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## THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION OF 1978-79: POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MAJOR COUNTRIES IN THE AREA

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**STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE  
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania**

**THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION OF 1978-79:  
POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR  
MAJOR COUNTRIES IN THE AREA**

**by**

**Robert G. Irani**

**30 June 1980**

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## NOTE

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## FOREWORD

This memorandum considers the reasons that the Iranian Revolution marks the dawning of a new era in the Middle East. The author believes that the revolution provides a relevant model of political change, particularly for the Islamic nations of the Third World. He concludes that the revolution appears to establish a precedent for some of the basic aspects of revolutions which may affect these countries. Some of the aspects he addresses are: the existence of deeply ingrained, traditional politico-religious values threatened by modernization; frustrated rising expectations; the misperception of the forces of nationalism; and, the ability of a charismatic leader to overthrow an established regime which lacks popular support and legitimacy.

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DeWITT C. SMITH, JR.  
Major General, USA  
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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

DR. ROBERT G. IRANI joined the Strategic Studies Institute in 1975. He graduated from Glenville State College with a bachelor's degree in history and social sciences, earned a master's degree in international relations from the American University, and a second master's degree and a doctorate in government and politics and international relations from the University of Maryland. Dr. Irani's research abroad includes trips to both sides of the Persian Gulf and one year of field research as a Research-Associate at the Institute for International Political and Economic Studies, Tehran, Iran. His published works include, *American Diplomacy: An Option Analysis of the Azerbaijan Crisis, 1945-46*, (1978); *Iran's Foreign Policy, 1941-1974*; *A Selective Bibliography*, (1976); and several articles in English and Farsi for professional journals.

## **THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION OF 1978-79: POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MAJOR COUNTRIES IN THE AREA**

The ultimate objective of the 1978-79 revolution in Iran was to totally transform the political system. The revolution in Iran was massive, broadbased and supported by most of the Iranian people.<sup>1</sup> It represented a zenith in Iran's contemporary history and lacks significant parallels in the Western, bourgeoisie models of revolution. The Iranian revolution was indigenous, deeply rooted in Iran's culture, religion, foreign policy, developmental aspirations and changing identity. It would be premature and superficial to generalize about the Iranian revolution in the framework of Western stereotypes and models.

The Iranian revolution reflected Iranian nationalism and the prolonged historic struggle between the two Pahlavi shahs and Iran's religious population and its growing middle class. In this context, the simplified, often politicized debate in the United States over who "lost" Iran failed to reflect the deep roots of the upheavals. Traditions and values as deeply rooted as those in Iran die hard. In Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's dictatorial system, which was dedicated to arbitrarily change traditional, nationally-

held values, and with the Shah's powerful and much feared secret service (SAVAK) which aroused popular hatred, traditional values and institutions were revived and reawakened to threaten the basic premise of legitimacy of the Pahlavi dynasty on a scale unprecedented in contemporary Iranian history. This threat to the Shah was unparalleled for its "...discipline in the face of Government violence. As such, it will long be studied for its lessons in agitational politics and mass organization."<sup>2</sup>

Iran's "unexpected" revolution surprised not only US and foreign leaders, but also the Shah of Iran and his confidants. The Shah and his top aides relied on SAVAK for information on domestic dissidents. SAVAK consistently underestimated the extent of the growing opposition to the Shah. US intelligence also relied heavily on SAVAK for information on domestic Iranian affairs, and as a result, also failed to accurately estimate and analyze the developing situation. Moreover, in Iran, most Americans did not establish or maintain contacts with the leaders of groups in opposition to the Shah. Americans in Iran socialized mainly with other Americans and with wealthy, Western-educated pro-Shah Iranians. As a result, they failed to understand the ground swell of opposition against the Shah.

In the US academic community, some scholars such as Richard Cottam and Hamid Algar warned their readers of the deep malaise in Iran's political system; the necessity to reevaluate US foreign policy toward Iran; and the need to understand the deeply ingrained Shia religious roots against dictatorship and tyranny. Other scholars, such as Professor Leonard Binder, wrote as late as January 1979 that "it is apparent that the government of the Shah is responding quite skillfully to the crisis. We would be misled if we underestimated the resources at the disposal of the Shah. . . ." Binder maintained that thus far the middle class was "outmaneuvered and overpowered by the monarchy."<sup>3</sup> Professor Hamid Algar stated prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79 that the opposition to tyranny was "one of the fundamental and most pervasive characteristics" of Shia Islam.<sup>4</sup> In Algar's opinion, there was a definite linkage between the role played by the *ulamas* (theologians), as the major opposition force against the Qajar dynasty in Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911, and the struggle by the *ulamas* against the Pahlavi dynasty in the present period. The *ulamas* in both periods were opposed to tyranny and dictatorship. Algar's profound analyses introduce the reader to the

historic and religious factors which contributed to the 1978-79 upheavals in Iran.

This paper focuses on the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79, its roots, its major domestic and external actors, the factors that led to the eruption of the upheavals in 1978, the options to consolidate the Iranian revolution and some of the potential implications of the revolution for major countries in the area.

## THE ROOTS OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

The political roots of the Iranian revolution can be traced to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911, which was essentially led by the *ulamas* to reduce the absolute, arbitrary power of the Qajar dynasty. The attitudes and views of Iranians are deeply and unalterably influenced by the political philosophy of Prophet Ali; the martyrdom of Shia Islamic leaders; the continuing theme in Shia Islam of the need for justice; and the legitimacy of the ruler.

Legitimate rule is one of the most critical tests of a leader's survival. Lack of popular support and legitimacy were the principal factors which contributed toward the downfall of the Shah. Legitimate rule, according to the political theory of *Ithna ashari* Shia Islam, belongs to the *Imam* alone. There are only 12 *Imams* in Shia Islam. The Twelfth *Imam*, Mohammad al-Mahdi's occultation in 874 A.D., ended in the disappearance of even the possibility of legitimacy of rule.<sup>5</sup> As a result, Iran's Shia national regimes and leaders have been viewed as repugnant usurpers, an ingrained attitude which prevailed in Iran throughout both the Qajar and the Pahlavi dynasties. Rulers in Shia Islam appear to be far more vulnerable to such popular political and religious attitudes of their people than rulers in Sunni Islamic lands.

The quest for social justice and a general repugnance toward tyranny are two critical underpinnings of socialization in Iran's Shia political culture.<sup>6</sup> As a rule, popular attitudes and aspirations play a vital role in Iran in denying legitimacy to anyone who rules arbitrarily. The Shah's arbitrary, dictatorial methods, and the brutality of his SAVAK, resulted in a latent, permanent freeze on legitimacy of his regime. The Shah, as the ruler and the symbol of authority, ignored these deeply ingrained popular attitudes and aspirations. His dictatorial methods increased popular disaffection and repugnance toward him and his rule, and ultimately led to his

ouster from power.

During the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1978), massive modernization and secularization efforts were undertaken in Iran. These efforts to modernize Iran were successful but they weakened traditional Islamic Shia leadership and institutions, and reduced the power and the self-esteem of the Shia *ulamas*. The modernization effort resulted in a politico-religious backlash by Iran's 32 million religious Shia Moslems to whom secularization and modernization, directed from above, without popular consent, were viewed as another clear manifestation of arbitrary decisionmaking by the Shah. In this context, the Iranian upheavals were, in part, a consequence of rapid industrialization, arbitrary decisionmaking by the Shah, rising expectations at all levels of society, frustration of those expectations, and the failure on the part of the Shah to seek popular consensus for his plans and to lead the nation in a manner consistent with its traditional values. In its anatomy, the Iranian revolution appears to establish a precedent for some of the basic aspects of the pattern of revolutions, particularly for the underdeveloped Moslem countries around the world: deeply ingrained traditional politico-religious values are threatened by a massive modernization, rising expectations are frustrated, catalytic events radicalize the population, forces of nationalism are misperceived, and a charismatic leader overthrows an established regime which lacks popular support and legitimacy.

Finally, the Shah neglected, misunderstood, and underestimated the forces of Iranian nationalism which were unleashed by Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh and his supporters in the 1950-53 period. This was the first manifestation of Iranian nationalism in the post-World War II era; Mossadegh's popularity in Iran was unassailable and his personal standing was extremely high among Iranian nationalists. According to Richard Cottam, Mossadegh's "atavistic view of British influence in Iran and the Middle East prevented him from understanding that the battle had been won when the British accepted the principle of nationalization of oil." Iranian nationalism of the Mossadegh era "floundered on the shoals of its own irrationality. . . Mossadegh was as much a prisoner of the irrationality as were many of his least literate supporters."<sup>8</sup> The Shah, instead of grasping the significance of nationalism as a potent force created obstacles in its path in Iran, further strengthening the basis of support for nationalism and eroding his own sources of legitimacy.

Since its inception, the Pahlavi dynasty failed to deal successively with serious socio-economic problems facing Iran. These problems festered for decades, perpetuating popular discontent with the Shah. Furthermore, many Iranians resented the extent and degree of corruption in their country. They believed high-level impropriety which blocked benefits for the masses must be ended; however, in their opinion, it was impossible to end wide-scale corruption as long as the members of the Pahlavi family were themselves deeply involved. The next section focuses on some of the major domestic and external actors in the Iranian upheavals.

## MAJOR DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL ACTORS

The major domestic and external actors and participants in the Iranian revolution of 1978-79 and an account of their sources of support and opposition are as follows:

- Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi had the support of the modern and well-armed Imperial Iranian Armed Forces. With their support, he felt secure and could not foresee that the Pahlavi dynasty would be seriously threatened by an internal element, as long as SAVAK succeeded in keeping the populace under control. As long as there was stability, the wealthy upper class appeared to support the Shah, as did most of the bureaucrats, some of the lower middle class, Iran's tribal population, and most of its minorities (Assyrians, Bahais, Baluchis, Jews, Kurds, and Zoroastrians). The Shah and the government of Iran also appeared to be widely supported abroad.

- Ayatollah Rouhallah Khomeini, the 78-year-old symbol of opposition to the Pahlavi dynasty, had suffered personally during the reign of the Pahlavis. His father was killed in the early part of this century, and his son was killed by SAVAK in the mid-1970's. Khomeini is the most important of the approximately 12 prominent ayatollahs in Iran. There are some 350 ayatollahs in Iran and approximately 1200 in the Islamic world. Due to his impeccable reputation for honesty and longstanding opposition to the Shah, Ayatollah Khomeini became extremely popular with the Iranian masses. During his 15 years in exile, Ayatollah Khomeini, in the perception of most Iranians, became the national symbol of resistance. Other ayatollahs, *ulamas*, and mullahs acting under the direction of Ayatollah Khomeini formed the religious

organizational nucleus for the forces opposing the Shah. Shahriar Rouhani, the young intellectual in charge of Iranian interests in the United States during the early phase of the revolution, has summarized the perception of the Iranian people toward Ayatollah Khomeini as follows:

The people of Iran are struggling for survival as a nation. Khomeini is the symbol and rallying point of this struggle. . . The people look at Khomeini for leadership and there is no alternative to his charisma. Instead of heading the state as a charismatic leader, which could result in a possible totalitarianism, he is providing only the general moral direction.<sup>9</sup>

- About 32 million of Iran's 36 million population are Shia Moslems. As the Shah pushed his massive modernization efforts, he underestimated the pervasive powers of religion and tradition and neglected to evaluate the disruptive impacts of his efforts on traditional institutions and value systems.

- The *Mujahadeen Khalgh*, the major Moslem revolutionary faction supporting Ayatollah Khomeini, received considerable training and assistance from Yasir Arafat's Al Fatah group of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The *Mujahadeen Khalgh* played a vital role—particularly after the Shah left Iran—in the Iranian revolution.

- The National Coalition Front (NCF) was formed in 1950, as a result of the union of four political parties represented in the Iranian Parliament immediately before the Premiership of Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh. Mossadegh was appointed by the Shah as Iran's premier in 1951, and he became the leader of the NCF. The return of the Shah to power in 1953 marked the suppression of the NCF, and many of its prominent leaders were jailed or exiled. The NCF was reestablished in the 1962-63 period; however, it was once again suppressed by the Shah, and its principal leaders were imprisoned. In December 1977, Karim Sanjabi, Darioush Forouhar, and Shahpour Bakhtiar, all of whom had served as ministers under Dr. Mossadegh, announced the reformation of the NCF, and by August 1978 the NCF included several parties, representing a broad-based coalition of political parties with a specific program designed to restore civil liberties in Iran. The NCF has the support of the middle class, which constitutes about 25 percent of Iran's population.

- It is possible that US enunciation of its human rights policy may have encouraged the Shah to expedite his liberalization policy,

which in turn contributed to the eruption of the Iranian upheavals. There is a perception that the US human rights policy affected the Shah's response toward the Iranian revolution. The Shah's abrupt and unexpected implementation of a wide-scale liberalization effort in late 1978 was most likely in accordance with Western ideals of human rights, and that policy may have expedited his downfall.

- Most Iranian students abroad and many at home were strongly opposed to the Shah. Iranian students in the United States were highly vocal in the 1970's, and they vehemently opposed the Shah after the US human rights policy was announced.

- The Marxist *Fedayeen Khalgh* was a small but effective element during the revolution. It was well-organized, armed, and it maintained a distance from Moscow. The extent of external support for *Fedayeen Khalgh* remains unclear.

- The *Forghan* Fighters, the group that claims responsibility for the killings of General Vali Gharani and Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, played a counter-revolutionary role in a critical period when the consolidation of the revolution was taking place. The *Forghan* Fighters oppose *Akhundha va Akhundbazi*, or rule of *akhunds* and *ulamas* (religious leadership) and institutions. They maintain that *Akhundha* keep people down by superstition and rejection of Westernization, while seeking to acquire power, influence and wealth.<sup>10</sup>

- The full extent of Soviet involvement in Iran during the 1978-79 period remains unclear, but it appears that the USSR and its friends have and probably will continue to contribute to the upheavals and to the post-revolutionary period.

- Yasir Arafat's *Al Fatah* group of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has been involved in training Iranian Shia Moslem revolutionaries (particularly the *Mujahedeen Khalgh*) for several years. The PLO has supported anti-Shah elements inside and outside Iran, a factor which is shaping one aspect of the foreign policy objectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Crisis and revolutions require a spark. In the Iranian case, an array of factors sparked the upheavals which led to the Iranian revolution. The next section evaluates the principal factors which triggered the revolutionary period in 1978.

## THE ERUPTION OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Due to the dangers of contemporaneity, it is difficult at this time

to fully answer the question of why the Iranian Revolution occurred in 1978. As a partial answer to that question, it appears that several factors, unforeseen developments and circumstances provided the needed spark for the severe upheavals in Iran in 1978. Without their joint presence the Iranian monarchy may have temporarily, but not for long, survived a less severe crisis. Among these variables the following are particularly notable:

- Most foreign workers, especially Westerners, earned top wages, lived in the best houses available, and enjoyed the highest standard of living in Iran. At the same time, most of the urban Iranians received low wages and suffered from an acute shortage of housing and unemployment, which contributed to their alienation, rebellion, and a rising xenophobia.

- After the 1973-74 oil price hikes, spiraling inflation caused severe economic hardships for most Iranians, due to a loss of real earning power. As a result, popular resentment of the Shah, the symbol of authority, increased substantially.

- In 1976, due to government attempts to control spiraling inflation, many construction programs in Iran were curtailed significantly. As a result, vast numbers of unskilled workers who had migrated to cities from rural areas to find work in construction and service sectors of the economy were unemployed. This group provided many of the people who participated in the subsequent demonstrations against the Shah.

- Rising popular expectations is a sociological phenomenon prevalent throughout the Third World. In Iran, the Pahlavi monarchs through massive exposure to the West helped fuel these rising expectations, but they failed to satisfy them. Instead, a growing and ever-widening gap developed between popular, rising expectations and the capacity and competence of the central government of Iran to meet these demands. The Shah was blamed for the poor performance of the government because he defined himself as the symbol and essence of the nation.

- By 1978, the middle class represented about 25 percent of Iran's population. The remarkable increase of Iran's middle class from 1953 to 1978 appears to have been largely ignored by the pro-Shah factions.

- The Pahlavis failed to provide adequate political channels for the Iranian people. Disregarding the constitution, both Shahs made decisions in an authoritarian, dictatorial fashion through *Farmans* (Royal Edicts). These edicts were implemented by loyal, pro-Shah

technocrats with little regard for the wishes of the people. This was a prime cause of discontent among the middle class. The Shah created a facade of a political party system, but in reality the parties did not function as in a democratic system, which added to the frustration of Iran's rising middle class.

- SAVAK, through its methods of brutality, created an overwhelming atmosphere of distrust, fear, and uncertainty in Iran. The prevailing belief that SAVAK was created by the United States, its personnel trained by Israel, and that it was the brutal instrument of the Shah alienated many Iranians against the Shah and diminished their respect for the United States. Iranians believed that as long as SAVAK existed the people would lack basic human rights.

- Most informed Iranians considered the Shah's huge arms expenditures extravagant and unnecessary in light of the immense domestic needs of the people. By placing primary, undue emphasis on foreign policy and defense expenditures, the Shah failed to focus on the basic internal needs of the people.

- Ayatollah Rouhallah Khomeini was exiled to Iraq in 1963 and was subsequently forced to leave there when Iraq was concerned over relations with the Shah in 1978. As a result, the Ayatollah established a new residence in France, and, with ample access to Western communications, he and his followers substantially expanded their attacks on the Shah. Riots, demonstrations, and rallies against the Shah became routine events both in Iran and abroad. Ayatollah Khomeini's presence to lead the opposition stimulated these events. Strikes in factories and various industries, particularly in the oil sector, were prevalent. These strikes, in conjunction with massive demonstrations in the major cities of Iran, paralyzed Iran's economy, and clearly indicated lack of support for the Shah. As the Shah uncharacteristically made concessions during the earlier phases of the revolution, the opposition began to believe and recognize that their demonstrations, marches, and riots were effective.

- The powerful, unexpected alliance between the religious factions and the National Coalition Front substantially expanded the power of the opposition to the Shah. Neither the Shah and his confidants nor most analysts in Iran and abroad predicted that such an effective alliance would take place in 1978. It was this alliance which formed the backbone of the opposition and which posed the greatest single threat to the Shah.

- The global Islamic reawakening and reforms had an impact on Iran, and contributed toward the revolution. This reawakening aided the opposition in their efforts to overthrow the Pahlavi dynasty. In short, the country was ripe for a revolution in 1978. The force of events and personalities led to the fulfillment of the revolution earlier than was anticipated.

## OPTIONS TO CONSOLIDATE THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

As long as instability prevails it would be premature to ignore any conceivable option to consolidate the Iranian revolution. The major options for an eventual consolidation, in an order of priority, include an Islamic republic; continued instability and unrest; and, a people's democratic Islamic republic.

*Islamic republic.* An Islamic republic would be based on the teachings of Islam; the *Sharia*, the laws governing the conduct of man, as set forth in the holy Koran; and *hadith* and *sunna*, interpretations and Islamic customs. It would be democratic in the sense that the rulers at all levels of society would be elected by the people. The *ulamas* would participate heavily and guide the democratic process of such a political system, particularly at grass-root levels. They could become candidates to represent the people in the new Iranian *Majlis* (a proposed unicameral Parliament). Islamic law would be the principal basis of governing the society. Prohibitions on drinking, gambling, and banking interest would be enforced on a nation-wide scale. Western-educated and Iranian-educated specialists would serve as technocrats, performing the major administrative tasks of governing the nation. Secular law may co-exist with Islamic law, where it does not conflict with Islamic law. Prominent religious leaders, particularly the well-known ayatollahs, would act as "critics" of government policy, with an explicit, established right to challenge and veto those policies which, in their opinion, contradict the teachings of Islam.

The foreign policy characteristics of an Islamic republic would reflect and include: (1) Nationalism and anticolonialism, eventually with a conciliatory approach toward the United States and possibly a noncommittal view toward the Soviet Union. In general, "nonalignment" would characterize its foreign policy posture. (2) Protection of Iran's independence and territorial integrity would have priority over all other elements in the substantive and procedural aspects of Iranian foreign policy. (3) Iran's ties with the

Moslem nations of the Middle East, North Africa and the rest of the Third World would expand and improve to a considerable extent. (4) Iran's relations with Israel and South Africa would be severed. No oil would be shipped from Iran to these two countries. (5) Oil may also be used as a political "weapon" against Israel's supporters. (6) Selective, measured support would be provided to various revolutionary groups in the Middle East, with considerable support for Yasir Arafat's Al Fatah branch of the PLO. As a minimum, Iran's support for the PLO would be financial, spiritual, and political. Such support might include sending Moslem revolutionaries, such as members from the *Mujahedeen Khalgh* to participate in pro-PLO operations. (7) Iran has renounced the bilateral Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and has severed diplomatic relations with Egypt; however, Iran's position vis-a-vis the steadfast Arab front which rejects the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty will probably remain ambiguous. (8) Iran's bilateral defense executive agreement of 1959 with the United States may be renounced, provided that the Islamic Republic could also renounce the 1921 Soviet-Iranian Treaty as well. Iran's multilateral defense tie with the West through the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) has already been renounced. (9) Iran's commercial relations with the West, particularly with the United States, would decline, with France as a possible exception to this rule, because of Ayatollah Khomeini's brief exile in France and the rapport that has since then been established between France and Iran. (10) Iran's arms procurement policies have changed. There will be a considerable reduction in the quantity of arms to be procured. However, spare parts for the US equipment already purchased by and in the hands of the Iranian military would be purchased from the United States. (11) Iran's overall production of oil would be sustained at lower rates than in the past, and sold at considerably higher prices. The West may no longer perceive Iran as a dependable source of oil as it has in the past, and Iran's role as the self-proclaimed policeman of the Gulf would end.

*Continued instability and unrest.* It is conceivable that Ayatollah Khomeini's call to all Iranians to lay down their arms and to unite may continue to go unheeded, and that the nation may fail to return to normalcy. In such a setting, it is conceivable that diverse ethnic groups in a spectrum from the right or the far left, could continue to fuel instability and unrest, a situation which could lead to coups and counter-coups in Iran, probably emanating from

junior officer ranks of the Islamic republic's armed forces. Ultimately, what is important is that which takes place after such a chaotic period. Therefore, the unfortunate, short-range consequences of such an era would not, in themselves, indicate the direction of Iran's foreign and domestic policy. These policies will be determined by those who take control of the government of Iran after such a chaotic period.

*People's democratic Islamic republic.* It is conceivable that the Iranian people may arrive at a government in which all elements of that nation, to include Marxists and other revolutionary groups, would play a role. Traditionally, once Marxists gain control of a nation's power structure, they would not relinquish their power in the political process. Such a process in Iran could ultimately lead to the creation of a people's democratic Islamic republic, which could be somewhat similar to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), but with a stronger Islamic flavor. The internal, defense and foreign policy postures of Iran under such a system would be leftist, Islamic, and conceivably pro-Soviet.

A pro-Soviet people's democratic Islamic republic would have negative implications for the pro-Western nations of the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula area in particular and the Middle East in general. It would tilt the balance of power equilibrium in favor of radical, pro-Soviet nations in the area. Finally, a pro-Soviet Iran, along with a pro-Soviet Afghanistan and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, would pose serious threats to traditional, conservative, pro-Western regimes in the Middle East, particularly if the Soviet Union persuaded such an Iranian regime to pursue an active revolutionary role in the area.

## CURRENT ASSESSMENT

The departure of the Shah from Iran on January 17, 1979, and Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran on January 31, 1979, are two of the highest points in the culmination of the Iranian revolution: both developments mark the success of the Khomeini-inspired and led revolution. From the holy city of Qum, Ayatollah Khomeini will remain the "guiding light" and the "father" of the Iranian revolution. Some of the people of Iran have bestowed the highest and most respectful Shia religious title of *imam* to him, while other, more cautious Iranians refer to him as *nayeb al-imam*. He will likely remain the most important personality in the planning and

implementation of an Islamic republic in Iran. The resumption of the flow of oil began on March 5, 1979, and is expected to continue in the future, but at a lower volume than during the Pahlavi regime.

In February-March 1979, the Prime Minister-designate Mehdi Bazargan's government served as the *de jure* government in Iran, while the *de facto* operations of governing the country were in the hands of the revolutionary committees (*Komitahaye Enghelabi*). These committees often acted autonomously, receiving direction from Ayatollah Khomeini's Revolutionary Council's Central Committee (*Komiteh Markazi*), which is, after Ayatollah Khomeini, the most important revolutionary "guide" in Iran. Bazargan had no authority over or dealings with the revolutionary courts, which by early April 1979 had sent about 158 people before the firing squads.<sup>11</sup> Bazargan emphasized the need to end the "spirit of revenge," implicitly suggesting an end to trials and executions of people who had served under the Shah.<sup>12</sup>

In late April 1979, Ayatollah Mahdavi Khani, the Supreme Commander of Iran's *Komiteh Markazi* (Central Committee) announced a purge of the revolutionary committees, and their phase-out to be implemented along with the reestablishment of a national police force throughout Iran. The national police force would be constituted from members of the revolutionary committees.<sup>13</sup> Also in late April 1979, a draft to Iran's constitution was published which effectively banned Communists from holding high office in Iran.

According to Iran's draft constitution, the president of the Islamic republic is to be a Shia Moslem, a nationalist—without "leftist" or "rightist" leanings. He cannot be a "follower of any misleading ideology."<sup>14</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini will have no official role under the newly revised constitution, a preliminary draft of which was published in May 1979. Elections for a Council of Experts were held in August 1979 and that body will draft the final version of the constitution.<sup>15</sup> The final draft of the revised constitution of Iran will probably reflect the views of the pro-Khomeini's 73-member Council of Experts. According to one Iranian constitutional scholar who has seen the preliminary drafted constitution, the new articles appear to be less "liberal" than the 1906 Constitution. The preliminary draft provides for a council of religious leaders to have the ultimate authority on deciding whether the laws are validly based on Islamic laws or not.<sup>16</sup>

Based on what has happened in Iran since the return of Ayatollah Khomeini, it appears that the chances of the successful establishment of a traditional Islamic republic in Iran are relatively high. However, the principal test of the capability of the Islamic republic will come in the future over the way the Islamic republic will deal with Iran's minorities. A successful effort to consolidate the Arabs, Baluchis, and Kurds into the mainstream of Iranian life will be a major hallmark of the ultimate success of the Islamic Republic. Likewise, a failure to provide the minorities with the basic amenities which are provided to others in Iran could enhance separatism among them. Iran's dealings with its minorities will also dictate the degree of the potential implications of the revolution for other countries in the Middle East who have large ethnic minorities, including Israel.

In late April 1979, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), representing the Kurds in Iran, announced that fierce fighting had resumed in Iran's northwestern provinces between Kurdish tribesmen and the Iranian Army, which was assisted by Azerbaijanis and Islamic revolutionaries.<sup>17</sup> It is quite likely that a united front by the Iranian Army, the Azerbaijanis and the Islamic revolutionaries will eventually contain the Kurds in Iran.<sup>18</sup>

The three million ethnic Arabs of Iran reside predominantly in the oil-rich southwestern province of Khuzistan. They have threatened to leave Iran, unless stability is restored to Khuzistan.<sup>19</sup> Some of the leaders of Iran's ethnic Arabs have openly demanded autonomy, a revival of Arab culture, and the right to educate their children in Arabic in Iran's public (government) schools. Furthermore, while allowing Tehran to maintain control over foreign and economic policies, some ethnic Arab leaders prefer to control regional planning in the province of Khuzistan.<sup>20</sup> The Baluchis in southeastern Iran and the Turkomans in northwestern Iran have also demanded various degrees of autonomy for themselves in their regions of Iran.

While the forces favoring the establishment of an Islamic republic have achieved victory in ousting the Shah and in establishing an Islamic republic in Iran, the struggle to unite the nation and to consolidate the revolution continues. In a nation divided by ethnic groups and ideologies, the attainment of unity must remain a long term objective rather than an immediate goal. The mere expression of slogans of *itihad*, *mobarezeh va piroozi* (unity, struggle and victory)—slogans which have been seen on a

daily basis in Iran's major urban centers—will not result in the consolidation of power in that country. These remain national aspirations. While the new regime aspires for unity, its actions in leading a diverse, heterogeneous people toward that objective also tend to indicate its ultimate success.

## POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Some of the potential, real, and perceived economic, political, and security implications of the Iranian revolution for the major countries bordering Iran in particular and the Middle East in general are, perhaps, just as important as what is really taking place. In general terms, the Iranian revolution should be carefully studied by students of political change and modernization, as a relevant model of revolution particularly for the Islamic nations of the Third World. The Iranian revolution may shatter the fundamental assumptions of the Western-oriented contemporary theories of comparative politics and modernization. It has already seriously threatened the validity and applicability of the secular model of development, particularly for the Moslem nations of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. For alarmists, awesome fears of instability, crisis, and upheaval are prevalent in the weak, vulnerable, and highly penetrable social and political systems of the conservative, traditional countries of the Islamic world. The potential midrange implications of such developments could be incalculable.

Serious questions arise regarding the prospects for US and Soviet influence in the Middle East. Iran, as one of the pillars of the US "twin-pillars" diplomacy in this area, will no longer act as an ally of the West, and the possible lack of attaining a comprehensive peace settlement in the Arab-Israeli zone of conflict will further reduce US influence in the region.

It is clear that in the period after the Iranian revolution any long-range US national security policy must be aimed toward maintaining a power equilibrium in the Middle East favorable to the West. The US ability to maintain a favorable equilibrium with the Soviet Union in the Middle East will, in turn, influence the changing balance of power between revolutionary versus conservative regimes in the area. Options for the United States in seeking a new pattern in the region could include: US assurances of

expanded supply of arms for US friends; more frequent appearances of US naval forces in the Indian Ocean; expansion of Diego Garcia; and, possible establishment of naval and air base(s) in the Middle East.<sup>21</sup>

In terms of Western dependence on Middle Eastern oil, in late December 1978, John Lichtblau, Executive Director of the Petroleum Research Foundation, stated that: "With the Iranian production, we had a very comfortable margin. If something were now to go wrong somewhere else, it could be disaster."<sup>22</sup> According to energy specialists, thereafter, the supply-demand equation for oil was "balanced on a knife edge, at the mercy of events and the large exporters."<sup>23</sup>

The December 1978 oil price increase of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was higher than expected. The higher increase has been attributed to the oil shortage created by the substantial decline in Iran's output. As a result, Americans faced a tougher year than expected, particularly in their attempts to control inflation, and reduce unemployment and a potential economic stagnation. The higher cost of oil will have a pervasive impact on transportation, housing and literally all sectors of the US economy. The 1979 federal budget deficit may rise beyond the \$30 billion ceiling pledged by the Carter administration. The 1978 federal budget deficit was close to \$40 billion.<sup>24</sup>

In early February 1979, Energy Secretary James R. Schlesinger stated that the Iranian revolution has resulted in an oil crisis "more serious" than the selective Arab oil embargo of 1973. Schlesinger accurately predicted mandatory closure of gas stations on Sundays by summer of 1979 as a necessity, if the Iranian oil shortfall continued. During the height of the Iranian upheavals, Saudi Arabia produced 10.5 million barrels per day (mbpd) in order to reduce the impact of the total cutbacks in Iran's oil exports; however, thereafter, Saudi Arabia placed a ceiling of 9.5 mbpd on its oil production, thus further increasing the already global shortage in the supply of oil.<sup>25</sup>

John F. O'Leary, US Deputy Energy Secretary, warned in early February 1979 that Iran's revolution will prompt some of the other major oil producers to restrict future production in the midrange period, and to adopt conservative production policies. Both O'Leary and Schlesinger stated that Iran's renewed oil production will probably not exceed four million barrels per day (mbpd) again. Prior to the revolution, Iran produced as much as 6.5 mbpd.

O'Leary viewed Iran's revolution as the forerunner of "the disappearance of the chronic surpluses that have dominated the oil market."<sup>26</sup>

Iran's revolution will probably have an impact on the Moslem Turkic and Asian minorities of the Soviet Union. The degree and extent of its impact, however, remains to be determined. These minorities have the highest birthrate in the Soviet Union. As such, the long-range implications of the resurgence of Islam will be noted and carefully observed by the Kremlin. The issue of Azerbaijani, Kurdish, and Turkoman separatism could also have a serious spillover impact on the USSR, because of the presence of these people in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the Soviet Union may have opportunities to exploit these minorities in Iran to the advantage of the Soviet Union.

*Afghanistan.* The uprising by the tribal elements and Islamic militants in Afghanistan will be influenced by the outcome of events in Iran. In early May 1979, reports indicated that over 3,000 Soviet advisers, technicians, and military personnel were helping Afghanistan to fight against the uprising.<sup>27</sup>

A prolonged tribal Islamic rebellion in Afghanistan will pose a serious threat to the legitimacy of the leftist regime in Afghanistan. It may lead to an even greater involvement of Soviet advisers, technicians and equipment in Afghanistan, testing the Soviet will to assist a friendly regime which has become increasingly unpopular in its own nation. Furthermore, the Pashtu people in northwestern Pakistan will probably continue to fight both the Pakistani as well as Afghan forces for an autonomous Pakhtunistan.

What would be the impact of the Iranian revolution and the Afghan rebellion on India and Pakistan? To what extent would the Islamic Republic align itself with the Moslem countries in the area? What would be the impact of a close alignment between Iran and other revolutionary regimes of the area on Saudi Arabia and the small vulnerable sheikhdoms of the Gulf area? How would such an alignment impact on US influence in this critical region of the world? The answer to these questions can only be given in time, as the Islamic Republic of Iran proceeds to solidify its ties abroad. However, it is clear that in the future Iran is bound to be more revolutionary and Islamic. As such Iran will inevitably draw itself closer to the Islamic nations in the area, particularly to those adjacent to Iran, such as Pakistan, and probably at the expense of Iran's ties with non-Moslem nations farther away such as India.

The Shah's unrealistic visions of an Indian Ocean littoral's common market, his grand plans for an ambitious role for the Iranian Navy in cooperation with India's Navy in the Indian Ocean, and the Shah's advocacy for Iran and India to jointly patrol the Indian Ocean are of course shattered.<sup>28</sup>

*Egypt.* As one of the leading nations in the Middle East and Africa, Egypt plays a key role in the Third World. The resurgence of Islam may have its greatest potential implication in Egypt, which is a leading nation in Sunni Islam, while the implications of the Iranian revolution on the Egyptian political system could be minimal. So far, President Anwar Sadat's quality of personal piety, leadership, humility, and his understanding of the centrality of Islam as a way of life for Egyptians has prevented the development of any serious politico-religious threat to the legitimacy of his rule. However, rising expectations, mounting economic pressures, under-employment, shortage of housing, and other socio-economic ills facing Egypt will seriously test the legitimacy of Sadat's government in Egypt.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia once regarded Iran as an anchor of stability and pro-Western influence in the entire Middle East. The Shah's collapse and drastic changes in Iran's foreign and defense policies are of prime concern to the Wahhabi dynasty, President Sadat, and other pro-Western regimes in the Middle East.

*Iraq and Turkey.* In mid-April 1979, Iraq and Turkey reached an agreement to act jointly on the Kurdish issue. Turkish Premier Bulent Ecevit stated that containing Kurdish separatism was one of his government's primary tasks. The agreement between Iraq and Turkey over the Kurds was probably a response to major concessions made by Iran's Islamic republic to the Kurds, in order to consolidate Iran's revolution and maintain national unity. As a result of the events in Iran, Kurdish nationalism and separatism were sparked in both Iraq and Turkey.

Approximately ten million Kurds now live in an area which covers parts of northwestern Iran, northeastern Iraq, and southeastern Turkey.<sup>29</sup> Iraq and Turkey have dealt with the Kurds differently. Iraq, for example, used 30 percent of its developmental funds in 1978 for the Kurdish areas. According to Baha Ahmad, a Kurd and the Governor of Arbil, Iraq, the Kurds "... have been raised up, like all the people of Iraq and even more."<sup>30</sup> The Iraqi regime of Ahmad Hassan Bakr poured economic relief and development funds into the Kurdish areas of northeastern Iraq,

allowed the Kurds to have a semblance of autonomy, and recruited Kurds into the Baath Party (the ruling party in Iraq) in order to reduce Kurdish separatist tendencies. The town of Arbil, located east of Mosul, is the nominal capital of the Iraqi Kurds. Mosul lies in the mountains of northeastern Iraq. Iraq has built villages such as Khobata, located between Arbil and Mosul, for the Kurds. Some Western observers suspect that these villages are like the reservation was for the American Indians.<sup>31</sup>

Is the Soviet Union fomenting Kurdish nationalism and separatism in order to establish a pro-Soviet Kurdish state in the region? Celal Talabani, one of the principal Kurdish rebel leaders in Sulaimaniyah, Iraq, is a self-proclaimed Marxist who commands a contingent of 1500 fighters, armed with Soviet-made automatic weapons and artillery. According to Talabani, "the downfall of the Shah has liberated [Kurdish] forces from one front."<sup>32</sup> So far, however, there is no evidence of Soviet direct activities in support of the Kurds in Iraq; however, assertions regarding covert Soviet activities in the Middle East are abundant. For example, Senator Kamran Inan of Turkey, who is a Kurd, maintains that the Soviet Union is definitely encouraging and assisting Kurdish separatists in this area.<sup>33</sup>

Aside from the Kurds, Iraq also has a considerable Shia population. According to one estimate, about 50 percent of Iraq's population are Shia Moslems. They are particularly strong in the Shia holy cities of Karbala and Najaf, which were sites of pro-Khomeini religious demonstrations in the spring of 1979. The top Iraqi leadership is largely Sunni from Takrit, a small town about 100 miles north of Baghdad.<sup>34</sup> A tightly-knit familial group of Takritis controls Iraq through the Baath Socialist Party. The impact of the Iranian revolution on the Shias of Iraq and on the legitimacy of Iraq's leadership could be significant in the mid-range period.

The Kurds and the Shias (Alawis) are viewed as the principal potential transmitters of the implications of the Iranian revolution in Turkey. An estimated five million Kurds reside in Turkey, and about 20 percent of Turkey's population are Shia Moslems.<sup>35</sup> Despite Ankara's promises of economic relief and assistance to the Kurds, it appears unlikely that meaningful assistance would be forthcoming because of Turkey's overall economic difficulties.

The Shias (Alawis) of Turkey reside principally in the eastern provinces of Turkey and in its major cities. The Shias of Turkey are

a liberal, progressive element of the society. They are reformists. The pervasive religious aspects of the Iranian revolution may have some impact on Turkey's Shia population, despite the fact that the Turkish political process has moved considerably away from religion, as exemplified by the reduced representation in the Parliament by the Turkish Unity Party which is a Shia party. Overall, the religious vote in Turkey is less than 10 percent. As such it is not a significant factor in Turkey's political process. Furthermore, both Turkey and Iraq lack national focus in a charismatic personality such as Ayatollah Khomeini to threaten the existing government and reawaken the masses. Finally, Turkey is a functioning democratic society capable of handling such threats in an institutionalized manner. Despite such an assurance, however, Turkey faces serious political problems arising from the growing polarization between the extreme ideological left and the religious right. In addition, expanded terrorism, unemployment, rampant inflation, shortage of housing, decline in public services, and an almost bankrupt national economy could seriously threaten Ecevit's government in the near future. For example, the rate of inflation in Turkey in 1978-79 exceeded 50 percent per annum, and the Turkish government lacks sufficient foreign exchange reserves to pay for its severely needed imports.<sup>36</sup>

In military-strategic terms, the Iranian revolution and the withdrawal of Iran and Pakistan from the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) have led to the withdrawal of Turkey from CENTO and its *de facto* dissolution.<sup>37</sup> The loss of US electronic surveillance sites in Iran has made US electronic listening posts in Turkey more significant, particularly for the purpose of assisting the United States in verifying a new strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT). In addition, it is highly likely that US-Turkish negotiations over the status of US installations and military presence in Turkey would be modified and supplemented, in order to emphasize a "full-fledged" partnership between the Turks and the West.<sup>38</sup> For Iraq, the spill-over potentials of the Iranian revolution into Iraq and its impact on Iraq's Shia Moslem fundamentalists and Kurdish separatists may require the use of Syria as a strategic depth. Both Iraq and Syria view each other as strategic depths for threats emanating from two potential zones of conflict, the Arab-Israeli zone to their west and the Iranian theater to their east. In the renouncement of Iran's commitment to play a

policeman role in the Persian Gulf area, Iraq may seek to fill some of the void created by the Islamic republic's plans to scale down Iran's military presence in the Gulf area. The impact of a potentially active and expanded Iraqi military presence in the Gulf area would depend upon Iraq's policy objectives, methods of implementing such plans, Iraq's relations with its neighbors, and the Peninsula Arabs' perception of Iraq's role. With a substantially reduced Iranian presence, the indigenous balance of power equilibrium in the Gulf area will undoubtedly change. If the Islamic republic of Iran aligns itself with Iraq and Syria, ideologically and militarily, that would drastically alter the pro-Western balance of power in the Middle East, and could have immediate consequences for fragile, pro-Western, conservative regimes of the area as well as for the Arab-Israeli zone of conflict. In this context, the implantation of the PLO mission in Ahwaz, Iran, close to the oilfields of Iran and the Arab world was a psychological boost for the radical Arabs, with an explicit impact in the minds of the Arabs regarding a potential major shift in favor of revolutionary forces in the Middle East.<sup>39</sup>

According to Henry Kissinger, the oil-rich states of the Persian Gulf area may doubt US resolve and support and seek reassurances in Moscow or Iraq, as a result of the Shah's departure.<sup>40</sup> If Iraq and Syria move closer to each other, the conservative governments of the Arabian Peninsula may feel the impact in their countries. Israel would also be influenced by such a strategic development in its Eastern front.

*Israel and the PLO.* The linkages between most of the nations of the Gulf area and the Arab nations opposing the bilateral peace treaty between Egypt and Israel will solidify and expand as long as a comprehensive peace settlement does not appear to be forthcoming. The Islamic republic of Iran has also interjected itself into the politics of the Arab-Israeli zone by breaking off its diplomatic relations with Egypt; renouncing Iran's ties with Israel; announcing its support for the PLO; and by halting the shipment of Iranian oil to Israel.

Iran's new relationship with Israel has shifted from a discreet entente to open animosity. Pars News Agency, the official press agency of Iran, on February 18, 1979, stated that termination of all relations with Israel and the full support of the PLO were cornerstones of Iran's foreign policy.<sup>41</sup>

Prior to the revolution, over 26 million barrels of Iranian oil per year were shipped to Israel. Since then Israel has purchased 10 percent of its oil needs from Mexico, and the rest from spot purchases at substantially higher than OPEC's posted prices, a situation which has left its impact on Israel's economy.

As a result of the severance of relations with Iran, Israel has lost the principal source for import of 60 percent of its oil needs and a lucrative contract market for services. Iran used to import over \$100 million of goods from Israel and EL AL had five scheduled weekly flights from Tel Aviv to Tehran. Iran and Turkey were the only countries in the Middle East which dealt with Israel. Israel, as a result of its bilateral peace treaty with Egypt, has probably written Egypt off its list of adversaries, but may have to add Iran to that list.

Yasir Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, was the first foreign leader to visit Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. During his February 1979 visit, Arafat stated that the Iranian Revolution has "turned upside down" the balance of power in the Middle East. He received a pledge from the Ayatollah that Iran would "turn to the issue of victory over Israel" after the Islamic Republic consolidated its power.<sup>42</sup>

*Saudi Arabia.* The geopolitical realities of Saudi Arabia's location place this kingdom in a precarious position. The kingdom is located between three zones of instability and change. First, the Iranian situation in the northern half of the Gulf, with its uncertain aftermath. Second, the continuing dispute in the southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula between North and South Yemen, and the potentials for another uprising in Oman against Sultan Qabus. Third, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and potentials for its extension into the Arabian Peninsula. Finally, crises which may develop as a result of inter-Arab or intra-Arab disputes between, e.g., Iraq and Kuwait. The Saud leadership is quite concerned about adventurism and instability in the periphery of the kingdom because of its potential spillover impacts into Saudi Arabia.

Internally, the Saud leadership has the wide support of its people. It is a respected, legitimate regime. The religious institutions in the kingdom are a part of the establishment. They even participate in deciding who the next king will be. As such, Saudi Arabia has a high likelihood of internal political stability during the midrange period. The only conceivable internal challenges to the Saud family may arise from within the royal

family or from the growing Saudi military. Some analysts contend that the growing number of foreign workers which include over one million Yemenis may also serve as a fifth column in the kingdom.

Palace politics in Saudi Arabia remain unknown to outsiders. American intelligence specialists have likened the discovery of what goes on in Riyadh to "the secrecy in Moscow and Peking."<sup>43</sup> Palace politics is discussed in great secrecy and confidentiality among the key personalities involved. In April 1979 Western reporters wrote of palace strife in the Saud royal family between Prince Abdullah and his brother Prince Fahd, who is second in power after King Khalid. Prince Abdullah vehemently denied the rumor, and American officials agreed with Prince Abdullah's views on this matter.<sup>44</sup>

The withdrawal of Iranian forces from Oman, as a result of the Iranian upheavals, could lead toward a reactivation of the revolt in Oman. The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), otherwise known as South Yemen, and Cubans with Soviet weapons, could expand their activities in support of radical groups in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. Such developments will be viewed as threatening Saudi Arabia, thus pressuring the Saudis to play the role of a policeman in the Gulf and the Peninsula, particularly in the absence of such a role played by Iran. That could trigger a multiple increase in the level of Saudi arms acquisitions from the United States.

In summary, the Iranian revolution of 1978-79, along with the bilateral peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, mark the dawn of a new era in the Middle East—an era in which legitimacy, public consensus, and popular support, rather than military might and external ties, will be the principal criteria for the capability of Middle Eastern leaders to remain in power.

## ENDNOTES

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2. *Ibid.*
3. Leonard Binder, "Revolution in Iran: Red, White, Blue or Black," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January 1979, pp. 52 and 54.
4. Hamid Algar, "The Oppositional Role of the Ulama in Twentieth-Century Iran," in *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East Since 1500*, ed. by Nikkie R. Keddie, pp. 231-232.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 231-255.
6. According to the Holy Koran (Verse 28:4) the return of Imam Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam, will result in the redemption and elevation of those who have been oppressed—an aspiration which reflects an inherent desire among Shia Moslems for social justice.
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12. *Ibid.*
13. Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Iranians Decide to Purge and Phase Out Vigilantes," *The New York Times*, April 26, 1979, p. 1.
14. William Branigan, "Draft Charter for Iran Would Bar Communists," *The Washington Post*, April 30, 1979, p. 22.
15. *Ibid.* See also Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Election in Iran: Khomeini's Victory May Prove Costly," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1979, p. 4.
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31. *Ibid.*
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33. *Ibid.*
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