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# **Khomeini's Incorporation of the Iranian Military**

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### 1. HISTORY

In her book, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (1979), revolutionary authority and sociologist Theda Skocpol states:

The repressive state organizations of the prerevolutionary regime have to be weakened before mass revolutionary action can succeed, or even emerge. Indeed, historically, mass rebellious action has not been able, in itself, to overcome state repression. Instead, military pressures from abroad . . . have been necessary to undermine repression.[\(Note 1\)](#)

In a later article, she further clarifies this by stating that the "centralized, semibureaucratic administrative and military organizations of the old regimes disintegrated due to combinations of international pressures and disputes between the monarchs and landed commercial upper classes."[\(Note 2\)](#)

In other words, according to Skocpol, for a revolution to occur (and subsequently succeed), the armed forces would have to be emasculated and therefore rendered ineffective (due to internal and/or external influences). But in the context of the Iranian Revolution, Skocpol's theory did not apply. Thus the following question arises: Given that the Pahlavi regime had the most powerful, well-equipped, and well-trained

military machine in the Persian Gulf,[\(Note 3\)](#) how then did Khomeini and his followers neutralize (politically, socially, and militarily) the armed forces of the Pahlavi Regime?

Placed within the context of Skocpol's theory, the revolution should not have even occurred, much less succeeded. The armed forces were at the pinnacle of their might and by all accounts were capable of removing any threat to the Shah, should he direct them to do so. Indeed, "the least likely of all scenarios generally was thought to be one in which the trained and elaborately equipped military forces of the Shah would fail at the eleventh hour to save the monarchy or at least to be in the vanguard of its replacement."[\(Note 4\)](#)

But the Iranian revolution succeeded not only in spite of the armed forces, but because of them. More specifically, the Khomeini regime successfully engineered the Iranian Revolution in spite of the military and then incorporated the military into itself. Once it had done so, it used the military as its coercive arm to consolidate its power by removing all potential competition (ethnic minorities, political opposition groups, and religious minorities) and establishing itself as the supreme power within Iran.

To analyze this process it is necessary to examine the inherent structural defects of the Shah's military hierarchy that led to the political emasculation of the armed forces. One defect was the

Shah's personal control of and involvement in the command and control structure. Additionally, the Shah insisted that the heads of the armed forces deal with him directly on all matters and prohibited direct contact among service chiefs, which prevented effective coordination to counter the revolution, even during a time of military rule. It could be argued that a well-coordinated military response was not necessary to quell the unarmed, civilian population because a section of any one of the armed services could have done so. While this is true, the explanation lies in the lack of decisive leadership on the one hand and psychological dependence upon the Shah on the other hand. Both these factors combined to make the armed forces incapable of independently responding to the uprisings.

Further, it can be shown that the Khomeini regime, having identified the incorporation of the armed forces into its power structure as the key to successful power consolidation, took active measures before and during the Revolution to do so. During the course of the revolution, Khomeini repeatedly appealed to the armed forces, the Shah's backbone,([Note 5](#)) to desert the monarch during the last days of the Pahlavi regime and join with the imam's forces. Due to the Shah's compartmentalization of the armed forces and his repressive policies toward Iranian citizens, these broadcasts found a receptive audience among the younger, less traditional members of the military, those not among the established hierarchy of the upper levels of the Pahlavi regime.

Once in power, the Khomeini administration incorporated the armed forces into itself, which ensured that it had the means to first exercise and then consolidate power. Throughout the process, the Khomeini government left the basic infrastructure of the armed forces intact while purging the monarchists from the upper ranks. Replacing the monarchists with "ideologically pure" officers, it then used the armed forces as its primary tool to consolidate its power over other elements of society. It was during this phase that the Pasdaran, or Revolutionary Guards, were introduced as an arm of the Islamic Republic. A later "ideological purge" further ensured military loyalty to the new government. In this manner, the Iranian revolution succeeded not only in spite of the armed forces, but because of them.

In the wake of the purges, the Khomeini regime and the armed forces were drawn even closer together through the Iran-Iraq War. The fledgling Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) found itself relying on the military expertise of the former government to defend the country in a fight for national survival. This wartime experience resulted in the armed forces further solidifying as an arm of the nascent Islamic Republic.

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2. Skocpol, "Social Revolutions and Mass Military Mobilizations," *World Politics* XL, no. 2 (January 1988), 151.
3. Joseph A.Kechichian and Houman Sadri, "National Security," from Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Iran: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1989), 237, and Robin Wright, *In the Name of God: The Khomeini Decade* (New York: Touchstone, 1989), 84.
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## Institute for National Strategic Studies

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## 2. PRE-REVOLUTIONARY IRAN

Both the Shah and his father came to power by way of military coups, thus the Shah's main pillar of support was the armed forces,[\(Note 1\)](#) which he directly supervised.[\(Note 2\)](#) The Shah's hold on the armed forces was based in his intense personal supervision of military affairs to the extent that he "insisted that the commanders of the army, navy, and air force report to him separately rather than act jointly."[\(Note 3\)](#) His compartmentation of the military was based, ironically, on fears of a military coup and led him to distrust his own hand-picked generals[\(Note 4\)](#) to the extent that "the shah trusted almost no one and assumed disloyalty even among his closest officers."[\(Note 5\)](#) Despite the Shah's paranoia, the military assumed even more importance with the passage of time and became his most important pillar, upon which his "survival critically depended."[\(Note 6\)](#)

During the Second World War, Muhammad Reza Shah replaced his father, Reza Shah, who abdicated and left Iran on a British ship.[\(Note 7\)](#) Following the end of the war, Muhammad Reza Shah was powerless to expel Soviet troops in the Kurdish and Azeri regions of Iran and had to rely on an ultimatum by President Truman to accomplish this task. When the popularly elected Muhammad Mossadegh was deposed by the United States and Britain in the early 1950s, Reza Shah again came to power. Because he came to power through force, he understood that he needed force to maintain his position.

However, because he had twice attained his position with tacit U.S. and British approval, he had the reputation of being an American lackey incapable of acting without the approval of his American sponsors. Over the decades, the Shah's economic and social policies eventually led to development on

the one hand and unrest on the other. In the early 1960s, he introduced a "White Revolution" to redistribute the land, nationalize the forests, sell government industries, form a literacy corps and enact new electoral laws.[\(Note 8\)](#) Protests against these reforms were suppressed with military force. Among the protestors was a cleric, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was imprisoned and later exiled. Ironically, by according Ayatollah Khomeini this notoriety, the Shah elevated the cleric to a status beyond that which he would have normally enjoyed and that would later contribute to the downfall of the monarchy.

Another reform undertaken by the Shah was the establishment of a single political party, the Resurgence Party (although he nominally allowed two parties and later one party, his goal was the same). By means of the Resurgence Party, the Shah hoped to exercise a degree of control over the bazaaris (merchants) and the ulama (religious scholars), over whom he had little influence. Instead of drawing them to him, it in fact had the opposite effect, alienating them further from the monarchy. During the Shah's last days, this alliance of bazaaris and ulama would prove to be an effective infrastructure for disseminating anti-imperial information and instructions.

In the long run, the Shah's economic policies had an uneven effect on the country. In spite of healthy oil revenues, the Shah became widely unpopular because of corruption, inflation, profligate spending (especially on advanced military hardware), and blatantly uneven distribution of the wealth. He further alienated himself from the populace by his reliance on foreign technicians and military advisors to supervise the training of his military and the upgrading and implementation of his modern weapons systems. Throughout this time, his power was based upon the allegiance of his armed forces.

The Shah ensured loyalty to himself by applying the divide-and-rule principle among his generals, accomplished by exacerbating intense personal rivalries among his generals and placing "personal enemies alternately in the chain of command" to preclude the possibility of a coup.[\(Note 9\)](#) Although he was never ousted by a military coup, his preventive measures precluded effective communications within the branches of the armed forces, leading to their utter psychological dependence upon him for any type of decision. This was evident not only in the military but also in the rest of society as well, especially in the social and political arenas. The Shah had so centered Iranian society upon himself that, without him, there was no functioning military, political, or governing system to run the country. The upper echelon of the officer corps was loyal to the monarch, who personally approved the promotion of all officers above the rank of major,[\(Note 10\)](#) any transfers above the rank of second lieutenant from one branch of the armed services to another, and the take-off or landing of any military plane.[\(Note 11\)](#)

Toward the latter part of the 1970s, many junior officers who had not been in the military system long enough to undergo the same level of scrutiny as their superiors, were judged to be less politically reliable because of their university backgrounds. At the universities, these junior officers had been exposed to the various anti-Shah factions (leftist and Islamic) that were prevalent in the late 1970s.[\(Note 12\)](#)

In terms of military capability, the Iranian armed forces had been seasoned with recent combat experience in Oman, where over 35,000 troops had assisted in the suppression of a Communist-supported rebellion in the southern region of Dhofar.[\(Note 13\)](#) During his reign, the Shah increased defense expenditures, expanding the number of personnel in uniform as he purchased advanced weaponry, primarily from the United States and Britain. The total number of personnel in uniform was 413,000 in 1978 (up from 181,000 in 1971). The armed forces included 285,000 in the army, comprising three armored divisions, three infantry divisions and four independent brigades (up from 150,000 in 1971 with the same structure). According to *New York Times* correspondent Drew Middleton, the Iranian Army had "the most advanced arms of any Asian country east of Israel," with 1,870 tanks (up from 960 tanks in 1971 and compared to 2,500 NATO tanks in Central Europe). The army was assessed to be "the most powerful for its size in Asia," according to Middleton's citation of American and British advisors. There were 28,000 in the navy, which had three destroyers and three frigates (up from 9,000 with one destroyer and one frigate in 1971). There were 100,000 in the air force with 459 combat aircraft (Israel had only 84 more) in 23 fighter squadrons (up from 22,000 with 140 combat aircraft in seven fighter squadrons).

The advanced level of military technology was especially evident in the Iranian Air Force, the Shah's favorite service and therefore the recipient of a formidable arsenal of state-of-the-art weaponry, which included over 200 F-4's and approximately 60 F-14's, with at least 20 more F-14's and 160 new F-16's to be delivered. At that time, these airframes were among the most advanced (and therefore coveted) in the non-Soviet world's air forces. The Iranian military was on the whole the

largest in the region (only Egypt had a larger standing army and only Israel had more combat aircraft)([Note 14](#)) and was geared toward defense from external attack. Because of longstanding concerns about Soviet and Iraqi intentions toward Iran, the Shah desired to ensure that Iran had the necessary means to deter any outside power with designs upon Iran. In addition, this advanced weaponry was a result of many years of expenditures that consumed a great part of Iran's national income to fuel the Shah's regional ambitions.([Note 15](#))

The Shah, like those who were to come after him, believed that Iran, by virtue of its size, its population, its resources, its military, and its armaments, should occupy the foremost position of power in the Persian Gulf. Through his efforts, the Shah "sought to make the Iranian military the dominant force in the Gulf and . . . the purchase of arms and military technology ran at more than \$4 billion per annum."([Note 16](#)) In spite of its advanced state of readiness in terms of weapons, size, and training, the military had no well-developed sense of institutional identity because of the Shah's idiosyncratic compartmentalization of the armed forces and his divide-and-rule policies.([Note 17](#)) For this reason, the armed forces, although militarily proficient, were lacking any independent decisionmaking capability, sense of identity, or ability to coordinate among themselves. These factors would weigh heavily against them during the fall of the monarchy.

The Shah's government provoked a furor when it published an article through the government-controlled press on January 7, 1978, that ridiculed Ayatollah Khomeini. Two days later, a religious demonstration and march took place in Qum. The armed response left a number of demonstrators dead, giving the revolution impetus to begin in earnest.([Note 18](#))

From that point on, a series of demonstrations took place at 40-day intervals until the Shah's departure (in Shi'a Islam, a religious ceremony takes place for 40 days after a death). In the Iranian case, confrontations between demonstrators and security forces led to deaths, which were then commemorated on the 40th day. This in turn led to another demonstration, which resulted in casualties and started the process over again.([Note 19](#))

The 40th day after the Qum incident was February 18. Although religious leaders had called for peaceful strikes and worship, demonstrators in Tabriz took over the city for about 36 hours, attacking banks, liquor stores, and any other establishment that did not observe the strike. The Shah responded with military force, which led to a number of deaths, injuries, and arrests. This incident was the largest public protest in Iran since 1963 and placed Iran irrevocably on the road to revolution.([Note 20](#))

Although the commemorations for the dead that took place every 40 days led to more deaths and therefore more commemorations, there were protests and demonstrations in between the 40-day periods as well. During 1978, throughout Iran, demonstrations took place in over 55 cities, leading to governmental use of force to quell the uprisings, which in turn led to more unrest.([Note 21](#))

Cracks in the seemingly unassailable structure appeared in May of 1978, when two former Iranian Army officers, Lieutenant Mehrdad Pakzad and Captain Hamzeh Farahati, disclosed at a press conference in London that many in the military did "not believe in the regime at all,"([Note 22](#)) and that the Iranian armed forces were rife with widespread discontent. They also alleged that they had not been allowed to resign their commissions and had eventually been imprisoned and tortured for "reading Marxist books,"([Note 23](#)) a charge they denied.

On August 19, over 400 people were burned to death in the Rex Movie Theater in Abadan. Although



security forces later arrested 10 people and extracted confessions from five of them, the government was blamed for the slow fire department response and the malfunctioning of its equipment. It did not help that the police had prevented rescue attempts. The 10,000 people who attended the funeral forced security and municipal officials to leave.

The most brutal repression of demonstrators occurred on September 8, which became known as "Black Friday." Although martial law was declared the day before, the government did not publicize the announcement. On the morning of September 8, thousands gathered in Tehran's Jaleh Square for a religious demonstration. The soldiers opened fire upon the crowd when it refused to obey the order to disperse. Tehran was in a state of chaos for the rest of the day. Although conflicting accounts exist regarding the number of casualties, several hundred persons were killed and many more were wounded during the government's raw use of military force to quell civil unrest. At that moment, the revolution took a more violent path from which it would not return.[\(Note 24\)](#)

In September 1978, Ayatollah Khomeini gave a speech coinciding with the end of Ramadan in which he proactively exhorted the Iranian armed forces to throw off the Shah's "yoke of slavery and humiliation" to join with their brothers.[\(Note 25\)](#) During October, Ayatollah Khomeini denounced elements of the Iranian Army, stating that they were

in reality under American command--it is even led at the upper echelons by American advisers and technicians. . . . But there have already been, among officers and soldiers, evident signs of trouble as the popular revolt mounts.[\(Note 26\)](#)

While this was true, these advisors and technicians neither led it nor were in any situation to exercise command over it. Although the statement was false, Khomeini played upon current sentiment to alienate the members of the armed forces from each other (within) and from society as a whole (without). By doing so, he hoped to paint them as an entity whose interests were inimical to the best interests of Iranian society. As he drove a wedge between the populace and the already unpopular military, he also raised doubts in younger members of the military who were not part of the established power structure or senior leadership, doubts as to who they were or why they were serving in such an institution. Having cast these seeds of self-doubt into the fertile ground of an entity so lacking in a sense of self-identity, he would later be able to give them a sense of belonging by welcoming them back into the fold as members of the new order.

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### 3. THE SHAH'S DEPARTURE

On November 6, 1978, the Shah placed Iran under military rule because of the growing discontent and violent nature of the leftist and Islamic opposition's antigovernment activities. Upon the declaration of military rule, opposition leaders urged their followers to avoid confrontations with troops.[\(Note 1\)](#) At that time, the Shah's hold on power was primarily attributed to the allegiance of the military and opposition fears of how he might use it.[\(Note 2\)](#)

During the preceding years, the Shah had alienated many Iranians through his unpopular social and economic reforms. These reforms had effectively created a gulf between the monarchy and the populace, which enabled a great number of disparate elements to unite under the rubric of antimonarchical sentiment.

During the rash of anti-Pahlavi demonstrations that occurred throughout fall 1978, the Shah demonstrated his indecisiveness as he used the military inconsistently against his own people, giving the United States intelligence community false signals regarding the threat to the monarchy

Circularity was the most common feature of the analysis; it started with the fact that the Shah had the security and military forces and went on to assume that he would use them as necessary. Because the Shah was not using force, the analysis continued, the opposition then was obviously no threat. This was a circle that could not be broken. The Shah's failure to act was taken as proof that the situation was normal. The unasked question was, what inhibitions on the Shah kept him from using force to stay in power?[\(Note 3\)](#)

This refusal to use the military to suppress the opposition was later assessed to be one of the Shah's critical mistakes, in

light of the fact that the military remained loyal to him until he departed. His reticence to use the military also enraged his hardline generals, who favored harsh measures to retain the monarch's power. It is quite possible that the Shah simply lacked the nerve to employ his military against the populace. [\(Note 4\)](#)

As tensions mounted in Iran between the Shah and the factions within society who opposed him, Khomeini (from Paris) called on the Shah's soldiers to desert their barracks, to stop helping the "traitor shah," and to "unite with the people" in order to undermine the monarch's power.[\(Note 5\)](#) In doing so, Khomeini correctly identified the army as the "key to the success of the revolution"[\(Note 6\)](#) and the element that would ensure the consolidation of power. Knowing that an all-out confrontation with the military would have been disastrous, he chose to utilize varying means (both "hard" and "soft") to bring the military into his camp with minimal bloodshed. He then "acted swiftly to neutralize the military"[\(Note 7\)](#) in order to incorporate it into the new power structure. Khomeini used this strategy because he was cognizant that, without the armed forces' assistance, the leftists and

autonomy-seeking ethnic minorities could undermine the Islamic Revolution. Thus, he pursued a policy "to maintain the institutional integrity of the armed forces while purging them of monarchists. . . . Despite the purges, the structural cohesion of the armed forces remained intact." [\(Note 8\)](#) Khomeini needed an intact military that could be persuaded to follow him in order to hold the country together.

Because of constant appeals from anti-Shah factions to the armed forces to desert, the Information Ministry issued a series of desperate communiques in mid-December denying reports that the Iranian Army was on the verge of mutiny. These communiques refuted antigovernment claims concerning armed forces desertion. A typical one addressed at length the loyal and noble character of the Iranian soldier, calling him a "high-flying phoenix across whose path no desperate cunning and treachery by the servants of the foreigner could ever set a snare." [\(Note 9\)](#)

Responding in kind, the antigovernment forces waged their own propaganda campaign to foment dissent within the ranks of the Iranian Army. The opposition accused the Pahlavi regime of pitting the army against the people in order to bring about a schism to separate the junior members of the armed forces from their own families. The opposition appealed to the "patriotic soldiers and noncommissioned officers of our homeland" to leave the forces of "a despotic, bloodthirsty regime" and join them to place themselves "on the side of the nation." [\(Note 10\)](#) By doing so, the opposition hoped to create a split in the military between the senior officers who owed their positions to the Shah, and the junior officers and enlisted personnel who had not been able to enjoy the finer aspects of military life. Such a split would facilitate a purge of the monarchists and throw military organization and discipline into a state of disarray, further weakening the military.

In the face of continuing unrest, elements of the armed forces (mostly enlisted and junior officers), continued to rebel, in many cases refusing to fire on antigovernment demonstrators and also deserting. In some instances, the government kept the soldiers in their barracks rather than send them into the streets to combat the demonstrators. [\(Note 11\)](#) The fear that the soldiers would heed the calls of the demonstrators to hold their fire and desert was stronger than the need to quell the unrest.

As the levels of intensity against antigovernment demonstrations increased, refusal on the part of soldiers to fire upon their countrymen became a topic of antigovernment broadcasts. These broadcasts exacerbated uncertainty within the armed forces, who, because of the Shah's self-centered management policies, lacked clear leadership and decisiveness at the top. These broadcasts also emphasized the refusal of many soldiers to obey direct orders from their commanding officers, especially orders to fire upon unarmed demonstrators:

The religious leaders and national forces have called on the armymen to carry out their national and religious duty to Iran and the Iranian people by disobeying the orders of the black generals of the Shah's court and by joining the people. The soldiers, officers and armymen are the children of the Iranian nation and cannot remain indifferent to the bloody events in the realm and the call--the invitation--of the national and religious leaders. The day is not far away when the armymen, by fully joining the ranks of the people, will cast the heads of this bloodshedding regime and its criminal generals into the trash can of history. [\(Note 12\)](#)

This reticence to quell the disturbances can be partially explained by the fact that the military forces were trained in conventional warfare, not nonlethal riot-control techniques. For this reason, military responses to anti-Pahlavi demonstrations tended to be harsh and repressive, which evoked strong responses from the Iranian people and the world community. [\(Note 13\)](#) This also served to further

confuse and alienate many of the younger soldiers, who were essentially being sent to perform a mission for which they had not been prepared. This in turn added to their apprehensiveness, which played into Khomeini's hands.

In the face of this potent psychological warfare, the blame for this predicament cannot be attributed to a lack of effort on the part of many senior military leaders. They repeatedly asked for riot-control equipment and training but their requests were denied time and again.[\(Note 14\)](#) In fact, the very orientation of the armed forces was not geared toward an internal threat, but rather toward an external one. The result of this policy was that "weapons and training for domestic disturbances were not emphasized."[\(Note 15\)](#) The outward orientation meant that the U.S.-trained military was "organized for the wrong war" in which its response to internal dissent was much less effective than it would have been in a foreign invasion scenario.[\(Note 16\)](#) Additionally, the internal strife tended to confuse the priorities of many soldiers by playing on their religious and nationalistic sensibilities, rendering them that much more ineffective.

The differences between regular officers and the conscripted soldiers were exacerbated as well during the period of unrest preceding the departure of the Shah. The fissures in the military were partially due to regular officers being part of an elite class that lived a separate existence from the men they commanded. They enjoyed access to free medical care, generous pay, and special commodities. On the other hand, the conscripts were paid very little and were drawn from the same elements of society as the demonstrators, with whom they were able to identify more easily. In many instances during the antigovernment demonstrations, the conscripts found themselves in a position where they had to choose between disobeying an order or suppressing (in some manner) a relative or friend.[\(Note 17\)](#)

As the demonstrations continued, the army came to be regarded as the force that prevented the country from sinking into utter chaos.[\(Note 18\)](#) As the crisis wore on, reports of soldiers defecting began to circulate. Additionally, soldiers began to shoot other soldiers to prevent them from firing on the antigovernment protestors, and army units began to disobey orders to quell the protests. This had the effect of undermining overall esprit de corps and military discipline, as well as making the soldiers more susceptible to incessant dissident propaganda broadcasts. From exile in Paris, Ayatollah Khomeini called for the soldiers to desert and join the opposition.[\(Note 19\)](#) Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri, a Khomeini ally, stated that Khomeini's appeals to the army were having an impact:

There is a spirit of rebellion inside the army . . . and if an Islamic government is installed in Iran, these soldiers and young officers will obey and follow the leaders who follow Khomeini's instructions.[\(Note 20\)](#)

Amid speculation about the imminent departure of the Shah in early 1979, senior officers in the armed forces expressed their dismay at the possibility of a new civilian government and apprehension concerning their collective and individual fates. With the Shah gone, the military's status in the new regime would be significantly altered. Additionally, there were concerns about the collective fate of the military since it had borne the brunt of public anti-Pahlavi sentiment. In spite of these factors, the military as an institution had maintained internal discipline imposed from above principally because of a sense of loyalty to the Shah. With his departure, the military feared being dismembered at the hands of a new regime as well as at the hands of the people. In terms of weaponry, the military did not fear the populace. Their concern was that with the Shah removed from their future, discipline would erode; leaderless, they would be unable to withstand popular demands for justice because of the armed forces' role in suppressing anti-Pahlavi sentiment. The military, because of its

compartmentalization, also feared corporate inertia, an institutionalized inability to act, and longstanding internal rivalries that would render them useless.[\(Note 21\)](#) In spite of these fears, the military took no steps to remedy these deficiencies, again because of an incapacity to coordinate and communicate amongst themselves.

On January 4, 1979, General Gholam Ali Oveissi, the Iranian Army commander and martial-law administrator of Tehran, resigned. The general cited health reasons as the cause of his resignation. He was disliked by the populace for his hardline views and he was vehemently opposed to any abdication of power by the Shah. In itself, the general's resignation is a negligible footnote, but in the context of political and societal turmoil, his resignation took on another significance in terms of lowering the morale of the soldiers he commanded.[\(Note 22\)](#) His resignation, in the opinion of Carter administration officials, reduced the possibilities of strong military opposition to a post-Pahlavi regime.[\(Note 23\)](#)

On January 6, Prime Minister Shahpur Bakhtiar named General Feridum Djam as War Minister. General Djam was a former Chief of Staff who had been dismissed in 1971 by the Shah for being "too good, too competent, too popular, too much his own man."[\(Note 24\)](#) Bakhtiar also named Lieutenant General Mehdi Rahemi Larijani as General Oveissi's successor to the post of military governor of Tehran. Larijani had been Oveissi's deputy and was considered more moderate than his former commander.[\(Note 25\)](#)

The situation became so serious in the eyes of the Carter administration that Air Force General Robert E. Huyser, Deputy Commander of the United States European Command, was dispatched to Tehran to urge the armed forces to unite behind the provisional government. General Huyser spoke with new Chief of Staff General Abbas Gharabaghi, who had been the Gendarmerie Commander and may have been brought in because of his outsider status and ethnic Azerbaijani heritage. General Huyser exhorted Gharabaghi to avoid precipitous military actions, especially a coup, which would lead to a curtailment of American military aid.[\(Note 26\)](#) Huyser also suggested to Gharabaghi that the Iranian military begin drawing up its own contingency plans for any future scenarios. He further recommended that Iranian military leaders begin to confer with one another to learn how to carry out intraservice communications, coordination, and planning. Gharabaghi's response was to request that the Americans accomplish these tasks for the Iranian military and to point out that he could not hold the military together if the Shah were to leave the country.[\(Note 27\)](#) Huyser's experience encapsulated the organizational problems as well as the command and control defects in the imperial military as structured by the Shah.

Although publicly General Huyser decried the possibility of a coup, it has been posited that Huyser was acting as the representative of the United States to formulate options that included plans to "encourage the Iranian military to support Bakhtiar's civilian government; plan for possible direct military action if required to bolster the civilian regime; support a military takeover by Iranian forces if public order collapsed." [\(Note 28\)](#) On January 10, former Imperial Guard Commander General Abdolah Badrai was named Commander of the Iranian Ground Forces, replacing General Oveissi. Whereas General Oveissi had been both the Military Governor of Tehran and the Commander of the Iranian Army, the positions were later separated to attempt to prevent the concentration of too much power in the hands of one individual.

In his position as Imperial Guard Commander, General Badrai had commanded the best trained, most elite soldiers in the Iranian military. General Badrai assumed command as Prime Minister Bakhtiar's power waned. By that time, Bakhtiar was viewed as impotent in the wake of a remark by a general

who publicly stated that the army would refuse to follow Bakhtiar. Instead of a harsh reprimand, the Shah promoted the general who made the remark, further undermining Bakhtiar's already precarious position.[\(Note 29\)](#)

As the controversy over a possible military coup was debated, reports began to filter in from Kuwait that over 50 Iranian Army officers had deserted in recent weeks. The Iranian authorities had been reticent to take any steps against the deserters due to "fear of popular reaction and possible armed confrontation" among competing factions of the Iranian military.[\(Note 30\)](#) During this time, General Huyser was still conducting meetings with senior Iranian officials concerning the ramifications of a military coup. Huyser reported back to Secretary of Defense Harold Brown that working with the Iranian military was difficult because of the severe compartmentalization of the services and the unwillingness (or inability) of the senior leaders to plan for a given situation or take any initiative whatsoever. The Shah's prohibition on coordination among the services for fear of a coup had left the military arms of the state incapable of joint or of independent action.[\(Note 31\)](#) In this vein, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance issued the following statement:

Iran's armed forces remain essential to the security and independence of Iran, and as a necessary complement to a legitimate civilian government. We have urged that everything be done to ensure their integrity and their support by the people of Iran.[\(Note 32\)](#)

Bakhtiar was forced to appoint General Jaafar Shafaqat as new Minister of War, to replace General Djam. A younger man than many of his colleagues, General Shafaqat was regarded as a moderate who favored civilian rule, although he had little faith in a peaceful resolution to the mounting crisis.[\(Note 33\)](#) He replaced General Djam because the Shah would not allow General Djam to appoint the heads of the armed forces. Fearing a coup, the Shah also refused to allow the heads of the armed forces to report to General Djam. In light of these new developments, new speculation emerged concerning the possibilities of a military coup if the Shah did not give the military a freer hand in security affairs.[\(Note 34\)](#)

From Paris, Ayatollah Khomeini stated that the Shah would stage a military coup rather than abdicate his power. Again attempting to bring the military into his future regime, the exiled opposition leader issued a call to the army to prevent any such attempts:[\(Note 35\)](#)

There is a possibility that the treacherous Shah, now about to depart, will commit a further crime--a military coup d'etat; I have frequently warned that this is probable. It would be his last blow. The courageous people of Iran know that there are only a few slavish and bloodthirsty individuals in the army, who apparently occupy important positions and whose identities are known to me, and that the honorable elements in the army will never permit these slaves of the Shah to commit such a crime against their nation and religion. In accordance with my God-given and national duty, I alert the Iranian army to this danger and I demand that all commanders and officers resolutely prevent the enactment of any such conspiracy and not permit a few bloodthirsty individuals to plunge the noble people of Iran into a bloodbath. Iranian army, this is your God-given duty. If you obey these congenital traitors, you will be accountable to God, Exalted and Almighty, condemned by all humanitarians, and cursed by future generations. . . . The Iranian people must treat the honorable officers and commanders of the army with respect. They must recognize that a few treacherous members of the army cannot sully the army as a whole. The record and responsibility of a few bloodthirsty individuals is something separate from the army as a whole. The army belongs to the people, and the people belong to the army. The army will not suffer any harm as a result of the departure of the Shah.[\(Note 36\)](#)



The Shah attempted to ensure the loyalty of the military forces to Bakhtiar to prevent anarchy upon his departure but

There was, however, a flaw in his thinking: Iran's armed forces were basically the shah's creation and loyal to him, not to an abstract concept of "constitutional authority." Should the shah choose to remain in the country and fight for his survival, there was a good chance that the army, even though suffering from occasional desertions and the mullahs' antimonarchist brainwashing, would side with the ruler and defend him. But it was somewhat naive to expect that the army would defend an empty palace and meekly transfer its allegiance to a little known former opposition leader in the name of constitutional principle.[\(Note 37\)](#)

For this reason, the armed forces lost all vestiges of discipline when the Shah left on January 16, 1979.[\(Note 38\)](#) Before leaving Iran, the Shah refused to appoint a strong, independent thinking military leader such as General Djam to hold the armed forces together, fearing that such a situation would work against him if he returned to Iran. (This referral is indicative of how out of touch the Shah was with the reality of the situation.) He was, in fact, incapable of transferring power from himself to the government.[\(Note 39\)](#) Skocpol's theory notwithstanding, it "was only after the Shah's departure that the process of disintegration of the army under political pressure set in."[\(Note 40\)](#)

Upon the Shah's departure, anti-Pahlavi demonstrators sought to win the favor of soldiers patrolling the streets of Tehran. The demonstrators kissed the soldiers and gave them flowers, in an attempt to emphasize their solidarity with them. In a return gesture, many of the soldiers placed the flowers in the barrels of their machine guns.[\(Note 41\)](#)

Amid the uncertainty, rumors circulated as to whether the military would attempt a coup or at least a crackdown. Iranian papers were especially critical of the armed forces; they

criticized the military's role in keeping the Shah in power and killing hundreds of Iranians.[\(Note 42\)](#) Waiting to see how events were going to develop with the incoming regime, Iranian Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Gharabaghi issued a warning to any officers who might be contemplating a coup, stating they would be "crushed." The General emphasized the need to avoid conflict between the armed forces and the anti-Shah factions in Iran. Emphasizing the importance of national solidarity, he stated that if any conflict occurred between them, "neither the army nor the nation will survive."[\(Note 43\)](#) The general further stated that the Army would support "any legal government" but that the Army had been subject to "provocations" by demonstrators in various Iranian cities and issued a stern warning to anti-government forces not to "provoke" the army, whose duty was to maintain order.[\(Note 44\)](#) In a similar vein, Khomeini urged the nation to "preserve public order and win the support of the armed forces."[\(Note 45\)](#) The Paris diplomatic community was surprised by the Ayatollah's moderate tone and his desire to include the armed forces in any discussions of a post-Pahlavi Iran.[\(Note 46\)](#) What these diplomats ignored was the fact that Khomeini in fact desired to gain political control of the army to use it as a tool to assist in the transition from a monarchy to an Islamic republic.[\(Note 47\)](#)

Khomeini ally Ayatollah Shariatmadari, who had promoted Khomeini to the rank of ayatollah to prevent his execution in 1963, also issued an appeal for calm. He urged Iranians to "respect the Iranian Army and treat it with kindness and fraternity." He also took pains to distinguish the majority of the soldiers from "those who have opened fire on the people," who in turn "should be treated separately."[\(Note 48\)](#) By doing so, he hoped to maintain the military structure intact to later integrate

it into the new regime.

In the oil producing city of Ahvaz, renegade soldiers opened fire on anti-Shah demonstrators, dashing any hopes of a completely peaceful transition to Bakhtiar's rule. Estimates of fatalities ranged from 10 to over 100. The violence began when a military officer told his subordinates that the Shah had left Iran and that they must obey Prime Minister Bakhtiar. Three officers and an undetermined number of soldiers then took to the streets rolling their tanks over cars and shooting at peaceful demonstrators. They were contained within a few hours, but not before giving rise to speculation concerning a possible coup.[\(Note 49\)](#)

In an attempt at damage control, the Governor General of Khuzestan, Lieutenant General Jafarian, decried the "opportunists who want to plunge our dear country into anarchy." He also criticized the renegade military members whom he described as "adventurists" who would be punished "in accordance with the law and regulations." He urged the army to obey Bakhtiar "so that a chasm--God forbid--may not be brought about between the army and the zealous, patriotic Iranian people."[\(Note 50\)](#)

In another bid to defuse the tension and keep the armed forces out of controversy, General Gharabaghi stated there would be no army coup, because the army was "the guardian of the constitution and the government," whose duty was to maintain public order. He also claimed that all military perpetrators of insubordination would be "severely punished."[\(Note 51\)](#) The general then urged all soldiers to carry out their duties "with a firm resolve, with moral discipline and a spirit replete with patriotism and by overcoming emotionalism and refraining from any act that might be contrary to military commands and duties."[\(Note 52\)](#)

Despite being reigned in, the army became the focus of public attention and a great deal of speculation concerning the possibilities of a coup. As the army generals expressed their support for Bakhtiar, supporters of Khomeini skeptically voiced their doubts about the army's intentions, especially in light of the Ayatollah's imminent return from exile in Paris. They were concerned the military might seek to eliminate Khomeini and in so doing remove the chief opposition figure to the Shah. Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani, one of the most prominent opposition figures, warned that the people of Iran would wage a "holy war" against the army if it attempted a coup.[\(Note 53\)](#) He stated that if the army tried to take over Iran, "the people would deal with" the military and would be "victorious."[\(Note 54\)](#) These fears proved to be unfounded, since the Army as a unified entity was incapable of acting without the Shah.[\(Note 55\)](#)

The military's public image became more tenuous, however, when renegade soldiers opened fire on pro-Khomeini, antigovernment demonstrators in Tehran on January 26. Although Bakhtiar gave the orders to quell the unrest, which included over 100,000 demonstrators, the army, as the enforcement arm, took the brunt of public outcry against its actions, which resulted in at least 15 deaths and dozens wounded.[\(Note 56\)](#) This served to further degrade the army's already tarnished public image. Further violence occurred on January 29, when demonstrators protested the army's closing of all airports, which prevented the return of Khomeini. After being pelted with rocks, soldiers fired on crowds in Tehran, killing 35 and wounding an unknown number of civilians. Soldiers also fired on antigovernment demonstrators in Resht, a town on the Caspian sea, killing 5 and wounding 40.[\(Note 57\)](#) Upon announcing that Iran's airports would reopen to allow Khomeini's return, army officers conferred with the Ayatollah's aides. Among other topics discussed were security plans to safeguard Khomeini.[\(Note 58\)](#) A more telling sign of the military's political emasculation was the fact that revolutionaries, not the army, provided security for Khomeini when he returned to Iran.[\(Note 59\)](#)

After Khomeini's return to Iran, instead of criticizing the armed forces, he appealed to the Iranian military to become "free and independent" so that they could join with him as "brothers."[\(Note 60\)](#) He then decried the presence of American advisors in the armed forces as an impure element and entreated the army to follow the correct path:

I invite them for their own good and the nation's good to be with us. I hope they can be guided. The people are their brothers. We want what is good for them; we want them to be free and independent.[\(Note 61\)](#)

Faced with the reality of the new regime, the military stated that its loyalties were to the Iranian constitution, not the Shah. The Khomeini regime, in return, stated that their goal was a transfer of power within the framework of that same constitution.[\(Note 62\)](#) By cooperating with the incoming regime, General Gharabaghi hoped to preserve the unity and structure of the armed forces, thereby maintaining cohesion to prevent disintegration and internal friction within the military. Gharabaghi also omitted the pledge of loyalty to the Shah, which had been administered on the previous February 6 to cadets of the Tehran Military Academy upon their graduation.[\(Note 63\)](#)

The show of unity suffered a blow when a number of Iranian Air Force civilian technicians staging a pro-Khomeini demonstration at Farahabad Air Force base in Tehran were fired upon by soldiers. Conflicting reports of the February 10 confrontation put the death toll between 20 and 70.[\(Note 64\)](#) As a result of this, violence spread throughout Tehran among factions within the military and armed civilians, causing many more casualties. The Imperial Guard, equipped with helicopters and tanks, found itself arrayed against the technicians, who were augmented by an increasing force of military officers, air force cadets, and civilians. A poorly planned offensive against the technicians failed to dislodge them and further weakened the military.[\(Note 65\)](#) In retrospect, the Homafaran "were singly the most important unit in the armed forces won over by the revolutionaries and were decisive in precipitating the final split in the army that sealed its fate on February 9 to 11."[\(Note 66\)](#)

The Homafaran were a particularly dissatisfied element within the armed forces. Although they were civilians, they wore military uniforms and possessed a military rank between officers and NCO's.[\(Note 67\)](#) They were hired on a contractual basis to perform maintenance and technical functions within the military. Although they were well paid, they were accorded very little respect within the military and were also forced to stay in the military after their contracts had expired. This led to discontent, owing to the fact that they could have made much more money working in the private sector.[\(Note 68\)](#) They also felt ostracized from the officers and enlisted members because they were treated as outsiders; this frustration finally manifested itself in the Farahabad incident. In an effort to contain the violence, the army called its troops back into the barracks "to prevent further bloodshed and anarchy," as Prime Minister Bakhtiar resigned.[\(Note 69\)](#) Additionally, General Gharabaghi declared that the armed forces were "neutral" in the political conflict, in an attempt to keep them intact and prevent popular rage from being directed at them.[\(Note 70\)](#)

The Farahabad incident was the vital catalyst that allowed anti-Pahlavi factions to overcome the might of the armed forces. This was not so much because of any ability of the revolutionaries to resist the armed forces, but rather because of the synergistic effects of popular, broad-based opposition to the Shah; reluctance of the soldiers to repress their fellow countrymen and military personnel; institutional inertia; the Shah's excessively paranoid compartmentalization of his security forces in order to prevent their conspiring against him; and the military's inability to act independently in response to a crisis situation.

After the Farahabad incident, speculation concerning the defeat of the Imperial Guard at the hands of "a mob of poorly armed civilians" began to circulate. Questions as to how and why a force in excess of 400,000 that was well armed and well trained could be routed abounded in Tehran during the early phases of the Revolution. [\(Note 71\)](#) One Western military attaché offered an analysis that seemed to state the obvious:

As a fighting force the army has been humiliated. As a political influence, its weight is greatly reduced. It is a tragedy to see this happen to a force with such fine tradition, but I am not surprised. I think the Imperial Guard was wrongly trained and badly commanded. But in the end you cannot ask a modern army to fight its own people. [\(Note 72\)](#)

Further comments by other military personnel criticized the Shah for not training his military in riot-control procedures or to combat the psychological effects of repressing their own countrymen. [\(Note 73\)](#) A more accurate criticism would have targeted the monarch's distrust and compartmentalization of his military and the institutionalized inability to make independent decisions. When the Army's decision to withdraw its support and retreat into the barracks was made public, the citizens of Tehran celebrated in the streets. They hailed the soldiers as they withdrew from the Iranian radio and television complex and threw flowers to them. [\(Note 74\)](#) In his ever-constant wooing of the armed forces, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a statement praising the military's decision to withdraw from the fray and encouraged the populace to accord the military the proper courtesy and respect in keeping with their status as part of the revolution:

Now that victory is near and that the armed forces have retreated and announced their lack of intervention in political affairs and also announced their support of the nation, you should not burn their institutions. . . . Again I say to you that if the army stops and joins the people and the legal Islamic government, then we will recognize them as being of the people. [\(Note 75\)](#)

In a show of support for Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution, hundreds of Air Force warrant officer technicians and other personnel from Hatami Air Force Base in Esfahan marched in solidarity to proclaim their support for the Bazargan government. [\(Note 76\)](#)

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### 4.

#### PURGE OF THE MONARCHISTS

Almost immediately, leading military figures were publicly displayed by the new regime in what was to become a string of summary executions that took place in "an atmosphere of arbitrariness and lack of control." [\(Note 1\)](#) This "reign of terror" was intended to send a clear message to the military to submit unconditionally to the new regime. [\(Note 2\)](#) In Tehran, three generals were paraded in front of foreign journalists as "some of the honorable thieves who have ruled this country for the last 10 years." [\(Note 3\)](#) The new leadership had in fact decided that a "purge of the armed forces would be undertaken, but on a limited scale, concentrating on 'corrupt elements.'" [\(Note 4\)](#)

Provisional Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan quickly appointed Major General Muhammad Vali Gharavi as the Chief of the Supreme Commander's Staff, in the first of what were to be many military personnel replacements carried out by the new regime. [\(Note 5\)](#) Bazargan also appointed Lieutenant General Sa'id Mehdiyoun as Commander of the Iranian Air Force. When announcing General Mehdiyoun's appointment, all air force personnel, to include "officers, warrant officer technicians, NCO's, administrative staff and enlisted men," were ordered to report for duty on the following day to their units. [\(Note 6\)](#) By doing so, the new regime ensured that the military were not only present and accounted for, [\(Note 7\)](#) they could also be employed against any potential dissident elements. Air Force Brigadier General Ayatollah Mahaqqeqi, the commander of air force fighters, was arrested. There was no reason immediately given. [\(Note 8\)](#)

On February 13, 1979, Major General Gharavi, Chief of the General Staff, issued an order to all senior officers of the staff command to report immediately to Staff Command

Headquarters for a conference. The urgency of the order was emphasized by the proviso that the officers were allowed to come in civilian clothes if necessary. [\(Note 9\)](#) Additionally, all officers, staff, and soldiers of the Army's Staff Command were ordered to report for duty to their respective sections to "discharge their duties" for the following day. [\(Note 10\)](#)

On the same day, an order was issued from Prime Minister Bazargan for all "officers, servicemen and employees of the War Ministry and its related organizations" to report for duty and "resume work immediately after receiving this message." [\(Note 11\)](#) Simultaneously, Colonel Tavakkoli, Head of the Provisional Islamic Revolution Staff Command, issued the following directive to all members of the armed forces:

Since all the units of the armed forces have accepted the leadership of His Eminence Imam Khomeyni, the leader of the revolution, all the units that have started moving toward Tehran in order to assist the units in the capital are hereby informed to immediately return to their barracks and report

the whereabouts of all units in the relevant garrisons to the provisional revolution staff command. People who are on the route of these units are asked not to obstruct their movement.[\(Note 12\)](#)

This same day, Khomeini addressed the Iranian populace, stressing that the army, as well as the police and gendarmerie, should not be attacked because they "have returned to us, and are one of us." The Ayatollah also stated that the "army is ours," appealing not only to those elements of society who harbored anti-military sentiment, but also to the military itself.[\(Note 13\)](#)

Deputy Prime Minister Amir Entezam issued a statement that the 487,000-man Iranian Army was "dissolved, unfortunately." He then went on to proclaim that he entertained hopes of improving the state of affairs for the military to "put it back together again."[\(Note 14\)](#) This sentiment was echoed by Prime Minister Medhi Bazargan, who stated the desire to rebuild the fragmented military rapidly with the same organizational hierarchy and a distinct command hierarchy of new, appointed officers,[\(Note 15\)](#) cast in the mold of the nascent Islamic Republic. Although these statements seemed to indicate that the military had dissolved, its basic structure remained intact, as evidenced by the return of the soldiers to their barracks and duty stations when ordered. The real crisis was one of leadership and knowing who was in charge.

In an attempt to keep the armed forces under government control, Major General Qarani, Chief of Staff of the National Army, issued a directive for all members of the army, police, and gendarmerie to return to their duty stations as quickly as possible. Appealing to those service members who had deserted to fight against the Shah, he stated that the "dereliction of duty has been forgiven" since they "deserted their barracks at the command of the imam."[\(Note 16\)](#) Simultaneously, all air force personnel were recalled to their duty stations to "maintain order in Tehran." All returning members were also instructed to bring in any weapons they might possess in order to prevent "unidentified individuals" from obtaining them.[\(Note 17\)](#)

General Manucher Khasrodad, the Army Airborne Division Commander, was arrested on February 13 attempting to flee Iran. As a loyal supporter of the Shah, he was placed in detention for future deliberations.[\(Note 18\)](#) On February 15, four generals, among them the former head of the SAVAK (the Shah's widely hated secret police) and General Khasrodad were executed by a firing squad in "accordance with Islamic standards and prescriptions"[\(Note 19\)](#) in Tehran.[\(Note 20\)](#) The state radio proclaimed to "have executed the executioners of the previous regime" in order to "purify the blood of the revolution and to put new blood of the revolution into circulation."[\(Note 21\)](#) The radio broadcast also stated that 20 other high-ranking officers of the Pahlavi regime would face a trial by revolutionary tribunal, followed by death sentences.[\(Note 22\)](#)

A new arm of the military, consisting of Islamic law enforcement officials, was announced as an integral part of the military. Their presence was explained as necessary to "give the utmost assistance" as "spiritual representatives" to the armed forces.[\(Note 23\)](#) This was necessary because "there simply was not a core of pro-Khomeini military personnel who could displace the discredited and mistrusted Imperial officer corps"; as a result, "the full fury of the revolutionary leaders were turned on the top commanders of the Imperial armed forces promptly after the triumph of the revolution."[\(Note 24\)](#) While purging monarchist elements, the new regime was scrupulously careful to maintain the military's command and control structure intact to preserve it as an institution. In a message to the populace, Ayatollah Khomeini's "Propaganda Committee" issued a statement explaining the ongoing purge of the armed forces:

The purging of the armed organizations affiliated with the former diabolical regime is among the top

priorities of the new government. It has top priority in the Revolution Committee appointed by Imam Khomeyni . . . all the unreliable and mercenary cadres whose loyalty to the antipopular front has been proved shall be replaced by revolutionary and popular Muslim cadres.[\(Note 25\)](#)

On February 17, General Qarani, Chief of Staff of the National Army of Iran, dissolved the Imperial Guard and the Immortal Guards. He directed all former members of the defunct organizations to place themselves at the disposal of the army.[\(Note 26\)](#) On the same day, 26 air force generals and four air force colonels were retired,[\(Note 27\)](#) and two military officers were arrested and handed over to the revolutionary committee.[\(Note 28\)](#) In the wake of the air force retirements, a new air force commander, Brigadier General Kiumars Saqafi, was appointed by General Qarani.[\(Note 29\)](#) On February 18, 41 generals and admirals were retired, including former Prime Minister General Gholamreza Azhari.[\(Note 30\)](#)

The arrests continued on February 18, with the government announcing the seizure of an undisclosed number of military officers in Tehran and other parts of the country.[\(Note 31\)](#) On February 19, the government announced that four more generals had been executed by firing squad in Tehran.[\(Note 32\)](#) On February 19, 25 more officers, including a number of generals and admirals, were retired from service.[\(Note 33\)](#) At the same time, seven officers in Orumiyeh were arrested and given over to the Islamic Revolutionary Council.[\(Note 34\)](#) The officers who were executed and retired were senior military members who had enjoyed strong ties to the monarch. Their purging was a clear signal that the new regime was intent upon removing any imperial taint from what had traditionally been the most visible symbol of the Pahlavi dynasty.

In the midst of the confusion generated by the rapid changes in the social fabric of Iran and in the wake of a rash of military executions, the Iranian military began to show signs of stress and disorientation. Dissent and crumbling discipline became apparent as soldiers began to veto the appointments of senior commanders, disobey orders, and demand the replacement of certain officers suspected of being SAVAK collaborators.[\(Note 35\)](#) Although the military's basic structure remained intact, the crisis within the ranks was due to a leadership vacuum. An observer noted a "disintegration of authority in the army,"[\(Note 36\)](#) which was indicative of the ambitions of junior officers who coveted positions held by senior officers perceived to be vulnerable to the ongoing purges.

On February 20, 20 more generals were retired.[\(Note 37\)](#) At the same time, four more generals were executed by Ayatollah Khomeini's Revolutionary Committee firing squad in Tehran. Upon hearing the news, Prime Minister Bazargan expressed his surprise at not being informed beforehand of the execution.[\(Note 38\)](#) On the same day, Iranian Army Chief of Staff General Qarani announced that more troops were returning to their barracks and duty stations. He also stated that the purges of the military would continue to remove all senior officers accused of collaboration with the Pahlavi regime. He claimed that the presence of these generals weakened the discipline of the army since the soldiers refused to obey their orders and that Iran "cannot afford to have a weak army."[\(Note 39\)](#) General Qarani also spoke of the challenges facing the armed forces and correctly explained some of the factors that had contributed to the army's poor performance during the Islamic Revolution:

Our problem concerns the fear, insecurity and humiliation felt by the army cadre. The necessary reconciliation between the army and the people has not been achieved yet, and this very element has been the cause of our lesser success with the capital's cadre. Basically, the army is not intended for maintaining domestic order: It is equipped to safeguard and protect the country's borders against foreign enemies. Our main program concerns organizing a national Islamic army that can pursue the ideology of a noble government with the progressive Shi'ite principles, and for this reason we want to

build an army with a national character and Islamic principles. Therefore, we need the kind of personnel who are able to fulfill this critical task and who have no bad records of past misdeeds. In pursuit of this program all the generals and lieutenant generals and a number of major generals and brigadier generals have been retired and half the Imperial Guard NCO's have asked to be retired. At any rate, with the extensive purge in the army . . . many of the problems will be resolved.[\(Note 40\)](#)

On February 21, 16 more generals were retired,[\(Note 41\)](#) while four military officers were arrested and incarcerated in Shiraz.[\(Note 42\)](#) At the same time, six officers were appointed to new positions of military command within the regime,[\(Note 43\)](#) which helped to reconstruct the command hierarchy with officers possessing minimal ties to the monarchy. The retirements continued on February 24, when 32 major generals were removed from active service.[\(Note 44\)](#) The retirements were followed on February 25 by the appointment of 10 officers to new command positions and 11 military lawyers to new posts.[\(Note 45\)](#) Ten colonels were also retired on February 26.[\(Note 46\)](#) The Iranian Islamic Army announced on March 1 that 71 officers had been retired and that 71 more would be retired in 2 days. The rationale for retiring the 142 officers was to "organize the National Islamic Army's dimensions and make more use of young people."[\(Note 47\)](#)

Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi spoke to the press about the armed forces on March 3. He dismissed notions that the army would be disbanded although he did say that there would be some organizational and hierarchical changes:

We must preserve the army in its present form, and at the same time launch a series of programs aimed at staging a cultural revolution within the army. Furthermore, we must purge the army of the value held under the monarch, so that we might be able to create an ideal army for the Islamic government. . . . Of course, there are those in the army who will resist such changes. . . . These individuals will be removed. . . . They shall be removed and, if necessary, put on trial.[\(Note 48\)](#)

On March 4, 13 generals and colonels were retired from active service,[\(Note 49\)](#) followed by 33 brigadier generals the next day.[\(Note 50\)](#) On March 5, seven generals were executed at Tehran's Qasr prison, after being charged with torture and killing under the Pahlavi regime.[\(Note 51\)](#) On March 6, two soldiers from the military garrison at Abadan were publicly displayed and confronted by a crowd, who accused them of having shot at and arrested demonstrators during a protest that took place the previous December. The two soldiers were also accused of torturing some of the persons whom they had arrested, to include pouring acid over the genitals of male prisoners. The soldiers were then sentenced to death.[\(Note 52\)](#) On March 9, three persons, one of them a lieutenant general, were executed for (among other things) "corruption on earth," and "combatting God, the apostle of God, and the imam of the era."[\(Note 53\)](#) This incident was followed on March 12 by the execution of 11 more military personnel, to include at least one general.[\(Note 54\)](#)

Actually, many of the military personnel executed were charged with being "corrupt on the earth" and "warring against God," two phrases became standard justifications for carrying out executions. Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi, the Deputy Prime Minister for Revolutionary Affairs, explained that the two charges had to "be understood in the Islamic cultural context," which was "a union of church and state in which law is essentially religious law" (the Sharia), which was derived from the Quran, the teachings of Muhammad, and the work of religious legal scholars. Yazdi commented that although the charge of "corruption on earth" was a serious one, it was difficult to explain, although it did mean "endangering the life of the nation."

Islamic law scholar Joseph Schachf states that every political theory in Islam began "with the

assumption that Islamic government existed by virtue of a divine contract based on the Sharia." Under those circumstances, political science was not an independent discipline (as in the West), but rather a part of theology to the extent that there was "no distinction between state and society or between church and state."[\(Note 55\)](#)

On March 16, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered a cessation of the closed trials and summary executions. He stated that from that moment on, all trials would have to take place under the direct supervision of the Islamic Revolutionary Council acting under the authority of the Islamic Government.[\(Note 56\)](#) On March 17, Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi cited the fears of a military coup as "the most important reason for the first round of executions." He went on to further justify the violence:

This is a war, this is a revolution. . . . We had to show that we mean business. Now we are in control. . . . Now we can afford to wait. Now we can have trials.[\(Note 57\)](#)

Yazdi also stated that the Shah had fallen so quickly that the incoming regime had not had a great deal of time to prepare to govern Iran or construct a legal system,[\(Note 58\)](#) much less construct a new organizational hierarchy for the armed forces.

At a press conference on April 3, Deputy Prime Minister Entezam commented that the Islamic Republic would not inhibit the retirement of senior officers from the military and would even encourage it in some instances:

Army officers from the rank of brigadier general on up will retire. If there should be a need for the expertise of some for them in restructuring the army, they might possibly be invited to serve again.[\(Note 59\)](#)

On April 6, three soldiers were executed in Isfahan in the first executions after a 3-week hiatus. On April 7, six soldiers were executed in Tehran following a 15-hour trial. They were condemned for their roles in the unrest of the preceding December in which the armed forces shot into demonstrating crowds from helicopter gunships. Prime Minister Bazargan protested the executions to Ayatollah Khomeini, to no avail. In the end, Bazargan had to resign himself to the resumption of the summary trials and executions of soldiers tainted by association with the monarchy.[\(Note 60\)](#)

Two generals were sentenced to death by secret trial and executed by the revolutionary authorities on April 9. One of them, General Amir Hussein Rabii, was the former Iranian Air Force Commander. To no avail, Rabii criticized the Shah during his trial, stating, "I realized what a hollow man I was working for when Americans such as Huyser could lead him out of the country by the nose."[\(Note 61\)](#)

On April 11, five more generals were executed after being condemned in a secret trial. They were charged with being "corrupt on earth" and "warring against God."[\(Note 62\)](#) The generals were believed to be among the most senior officials of the Pahlavi regime and included the former Chief of the Immortals (the Shah's elite guards) and a former head of the Second Department, a military intelligence organization.[\(Note 63\)](#) More executions followed on April 14. In the wake of these executions, the New York-based International League for Human Rights requested that the Islamic Republic review its trial procedures and stop the executions. The League's president commented that it was "no advance for human rights to have the abuses of the Shah replaced by abuses of revolutionary tribunals."[\(Note 64\)](#)

Ayatollah Khomeini, addressing soldiers in their barracks in the holy city of Qum on April 15, spoke of the transformation of the Army since the Islamic Revolution:

Our army today is not the satanic army but a Mohammedan army, you soldiers should protect the army. You should listen to your superiors. Expel those who cause sedition among you from your midst: The protection of the country depends on the existence of order in the army. We are your supporters and you are our supporters and the nation is the supporter of all.[\(Note 65\)](#)

The Army's name was changed on April 16 to the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The name change was attributed to Ayatollah Khomeini by government sources to remind the nation that the army was "an inseparable part of this revolution" who would fulfill "its great mission of safeguarding the gains of the Islamic Revolution within the context of its duties."[\(Note 66\)](#) On the following day, Major General Naser Farbod, the Chief of the General Staff of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran, spoke of the changes taking place in the army as an example of the societal innovations occurring within the country:

The army, like other sectors of the community, is also being reestablished on the basis of the life-giving school of Islam. The transformation in the status of the army, which began with the end of the fallen imperial order in the form of joining the ranks of the people's struggle and resisting bloodthirsty rulers, was pursued by purging itself of antipeople elements. The greatest effort in the appointment of new commanders and senior officers was made so that the assignment of posts and positions is based only on competence and piety. For in our view, attaining rank and office is not a privilege but a heavy responsibility in the safeguarding and fulfillment of the popular mission of the army.[\(Note 67\)](#)

On April 18, six soldiers of the former regime were executed for their actions against anti-Pahlavi demonstrators.[\(Note 68\)](#) The soldiers were sentenced for "waging war against God, God's messenger, the people of Iran and the imam's representative; for sowing corruption on the earth, and effective and direct participation in killing and massacring the struggling people of Tehran and Iran."[\(Note 69\)](#) These executions took place on "Islamic Republic Armed Forces Day," proclaimed by Khomeini as a day for the armed forces to "demonstrate with their uniforms and their arms for the Islamic Republic."[\(Note 70\)](#) Khomeini stated that the people of Iran were "duty bound to show their respect for the Islamic Army and show brotherly respect toward it" now that the Army was at "the service of the people and Islam." Khomeini also said that opposition to the Army was "unseemly."[\(Note 71\)](#)

The demonstration fell short of Khomeini's expectations, although thousands of people came to see the event. Helicopters and aircraft flew overhead while a few platoons of army and air force personnel paraded through Tehran. The small number of military participants was contrasted unfavorably to the grand scale of the pomp and circumstance parades of the Shah and "demonstrated the drastic decline of Iran's once mighty force of 450,000 members."[\(Note 72\)](#)

The former Deputy Chief of the Khorramshahr Military District was sentenced to death and executed on April 20. There were three more executions on April 21, including a general and a colonel who were identified as "corrupt individuals,"[\(Note 73\)](#) which, by now, had become standard charges for those soldiers guilty of imperial ties.

The Iranian Army was dealt a further blow when three unidentified gunmen shot and killed General Vali Ullah Gharani, who was appointed by Khomeini as the Army Chief of Staff after the Islamic Revolution. He had later resigned after controversy regarding his heavy-handed use of force in

suppressing rebellious Kurds. Iranian Government officials stated that the army would be demoralized by the General's death after undergoing internal strife and collapse during the Revolution.[\(Note 74\)](#)

Acting Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi proclaimed on May 3 that the Iranian Government intended to reduce the size of the military by half, to 250,000 soldiers. He stated the reductions would occur over the coming 2 months.[\(Note 75\)](#) In early May, Ayatollah Khomeini and the clerics announced the formation of a new, independent military force to serve as a counterweight[\(Note 76\)](#) to the army that would be "the key to neutralization of future challenges from the armed personnel and thus to perpetuation of their rule."[\(Note 77\)](#) This new element was called the Pasdaran (Guardians) and eventually came to be known as the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC or Revolutionary Guards). The Pasdaran was responsible to the religious authorities and operated outside of and parallel to the established military structure.[\(Note 78\)](#) As a creation of the Islamic Republic, they did not have the same taint associated with the imperial military. On the contrary, they possessed the "correct" religious and political views to serve the new regime. On May 8, more executions took place amid rumors that the revolutionary authorities were considering a general amnesty for lower ranking officials of the Pahlavi regime who were not directly responsible for torture or death.[\(Note 79\)](#)

On May 10, Chief of the General Staff Major General Naser Farbod spoke to the media concerning the army, stating that during the Revolution, the army was "in no way defeated, but it decided to submit to the will of the nation." While stating that the army was well armed, he admitted that "army morale has not returned to its desired state." He also claimed that the creation of the IRGC would strengthen the army, while continuing the "revolutionary spirit" as it combatted "anti-revolutionary elements."[\(Note 80\)](#) In a later interview, General Farbod stressed the Islamic nature of the army. In this context, the army belonged to the nation and was an integral part of it, which included enjoying the freedom brought to Iran by the Islamic Revolution. This freedom "even spread into the army barracks."[\(Note 81\)](#)

On May 26, a military officer with ties to the Pahlavi government and who had commanded a national defense artillery battalion was sentenced to death and executed for participation in a "massacre" against anti-Pahlavi demonstrators.[\(Note 82\)](#) On May 29, five more soldiers were executed for their participation in suppressing anti-Shah demonstrations.[\(Note 83\)](#) The executions continued with the deaths of four more military personnel in Mashhad on May 30. All the "criminals" were condemned for "slaying and wounding . . . innocent" Muslims during an anti-Pahlavi demonstration (the highest ranking soldier, a colonel, was additionally charged with "using maximum firepower and the utmost severity").[\(Note 84\)](#) Three soldiers were also executed in Qazvin on May 30 on charges similar to those brought against the Mashhad soldiers.[\(Note 85\)](#)

In an attempt to further define the role of the army, General Farbod spoke on June 3 to a group of military personnel in Tehran. He stated that "in order to safeguard the revolution, the revolutionary people and the Guardians of the Revolution should be used as much as possible, for we have done nothing for the revolution." He then commented that the Army's role was to safeguard Iran's borders. An NCO then stated that if military personnel were being tried and executed for killing demonstrators, how could they be assured that they would not later be tried and executed like the soldiers of the Pahlavi regime if they suppressed the ethnic unrest occurring throughout Iran? General Farbod replied:

The situation is now different from the past. You are now moving in the direction of the wishes of the

majority of the people. You are carrying out the decision of a government that has been elected by the people.[\(Note 86\)](#)

The Iranian Defense Ministry issued an order on June 21 banning all military personnel from making statements to the media. The order stated that many uninformed persons had made statements that contradicted the "country's supreme interests." The Defense Ministry announced that an authorized spokesman would from that moment on offer official pronouncements.[\(Note 87\)](#) This move was similar to United States military practices that designate a public affairs officer to hold press conferences and give official pronouncements. Any statement or press conference not approved through official channels (to include public affairs) is not sanctioned and therefore liable to administrative or judicial punishment.

In late June, the lack of discipline within the armed forces had reached such a state that the newspapers and radio broadcasts discussed daily the many examples of insubordination. In one instance, a squadron of fighter pilots refused to fly their warplanes to a troubled region and openly questioned the government's decision to suppress unrest. In another case, Navy sailors refused to perform manual labor until joined by the officers, stating "We're all equal now." Other examples included soldiers refusing to quell domestic unrest for fear of later being charged with repression.[\(Note 88\)](#)

In a departure from past policies, the Revolutionary Council announced on July 3 that, effective July 10, all members of Iran's armed and security forces would be granted amnesty except for instances of murder or torture. After the implementation of the new policy, any unsubstantiated complaints of murder or torture would result in a prison term of up to 2 years. A Revolutionary Council spokesman stated that the amnesty was essential to allow the armed and security forces to fulfill their duties.[\(Note 89\)](#)

Ayatollah Khomeini announced the implementation of the new policy on July 9. Khomeini praised Prime Minister Bazargan for suggesting the amnesty policy and lauded his efforts to serve the nation.[\(Note 90\)](#) At the same time, Brigadier General Saif Amir Rahimi, the Commander of Tehran's military police Revolutionary Guards unit, was dismissed from his post for making comments not authorized by his superiors. The general alleged that the armed forces were engaged in a "major conspiracy to discredit the Islamic Republic." General Rahimi refused to acknowledge the order to dismiss him issued by General Farbod, stating that he would only step down if told to do so by Khomeini himself.[\(Note 91\)](#) At a news conference, the general stated that the armed forces were in a sad state of disarray because of the recent purges and that force reductions had resulted in a drop in manpower from half a million soldiers to 300,000. As a result, all the senior generals were gone and discipline was almost nonexistent. He further stated that all militia groups in Iran should be disbanded and disarmed so as not to conflict with the armed forces.[\(Note 92\)](#)

In the wake of General Rahimi's comments, Ayatollah Khomeini stated that the general should remain in his position. General Rahimi's insistence that all elements of the armed forces must obey their generals had placed him in good stead with the regime. He had specifically aimed his comments at the Homofars, the air force technicians who staged the strikes at Farahabad that sounded the death knell for the Shah's regime. When the Homofars refused to obey orders after the Islamic Republic was established, he ordered them jailed. After Khomeini's statement, Prime Minister Bazargan and General Farbod echoed their agreement with the Ayatollah's decision.[\(Note 93\)](#) After his vindication, General Rahimi voiced the need for a disciplined, strong army now that the force was once again "a sound body," after the antimonarchist purges.[\(Note 94\)](#)



General Farbod was then removed from his post on July 21, allegedly for his "inability to improve morale in the armed forces." He was replaced by General Hussein Shakeri, who, as Iran's third military leader in 6 months, was given the new title of Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At the same time, four soldiers were executed for killing anti-Shah demonstrators during the preceding year's unrest.[\(Note 95\)](#)

Soldiers at odds with the government over the execution of a colonel and a sergeant fought with Revolutionary Guards on August 8. The confrontation took place in Orumiyeh, in northwestern Iran.[\(Note 96\)](#) This led to Revolutionary Guard calls for a "complete purge" of the Army to remove "mercenary elements" who engage in "antipeople" plots.[\(Note 97\)](#)

In another significant development in the Islamic Republic's relations with the military, Khomeini went over the heads of military leaders on August 18 and directly ordered soldiers to suppress Kurdish rebels in the town of Paveh. The military leaders in the area around Paveh had voiced their reluctance to use the army as a tool to quell internal unrest. The army officers were cognizant of what had befallen other officers who had commanded soldiers used to quell antigovernment activities during the Shah's last days and wished to avoid similar fates. Casting aside their doubts, Khomeini stated:

As head of the whole army, I give the order to the army Commander in Chief to move into the area with all the necessary preparation and I also give orders to the army garrisons and state police forces that, without awaiting any further order and wasting any time, that they move toward Paveh with the necessary ammunition, preparation and forces.[\(Note 98\)](#)

## 4. Purge of the Monarchists

1. Cottam, 192.
2. Nikola B. Schahgaldian, *The Iranian Military Under the Islamic Republic* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1987), 27.
3. Ibrahim, "Some Leaders of Shah's Regime Are Put on Display as Prisoners," *New York Times*, February 13, 1979, 1.
4. Kechichian and Sadri, 'National Security,' Metz, 247.
5. "New Chief of Supreme Staff," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1245 GMT, 12 Feb 79 (LD121258), February 13, 1979, R3.
6. "New Air Force Commander," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1705 GMT, 12 Feb 79 (LD121736), February 13, 1979, R7.
7. Those who did not report for duty could also be identified as possible subversives.
8. "Air Force General Arrested," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 0630 GMT, 13 Feb 79 (LD130658), February 13, 1979, R10.
9. This may have been a safety precaution as well in light of the anti-military sentiment prevalent among certain elements of the population.
10. "Senior Army Officers To Headquarters," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 0830 GMT, 13 Feb 79 (LD130858), February 13, 1979, R11.
11. "Military Personnel To Resume Duties," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 0840 GMT, 13 Feb 79 (LD130938), February 13, 1979, R11.
12. "Units Ordered To Barracks," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 0930 GMT, 13 Feb 79 (LD131028), February 13, 1979, R11.
13. "Khomeyni Addresses Nation," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1701 GMT, 13 Feb 79 (LD132038), February 14, 1979, R8.
14. Markham, "Iran Regime Is Expected To Insist in Total Power," *New York Times*, February 14, 1979, 8.
15. Markham, "Marxist-Leninist Guerilla Group Is a Potent Force in New Iran," *New York Times*, February 15, 1979, 18.
16. "Appeal To Army, Police," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1511 GMT, 15 Feb 79 (LD151608), February 16, 1979, R3.
17. "Air Force Personnel Recalled," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1835 GMT, 15 Feb

79 (LD151900), February 16, 1979, R5.

18. Ibrahim, "Iran's New Premier Names 7 To Cabinet; Khomeini Asks Calm," *New York Times*, February 14, 1979, 10.

19. "Four Generals Executed," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 0619 GMT, 16 Feb 79 (LD160932), February 16, 1979, R10.

20. "Secret Police Head And 3 Others In Iran Said To Be Executed," *New York Times*, February 16, 1979, 1.

21. Markham, "20 More Shah Aides Said To Face Death In Start Of A Purge," *New York Times*, February 17, 1979, 1.

22. Ibid.

23. "Islamic Law Enforcement Officials," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 0830 GMT, 16 Feb 79 (LD161008), February 16, 1979, R11.

24. Zabih, 116.

25. "Propaganda Committee Issues Statement," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1630 GMT, 16 Feb 79 (LD161905), February 21, 1979, R2.

26. "Imperial, Javidan Guard Dissolved," *Tehran Domestic Service*, in Persian, *FBIS*, 1022 GMT, 17 Feb 79 (LD171203), February 21, 1979, R5.

27. "Air Force Officers Retired," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1230 GMT, 17 Feb 79 (LD171348), February 21, 1979, R6.

28. "Two Mashhad Officers Arrested," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1530 GMT, 17 Feb 79 (LD171749), February 21, 1979 R7.

29. "New Air Force Commander," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1930 GMT, 17 Feb 79 (LD172101), February 21, 1979, R8.

30. "Azhari, Other Officers Retired," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1030 GMT, 18 Feb 79 (LD181131), February 21, 1979, R10 and "Seven More Generals Retired," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1630 GMT, 18 Feb 79 (LD181830), February 21, 1979, R11.

31. "More Top Officials Arrested in Iran," *New York Times*, February 19, 1979, 6.

32. "Iran Reports 4 More Officers Dead, Executed by Order of Islamic Court," *New York Times*, February 20, 1979, 1.

33. "Additional Officers Retired," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1030 GMT, 19 Feb 79 (LD191122), February 21, 1979, R18.

34. "Arrests of Orumiye Military," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1630 GMT, 19 Feb

79 (LD191940), February 21, 1979, R18.

35. Ibrahim, "Army Is Paralyzed by Dissent," *New York Times*, February 20, 1979, 1.

36. Ibid.

37. "Officers Pensioned Off," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 0815 GMT, 20 Feb 79 (LD201052), February 21, 1979, R6.

38. Ibrahim, "Iranian Premier's Office Expresses Surprise Over 4 Latest Executions," *New York Times*, February 21, 1979, 1.

39. Ibid, 3.

40. "Qarani on Army's Disintegration," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1030 GMT, 20 Feb 79 (LD201220), February 21, 1979, R22.

41. "16 Generals, Brigadiers Retired," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 0701 GMT, 21 Feb 79 (LD211123), February 21, 1979, R31.

42. "More Officers Arrested," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1830 GMT, 21 Feb 79 (LD211952), February 22, 1979, R3.

43. "Army Appointments," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1630 GMT, 21 Feb 79 (LD212110), February 22, R3, and "Armor Center Commander Appointed," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 1630 GMT, 21 Feb 79 (LD212111), February 22, 1979, R4.

44. "More Army Generals Retired," *Tehran Domestic Service* in Persian, *FBIS*, 2030 GMT, 24 Feb 79 (LD242150), February 26, 1979, R13.

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## Institute for National Strategic Studies

McNair Paper Number 48 Chapter 5, January 1996

### 5.

#### IDEOLOGICAL PURGE

Defense Minister Dr. Mustafa Chamran spoke to the press on October 1, 1979, regarding the roles of the army and the rationale behind a new wave of "ideological purges." He claimed the purges were necessary to change the existing system in the Army which was "an order created and tailored by the satanic regime." To remedy this existing system, he emphasized that "present revolutionary conditions warrant a change in this order so that the army may be brought into line with revolutionary requirements." He also stated that he had initially thought the army could be dismantled in favor of the Revolutionary Guards, but that the internal, ethnic unrest, which he described as "ominous plots hatched by the colonialists" to the extent that "we will never be able to survive without a strong army," made the armed forces a necessity. [\(Note 1\)](#) He coded his comments by stating that although "any request to abolish the army is senseless," that the army needed to conform to "our Islamic standards as well as our revolution's rules." Stating that the purge would be both Islamic and revolutionary, Chamran claimed, "The purge will take place at the very top. At later stages it will embrace lower levels." [\(Note 2\)](#)

The purge of which Chamran spoke was an "Islamicizing," ideological one that "resulted in the discharge of some 12,000 military personnel, the majority of whom were officers, by the time of the Iraqi invasion a year later." [\(Note 3\)](#) This Islamic indoctrination (Islamization) was sanctioned in Article 144 of the Iranian constitution. [\(Note 4\)](#)

In the wake of Chamran's comments, military leaders became concerned not only with their own future, but with that of the military, which had already suffered one

comprehensive purge of its senior ranks immediately after the revolution, when nearly every general was either dismissed, executed, or forced to flee:

Apart from the general dissatisfaction . . . many officers found their orders were being ignored. Islamic committees set up by the men to ensure that the military was run in a "revolutionary" fashion, began to quibble over commands. [\(Note 5\)](#)

Recent exercises and successful actions to quell the rebellion in Kurdistan had boosted morale and restored confidence in the military command structure. The Kurdistan military response not only proved the necessity of the army, it also outlined the inability of the Revolutionary Guards to respond at that time to a "large-scale rebellion." During the Kurdistan campaign, the differences in military proficiency between the army and the Revolutionary Guards were further accentuated when the Revolutionary Guards, ignoring army advice to remain in their barracks, ventured into Kurdish territory. They were promptly ambushed by Kurdish rebels, who annihilated them. At this early stage



of their existence, the army's experience and military expertise were recognized as superior to those of the Revolutionary Guards, "whose skills as a fighting force are by no means as advanced as their enthusiasm for Ayatollah Khomeini." [\(Note 6\)](#)

In October, the Iranian Council of Experts approved a constitutional clause granting Khomeini absolute control over the military forces. As the head of the armed forces, he was vested with a wide range of authority over military affairs, although he was required to at least engage in nominal consultation with a military council. [\(Note 7\)](#) The intent of this legal maneuvering was to establish undisputed clerical dominion over the military forces, which included supervision of the officer corps, restrictions on cross-communications between officers and monitoring the activities of senior officers (not unlike the Shah). In his role as supreme religious leader and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, Khomeini had the power to "appoint and dismiss the chief of the joint staff of the professional military; appoint and dismiss the commander in chief of the IRGC; supervise the activities of the Supreme Defense Council (SDC); appoint and dismiss the service commanders of the ground forces, the air force and the navy; declare war and mobilize the armed forces." [\(Note 8\)](#)

On November 4, 1979, pro-Khomeini students forcibly entered the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took the American personnel working there as hostages. While it gave Khomeini and his lieutenants a psychological rallying point, the ramifications of this action would later have a tremendous impact on the Iranian military, as one of the U.S. responses was the cessation of sales of military hardware and spare parts.

In November, the U.S. Defense Department issued a statement that the Iranian armed services were "no longer an effective military force." Citing the executions, purges, and desertions, the Defense Department stated that discipline had "virtually disappeared," quoting examples of soldiers refusing to obey orders, as well as a dissolution of the military logistics system, which impeded the flow of spare parts and supplies. Additionally, the breakdown in maintenance and repair capabilities caused by the logistics difficulties had in effect grounded the air force and kept the navy in port. [\(Note 9\)](#)

The purges continued on January 12, 1980, when four Army officers accused of firing on anti-Pahlavi demonstrators were executed by a firing squad in Tehran. [\(Note 10\)](#) On February 6, Lieutenant General Jamshid Fathi Moqaddam was sentenced to death. The former commanding officer of an army corps was charged with "trying to strengthen the former regime . . . opposing the Islamic Revolution . . . resisting God, His Prophet and the vicar of the hidden imam; and carrying out suppression in the army." [\(Note 11\)](#) On February 7, more monarchists left active duty as 145 officers were discharged from the military. They included 91 admirals, 14 colonels, and an assortment of junior officers, NCO's, and technicians. [\(Note 12\)](#) In the wake of these recent purges, President Bani-Sadr met with the military commanders on February 10 to discuss the reorganization of Iran's armed forces. After the meeting, General Shadmehr, Commander of the Combined Army Staff, stated:

The mission and duties of the army have been established by the constitution. Therefore a group of experts have been asked to reorganize the foundation of the army according to these duties established by the constitution. These experts, by organizing work teams and exchanging ideas, will provide for an organization which will be able to defend the borders of the country, up to the limit of a jihad. This organization will, however, require national assistance for defending the borders of the country. [\(Note 13\)](#)

On February 13, General Shadmehr spoke of a "Cleansing and Purging Bill" from the Revolutionary

Council. He stated that the army had been the first of the armed forces to implement this new bill and that the purge was nearly complete. Issuing a warning to any would-be dissidents, he cautioned that persons "who take any action in the future contrary to the path of the revolution will be handed over to a military revolutionary tribunal." Invoking repeatedly the cause of the revolution, he commented on those members of the military who:

are trying, through commotion and clamor, to voice certain things which are neither in line with the principles of Islam nor with the laws of the Armed Forces. Most important of all, they are not in line with the imam's commands and recommendations. . . . What distinguishes the present army from that which existed in the past is that no ideological issue could be voiced in the past . . . in the Islamic Republic Armed Forces, by contrast, political and ideological organizations were created after the victory of the revolution. They are responsible for organizing debates and discussions on various ideologies, providing freedom for everyone to voice their views, and generally enabling people to benefit from an exchange of ideas. All this, however, must take place during off-duty hours. We have, for example, Islamic associations whose job it is to hold off-duty debate and discussions with those who do not know much about Islam with a view to winning them over.[\(Note 14\)](#)

In July 1980, Iranian President Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr announced that the Revolutionary Guards had foiled an attempted military coup. He stated that the plotters had attempted to seize an air base in Hamadan Province in order to then later bomb Ayatollah Khomeini's home in Tehran, as well as other facilities.[\(Note 15\)](#) Seventeen army officers were arrested in Ahvaz and immediately placed on trial for their part in the plot. The officers were found to possess leaflets proclaiming the authority of the "National Military Council of Iran."[\(Note 16\)](#)

In the wake of the coup attempt, over 300 military personnel were arrested, including a number of air force pilots and two generals, one from the air force, the other from the gendarmerie. The generals confessed to having contacts with former Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar and described themselves as "nationalists" seeking the separation of politics from the clergy. The result of the attempted coup was a stronger sentiment for further purges of the military, especially a thorough one of the air force.[\(Note 17\)](#)

As an institution, the air force had been very loyal to the Shah because he had ensured that they had been afforded the most advanced technology available to them. Under the Khomeini government, the spare parts to keep the F-14 and F-4 fighter jets flying were in short supply. For this reason, the air force was less favorably inclined toward the rulers of the Islamic Republic than it had been toward the Pahlavis. President Bani-Sadr announced that in the trials of the coup plotters, the plotters would be dealt with "in a resolute manner," stating that "some will be executed." Bani-Sadr also admitted that "constant undermining of the morale of the armed forces, especially through purges," had contributed to the sense of dissatisfaction within the military and added an element of pressure to the lives of the professional military.[\(Note 18\)](#)

On July 20, four of the coup planners (including the air force general and two other pilots) were executed for "plotting."[\(Note 19\)](#) On July 24, 20 soldiers were executed by a firing squad in Tehran for their role in the attempted coup. Ayatollah Khomeini had personally ordered the death penalty for all persons connected with the plot, which, if successful, would have bombed his home.[\(Note 20\)](#) In the wake of these events, Bani-Sadr called for an end to the purges and a strengthening of the army, emerging as an advocate of potent military power.[\(Note 21\)](#) With an eye toward potential future conflicts, Bani-Sadr was also concerned about the concentration of Iraqi forces along the southwestern Iranian border and wanted to assure that an Iraqi invasion would not easily push into

Iran due to a weakened, purged military.[\(Note 22\)](#)

On September 8, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered an end to the arbitrary arrest and prosecution of military members by military courts. He further ordered that claims against military members should not be made public until the guilt of the soldier was proven. Khomeini's move was an attempt to improve the sagging morale of the armed forces in the wake of the recent arrests resulting from the coup plot.[\(Note 23\)](#)

## 5. Ideological Purgee

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## Institute for National Strategic Studies

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### 6.

#### THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

On September 22, 1980, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein ordered an invasion of Iran, which "put the entire issue of purging the armed forces in a new perspective," [\(Note 1\)](#) because the recent purges of the armed forces initially resulted in a fragmented opposition to the invaders. [\(Note 2\)](#)

The initial Iraqi successes in the war can be directly attributed to the fact that the Iranian military had just undergone an extensive purge that had brought it to the brink of collapse [\(Note 3\)](#) and that it was suffering the effects of a parts embargo from the United States. As Iran had purchased a great deal of American weaponry during the Shah's reign, it found itself either without the necessary parts it needed or frantically cannibalizing parts from other weapons systems. As these were two situations that had not been anticipated in a military unaccustomed to independent thought, preparation or planning, the results were disastrous for Iran at the beginning of the conflict.

In the early stages of the Iran-Iraq War, the Iranian Army was relegated to a secondary role in favor of the Revolutionary Guards. While the IRGC had great zeal, they lacked the professionalism and ability of the U.S.-trained imperial armed forces. [\(Note 4\)](#)

The military was also beset by command and control problems because of the rapid rise of junior officers as a result of the purges of monarchist or ideologically unreliable senior officers. These junior officers were ideologically acceptable to the regime but had little experience, which further undermined the military's efforts in the early stages of the war. [\(Note 5\)](#) The war did, however, serve as a unifying factor as the military leadership mobilized to support the government

and some officers detained under the purges were brought back into service. [\(Note 6\)](#)

In an attempt to rectify command and control deficiencies, Iran's Higher Defense Council established a unified command in October under which all forces, to include the military as well as the Revolutionary Guards, would fall. The Iranian Government hoped to promote discipline and an effective chain of command in order to coordinate effective military activities in the face of the Iraqi onslaught. [\(Note 7\)](#)

Although friction existed between the professional military leadership and the Revolutionary Guards (who were backed by the mullahs) over how to wage the campaigns of the war, Saddam Hussein's invasion served to place the military squarely in the corner of the Islamic Republic as the war became a fight for national survival. With the passage of time, the armed forces exhibited their valor in defending Iran, proving that their loyalty to the state overrode their animosities toward the Pasdaran, [\(Note 8\)](#) who were forced to rely on the professional soldiers for their military

expertise.[\(Note 9\)](#)

Differences of approach regarding the war, and specifically on how it should be conducted militarily, persisted throughout the conflict. There were instances when it appeared that the military's skills and the Pasdaran's fervour might be combined and made complementary, but these moments were fleeting. Suspicions, resentments, political differences and uncertainty clouded relations throughout. These reflected the larger issue--that of the relationship between the Islamic Republic and its military forces.[\(Note 10\)](#)

An unfortunate result of the war was the tendency by Iran to use "human wave" assaults which were reminiscent of those used by the People's Republic of China in the Korean conflict. Although these assaults were deemed necessary by the mullahs to compensate for the lack of spare parts and ammunition, they were devoid of any military planning and needlessly sacrificed thousands of lives. As the "human wave" attacks continued, the Revolutionary Guards attained a pre-eminent position, pushing aside the regular military into a secondary role. The military's effectiveness was further undermined by the country's pariah status, which made spare parts acquisitions extremely difficult. This in turn rendered many combat systems inoperable.

Another innovation was the creation of the Supreme Defense Council (SDC), which assigned political commissars "to all military echelons down to the division level."[\(Note 11\)](#) The SDC was also assisted by a Political-Ideological Directorate (PID), which worked with the soldiers directly to provide indoctrination, counter dissent, spread propaganda, and oversee security and intelligence activities among the soldiers. An Ershad (Guidance) Organization guided by clerics also served to identify potential political or religious dissidents.[\(Note 12\)](#) Through implementation of these and other measures, the mullahs consolidated their hold over the military, bringing it further in line with that which was "acceptable" within the IRI.

## 6. The Iran-Iraq War

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## Institute for National Strategic Studies

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### 7.

#### CONCLUSION

In retrospect, the very existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran belies Skocpol's contention that the military must disintegrate because of outside pressures for the revolution to succeed. In spite of the fact that the Pahlavis had the most powerful, well-equipped and well-trained military machine in the region, it was unable to prevent their fall from power.

On the one hand, the Khomeini regime neutralized the military socially and politically from within, thereby partially negating its effectiveness. On the other, the military's hierarchy was structured in such a manner that it was emasculated without the Shah to direct it. The Shah's insistence that the military chiefs deal directly with him, coupled with the prohibition that they have any contact amongst themselves, prevented effective joint coordination to engage in contingency planning to counter the revolution and undermined the military's already feeble command and control structure at a time when cross-communications were a vital necessity.

The preceding analysis leads to the conclusion that the Khomeini regime came to power not only in spite of the armed forces, but because of them as well, in contrast to Skocpol's theory. The Khomeini regime identified the incorporation of the armed forces into its power structure as the crucial element to successful power consolidation and took active measures before and after the revolution to accomplish this. Its appeals to the armed forces to desert the monarchy (who were the backbone of the Shah's power) during the last days of the Pahlavi regime and join with the Imam's forces had an impact on the collective military psyche during the turbulent transition from monarchy to Islamic Republic.

Having incorporated the armed forces unto itself, the Khomeini regime left the infrastructure of the military intact.

It then embarked upon a purge of the monarchists from the upper ranks, replacing them with "ideologically pure" officers. The IRI also employed constitutional measures to ensure that the military would legally and unequivocally fall under its control.

The Khomeini regime demonized its enemies (perceived and real) throughout its power consolidation process, labelling those with whom it was displeased as "enemies of God" and "corruption on earth," which carried a strong jurisprudential seal of disapproval under the laws of the nascent IRI. Throughout this demonization process, the IRI used its own unique theological and jurisprudential justifications to engage in power consolidation by purging those it deemed to be "impure."

In the end, the Iran-Iraq War served as the catalyst that gave the Iranian Armed Forces a sense of

cohesion and identity and put them on course toward becoming an effective fighting force capable of defending Iran from external threat.[\(Note 1\)](#) Under the Islamic Republic, the military command and control structure was realigned and subsequently used with fluctuating effectiveness in the war with Iraq. Although there was a great deal of mutual suspicion between the professional military and the Revolutionary Guards during the initial stages of the war, the exigencies of combat produced a grudging, mutual respect born out of the shared experience of defending the country from foreign aggression.[\(Note 2\)](#)

In spite of its defense of Iran from external aggression, the military was (and still is) viewed with distrust by the IRI Government. This distrust could be found during the "Reign of Terror," when the government used the Pasdaran instead of the armed forces to suppress the Mujaheddin-e Khalq.[\(Note 3\)](#) Even after the Islamic Republic had consolidated its hold over the military, dissident elements were to be found among the ranks. In connection with an August 1982 plot to overthrow the government masterminded by former Foreign Minister Sadeq Qotbzadeh, 70 military officers were executed.[\(Note 4\)](#) After the termination of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the military, seen as the saviors of the nation, enjoyed increased popularity.[\(Note 5\)](#)

The death of Ayatollah Khomeini on June 3, 1989, marked the passing of an era for Iran. The defeat of Saddam Hussein at the hands of the U.S.-led coalition and the breakup of the Soviet empire also altered the context of Iran's views of itself and the rest of the world.[\(Note 6\)](#)

There has been a great deal of discussion regarding future use of the military vis-a-vis the IRGC, although Iran's social, political, and economic problems far outweigh any civil-military affairs issues. While the military is still an integral part of the IRI's power structure, it is held at arm's length while more responsibility has been transferred to the IRGC. However, the military has slowly and steadily been built up both in manpower and equipment since the end of the war.[\(Note 7\)](#)

Today the military is part of the government structure and will be the primary tool to withstand any external or internal threats that may confront the IRI, although its primary task remains the defense of the country from external attack.

The regime has counted on the military to attain and maintain its power (as Skocpol's theory suggests) and the Iranian Constitution will ensure the military's subservience to the IRI for the foreseeable future. The IRI has engaged in a military buildup that concerns the United States and its allies in the region. Purchases and planned purchases of state-of-the-art weaponry also raise questions about the intended use of such weapons. The reason could be the simple truth that the leaders of the Islamic Republic have recognized from the onset of the revolution: a strong military under the control of Tehran is essential for the maintenance and exercise of power.

## 7. Conclusion

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