution, wrote the *Time* editors, threatened “to upset the world balance of power more than any political event since Hitler’s conquest of Europe.” Khomeini’s victory was to serve as a “model for future uprisings throughout the Third World.” The United States, Western Europe, and Japan were to be plagued by “continuing inflation and rising unemployment.” The policies of the new Islamic Republic were to lead to “Soviet adventurism” and U.S.-Soviet confrontation. A rebellion was believed possible among the USSR’s fifty million Moslems as a consequence of Khomeini’s “incendiary Islamic nationalism.” Professor James Bill, who predicted the shah’s downfall in 1978, saw only three basic alternatives:

an authoritarian leftist regime, a right-wing military junta, or a Western Liberal democratic government; none of which actually transpired. Professor Abrahamian, among other leftist sympathizers, also foresaw a quick defeat for Khomeini at the hands of the "labor movement and the left."¹⁴

History seems to have played its cruelest joke on these soothsayers. Contrary to *Time's* cataclysmic predictions, the revolution had no perceptible effect on the world balance of power; the West had its longest postwar recovery period, U.S.-Soviet relations improved to the highest level since the World War II alliance against Nazi Germany, and Islamic tendencies were reversed in Pakistan and Sudan. Even at the height of the war with Iraq, the Iraqi Shi'ites did not raise a finger against Saddam Hussein, in sympathy with Khomeini. To be sure, Islamic fundamentalism, as a *political* force for change, has survived Khomeini and Khomeinism. But in country after country—Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria—the fundamentalist groups have, so far, operated within the system, and free from revolutionary zeal.

None of the pundits who explained the shah's ouster, after the fact, as the obvious and inevitable outcome of his "cruelty, corruption and ineptitude," seemed to demonstrate any *ex ante* sagacity in foreseeing the fate of the new, postrevolutionary government. They spoke confidently of the early and equally inevitable collapse of Khomeini's "makeshift" regime due to such factors as capriciousness, repression, an anachronistic moral code, internal friction, ethnic separatist threats, widespread corruption, incapacity to run a faltering economy, the need to sell oil abroad, and a resurgence of Persian nationalism. The prevailing wisdom was that Khomeini's control over Iran was tenuous. Long-term observers of the Iranian scene predicted that Khomeini would be unlikely to play a central part in governing the new Iran, and his "possibility of sustained success" looked "bleak indeed."¹⁵

In spite of these dire predictions about the small chance of his survival and effective leadership, Ayatollah Khomeini consolidated his power gradually and methodically. He succeeded in establishing his Islamic republic in Iran over the objections of *all* his former allies and corevolutionaries. His designated government leaders successfully rid themselves of all enemies (Kurdish separatists, Mossadeq democrats, Shariatmadari followers, Tudeh party agitators, intra-Islamic dissidents, Marxist guerrillas, and others). Despite the loss of many of his closest aides in domestic terrorist incidents, a long bloody and ruinous war, international isolation, and economic difficulties, the Islamic Republic, and the ayatollah's own undisputed leadership survived.

The reasons for many of these surprises, misunderstandings, faulty predictions, and near confusion may be found in a pervasive political and intellectual amnesia that overlooked or underestimated underlying forces for change, and an institutional myopia that exaggerated the significance of short-run factors. Hegel believed that people and governments never learn anything

from experience and history, while Santayana warned that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. Mohammad Reza Shah, his critics, and his supporters would seem to have proved both of these points.

A "RAINBOW" COALITION

A wide base of urban support was the 1979 revolution's second special feature. There is no doubt that the revolution was not the work of a single group, with a single organization for a single cause. The final struggle to topple the shah, meticulously organized and methodically followed during 1978 and early 1979, clearly included several warring factions—as diverse in their backgrounds, training, beliefs, objectives, policies, and programs as red and black in a spectrum of colors and callings.

The "rainbow" coalition that led to the shah's defeat included avowed Marxist-atheists, liberal agnostics, nonpracticing Moslems, progressive Islamic elements among intellectuals and students, social democrat followers of former Prime Minister Mossadeq, Islamic-Marxist reformers, the established Shi'ite hierarchy (with different objectives and involvement), and, finally, Islamic fundamentalists and hard-line disciples of Ayatollah Khomeini. Participants in street marches and demonstrations included *declassé* aristocrats, old-time politicians, disgruntled job-seekers, small businessmen, new industrialists, urban workers, and idle hangers-on.

At the extreme left were the *Feda'iyān Khalq* (People's Freedom Fighting Guerrillas) and their splinter guerrilla groups that had roots in the early postwar Marxist movements and Iran's Tudeh party. These avowed Marxist-Leninist guerrillas were opposed to Western colonialism, imperialism, comprador capitalism, and U.S. involvement in Iran. They wished to establish a socialist republic modeled after that of Mirza Kuchek Khan back in 1920. Their immediate ideological platform of economic, political, and military goals called for the nationalization of industry and banking, the transfer of power from central government to workers' committees in various public or parastatal enterprises, and the disbanding of the Iranian armed forces in favor of a revolutionary people's army.

Next to this group were the *Mojahedin Khalq* (People's Crusaders) also a Marxist-leaning faction with their origin in the 1960s' religious wing of the United Front, and later, the Liberation Movement. Under the ideological tutelage of Ali Shariati (a reformist Islamic preacher), and spiritual guidance of Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani (the "red" ayatollah), this group wanted to establish a radical Islamic regime in line with the teachings of Seyyed Jalaeddin Afghani (Assad Abadi) in the nineteenth century. The latter's dream would, ideally, create a harmonious society based on Islamic equity, solidarity, and

freedom, but free from theocratic dogma, the rule by an infallible *faqih*, or the official agnosticism or atheism of a communist regime. The group's slogans advocated heroic acts of violence for the cause of freedom and justice against reactionary imperialism, foreign oppression, and American domination.

At the center of the spectrum stood a group of liberal, laic nationalists who sought to create a Western-type secular, democratic government similar to those of the Eurosocialists. Some in this group (like the Mossadeq-era National Front leaders) clearly believed in the essential (if not *de jure*) separation of the mosque and the state. They also advocated the shah's reign but not his rule. This group had the tacit support of most modernist and reformist intellectuals, professional cadres, the haute-bureaucracy, university students, modern industrialists, middle-class *non-bazaar* businessmen, and other progressive elements in society.

To the right of the center was the *Nehzat-e-Azadi* (Liberation Movement)—a religious offshoot of the original National Front—headed by Mehdi Bazargan, a university professor and civil rights activist with strong leanings toward Islam in his religious beliefs, and sympathy for Western democratic liberties in his politics. His group was in favor of some mixture of religion and politics—a kind of Islamic liberation theology—but stood away from both a theocracy and a literal application of Qor'anic laws to everyday life; it was non-Marxist. This group was largely supported by religious leaning faculty and university students, the *bazaar* and small bourgeoisie, and some progressive-minded clergy (e.g., Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari) who were essentially in favor of the 1906 Constitution and the restoration of clerical influence in *Majles* laws, but not a total Islamization of the government.¹⁶

On the extreme right, there were ultraconservative Islamic fundamentalists, followers of Ayatollah Khomeini, who advocated the establishment of a theocracy, led and administered by a theologian (*Vali-e-Faqih*) who would interpret and apply the Qor'an's scriptures, edicts, and laws as guidelines for a new Islamic way of life. While the majority of Iran's grand ayatollahs found it their duty to preserve the religious codes (*shari'a*), and protect the Islamic community against abuses by the state and the monarch, this group's notion of an Islamic government was to merge religious dogma and political power into the *Velayat-e-Faqih*. The orthodox Islamic faction was closest to Ayatollah Khomeini's thoughts, writings, and preachings. They had the active support of Khomeini's own former students and some *mojtaheds* and *mollahs* in provincial and rural areas, and particularly in the city of Qom.

Fundamental differences thus existed among these groups in the basic philosophy of administration, loyalty to the 1906 Constitution, foreign policy orientation, economic goals, experience in government, and competence in running a new regime. Not only was the Islamic contingent ideologically distinct from secular forces, the turbaned clerics and religious network of Islamic

associations had their own separate agendas. For example, Mehdi Bazargan, an Islamic politician who later became the head of Khomeini's provisional government, differed from the ayatollah in the latter's hatred of the monarchy, his savage attacks on imperialism (i.e., the United States and the West), his religious monopoly of leadership, and even in the very viability of an Islamic republic.¹⁷

The fierce power struggle that erupted on the heels of the shah's departure vividly showed the confusion and discord within the opposition. The fissures appeared shortly after the establishment of the provisional government when the Marxist *Feda'iyān Khalq* lost no time in challenging it.¹⁸ Grumbling also arose after the formation of the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini, when some other groups in the initial *de facto* coalition (e.g., the pro-Mossadeq National Front, the *Mojahedin Khalq* and the Tudeh party) broke rank with the clergy and gradually disappeared from the political scene.¹⁹ Some of the groups that were united behind Ayatollah Khomeini and played a crucial role in toppling the shah—hoping to find freedom, stability, and nationalist pride after the monarch's ouster—rose against religious involvement in political leadership and administration.²⁰ As the *Time* cover story put it, no one seriously expected that the coalition of disparate forces would hold solidly together for very long. But neither was it widely expected that *Mojahedin* and *Feda'iyān* would rise *so soon* as a mortal challenge to the ayatollah's rule.

Due to these differences in ideology, objectives, and programs, the united opposition that began in the name of freedom, justice, independence, and piety was soon mired in defections from its democratic ranks (Bazargan and the National Front), its leftist supporters, and even some of its religious backers (Ayatollah Shariatmadari). Terrorist bombs, gun battles, and assassination attempts shattered the anti-shah coalition.

A REVOLUTION FOR EVERY THEORY

The third unique feature of the February revolution has been the difficulty of its identification or classification within conventional theories. Revolutions in a true sense are quite rare. Unlike wars that never seem to cease, the overthrow of a regime in power by an organized opposition through violent means occurs only once in a very long while. The modern post-Reformation history of the world shows no more than a few such events.

Revolutions differ from independence movements and wars of liberation, coups d'état, rebellions, uprisings, and riots—in several ways. First, a real revolution is always an *ex post* phenomenon: if the opposition does not succeed, the outcome will not be called a revolution but an insurrection. Second, a true revolution is distinguishable from wars of independence waged by native

opposition against foreign rulers; it is an internalized conflict. Third, although in its final unfolding, a revolution may be triggered by certain blunders or provocations on the part of ruling authorities, it is often the result of long-simmering popular grievances and pent-up hostility toward a regime that has consciously or unconsciously exhausted its people's patience. Fourth, contrary to most coups d'état or palace revolts that end up merely in a change in leadership at the top, a revolution results in a wholesale replacement of the ruling elite by opponents. Fifth, while they may not always be precisely planned in advance, revolutions are frequently the cumulative outcome of the regime's past mistakes, misjudgments, or misconduct that may begin with small and isolated ripples and gradually turn into a gigantic tidal wave. And, finally, unlike political uprisings, riots, or revolts that spring up spontaneously and rather superficially in reaction to particularized grievances and usually cool off shortly after their outbreak, a revolution commonly generates a momentum of its own, gathers strength, and eventually becomes unstoppable, even by the revolutionaries themselves. In all of these characteristics, the 1979 change of regime in Iran was a genuine revolution.

By this definition, a revolution, like the French in 1789 (with its Declaration of the Rights of Man), is genuine in that it turns the whole society upside down and involves vast social upheavals with far-reaching effects lasting years and even decades. By comparison, the 1776 American Revolution was in reality a "war of independence" that gave British colonies their own sovereignty, and reaffirmed the ideal of liberty, justice, and individual dignity for the new nation.²¹ By the same token, Iran's "Constitutional revolution" of 1906 was not a revolution in a true sense, because the prevailing monarchic system and the incumbent dynasty remained intact. Political change was limited to power sharing between the shah and a new national consultative assembly (*Majles*).

Revolutions also often elude easy explanation, and defy standard classification. The profusion of empirical and analytical literature on social conflict and revolution attests to the heterogeneity and complexity of the concept. For some, the term revolution is simply a *process*, devoid of a special content; it is merely the replacement of an "in" group by the opposition through extralegal means. Whether inevitable as a matter of historical necessity beyond human control, or triggered by conscious political action against incumbents, this definition is neutral as to the revolution's objectives and outcome.²² For others, however, a true revolution involves changes in society's dominant moral values, political institutions, social structures, and national leadership.²³ Adding to the difficulty of defining a revolution is the fact that the eventual course and ultimate direction of a genuine revolution may be markedly different from its original objective and intended target.

The Iranian case seems both to support and deny many conventional revolution theories.²⁴ The Iranian experience, for example, partially supports

the hypotheses that: (1) revolutions do not occur out of abject poverty or desperation, but when people are given a taste of prosperity and welfare; (2) powerful armed forces are of no use in countering internal mass movements or the opposition's weapon of passive resistance (e.g., paralysis of normal public functions); (3) popular uprising, like wage-price inflation, is an inertial process that is slow to accelerate from its existing level in the early stages, but hard to stop once it gathers momentum; (4) the direction and outcome of a revolution may be vastly different from its root causes and initial objectives; and (5) revolutionary potential may be high when political development lags behind socioeconomic progress, or when stimulated welfare expectations suddenly face hard times.

At the same time, the February revolution calls into question the presumptions that (1) people always tolerate a good deal of political restriction when they have peace and prosperity; (2) economic growth and full employment resulting in higher living standards usually lead to conservatism and dampen radical demands; (3) the growth of the middle class and the industrial bourgeoisie helps maintain political stability and social calm; (4) economic expansion and social welfare considerations are of far greater significance to a poor and illiterate people than political development and democratization; and (5) violent upheaval against the existing political order usually begins with rural populations and peasant revolts.

Most analysts believe that the Iranian revolution was *sui generis* since it had no central ideology, no identifiable philosophy, no concrete platform, and no blueprint for action. The focus was on only one theme—the overthrow of the shah.²⁵ It is also agreed that the revolutionary coalition that overthrew the shah would not have been successful had it been known that Khomeini would actually be its permanent supreme leader, or that the ayatollah's concept of an Islamic republic would be so "comprehensive and pervasive" as to preclude competitive political participation.²⁶ The collective, and somewhat incongruous, objective of the coalition was a government of national unity—at once Islamic, nationalist, democratic, egalitarian, bourgeois, nonaligned, socialist, and economically self-sufficient. It was in the truest sense of the word, a government of all things to all men.²⁷

As already indicated, the postrevolutionary explanations suggested by foreign and Iranian observers range from the fairly plausible to the patently absurd. They cover the event from all angles, and offer a wealth of information. The more sober and scholarly analyses treat the subject from both ideological and disciplinary viewpoints. Left-of-center analysts—Marxists, dependency theorists, foes of comprador capitalism, and anti-American imperialists—point to the flawed nature of Iran's capitalist system; they speak of the misery of the proletariat, economic class struggle, bourgeois administration, and the exploitative character of the shah's foreign alignment (e.g., a subservience

to the interests of multinational corporations, the Western military-industrial complex, and U.S. geopolitics). Centrist social scientists emphasize cultural and historical factors, the absence of equilibrating political processes and institutions; shortcomings of the economic development strategy; repression, corruption, lack of respect for people's feelings; ineptitude of administration and management; the psychological shock of modernization and alienation; and the resurgence of Shi'ite fundamentalism. Political conservatives, pro-Pahlavi royalists, an overwhelming number of the *ancien régime's* beneficiaries in exile, and a purported silent majority living in Iran remain convinced that the shah's downfall was the result of a foreign conspiracy involving the United States, Great Britain, some EC members, the Soviet Union, and Israel.²⁸

Disciplinary approaches and analyses also supply an abundant harvest of answers and explanations on the background or unfolding of the revolution. Some writers seek the causes of the shah's demise in the fragility of *political* and administrative institutions.²⁹ Others attribute it to adverse *economic* development and particularly inflation.³⁰ A few researchers view the event as *sociological* clashes of cultural and psychological identities.³¹ A number of American analysts and observers focus mostly on Iran-U.S. *diplomatic* relations and the role of U.S. foreign policy.³² Several analysts point to *religious* ideology and the church-state conflicts.³³ And, finally, a group of authors explore the field from a political and *socioeconomic* perspective in the contexts of Iran's history and culture.³⁴

The widespread and intense hostility toward the person of the shah as *the* cause of the revolution is another issue. The shah's persistent critics attribute this hostility to several diverse factors. Liberal intellectuals point to his suppression of political and ideological freedoms; old Mossadeqists refer to his insistence on reign *and* rule; religious fundamentalists allude to his secular kingship. Some observers relate this irrepressible hatred to the monarch's attitude and behavior: Wishing to be simultaneously feared as a strong commander in chief, respected as a wise and courageous leader, and loved as a benevolent and caring reformer, he attracted most of the attention and all of the blame to himself. Others criticize his irritating rivalry with older and acknowledged world leaders, his imperial style, and his love-hate relationship with industrial powers. Still others single out certain unflattering aspects of his personal character.

Yet, none of these flawed traits or character defects can convincingly account for the indignities and abuses he received from his own people, or the humiliation and disrespect he suffered in his quest for an asylum among his former friends and allies. None of the ousted political leaders in this century with long-standing reputations for corruption, oppression, and human rights violations, was so widely or unfairly criticized in the world press and public opinion. None was so universally mistreated.³⁵

What is also missing in these and other insightful and engaging studies are certain crucial but still unclear aspects of the revolution itself.³⁶ These hidden details refer first to the shah's own state of mind: his inner thoughts, impulses, and motivation in the last few months before his departure from Iran. When did he decide his cause was lost? Why did he not offer resistance? Was the ship sinking when he left? Did he get bad advice? Second, the identity of behind-the-scenes organizers of street demonstrations, public employees' strikes, student riots, and mob attacks on private property as well as their sources of arms, money, materials, and instructions. Third, the behavior of certain high officials in the Iranian armed forces, the security and intelligence agencies, foreign diplomatic missions, and the bureaucracy with respect to their loyalty to the shah and the regime; their possible knowledge about the opposition's plans and preparations; their suspected involvement in aiding and abetting the regime's opponents; and their ability and sincerity in keeping the shah and his government informed about the dangers to the crown. Fourth, the role of the regime's foreign enemies, or foreign-directed opposition groups, as relates to foreign radio broadcasts, guerrilla training camps, arms supplies, infiltrators, tactical maneuvers, and funds. Fifth, the influence of the foreign press, particularly the alleged role of the British Broadcasting Corporation, in deprecating the regime, weakening the shah's resolve, informing and instructing local opposition about the government's weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and even allegedly directing some of the rioters in their time and place of action. Sixth, and finally, any role played by foreign governments, foreign intelligence services, or foreign officeholders in protecting their international turf, their political party, or their own position—having to do with assistance to the opposition, denying the shah and his government certain information or aid, or giving him bad advice.

These questions will probably always remain part of the 1979 revolution's unsolved riddle. And, in the absence of pertinent future revelations, any account of the shah's downfall will be necessarily incomplete. In the final analysis the overriding question would have to be: could the 1977-79 events be in any way foreseen, forestalled, or altogether prevented, if all these answers were known? Maybe—if one believes, as many do, that the revolution was like a bolt of lightning that struck the regime, and could have been diverted if the rods were in place. Maybe not—if one agrees with the American abolitionist Wendell Phillips that revolutions are never made; they grow out of roots that are steeped in the historical past.

A brief look at suggested hypotheses of the Iranian revolution, each focusing on a dominant cause—religious, sociocultural, economic, political, and conspiratorial—will provide the backdrop for this study's main theses.