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14. ABSTRACT As the first globally televised revolution with dramatic images of hundreds of thousands of protesters in the street destroying effigies of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, it is easy to assume that Iran's revolution in 1979 succeeded due to a mass popular uprising against him. However, a review of Iran's modern history and a critical examination of firsthand accounts of the 1979 revolution reveal that its success had more to do with the Shah and his regime than the revolution itself. This study takes a more nuanced look into the role of the Shah's own regime in bringing about the success of the revolution where previous attempts had failed, while also countering common misconceptions that the revolution was necessarily Islamic or even popular. Dominant explanations on the success of the Iranian Revolution overemphasize social upheaval and the role of the revolutionaries as the critical factors for its success. However, it was the Shah's own insecurities and power plays by members of his own royal court that led to the revolution's success. In fact, Iran's leading clergy at that time did not support the Shah's ousting and implored the Shah to restore order. Any modern analysis of revolution must not only consider the revolutionaries, but more importantly, the ability of the existing government to remain unified and maintain control.					
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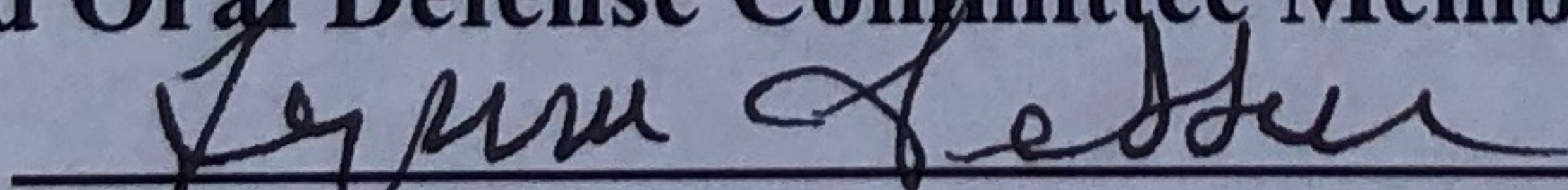
Behind the Curtain of the Iranian Revolution

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Executive Summary

Title: Behind the Curtain of the Iranian Revolution

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Thesis: The success of the Iranian Revolution was not based on popular support as dominant theories contend, but rather rested on the weakness of the Shah and fractures within his own royal court.

Discussion: As the first globally televised revolution with dramatic images of hundreds of thousands of protesters in the street destroying effigies of the Shah, it is easy to assume that Iran's revolution in 1979 succeeded due to a mass popular uprising against the Shah. However, a review of Iran's modern history and a critical examination of firsthand accounts of the 1979 revolution reveal that the success of the Iranian Revolution had more to do with the Shah and his regime than the revolution itself. This study seeks to take a more nuanced look into the role of the Shah's own regime in bringing about the success of the revolution where previous attempts had failed, while also countering common misconceptions that the revolution was necessarily Islamic or even popular.

Conclusion: Dominant explanations on the success of the Iranian Revolution overemphasize social upheaval and the role of the revolutionaries as the critical factors for its success. Rather, it was the Shah's insecurities and power plays by members of his own royal court that led to the revolution's success. In fact, Iran's leading clergy at that time did not support the Shah's ousting and implored the Shah to restore order. Any analysis of the probability of the success of future revolution in Iran must not only consider the revolutionary forces but also the will and ability of the existing government to maintain control.

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Preface

This paper seeks to temper our natural inclination towards excitement when we see social upheaval in the face of autocratic regimes. It is far too often the case that in a desire for positive change, we only look at the popular movement itself and ignore the other half of the picture, which are the conservative forces of the existing order. As a Foreign Service Officer, I have seen firsthand the un-tempered excitement and shock when the 2009 Green Movement in Iran failed miserably, despite insistence from those who supported it that the time for change in Iran had finally come. Most recently, protests in Iran that appeared to have even broader support also proved unsuccessful despite growing discontent over poor economic conditions.

As a first generation American, whose father served as one of the Shah's most trusted advisors, I have had the privilege of access to him and others within the Shah's regime that personally witnessed the events of 1979 and shared critical insights and experiences. My father is Queen Farah's cousin, raised together and was an active member of the Shah's inner circle. He was also one of the Shah's most trusted confidants and an active member of the royal court, interacting between the Shah and key political and military figures, including Shahpour Bakhtiar Amir-Abbas Hoveyda, General Gholam-Ali Oveissi and Iran's highest ranking cleric, Ayatollah Mohammad-Kazem Shariatmadari. It was through him that I gained access to the Shah's private assistant, Mahmud Eliyasi.

I want to express appreciation to my faculty advisor: Dr. Lynn Tesser, who provided invaluable expert academic guidance and support throughout the process of examining this research topic and to Dr. Amin Tarzi and Dr. Jonathan Phillips who both

provided valuable expertise, guidance and critique, which qualitatively refined this effort.

The hope is that this research paper will serve to better inform policymakers as they examine socio-political trends in Iran through a more nuanced view of the dynamics that led to the success of the Iranian Revolution.

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Behind the Curtain of the Iranian Revolution

The Iranian Revolution caught much of the world, including the United States, by surprise and removed a key U.S. ally in the Middle East.¹ In the case of Iran, the revolution ended a 2,500-year-old monarchy, replacing Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi with a semi-democratic government, tightly controlled by a portion of Iran's clerical establishment. This paper will build on existing theories, research and first-hand accounts to analyze why the Iranian revolution succeeded where previous modern movements failed, which will help inform policymakers of the likelihood of regime change in Iran today.

There are many competing theories that attempt to explain the fall of the Shah. Theda Skocpol's theory dominates, contending that the Iranian revolution was a mass supported social revolution that succeeded based on the successful alliance between Iran's merchant, clerical and urban classes in wearing down and ultimately overwhelming the ruling regime.² Gary Sick similarly attributes the revolution's success, at least in part, to an underestimation of religion in Iran by both the regime and the West, including its religious hierarchy.³ The Shah's own account of the revolution in his final memoir amounts to a conspiracy theory blaming an unspecified clandestine organization and oil companies for being behind the revolution and explains his refusal to stop the revolution due to his refusal to shed blood.⁴ Andrew Scott Cooper's recent revisionist approach minimizes the notion that the revolution truly had popular support and focuses on the Shah's position that refusal to shed blood out of his desire to move the country away

from authoritarianism and towards democracy was what ultimately led to the revolution's success.⁵

However, a thorough assessment of the history of modern revolutionary movements in Iran, including the 1979 revolution, proves that Skocpol, Sick, Cooper and the Shah's own explanations are incomplete. The success of the 1979 revolution as opposed to previous failed attempts in modern Iranian is best explained by Louis Gottschalk's theory of revolution. Gottschalk attributes the success of a revolution to the weakness of conservative forces, which in this case resulted, not from the Shah's liberal notions against the use force as Cooper argues, but from the Shah's insecurities and power plays by members of the royal court. Gottschalk insists that the success of any revolution will, much like Clausewitz's description of war, depend on the ability, including the will, of the conservative forces to stay in power.

In 1906, a popular-elite led revolutionary movement successfully limited the power of the monarch by declaring Iran a constitutional monarchy, but did not fundamentally alter the Shah's position. In 1953, elites undertook another revolution to limit the power of the Shah by enforcing the consequences of the 1906 constitutional revolution, but again failed in the end. Ruhollah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini attempted revolution in 1963, yet was again unsuccessful. However, by 1979 conditions were changed in such a way for Iran's 2500-year-old system of government to fall and be replaced with the world's first modern Islamic Republic. It is true that Khomeini obviously played an important role as the leader of the Iranian revolution. Without a doubt, one key element always present in successful revolutions is the unification of the opposition under one leadership. Without a unified opposition, revolutionary success

remains unlikely. However, contrary to prevailing views, the key to the success of the 1979 revolution in contrast to preceding attempts remains the undermining of the conservative forces of Iran's monarchy, including the Shah himself.

At least in the case of Iran, when elites as well as the general population perceive that one side is not stable while the other shows strength and stability, they are most likely to shift their support and allegiance to the more stable power. As James S. Davies notes, "political stability and instability are ultimately dependent on a state of mind, a mood, in society."⁶ As will be noted later, it is only when the Shah effectively abandoned the country did the tide truly shift in favor of Khomeini.

Based on his own evaluation of what made revolution successful in France and Russia, Louis Gottschalk ascertained five criteria that revolve around leadership as a key element of revolutionary success. These same five criteria that Gottschalk pulled from the revolutions he analyzed in Russia and France serve as a frame of analysis in analyzing why revolutions in Iran failed and succeeded throughout the past century and whether or not these criteria are possible in Iran today. The first is what Gottschalk calls provocation where there is enough dissatisfaction to create an "epidemic desire for action."⁷ This element produces a demand for change, however, as he further notes, "provocations alone do not create revolutions." Gottschalk's second necessary element of revolutionary success is "solidified public opinion" where revolutionaries identify a large number of people who share their discontent and unify their position. Further, the third criteria emerges in part from the previous, which is "hopefulness of success" in which there is both a "program for reform" and "someone whom they trust [who will] lead them to the achievement of that program."⁸ Consequently, the fourth criterion is

“leadership” of which “without such leaders, movements that bade fair by glorious beginnings to become major revolutions ended with the first concessions of the revolutionaries.” As Jack S. Goldstone notes, “taking advantage of the new opportunities requires building coalitions and mobilizing support among the social and political fragments set free by the collapse of the state.”⁹ Gottschalk then explains that the above criteria are not enough because many revolutionary attempts contained all of the above criteria, yet failed in the end. Thus, the final criteria, “the weakness of conservative forces” plays the determinate role for the revolution’s success or failure.¹⁰ As Gottschalk succinctly emphasizes, “Despite the universal demand for revolutionary change, despite intense hopefulness of success, unless those who wish to maintain the status quo are so weak that they cannot maintain themselves, there is little likelihood of a successful revolution.” Gottschalk notes that this weakness could appear due to divisions within the conservative classes or even in the army. He even notes that many of the factors that weaken the conservative elements turn out to be the same causes that cause the element of “provocation.” Goldstone also notes elite disunity as an important and necessary element of revolutionary success when he extricates that “revolutionary struggles arise only when elites are severely divided” whereas if the elite forces remain united other courses of action occur such as military coups.¹¹

Gottschalk rightly asserts, as one will examine in the case of Iranian revolutionary movements, “a revolution occurs when the upper class cannot and the lower class will not continue the old system.”¹² As Goldstone explains “new opportunities appear because of the state’s loss of initiative and inability to enforce its views” and further, “genuine concrete problems have undermined the belief that the state is capable of maintaining

order and balancing the needs of varied groups in society.”¹³ Iran’s modern history of revolutionary movements provides striking evidence that it is only at this point, where the conservative elements lose initiative, which the tide of revolution can turn and become successful.

The Constitutional Revolution of 1906

The first Iranian revolutionary movement of the past century attempted to shift the country away from a system of absolute monarchy to a system of constitutional monarchy in which the monarchy would be restricted greatly by an Iranian parliament, the Majlis. This movement appeared to consist of the first three of Gottschalk’s criteria, however, for the most part definitely lacked the last two major criteria for a successful revolution.

The provocation for revolutionary change came from discontent with the ruling Qajar monarchy’s consistent concessions to foreign powers such as Britain and France. Anti-imperialism “led to... the gradual unification of the various disparate elite groups with the sole purpose of bringing the monarchy to account.”¹⁴ Two popular Shia mujtahids, Seyyed Abdollah Behbahani and Sayyed Mohammad Tabatabai were even able to garner some popular support from the masses within Tehran itself for a movement to impose a constitutional system on the Shah.¹⁵ Additional popular support followed when the regime punished several Tehran merchants and a low ranking Shia cleric died during protests over their punishment.

Ultimately, the revolution would crumble by 1908. It did not satisfy the last two and most important of Gottschalk’s criteria, leadership on the part of the opposition and weakness of the conservative forces. The constitutionalists lacked a trusted leader who

could hold the revolution together and splintered into rival groups, with some clerics opposing it altogether due to their opposition to secularist notions that sovereignty should reside with the people.¹⁶ Further, the revolutionaries also overestimated the movement's support and combined with the aforementioned divisions, rendered their attempt at governance ineffective, causing it to fail.¹⁷

Further, the monarchy easily dissolved the Majlis in 1908 with Russian military assistance and established *de facto* control over future majlises. In this case, Russian support for the existing regime played a key role in bolstering the conservative forces' strength in regaining their shortly lost power from the constitutionalists.¹⁸ Further, the movement failed because, although there was a general nationalist feeling for an idea of reform in that the monarchy had to be constrained and held accountable, "differences in detail prevented a workable and durable synthesis."¹⁹ This especially was demonstrated by the fact that many of the clergy were clearly not in favor of the system of government proposed by the constitutionalists. Further, although there was somewhat of a unity among the population for the movement, this proved fleeting as there "was a limited level of popular awareness and the desirability of extending it" and "its popular appeal, while spontaneous and often decisive, was not profound."²⁰ What popular appeal there was remained primarily in the cities, such as Tehran, and did not extend to the country as a whole at this time. Thus, even the less determinate criteria of a solidified public opinion and hopefulness of success, which comes from a clear program of reform, were only temporary at best as the population was not only divided over the details of reform, but lacked the necessary lasting political awareness one would find in a more educated society. Consequently, as no clear structure was formulated to take the place of the

existing 2500-year-old system, the constitutional revolution was doomed for failure at this time despite the deep frustrations of the Iranian populace over the domination of their government by foreign powers. This frustration itself was also confined to the urban city centers, as much of the country was most likely unaware of what was occurring internationally.

A Second Attempt at Constitutional Revolution: Mossadegh in 1953

About a half a century after the constitutional revolution failed, dissatisfaction had once again arisen enough for a second major revolutionary movement to enforce the original ideals of 1906 to limit the power of the Shah to that of a constitutional monarch. In the early 1950's, similar to the situation in 1906, imperialism was the leading element of provocation. Various sectors of society were again tired of British control over their government, including the clergy. By 1951, the very influential Ayatollah Abol-Ghasem Kashani made a call for "all sincere Muslims and patriotic citizens to fight against the enemies of Islam and Iran by joining the nationalization struggle."²¹ The presence of nationalist sentiment in the Majlis led to the resignation of a pro-monarchy prime minister and further, due to political miscalculations, Mohammad Mosaddegh was appointed prime minister. Consequently, "binding himself to the principle of nationalization, [he] insisted that his acceptance [of the appointment] be predicated on the ratification of the nationalization law."²² Further, the Shah's attempt to remove Mosaddegh over a dispute over the appointment of a war minister led to 5 days of mass demonstrations that primarily was the result of Ayatollah Kashani's labeling of Mossadegh's replacement as being anti-religion.²³ Following this demonstration Mosaddegh "began stripping the Shah of much of the powers he had enjoyed under the

Constitution, ensuring that henceforth he would be little more than a ceremonial monarch.”²⁴ Thus, early on it seemed as if this attempt at revolutionary change had enough momentum to succeed unlike the previous movement in 1906, however, the lack of many of the elements necessary for success would prove fatal.

Mosaddegh now found himself as the leader of the National Front which was “a broad movement composed of different parties including socialists, and secular and religious nationalists, and driven less by a cohesive rigorous ideological platform and more by ambiguous, if potent, ideas of self-determination, nationhood, and anti-imperialism.”²⁵ Thus, a solidified public opinion existed in that nationalism and anti-imperialism served to galvanize the masses and elites to reattempt a change in the ruling regime. At the same time, as indicated by a lack of a clear program of reform, hopefulness for success rested primarily on idealism and not any type of realistic plan for the future of the new government.

Further, as Mosaddegh’s premiership continued, he began to isolate himself from many major groups of the broad coalition he relied on to secure his power. Most notably he would lose the support of the clergy, which was mostly a result of Mosaddegh’s increasing reliance on the communist Tudeh (Masses) party, which most of the clergy opposed as they viewed communism as an anathema to Islam. Consequently, “there was a growing clerical support for the Shah in Mashhad. To some it appeared as if confusion reigned, and there were few things the Iranian political establishment abhorred more than the whiff of anarchy.”²⁶ The disbandment of the broad coalition that originally had supported Mosaddegh ultimately led to calls from the same groups within the same coalition for the return of the monarchist system as it was “seen as an anchor for social

and political stability” in the face of the deeper anarchy that was emerging due for the most part on a lack of a clear program for reform that could be agreed upon by the various groups of the coalition.²⁷ Conservative forces were thus re-strengthened, not only by British support for a coup against Mosaddegh in 1953, but also by the return of many of the major groups of the National Front to their side, especially the clergy and the army.

The attempt in the early 1950’s at enforcing the ideals of the constitutional revolution of 1906 failed in many respects for the same reasons that the first attempt at revolution had failed. In both cases there was nationalistic sentiment against the imperialism of foreign powers that served as the main provocation for making an attempt to eliminate the absolute power of the monarchy, although it must be noted that in the latter attempt, clerics played a more prominent role in bonding religion with nationalism. Further, in both cases the provocation resulted in the union of various political and societal groups such as the clergy with the nationalist groups, yet in both cases solidified public opinion fell apart as there was no clear program for reform and thus little hopefulness for success.²⁸ Interestingly, the 1906 attempt lacked a trusted leader, while in the early 1950’s Mosaddegh was a formidable leader at the beginning, yet was unable to maintain the solidified support needed to maintain his coalition. Finally, in both cases conservative elements were strong enough, although bolstered by foreign powers, to regain control over the country and impose the monarchy without formidable opposition.

A New Attempt at Islamic Revolution: Khomeini in 1963

Ultimately, issues regarding how power was traditionally distributed in Iran and particularly the power of the Shia clergy in Iran are essential to understanding both why the revolution took on an Islamic flavor and how the organization of the revolution was

possible at all following the coup against Mosaddegh in 1953. One will find that throughout the latter half of the 20th century, while most traditional power structures crumbled under the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty, the clergy remained the primary dominant power outside of the official government capable of filling a major power vacuum. It is essential to keep in mind that the clergy in Iran traditionally were the most organized hierarchy in Iran outside of the government, and thus, even though they preferred to remain outside of political rule throughout Iran's history, they were always potentially the most capable and effective force that could unify the country outside of traditional political structures. This reality of the tremendous power of the clergy and the failure of secular nationalists in both 1906 and 1953 to recognize it, was the main cause for the inability of both earlier attempts at revolutionary change to maintain a solidified public opinion, as the clergy always were critical to shaping public opinion.

Up until his death in 1961, Iran's leading cleric Ayatollah Seyyed Hossein Borujerdi, was able to convince all the members of the religious hierarchy to continue support for the monarchy largely due to the clergy's fear of communism.²⁹ However, after his death no authority was able to uniformly continue this support.³⁰ At the same time, the Shah began a program of reforms and legislation that sparked major provocation from various sectors of society, but this time a religious cleric rather than a secular nationalist took the lead.

Under pressure from the U.S. administration, the Shah introduced land reforms as part of a White Revolution.³¹ Capitulation laws were concurrently introduced into the Majlis, which prevented Americans from being put on trial or in prison in Iran.³² These actions, particularly the land reforms, had significant consequences for the clergy's main

source of revenue, which was from contributions from followers who paid the mullahs' twenty percent of their savings every year. At that time there were only two sectors that had savings and could make these types of contributions; the rich merchants of the bazaar and the landlords.³³ Consequently, under the leadership of Khomeini, the landlords pressed the clergy to oppose the Shah's reform.

These factors gave Khomeini enough reason to attempt an uprising on June 3, 1963. At the time, the landlords and a minority of the conservative clergy supported Khomeini.³⁴ Therefore, as in the previous two attempts at revolutionary change, both provocation and a relatively solidified public opinion did exist in opposition to the regime. Further, in this case there was a leader that all sides trusted at the time to oppose the Shah and possessed a program of reform detailed in his philosophical and religious writings. However, this attempt lacked the final necessary ingredient for revolution: the weakness of conservative forces.

Whether or not the Shah was a weak ruler in 1963, as many contend he became by 1979 was irrelevant. During this attempt, the Shah's closest advisor, Prime Minister Asadollah Alam, took total control over the situation and prevented a full-scale revolution by ordering the army to crush the uprising.³⁵ Several thousand rioters were killed, though the government claimed that it was only several hundred. Nonetheless, the "riots were ruthlessly suppressed" and the revolution screeched to a halt.³⁶ In order to save him from execution, as the Shah was forbidden by law from executing any cleric of that rank, Ayatollah Mohammad-Kazem Shariatmadari promoted Khomeini to the rank of Ayatollah and he was exiled to Turkey.³⁷

Thus, in the case of 1963 there was a relatively unified coalition, though it lacked the backing of the official religious hierarchy, but more importantly force was used to quell it without hesitation. In effect, as will be demonstrated in 1979, countering Sick's notions that the support of Iran's clerics was essential to success in 1979, most of the religious hierarchy would continue to support the Shah up until the last minute when anarchy ensued due to the Shah's failure to act.

The Success of Revolution in 1979: The Implosion of the Monarchy

The Iranian Revolution was both sparked by and succeeded due to various power plays within the Shah's own court, which coupled with the Shah's own insecurities, rendered the revolution a success. The revolution itself began due to lust for power and miscalculation made by one of his most important ministers, Amir-Abbass Hoveyda. The Shah replaced him with Jamshid Amuzegar as prime minister, making him the court minister in 1977. Hoveyda, desiring to regain his post, wanted to convince the Shah that Amuzegar was incapable of running the government by creating different incidents in order to discredit him.³⁸ The most important of these incidents occurred in the summer of 1977 when Khomeini attacked the Shah in a speech that was brought to the Shah's attention. The Shah asked Hoveyda to respond to it; therefore, a letter was prepared that attacked Khomeini and labeled him a homosexual. In order to blame Amuzegar for imprudence, Hoveyda gave the letter to Darius Hamoyun, who was Amuzegar's information minister, to be published in Iranian papers. Consequently, after the letter was published and in a serious miscalculation of risk by Hoveyda, some of the clergy from the city of Qom protested and were killed by the Shah's security forces, sparking the beginnings of the revolution.³⁹

Despite this, no one in the country or outside of the country believed that the Shah's government could fall in the late 1970's. In fact, in opposition to Skocpol's notion that the masses drove the revolution, U.S. General Robert Huyser observed "total support for the opposition never stood at more than fifteen to twenty percent of the population" and that even when Khomeini returned, he did not have the support of the majority of Iranians.⁴⁰ Secret negotiations between Ahmad Ali Massoud Ansari, the Shah's close confidant and nephew, and the highest religious authority in Iran Ayatollah Shariatmadari reveal that even the clergy were unwilling to support the revolution. Shariatmaderi definitively asked the Shah to act with strength to prevent the revolution, conveying that, "we said freedom, but this is anarchy and the Shah has a duty to stop it."⁴¹ One reason no one took the revolution seriously, including U.S. diplomats and the CIA, was little expectation that the Shah would allow the revolution to continue to grow and that he would ultimately abandon the country without much of a fight.

However, in the last months of 1978, the Shah and his regime did not act with the requisite force at the necessary moments to prevent the revolution, enabling the last and most critical of Gottshalk's conditions for a successful revolution. It is worth noting that the Iranian political system, Shahhanshahi (King of Kings), resembled feudalism where the Shah was the King of many lesser kings. The kings were in effect the landlords and heads of tribes. Due to the aforementioned White Revolution, all lands were distributed and the landlords and tribal leaders lost much of their authority, undercutting one of the Shah's key sources of legitimacy. The remaining traditional sources of legitimacy in 1979 were the military and the religious establishment, both of which, despite Khomeini coming from the religious establishment, backed the Shah to the very end. In the last

months of his reign, elements within the conservative forces of his own regime, primarily Queen Farah and her advisors, aided the opposition and directed a demoralized and insecure Shah to discredit, dismantle and neutralize his regime from within.

In terms of his court, the Shah was insecure and as a result surrounded himself with advisors that were weaker than him. The Shah started a pattern of excluding capable advisors from his court in favor of those he could control.⁴² The Shah “in 1965 seemed less interested in seeking advice, relying on a smaller and smaller circle of friends and sycophants...if fewer and fewer Iranians were bothering to listen [to the Shah], that mattered little [to him].”⁴³ As far as the army was concerned, because the Shah was afraid of a coup, he rarely permitted any officer with accomplishment to pass the rank of colonel. Most of his generals were ceremonial in position and would obey the Shah blindly without any initiative of their own. As Huyser observed, “the Shah made all decisions, no matter how trivial – even those that in most military organizations would have been made by lieutenant colonels or colonels” causing even those at higher ranks to have little to no initiative to take action when it was most needed.⁴⁴ When the Shah himself lost his will to take a stand, there was no one in the army who would take any initiative.⁴⁵

The Shah’s terminal illness and family issues also had a profound impact. When the Shah became sick and realized he only had a few years to live he came to the realization that his heirs Queen Farah, whom he appointed as regent, and his son Reza Pahlavi were incapable of running the country the way he had run it.⁴⁶ Therefore, he decided to allow some political freedoms in order for the country to start forming a democratic political structure that would make it easier for his wife and son to reign, but

not rule. The Queen, the appointed regent, was a liberal leftist, was having an affair with leftist Fereydoun Javadi and was surrounded by friends and advisors who were also leftists that desired to gain power through her.⁴⁷

Further, the Shah used the concept of divide and rule to create division between his military and political supporters in order to make sure he kept control. However, this policy backfired dramatically during the revolution because his supporters, instead of uniting to defeat a common enemy, started fighting each other. Moreover, many of the Shah's closest advisors also died in the years leading up to the revolution including Alam, who had acted to crush the revolt of 1963.⁴⁸ Accounts from Ambassador William Sullivan and Huyser are clear that the United States was indecisive and offered the Shah little guidance throughout the revolution. Thus, the Shah was left only with the Queen and her advisors who took over as his main advisors and began to give advice based on a leftist way of thinking, which served to aid the revolution.⁴⁹

It was under the advice of the Queen's inner circle, primarily her cousin Reza Ghotbi, that the Shah put many of his loyal supporters, including the head of secret services (SAVAK), General Nematollah Nassiri and Hoveyda in jail.⁵⁰ As demonstrations grew in intensity, the Queen and her advisors advised the Shah to prevent the police, the army, and the secret police from taking decisive action. During this phase of the revolution, Iranian television and radio became instrumental. Ghotbi, who also headed Iranian Radio & Television, flooded broadcasts with anti-monarchy themes, including anti-monarchy films.⁵¹

During the summer of 1978, the Shah still did not believe he was threatened. However, when he came back from his summer vacation in September, he was

confronted by demonstrations made up of hundreds of thousands of people who would chant “death to the Shah.” When the Shah saw the demonstrations, he lost his morale and realized that he was losing the country.⁵² At this point, Farah and her advisors convinced the Shah to dismiss his last senior personal advisor, Dr. Abdol Karim Ayadiand brought the Shah under their total control.⁵³ Jafar Sharif-Emami replaced Amuzegar as prime minister and granted the opposition several concessions. Meanwhile, General Gholam-Ali Oveissi declared martial law in most Iranian cities and introduced several plans to quell the unrest.⁵⁴ However, Farah and her advisors prevented Oveissi from taking effective action. Thus, soldiers were sent into the streets and ordered only to shoot in the air.⁵⁵

This lasted a few months, demoralizing the army and police. The army high command pleaded with the Shah to allow them to take action and take control, but the Shah, under the advice of Farah and her advisors, continued to prevent them from taking decisive action. For example, according to Oveissi, the Shah was called by the high command that told the Shah that there were only one thousand leaders of the demonstrations and pleaded with the Shah to let the army capture them and take them to Qeshm Island until the situation normalized.⁵⁶ Huyser also mentioned in his account that Acting Minister of War Toufanian proposed this idea as a means to quickly contain the revolution.⁵⁷ The Shah finally agreed, but fifteen minutes later, Farah called the high command and reversed the Shah’s decision.⁵⁸

When the demonstrations became larger the Shah decided to put in place a military government, choosing General Oveissi, who had gained a reputation for toughness, as the military Prime Minister. However, the Queen and her advisors objected

to this appointment and chose General Gholam-Reza Azhari.⁵⁹ It was during this period, the Queen and her advisors put many of the Shah's officials, including Nassiri and Hoveyda in jail, while freeing two thousand communists from jail. The same day, the Queen and her advisors at the last minute provided the Shah a speech that he read for the first time live on Iranian television in which he said his government was corrupt, made mistakes, that he himself was on the forefront of the revolutionary movements and that if he were given a chance, he would end his corruption from that point on.⁶⁰

During the last months of the Shah's rule, the other pillar of his support, the United States, continued to be indecisive. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was anti-Shah, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski was pro-Shah and President Carter refused to make decisions for the Shah. This caused mixed signals that did not help the situation, one that was no better on the ground in Tehran. As Secretary of State Alexander Hague noted with regards to the Huyser Mission, "differences between Dutch Huyser and Ambassador Sullivan reflected an infirmity of purpose in Washington."⁶¹ This is in stark contrast to the constitutional revolution of 1906, and the attempt in 1953 where foreign powers proved as reliable backbones of support for the monarchy against internal revolt.

In the last months of the Shah's reign, Azhari had a heart attack and the Shah approached Gholam Hossein Sadighi, a leading member of the National Front, asking him to become the prime minister.⁶² Sadighi agreed on the condition that the Shah not leave the country and warned the Shah his departure would cause the armed forces to collapse. The Shah agreed and ordered his private assistant, Mahmud Eliyasi to prepare a trip to Kish Island. However, upon discovery, Farah convinced the Shah to abandon his

trip and introduced Shahpour Bakhtiar, who had no objection to the Shah leaving Iran, as an alternative to Sadighi. Shortly after the Majlis accepted Bakhtiar on January 16, the Shah left the country. Bakhtiar was one of the Shah's opponents since the coup of 1953 and had no chance of success short of a military coup. However, the Carter Administration instructed General Huyser to prevent military action until it was too late.⁶³

While in Morocco, Farah prevented the Shah's contact with the Iranian military. Puzzled that he was not receiving calls from Iran, the Shah asked Eliyasi to look into the situation. He had discovered and informed the Shah that Farah had directed King Hasan of Morocco's palace switchboard not to connect calls from Iran to him. The next day, Eliyasi was poisoned, though survived through the Shah's intervention.⁶⁴ Bakhtiar's government would fall to the revolutionaries only a few weeks later.

It was only at the very end when the people, including the military and the clergy, saw the weakness of the Shah in dealing with the situation that the masses gradually had no choice but to move towards Khomeini in order to protect their interests in the event of any change. Satisfying Gottschalk's criteria for a successful revolution, forces from within the Shah's government fundamentally destroyed his regime, making Khomeini's eventual ascension inevitable. In contrast, Khomeini acted with pure guile to the extent that "many of the political groups that had fought for the revolution remained indifferent to Khomeini's leadership" and most thought "he would retire to Qom once the revolution had been won."⁶⁵ Thus, to the majority of Iranians, Khomeini represented the symbolic force needed to produce a revolution and nothing more, and in this way he was able to

maintain a solidified opposition to the monarchy that proved more durable than past coalitions in 1906 and 1953.

There are some indications that towards the end of the Shah's rule, U.S. officials, including then Ambassador to Iran William Sullivan, threw support towards Khomeini and wanted to get rid of Iran's top military leadership because he believed that Khomeini was the only figure that could maintain stability and counter communism in Iran.⁶⁶ There are also some assertions within the Iranian community that the Kremlin may have played a role to oust the pro-U.S. Shah, however, there is little research, at least in the English medium to substantiate this at this time. However, this is all in stark contrast to previous foreign interventions that sought to preserve the monarchy.

Once the revolution succeeded, in contrast to the Shah, Khomeini acted decisively and often ruthlessly. "There was clear tension between the desire for a genuinely popular revolution which could claim considerable legitimacy and the fear that such popular movements were democratic in the worst Aristotelian interpretation of the term."⁶⁷

Khomeini quickly eliminated the groups who vied for power to whom he had previously promised his own retirement. This is when people began to realize that Khomeini was not the simple, pious man that they thought he was, but a shrewd politician who was willing to shirk his Islamic duties in order to consolidate power.

This was in stark contrast to what Khomeini proclaimed previously that "Islamic Government ... is not tyranny, where the head of state can deal arbitrarily with the property and lives of the people, making use of them as he wills, putting to death any one he wishes."⁶⁸ In effect, Khomeini was willing to continue to be decisive to conserve his hold on power at all cost. As a result, the Iranian people, including the clergy, had no

alternative but to accept the demise of the monarchy and throw their support behind the Islamic Republic, a new reality that Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran would help compound.

Conclusions

As illustrated in the discussions and comparisons of the various failed revolutionary attempts up to the 1979 Revolution, the latter succeeded because it embodied the fifth and most important of Gottschalk's criteria for revolutionary success. One must also note that in 1906, 1953, 1963, and in 1979, although a few members of the clergy may have participated in each of these movements, the official religious hierarchy never initiated or supported the drive for revolution or change of government until the monarchy failed to act in totality in 1979. Neither was there any form of mass support until the very end in 1979, when the Shah effectively abandoned the country and the military was rendered useless. It is important to note that in 1906 the movement was primarily secularist, wanting to hold the Shah accountable. In 1953 it was again mainly secularist democrats, and communists, who backed Mosaddegh. In 1963, although religious conservatives backed Khomeini, the landlords urged him to lead a revolt. Finally, even the 1979 revolution could be seen as a primarily secularist and communist revolution whose leader happened to be an Ayatollah who often spoke with language that was congruent with communist and secularist ideology, although appealing to the religious conservatives at the same time. The shrewd leadership of Khomeini brought all the groups together; but what kept the country from falling into civil war was the religious hierarchy as the only traditional power structure left capable of holding the country together. All along, throughout Iran's history, the only political force that could

prevent the country from descending into anarchy in lieu of the Shah was this religious hierarchy. This fact has often caused many to consider the Iranian Revolution itself Islamic, though in fact, Iran's rank and file clergy opposed it.

Although most of the clergy did not support Khomeini's idea of clerical rule, Khomeini offered a clear program for reform that was familiar to most Iranians as most are Muslims and many conservative. Unlike communism and even democracy, which most Iranians had little knowledge of, Islam was and is very familiar to all Iranians and many underestimated this factor. Unlike the 1906 and 1953 programs for reform that were for the most part confined to the elite classes who understood that their objectives were more than just to get rid of the Shah and his imperialists influences, in 1979 the program of reform extended and could be understood by all Iranians, elite or not. Thus, the country for the most part could be kept together by this.

The history of revolutionary movement demonstrates the need to examine the state and composition of the conservative forces rather than view existing regimes as monolithic entities. In order to understand the chance of revolutionary success in Iran today, a serious inquiry must be made to elucidate the interests of key players within the regime and the likelihood of any fractures that would impact the regime's ability to preserve itself. Despite excitement over protests in Iran in 2009 during the Green Movement and more recently over the country's deteriorating economic situation, the chance of revolutionary success absent these fractures remains minimal based on the conclusions of this paper.

Further, no alternate power structure has emerged that would be capable of taking the place of the clergy as the last remaining traditional pillar of Iranian power. It will be

interesting to see if the democratic republic part of the “Islamic Republic” has evolved enough to provide sufficient stability to stand on its own without clerical support and how resilient the supporters of Iran’s current regime can be under what appears to be increasing internal and external pressures. Given necessity of Gottschalk’s criteria of the weakness of conservative forces and how the 1979 revolution succeeded, any future successful regime change will not depend so much on the opposition. Rather, it will require the current regime to either acquiesce or adequate fractures must appear, such as between the ruling clerics, the elected government or the armed forces, for such a movement to have any chance of success.

Endnotes

¹ A revolution in this paper is defined in political terms as the effective replacement of the existing political system in favor of a new system fundamentally different from the previous system.

² Theda Skocpol, “Rentier State and Shi’a Islam in the Iranian Revolution in the Modern World,” *Theory and Society*, vol 11 (May 1982), 256-83.

³ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down* (New York: Random House, 1985), 165.

⁴ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History* (London: Stein and Day Pub, 1980)

⁵ Andrew Scott Cooper, *The Fall of Heaven* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2016)

⁶ James S. Davies, “Towards a Theory of Revolution” *American Sociological Review* 28 (1962) 6.

⁷ Louis Gottschalk, “Causes of Revolution” *The American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 50, No. 1 (1944), 5. Note that the rest of this paragraph draws from Gottschalk’s “Causes of Revolution.”

⁸ *Ibid*, 6.

⁹ Mark N. Katz, Ed, *Revolution: International Dimensions* (Washington, CQ Press, 2001), 19.

¹⁰ Gottschalk, 7.

¹¹ Katz, 12.

¹² Gottschalk, 8.

¹³ Katz, 19.

¹⁴ Ali Massoud Ansari, *Iran, Islam, and Democracy* (Great Britain: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), 27.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

¹⁸ Ali M Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid*, 11.

²² *Ibid*, 113.

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- ²³ Ibid 118.
- ²⁴ Ibid 119.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 113-14.
- ²⁶ Ibid, 122.
- ²⁷ Ibid, 122.
- ²⁸ Ibid, 122.
- ²⁹ Ahmad Ali Massoud Ansari (personal advisor to Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi), discussion with author, December 28, 2017.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 2017.
- ³¹ Ansari, 2003, 153.
- ³² Ibid, 162.
- ³³ Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ³⁴ Ansari, 2003, 160.
- ³⁵ Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ³⁶ Ansari, 2003, 160.
- ³⁷ Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ³⁸ Babak Ganji, *Politics of Confrontation: The Foreign Policy of the USA and Revolutionary Iran* (New York: Tuaris Academics Studies, 2006), 51-52.
- ³⁹ Ibid, 51-52.
- ⁴⁰ Robert Huyser, *Mission to Tehran* (New York, Harper & Row, 1986), 12, 259.
- ⁴¹ Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ⁴² Ibid, 2017.
- ⁴³ Ansari, 2003, 164.
- ⁴⁴ Huyser, 27, 265.
- ⁴⁵ Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid, 2017.
- ⁴⁷ Ali Haydar Shahbazi, *The Guard of the Shah* (Tehran: Ahal Ghalam Publisher, 1999) 265, 297; Tadj Ol-Malouk Pahlavi, *Diaries of Tadj Ol-Malouk* (Tehran: Bij Afarin, 2014) 465.
- ⁴⁸ Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ⁴⁹ *A Dying King*, directed by Babak Kalhor (United States: 2017) DVD.
- ⁵⁰ Abbas Milani, *The Persian Sphinx and the Riddle of the Iranian Revolution* (Washington: Mage Publishers, 2004) 313.
- ⁵¹ Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ⁵² Kalhor, 2017.
- ⁵³ Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ⁵⁴ Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah Khomeini & The Islamic Revolution* (Bethesda: Adler & Adler, Publishers Inc, 1985), 232-233.
- ⁵⁵ Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ⁵⁶ Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ⁵⁷ Huyser, 32.
- ⁵⁸ Massoud Ansari 2017.
- ⁵⁹ Mahmud Elyassi (personal assistant to Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi), Interview, January 8, 2017.
- ⁶⁰ Houshang Nahavandi, *The Last Days* (Los Angeles: Khitab Corp, 2004) 260.
- ⁶¹ Huyser, ix.
- ⁶² Massoud Ansari, 2017.
- ⁶³ Taheri, 240.
- ⁶⁴ Eliyasi, 2018.
- ⁶⁵ Ansari, 2000, 43.
- ⁶⁶ Huyser, 17.
- ⁶⁷ Ansari, 2000, 49.
- ⁶⁸ Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution I* (United States: Mizan Press, 1981), 55.

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