

# Violence and Extermination against the Islamic Revolution of Iran

8

*Bahram Navazeni*

## **Introduction**

Violence within society has different indicators, one of which is the use of force by government. Government use of force, if not much more widely reported than generalized statistics on individual violence, is not much less amenable to suppression. It does present its own particular problems inside and outside in the international arena. Extermination is also a violence that can be used by the government to destruct an ethnic, racial or religious group. According to the UN General Assembly resolution of 11th December 1946 the destruction in whole or in part of a national ethnic, racial or religious group is a crime under International Law and the convention of the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, adopted by the General Assembly which came into effect on 12th January 1951. The Convention listed genocide as:

- (1) killing of the members of a community or a group because of their affiliations;
- (2) causing bodily or mental harm to the members of a community or a group;
- (3) deliberately inflicting conditions on the community or the group to bring about its physical destruction;
- (4) imposing measures to prevent births in the community or the group;
- (5) forcibly transferring children from one group to another.

The significance of the use of force by government is the evidence it presents about the role of violence in the official culture of the rulers of the society to maintain their own position

and to this end they collaborate with the global and regional status quo powers and these powers may intervene in six levels of diplomatic, clandestine political action, demonstrations of force, subversion, military intervention with its own forces to support or oppose the rulers, as Peter Calvert (1996: 130-42) puts.

Theda Skocpol (1979: 154, 280) has also concluded that not only in great societies but in "small dependent countries" like Cuba, the course and outcomes of the revolutions "are powerfully conditioned not just by the requisites of military deterrence and assertion against actual and potential foreign invaders but also by direct economic and military aid from abroad" and "such revolutionized regimes simply become 'clients' of great powers" (*Ibid.*, 289). "The external support", to Thomas Greene (1990: 129) is an "obvious" fact and "determining factor" that frequently plays in the success or failure of revolutionary movements, whether on the left or right, whether in the twentieth century or in earlier periods of anti colonialism and modernization. Citing Ted Gurr's study of 114 countries for the brief time span of 1961 to 1965, Greene explains that in 30 out of 54 'internal wars', rebels took advantage of the external support provided by 'foreign states' (1970: 270-71). The changes in the map of Asia, Europe and America after each major war and the intensifying struggle between the Western and Eastern Bloc over the third world revolutions during the cold war, illustrates the point.

On the other end of the case were the dissident individuals and groups and revolutionary movement that despite the strong believe in Islam as a religion of "peace" and "submission" to Almighty God, had no choice but to seek their identity in the deployment of violence against the holders or symbols of not only the government but also its international supporters regarded as being repressive. This was the case in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran too.

This paper explores the causes of this long lasting violence against the government and its supporting foreign status quo powers and shows how the US government as the leading status quo power implemented a variety of interventional measures either to repress the revolutionaries in Iran or to disturb and

collapse the Iranian post-revolutionary order thus engaged the Islamic Republic of Iran in an upward spiral of hostility and drove it to an unwanted offensive position of export of the revolution both to the Muslim regions and to the oppressed and colonized ones throughout the world and insisted on extermination of the occupying Israel too.

### Extermination

It is hard to pin-point the start of the pre-Revolutionary Iranian government use of force as the numbers of instances are many. Beside odd politicians like Seyed Hassan Taqizade who believed that to move fast toward modernization, Iranians should be replaced wholly by Europeans, the major use of force may be referred to as the Anglo-American sponsored military coup that overthrew the national government of Mohammad Mosaddeq on 19th August 1953 and caused the Shah who had fled the country on 16th August return on 22nd August and reinstated the monarchy (Abrahamian, 1993: 111-31; Ashraf, 1997: 58-88; Pipes, 1996: 75-86; Hone and Dickinson, 1910: 88; Great Britain, 1936: 841; Kazemzadeh, 1968: 639; Ullman, 1972: 388; Wilber, 2000). The coup was in the line of the US containment of the International Communism sponsored by the Soviet Union and with the pretext of supporting the Shah's government against the Communism, paved the way for further US interventionist activities in Iran. The new military government was granted on 5th September 1953, \$45 million by the US for immediate assistance, encouraging Iran to settle the Anglo-Iranian dispute as soon as possible.

This exterminating policy still continued to the time of John F. Kennedy's presidency on the same pretext of confronting with the communist propagandas in Iran. This time the US government pressed hard on the Iranian government to make some secularist and anti-clerical socioeconomic reforms. These reforms were first involved in the 8th October 1962 law abolishing the requirement that candidates for election to local assemblies be Muslim and the oath to be upon Quran. This was regarded as the first government attack against the Islamic rules and thus was the first cause for the opposition and its major clerical figure, Ayatollah Khomeini.

Despite other clerics who felt that the clergy should avoid “the dirty business” of politics and should concentrate on spiritual concerns, such as preaching the word of God, studying within the seminaries and training the future generation of theologians, (Rajabi, 1991: I, 250-60; Abrahamian: 473-75) Khomeini insisted that in Islam legislation is a divine affair and called for the government to be closely guided by the Holy Shari’at. Ayatollah Khomeini insisted that legislation would be valid only if passed by the Majlis [parliament] and approved by the Ruhaniyat [clergies] according to the Constitution. Article 2 of the Supplementary Constitutional Law of 1907 required at least five Mojtaheh-i Taraz-i Avval (learned theologians) to be constantly present in the Majlis to “discuss and deliberate the Bills proposed in both Houses, and reject those that contravene the holy principles of Islam, so that they shall not become law”. In 1962 he argued such:

We speak to the régime in its own accepted terms, not that the Constitution is, in our view perfect. Rather, if the ulama [clergies] speak in terms of the Constitution, it is because Article 2 of the Supplementary Constitutional Law does not recognize any legislation opposed to the Quran as law otherwise than what it is to us. The only accepted law to us is the law of Islam...the Traditions of the Prophet and the Imams. Whatever is in accord with the law of Islam we obey and whatever is opposed to Islam, even if it is the Constitution, we oppose. (Howzeh: I, 95)

Due to the popular pressure caused by this speech, the Shah though officially repealed the law, did not refrain from his next attack to exterminate the clerical institutions itself in 1963, when he began to promulgate a series of measures for reshaping the political, social, and economic life of Iran that were collectively designated the “White Revolution”. This time the Shah himself traveled to Qom and delivered a speech calling the clergy “black reactionaries” worse than the “red reactionaries” and a “hundred times more treacherous than the (Communist) Tudeh party” (Rajabi: 264) and two days later he put the reforms into a referendum, held on 26th January 1963 to obtain the appearance

of a popular approval in which 5.6 million against 4,150 people voted for the reformation (*Ittela’at* and *Kayhan*, 27th January 1963).

### Violence

The referendum was a good pretext for the government to take a tougher practical action against the clergy who were estimated at 350,000, in a report prepared by the security police (SAVAK) in 1963 (Fardust, 1991: 517). On 22nd March 1963 paratroopers attacked Feyziyeh Madrasa and killed some theology students and ransacked the Madrasa. This event marked the beginning of a new period of determined struggle that was directed not only against the errors and excesses of the government but against its very existence. From this time and in the wake of a system of justice that catered to the demands of individuals, some individual and small opposition groups such as People’s Militants, People’s Devotees, Islamic Allied Commissions and Islamic Nations Party chose militant confrontations and did some political assassinations against both the government officials and the US military personnel in Iran.

### Foreign Intervention and Expansion

This, however, did not aggregate sufficiently to become a threat. The more threats to the government came from the revolutionary mass when a great many people were attracted to revolutionary causes and what makes them uncontrollable was the presence of an external threat. Perception of an alien threat triggered the mass mobilization of hostility because the alleged aggressor represented all that people regarded as being worst in their society. Calvert (86) maintains that “because the aggressor is outside their society, there are no taboos preventing people from venting their rage”.

This external threat was not only for the religious establishment in Iran but for the whole Islamic one as well. The creation of Israel in 1948 and its territorial expansions through wars involving Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon and occupation of their lands that have been at the heart of Middle Eastern conflicts for the past half century might not be realized except with the interventionist policies of the Anglo American status

quo powers. The British provided its pre-World War II mandate in Palestine to the Zionist movement to create a homeland for the Jews scattered all over the world and together with the USA pressed for the international recognition of a Jewish state and did not hesitate any support it might need. Since then millions of Palestinians were displaced, thousands massacred and many jailed.

Therefore, the Iranian government was hated not just because it was secular, tyrannical and exterminating, but because it was seen as American and Israeli sympathizer too. Throughout the spring of 1963, Ayatollah Khomeini concentrated his speeches on the tyrannical nature of the Shah's government as well as its subordination to the United States, and its expanding collaboration with Israel (Fardust: 364-71). He referred to Iran and Islam and the threat to them from Western colonialism as such:

All the problems facing Iran and other Muslim nations are the work of America. Until recently, the British enslaved the Muslim nations; now they are under American bondage.... The Americans appoint Majlis Representatives; and attempt to eliminate Islam and the Quran because they find the ulama to be a hindrance to colonialism. (Howzeh: 95)

The government's repression reached to its peak when Ayatollah Khomeini denounced the government in a speech in Qom on 2nd June 1963, the tenth day of the month Muharram,<sup>1</sup> and warned the Shah not to behave in such a way that the people would rejoice when he would ultimately be forced to leave the country. The government reacted brutally and not only arrested and took him to confinement in Tehran but ordered the army to shoot to kill the unarmed protestors in Tehran, Qom, Shiraz, Mashhad, Isfahan, Kashan and other cities, demonstrating against the government thus slaughtered between 4 to 15 thousand people (according to different sources<sup>2</sup>) in a few days.

The date of this brutal suppression, 15 Khordad according to the solar calendar used in Iran, marked a turning point in the modern history of Iran. It established Ayatollah Khomeini as

national leader and spokesman for popular aspirations, provided the struggle against the Shah and his foreign patrons with a coherent ideological basis in Islam (Fardust: 583) and introduced a period of mass political activity under the guidance of religious leadership instead of the secular parties that had been discredited with the overthrow of Musaddeq. To Hamid Algar (1981: 17) the seriousness of this "foreshadowed the Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979".

Further proof of the government's tutelage to the USA came in October 1964, when judicial immunity (Capitulation) was granted by Law to American personnel for all offences committed in Iranian territory. Ayatollah Khomeini's opposition to this "open violation of Iranian sovereignty and independence" was reacted by the exile into Turkey and then Iraq, in the hope of destroying his influence. Now the government could easily continue its exterminating policies against the clerical institutions. In 1967, the Majlis disregarding the Shari'at, passed the Family Protection Law. This action by a constitutional government was an unforgivable contradiction of the Islamic law which the government was supposed to put into action and which the Shah had taken an oath to support. The Family Protection Law became associated with an increasingly unpopular government and with Western-style mores disliked by religious people.

Further attacks by the Rastakhiz (resurrection) party, the single government party, involved measures regarded by the Ruhaniyat and the opposition as nationalizing the religion and caused more reactions. The party claimed the Shah to be a spiritual as well as a political leader; denounced the Ruhaniyat as "medieval black reactionaries"; replaced the Muslim calendar with a new royalist calendar; discouraged women from wearing the chador on university campuses; sent special investigators to scrutinize the accounts of the religious endowments; announced that only the state-controlled Sazeman-i Uqaf (Organization of Endowment), could publish theology books; encouraged the College of Theology in Tehran University to expand the recently created Sepah-i din (religious corps), and sent more cadres into the countryside to teach peasants "true Islam". To Ayatollah Khomeini, as argued from his exile in Iraq, the party intended,

among others, to destroy Islam and plunder the country on behalf of American imperialism (Mujahed, 1975). A few days after this proclamation, the government arrested and imprisoned Khomeini's close associates in Iran, including many clerics who were to play prominent roles after the Islamic revolution.

In early 1975, the London-based Amnesty International found that Iran was one of the world's "worst violators of human rights" (Annual Report: 1-72). The International Commission of Jurists in Geneva took the government to task for "systematically using torture" and "violating the basic civil rights of its citizens". Likewise, the UN-affiliated International League for Human Rights sent an open letter to the Shah in which it accused the government of intensely abusing human rights and called upon him to "rectify the deplorable human rights situation in Iran". Even influential newspaper such as the *Sunday Times* of London that had previously praised the Shah ran a series of exposés on SAVAK and concluded in 19th January 1975 that "there was a clear pattern" of torture used not only against active dissidents but also against intellectuals who dared "whisper criticisms of the régime." Without the US interventionist policy, the Iranian government could never found in 1957 its security police responsible for everyday repression and extermination.

Even fewer than 10 American technical advisers in 1952 increased to the unprecedented number of nearly 50,000 by the end of 1977 clearly indicates this increasing US interventionist policy that became integral parts of the Iranian political process after the coup of 1953. The US responsibility for the daily massacres in Iran was not vague anymore as Dutch Huyser, the Deputy Director of NATO was sent to Tehran on an unofficial visit in January 1979 to foment another military coup (Fardust, I, 601; Sullivan, 1981: 227-47). Sullivan, (246) the last US ambassador to Tehran recalls Brzezinski's total absurdity on "the possibility of a *coup d'état* by the Iranian armed forces" to suppress the revolutionaries that provoked him to "a scurrilous suggestion for Brzezinski...to translate it into Polish and hung up the receiver".

### Conclusion

Application of these findings to current circumstances may suggest that the widely held view that revolutions can be propagated unchanged across national boundaries is not only likely to be wrong, but is almost certainly the exact converse of the truth; and that the only thing that could make it possible would be the nationalistic response generated by the attempt by an external power to exterminate revolutionary feeling by coup or even all other sorts of cultural, economic and diplomatic interventions. These have critical influence in creating a backlash of hostility by the revolutionaries. The government before the Islamic Revolution used a systematic violence against all even peaceful opposition including the dissident individuals, political groups and the mass meetings and marches too. These harsh and violent government reactions to the unarmed opposition made the revolutionary leaders project their hostility to its foreign patrons; the US and Israeli government after the collapse of the government and executed some of the ex-officials after the victory as murderer or foreign spies.

### NOTES

1. The month in the Islamic calendar when the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, is commemorated and aspirations to emulate his example, by struggling against contemporary manifestations of tyranny, are awakened.
2. Cited in Madani J., *Tarikh-i Mo'aser Iran*, [The History of Contemporary Iran], Tehran, Islamic Culture Press, 1982, vol. 1, 47; According to H. Katouzian, "the official estimates put the number of casualties below ninety (!) as against unofficial estimates of 5,000 to 6,000. For the country as a whole, the figure must have been at least a couple of thousand". See Katouzian H., *The Political Economy of Modern Iran; Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, New York: New York University Press, 1981, 228.

### REFERENCES

- Abrahamian, Ervand. 1993. "The Paranoid Style in Iranian Politics," In *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, Berkely: University of California.
- Algar, Hamid. 1981. Khomeini R., *Islam and Revolution*, (trans.), London: KPI.

- Amnesty International. 1975. *Annual Report for 1974-75*, London, International Commission of Jurists, *Human Rights and the Legal System in Iran*.
- Ashraf, Ahmad. 1997. "The Appeal of Conspiracy Theories to Persians", 58-88 in William Harris et al., *Challenges to Democracy in the Middle East*, Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers.
- Calvert, Peter. 1996. *Revolution and International Politics*. London: Pinter.
- Fardust, H. 1991. *Zhohur va Soqut-i Saltanat-i Pahlavi [The Rise and Fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty]*, Tehran, Institute of Cultural Research and Studies, Vol. 1.
- Great Britain. 1936. *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, ed. G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley. Vol. 10, pt. 1, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Greene, Thomas. 1990. *Comparative Revolutionary Movements: Search for Theory and Justice*. Englewood: Prentice Hall.
- Gurr Ted. 1970. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hone, J.M. and Page L. Dickinson. 1910. *Persia in Revolution*. London: T. Fisher Unwin.
- Howzeh-yi 'Ilmiyeh, *Zendeginameh-yi Imam Khomeini*. Vol. 1. *Ittela'at* and *Kayhan*. 1963, 27 January.
- Katouzian, H. 1981. *The Political Economy of Modern Iran; Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*. New York: New York University Press.
- Kazemzadeh, Firuz. 1968. *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
- Madani, J. 1982. *Tarikh-i Mo'aser Iran. [The History of Contemporary Iran]*, Tehran: Islamic Culture Press. Vol. 1.
- Pipes, Daniel. 1996. *The Hidden Hand: Middle East Fears of Conspiracy*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rajabi, M.H. 1991. *Zendeginame-yi Siyasi-yi Imam Khomeini; Az Aghaz ta Tab'id [Political Life of Imam Khomeini]*, Tehran: The National Library. Vol. 1.
- Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions: A comparative analysis of France, Russia and China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sullivan, William H. 1981. *Mission to Iran*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- The Sunday Times*, 1975, 19 January.

- Ullman, Richard H. 1972. *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1920*, Vol. 3. The Anglo Soviet Accord. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Wilber, Donald N. 2000. *Clandestine Service History: Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952-August 1953*. Langley, Virginia, Central Intelligence Agency, CS Historical paper, no. 208. Published on the *New York Times*, website, <http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/mideast/iran-cia-intro.pdf>, June 16.