

The Triumph of the Oppressed Clergy in 1979 Revolution and the Decay of Iran-US Ties:

By

¹Akram Jan, ² Prof. Dr. Abdul Manan

Abstract:

Iran-U. S ties have been hostile, since 1979 revolution when Iranian Clergy after around seven decades' destitutions, succeeded in getting the political authority under the leadership of the exiled leader Ayatullah Roohullah Khomeini. Before 1979 revolution Iran was ruled by a brutal, autocratic and pro U.S Shah, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, who was a harsh opponent of the clergy because of his liberal, secular and westernized thoughts. Thence since the 1979 Iranian revolution Iran-US relations has not been restored because the clergy Government emerged a force with an anti-US sentiment.

Keywords: Iranian Revolution, Coup, Clergy, politics, Secular.

Introduction:

Iran's 98% population are Muslims and among them 90% are Sheia by Sect. it means Sheia population occupies over whelming majority in the country. (Wikipedia). Religious backing was one of the prominent bases of political authority for the traditional monarchies in Iran. But the constitutional uprising of 1906-1911 abolished their grip over education and legal system of Iran. Raza Shah Pahlavi, who initiated reforms movement in the country in early 1920s, actually he diminished the influence of the clergy in Iranian politics and society. (Mehdi, 2010). Almost of the steps of the Shah were deliberately devised to undermine the power of spiritual legitimacy. (U.S library of congress).

When Reza Shah Pahlavi became powerful he embarked over depreciating Western influence specially, the Britain and US in Iran and he got technical support from Germany which infuriated Britain and USA and as a result he was toppled in 1941 and his son Muhammad Reza Shah was placed on power. (Shaul)

Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlvi (1941-1979) followed his father's policy and continued his father's reform movement but he faced strong opposition from Nationalists, under the leadership of Muhammad Mossadiq, who became Prime Minister in 1951. Muhammad Musadiq and his National front cabinet were overthrown by a CIA and Britain's devised

¹M.Phil. scholar, in the Department of Area Study Centre, University of Balochistan, Quetta Pakistan

² Supervisor, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Balochistan, Quetta Pakistan

Military Coup in 1953, in order to install a pro-Western Government in Iran, because Mossadig was completely against the US interest in Iran and he nationalized British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (BAIOC). Hence the hold of pro-US Shah was strengthened for the next 26 years. (Ibid)

Mark Gasiorowski, author of “Muhammad Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran”, says the Mossadig’s overthrow favored two political fashion-radical Islamists led by Ayatullah Rohullah Khomeini and fundamental leftists in the disguise of Mujahedin-e-Khalq, who strengthened in the following decades. Beside, Gasiorowski Says, “What the coup did was to take out the moderate, secular, elements of Iranian politics and enabled radical Islamists and radical leftists to emerge as key opposition factions in place of it “in the 1960’s and 70’s”. (Frud, 2013)

Furthermore, Muhammad Reza Shah in order to strengthen his hold over Iran trained armed and financed his secret police agency SAVAK, under the auspices of US and Israel’s secret agencies which brutally arrested, executed and deported the opponents of the Shah? In addition, Shah of Iran initiated land reforms that is named as “White Revolution” and confiscated the land of religious foundations and big land owners, which compelled clergy, nationalists, landlords, women and students to unite under the leadership of deported leader Ayatullah Rohullah Khomeini, who was expatriated in 1964, due to his opposition to the policies of the Shah and his pro-US inclination. (Edward)

Khomeini kept criticizing Shah, his barbarities, dislocations due to his reform movement, his leaning towards USA and the atrocities of SAVAK. At last, he succeeded in overthrowing the Shah of Iran in 1979, with the help of oppositional coalition of the clergy, Nationalists and Students. Khomeni announced the formation of Islamic republic of Iran, with key position and power reserved for the clergy leadership. He suppressed his coalition partners and announced that the country would run under his prominent ideology of Velayet-e-Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist). (Janet)

After 1979 revolution Iran and United States relations collapsed because the Sheia dominated government under the patronage of Khomeini, had an anti-US feeling from the very first day. Therefore, Iran cut off diplomatic ties with USA, discharged Iran from Arms deals, and avoided containment policies in Iran. Moreover, the situation further worsened when the Muhammad Reza Shah was allowed to enter US for medical treatment on 04 November 1979, that aggravated Iranian students who hostage US embassy in Tehran for 444 days and captivated 66 US officials.

Background of Iran US Relations:

The United States of America and Iran had relations since the nineteenth century and even American preachers were present in Iran before it. However, their close ties dates back to world war-II. (Shaul)

Discussing, US Iran ties in the context of religious clergy it would be incomplete without adding the modernization and reforms movement of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1921-1941) who took several steps for limiting the power of the religious order. His reforms in education were directed to undermine their hold over education. Secondly to weaken their hands, Shah resorted the categorization of the law, created a platform of secular law that was expounded by civil jurist, spared clerics from becoming

Judge, design a system of Secular Judicial System, took the authority of documents certification from clerics to state authorized notaries and state even interfered in the management of spiritual charities.

Moreover, with intention of creating solidarity among socially fragmented society, he liberated women and enforced western style dress on people. Besides, he initiated schools for women encouraged them to work places and in 1936, culminating these steps with the end of wearing veils for women. Furthermore, setting examples of brutalities his police heads arrested spiritual leaders or they were forced to abandon the country. In 1936 when spiritual people were gathered in Mashad in the Shrine of Imam Reza to condemn the atrocities of the Shah, forces either arrested their religious authorities or killed them barbarically. In addition, powerful bureaucrats, Journalists and Ministers were also treated identically hence keeping in view, the immense harshness of the Shah religious section of population highly infuriated against the secular, liberal and pro-western Shah. (Library of congress)

After consolidating the country in the domestic front he took some measure on foreign policy, in order to undermine the massive influence of Britain and USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic) he sought technical assistance for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) that was dominating all of the Iranian Oil resources, from Germany, France and Italy, neglecting Britain and USSR. During second world war and Britain and Germany became foes and their interests conflicted in Iran. Britain demanded the withdrawal of German Technician in the plea that they might involve in spying and disrupting the oil flow from South-Eastern Iran that was rejected by Shah, responding that it would disturb his advancement schemes.

Britain and Soviet Union became ally when in June 1941, Germany attacked USSR. Both powers collectively looked towards Iran, fascinating by her newly built Cross-Iranian rail road with intention to use it a route from Persian Gulf to Soviet Union. Consequently, after the denial of the Shah to discharge German engineers both Britain and USSR attacked Iran, Initially Jailed and later exiled Shah and limited his constitutional rule. In 1942, USA as an ally of Britain and USSR also sent forces to Iran and controlled some sections of Rail Track.

Muhammad Reza Shah in Power (1941):

All the major three powers allowed the son of Reza Shah Pahlavi, Muhammad Reza Shah to succeed his father. He wanted to carry his father's reforms campaign but a new dilemma occurred in the politics of Iran, the agenda of nationalization of Iranian Oil, under the leadership of Muhammad Mossadiq, an experienced figure in the political landscape of Iran. (Shahpour)

Muhammad Mossadiq's Oil Nationalization:

In 1951, when Muhammad Mossadiq became Prime Minister he had intended to act upon Nationalization Laws specially to get Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in state custody. Anglo-Iranian Company was under full Britain Control; Iranians neither had control over management nor production. It was the biggest source of employment and foreign exchange reserves. (Shaul)

Mussadiq's move was initially tolerated by Truman administration because the administration was suspicious about the imperial forces of Iran but soon US was convinced by Britain seeing Mussadiq's reforms in the lenses of socialism.

CIA 1953 Coup:

Therefore, after the arrival of Eisenhower in Washington, Britain succeeded to convince him for a plot to overthrow Mussadiq from office considering neutrality in cold-war immoral. Hence Eisenhower, Secretary of state, John Foster Dulles and the Chief of the CIA Allen, accompanying the discontented faction of population specially the religious section who declared Mussadiq's nationalization in Islamic, and finally overthrew Mussadiq and his Secular Cabinet in 1953.

The involvement of CIA in the ugly coup, of an elected Prime Minister has now openly admitted by the CIA, considering Mussadiq a dangerous threat to the interest of the west. The documents also reveal that how Britain influenced to keep her involvement secret. The fall of the Mossaduq which consolidated Monarchy for the next 26 years and safeguarded US Oil interest, is a cause of mistrust of Iranian over British and US authorities up to now. The archived CIA documents also have a piece about coup title "Campaign to install a pro-western Government in Iran" which elaborates the aim of the agenda as "through legal, or quasi legal methods to effect the overthrow Mussadiqs regime and to bring a west-friendly Government under the leadership of the Shah and Zahidi as its Prime Minister". (Deheghan and Taylor)

The Post CIA Coup Era:

After the successful Britain and U.S engineered Government change in Iran, relations between the officials of Iran and USA developed but the people of Iran were not satisfied. When the Shah of Iran was restored to power it was meant for US and Britain to direct his steps and manage his rule. The US supported the Shah who was also called "US Stooge" and autocratic ruler over Iranian Government and people. Therefore, Government officials and common public did not favor western powers policies and as a result an anti US feeling developed in them. (Krysta)

Muhammad Reza Shah ruled very much in suppressive manner through Iranian Intelligence and Security Organization (SAVAK), the group which was formed and ratified by America, and hired 30,000 Iranians, among whom 5000 members, suppressed, executed and Annihilated thousands of Shah's dissidents. (Ibid)

Due to the Shah's authoritative rule, political policies and public opinion were not on the same page. For instance, almost of the Iranian held and anti-Israel emotions while Israel was Iran ally due to its friendly relations with America. (Keddie, 2006)

In the 1960's, high prices destabilized Iranian economy and almost of the resources were preoccupied by the people. That was either connected with oil industry or the Shah. However, such people were less in number and majority of the population was poor. (Ibid)

The Shah of Iran acquired the fruits of oil money due to his contracts with Britain and America. Therefore, he did not care his suppressed population. Another plan that was contradicted by the people of Iran was the ratification of 200 Million dollars' military arms and ammunition pact

with US in 1964 by the Shah's dominated Majles that was expounded by the opposition as Iran's enslavement, to US. Muhammad Reza Shah kept up the improvement of Iranian Military with US Aid and support. Even in 1971, President Richard Nixon and his cabinet certified a scheme for Muhammad Reza Shah to buy contemporary advance military arms from the US, other than nuclear arms. Consequently, before 1978, Iran had the most efficient trained & armed force in the Persian Gulf region. It was the fourth largest air power and fifth largest military in the world. Likewise, Iran's Military expenditures rose from 293 million dollars in 1963 to 7.3 billion dollar in 1977. The Iranian air force persons spoke English efficiently and their pay was based on English speaking efficiency. (Krysta)

Ayatullah Khomeini's Antagonism to the Shah in 1960s:

The United States of America helped and hailed the 38 years, Coercive rule of the Muhammad Reza Shah. In the course of this duration oppositional leaders and groups emerged many times that were suppressed successfully by the Shah. But a charismatic leader emerged in shape of Ayatullah Khomeini, who defeated the unsuccessful schemes of the shah. (Moin, 1999)

Khomeini, a Sheia fundamentalist, got education in Qom, which is the essential place for Sheia education in the world. (Ibid)

He contradicted the rule of the Shah due to two main causes: (1) The United States Connections and (2) the secularization of Iranian Society. (Keddie)

Moreover, he convinced that Israel was the state, advancing western imperialism and she was directly supported by America and eventually they were collectively at war with Muslims. (Ismael)

In 1962, under influence of the Kennedy administration the Shah approved a poll draft and allowed the non-Muslims of Iran to participate in polls as Candidate. (Moin)

Another act of 1960s was the ratification of SOFA- (Status of Forces Act) in 1964 by the resistant Shah, his cabinet and Mejlis, under the direct pressure of America. The ratification of the SOFA reminded the so called "Capitulation" policy of Europeans that was frequently followed in 19th centuries in the region, in order to protect military persons and other officials from the jurisdiction of the abroad countries and to get diplomatic immunity for their nationals in foreign Countries, in case of, Committing Crimes. (Shaul)

If any of them commits a crime in Iran, they are immune. If an American or cook terrorizes your source of religious authority in the middle of the Bazar, the Iranian police do not have the right to stop him. The Iranian courts cannot put him on trial or interrogate him. He should go to America where the masters would decide what to do.... We do not consider this Government a Government. These are traitors to the country. (Brun, 1978)

Due to the condemnation of the shah by Khomeini, he was arrested and incarcerated for two months in 1962. But this was not enough to discourage Khomeini, Criticizing American stooge. Therefore, in 1964,

the shah deported Khomeini to Iraq. (Gagem, 1978) from where he inspired and galvanized Islamic revolution that radically changed Iran.

Financial Downfall and Revolutionary Chaos in the 1970s:

The key events though erupted in 1979 but from the med 70s Iran observed colossal financial decay in shape of high prices, Corruption, unemployment, wide pause between haves and have not's, rapid urbanization and dishonest electing process. (Keddie)

Therefore, three significant groups emerged in Iran against the Shah: women, students and spiritual fanatics. (Krysta)

Hence, the former two groups of agitators were swallowed up by the later: spiritual leftists, under the patronage of Khomeini, and by getting the leadership of the said groups, it fascinated different other factions such as: middle class, the National front, laborer and guerillas. All oppositional groups sought to overthrow Shah from power and constitute such a Government that could profit Iranian masses, and Islam not the ruler. (Keddie)

The extended pressure created by opposition, under Khomeini championship, built immense chaos in Iran and compelled shah of Iran to announce Martial law in Tehran including eleven other cities of the Country. In the maddest of the tensions the Shah's military and SAVAK kept on the killing of the people. On November 3, 1978, Khomeini said, "the Shah must go". In addition, the incessant tensions, protests and strikes, left Iranians Bank un functioning, Industries stopped manufacturing, oil industries also seized and Banks stopped working. Therefore, on December 29, 1978, Muhammad Reza Shah announced to briefly leave Iran. (Krysta)

Hence, the banished leader Ayatullah Rohullah Khomeini returned Iran and led the revolution and established on Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Descent of Iran-U. S Relations:

As a result of the change of government in Iran the new Government emerged with a complete changed policy towards west, especially towards America. The Islamic regime from the very first day had an anti-American emotion. They broke diplomatic ties that have not been restored since. Besides, Khomeini, s revolution was primarily against the shah and his cordial links with America. Moreover, Khomeini was exiled from his own country virtually, due to his opposition to SOFA, and he spent 14 years in Iraq and for a short period in France. (Shaul)

Shah's Asylum in U.S:

The relations between Iranian clergy and U.S Government further deteriorated when Carter Administration admitted the Shah of Iran to U.S on October 23, 1979, substantiating it on humanitarian basis. (Ghallagher, 1979)

Mohsen Mirdamadi, the students and hostage patron in Iran in 1979, spoke in 2009 that "when the revolution happened in Iran, young people were concerned about the intentions of the United States regarding the new regime. We believed the United States was against the revolution and that it was preparing another coup. When the Shah went to America, it was a confirmation of this belief." President Carter remarked that "I was told the Shah was desperately ill, at the point of death. I was told that New York was the only medical facility that was capable of possible saving his life

and reminded that the Iranian officials had promised to protect our people in Iran. When all the circumstances were described to me, I agreed.” Thus, the situation bitterly worsened and twelve days after the Shah’s entry to U.S the United States of America Embassy was hostage in Tehran by students and protesters for second time. (Keddie)

U.S Embassy Hostage Crisis-November 4, 1979:

Iranian students and radicals ascended the wall of the American Embassy in Tehran and hostage 53 diplomatic officials and security persons for 444 days. (V.O.A)

This episode left deep repercussions on the U.S Official conception and Iranian as well. This was an irritating experience for U.S and a moment of victory for Iranians which made Iranian students the heroes of the nation. (Shaul)

Moreover, the inflexible attitude taken by religious guardianship on the hostage crisis made talks impossible. And the Carter Administration in order, to, threaten Iranian Clergy resorted with asking International market to stop buying Iranian Oil, frosted Iranian assets and Washington even indicated the chances of U.S military actions. But it impacted little the behavior of religious regime in Iran. And Khomeini expressed harder and stubborn attitude. “We will not depart a step ... we would welcome Shahadat ... since this no more the clash between Iran and U.S but between Islam and Kuffar.” (Sayeed, 1999)

Nevertheless, the Majles of Iran ratified a bill in November, 1980, regarding the hostage crisis with four conditions for release. (1.) The United States of America would have to acquit Iranian frosted wealth. (2) She would not meddle in the Domestic affairs of Iran. (3) To with draw all assertions against Iran and (4) to refund the money of the Shah. Somehow, Iran and ‘Great Satan ‘had reached a commitment and the hostages were liberated on January, 20, 1981. (Keddie)

Conclusion:

To conclude, Iran’s religious faction was highly sidelined after 1911 Constitutional Revolution, in the spheres of politics, Education and judiciary. The liberal, secular and westernized policies of Pahlavi dynasty and their extra-ordinary leaning towards west and USA angered clergy to overthrow the autocratic and barbaric Shah in 1979 Revolution. When religious succeeded they strengthened their hands over political authority, due to possible fear of another U.S Coup, they cut of diplomatic ties with USA, declared arms deals null and void with U.S and hostage 66 U.S Officials in American Embassy in Tehran. Hence, Iran-US relations have not yet recovered from the 1979 shock, after 38 years.

References:

- Afray Janet, "Iranian Revolution of 1978-79." The Editor of Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Bakhash Shaul, "The U.S and Iran in Historical Perspective.", U.S foreign Policy Research Institute, September 28, 2009.
- Baqer Moin, Khomeini: Life of th Ayatullah (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pg. 199.
- Bezhan Frud, "aftershocks of Iran's 1953 Coup still felt around the world, 60 years later." August 15, 2013.
- Ghasemi Shahpour "Pahlavi Dynasty 1925-1979, Iran Chamber Society.
- Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations, Wikipedia free encyclopedia.
- Ismael and Ismael," Social Change," pg. 616.
- J. Gallagher Edward, "the 1953 Coup." Lehigh University Digital Library.
J. Gallagher Edward, "the 1953 Coup." Lehigh University Digital Library.
- Kamali Saeed Dehghan and Richard Norton Taylor "CIA Admits role in 1953 Coup." The Guardian 19 August, 2013.
- Nicholas Gagem, "Iran: Making of a Revolution, "New York Times December 17, 1978.
- Nikki Keddie, Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution, (New Haven: Yale University press, 2006), pg. 146.
- Thiery Brun, "Resurgence of popular Agitation in Iran," le Monde Diplomatic, July 17-18, 1978.
- V.O.A Radio "U.S Iran Relations still fell impact of Islamic Revolution.", November 02, 2009, 11:32 AM.
- Prof. Sayeed S.M.A "Iran before and after Khomeini." Royal Book Company 1999, page. 219.