

In what ways and with what consequences did westernization of Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) influence the Islamic Revolution (1979)?

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**Part A: Plan of Investigation**

This investigation evaluates the influence and the consequences of westernization of Iran during the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979), with regards to the Islamic Revolution in 1979. In order to assess the westernization of Iran, the Pahlavi Dynasty's various reform measures to modernize and westernize Iran, will be examined. This investigation will further evaluate the widespread social reprisals against the Dynasty's policies that promoted western culture and allowed for exploitation of Iran's Oil by western nations. In order to evaluate the consequence of westernization, this investigation will examine how the popular support for an Islamic theocracy against the West, changed the social and political conditions for Iranians in post-revolutionary Iran.

Two sources, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* by Nikki Keddie and *The Uprising of Khurdad 15, 1979* by Ayatollah Khomeini will be evaluated for their origins, purposes, limitations and values.

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## Part B: Summary of Evidence

### 1) Modernization under the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979)

- Like most elite intellectuals of Iran, Reza Shah was inspired by Aryanist and Pan-Persian ideologies<sup>1</sup> to turn Iran into a secular, modern nation.<sup>2</sup>
- The Shah banned veiling of women and traditional robes as well as head gear for men; ordering Iranians to wear Western Dress in 1936.<sup>3</sup>
- In 1936, Sharia legal system and religious courts were abolished.<sup>4</sup>
- The Shah completed the Trans-Iranian Railroad in 1938.<sup>5</sup>
- The Shah expanded both primary and secondary schools, and established a coeducational modern university that was accessible to women.<sup>6</sup>
- Mohammad Reza Shah's "White Revolution" in 1963 initiated various reform measures such as nationalization of forests, raise in pay for industrial workers,

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<sup>1</sup> Katuzian, Homa. *Iran*, (London: OneWorld Publications, 2013), 109. The term "Aryan" has its origins in the Vedic Sanskrit culture as well as the Indo-Europeans that founded the Persian language and culture. Iranian nationalism during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century by very small elite embraced the glory of Iran's pre-Islamic past of the Persian Empire, and blamed their downfall solely on Arabs and Islam. It further asserted racial commonality between Aryan Germans and Aryan Iranians.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 109. Reza Shah sought to model the Iran after a Western European model of a society; one that is characterized by industrialization, and secularism. Shah wanted to change Iran from a primarily religious, agrarian and illiterate society into a modern, educated and an industrial nation.

<sup>3</sup> Axworthy, Michael. *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 39.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel, Elton. *The History of Iran*, (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 135. Iranians had long hoped to build a national system of railroads, but had difficulties due to mountainous terrain. Reza Shah completed the construction of Trans-Iranian railroad in 1938 to improve communication and transportation.

<sup>6</sup> Katuzian, 116. Reza Shah wanted to improve Iran's 95% illiteracy rate.

increase of legal status of women<sup>7</sup>, construction of postal service, libraries, and dams to irrigate Iran's arid land.<sup>8</sup>

## 2) The Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941

- Iran's Oil was vital to the British fleet, particularly since the outbreak of World War II in 1939.<sup>9</sup>
- Great Britain and Soviet Union invaded Iran to secure Iran's Oil resources, and pressured Reza Shah into abdication in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah as the new ruler of Iran in 1941.<sup>10</sup>

## 3) Mohammad Mossadeq's Oil Nationalization

- Britain's Anglo Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) dominated Iran's Oil industry and shared less than 20% of the profits to Iran.<sup>11</sup>
- Popular support for Mohammad Mossadeq rose significantly because he sought to nationalize the Anglo Iranian Oil Company and end foreign exploitation of Iran's Oil.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel, 157. Mohammad Reza Shah granted women's suffrage, and increased the legal age of marriage to 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 157. Mohammad Reza Shah sought to appease Iranian citizens and gain political support by distributing land to peasants and increasing pay for industrial workers, and by starting major construction projects for the Iranian public.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>10</sup> Axworthy, 46.

<sup>11</sup> Kinzer, Stephen. *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (John Wiley and Sons: 2003), 48. Most historians agree that AIOC had never given a fair portion of the profits made from Iranian Oil to Iran.

<sup>12</sup> Katouzian, 132.

- Mossadeq was elected prime minister and the Shah signed the nationalization bill on May 1951.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4) The 1953 coup

- The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) overthrew Mossadeq in 1953 and denationalized Iranian Oil; giving full control of production and distribution of Iran's Oil to foreign companies such as the AIOC.<sup>14</sup>
- The CIA aided the Shah to create SAVAK, a secret police organization to control opposition to Shah's regime.<sup>15</sup>
- SAVAK crushed any political opposition to the Shah through arrest, torture and execution of political prisoners.<sup>16</sup>

#### 5) Islamic revolution and the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini (1979)

- Ayatollah Khomeini<sup>17</sup> opposed the Shah's attempts at westernizing Iran, and was detained and exiled to Iraq in October 1965.<sup>18</sup>
- Riots and demonstrations by Khomeini's followers lasted for three days, after Khomeini's arrest.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel, 152. The CIA used various tactics to over throw Mossadeq, such as spreading propaganda about Mossadeq to turn his supporters against him.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>16</sup> Axworthy, 58.

<sup>17</sup> Keddie, Nikki. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*, (New York: The Vail-Ballou Press, 1981), 251. Khomeini was a religious leader that opposed the Shah and westernization. By 1978, Khomeini had acquired mass followers consisting of religious supporters, and various other anti-Shah factions.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 133.

- In January 1978 an article written by high circles in the government, Khomeini was accused of being a British Spy and a probable homosexual.<sup>20</sup>
- The article initiated massive riots and demonstrations between 1978 and 1979, where Khomeini's followers and religious figures were joined by various anti-Shah protestors.<sup>21</sup>
- The Shah left Iran in 16 January 1979.<sup>22</sup>

#### 6) Post-Revolutionary Iran (1979-1989)

- Khomeini was declared the supreme religious and political leader of Iran in 1979.<sup>23</sup>
- The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran was adopted on October 24, 1979.<sup>24</sup>
- All women were now required to follow the Islamic Dress Code.<sup>25</sup>
- Khomeini placed restrictions on freedom of speech and press by punishing (includes imprisonment) writers and journalists oppose the Islamic republic.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel, 173.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>23</sup> Katouzian, 183.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 183. This constitution was greatly influenced by Islamic Shiite theology. Over 16 million people voted, and 99.5% approved the constitution.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 184. For instance, Khomeini issued a fatwa, where he issued a death sentence to Salman Rusdie for his book The Satanic Verses in 1989, which Khomeini perceived to be anti-Islam.

### Part C: Evaluation of Sources:

Keddie, Nikki. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*, (New York: The Vail-Ballou Press, 1981).

Nikki Keddie's *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* is a monograph on the Iranian Revolution that was published in 1981. The purpose of this source is to educate scholars about the impact of modernization on Iranian politics throughout 1925 to 1979. It provides a detailed account on how modernization led to increasing discontent of the Iranian people by taking economic, religious and cultural factors into account. This source is valuable to historians because it analyzes causes and effects of these factors leading to the Islamic Revolution. As a book written after the revolution, it has access to a wide range of sources and evidence that were exhaustively researched to build an interpretation of the Iranian Revolution. Keddie further mentions that many persons, both Iranian and Western have aided in her research,<sup>27</sup> which demonstrates effort at objectivity for her scholarly work. One limitation, however, is that this monograph may not have had access to the full range of sources and perspectives concerning the Islamic Revolution. The evidence presented may be selected to support Keddie's arguments, thus leaving out other evidences relevant to the revolution.

Khomeini, Ayatollah. *The Uprising of Khurdad 15, 1979*.

*The Uprising of Khurdad 15, 1979* is a speech given by Ayatollah Khomeini at the end of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. In this speech, Khomeini warns the Iranian citizens against Western culture and foreign "superpowers", which, according to him, undermine human rights and the Islamic Law. The purpose of this source is to gain further support for Khomeini's

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<sup>27</sup> Keddie, xi.

political agenda of overthrowing the Shah, removing western influence in Iran and establishing a new Islamic government. This source is valuable to historians because it provides insight into the mindset of religious factions that supported Khomeini in overthrowing the Shah. It most directly demonstrates Khomeini's thoughts and intentions of establishing Islamic laws in the post-revolutionary Iranian government. However, Khomeini's position as a religious leader and his political agenda to establish a theocracy makes his statements about the consequences of westernization, biased in perspective. Furthermore, facts may have been omitted or exaggerated to enhance his rhetoric for his audience of anti-Shah and anti-West protestors.

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#### **Part D: Analysis**

The drive to modernization of Iran during the Pahlavi Dynasty has its roots in Aryanist and pan-Persian ideologies.<sup>28</sup> Reza Shah, a dictator who founded the Pahlavi Dynasty in 1925, was inspired by these ideologies to turn Iran from a predominantly religious, illiterate, culturally and economically stagnant country into a modern, secular and an industrial nation.<sup>29</sup> He used his dictatorial powers to increase literacy, to separate religion from politics, to promote secularism and modern industry, to establish a unified army, all of which was aimed to turn Iran into a

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<sup>28</sup> Daniel, 134. At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the nationalist intellectual elites of Iran were heavily influenced by Aryanist and Pan-Persian ideologies. They viewed the Iranians as belonging to the Western European race, which had accomplished the great social and scientific civilization of contemporary Europe. A major frustration among these nationalist elites resulted from the stark contrast between Iran's relative social backwardness and Europe's modern achievements. They believed that this difference was due to the Semitic influences of Arabs and Islam, which had led to their downfall from the glory of their pre-Islamic past, namely their glory of the Persian Empire during 651-1501.

<sup>29</sup> Katouzian, 116.



Western European version of a society within a short span of time.<sup>30</sup> Between 1927 to 1941 Shah actively initiated the modernization of Iran through numerous measures such as the forced unveiling of women, the abolition of Sharia law and religious courts in favor of a more secular legal system in 1936, and the establishment of schools and universities to improve upon Iran's staggering 95% illiteracy rate. Keddi's research of multiple perspectives shows that the country was divided in the topic of modernity. While the majority supported Shah's reforms due to its positive effects on the economy, modernization received its most vocal opposition from the Shiite Clergy under the grounds that unveiling of women, women's suffrage, and secularization were against Islamic Law.<sup>31</sup> Despite their fervent opposition, religious leaders had little to no political power to challenge the Shah's dictatorial authority during his reign.<sup>32</sup>

Reza Shah's modernization of Iran came to a halt during the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941. Allied pressure forced Shah into abdication, and installed his son, Mohammad Reza Shah as the new king of Iran<sup>33</sup> in order to gain favorable economic concessions to exploit Iran's vast oil resources. This resulted in a deep state of turmoil in Iran's political atmosphere from 1941 to 1979. In the wake of increasing foreign interference and the exploitation of Iran's Oil particularly by Great Britain, popular political thought shifted towards independence from foreign control.<sup>34</sup> No longer constrained by the old Shah's dictatorial powers, Iran saw the emergence of various new political parties and factions, all of which sought to nationalize

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel, 134.

<sup>31</sup> Keddie, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel, 136.

<sup>33</sup> Kapuscinski, Ryszard. *Shah of the Shahs*. (Penguin Books: 2006) , 25. Statement made by Great Britain: "Would His Highness kindly abdicate in favour of his son, the heir to the throne? We have a high opinion of him and will ensure his position. But His Highness should not think there is any other solution."

<sup>34</sup> Kiddie, 101.

Iranian oil and end foreign dominance.<sup>35</sup> Most notably, Mohammad Mosaddeq rose in popularity because of his opposition to all foreign economic concession and his anti western credentials.<sup>36</sup> His ideas had almost universal appeal in Iran, which enabled Mosaddeq to use popular pressure in the streets with organized protests and demonstrations.<sup>37</sup> Yielding to popular demands, the Shah accepted Mosaddeq as the prime minister and signed the oil nationalization bill on May 1951.<sup>38</sup>

In 1953 the CIA and the Anglo-American operators organized a coup to overthrow Mossadeq and installed the Shah's autocracy, which allowed them to denationalize Iran's Oil industry and give foreign companies full control over production and distribution of oil.<sup>39</sup> The United States further helped the Shah create SAVAK, a secret police organization that crushed any political opposition against the Shah's regime.<sup>40</sup> As a result, the Shah was faced with an ever increasing political dissent against his rule. The Shah became widely recognized by the Iranian public as "the puppet of the west".<sup>41</sup> The coup of 1953 facilitated by the United States and the subsequent denationalization of Iranian Oil had already encouraged resentment and xenophobia as well as the feeling that the country was being operated for the benefit of western nations.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Katouzian, 123. Parties such as Mossadeq's National Front, the communist Tudeh and various religious parties emerged, all of which sought to end foreign domination of Iran's Oil and politics.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 125. Mossadeq was known for opposing the Shah's monarch and Shah's allowance of foreign exploitation of Iran's Oil.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel, 149.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>40</sup> Axworthy, 122.

<sup>41</sup> Percy, Norma, Dir. *Iran and the West: Imam Khomeini The man who changed the word*. (BBC: 2009), *Film*. Ayatollah Khomeini is responsible for popularizing the phrase "puppet of the west" to describe the Shah.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel, 165.

Anti-imperialist and anti-western sentiments were greatly exacerbated by SAVAK's torture and execution of thousands of political prisoners that criticized Shah's regime.

Opposition by the religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shiite Clergy particularly thrived in this new political atmosphere because Iranians increasingly turned to their traditional Islamic roots against the West.<sup>43</sup> In Khomeini's speech of 1979, Khomeini uses the growing anti-western and anti-imperial sentiments to fuel the revolution and the establishment of an Islamic government.<sup>44</sup> The spark of the revolution in January 1978 was ignited by an article written by high circles in the government. The article vilified Ayatollah Khomeini as everything from being a British spy to a probable homosexual. Outraged, various religious factions, Khomeini's supporters and anti-Shah protestors organized protests and demonstrations that cumulated into a violent revolution, ultimately forcing the Shah into abdication on 16 January, 1979.<sup>45</sup> The autocratic monarchy under the Shah was replaced by an Islamic Republic, where the Islamic clerics serve as head of state and played major role in government.<sup>46</sup> A major turn against the West, this theocratic state enforced veiling for women, opposed United States and rejected capitalist economy in favor of populist Islamic economic and cultural policies.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Axworthy, 136.

<sup>44</sup> Khomeini, Ayatollah. *The Uprising of Khurdad 15, 1979*. Khomeini says, "But as for those who want to divert our movement from its course, who have in mind treachery against Islam and the nation, who consider Islam incapable of running the affairs of our country despite its record of 1400 years---they have nothing at all to do with our people, and this must be made clear. How much you talk about the West, claiming that we must measure Islam in accordance with Western criteria! What an error! It was the mosques that created this Revolution, the mosques that brought this movement into being."

<sup>45</sup> Keddie, 151.

<sup>46</sup> Parsa, Misagh. *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, (London: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 242.

<sup>47</sup> Katouzian, 159. "Islamic economy" is not a clearly defined term. However, it incorporates elements of socialism to minimize social stratification, and it incorporates religious scripture to guide the processes of sharing profits, donating to needy, performing transactions, etc.

Iran went through some radical changes due to the revolution. The forced unveiling of women during Reza Shah's reign (1925-1941) was replaced with the forced veiling of women after the revolution (1979). SAVAK's brutal oppression of writers who criticized the Shah's reign was replaced with Khomeini's restrictions on the freedom of speech and press by imprisoning or issuing death sentences to writers and journalists who criticize Islam. Thus, Iran went through the shift between the two extremities; westernization under the Pahlavis and Islamization under Khomeini. Regardless of this monumental shift, neither the Pahlavi reign nor the Islamic Revolution provided Iran and her citizens with laws that completely granted essential human rights, particularly concerning freedom of speech and the right to dress as one desires.

*Word Count: 870*

## **Part E: Conclusion**

Reza Shah's thrust towards westernization and modernity starting with his reign in 1925 ultimately failed to establish Iran as a modern secular nation. Instead, it led the predominantly illiterate and religious majority to refuse the Shah's vision of Iran. The seeds of the revolution had already been sown with Reza Shah's forced unveiling of women, and his abolition of religious courts, which outraged the Shiite Clergy and religious figures. The opposition to westernization further developed amongst the wider public after the CIA's 1953 coup that installed Mohammad Reza Shah's autocracy, allowing Great Britain and the United States to exploit Iran's Oil. The growing opposition to the Shah and his western allies led Iranians to turn to Islamic fundamentalism through Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership, and managed to overthrow the Shah in favor of a theocratic state influenced by Shiite Islamic theology in 1979.

*Word Count: 140*

## **Part F: Bibliography**

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