CHAPTER V

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The United States of America appears to have been one of the key factors of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. With the exception of style of foreign policy functioning, the "Yankee imperialism" does not materially differ from the traditional imperialism. The American interests and clandestine activities in Iran reached to the point of mischief. The criminal indifference and insensitiveness of the Americans on the fact of the Shah's increasing list of crimes of wanton destruction of human life and property of the Iranian people is really a blow to the human conscience. They were observed with their own vested interests and did not care for the melting lava against them and the Shah. It is a disaster of the American foreign policy the American stranglehold over the Iranians was such that at a time fine US intelligence agencies - the Defence Intelligence Agency, the Military Assistance Advisory Group of the Defence Development, the Intelligence and Research Bureau of the State Department, the C.I.A., and the National Security Agency were monitoring Iran.
If the revolutionaries had not been led by someone as astute and steadfast as Ayatollah Khomenei, they would most likely have failed to overthrow the Pahlavi dynasty. It is still hard to believe that the region is the most powerful monarchy, backed by a loyal military force of over 400,000, was dethroned by a movement of ordinary, unarmed citizens.¹ The Islamic Revolution of Iran could be placed in a category in itself. Describing the distinctive features of the revolution Dilip Hiro has aptly observed:

The Iranian revolution stands apart from similar upheavals in the Middle East. During the period of 1952–62, the monarchs of Egypt, Iraq and North Yemen were overthrown by a group of military officers, and republics established. These coups were welcomed by the people, and they set the scene for widespread political and economic reforms. In Iran, however, the involvement of millions of people in the process of toppling the Pahlavi regime made a qualitative difference.²

The single most important contributing factor for
revolution was the decades of oppressive dictatorship of the Shah supported by the superpower - America. America had destroyed the nationalist government of Dr. Mossadeq in 1953 and imposed Mohammed Reza Pahlavi on the Iranian people and made them suffer his autocratic rule for a quarter of a century. American close ties with Mohammed Reza Shah developed during the Second World war went on progressing and in the course of time they developed vested interest in strengthening, protecting and preserving the institution of monarchy in Iran. The main concern of the Americans and the Shah was to prevent any democratic and nationalist movements and forces not only in Iran lent elsewhere in the region. In the process, they suppressed democratic, economic, cultural and religious aspirations and institutions in the country. Besides the ideological consideration, they exploited the key resources and markets for dumping military and non-military goods. The West's lifeline depends on this region's oil. It was the covering of interests that brought the Americans and Mohammed Reza Shah together against the Iranian people. Ashok Mitra has rightly pointed out the conditions of the Iranian masses:
The Shah and his megalomania were on the rampage. The Iranians had their fill of the state terrorism. The western governments supplied the Shah with easy money and unending sales of arms as a means of getting back the money he took as royalty from the oil companies. A deal was, however, a deal; a Nelson's eye was turned on butchery that Shah directed against his own people.  

The oil revenues brought into existence a new economy and a new style of living among the elites of the country which benefited mainly the foreign investors. The revolutionary leaders made foreign policy of Iran especially towards the U.S.A. a major concern and mounted pressure against the extensive militarization of the State which brought a large number of Americans in Iran causing social upheavals. The revolutionaries denounced the Shah's despotic rule and accused him of subservience towards the US. Iran's defacts alliance with Israel also became a matter of grave concern because of its clandestive activities in Iran and repressive nature towards the Muslim Arabs. Secularization of the country hurt the religious sentiments of the people. The western
concepts such as democracy, nationalism, secularism, and socialism, and the like sounded hollow to the Islamic revolutionary leaders. The Islamic Revolution, in short, is the expression of the Iranian identity.

While pointing out that the Pahlavi regime had created "the silence of the grave in Iran", Ashok Mitra has rightly said: "It is, however, human nature to rise in revolt when oppression crosses a certain threshold." 5

The result was the Islamic Revolution and the overthrow of the institution of monarchy. The revolution ousted Mohammad Reza Shah from Iran and with him ended an era of the American and their close ally Israeli rampage in Iran. The revolution was spearheaded by Ulema led by Imam Khomeini by millions of Iranian people. As Dr. (Mrs) Asopa has said of the ulema:

"The leading ulema are generally the men of great learning, integrity and popularity. Their hold over the masses is unparalleled. The millions of dollars pass through their hands as they receive the religious dues from the faithfuls and redistribute them among the poor and the needy. Thus, they
act as guardians of social justice in the society. They have always acted as a rallying point against the despotism and authoritarian rule of the monarchs."

The Shia sect traces its origin from Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed. In Iran, the descendants of Ali represent a chain of charismatic leaders (Imams). The Twelfth of them went into occultation in A.D. 940. The Shiite leaders known as mujtahids are representatives of this last Imam and great spiritual as well as economic and political power. Since 1501, when Shiism became the State religion of Iran, the Shah have ruled under the shadow of the mujtahids. The conflict between the secular Shah and religious clergy is inherent in the Iranian system.6

The revolution was deep and broadbased and led by the ulema and hence came to be known as Islamic Revolution. Dilip Hiro has observed:

The events of 1978-79 in Iran have proved to be unique in more ways than one. Together
they constituted a revolution and not a coup backed later by popular support. It was a phenomenon in which millions of people participated, and where the participants avoided violent confrontation with the armed forces. The revolutionary movement was led primarily by clerics, who followed the guidelines issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini, then living abroad. Khomeini used religious festivals and customs and carried it to its final victory.

If nothing else, the success of the revolution has underlined the importance of Iran as an Islamic state. This is a recreation of the past, in so far as Iran was for a long time an important actor in the history of Islam...

In a sense Iran represented the eastern branch of Islam, which originated in western Arabia in the seventh century. It was through Iran that Islam spread to the Indian subcontinent, where today there are more Muslims than anywhere else in the world.

Islam in Arabic, means state of submission; and the one who has submitted to the will of
Allah - the one and only God - is called Muslim. In Arabia, the faithful were United in their belief in Allah and his precepts, as conveyed through Mohammed (praiseworthy), his messenger.  

The role and position of ulema, as Dr(Mrs) Asopa has observed:

In Shia doctrine it is taken for granted that in the absence of Imam, the ruler is bound to falter in his rule and ulema as the rightful interpreters of Holy Law, should organize themselves in an independent organization so that they can check the 'illegal' or 'unjust' acts of the ruler. In Iran such organization is provided by mujtahids. Their job is to see that the faith is correctly observed and worship is properly conducted. Zakat and Khums are paid to them directly which they spend on the poor, widows and orphans. In addition to Zakat and Khums, the organizations of Mujtahids get financial support for religious endowments (awquaf). No state can take away Zakat and Khums from the ulema so long they
enjoy the respect and support of the people.\textsuperscript{8}

The system of government, if the revolution succeeded, that was in the offing, to quote Dilip Hiro again, who has observed:

Since the Iranians has suffered decades of oppressive dictatorship, they genuinely desired freedom of expression and association... It is obvious from Khomeini's writings that he draws his inspiration exclusively from Islam — with not the slightest reference to such western concepts as democracy, nationalism or socialism — that he takes a literalist view of Sharia, and he believes firmly indirect rule of the ulema. Khomeini has been consistent in his views, and he has had the reputation of being uncompromising. It is true that he did not issue a clear-cut political programme of his own during the revolutionary movement. But his writings provided a fair indication of what expect if the movement being led by him succeeded in overthrowing the Shah.\textsuperscript{9}

The success greeted the revolutionary movement and consequently the revolutionary regime and thereafter the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on the holy Quran and
Sunna covering individual, national and international life of the Iranians.

The Iranian history of revolutionary movement is long and hazardous but the movement gathered momentum during the summer of 1978 reaching its final goal of the Shah's ouster in February 1979. "On an ideological plane it had been a conflict between the State and Mosque. The conflict between them - personified by the Shah, the ruler, aided the abetted by the US and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini representing Mosque and also the aspirations of the mass of Iranians. In June 1963, the Shah and the Americans won and Khomeini and his people lost. Khomeini was deported and a reign of terror perpetrated on the people. The clash between them came fifteen years later, this time Khomeini and people won and the Shah and Americans lost.

As was expected of Imam Khomeini, after establishing himself firmly in power, gave first priority to the purification of the society at home. He believed that "if the Islamic law of retribution, blood-money and punishments is put into action even for a simple year, the
seeds of injustice, theft, unchastity will be eliminated from the country. Simultaneously, he took up the task of eliminating the western influence from the entire Muslim world by exporting the revolution to them. This revolutionary interpretation of Islam came as a threat to the status quo in various Muslim countries. The rulers of neighbouring Muslim states - especially the monarchies having pro-western orientation were put on the defensive. The Iranian revolutionaries maintained that they had nothing against the Muslims but they opposed the rulers who had kept the people under dogs - deprived of participation in power.

The United States of America in league with the Shah and the ruling circles relentlessly and uncompromisingly stood for a full-scale crush of the Islamic revolutionary anti-monarchical movement. It was a reflection of the United States of America's hostility against the democratic aspirations of the Iranian people. The Americans came out with various plans either to destroy or to crush the people's movement by reimposing the autocratic Shah
and preserving and protecting the institution of monarchy. President Carter’s National Security Adviser, Brzezinski, maintained his contact and backed the Shah consistently. To thwart the democratic movement by the democratic Americans, the US Ambassador to Iran William Sullivan proposed a plan for the Shah to follow. The plan advocated to form a government including the opposition especially the National Front leader and the US should get involved in the process and the Shah stepping down at some point in favour of his son. The Shah too sought American approval for a military government when he was thoroughly discredited by his own people. The US had already entrenched the Iranian military and exercised a lot of influence over it. But the American involvement in the making of government in Iran would have meant a direct interference in Iran’s internal affairs and it would have further exposed the US to the revolutionaries and to the world. The Iranian people had already stood firmly for the abolition of the institution of monarchy altogether from Iran. Imam Khomeini in his exile in Paris remained steadfast. If the Shah had already heard “the revolutionary message” of the people, the Imam retorted, he would abdicate
the offer himself for an Islamic trial. Warning that any body co-operating with the government would be considered a traitor to Islam, Imam Khomeini urged the faithful to continue strikes and demonstrations until the hated monarchy was overthrown. Brezsesinski maintained that Iran was so vital to US interests that the nature of the Shah’s regime was of secondary importance. He advised the Shah to crush the revolutionary movement. But the Shah felt that “the suppressed forces would blow up in the fact of his son, and the dynasty would in any event, be blasted away.” The US kept up its strong position till the last movement, and came out with yet another plan of appointing a pro-American and Pro-Shah Prime Minister before the departure of the Shah from Iran. The Shah on the face of mounting opposition and breakdown of administration, had already announced on January 1, 1979 that he would like to take vacation if the situation permitted. But the Shah was not prepared to leave the country unless he had secured certain vital guarantees from the US that he would retain command over the armed forces while being on the “vacation.” He
was the only co-ordinating link between different commanders. Most importantly, the Shah wanted to finalise plans with the US for a military coup before leaving Iran. The Shah left the country on January 16, 1979. From January 16, 1979 to February 12, 1979 the Iranian armed general tried twice to mount a coup but failed. In this, General Auyser, Commander of the US forces in Europe, who supervised the Military Assistance Advisory Group in the Middle East and who had arrived in Tehran especially for this task. He also conveyed the generals’ request that the US must not allow Imam Khomeini to return Iran.

With the failure of these plans, the US came out with yet another scheme to deny the people of the fruits of revolution. Now the US efforts were concentrated to appoint a pro-American, loyal and pro-Shah Prime Minister for a transitional government till the Shah got his foothold over the government. Shahpur Bakhtiar was suitable for the realization of the scheme of things and who would most probably command loyalty from the armed
forces of the country and most importantly if ordered them to crush the revolution. After choosing Shahpur Bakhtiar replacing General Anseri as Prime Minister, the US put all its efforts on securing for him the loyalty of the Iranian armed forces. The Carter administration then concentrated itself on the Bakhtiar government to scuttle Imam Khomeini's further move. He sent a message to the Imam that the US was backing Shahpur Bakhtiar, and since he had adopted the opposition's programme, President Carter hoped Imam Khomeini would call off the agitation and support Shahpur Bakhtiar. Otherwise, continued the message, the army would move to crush the revolution and mount a coup.

Imam Khomeini was shrewd enough to sense the danger. "Anseri's government was a military coup" the Imam retorted. "Bakhtiar government is no more than a facade for a military coup... If the army does intervene it will be under the control of the Americans, in which case we would consider ourselves at war with America." In Imam Khomeini's view America and the Shah were inextricably linked. "America is an accessory to the Shah" and has backed the massacre of our people by the Shah's ignoble
regime", he said in an interview in early January 1979. Immediately after his return to Tehran from exile on February 1, 1979, Imam Khomeini alerted his people about the repetition of the overthrow of the nationalist government of Dr. Mossadeq. "We will not let the United States bring back the Shah," the Imam said. "This is what the Shah wants. Wake up. Watch out." Given this, the US came into an open conflict with the revolutionary leaders. This happened on February 6, 1979, a day after Imam Khomeini appointed Mahdi Bazargan as the Prime Minister of the provisional government. The Carter administration reiterated that it supported the Bakhtiar government. The US move then was to secure the loyalty of the Iranian armed forces to Shahpur Bakhtiar. It was of Prime importance for the US that the Iranian armed forces remained together and loyal. The US now whatever influence it had in Iran it, was, now restricted to the armed forces. But in the first week of February 1979 it became clear that the army of the country was fast disintegrating. Then came the Doshan Japeh air force incident. There the fate of the trapped American air personnel became entangled in the internecine fighting with
the Iranian military. "Given the deep involvement of the US in the Iranian armed forces, something like this was bound to happen sooner or later."25 The American ambassador to Tehran received a message from Brzezinski who asked "whether I could arrange a military coup against the revolution."26 Clearly US was unwilling to accept the overthrow of the Shah. It would have given satisfaction and comfort to the Americans and America if the Iranian generals' had mounted a coup and succeeded. When the Iranian generals failed, Brzezinski made a further attempt to instigate a coup on behalf of the US to destroy the revolution.27 Imam Khomeini warned his people about the prospect of the Shah's restoration with the American help. Imam Khomeini was so astute and steadfast that he neutralized every US effort to stage the Shah's come back to Iran.

**The American Hostage Crisis:**

This study would be incomplete without the discussion of American hostage crisis. The clandestine activities of the United States of America in Iran
quickened the pace of the consolidation of revolution in Iran vis-à-vis it quickened the pace of the elimination of the American influence from the country. The Iranian militant students on November 4, 1949 seized the American embassy commonly known as "Spy Den" after a well thought out programme. General Nematouah Nasseri, the Chief of Savak (Secret Police) from 1965 to 1978 had been assesseed by the Agheri government under marshall law for illegal asserts and torture. General Nasseri confessed to the revolutionary student interrogators that Savak had an undercover agent, codenamed Hafiz, inside the US embassy in Tehran. The Revolutionary government contacted Hafiz and offered him immunity if he would continue the past activity. Since Hafiz was neither American nor Iranian he felt vulnerable. He co-operated with the revolutionary government. Before he was allowed to leave the country in September 1979, he passed on two cables exchanged between Cyrus Vance and William Sullivan and later Bruce Laigon. The documents stood that contrary to public statements, the US was actively considering to
admit the Shah into America and the US involvement
with the dissident officers in the military, Kurdish and
Azerbaijani leaders.\textsuperscript{28} Apprehensive of the US intention,
the Revolutionaries took over the American embassy with
a view of seizing all the documents. They not only
seized most of the documents in tact, but also "preserved
the shreds and later on painstakingly reconstructed."\textsuperscript{29}
These documents proved to be a wealth of information to
the Revolutionary leadership in the following months. It
used them to discredit and eliminate most of its opponents
and even some of its lukewarm supporters. Protesting
against "irresponsible intervention in governmental
affairs" by the militant students, Mahedi Bazargan resigned.
On November 4, 1979, the Imam accepted his resignation,
and ordered the Islamic Revolutionary Council to take over
the administration of the country. Imam Khomeini was so
shrewd that he had set up a parallel government - a
network in other ministries, in addition to other
para-military forces e.g., Islamic Revolutionary Guards
and the Islamic Revolutionary Council and the like.\textsuperscript{29}
The administration of the Shah in the United States of
America turned the Iranian people deeply against the Americans. The militant students declared that American diplomats would be released after the US had returned the Shah to Iran. Such an exchange was out of question, said the Carter administration. The result was that the crisis lasted 444 days. President Carter broke off diplomatic relations with Iran on April 7, 1980. Imam Khomeini called this a good omen worth celebrating, and declared next Friday, April 11, 1980 as the Unity Day.

The seizure of the American embassy is undoubtedly not in keeping with the international convention of respecting the diplomatic privileges and immunity. This act however, cannot be taken out of the overall context of American relations. The attempts by the Unity States to blackmail Iran by massing armed forces on her frontiers and dictate a line of conduct to her by force are a gross violation of the standards of international law.

The US confrontation with the Revolutionary government gave meaning and content to the slogan raised on the day the Shah left Iran. "After the Shah, the Yankee imperialism." The Iranian government in June 1980
held an International Conference on US Intervention in Iran. It was attended by 300 delegates from 57 countries and organizations. The American delegation was led by Ramsey Clark, former attorney general. Among the documents released at the Conference was the Brzezinski's secret memorandum of Vance which recommended "destabilization" of Khomeini's regime through Iran's neighbours. The immediate objective of the US after the revolution was to impose a "moderate" government in Iran. Yet another document was, a report sent by the US embassy in Tehran to the State Department on July 24, 1979 pertaining to an attack on Imam Khomeini's residence in Qom in early July "involving the use of a hand grenade."

The American hostage crisis united the Iranian nation. Imam Khomeini became more popular especially amongst the young that the Imam was as staunchly anti-imperialist as the other organisations like Fedai and the Mujahedin. Both these were radical groups in Iran. More importantly, the crisis, provided with a chance to educate the Iranian people politically and command popular support for the Islamic constitution. The Imam rejected
the offer of talks with a delegation being sent by the US. Consequently, the Carter administration stopped the shipments of $300 million worth of military spare parts that had been paid for during the Shah's regime. On November 11, 1979, Iranian papers published documents, released by the students occupying the US embassy, revealing US-British plots in Iran, Imam Khomeini described Carter as "an enemy of humanity." The next-day Carter banned the import of Iranian oil and on November 14, 1979 he froze the Iranian assets deposited in US banks estimated to be between $8,000 and $10,000 million. As American and British warships began joint naval exercises in the Arabian Sea, Iran closed its territorial waters and air-space to US ships and aircraft. On November 20, 1979, beginning Muharram, Imam Khomeini said that whereas in last Muharram the Iranian people had faced the Shah, a child of the Mother of corruption-America, today they faced the Mother herself. The following day as millions of Iranians marched against US imperialism, the militant students occupying the American embassy said that all hostages would be "destroyed" if the US was to use
military force against Iran. Imam Khomeini used the hostages to check the US taking any military action against Iran as also to rally voters for the referendum on the Constitution scheduled on December 1, 1979. "We are facing a stanzaic power today, and it wants to destroy our country", he said on November 28, 1979. "Don't let the foundation of the Islamic Republic be weakened or the enemies of Islam fulfill their dreams." Dilip Hiro has aptly observed:

This was an ignominious end to American hegemony in Iran which began on 19th August, 1953. On that occasion there was much jubilation in Washington. In the cold war climate of the period the coup was seen as a triumph over the Soviet Union. In the process a representative government, which faithfully reflected the nationalist aspirations of Iranian people for economic and political independence, was destroyed, and a monarchist dictatorship imposed. For the next quarter of a century the Pahlavi regime served the interests of the Western camp led by the US. The nexus between Tehran and Washington became important feature of
international affairs. It gave impetus to the rapid capitalist development in Iran. But, by failing to match this with commensurate channels for political participation by the people, the system stored up pent-up frustrations of revolutionary proportions. For all the bravado he should in the aftermath of the oil boom of the mid-1970s the Shah was dependent on the US for his military and political survival. His overthrow by Iranian revolutionaries was as much a defeat for the Pahlavis as it was for the US government. And it was stunning event.34

Imam Khomeini echoed a similar sentiment differently: "No other country was receiving the same benefits from Iran as much as was the United States."35

With the ouster of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi from Iran and with him ended an era of the American rampage in Iran. The Iranian revolution is a major event on the international scene in recent years. It is an outstanding contribution of Imam Khomeini to the history of revolutions in devising and implementing
an original set of strategy and tactics to neutralize the schemes of the United States of America, as superpower.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Dilip Hiro, I, n.1, p.94.

2. Ibid., p.357

3. See Chapter-II.


5. Ibid.


8. Dr. (Mrs) Sheel K. Asopa, I, n.3, p.134.


11. Dr. (Mrs) Sheel K. Asopa, I, n.3, p.136.


13. Ibid.


17. *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, January 10, 1979


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., pp.315-315.

21. Ibid., p.315.

22. Ibid.


29. Ibid., p.136.

30. Ibid., p.138.

31. See for details

33. *Tabas, A Confrontation of the Chapter of the Elephant, An Examination of Adventure at Tabas*, (In Persian), Muslim Students following the Imam’s line, Tehran, 1982, pp.54-55.


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