

# THE IRANIAN MILITARY IN REVOLUTION AND WAR

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Sepehr Zabih

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**SEPEHR ZABIH**

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**THE IRANIAN**  
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**REVOLUTION**  
**AND WAR**

**SEPEHR ZABIH**



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*By the Same Author*

*Marxism and the working class*, by William Gallagher (translated into Farsi), 1949

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*The Mossadegh era: roots of Iranian revolution* (Lakeview Press, Chicago, 1982). Also available in Farsi, 1983

*Iran since the Revolution* (Croom Helm, London; Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1982)

*The left in contemporary Iran: ideology, organization and the Soviet connection* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1986)

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

APC	Armoured personnel-carrier
ARA	<i>Artesh Rahaibakhshe Iran</i>
AWOL	One who is absent without leave
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
H.I.	Hojatol-Islam
IIAF	Imperial Iranian Air Force
IIG	Imperial Iranian Gendamerie
IPD	Ideological–Political Directorate of the Armed Forces
IPSA	International Political Science Association
IRP	Islamic Republic Party
MAAG	Military Assistance and Advisory Group
NIOC	National Iranian Oil Company
NSC	National Security Council
POW	Prisoner of war
SAM	Surface to Air Missile
SCIRI	Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq
SDC	Supreme Defence Council
<i>Sepah</i>	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
TOW	Tube-launched Optically-tracked Wire-guided



## Cast of Principal Characters

**MOHAMMADREZA PAHLAVI:** The second monarch of Pahlavi dynasty who ruled from 1941 to 1979, and died in Cairo, July 1980.

**Dr MOHAMMAD MOSSADEGH:** Leader of National Front government, 1951–3; died in internal exile in 1966.

General **GEORGE BROWN:** Chairman of US Joint Chiefs in 1970s.

**RICHARD HELMS:** US Ambassador to Iran, 1972–7 and former CIA Director.

**General ABBAS QARABAQI:** the last Chief of Staff of the Iranian armed forces before the revolution.

**Dr SHAHPOUR BAKHTIYAR:** The last Prime Minister of the old regime.

**Admiral AHMAD MADANI:** First Defence Minister of the Provisional Government.

**MEHDI BAZARGAN:** Prime Minister of the Provisional Government, February–November 1979.

**IMAM KHOMEINI:** Official title of Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic.

**ABOLHASAN BANISADR:** First President of the Islamic Republic, January 1980 to June 1981.

**HOJATOL-ISLAM (H.-I.) ALI KHAMENEI:** Third President of the Islamic Republic since autumn 1981.

**BASEEJI:** Paramilitary volunteers controlled by the *Sepah*.

**Dr JAMSHID AMLIZEGAR:** Prime Minister from summer 1977 to summer 1978.

**JAAFAR SHARIF-EMAMI:** Prime Minister, August–November 1978.

**General NASSER MOGHADDAM:** Last Chief of SAVAK, executed in 1979.

**General GHOLAMHOSSEIN AZHARI:** Prime Minister of military cabinet November–December 1978.

**General GHOLAMALI OVEISSI:** Martial Law Governor, September–November 1978.

**Ambassador WILLIAM SULLIVAN:** Last US Ambassador to Iran, 1977–80.

**General AMIRHOSSEIN RABII:** Last Commander of the Imperial Air Force.

### *Cast of Principal Characters*

**Admiral KAMAL HABIBOLLAHI:** Last Commander of the Imperial Navy.

**Ayatollah KAZEM SHARIATMADARI:** One of the six grand ayatollahs representing Azarbayjan province.

**General ABDOLALI BADREI:** Last Commander of the Imperial ground forces.

**AMIRABBAS HOVEYDA:** Long time Prime Minister of the Shah, executed April 1979.

**Dr IBRAHIM YAZDI:** Foreign Minister and member of Revolution Council, February–November 1979.

**General JAAFAR SHAFEGGAT:** Defence Minister in the Bakhtiyar cabinet.

**General ROBERT E. HUYSER:** President Carter's special envoy to Iran, January–February 1979.

**General PHILLIP GAST:** Head of the US Military Advisory Mission to Iran, MAAG.

**General HASSAN TOUFANIAN:** Head of the Imperial Military Industries Organisation.

**Ayatollah MOHAMMAD BEHESHTI:** Chief Justice and head of the Islamic Republic Party, assassinated in June 1981.

**JALAL TEHRANI:** President of the Regency Council formed after the Shah's departure.

**General MEHDI RAHIMI:** Last Military Governor, executed in February 1979.

**Dr YADDOLLAH SAHABI:** Minister of State in Bazargan's Provisional Government.

**HOMAFAR:** Air force warrant officers who staged a mutiny in favour of Khomeini in February 1979.

**General AHMADALI MOHAGHEGHI:** Last Commander of the Imperial Gendarmerie.

**General MANLICHEHR KHOSRODAD:** Commander of Ground Forces' Aviation Corps, executed in February 1979.

**General HOSSEIN FARDUST:** Chief of the Imperial Special Bureau of Intelligence.

**General ABDOLALI NAJI:** Military Governor of Isfahan, executed in February 1979.

**Captain BAHRAM FAZELI:** 3rd Commander of the Islamic Republic Navy, executed in February 1984 as a member of the Communist *Tudeh* Party.

**General TAGHI RIYAH:** Dr Mossadegh's last Chief of Staff, who served as minister of defense in the Provisional Government from April to September 1979.

*Cast of Principal Characters*

**SADEGH GHOTBZADEH:** Head of State TV–Radio, Foreign Minister, executed in 1982 for plot against Khomeini.

**General GHASSEMALI ZAHIRNEJAD:** Khomeini's personal representative in the Supreme Defence Council (SDC).

**MOSTAFA CHAMRAN:** Defence Minister from September 1979 to Spring 1981, when he died at the Iran–Iraq War front.

**General NEMATOLLAH NASSIRI:** Long time Chief of SAVAK, executed in February 1979.

**Dr ABDOLRAHMAN GHASSEMLLI:** Head of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran in rebellion against Khomeini since June 1981.

**General ALI MOHAGHEGHI:** Air Force general who led attempted *Nowjeh* coup, executed in August 1980.

**MASSUD RAJAVI:** Head of People's Mojahedin, presently waging guerrilla war against Iran from Iraqi territory.

**General SAYYAD SHIRAZI:** *Imam's* representative in SDC, hero of the military operation against the Kurds in 1979–80.

**ALI SHAMKHANI:** Acting Commander of the *Sepah*.

**H.-I. MOHAMMADI REYSHAHRI:** Former Prosecutor of the Revolutionary Military Tribunal and present Minister of Security and Intelligence.

**JALALEDDIN FARSI:** Majlis deputy since 1980 and ideologue of the Islamic Republic Party before its abolition in 1977.

**MEHDI TAYYEB:** Chairman of Majlis Defence Committee.

**H.-I. GHOLAMREZA SAFAI:** Head of Ideological-Political Directorate (IPD).

**Ayatollah MAHDAVI KANI:** Head of the Society of Combatant Clergy.

**MOHSEN RAFIGHDUST:** Minister of *Sepah* since 1982.

**H.-I. ALIAKBAR HASHEMI RAFSANJANI:** Speaker of Islamic Majlis and the *Imam's* representative in SDC since 1980.

**MOHAMMADALI RAJAI:** First Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic and its second President, assassinated in August 1981.

**HAMZEH:** A title for *Imam* Ali given to the *Sepah's* field headquarters in the Western region.

**General ISMAIL SOHRABI:** Present Chief of Staff of Armed Forces.

**H.-I. RAHMANI:** Commander of Baseej combat forces.

**MOHSEN REZAI:** Commander-in-Chief of the *Sepah* since June 1980.

**MOHAMMAD QASSEMZADEH:** Commander of *Sepah's* naval units in the Karbela III offensive, October 1986.

*Cast of Principal Characters*

**Seyed MOHAMMAD BAKER-EL-HAKIM:** Iraqi head of Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).

**H.-I. JAVAD BAHONAR:** Second Prime Minister appointed by the Majlis in July and assassinated in August 1981.

**RAHIM SAFFARI:** The *Sepah's* operation chief since 1982.

**BEHBUD KARIMI:** Commander of the *Sepah's* Tehran units since 1982.

**H.-I. MOHAMMAD KARUBI:** Majlis Deputy-Speaker and the *Imam's* representative to pilgrims during bloody riots in Mecca, July 1987.

**ALIREZA AFSHAR:** Head of the *Sepah's* central headquarters and its official spokesman since 1983.

**HASSAN AKRAMI:** Minister of Education since 1985.

**Ayatollah MOHAMMAD GOLPAYGANI:** One of the present six grand ayatollahs, who has largely supported Khomeini.

**Ayatollah HASSAN QOMI:** A grand ayatollah who has opposed both the Shah and Khomeini and is now under house arrest in Mashad in north-eastern Iran.

**H.-I. MOHAMMAD KHOEYNIHA:** A radical cleric who acted as advisor to captors of US hostages in 1979–80 and has been Prosecutor-General since 1985.

**H.-I. SADEGH KHALKHALI:** Deputy of Qom in Majlis who acted as Islamic judge in the early years of the Islamic Republic, earning the title of the 'hanging judge'.

**General VALLIOLAH GHARANI:** First Chief of Staff of the Provisional Government in February 1979.

**General VALLIOLAH FALLAHI:** Chief of Staff for about a year until he died in an air crash in September 1981.

**Colonel MOHAMMAD SALIMI:** Defence Minister between 1981–5.

**General SAEED MEHDIYLIN:** Air Force Commander in 1986, executed in July of that year in connection with *Nowjeh* coup attempt.

**Colonel MANSUR SATTARI:** Air Force Commander since 1986.

**Captain MOHAMMADHOSSEIN MALEKZADEGAN:** Navy Commander since 1985.

**Colonel HOSSEIN HASSANI-SAAD:** Commander of 21st Infantry Division and military leader of FAO operation, 1986.

## Preface

This study is the fourth volume of the author's works on post-revolutionary Iran. It was conceived when research was conducted over the period 1983–4 on the third volume in this series entitled *The left in contemporary Iran*.

In the spring of 1983, Dr Shahgeldian of the Rand Corporation asked me to conduct a preliminary survey of Iranian officers in European exile for their project undertaken for the Defense Department (Air Force). While doing so I became convinced that the Iranian Army's behaviour in the revolution and the subsequent war against ethnic insurgencies and Iraq needed a thorough investigation. The Hoover Institution on Revolution, War and Peace granted me generous financial support to undertake precisely such a study.

In 1986, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University invited me to join the Center to complete my work. St Mary's College provided several academic leaves between 1984 and 1987 which enabled me to devote part or full time to research and writing. Thus, this study is the outcome of the financial and academic support of the above three institutions.

In the course of research and writing, several sections of this work have been presented to academic conferences. In 1985, the Military and Society study group sponsored a preliminary draft of 'The Iranian military in revolution and war', presented at the International Political Science Association (IPSA) meeting in Paris. In the academic year 1986–7, I was invited to address two forums at the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. In December 1986, my topic was the Islamisation of the armed forces. In March 1986 I spoke about the disintegration of the Imperial military in 1979. I learned much from discussions and suggestions following these presentations.

To Professors Nedav Safran and Laurie Mylroï, both of Harvard, must go especial thanks for their support and encouragement. Richard Starr, the Co-ordinator of the International Studies programme at Hoover, must also be mentioned for his persistent support in the initial two years of my work there. Professor Samuel Sarkisian, the director of the IPSA's research group on Military and Society, was encouraging about this study and very helpful in acquainting me with foreign



## *Preface*

scholars interested in the same topic.

In addition, with the disclosure of the US–Iranian initiative in the fall of 1986, I got the opportunity of learning from US Government sources about some critical aspects of the Iran–Iraq War and its impact on the Islamic armed forces. In January, the New York-based Council for Foreign Relations sponsored a lecture tour during which much was learned from several US and other military experts about the War. In March I addressed a similar conference at the Swedish Institution of International Affairs and subsequently interviewed several Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence officials with vast experience of and insight into the Iranian military institution and the Persian Gulf. I would like to express special thanks to Lennart Linner of the Ministry of Defence as well as Aaron Karp of the Stockholm International Peace Research for sharing valuable insights with me. US military experts on contemporary and/or pre-revolutionary Iran have also been extremely helpful. Although this project had no financial backing from any government agency, the co-operation of some former or active officials of these agencies was of immense value. For obvious reasons many should remain unnamed, but I can cite Henry Precht, a former military officer assigned to Iran and subsequently the head of the Iranian desk in the State Department. His knowledge of the military before the revolution and his involvement with the Iranian situation during and immediately after the revolution was quite worthy. I benefited from the factual knowledge of George Cave, who had served as a military official in the 1960s and as a non-military official up to 1978. Nizar Hamdoon, Iraq’s ambassador to the US, was also quite useful in helping me understand aspects of his government’s war policy towards Iran. None of the above mentioned individuals are in any way responsible for this work.

In drafting and ascertaining the reliability of maps and the battlefield situation, I owe much to the Institute of International Affairs, Stockholm, where I was given access to the up-to-date and detailed satellite secured battle site maps of *Karbela IV–X* offensives. The indexing was done by Leyla Zabih, an English Literature graduate, with care and devotion. Ramin Zabih, a PhD student in Computer Science and Mathematics at Stanford University, helped me with the tabulation of military and other data used in this work. Joan Zabih offered her usual unselfish support during various phases of research and writing for this volume. I owe them all fond and profound gratitude.

## *Preface*

A word of thanks is also due to Betty Oats of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and Laura Delaplain of Harvard, for typing several drafts of this manuscript.

Several observations are also in order concerning transliteration of Farsi words in this work. As usual I have observed a system of transliteration which would render the pronunciation of non-English terms as accurate as possible. However, if a particular source or individual interviewer has preferred a different form, I have followed their wishes — hence the apparent inconsistency on this matter. The second point concerns the use of Farsi names for various institutions or battle-plan code names. In the past *Artesh* (Army) was used to denote the entire three services of the Iranian armed forces. More recently under the Shah, *Niruhaye Mossallah Artesh Shahanshahi* [The armed forces of the Imperial Army] was used to connote the same thing. The Islamic Republic chose *Arteshe Jomhuriyeh Islami Iran* [The army of the Islamic Republic of Iran]. Each service was described in the same fashion, *Niruyeh Zaminiye Jomhuriyeh Islami Iran* [Ground forces of Islamic Republic of Iran] and so forth. Not all sources make a distinction between ‘army’ referring to the ground forces, and the army meaning the three-service military establishment. Thus, the two are used interchangeably. Mindful of this problem, I have chosen either the military or the armed forces to embrace all services whenever possible.

Similarly, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is often referred to as *Pasdaran* (Guards) or *Sepah* (The Corps). Again, except for direct quotations, I have used *Sepah* consistently for this important wing of the Islamic regime’s military establishment.

Cambridge, July 1987



# 1

## Background and Scope

In any study of the Iranian military in revolution and war, an examination of historical background is indispensable. The role of the first Pahlavi King, Reza Shah, in the formation of the Iranian Army, the gradual integration of different fighting forces into the national army, the conscription law that made it mandatory for young people to serve in the military, and the gradual modernisation of the military — all must be carefully examined.

Many scholars, in their initial attempt to analyse Iran, are impressed by its similarities with typical non-Western military dictatorships: the absence of dissident political groups, the existence of a secret police, and the concentration of such important power as that of the Commander-in-Chief in the institution of the monarchy. Other indications reinforcing that characterisation include the reality that the armed forces have sustained the regime against their internal enemies, and, as an institution, the armed forces had played a major role in the socio-economic life of the country. Finally, two military *coup d'états* (in 1921 and 1953) established and consolidated the Pahlavi dynasty.<sup>1</sup>

While cognisant of the above, significant differences between Iran and typical military regimes — similar to those of Syria, Iraq, or farther away in Sudan and many Latin American countries — must be acknowledged. Both Pahlavi Shahs were essentially able to dominate the military and a monarchical system of government quite distinct, in practice and in ideology, from those found in typical non-Western military dictatorships. Reza Khan, a colonel in the Czarist-supported Cossack Brigade, lost no time in creating a dynasty once he secured control of Iran. He sought to ensure that the military would not be politically involved, wanting the armed forces to act as an instrument of coercion and suppression

### *Background and Scope*

but never as a source of threat or interference in the political affairs of the country. Similarly, after the 1953 *coup d'état*, the military was not given a permanent role in the affairs of the government — far from it. As soon as the Shah consolidated his power, he appointed the coup leader Prime Minister, and after about 18 months, forced him out of office.

Why was the military so subservient to the Shah? A partial answer is that the military institution in Iran was extremely weak before the arrival of the first Pahlavi King and was in no position to demand a powerful role for itself under his rule. The military knew that its expansion, its budget, and its improvement had to be secured with the support of the monarch, who, by controlling the entire political system, could allocate a sufficient portion of the national budget to the military. Some historical data bear this out. In 1914, the central government controlled a disorganised force of about 5,000 men, nominally supplemented by a number of foreign-created forces. In 1879, Russian Cossack officers had set up a unit in northern Iran; in 1911, Swedish officers (at the request of the central government) established a Gendarmerie for controlling the rural areas; and in 1915, the British in southern Iran established what is known as the South Persian Rifles (commanded by Indian officers). Quite apart from the official forces, which had a mercenary quality without any firm loyalty to the central government, there were numerous regional tribal armed units curbing the central government's authority beyond urban areas.<sup>2</sup>

The 1917 Russian Revolution affected the situation to some extent. The British replaced the Russians as the backer of the Persian Cossack Brigade to ensure that the Bolshevik Revolution would not reach northern Persia. The British also wanted to support the opponents of the Bolshevik regime seeking to flee the advancing, newly created Red Army that was moving in the general direction of Iran and India. It is in this context that the British offered their support to one of the Cossack officers, Colonel Reza Khan, to march on Tehran and seize power in February 1921. Whether or not this act stemmed from patriotic sentiments, or, as some Iranian historians later argued, was due to Reza Khan's plan to crush the old monarchical institution and set up a pro-British government, is another matter.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that in the chaos between 1917 and 1925, when Reza Khan gradually founded the Pahlavi dynasty, many attempts were made to integrate the scattered units of the armed forces under the new Commander-in-Chief.

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Data about the share of the national budget allocated to the Iranian military prove this. In 1922, the military appropriation amounted to 40 per cent of the total budget; by 1925, a unified army of 40,000 had come into existence; in 1926, the first general conscription law was introduced; and by 1930, the armed forces stood at about 80,000 men. The total rose to 125,000 men in 1941 when the Soviets, in conjunction with the British, invaded Iran. The Iranian armed forces, after token resistance, disintegrated.<sup>4</sup>

Under the first Pahlavi a couple of military schools were established and some officers were sent to France, Germany, and even Russia for training. In 1924 a small air force was established, and in 1932 a small navy was organised. However, the major function of the armed forces during the reign of Reza Shah remained the suppression of all movements for autonomous regional or tribal control even in remote restricted sectors of the country. In successive tribal confrontations, the central government managed to put an end to armed resistance: many tribal chiefs were arrested, put to flight, or simply submitted to the authority of the central government by disbanding their armed units. They were forced to accept the laws of conscription and send their young members, just as other Iranians, to urban centres for required military training.

Perhaps another reason for the ease by which the monarchy had protected itself against the military establishment was the relative newness of the modern Iranian military. Unlike European countries, there never developed in Iran a hereditary officer corps that successively acquired a position of influence and that could be used in times of crisis to exercise a credible role in the political affairs of the country.

The dominance of the Shah and his special relationship with the military has been characteristic of the armed forces since 1953. The Constitution granted the Shah the position of Commander-in-Chief, and the right to approval of cabinet ministers. The position of Minister of Defence in charge of the armed forces bureaucracy traditionally went to a supporter of the Shah. This particular issue became a source of contention between Dr Mossadegh and the Shah in 1952 when, as leader of the Nationalist regime, Mossadegh wanted to have his own man in charge of the army's General Staff; also, he wanted to serve as his own defence minister. The Shah's refusal led to the premier's temporary resignation and a major uprising which reinstated him to power in July 1952. Dr Mossadegh's return to power enabled

### *Background and Scope*

him to begin purging the armed forces with the intention of diverting that pillar of support from the monarch to the central government.<sup>5</sup> This was not an easy task, however, because the armed forces were subjected to intensive indoctrination based on assuring their loyalty to God, King, and country, in that order. They were constantly reminded that their loyalty to the King was the bond that tied the armed citizens of the state to the state itself. They were also reminded of the role that powerful armies of ancient Iran had played. The mythology of historical continuity of Iranian kingship was perpetuated by reference to the conquest of India by another Shah in 1858, or the pre-Islamic domination of the vast Persian Empire.

While the Shah relied on the military that reliance was not reciprocal. Rather, his reliance was rooted in his control of the armed forces. During the slow decline of the monarchy, such as after the occupation of Iran in 1941 and in the tumultuous Nationalist era from 1951 to 1953, the armed forces became somewhat politicised. As soon as the monarch was able to redress the constitutional balance of power between the civilian government and the institution of the monarchy in his own favour, he resumed a systematic effort to keep the military out of politics. However, this does not mean that the military never tried to influence such political matters as the conduct of general elections, anti-subversion policies, and the allocation of the military budget by the central government. The monarch attempted to maintain a wall of separation between the individual commanders of the armed forces and the civilian population so that the latter would not have an opportunity to cultivate the allegiance of the military. Conversely, the military could not attract the support of influential members of the Parliament or the community at large to defy the Shah's authority. Thus, there were no successful military coups during the reign of the two Pahlavi Shahs. The role of the armed forces as a pillar of the regime of the second Pahlavi Shah began in 1953 and continued for another quarter of a century. During those 25 years, two important changes were made: firstly, the gradual Americanisation of the armed forces with both technological and social implications, and secondly, the emergence of the Iranian armed forces as an instrument of Westernisation and social modernisation under the control of the central government. Between 1970 and 1978, the Iranian armed forces increasingly became more of a factor in the Shah's foreign policy. He made several attempts to secure a collective defence

### *Background and Scope*

treaty with the United States, and failing that, he tried to create the Central Treaty Organisation with informal military ties with the US. This move was designed to put the Iranian armed forces at the disposal of weaker regional countries threatened by the radicalism both of the Left and of Arab nationalism.

Whether or not this shift away from protecting internal security to promoting the foreign policy designs of the Shah contributed to the gradual disintegration of the armed forces toward the end of the upheaval in 1979 is conjectural. What is known is that the armed forces were not trained in such practices as crowd and riot control, and were thus ill-prepared to cope with an intensively mobilised population for six or seven months in 1978. Nevertheless, the fact that Shah had a firm grip on the armed forces for nearly 25 years cannot be obscured.

The methods by which the second Pahlavi Shah was able to control the Army were diverse, and they were applied persuasively and pragmatically. Thus, for example, no general outside the capital city could visit Tehran without permission from the Shah. The Shah himself reportedly checked all promotion above the rank of major, and ensured that those who attended training school — especially in the Air Force (the most favoured service) — possessed creditable backgrounds or had proven loyalty. The Shah also accorded a privileged position to the officer corps. He never let them forget their dependence on him personally or on the institution of the monarchy. He frequently reshuffled the top commanders to ensure they could not form power bases or enduring alliances. He used personal secret police (the Imperial Organisation) as well as conventional military channels to make sure that no officers, especially those commanding crack divisions such as the mechanised 7th Brigade in the religious city of Mashhad, could make alliances with leaders of the clergy or threaten his position.

The Shah also used public scolding of high-ranking officers, both to ensure that no one, not even the highest ranking officers, was immune from a system of reward and punishment carefully devised by him, and to impress the citizens of Iran that charges of corruption, when proven, would be used to penalise high-ranking army officers. On several occasions, the Shah, under the guise of waging an anti-corruption campaign, penalised officers suspected of personal disloyalty. This method of punishment demonstrated the Shah's capacity to strike down any officer at will.



### *Background and Scope*

A recent commentator on the Iranian military and its relationship with the monarchy wrote that 'frequently when members of the league were charged with corruption, removed from office, exiled, or imprisoned, their offence was in fact entirely political'.<sup>6</sup> Such accusations were made in order to mask the existence of political turmoil that endured beneath the placid facade of Iranian unity and stability. In 1974, three generals and two colonels from the ground forces and transportation corps were tried for corruption. In February 1976 the former head of the Navy and his deputy were sentenced to five years imprisonment for bribery in a trial in which 14 people in addition to the naval officers were sentenced. In the early 1960s the Shah had sacked several hundred officers, including five generals, for corruption; and in 1963 about 300 colonels were dismissed. There can be no doubt that the Shah's personal control of the officer corps grew stronger after 1963.

The Shah's power over the armed forces was exercised through weapons procurement, which correlated with the aims of his foreign policy and his relations with the United States. In the last decade of the Shah's rule, it was perhaps his most powerful leverage over the armed forces. The purchase of sophisticated weapons required training of officers, and their selection and promotion were based not only on competence but on a high degree of loyalty to the monarchy. It is possible to argue that the Shah acquired multi-dimensional power because the Westernisation of the Iranian military required control of the armed forces. This becomes clear when the role of the military in the social development of the country is analysed.

One recent study of the social role of the Iranian military identifies several areas quite succinctly. According to Fred Halliday, who wrote a credible account of Iran's monarchical dictatorship and development, the military's role was played in the following areas:<sup>7</sup> firstly, as a means of social mobility during the conscription period and through offering military education on a state scholarship, it was able to recruit from all components of society. Lower civil servants, farmers, and ethnic tribal people whose demand for autonomy had been crushed in the previous decade of the Shah's rule comprised the draft's pool. In addition, the better-educated middle class was often attracted to serve in the armed forces, especially at the graduate level when opportunity to receive state-sponsored education in some of the best schools abroad, notably the United States, Great Britain, France and Italy became available.

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A second function of the Iranian military has been its contribution to national integration. This became obvious in the 1920s before the first Pahlavi Shah enthroned himself as the founder of the dynasty, even though tribal revolts did not end with the abdication of that Shah in 1941. In the period of the World War II occupation, the Iranian armed forces were frequently confined to the task of protecting internal security so that the occupation forces could perform the function of assembling supplies from the Western countries for shipment to the Soviet Union. In this period the military was almost constantly engaged in quelling rebellions by ethnic groups, whether in Kurdestan, in the Caspian forests, or in the Lorestan provinces. There is every reason to believe that the occupying powers not only encouraged this, but always regarded the involvement of the Iranian military in that endeavour as contributing to the war effort.<sup>8</sup>

A third social role of the military was the dissemination of the regime's ideology, namely that of the monarchy, at different levels. Training in the military schools always included a heavy dose of Imperial history with chauvinistic songs, and monarchistic values and preferences. A significant by-product of this was an attempt to 'purify the Persian language of alien cultures', which means essentially Arabic and Turkish, though this effort had to be balanced by the recognition that Iran itself was a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic society. In particular, the Azarbanyjanis were sensitive to a formal policy of contempt for their native language, which is a dialect of Turkish spoken in Turkey proper. By and the large the armed forces were successful in trying to maintain linguistic diversity without permitting language to become a permanent source of dissension or to acquire any political characteristics.

A fourth dimension of the social function of the armed forces was that of providing the government with at least a semi-qualified personnel to manage the bureaucracy and control other programmes that the government had sponsored, especially in the areas of modernisation and industrialisation. Additionally, the military was in charge of civilian police, the security organisation (SAVAK), the Gendarmerie, and in times of crisis they were entrusted with such reformist policies as the implementation of land reform, the introduction of literacy, and the health corps.

The period during which the military functioned primarily as an instrument of maintaining internal order began in 1945 and terminated in 1963. The armed forces were at least marginally

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involved in the diplomatic solution of the Azarbayjan-Kurdestan crisis in 1945–6, and again in 1953 when they participated in a *coup d'état* to overthrow the Nationalist regime of Dr Mossadegh. The military's most important test occurred during the religious uprising of 1963. Unlike the last phase of the revolutionary upheaval in 1978–9, the armed forces had joined the police and the SAVAK to quell that religious uprising in a decisive and systematic manner. Their performance in quelling the 1963 religious uprising made several important impressions on the Shah. Reliance on the military demonstrated that in this relationship of dependence and control, the equation did not always favour the monarchy: that is, the armed forces prevented the collapse of the regime by putting down the bloody religious riots and could justifiably claim that it ought to be rewarded in a way that could erode the authority of the monarch.

The enhancement of the military's external defence capability also became a matter of concern. To continue to justify the allocation of a large portion of oil revenues to the enhancement of the fighting capability of the armed forces required a new logic. Because its performance in 1963 showed that it possessed sufficient weapons and enough manpower to deal decisively with an internal crisis, continued requests for financial support designed to equip the armed forces for purposes other than the maintenance of internal order became suspect. Thus, for example, servicemen rarely received training in crowd control, in dealing with internal guerrilla warfare, or controlling mass rallies, general strikes, and different types of civil disobedience. The new justification was that the continued build-up of the Iranian military, at least in the decade of the mid-1960s to the 1970s, was needed for external defence, especially for the protection of the Persian Gulf in view of the rising significance of oil exports from both Iranian and non-Iranian littoral states.

The dual characteristic of dependence and control by the Shah required very close surveillance of the armed forces. In the early 1960s some analysts of the Iranian military identified a number of organisations, each entrusted with surveillance of their particular area as well as with counter-intelligence and surveillance of other units within this large security apparatus. One author has mentioned at least eight of these organisations.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Americanisation of Iran's military**

During the reign of the second Pahlavi Shah, the United States gradually emerged as the main source of supply and training for the Iranian armed forces. The US sent nearly 30,000 troops to Iran at the time of the Anglo-Soviet occupation for the purpose of assuring the speedy transport of military hardware to the Soviet Union from the Persian Gulf to Iran's Caspian seaports. Since about 1941, the US has had a role in enhancing the capability of the armed forces, and has also been the source of military supplies to many other countries; but the background of the military relationship between the US and the armed forces of Iran, the huge amount of this aid, the rapid progression of military training, and the presence of thousands of American military advisers in the country made Iran an exception. All this played a critical role towards the end of the Pahlavi reign because the internal opposition could identify the US as the chief prop of the regime. Not only the opposition, but some of the supporters of the regime often questioned the purpose of the build-up of Iranian military. There were those who had difficulty accepting that the Soviet Union could in any way be concerned about the Iranian armed forces. Other Iranians believed that the military build-up and the American connection in such an enterprise was really designed to extend the control of the regime to the countryside.

Yet by the early 1960s, US criticism of the Iranian Government had increased and Washington was hinting that the Pahlavi regime was not likely to be the guarantor of Iranian stability unless significant reforms were undertaken. It is indisputable that during the Kennedy Administration, considerable pressure was put on the Shah to launch a series of reforms, especially agrarian ones. These reforms were later lumped together as the white revolution of the people and the Shah. Fred Halliday quotes from a Kennedy adviser in this period concerning the relationship between Iran and the United States:<sup>10</sup>

In Iran the Shah insisted on supporting an expensive military, too large for border incidents and internal security, and of no use in all-out war. His military resembled the proverbial man who was too heavy to do any light work and too light to do any heavy work.

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It should be noted that apart from internal political ramifications, the US–Iranian military ties were plagued by other problems. The 1972 agreement between the Shah and President Nixon which opened the gates for a massive inflow of arms from the US to Iran quickly made significant problems obvious — the need for assimilation, training, logistics, and central control which accompanied the purchase of weapons in such vast quantities from the United States and other Western powers such as Great Britain, France, and so on. There was no central control for arms procurement: no US agency was overseeing what Iran was ordering, nor was any Iranian Government agency overseeing the Shah. He possessed sole responsibility for major arms purchases, and he did not bother to investigate the details of his acquisitions.

In 1976, relations between the US and Iranian officials involved in the purchases showed signs of tension. The Shah accused some of his US friends of dumping useless equipment on Iran and unjustifiably hiking prices while at the same time US congressional investigations were questioning Iran's capacity to assimilate the weapons it was securing from the US. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General George Brown, remarked that the military programme the Shah was pursuing made one wonder whether he had a vision of a revived Persian Empire. In a similar vein, US Ambassador Richard Helms declared that he had washed his hands of parts of the US military sales programmes.<sup>11</sup>

There were practical military matters that had to be considered, but the political implications of a close alliance between the United States and Iran and the commitment of the major portion of oil revenues to this ambitious arms build-up played critical roles in the turmoil of 1978. The anti-Americanism of the revolutionary Islamic regime might in large part be attributed to the 1972–8 developments.

A second serious problem resulting from the massive transfer of weapons was related to the shortage of Iranians with the skills to maintain and use the new equipment. According to the *Congressional Report*, technical manpower requirements in the Iranian Air Force were likely to rise from 27,000 in 1976 to 40,000 in 1980. The 1976 shortfall was 7,000, with an anticipated rise to 10,000 in 1981. The Iranian Navy also experienced difficulty getting trainees for its marine crews because of the demand for instructional personnel for the school's programme. The same report indicated that most training and equipment programmes were running considerably behind schedule. The great shortage of

skilled personnel in the Iranian economy as a whole — estimated at 700,000 between 1970–8, or the equivalent of the Five-Year Programme — was a conservative estimate, and placed considerable pressure on the military. While the military sector found citizens from the private sector who could be employed for sensitive military training programmes, Iran had to depend upon itself rather than on guest workers from neighbouring countries.

The degree of efficiency of the Iranian military machine presented a third problem.<sup>12</sup> Unlike a number of Arab countries, or India, Pakistan and Israel, the Iranian forces did not have combat experience.

The operation in the Dhofar province in Oman was of limited duration and thus had an insignificant military dimension and limited Iranian participation. In that campaign, lasting from 1973 to 1976, no more than 3,000 Iranian troops served in the expeditionary force. In order that maximum experience would be afforded to the Iranian combat units, there was a deliberate policy to rotate these forces every four months. Though no reliable reports on the level of performance of the Iranian expeditionary force are available, one of the most frequent comments by observers (including British officers in charge of the Omani's army) indicates that the Iranians were not fighting to the extent required, and that they were relying heavily on the massive equipment, fire power, and air power at their disposal. Their involvement in that operation could not be judged an experience that would prove the battle-readiness of Iranian forces.

A fourth problem, predicted by the American advisory mission, was that the inflow of US arms would require the employment of many more US military advisers and trainers. In 1976 they numbered about 3,000: according to a Senate investigation in 1980, it was reckoned that there would be between 50,000 and 60,000 personnel and their families involved in defence-related contracts with Iran. In 1978–9, at the time of the Iranian Revolution, the figure quoted most frequently was 50,000 Americans, the majority of whom departed the country by the time the revolutionary turmoil reached its zenith in December 1978.

Equally significant was the recognition that Iran's education institutions were not able to train sufficiently large numbers of Iranians to serve in the military, it therefore being necessary to send a large number of students abroad, notably to the United States. The opportunity for these students to become exposed to