

Shahs possessed the imagination or drive of a Peter the Great. Besides, the Qajars suffered from Anglo-Russian rivalry which tended to stifle any ideas which Iranian visionaries or European entrepreneurs might have for the economic development of Iran. There would have been railways in Iran long before 1927 but for this rivalry.

When Riza Khan seized power in 1921 he was determined to free his country from foreign tutelage. He also aimed to establish a strong central government backed by a national army and launch Iran on an industrial path. By the time of his abdication and exile at the end of 1941 he had largely succeeded in achieving his first two objectives but had only taken a few halting steps on the road towards industrialization. The Anglo-Russian occupation of Iran during the Second World War, subsequent Russian intrigues in Azarbaijan and Kordestan, and the chaotic aftermath of the war caused the most serious difficulties for the immature Iranian economy and confronted a young and inexperienced new Shah with daunting problems. For some years the country seemed Printed and bound in Great Britain by to lose direction. Additionally the oil crisis, precipitated by Dr Musaddiq's Morrison & Gibb Ltd, London and Edinburgh nationalization of the oil industry, deprived Iran of much-needed oil

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TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRAN

1900-1921: THE LAST YEARS OF THE QAJAR DYNASTY

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Iran was no more one society than it was one economy; like many other ment. First, modern governments appropriate as national revenue between traditional societies it was a mosaic of social units. The village, the tribe twenty-five and fifty per cent of national income; in 1900 the Iranian and the urban quarter or guild provided species of economic association government took only two per cent. Second, the ultimate guarantee of for their members but these groupings were endorsed or intersected by state authority is its army; the Iranian army was almost a music-hall joke other allegiances. Iran was a country of many languages: Persian (Farsi) and the only effective force at the disposal of government in 1900 was the was spoken by less than half the population; fifteen per cent spoke Persian Persian Cossack Brigade, a force of 1 500 men which had been founded in dialects so distinct as to be unintelligible to the main group; twenty-five 1879 and which employed Russian officers and NCOs. In such a situation per cent spoke Turkish languages; and the remainder spoke a variety of the Iranian government could not coerce but was obliged to bargain with languages including Kurdish, Arabic and Baluchi. Nor, despite a common its subjects and its own local governors. The Iranian political system was misapprehension, was Iran religiously united. It is true that the great no more than a giant bazaar. But by 1900 the bargaining system was majority of Iranians belonged to the so-called Twelver Shiite branch of beginning to break down.

Islam, although there were substantial numbers of Sunnis as well as some

In 1900 Iran was ruled by the Qajar dynasty which had seized power at

non-Muslims (Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and Babis). But Twelver Shiism is of its nature peculiarly prone to factionalism for the ultimate source of authority, the Imam, is held to be in seclusion-the Hidden Imam-and there is no agreement on who should supply his place. In the present pleasures of this world and in the contemplation of the prospective pleasures of the next. This view is unjust. It is true that the Qajars course of the eighteenth century most Twelver Shiites came to accept the adhered to the ancient but currently unfashionable view that kings should guidance offered by the consensus of opinion among the mujtahids, the enjoy kingship but they did possess other merits in the eyes of their most eminent Shiite theologians of Iraq and Iran. Nevertheless there was subjects: they were pious; they strove to preserve some sort of order in still ample room for argument about which opinions should be given most Iran; and they resisted pressure from Russia and Britain. They also made weight in establishing the consensus and many hostile factions were intermittent efforts at reform-to strengthen their army and administraformed such as the Usulis, the Akhbaris, the Shaykhis and the Muta- tion, to collect more taxes and to stimulate economic developmentssharis. 2 In addition the various Sufi orders, notably the Nimatullahi order, although with no great conviction; and these would-be reforms were provided important foci of loyalties. 3 Thus economic, linguistic, religious greeted without enthusiasm by other groups within the Iranian political and other associations (such as the numerous, popular wrestling clubs, establishment to whom they appeared as curtailments of their own zurkhanehs) formed the bases of the social life of Iranians and it was privileges.

through such associations (and above all through his own family) that

The Iranian political establishment included three groups. First were the Iranian sought both entertainment and all those services which are those whose influence derived from their position in the governmental now provided by the state: education, law and security against the system: the Qajars, their numerous progeny and the bureaucrats reared in consequences of sickness and old age. In the nature of things such that long tradition of Persian administration and embodying more than associations could not bear extensive burdens; insecurity was endemic any other group something which was peculiarly Persian. Second were and less than one in twenty Iranians could read or write.

those who commanded a religious following: the ulema. Third were

The Iranian political system was characterized by that dominant trait of those whose power derived from their local influence as great landlords or traditional societies--rminimal government. Iranian governments were tribal chiefs. The categories overlapped: ulema and local notables sought not expected to do more than to provide the conditions in which Muslims government jobs; Qajars and bureaucrats sought local influence; and all could live as good Muslims. All those economic and social functions which

coveted landed wealth. But all these men possessed wealth, patronage or are discharged by modern governments were left to non-governmental position which could command followers and thereby influence the political agencies; only in the nineteenth century were such basic functions as system. The successful working of that system depended on some defence and the conduct of foreign affairs assumed by the central government - collaboration between them and it was the increasing want of such collaboration and then only imperfectly; in earlier periods they were confused - tion which imperilled the system at the end of the nineteenth century.'

with border problems and left to the appropriate provincial governors.

Two factors menaced the ancient political consensus. The first was the Two simple tests may serve to illustrate the weakness of Iranian government - influence of the West. This influence manifested itself directly through the TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRAN 1900-1921:
THE LAST YEARS OF THE QAJAR DYNASTY 5

political and economic pressures applied differently by Britain and oblige him. 6 'The real friend', commented the British Prime Minister Russia and indirectly through the striking example of the success of Lord Salisbury, sadly, 'is the friend from whom one can borrow.'⁷ I~ European economic, social and political ideas and techniques. Iranians January 1900 Iran borrowed £2.4 million at five per cent, although diswere led to try to exploit the new economic opportunities and to agitate counts reduced the sum to c.£2 million and increased the true interest rate for changes in Iranian institutions in order to bring them closer to those to nearly six per cent. Three-quarters of the loan went to pay off old of the successful world of Europe. The second factor was the effort of the debts and the remainder was spent on pensions for Qajar supporters and Qajar state to tilt the traditional balance of political influence in the favour on an expensive European tour by the Shah. 8 In April 1902 Iran came of the state itself. Even at the beginning of the nineteenth century it back for another £1 million loan from Russia although skilful Iranian seemed apparent to many Iranians that the traditional institutions would diplomacy frustrated Russia's attempt to attach a condition that would not protect Iran against the pressure of Europe, particularly the advance have given Russia the right to construct a pipe line to bring Baku oil to the of Russia from the north. Iran required a new, European-style, disciplined Persian Gulf. Nevertheless Iran did concede to Russia a veto on railway army both to unite Iran and to preserve it from attacks from outside. Such construction in Iran as a condition of the loans. Before the end of 1902 the armies cost money however and Qajar resources were pitifully small: new loan was exhausted, helped by another visit by the Shah to Europe, virtually all the land tax that was not misappropriated was spent in the and in April 1903 it was Britain's turn to aid the Iranian government provinces and the central government was obliged to rely upon customs

to the tune of £200,000, guaranteed, like the Russian loans, on certain duties, the sale of concessions and whatever it could extract from its own revenues.

officers as the price of their appointment to or continuance in office. The

The money raised by foreign loans had been frittered away. Admittedly state needed to obtain more wealth either by appropriating a greater share it was not much. By comparison with that of Egypt and the Ottoman

Empire, or judged in relation to the wealth of Iran, the Iranian debt was activity and hoping that its own revenue would rise in proportion, or by trifling; it was significant only in relation to the government's minuscule borrowing. In practice the Qajars had little success with any of these.

revenues. But what had been borrowed had been wasted. The only Partly this lack of success was due to foreign pressure: Russia opposed department of government which had been reformed was the customs concessions which would benefit Britons and Britain opposed concessions administration which, as the only major source of central government which would benefit Russians. Partly it was due to the inadequacies of the revenue, was of particular importance to the state, the more so as future Qajars themselves and their willingness to throw over reforming ministers receipts were mortgaged to pay for the loans. The customs had been put and their policies when the going became rough. Partly it was due to

in the care of Belgian experts, led by Joseph Naus, who sought to make internal opposition to change, especially on the part of the ulema who the collections more efficient and to increase their yield by raising duties regarded innovations as un-Islamic as well as being a threat to their own

from the standard five per cent to which Iran had been held by treaty interests and who commonly secured the support of court factions. Fierce since 1828. In 1903 new customs agreements permitted an increase in clashes took place within the Iranian political elite such as those which tariffs although British Indian merchants complained that imports from occurred over the mighty economic concession given to Baron Julius

India were unfairly penalized and joined their criticisms to the vociferous Reuter in 1872 and over the monopoly on tobacco given to a British complaints of Iranian merchants. But the unpopular Belgians persisted in company in 1890. In both cases the Qajar ruler, Nasir al-Din Shah their efforts to improve revenue yields and extended their reform pro-

(1848-<)6) was forced to give way. 5 proposals to the general finances of the Iranian government, thereby menacing Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896 by a follower of the Persian ing the interests of all those groups, notably the ulema, who evaded Pan-Islamic propagandist, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and was succeeded by payment of revenue due on their lands.

his son Muzaffar al-Din Shah (1896--1907) in whose reign the conflict

Hostility to the foreign loans, to the concessions, to the customs within the Iranian political system came to a head. Muzaffar, a weak, reforms, to the extravagances of the court and to such un-Islamic

gentle man, who was known in Paris as 'mauvaise affaire de Din', was practices as wine drinking manifested itself ever more strongly in Iran and devoted to religion and cats but ignorant of government and diplomacy.

frequently vented itself in attacks on non-Muslim minorities, especially He sought a foreign loan and after long negotiations with Britain had the Babis, who could not claim foreign protection. Popular manifestations failed to produce a satisfactory result, found Russia more willing to

also took the form of bread riots, not infrequently caused by speculators
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an agreement was reached with the Iranian government, ratified in October 1954, on the then generally established 50 :50 profit sharing basis. Iranian oil again took its place in world markets.

Domestically, two immediate measures seemed to point to a serious interest in economic and social reform. First, the Seven Year plan was revived and Abdul Hasan Ebtehaj appointed as director. 46 If the principles of the plan could be put into action it meant that some Iranians believed, as expressed by E. A. Bayne in a university lecture, that man can change his environment. Second, the Shah resumed the sale to the peasants of lands inherited from his father which he had begun in 1951 but which had been suspended by Musaddiq.

On another level, too, a new era began. The Shah determined to rule as well as reign with a thoroughly restructured national army as his base. In the course of rooting out pockets of opposition to the regime, the scale of Tudeh infiltration was discovered. Over 500 members had penetrated the army officer corps. It was alleged that this network had planned a coup by which Musaddiq would have been succeeded by Riza Radmanesh, a long time promoter of the revolutionary cause in Iran. Riza Shah had imprisoned him for communism in 1938.

These revelations and the continued uncertain political atmosphere made any predictions about Iran's future hazardous. In 1955 a member of the Fidayan-i Islam shot at Prime Minister Ala. 47 His assailant and other Tehran, c. 1895. (By courtesy of BP Archives)

members of the Fidayan-i Islam were executed in January, 1956 along with Razmara's assassin. Throughout 1955 and 1956 sentences of death or imprisonment were passed on numerous army officers and others with Khorramshar (formerly Muhammarah) in the early 1920s. (By courtesy of BP Archives)

opposition views-Tudeh or religious. The anti-Bahai riots in May, 1955 gave a good indication of the power still exerted by the mullas. In spite of all this, there were many signs which pointed, certainly from 1956, to the Shah's taking a firmer grip on the conduct of affairs, foreign and domestic. In foreign policy Iran seemed unreservedly pro-Western. But in the 1950s some evidence suggests vacillation on the part of the Shah. It would take nearly ten years to transform him into the more confident ruler he became. In 1955 the Baghdad Pact (CENTO after 1959) offered the security of formal association with the West. Despite strong Turkish

pressure, the Shah hesitated, not because of lack of attraction on his part to the Pact but because of high level ministerial opposition, the lack of popular support in Iran, and the refusal of the British and American governments to give the guarantees he sought. Still, in February, 1959, Iran joined.

The terrible lessons of the Iraqi revolution of 1958 profoundly affected Iran. The fear of increased and hostile Egyptian influence there and the continued Russian propaganda~ combined with other factors~ caused the

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heavily as in Mehriz and Shahrabak (near Yazd) where the farmer Safavi made that form of Islam the state religion as a tool of national integration and anti-Ottoman mobilization. Previously the four Sunni schools, half to two-thirds of the harvest, and in the Bafq area only a third. 67 With the several Shiite sects and the various popular Sufi movements competed and reform, the boneh system fell apart: it required the abyar-kadkhoda-for followers and achieved dominance in localized areas rather than arbab (work team leader, village headman, landowner) authority structure. nationally. n Claiming religious as well as political leadership, the Safavids

In the Veramin villages attempts to reconstitute it on a voluntary basis endowed shrines and madressehs and used ulema in official positions to have failed. In the villages of Yazd, however, which have long been owned promote a standardized state religion. 72 There were, however, many ulema by small holders, shares in a common irrigation system together with who were not integrated into the state, Iran remaining in this and other endogamous marriage patterns and late division of inheritance allowed a respects less centralized than its Ottoman rival; and a strong tradition was relatively harmonious quasi-joint land-holding system to emerge. This is maintained by the ulema of independence and claim to moral supremacy clearest among Zoroastrian villages where much land was made vaqj (a over worldly politicians and the ulema in the latter's pay. After the religious endowment) and supported periodic communal feasts intended Safavids, Nadir Shah (1736-47) attempted to play down Shiism,73 but it to ensure that even the poorest members of the village survived. Similar had become too well established, and the Qajars (1785-1906), as outlined communal feasts accompanied Muslim village preachments (rauzeh). 68 by Hamid Algar, were forced to appeal to Shiism and the ulema in their Whatever has been lost, whatever temporary problems of new experi-attempts to rebuild the state. In the nineteenth century the ulema became spokesmen against the concessions being given the Russians and English. many areas and particularly the \$1,400 billion food import bill last year, 69 The fact that the latter preferred to work through their coreligionists or and the related inability of the rural population to provide a sufficiently

nationals made charges of colonialism in terms of attacks on Islam credible, increasing demand for domestic industrial production. 70 (See Chapter 6.)

and worked to set off a number of riots against these minorities. 74 The most traumatic of the 'attacks on Islam' was the rapid growth of the Babi-later Bahai-movement, which tried to combine modernization with

4. Islam, Religion and Civil Society

fundamentalist assumptions about prophecy, divine guidance and redemption; charged with heresy, apostasy (a capital crime), and treason

After the now fading tribal-urban dualism, and the central economic (colonialist agents), blood flowed as late as 1956, and still today even reorganization, perhaps the third issue in Iran's modern nation-building relatively well-educated middle class Muslims will launch into a string of effort is religion. Modernists do themselves a disservice when they make a obscenities and curses against Bahais at the slightest excuse.

simple identification of religion with outmoded tradition: the different

The position of the ulema as defenders of the Persian Islamic identity styles of religious behaviour provide an extremely useful guide to cleavages was solidified by the various battles of the nineteenth century, their parin the social structure. Not only has Islam become a major idiom of proticipation in the Constitutional Movement to remove a monarchy which

test against the stresses and disruptions that modernization involves, but had bonded Iran financially to foreigners, and their continued fight

religion plays at least four other socially important roles: it is a means of afterwards against imperialism and the introduction of a secular society.

organizing local communities (villages and urban neighbourhoods); it has

Part of the legacy of their success remains in the provisions of the Iranian served in the past as the cultural environment of the intelligentsia and still

Constitution that five mujtaheds may veto legislation conflicting with the provides symbols of self-identity as well as symbols for metaphysical

consharia; that freedom of the press and education be limited where it

contemplation; it has been used by the state to bolster claims to legitimacy.

flicts with Shiism; that King, judges and cabinet ministers be restricted to

The role of minority religions, of which Iran has a sparkling varietythose of

the Jafari Shiite faith; and that only four religions be granted legal

Armenians, Assyrians, Bahais, Ismailis, Jews, Sunni Muslims, Zoroastrianism

(Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism; but not the

astrians, and Sufi groups-must be viewed within the context of these four largest minority: Bahatism).

dynamic roles played by the majority Jafari Shiite Islam.

De facto freedom of religion is guaranteed today by strict enforcement

of the civil order by the police and gendarmerie. The Shah and the

a. Religion and the Legitimacy of the State

bureaucracy are committed to a separation of religion from politics and

Most Iranians are Jafari or Twelver Shiites because in 1501 Shah Is

relegation of the former to the private sphere. Riza Shah not only system-