

What the U.S. Needs to Know About Iran

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The recent uprisings in Iran took the world in general and the United States in particular completely by surprise. Indeed, the shah himself and his government were caught off guard. He had stated repeatedly in his frequent interviews with foreign reporters that there was a close bond between him and the people of Iran, that he was like a father to them, and that he loved them and they loved him.

If he actually believed this, then he must have been shocked to witness a grass roots revolt, the like of which had not been seen in the history of Iran. How was it possible for a government described as the most stable in the Middle East and a great bastion against the spread of communism to find its back against the wall in such a short time? How was it possible for a people so permeated with agents of SAVAK, the secret police, to mount numerous demonstrations, not only in large cities, but in towns and villages all over the country without the government knowing about it?

These questions need convincing answers. Almost immediately the media pundits had at least two ready answers. One explanation was what the Iranian government had been claiming for the past several years, namely, that the unrest was instigated by the Communists. The other explanation was that it was a fundamentalist religious reaction against the modernization program of the shah. These answers range from the simplistic to the untrue.

It is true, however, that ever since the shah decided to sell oil to Israel some Arab countries, and especially the Palestinian Liberation Organization, hated him, and that Palestinians trained some Iranians in terrorist tactics and sporadically sent them to Iran to cause trouble. As to the other explanation, the Soviet Union, which has been the recipient of His Majesty's largesse in the form of inexpensive Iranian gas (which it has sold to Europe at great profit), was also surprised at the shah's

overthrow. It did not have a hand in instigating the uprising. Indeed, the USSR seems to have tried to save the shah from embarrassment. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the Soviet Union has millions of not altogether happy Moslem citizens who share language and culture with Iran. It would seem that an Islamic revolt is the last thing the Soviet Union wanted, which will not prevent it from taking advantage of the confusion, however.

Was the revolt, then, a fundamentalist Islamic opposition to modernization? One can find a kernel of truth here, but not enough to account for a full-scale revolt. Most of the religious leaders deny such allegations vehemently. As Ayatollah Shari'atmadari of Qum said, "It is silly to insist on riding a camel when there is the automobile" (*Ettela'at*, October 12, 1978). They insist that it is the destruction of the religious, moral, and cultural values by the uncritical importation of everything Western that they are against, and not genuine modernization.

For example, when, in 1963, land reform became part of the six-point "White Revolution," which included a point on women's suffrage, there were riots led by religious leaders. Chief among these leaders was Ayatollah Khomeini. Their attacks on the shah were not so much against land reform and women's suffrage as they were against the government's use of arbitrary power. Already most Iranians have become used to seeing women in public offices from district commissioner to cabinet member. There is no question that in an "Islamic government" some of the activities of women will be curtailed for a while, but not many or for any length of time, for even the religious leaders cannot set the clock back.

The second reason the religious leaders took up the banner against the shah does not have anything to do with modernization, land reform, or freedom of women. It is a matter of their survival. Because almost all the clergy of all religions identify their own fate with that of the religion they represent, the main problem in the eyes of the religious leaders is the very survival of Shi'a Islam. Mohammad Reza Shah, unlike his father, is a

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religious individual. He stated quite often that the Hidden Imam (Messiah) had appeared to him and that he is as much a mojtahed or ayatollah (one who has the right to interpret the Law of God) as any of them.

Technically, he had the right to make the last statement, for there is no hierarchy, ordination, or priesthood in Islam. Indeed, Islam subscribes to the "priesthood of all believers." Furthermore, there are in Iran historical precedents for the shah's claim. The main problem was that His Majesty seemed to be making this tremendous claim *after* the promulgation of a constitution that did not permit him to have most of the political powers he assumed, let alone the spiritual ones. Furthermore, no one appoints a mojtahed, and neither is it a degree to be earned. He must be *accepted* as such, and so far as I know no one considers the shah a genuine mojtahed. Nevertheless, by organizing the Religious Corps, the shah threatened to replace the mullahs of the villages. This was a threat to their very existence, and one can understand why they fought it with every means at their disposal.

Some of the critics of President Carter have suggested that the uprising is all his fault and is caused by pronouncement of his human rights policy. (Those Americans who criticize the president, however, reveal their own explicit approval of ruthless dictatorship in "friendly" countries.) It is alleged that in order to please the president the shah relaxed his control just a little and that a little was enough eventually to break the dam and cause this huge flood. There is some truth in this also. But it is evident that this dam was holding a huge body of resentment that would have broken it sooner or later. The slight relaxation broke it a little sooner.

It is the contention of this essay that (1) much of the economic dislocation and derangement of the country was caused by the manner in which the government conducted the "White Revolution," or "The Revolution of the Shah and the People"; and (2) almost all the political unrest that sent thousands to prison and many to their deaths was the result of the shah's neglect of the Constitution and his antiquated interpretation of the Institution of Monarchy. These were further aggravated by corruption from top to bottom, the like of which is hard to find. The only way left for the people to protest their economic misery, which practically everyone felt, and the political suppression, which the educated felt, was through religion. It should be evident for those who know Iran that Shi'a Islam, with nearly seven hundred years of persecution as a minority, is especially suited for this type of role.

"The Revolution of the Shah and the People" was launched in 1963 with a large affirmative referendum. It had six points: distribution of land, nationalization of water and forests, profit-sharing plans for factory workers, revision of electoral laws, enfranchisement of women, and the establishment of Houses of Justice in the rural areas. These and the subsequent thirteen points added in rapid succession were all very useful. Even though some of my compatriots will deny it, let us say that the shah's intentions in introducing each reform

were without blemish. The fact remains, however, that the road to hell is paved with good intentions that are unfinished, or hastily planned, or are not implemented at all. His Majesty was in such a hurry to carry out a reform that he identified his announcement of reform with the finished product. His ministers reported that all was well, and he gradually believed his own propaganda.

The land reform was a necessary and revolutionary reform, and many benefited from it. However, there was only one law for a large country like Iran with varied climate, modes of living, and traditions. Time was needed to adapt the law to the needs of each locality; education was needed to teach the farmer how to work in a cooperative; laws were needed to protect the farmer; and money was needed to help him stand on his feet. Alas, there was not enough time for adaptation or education or laws, because all the functionaries of government were busy nodding their heads in praise of a new point His Majesty had added to the Revolution of the Shah and the People. Money there was aplenty—but for new reforms.

Soon the flood of billions of petrodollars opened the way to "industrialization" and wholesale increase of corruption. Agriculture was put on the back burner. Instead, factories were installed for which there were no trained Iranian workers; millions of tons of goods were brought by uncounted ships for which there were no docking facilities; thousands of huge trucks were imported for which there were no drivers; and tens of thousands of cars were imported for which there were no roads or city streets. As though these were not enough, contracts were signed with the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Japan to assemble more automobiles. There was more profit in importing items than in educating Iranians to produce them. This was especially true of agricultural products. For example, it was more profitable to import tons of frozen meat from Peru than to help the sheep herders of Iran produce more meat.

The same arrangement was made about rice from New Orleans, eggs from Denmark, butter from Holland, potatoes from Pakistan, oranges from Israel, onions, beans, wheat, sugar, vegetable oils, etc., etc. from other countries. A decade ago Iran used to export a good number of the above commodities, but now the whole country has been turned into a consumer nation. This was reported by the president of the Bank of Agricultural Development (*Ayandegan*, 11 Mordad, 1976).

Billions of petrodollars were spent by one man and apparently without consultation with anyone. The shah spent millions to save the tottering German Krupp Munitions Company, to the surprise of the Germans. He bought two ten-year-old luxury liners, which were losing money, from Italy as recreational facilities for the naval officers on the Persian Gulf. He spent billions to purchase his favorite toys—sophisticated armaments—that Iran does not need and cannot use, from the United States, England, France, Germany, Israel, and even the Soviet Union. A high-ranking retired U.S. Army officer who spent two years as advisor in Iran told me that he and a number of his colleagues advised against buying or

selling the equipment, but the shah insisted on having it. If the United States would not sell, then he would buy from other countries. In the end some people in the Pentagon threw up their hands and said, "What do we care, it is his money." Of course it was not his money, but the shah and his supporters acted as if it were. And the supporters had their own special toys. For example, a rich young Iranian in Hollywood bought a sports car for \$125,000. Asked why, he replied: "If you can afford it, why not?"

I have mentioned that each of His Majesty's proposed reforms was good. Though all were not implemented, a great deal was accomplished. The peasants who were fortunate enough to be beneficiaries of the first phase of land reform have prospered; dams have been built, and a good portion of the Khuzistan plain has been irrigated. Even though the bulk of the industrialization is of the assembly-line variety, many genuine industries were started, and sanitation and education improved. Unfortunately, most projects were poorly planned and practically everything was tinged with corruption and political repression. People in practically all walks of life were hit by economic dislocation and spiraling inflation, but the educated classes had the additional burden of political repression and absolute dictatorship.

The last sentence of my little book called *Iran*, published in 1972, is this: "If the long history of Iran teaches anything at all, it teaches that only when the Persians have been free from repression have their genius, ability, and imagination taken wings and flown to great heights." The most tragic fact in the life of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi is that with all his education and knowledge of the world he did not give hundreds of Iranians who returned to Iran with degrees from the best universities of the West a chance to express their opinions or freedom to do a job. Usually those were chosen who accepted everything he said and reported to him what he wanted to hear. These educated young men and women either left Iran in droves or joined the silent bystanders. His Majesty's book, *Toward a New Civilization*, published in 1978, is amazing reading. If he had written it in English or French, one could say that it was to impress outsiders. But it was published in Persian, and those who read it must have wondered if it was Iran the shah was describing or a Shangri-la. This is not the writing of a demagogue but of one who has been so completely isolated from reality as to believe what he has written. The two Royal Investigation Commissions he established, one fifteen years ago and the other in 1976, to act as his "eyes and ears," apparently reported to him that, with the exception of a few small-time embezzlers and a number of bazaar extortionists, who were punished with great fanfare, all was well with His Imperial Majesty's subjects. And the shah was willing to believe that every one of his reforms was being implemented without a hitch.

The Constitution of Iran, which was ratified in 1906, is the oldest constitution on the continent of Asia. In this Iran is unique among the developing nations of the world. Everywhere else the change of government or the



rise of a strong man has caused the discarding of the existing constitution and the writing of a new one. Not so in Iran. Apparently the Iranians would rather have their constitution collect dust on the shelf than be burned in the ash can. They are perhaps wise, because it remains an unfulfilled hope and therefore the battle cry of those who desire to implement it.

The shah caused the Constitution to be amended in order to give himself more power. Perhaps this was necessary. He then, in effect, discarded it altogether by decreeing that no one could criticize the Constitution and the Institution of Monarchy. Even though His Majesty was seemingly defending the Constitution, in reality he was attacking it by the simple act of placing the two side by side, as though the Institution of Monarchy was of the same importance as the Constitution and was a second pillar upon which the country rested. The fact of the matter, however, is that there is no monarchy *outside* the Constitution. Indeed, Iranians in the first decade of this century struggled and died for the express purpose of limiting the power of monarchy and clearly defined it in the Constitution. The intention of the shah to elevate the Institution of Monarchy as an independent entity and separate from the Constitution had only one meaning, namely, that he did not like the limitation the Constitution has placed on the Institution of Monarchy. Not only did he concentrate all power in his own hands, but a succession of prime ministers and ministers received written and oral orders from the shah, which the Constitution explicitly forbade. Were some deputy to ask even the most innocuous question, he would be reminded that it was ordered by His Imperial Majesty—and that was enough to shut anyone's mouth.

On the basis of numerous statements by the shah, it is quite evident that His Majesty believed that the adulation and power of the shah should be as they were throughout the history of Iran before the Constitutional Revolution. Not surprisingly, therefore, he allowed people to bow very low and kiss his hand and even his feet. Old expressions such as "As is the decree of God so is the decree of the shah," "We are all slaves and worshippers of the shah," were put to music and sung by school children.

The shah was able to do this, albeit for a time, by using an army of the guard, reminiscent of the palace guard of the Russian czars, and the secret police known as SAVAK. The original purpose of SAVAK was to prevent subversion by the Communists. But the SAVAK in Iran proved to be no better in distinguishing the subversive from the innocent than have similar organizations in many countries of the world. To the SAVAK everyone was suspect, and it saw little difference between the criticism of the concerned patriot and the activity of a subversive. With the passage of time SAVAK widened the scope of its activities and "improved" its means of physical and psychological torture. The popularity of the shah decreased in proportion to the cruelty of the SAVAK. Many simply disappeared, thousands were jailed and tortured without trial, and hundreds of thousands were alienated. All trials were held in military court. The defense lawyers of a few were arrested by SAVAK on the ground that they had

repeated the views of the accused in open court, and this in itself was subversive! Everyone who complained against injustice and torture was put in jail as a Communist, as though the Communists were the only ones who were against injustice and torture.

Beginning about 1973 many were tried in military courts as "Islamic Marxists." I was interested to find out how the Islamic Marxists joined Mohammad with Karl Marx. I searched in Iran to find an explanation. The two pamphlets I did find, both entitled "Islamic Marxism," were essays stating that the two concepts were contradictory. A friend of mine told me that there was no such person as an "Islamic Marxist." He said that the young men so named were either Moslem theological students or their sympathizers. The SAVAK did not want to appear to be putting real Moslems in jail and so had appended the "Marxist" adjective. This was confirmed to me later by some of the teachers of the theological school in Qum.

As a consequence of what has been described and much more, a large number of people representing a cross section of Iranian society became dissatisfied with and even resentful of their lot. The only way they could manifest their resentment was through the religious organization, which had a network of communication and was in touch with the people from the smallest village to the largest city. Religious idioms and expressions, religious leaders, and even the black *chador*, the veil that demonstrating women wore over their jeans or the latest Parisian dress, became symbols of this resentment.

As soon as the uprisings and demonstrations started in Iran it became evident that the main leadership came from the religious centers. When religious leaders talked about wanting to establish an "Islamic" government, it was quite natural for some reporters and writers in this country to jump to two conclusions. One was that since this movement was "religious," it must be "reactionary." Nothing will convince some people that religious persons are not necessarily reactionary any more than secularists are, *per se*, liberal. The second thing they did was to try to project what an "Islamic" country would be like. It is safe to assume that nine out of ten sources available on Islam deal with the orthodox Sunni branch, which includes the vast majority of Moslems of the world. This does not

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help, because the Persians belong to the heterodox Shi'i branch, which is quite different. The Shi'is in turn are divided into different branches. These include the Druzes of Lebanon, the Nusayris or Alawis of Syria and Turkey, the Zaydis of Yemen, and the Isma'ilis scattered in Iran, Pakistan, and East Africa. The majority of the Shi'is, however, are the Ja'fari, or the Twelvers, who form 93 per cent of the population of Iran. It is of great importance that the policymakers of the United States and the interpreters of current events know the role of the Twelve Imamate Shi'a in the society and culture of Iran.

The fundamental principles and laws governing the religious, social, political, and personal life of all Moslems are based on the Koran and the Tradition (Sunna), which comprise the practices and sayings of the Prophet Mohammad. The Sunni majority allowed only four set schools of interpretation. From the most liberal to the most conservative, these are:

1. The Hanafite School, prevalent in Turkey, India, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.
2. The Malikite School, prevalent in North Africa exclusive of Egypt.
3. The Shafi'i School, prevalent in Egypt, Indonesia, East Africa, and Lebanon.
4. The Hanbali School, prevalent in Saudi Arabia.

With the possible exception of a loophole here and there, things are crystallized and the right of new interpretation—*ijtihad*—is closed. Not so with the Shi'a. The best and briefest way I can describe this is to show the political, theological, and social characteristics that distinguish the Shi'a from the rest of the Moslems. This will be done in the order indicated because that is the way that Shi'ism developed.

When Mohammad died, he was both the Prophet of God and Head of State. As Prophet he could not have a successor, but in the absence of a will the question of succession to the head of state was left open. One of the options was that succession should go to the immediate descendant of the Prophet. Since he did not have a male issue, the caliphate should have gone to Ali, Mohammad's son-in-law and younger first cousin, and after him to his descendants. Ali was not chosen, and he reluctantly paid allegiance to Abu Bakr, an old and respected member of the Kuraysh tribe and father-in-law of the Prophet. Abu Bakr died after three years and the caliphate went to Umar, who was assassinated, and then to Uthman, who also met with violent death. By that time the situation was so bloody and confused that Ali assumed the office of caliph. He too was assassinated, and Mu'awiya, a member of the Kuraysh, was able to establish the Umayyad Dynasty. This was in 661 A.D., only twenty-nine years after the death of the Prophet.

The partisans (Arabic word, *Shi'a*) of Ali were not satisfied. The younger of Ali's two sons, Husayn, who was more active than his elder brother, Hasan, took up the challenge and refused to pay allegiance to the new Caliph Yazid. By secret arrangement he and a small party traversed the desert to the head of the Persian Gulf to join his followers and then rise against the caliph in Damascus. But the secret police of Yazid knew all about it. This small party was ambushed in an oasis

named Karbala about twenty-five miles south of Baghdad. There on the tenth of Muharram, 680 A.D. (last year the anniversary was on December 11) Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, was killed. His head was paraded around in different cities as a sign of triumph and was buried in Cairo. His body was buried in Karbala, which has become the holiest shrine of all Shi'is, in some respects surpassing even Mecca.

This did not stop the partisans of Ali either, for Ali and Husayn became more powerful after death than when they were alive. The Shi'is increased in number and accepted the descendants of Husayn as the "true" rulers, even though they never presided over the affairs of a state. It was quite natural therefore for them to consider all the caliphs of the Umayyad and Abbasid Dynasties, and after them the Ottoman sultans and the kings of the petty principalities that arose all over the Moslem world, as "usurpers." Since the most important single group against the domination of the Arabs was the Persians, Iran became a haven for the activities of antiestablishment groups.

In the course of time the partisans of Ali, who had separated from the mainline Moslems for political reasons, worked out a separate system of theology and also tradition. This is not the place to discuss the whole Shi'i theology except for three points in the Twelver branch of Shi'ism that are relevant to what is happening in Iran today.

1. *The Doctrine of the Imamate.* Imam means "leader" and is the Shi'i counterpart of the Sunni caliph. Ali was the first imam and after him his direct male descendants for twelve generations. The twelfth imam by the name of Mohammad, bearing the title of "Mehdi" (Deliverer or Messiah), disappeared. He is in a state of occultation until his reappearance, when he will conquer the world and establish true Islamic rule. All the Shi'is venerate Ali, sometimes more than the Prophet himself. Some of the Shi'i groups, among them the Alawis, go so far as to consider Ali the incarnation of the deity. "Twelver" Shi'is of Iran, however, are the only ones who emphasize the doctrines of Absence, or occultation, and the eventual Return.

Since the eleven imams, while they lived, were the legitimate rulers and all others were usurpers, it follows that the twelfth imam, even though absent, is the "Leader of the Age" and the only true ruler in the world. Hence, according to one interpretation, *all* rulers are illegitimate unless they rule according to the will and dictates of the Hidden Imam. But how is one to know the will of the Hidden Imam?

2. The answer to this question brings us to the second point in the Shi'i theology, namely, the *Doctrine of Ijtihad*, or the right to interpret the Koran and the Tradition. Among the Sunnis the four schools of interpretation have been closed, but for the Shi'i it is always open.

The Twelvers who follow the Hidden Imam believe that they can know the will of the imam through mojtaheds, or those who have the right of interpretation. It should be made clear that even though a mojtahed is the spokesman of the imam, he is not the imam and therefore not infallible. No one appoints or elects a

mojtahed. He is sometimes declared as one by a recognized mojtahed, but more often he "evolves" and is accepted as one because of his maturity, intelligence, faith, justice, and experience. It is important to note that sometimes these mojtaheds do not agree with one another. A "liberal" mojtahed might give a different type of opinion on a given subject than a conservative one. These different and sometimes opposing interpretations, however, have not diminished the validity of *ijtihad* in the minds of the Shi'is any more than the different and sometimes opposing interpretations of the Bible have diminished the validity of the guidance of the Holy Spirit among Protestant Christians.

3. There is a corollary doctrine that gives the Doctrine of *Ijtihad* practical importance, and that is the *Doctrine of Taqlid*, or imitation. According to Shi'i theology, all believers are divided into two groups: a small number whose job it is to interpret and be "sources of imitation," i.e., mojtahed or ayatollah; and a majority whose duty is to imitate. It must be emphasized, however, that the believer is not asked to accept anyone's opinion in matters of faith without proof, but in matters of practice or implementation of the faith he must either be a mojtahed himself or imitate one. In the course of time this distinction has often been overlooked, and many mojtaheds have demanded blind obedience from their followers.

It is incumbent upon each believer to choose for himself a "source of imitation." Some mojtaheds lead hundreds, some thousands, and some millions. Since it is forbidden for anyone to follow a dead mojtahed, there is a continuous, living, and close relationship between the individual and his source of imitation. Because the mojtahed is a landmark or sign for the believer in matters of practice, he is also known as ayatollah. It is hard to exaggerate the power of the ayatollahs for good or evil, for freedom or suppression, and for modernization or reaction.

All the historians of Iran admit that the Constitutional Revolution would not have succeeded without the aid of mojtaheds. It is true that some wanted to change the course of the movement and establish religious law, but others, who believed that the shah's rule was not legitimate, felt that a limited monarch would be less of a usurper. One mojtahed, Shaykh Fazlollah Noori, who was against the Constitution, was hanged on July 31, 1909.

Mojtaheds are powerful but not infallible and will be punished if they do not place the common good above their personal gains or desires. It is wrong to write about Ayatollah Khomeini as though he were *the* leader of the movement. He is not. At least four or five ayatollahs are as important as he is. It must be pointed out that there is a very basic distrust of all governments at the core of Shi'i theology. Consequently, the more enlightened among them would rather stay outside and guide the ruling powers than be so involved as to lose sight of the goal.

Another category that distinguishes the Shi'is from the rest of the Moslems is the social one. Among the three great missionary religions of the world, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, Islam has not had a history of

persecution. With the exception of the first few years of difficulty in Mecca, Mohammad and his followers have enjoyed great success. Other than a few defeats during the Crusades, Islam has been victorious from its beginning up to the eighteenth century. The Shi'is, on the other hand, have had more than seven hundred years of persecution as a minority at the hands of their Sunni coreligionists. They learned to survive underground and strike back whenever they could. They organized secret cells and an underground communications network. They penetrated the Sufi orders and used them for political purposes, used the bazaar trade guilds as their economic base, and organized philosophical discussion groups along the trade routes, where they discussed politics as well. The Qezel Bash (Redheads), which was the backbone of the Safavid bid for power, was a Shi'i order. It was not until 1502 that the Safavids came to power and made the Twelve Imamate Shi'ism the state religion of Iran.

The early Safavid shahs claimed that they were direct descendants of the imams (actually they were of Turkish origin) and acted as the Hidden Imam's spokesmen. The mojtaheds were honored but not listened to, because the shah was a "mojtahed" himself and accepted as such. As the shahs became weaker, the mojtaheds came into their own and established contact with their followers. Even though Shi'ism was the state religion and the religious leaders were honored rather than persecuted, the relation between the religious leaders and the shahs throughout the centuries has been tense.

Perhaps because of the ever-present tension, the believers have kept up the cells and societies they had in the days of their persecution. There is a network of mullahs (lower clergy) in every village and town and city. Their work is to lead in prayer, officiate in marriage and burial, and tell the stories of the numerous religious leaders and imams who were killed, poisoned, or imprisoned. Laymen in every locality manage these cells and organize the numerous religious processions, help the poor and strangers when they can. When necessary, either directly or through the mullahs, they apprise national or local mojtaheds of the situation in their locality.

In the Shi'i religion there are a great number of religious processions, the most important of which occurs on the tenth of Muharram, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Husayn. The lay leaders organize these processions with the help of "committees." The Persian word for procession is *dasteh* and the organizers are called *dastegardan*. Whenever necessary these groups and their processions become political. When American interpreters, such as Dr. Kissinger (*Time* magazine, January 15), conclude that because the demonstrations and strikes in Iran are so well organized the organizers must have been trained by the Soviet Union, they are unaware of the experience and ability of hundreds of *dastegardans* in the country. They were the organizers of secret societies that fomented the Constitutional Revolution. The bazaar guilds were the main source of strength for Dr. Mossadeq's nationalization of oil. It is the *dastegardans* and their assistants who handled the logistics of the recent demonstrations.

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Iran has been open to the West, and to a lesser degree to the Eastern bloc countries. All of these countries have known full well the corruption of power and the atrocities of SAVAK, but all have looked the other way. They sold armaments they knew were of no use to Iran. The very CIA that put the shah in power was calling him a megalomaniac, but continued supporting him. Of all the countries of the West the United States was most involved, with over forty thousand Americans in the country. Under these circumstances it is inexcusable that the American embassy and the intelligence officials in Iran, who had virtually the run of the country, did not have the slightest idea of what was going on under their noses. Apparently the embassy and the intelligence officials were talking only to the shah and SAVAK respectively, and they were all communicating with the ghost of Joe McCarthy, seeing Communists and “Islamic Marxists” behind the slightest criticism. All of them had isolated themselves from the people. Even during the recent events in Iran, the administration, instead of trying to get in touch with the religious leaders to find out what it is that they are after, kept shouting “We support the shah.”

The people who guided these demonstrations and who co-opted most of the educated classes to their side worked at this for a long time. Such a feat is not easy under favorable circumstances, let alone underground. These people seem to be a cross section of the religious groups who have been under constant attack during the past twenty years; the university community whose freedoms have been usurped; the middle class in private and public sectors who were under heavy economic and psychological pressure; owners of industries who became victims of wrong and reckless economic policies; educated young officers in the armed forces who were rendered inactive; agricultural groups who had to seek jobs in the cities because of lack of support; and the youth who lost religious and cultural values and were at the brink of aimlessness. There is no guarantee that they will stay together. The tragic fact about modern Iran is that while individual Iranians are capable, they tend to fall apart when they get together.

During my trips to Iran I met a number of the religious groups, lay and clergy. I have spoken to them on the phone during the past months. I don't have the right to speak for them, but I know that they believe strongly that it is the will of Allah for them to do what they are doing. They have talked to me, a Christian, of their fears. Two things are important to them: their religious values and Iran. They believe that in this world of rival powers they are more likely to keep their religious values and a free Iran if they keep their ties with the West.

Now that Ayatollah Khomeini is in Iran, he has learned the hard way what his friends who were in Iran feared all along. He realizes that a number of people who rushed to Paris to kiss his hand were not devout Moslems but devout Communists who wanted to change the direction of the revolution at the proper time. They almost succeeded. When it became evident that the new prime minister had not chosen a single leftist for his cabinet, they stormed the American embassy and made desperate attempts to take over the Radio Center and cause trouble in Tabriz. They were defeated in all three attempts. The danger still remains, however, for they are powerful enough to make the classic Communist demands such as the formation of a “People's Army”; control of oil, communication and other industries by “workers' committees”; and recognition of strikers as the “core of the revolutionary council.”

Among the tremendous political, economic, and social problems facing the new government perhaps the most subtle is whether the leaders of the revolution will be able to resolve their personal differences in favor of the common good. It is no secret that all the major ayatollahs do not agree about the nature and composition of the “Islamic government.” Nor do the lay leaders see eye to eye on the nature and composition of a “democratic republic.” Compromise is essential, and it remains to be seen whether these leaders have learned that politics is “the art of the possible.”

Since the victory of the Khomeini forces in Iran there has been too much confusion to see any pattern developing. Judging by the Persian newspapers that have begun to arrive, everyone is committed to the establishment of an “Islamic” Republic, but there are numerous interpretations of the term. The leader of the far-left Fedayan-e Khalq believes that “It means from everyone according to his ability and to everyone according to his need.” The one who is called the “theoretician” of the movement believes that “for the present we must use the name and fill in the contents gradually as time goes on.” The one who is apparently the candidate for the first president of the Republic has been quoted as saying, “We cannot go back to the seventh century.” One ayatollah says that “Islam means freedom of the individual limited only by the freedom of others.” Another ayatollah has written that “What used to be called ‘justice’ in Islamic government is nowadays called ‘democracy.’ ” Khomeini himself is rather silent on the subject but, judging from his book, which is being widely distributed, he wants to go back to the death of Ali in 661 A.D. and start all over again—this time “completely according to the Koran and not the way they did it.”