

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: "CONSCRIPTING THE STATE: MILITARY AND SOCIETY IN IRAN, 1921-1941"

Lyndon G. Bingaman, Master of Arts, 2011

Directed by: Dr. Madeline Zilfi
Department of History

Reza Shah Pahlavi came to power in an Iranian state on the verge of disintegration and dominated by foreign powers. In order to reverse this decline and protect national sovereignty, Reza sought to build a centralized state and strong national military modeled after those of Europe. The military came to dominate affairs within the country by consuming a large percentage of the national budget and by the favoritism given to its officers. The government also attempted to impose martial order on society by implementing conscription, requiring military instruction for students, and imposing national dress codes for citizens. Reza's elevation of the military, heavy-handed style of governance, and the systemic corruption of his regime made it unpopular with much of Iran's population. This thesis argues that Reza's reforms did much to alter the appearance of Iran and its military but failed to make critical institutional changes.

CONSCRIPTING THE STATE: MILITARY AND SOCIETY IN IRAN, 1921-1941

By

Lyndon G. Bingaman

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Madeline Zilfi, Chair
Professor Antoine Borrut
Professor Jon Sumida
Professor Peter Wien

Preface

In the course of my academic career I have paid particular attention to the acknowledgments of the texts that I have read. I reached the conclusion that, very often, these had less to do with expressing thanks than they did with affording the author an opportunity for self aggrandizement. Scholars mentioned lengthy trips to various archives in which they conducted unprecedented amounts of research. They named numerous academic figures, intellectual goliaths, with whom they exchanged ideas. They listed the scholarships, fellowships, and grants they received, all prestigious in nature, that supported them financially as they produced their scholarly masterpieces. If, at any moment, they seemed overly gratuitous, it was only to embellish the merits of their product. Now, being the cynic that I am, after having undertaken a substantial project of my own, I have not changed my mind on the matter, and this has led me to consider that one might consider my own acknowledgements to be a type of surreptitious self promotion. Let me assure you that this is not the case. I am genuinely thankful to a great many people who, in their respective ways, made the present work possible. I could not have done it on my own.

Without the prodding and assistance of two teachers at my high school, Darlene Callahan and Tom Rudisill, I would never have gone to college. I cannot thank them enough for refusing to allow me, in spite of my best efforts, to fall through the cracks. I can only that hope I have lived up to their expectations. As an undergraduate at the University of South Carolina, my curiosity was stimulated most by Dr. Kenneth Perkins, Dr. Tobias Lanz, and Dr. Waleed El-Ansary. These individuals challenged, encouraged, and, at times, entertained me as I completed my first degrees. Dr. Simona Kragh, now of

Averett University, was the first to suggest that I pursue education at the graduate level, so I would be remiss to not credit or blame her for my coming to Maryland. The example she set by simultaneously, and magnificently, performing the roles of student and parent helped me remain steadfast when I questioned my decision to become a graduate student. I must also thank the staff of the African and Middle Eastern Division of the Library of Congress, especially the IT specialist, for ensuring that I always found what I was looking for and never letting me leave empty handed. The daunting task of conducting research was made feasible by the specialists at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. I must single out archivist Eric Van Slander for taking the time to familiarize me with the facility, to listen, patiently, while I explained my project, and to locate additional files that he thought may be of use. Without his help, my trips to the archives would have amounted to an exercise in futility.

I have been fortunate to attend the University of Maryland and meet the people who make it such a remarkable institution. My fellow graduate students have been a constant source of comfort, aid, and amusement. Evan Norris, Alda Benjamen, and Harrison Guthorn have always been willing to listen to my ideas, however asinine some might have been, and offer constructive feedback. Lejnar Mitrojorgji, as well, provided moral support and often helped me understand what I was trying to say when even I was not sure of the meaning. I look forward to the day when I may purchase the books that my present colleagues have written and proudly remark that I once shared a classroom with them. Maryland's faculty members are just as laudable. Dr. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak was instrumental in procuring the fellowship that allowed me to begin graduate study and instilled in me an affinity for Persian literature. He also allowed me to begin my study of

the Persian language under the guidance of Ms. Delaram Soltani, and I am grateful to them both for their accommodation of my interests. Dr. Julie Greene and Dr. Paul Landau challenged me to take my thinking in directions that I had never considered. Dr. Madeline Zilfi, Dr. Peter Wien, Dr. Antoine Borrut, and Dr. Jon Sumida, in addition to overseeing this thesis, have been cherished mentors and critics. Without their guidance, I would have long since lost my way. Without their criticism, I would have settled for mediocrity. Without their encouragement, I would have surrendered countless times by now. In the past, I have always treasured the wit and wisdom of my teachers, recognized and valued their contributions to my life. Those I have met at Maryland will be no different.

Finally, I must express my undying gratitude and eternal debt to my wife and son, Rachel and Logan. Without so much as a complaint, they have endured my physical and psychological absence during my time in graduate school. My wife has supported me financially, spiritually, and emotionally while my academic ambitions taxed all of those resources. At times, she must have felt like a single parent, balancing work and home while I hid behind a wall of books or locked myself in a room and banged on a keyboard late into the night. If she did, she never said so, or even let on as much. My son has made enormous sacrifices for such a young age. He has played in utter silence to avoid disturbing my studies and endured the pain of hunger when I, caught up in books, forgot that people need to eat. Above all, he accepted that his father had little time for him, understood that our shared activities would be an afterthought performed with an eye turned toward the clock. Together, they have graciously excused my virtual abdication of the roles of husband and father and insisted, even when I knew otherwise, that it did not

bother them. I will never be able to repay, in a single lifetime, the love and forbearance that they have shown, but I resolve myself to make every effort to do so.

To all those I have mentioned and those whom my memory has neglected, I extend my most sincere and heartfelt thanks. I could not have done this without you. Although many brilliant minds have made the present work possible, I must claim a monopoly on any errors or oversights contained herein. They are my responsibility entirely.

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Introduction

Reza Shah once said that he viewed everything in life as a cannon ball in flight. If one stops moving forward, speeding inexorably toward a target, he is defeated¹ His reasoning here helps to explain the nature of his rule. First, it is a military metaphor from a military leader. His reference point for life itself is the martial. Considering this, it is only natural that the armed forces would be at the center of his thought. Second, the metaphor introduces a theme of uncompromising progress. A cannon ball, if deflected, will miss. If it slows, it will fall short of its intended target. Reza's analogy reveals him to be unrelentingly goal oriented. One may negotiate with a cannon ball, but the shot will not negotiate in return. Once in flight, it cannot be called back.

This study examines the role of the military in Reza Shah's Iran. The primary argument of the thesis is that Iran, under Reza, took on the semblance of a Western state while lacking the substance. Reforms were implemented which altered the appearance of the country, its military, and its people, but the underlying social order and power structure remained the same. A deconstruction of the amorphous concept of "modernity," a term widely used in discussions of the country at this time, is crucial to understanding his policies and will be explored below. This text will focus upon the central government's efforts to develop a strong military, specifically, a Western-modeled force, as well as its attempt to modernize Iranian society through militarization. The main objective of this text will be to describe the foreign and domestic challenges faced by Reza Shah and to explain how and why his military-centered modernization program failed to meet them.

¹ Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "Triumphs and Travails of Authoritarian Modernisation in Iran," in Stephanie Cronin, ed. *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941* (London:

Reza rose to national prominence in 1921 before ascending to the throne five years later. He inherited a state in turmoil, recently conquered in war, occupied by foreign powers, wracked by internal strife, and whose central government's authority did not extend far beyond the borders of Tehran. Reza Shah's strategy to rectify the untenable security situation while centralizing the government and Westernizing the country was constructed around the military, which he saw as the foundation of a modern state.

The army that Reza developed was sufficient to address the main internal threat to the central government, that posed by rebellious tribes and domestic opponents. Confronting the foreign menace, however, was a more difficult issue. Reza's ambition was to develop an Iranian state that possessed the military capacity to counter European encroachment and regional competition. Achieving such a goal in a short period of time was an impossible task that defied his best efforts.

In 1921, Iran was a backward state. Its population was ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous, largely uneducated, and lived in isolated enclaves scattered throughout the countryside. The country's rugged geography was virtually untouched by roads and railways, a situation that prevented economic development and hampered the central government's efforts to assert its authority over the periphery. Simply put, the burden of military modernization, as envisioned by Reza, exceeded Iran's economic, technological, and social capacities. Furthermore, by placing the military at the heart of his efforts, which included attempts to militarize society itself, Reza Shah prevented the development of other institutions essential to the creation of a modern state.²

Routledge, 2003), 148.

² Although Reza was not crowned until 1925, I have opted to use the term "Reza Shah" to refer to him for

This text is organized into four chapters, each of which contains several sections. Chapter one discusses the historiography of Reza Shah's Iran, examines the notion of "modernization" in the historiography of Iran, addresses questions of military modernization, and then establishes a general picture of Iran's history through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first section is a discussion of relevant historiography and the position of this thesis within it. Section two explores the various ways that historians have understood and approached "modernity" in Iranian history. Next, it discusses modernization in a military context, offering a definition of what constitutes a modern army. The final section offers a brief chronology of Reza's rule and the years leading up to it. It is a general overview of the events and developments that the bulk of this study will examine in greater detail.

In chapter two, the thesis looks at the origins of the reformist movement in Iran and its opponents. The first section examines the state of Iran in 1921. It looks at the country's geography, infrastructure, and population to present a picture of the difficulties facing Reza Shah's state-building project. The second traces the development of Iranian nationalism and Reza's relationship with its proponents as he accumulated political power. In the late 19th century, nationalist ideas began circulating through a new intellectual elite. The Constitutional Revolution in 1905 gave nationalists a voice in government, but their ambitions for the country were thwarted by infighting and foreign invasion during the Great War. Reza allied himself, first, with the more traditional elements of Iranian society before turning against them and pushing forward his program

the sake of clarity and consistency. For the same reason, I have chosen to refer to Iran by its present name rather than use "Persia" for events prior to 1935. That year, Reza Shah decreed that the country would henceforth be known, officially, as Iran in an effort to foster a sense of nationalism and assert national sovereignty. The moniker of "Persia," in reference to the entire country, was used primarily by European

of centralization and Westernization with the backing of the nationalist intelligentsia. The third section looks at opponents to Tehran's centralization policies before and during the early days of Reza's rule. During this period, after the Great War had ended, Iran was fragmented by tribal forces and groups who opposed the government along ideological grounds. Both Iran's nationalists and foreign observers felt that only a strong military under the control of the central government could save the country from disintegration. The chapter ends by showing the broad picture of attempts by Middle Eastern states to create Western-inspired militaries. The final section ends with a discussion of the three primary military forces that existed in Iran in 1920. These groups, the Gendarmerie, the Cossacks, and the South Persia Rifles, existed to serve the interests of the Iranian parliament, monarchy, and Britain respectively. There was no unified national force to serve the central government.

Chapter three is dedicated to the reconstruction of the Iranian military and society under Reza Shah. The first section is dedicated to the development of the armed forces. Although the military grew dramatically in size and could boast of possessing cutting-edge weaponry, it retained many of the characteristics that hampered it during the Qajar period. Systemic corruption went unchecked and officers were promoted, not based on merit, but on political reliability. While the military's new equipment looked impressive in parades, it was difficult to maintain and coexisted with antiquated weaponry.

Generally, Iran's armed forces under Reza Shah were shaped to intimidate opponents and were far less effective on the battlefield than they were on paper. Section two deals with the attempt to impose martial order upon Iranian society. Reza based his legitimacy on the fact that he was a successful military leader. Thus, he wore his uniform to all public

appearances to symbolize the military source of his political authority. A privileged military elite composed mainly of his former Cossack comrades developed around him. By virtue of their relationship with Reza, these officers were able to act with virtual impunity. They were free to overrule or impede the civilian leaders of the regions they were assigned to. The armed forces were celebrated in public discourse as the guarantors of Iranian independence. Their grandeur was inflated, almost comically, by books and newspaper articles. Military service was presented as a prerequisite for citizenship, which was essentially a statement that a man would only become Iranian by donning a uniform and also one that placed women in a secondary position in society. Boys were compelled to join scouting organizations, military drill became a standard part of education, and even adults, male and female, were subject to standardized dress codes. All of these together were designed to create a society that would readily defer to authority, namely, Reza Shah's authority, and that would conform to his image of "modern."

The final chapter is a study of the consequences of Reza's policies. Section one looks at opposition to his rule from three sectors of society. The traditionalists in Iran, religious officials and their supporters, strongly resented the state encroachment upon religion and policies that harmed them financially. While there were examples of individuals resisting secularization efforts, by and large the religious leadership did not work to organize a coherent opposition movement. The growing secular intelligentsia, in time, became dissatisfied with Reza's authoritarianism, corruption, and the lack of any outlet for political expression. Individuals from this class tended to organize clandestine political parties that were, when discovered, often brutally crushed by the government.

Even within the military, junior officers and regular soldiers objected to their subordinate status to the former Cossack elite. These men were also willing to rebel in response to physical and financial abuses by their superiors. Discussed in more detail in the last chapter, the most glaring example of opposition to Reza Shah's rule came in 1935 when a protest initiated by a cleric resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths and even revealed fissures within the armed forces. This event marked the point at which the position of the Pahlavi regime grew increasingly precarious until, by 1941, foreign observers felt that a revolution or coup was imminent. Part four ends with an analysis of Reza's military in combat. The army was an instrument of intimidation more than a potent fighting force. Its success was not assured, even against domestic opponents. While it became increasingly more successful through time, the Allied invasion of 1941 exposed the operational shortcomings of the army. The British and Soviet invaders crushed Iran's forces so quickly that many Iranians did not believe that they had actually attempted to defend the country.

Within a month of the Allied invasion, Reza Shah abdicated and was led into exile by the British. Having lost the support of the Iranian people, he had relied upon the threat of military force to remain in power. When the army was brushed aside, almost effortlessly, by the Allies, Reza's fate was sealed. The defeat of the military robbed the shah of, not the guarantor of Iranian independence, but the defender of his throne. His departure from the country was hardly an occasion for widespread mourning. In the two decades that he wielded political power, Reza attempted to impose a new order upon the Iranian military and society. The changes he brought about, even those that were to ensure the survival of his regime, however, lacked depth and substance. This much was

exposed by the invading Allied armies. Faced by a real challenge, the facade of Reza's rule crumbled. In the end, the unwavering, unflinching cannon ball of modernization was revealed to be paper-mâché.

I. Concepts and Chronology

Reza's Rule in Iranian Historiography

In most texts on the history of modern Iran, Reza Shah is approached in a manner dependent upon the interests of the authors, at times even based on their personal opinion of him. That Reza presided over Iran during a period of transformation is widely accepted. It is the central motif in texts that deal with Iran in a general manner, those concerned with painting a broad picture of the country's history. While there is agreement that changes occurred in Iran during Reza's reign, scholars are forced to reconcile the developments that took place with the less endearing attributes of his rule. The result is that authors must consciously frame reforms in comparison to the changes that did not take place. The fruits of reform are presented as tainted by Reza's authoritarianism.

The Making of Modern Iran, a collection of essays edited by Stephanie Cronin, opens with the assertion that, under Reza Shah, "Iran underwent a profound transformation."³ Each chapter explores a particular area of Iranian history under Reza, such as the military or education, or an episode, such as Reza's visit to Turkey. Although the various authors' findings are shaped by their topic, their common ground is that Iran was changing at this time. Ali Ansari, in the introduction to *Modern Iran Since 1921*, bluntly states that his book is "fundamentally [...] about change and the politics of managing that change."⁴ When he deals with Reza Shah, he openly endorses the opinion that modern Iran is a product of Reza's reign. Still, Ansari tactfully takes on a nuanced

³ Stephanie Cronin, ed. *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.

tone by pointing out the contradictions in Reza's rule, mainly the tension between his utilization of traditional patrimonial methods of leadership and his espoused push for modernization.⁵ Nikki Keddie, in *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan 1796-1925*, a book that follows the trajectory of the Qajar dynasty, takes a similar approach when discussing Reza Shah. Like Ansari, she characterizes him as an ambitious, yet flawed, reformer. The changes he made that helped to develop the country were offset by the effects of his personal avarice and brutality.⁶ M. Reza Ghods' book, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, was written, in his words: "to illustrate the continuities and discontinuities in Iranian political history."⁷ The chapter dedicated to Reza Shah's reign conceptualizes three phases of his leadership. This is a *de facto* presentation of his rule as a transformative epoch. In spite of this presentation, however, Ghods tempers any discussion of reform by stating that Reza Shah "wanted to modernize Iran without altering the patrimonial structure of society, which was his main source of power."⁸ Each text relies upon a similar narrative that contrasts the drive for modernization with the continued dependence upon a traditional form of rule.

Iran: At War with History, by John Limbert, only slightly deviates from this formula.⁹ Like the others, Limbert emphasizes Reza Shah's push to transform the country, but he differs in that he does not connect the regime's authoritarianism and greed with traditional patrimonial rule. Instead, he presents Reza Shah as an innovator,

⁴ Ali Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: The Pahlavis and After* (Harlow: Longman, 2003), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶ Nikki R. Keddie, *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan 1796-1925* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1999), 88.

⁷ M. Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century: A Political History* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), x.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 93-121.

⁹ John Limbert, *Iran: At War With History* (New York: Westview Press, 1987), 84-89.

militantly opposed to all traditions that would undermine his reform efforts. While Limbert's decision to overlook the similarities between Reza's rule and the practices of his predecessors might seem innocuous, it has significant ramifications for readers' understanding of the Iranian military. By portraying the shah as an innovative figure, one unencumbered by the history of Iran, readers could easily be left with the impression that Reza's military was purely his own creation rather than an awkward amalgamation of two eras. Differences aside, Limbert's text reinforces the notion that Reza's Iran was characterized by a national transformation under a repressive regime. The motif of change is a prominent feature of the work.

Although Amin Banani, in *The Modernization of Iran, 1921-1941*, is more explicitly concerned with the material consequences of Reza's reforms, he uses a similar method of employing contrast. In this case, Banani focuses upon the concentrated program of Westernization that took place under Reza Shah's guidance while identifying the underlying cause for this transformation as a deep-seated sense of inferiority. There are two paradoxes here that Banani is concerned with: the Westernization of Iran during a period of nationalism, and the espousal of nationalism when a sense of inferiority is pervasive. The two, he writes, were related.¹⁰ Reza's push for industrialization "beyond the bounds of economic rationale" and his attempts to force Iranians to alter their clothing were aimed at enhancing national prestige but were, ultimately, "an indiscriminate imitation of the surface gloss of Western societies."¹¹ This reflects Reza Shah's indifference toward Western thought and fixation upon Western technology. The veneer of modernization, its most outwardly visible aspects in Iran, is contrasted with the

¹⁰ For example Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 3, 147.

absence of substantive social and ideological development in the country. One must wonder how much Banani, writing in the early 1960's, was reflecting on the policies of the second Pahlavi shah.

Other specialized texts follow a similar formula of presenting Reza's reign as overseeing an incomplete or flawed transformation. In *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, which focuses upon Iranian society, Ervand Abrahamian writes that Reza brought about the initiation of many reforms but also sparked, what he terms, "the politics of social conflict."¹² Looking at foreign policy, Rouhollah K. Ramazani writes in *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1500-1941*, that Reza Shah's reign was a transitional period in which the concept of an Iranian national interest gained real traction.¹³ For the most part, Reza was cognizant of the relationship between his objectives, namely creating an independent and modern country, and the means at his disposal to accomplish this. In his pursuit of independence for Iran, he sought to counterbalance British and Russian influence by courting other Western powers and strengthening ties with the neighboring states of Turkey, Iraq, and Afghanistan. This realistic approach was not to be maintained, as Reza Shah eventually associated himself too closely with Germany before making the fatal mistake of either overestimating the Iranian military's ability to defend the country or misjudging British and Russian willingness to take military action against him.¹⁴ If Reza's rule was a transitional period to realistic foreign policy, the Allied invasion in 1941 revealed, in no uncertain terms, that it was a transition left unfinished.

Stephanie Cronin and Steven Ward, in their respective works *The Army and the*

¹¹ Ibid., 147.

¹² Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Harlow: Princeton University Press, 1982), 165.

¹³ Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941: A Developing Nation in World Affairs* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 171.

Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910-1926 and *Immortal*, deal specifically with the Iranian military. Cronin's text looks at the development of Iran's army in the decade preceding Reza's rise to power and its first five years under his control. She finds that, while the military was undergoing a transformation in terms of recruitment and weaponry, it retained characteristics of the Qajar period, most notably corruption, that had an impact on its quality.¹⁵ What the text lacks in terms of chronological breadth, it makes up for with its attention to detail. Steven Ward's book is more expansive in scope, reaching from ancient Persia to modern debates over Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. It covers a wider period of time than Cronin's work but does not offer the same degree of detailed analysis. In his chapters on the reign of Reza Shah, Ward credits him with forging the modern army, but argues that it was "a growing yet hollow military."¹⁶ Although the armed forces of Iran grew larger and acquired more modern weaponry through the 1930's, continued corruption and the poor quality of its officers limited its effectiveness. Both of these authors essentially argue that Reza presided over a military that was outwardly changing while perpetuating many of the traits that hampered it under the Qajars. It is a variation on the popular incomplete transformation motif.

The present study is in agreement with the aforementioned scholarship regarding the superficiality of Reza Shah's modernization project and some of the legacies of the Qajar era. It synthesizes the work of various scholars mentioned above, but also holds that, as the military is acknowledged to have been at the center of Reza's state, the merits and deficiencies of the country's transformation are particularly noticeable in the Iranian

¹⁴ See *Ibid.*, 171-310.

¹⁵ Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910-1926* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 108-143.

¹⁶ Steven R. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces* (Washington, DC:

armed forces. The elevated position of the military and its relationship to the Pahlavi monarchy suggest that its handling is emblematic of Reza Shah's reign in general. One contribution of this thesis is that it recognizes the centrality of the military in the construction of the modern Iranian state. In Reza's Iran, the military was pervasive, and its fingerprints can be found in a great many of the reforms initiated during the interwar period.

While it looks at the entirety of Reza Shah's rule, this thesis is particularly interested in the final half of his reign, from the early 1930's until the Allied invasion in 1941. It was during this period that, with the tribal population largely subdued and oil profits on the rise, Reza was able to aggressively push forth his modernizing agenda. Iran's armed forces and citizens were both heavily subjected to the will of the shah at this time. By looking more closely at the military during this period, the thesis attempts to fill a gap in the existing historiography.

Because of Britain's historical involvement in Iran, British sources tend to have a favored position among scholars. The majority of the secondary literature on Reza Shah's reign focuses squarely upon documents from the British foreign office on the grounds that Britain played the leading role in Iranian affairs. While this approach may be justified, it ignores the archival collections of other countries that had interests in Iran, such as the Soviet Union, the United States, or Turkey. This thesis introduces American diplomatic and military documents that previous scholars have typically mentioned only in passing or have overlooked altogether. These documents reveal American observers to be, not just aware of Reza Shah's ambition to create a powerful military and militarized society, but fully cognizant that this agenda would lead to unrest within the country.

Four decades before the Islamic Revolution brought down the Pahlavi regime, an American official warned that the population needed little more than a leader, an objective, and organization to cause havoc on the streets of Tehran.¹⁷ Other sources from the United States, specifically those related to Iranian weapons procurements, are used to reveal the superficial nature of Reza's modernizing reforms. By examining the military at the time in which most of its development took place, and also by considering the observations of foreign officials, this thesis reveals the innate flaws in Reza Shah's modernization program that would eventually end his rule.¹⁸

Modernization in Iran

As R.K. Ramazani writes in *The Foreign Policy of Iran*, "The essence of modernization is change," and that can involve any number of elements.¹⁹ A more pointed definition is to be found in Ali Ansari's *Modern Iran since 1921*. To Ansari, modernization is "understood as the appropriation and assimilation of Western achievements."²⁰ This allows for the inclusion of material development through industrialization and technological advancement while making room for intangibles. Western perspectives regarding government, of republicanism or socialism, even the dubious accomplishment of nationalism, adopted by Iranians, could all be seen as products of social modernization. In both cases, modernization is a process, not a light switch. A state may modernize slowly or rapidly, but it will not do so instantaneously.

¹⁷ Engert, "Dispatch 1254, March 14, 1938," G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1661/File 3000, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁸ A fascinating path for future scholarship, unfortunately beyond the scope of the present study, would be to connect, explicitly, the arguments contained herein with the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

¹⁹ Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*, 9.

²⁰ Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921*, 2.

Ansari states that Reza Shah oversaw the material modernization of the country, while modern political ideas first began to appear around the time of the Constitutional Revolution in 1906. His reign managed Iran "from a perception of tradition to a particular conception of modernity."²¹ This definition conforms to the view alluded to by Nikki Keddie. In *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan 1796-1925*, she also singles out the 1906 revolution as introducing reforms "based largely on Western models."²² Ervand Abrahamian, writing in *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, not only notes the importance of Western influence and the role of the revolution in bringing it to the forefront, but also discusses Western-inspired modernization efforts in the early nineteenth century.²³ Rudi Matthee, in an article on Reza Shah's education reforms, writes, considering that many reforms were done "in conscious emulation of Western patterns," that likening modernization to Westernization is justified.²⁴

Equating Westernization with modernization is quite common. In *Iran: At War with History*, John Limbert makes virtually no distinction between the two. Reza Shah, he writes, sought to create an Iranian nationalism that adopted "the material achievements of the West," and a modern military that could oblige citizens to "exchange their traditional way of life for Western economic and social models."²⁵ Only the inclusion of Iranian nationalism makes Reza's effort anything more than a simple aping of Europe. Amin Banani's book, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, takes the impact of the West to the extreme. Far from envisioning any sort of exchange or synthesis, Banani writes

²¹ Ibid., 2-3.

²² Keddie, *Qajar Iran*, 14.

²³ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 50-62.

²⁴ Rudi Matthee, "Transforming Dangerous Nomads into Useful Artisans, Technicians, and Agriculturalists: Education in the Reza Shah Period," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1993): 314.

²⁵ Limbert, 85.

that "one speaks today not of the interplay of civilizations, but of the impact of the West on the rest of the world."²⁶ Such a statement would arouse the passions of any transnational historian, but, as the text was written in 1961, it must be placed in its historical context. Iran, in 1961, was still under the control of the Pahlavi dynasty, aligned with the United States, and following a policy of aggressive Westernization. The reign of Reza Shah, Banani argues, gave rise to "intense Westernization" that deeply influenced Iran, but it was only after his abdication that "the intellectual and ideological aspects of Western civilization, which had been forcibly kept out during the Reza Shah era, now flooded the country."²⁷ This is not to say that Reza was wholly successful in his efforts to control intellectual developments. Banani expresses a desire to write a sequel addressing those and other factors, such as Western influence on the arts or the status of women. The point is, the focus of Reza Shah's modernization, or Westernization, was upon development with regard to the outward features of the state, not with the minds of its people. In his vision, Iran's material transformation should come before, possibly even help to bring about, a change in the attitudes of Iranians.

Some texts are content to introduce the concept of modernity without an explicit definition of what it entails. M. Reza Ghods, early in *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, frequently refers to Reza Shah's attempts at "modernization programs" and "nationalistic modernization" without explaining what they entailed, or to Iranians' perceptions of the shah as a "modernizing reformer" without an elucidation of the Iranian understanding of modernity.²⁸ Westernization is downplayed to the point of omission. Advocates of

²⁶ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

²⁸ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 7.

modernization are not "Westernized," but often "European-educated,"²⁹ or somehow in contact with Europeans.³⁰ This silence on the nature of modernization leaves its meaning dependent upon the preconceived notions of the reader based on his or her background knowledge of Pahlavi rule or interpretation of the term. Because Ghods never plainly states what modernity is, readers must look at how he represents Reza Shah's actions as a departure from his predecessors to formulate an understanding of the term.

Ghods points to the Qajars as lacking a centralized bureaucracy, strong military, or uniform legal system. The arbitrary nature of their rule meant that property owners did not necessarily have a legal title to their land, and their policies of confiscation and concessions to European commercial interests led to a decline in industry within the country.³¹ These general policies are contrasted with the efforts of reformers who aimed to transform Iran, such as those who led the 1906 Constitutional Revolution or forward-looking nineteenth century leaders, such as Mirza Taqi Khan, who served as prime minister from 1848 to 1851. Their objectives offer insight to the understanding of modernity within the country. Various individuals advocated or, in the case of those who occupied government posts, imposed changes to Iran's policies. Mirza Taqi Khan, known as *Amir Kabir*, or Great Lord, in Iran, took steps that would be followed, almost a century later, by Reza Shah. To protect national sovereignty, concessions to foreigners were opposed. Centralization, as well, was a central element of the reform program. This meant the establishment of a strong military under the command of the central government and administrative reforms designed to expand Tehran's power over the provinces. At the same time, efforts were made to encourage education, public health,

²⁹ Ibid., 96.

³⁰ Ibid., 32.

and industrial development. Ultimately, Amir Kabir's power and innovations attracted hostility from the traditional sector and the suspicion of the shah and he was removed from office and killed in 1851.³² Implicit in Ghods' presentation of reform efforts is that modernity can be defined in contrast to the Qajars. Whereas the Qajars stood for backwardness, their successors were a force for modernization.

What problematizes this strategy is that, prior to introducing Reza Shah, Ghods presents the 1906 Constitutional Revolution as a product of reformist efforts. In his analysis, reformers wanted more than just centralization, protection of sovereignty, and such, but a constitutional check on royal authoritarianism.³³ This conceptualization makes Reza Shah stand apart. He may have been a centralizing leader, bolstered the military, and worked to encourage educational and other reforms, but his dictatorial tendencies left him with little concern for representative bodies. Far from representing the antithesis to Qajar excess, Reza may well be seen as what the Qajars might have been if only they had the power and will. Ghods' concept of modernization under Reza Shah, therefore, cannot be framed in terms of it being an inversion of the policies of his predecessors. How could Reza's authoritarianism be reconciled with the efforts of Iran's reformers?

The key to understanding Ghods' concept of modernity can be found in *Men of Order*, edited by Touraj Atabaki and Erik J. Zürcher. Generally, the editors' introduction, elaborates upon much of what has already been discussed in this section. Modernization, they write, meant the importation of European rules, laws, and technologies, and the impetus to modernize came from the need for Middle Eastern states to defend

³¹ Ibid., 14-15.

³² Ibid., 22-23.

themselves. More importantly, they show how modernization efforts in Iran became intertwined with dictatorship. Because modernization was a defensive strategy, it was carried out in the name of state survival, not the betterment of individuals, and championed by an intelligentsia "made up of bureaucrats and military officers who identified their own interests with those of the state."³⁴ Moreover, the perpetual threat posed by Europe meant that it needed to be conducted as quickly as possible. Together, these factors led many members of the intelligentsia to see dictatorship as the political model best suited for rapid modernization.³⁵ By the time Reza Shah began his rise to power, this belief had been reinforced by the perceived failure of the constitutional government.³⁶ The importance of the foreign occupation of Iran during the Great War and its subsequent fragmentation cannot be overstated. The virtual collapse of the state made Reza's leadership much more desirable and his faults more forgivable.

Atabaki and Zurcher make a point to remind readers that Reza Shah's policies were not the result of his devotion to a program offered by modernist thinkers. On the contrary, he drew upon their ideas when they benefited him and would cast them aside when they did not. Reza did not adhere to any type of broad theory or political movement. Theories, movements, and their advocates existed only to be used as instruments in his state-building project. Individuals who fell out of the shah's favor faced serious consequences. When the "modernist intellectuals," reformers who had initially supported the secularizing and centralizing mission of Reza Shah, discovered that they had been used as pawns, when his arbitrariness and brutality became undeniable, those

³³ Ibid., 28-44.

³⁴ Touraj Atabaki and Erik J. Zurcher, *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization Under Atatrk and Reza Shah* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 2.

³⁵ Ibid., 1-3.

who had not been executed or intimidated into submission came to oppose him.³⁷

Reza Shah's particular understanding of modernization is difficult to gauge. As Amin Banani notes, Reza "left no political testament, which, taken as a whole, could be considered his program of the ideological core of his revolution."³⁸ His actions suggest that he acted with "a perception of tradition" and "a particular conception of modernity."³⁹ That he sought Western technology and military supplies while forcing Iranians to adopt Western clothing reveals that he had an eye turned to Europe, but might indicate that his knowledge of the Western world was not very deep. He only knew that which he could see. This could help to explain why a political party modeled after fascist groups in Europe, and designed to support him, was eventually dissolved by Reza Shah because it could, potentially, turn against him.⁴⁰ It seems safest to say that the modernization of Iran under Reza Shah involved the adoption of Western industries and technologies, the creation of a centralized government with Western-styled systems of administration, and the Westernization of the population by mandating dress codes and by pursuing a policy of secularization. All of this was done while championing Iranian nationalism, especially the grandeur of the pre-Islamic period.⁴¹ The goal of this project cannot be seen as the simple imitation of Europe, but the adaptation of European systems for the purpose of national renewal. As Jeffrey Herf has written, "There is no such thing as modernity in general. There are only national societies, each of which becomes

³⁶ Ibid., 4-6.

³⁷ Ibid., 6-10.

³⁸ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 44.

³⁹ Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921*, 3.

⁴⁰ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 100.

⁴¹ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 46-47.

modern in its own fashion."⁴² The story of Iranian modernization, as carried out under Reza Shah, deals with the effort to move in the direction of the West while retaining a distinct national character, as well as the attempt to create a Western country where, previously, only a nominal state existed.

Military Modernization

At the center of Reza Shah's modernization effort was the military. To him, the creation of a modern army, above all else, was the only way to save the country from destruction.⁴³ The modern military, however, was more than the guarantor of sovereignty. Creating a unified force under the command of the central government was an unprecedented step in Iran's history. By constructing garrisons throughout the country, the central government was able to assert its authority over the Iranian interior. Conscription allowed, not only for the expansion of the armed forces, but for the education and indoctrination of the population. On a variety of levels, the development of the military was an exercise, not just in state-building, but nation-building as well. In order to understand how the creation of a modern military contributed to Reza Shah's project, the concept of the "modern military" must first be examined.

David Ralston rejects the term "modernization" in favor of the more precise "Europeanization" when discussing the development of the military in non-Western states. In *Importing the European Army*, he argues that there is no benchmark for modernity, just as there are no criteria to establish its superiority over the "nonmodern." The adoption of European inspired militaries opened the door, however unintentionally,

⁴² Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1.

for the introduction of additional Western practices.⁴⁴ Given the previous discussion of modernization in general, the usage of Europeanization or Westernization does not seem objectionable. The modern army, therefore, is one patterned after those developed by Europe, specifically those "tailored to meet the resources of [a state], with the soldiers organized on a regular basis."⁴⁵ Such a force requires several elements: financial support, trained personnel, an officer corps, an administrative apparatus, and, of course, weaponry.⁴⁶ These features necessitate that, in order to field a modern, Westernized army on the battlefield, a state make institutional changes necessary to maintain it during peacetime. For non-Europeans, this often meant making changes to domestic policies.⁴⁷ Amin Banani has observed that Reza Shah "instinctively understood the lesson of European history- the emergence of a unified national state coincides with the development of a standing national army."⁴⁸ However "instinctively" he may have done so, in some fashion, Reza connected the military with nation and state building.

Creating and maintaining a modern army are expensive undertakings. In order to extract the resources necessary to maintain a military force, those resources being manpower, materials, and money, rulers must rely upon coercion or persuasion to acquire them. The coercive approach would be to requisition whatever resources were desired, even by force, if necessary. In a state, such as Iran, where collecting taxes often required the threat of military force, this can lead to a cyclic pattern where more soldiers are desired in order to obtain more resources. Alternatively, a ruler may rely upon

⁴³ Ward, *Immortal*, 129.

⁴⁴ David B. Ralston, *Importing the European Army: The Introduction of European Military Techniques and Institutions in the Extra-European World, 1600-1914* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996), ix-x.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 173-180.

persuasion in cases where, whether for religious or nationalistic purposes, a population actually desires to provide resources to the military. Samuel Finer writes that "[b]eliefs could inspire populations to sacrifices hitherto undreamt of," leading rulers to favor consensual donations over those gained by coercion.⁴⁹ In either case, the need for regular and predictable supplies of resources led to the rise of bureaucracies designed to administer the internal affairs of countries. Additionally, it led to legal reforms designed to stabilize society as "the more uniform and better disciplined a society was, the more easily it could be administered and the more predictable were the moneys it could produce."⁵⁰

The process of creating the bureaucratic structures designed to procure the necessary resources needed by a military is linked to the projects of nation and state-building. State-building can be seen to involve what Samuel Finer has termed territoriality and function. Territoriality is simply the assertion that a state is a bounded entity united under a single government. Function refers to the individuals who serve in the government of a state, specifically whether they are members of the civil or military service.⁵¹ The bureaucratization process demonstrates both of these factors in action. On one hand, the bureaucracy serves a single government presiding over a state, not a collection of fiefdoms. It represents the ruling body that has monopolized power over a parcel of territory. On the other hand, it highlights the functions of state agents as individuals who either defend it by the use of force or support it by playing a non-military role. The more specialized a country's bureaucracy, the more efficiently it could perform

⁴⁸ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 54.

⁴⁹ Samuel E. Finer, "State- and Nation-Building in Europe: The Role of the Military," in Charles Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 96.

⁵⁰ Ralston, *Importing the European Army*, 9.

its tasks.⁵² Bureaucratized states can more effectively collect taxes or conduct conscription and play a greater role in the lives of ordinary citizens.⁵³ The incorporation of new technologies, the telegraph or radio, further streamlines this process.

To draw upon Finer's thought again, nation-building occurs when a state's population identifies itself as a national community and "its members mutually distribute and share duties and benefits."⁵⁴ By fostering a sense of nationhood via the promulgation of nationalism, a government could simplify its pursuit of resources. The power of nationalism is that a population will sacrifice resources without the threat of coercion.⁵⁵ Individuals will give up money, time, or their very lives for the good of their national community. Through persuasion where a sense of nationalism is forged, a state's power to extract resources becomes virtually unlimited.⁵⁶

The need for trained soldiers, officers, and bureaucrats also requires the intrusion of the state into non-military matters. As units became more specialized and weapons more complex, the training of individual soldiers, including the instillation of a sense of discipline, became more important.⁵⁷ The potentiality for conscription meant that all young men were prospective soldiers, thus, all needed to be prepared for military service should the need arise. Even in the absence of compulsory service, the favor shown to the persuasive factor of nationalism made it desirable for youths to be indoctrinated with a fair amount of nationalism. Education, the state-operated school, can be seen to introduce children to military order. There they are taught the prevalent ideology of the

⁵¹ Finer, "State- and Nation-Building in Europe," 85-87.

⁵² Ralston, *Importing the European Army*, 10.

⁵³ Finer, "State- and Nation-Building in Europe," 97.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

state and, depending upon ability, for a particular role within it.⁵⁸ Similarly, as fighting units grew smaller and more dependent upon the command of officers, the professionalism of those officers became a major concern. The increasingly complex nature of their responsibilities required that they be the recipients both of general education and specialized training for their military role.⁵⁹ In order to administer the state, oversee the maintenance of the military, and develop new technologies for military application, states need trained bureaucrats. Throughout Europe, schools were constructed with the explicit purpose of training experts to perform functions that supported the military. As Ralston concludes, "[b]y its very existence, by the demands it created and the social pressures it caused, the standing army was one of the major forces behind almost every revolutionary transformation of European society between 1500 and 1700."⁶⁰ A non-European state that wished to create a Westernized military force would have to make similar changes to its domestic arrangements, whether it intended to or not.

Iran, 1890-1941: An Overview

What follows here is a brief chronological summary of the major events that shaped Iran's history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶¹ The 1890's

⁵⁷ Ralston, *Importing the European Army*, 7-8.

⁵⁸ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 104-106.

⁵⁹ Ralston, *Importing the European Army*, 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶¹ There is a considerable amount of literature dedicated to Iran's history. This summary is based on several works that, when patched together, offer a coherent chronology of modern Iranian history. Limbert's, *Iran: At War With History* and M. Reza Ghods', *Iran in the Twentieth Century: A Political History* are more general texts that can be used to introduce readers to the forces that shaped modern Iran. *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan 1796-1925* by Nikki Keddie and Ansari's, *Modern Iran since 1921: The Pahlavis and After*, similarly, provide excellent surveys of their respective periods. Finally, Ervand Abrahamian's, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* is, in my opinion, the best existing text on modern Iran. It offers significant detail and analysis while remaining readable. Each text named here is cited, at various

stand out as a defining moment in Iranian history. The Qajar dynasty presided over an Iranian state that was in distress. Britain and Russia used the country as a pawn in their political battle with one another while the shahs were, seemingly, powerless to remove foreign influence. The Iranian people were impoverished, subject to the whims of arbitrary and autocratic rulers, and increasingly aware of their vulnerable position in the world. During the final decade of the nineteenth century, the Qajar shahs became increasingly unpopular, in part due to the economic concessions doled out to Europeans. In 1890, Iran's ruler, Naser al-Din Shah, granted a monopoly over the tobacco trade to a British company. This generated considerable resistance and sparked the cooperation of a wide array of Iranians who, in spite of their differences, were willing to work together for a common purpose, in this case, the cancellation of the tobacco concession. A boycott of tobacco products began in December 1891 and, after demonstrations against the concession grew so large that they had to be bloodily dispersed, the shah relented and rescinded the monopoly early the next year. It was to be a harbinger of things to come, an example of the population rising up against the decaying Qajar dynasty. The three primary groups whose efforts helped to drive the protests, the merchant middle class, the clergy, and the nascent Western educated intellectual elite, will be discussed further below.

In spite of the protests, the Qajar shahs continued to antagonize their subjects through repression and misguided economic policies. These steps further alienated the developing intelligentsia, took money out of the hands of the merchants, and, by extension, deprived the clergy of their expected tithes. A series of demonstrations against the government's response to an economic and agricultural crisis in 1905 became

increasingly intense and, by 1906, had grown into a revolution. This conflict, which would eventually become known as the Constitutional Revolution, pitted the Qajar shah and his supporters against the proponents of constitutional rule. The latter included the aforementioned alliance of clergy, merchants, and intellectuals. Iran's intelligentsia was instrumental in pushing forth the idea of constitutionalism as a check on royal power. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a small number of Iranians attended European mission schools or traveled to Europe for education. These individuals were imbued with a knowledge of Western political concepts and were eager to apply them at home. During the late Qajar period and into Reza's rule, this small yet educated and energetic class was a driving force behind most reform efforts.

Although the government responded to the uprising violently, the continued unrest, and threat of it spreading, forced the shah to approve the creation of a national assembly in 1906. Even with the creation of this body, the constitutionalists and monarchists continued to vie for political power. In 1908, the shah used loyal military units to forcibly close the *majlis*, Iran's parliament, and tried to round up, imprison, and execute as many of his opponents as possible. Tabriz became the locus of resistance and, after surviving a siege, constitutionalist leaders there linked up with their allies to advance on Tehran. The shah abdicated, in 1909, in favor of his young son and fled with the assistance of the Russians. Even with their success in overcoming monarchist opposition, Iran's constitutionalist leaders came from such disparate backgrounds that they found it difficult to work together without a common foe. The country remained decentralized and, after the *majlis* refused a Russian demand that an American financial advisor be dismissed from national service, was invaded by Russian forces in 1911. The

majlis was dissolved, not to be reconvened until 1914, and the revolutionary period came to a close.

Beginning in 1911, Iran was occupied by British and Russian forces. There were numerous protests against foreign occupation, several of them bloody, but the Europeans remained in control. During the Great War, Iran remained, officially, neutral, but was not spared violence. Ottoman soldiers invaded the northern part of the country while German agents incited tribal insurrections against the occupying British and Russian armies. In response, Britain recruited its own military unit and found tribal allies to protect its interests in the country. Nationalist leaders, emboldened by German and Ottoman successes in Europe, fought against the British, the Russians, and their allies. By 1916, the most prominent resistance group, the Government of National Defense, had been crushed by Britain and its allies, but other factions continued to fight elsewhere in the country. When, in 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution caused the retreat of Russia's armies, British troops expanded northward to fill the void.

Through it all, the Qajar leaders in Tehran appeared absolutely unable to either protect Iranian sovereignty or to assert authority over the country's interior. Russian and Ottoman soldiers were withdrawn from the country with the end of the war in 1918, but the British were entrenched more firmly, politically and geographically, than ever before. Iran's central government held no power beyond Tehran, leaving virtually all of the country under tribal control or British occupation. Worse still for the Qajars, their close ties with Britain, however coerced they might have been, infuriated the nationalist groups in the country that were still under arms. One of these, Kuchik Khan's Jangalis, which will be discussed further below, began working with the Bolsheviks, who sent soldiers in

early 1920 to help fight the British armies advancing on northern Iran. With the country fragmenting among tribes and factions, militarily occupied by foreigners, and under a government whose power was virtually nonexistent, many Iranians hoped for the emergence of a strong leader to reverse the country's decline. What they got was a Cossack Colonel named Reza Khan, an ambitious and opportunistic character whose policies would, better or worse, transform Iran forever.

In February 1921, Reza led a contingent of Persian Cossacks to Tehran and arrested dozens of political leaders. He stated that his intent was to save the Qajar monarchy, to end foreign occupation, and to stop the disintegration of the country. The Qajar shah granted Reza the position of Army Commander and named his co-conspirator, Sayyid Zia Tabatabai, prime minister. Almost immediately, the new government went to work. A treaty was signed with the Soviets exchanging their withdrawal from northern Iran for a guarantee that the country would not be used to attack the Soviet Union. Additionally, a 1919 treaty with Britain was cancelled and social reforms were declared. The partnership between Reza and Tabatabai was to be short lived, however, as the two held major differences in opinion regarding key issues, particularly the matter of British advisors to the Iranian military. Tabatabai wanted Britain's assistance, Reza, seeking an all-Iranian force, did not. In May, 1921, Sayyid Zia was forced out of office.

Once his former partner was out of the way, Reza expanded his power over the new government, specifically the War Ministry, and used a combination of armed force and political maneuvering to eliminate the rebel groups that had plagued the Qajars since the Great War. Military victories enhanced Reza's prestige, as did the political alliances he forged with foreign and domestic partners. A significant partnership was formed with

American financial advisor Arthur Chester Millspaugh who, between 1922 and 1927, led a team tasked with organizing Iran's budget. In order to collect taxes, Millspaugh had to rely upon military force. Increased revenue allowed for further expansion of the military, and the larger military served to expand the power of the central government. Moreover, Iran's armed forces were consolidated into a single army under Reza's command. In 1923, Reza assumed the office of prime minister and became Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces two years later. The Qajar shah, who had journeyed to Europe in 1923 for alleged medical purposes, was powerless to stop Reza's consolidation of power. In 1925, after briefly floating the possibility of implementing a republican form of government, Reza oversaw a vote that decided to abolish the Qajar dynasty and offer him the throne. Reza Khan had become Reza Shah Pahlavi.

With his rise to power complete, Reza Shah dedicated himself to modernizing Iran, meaning the Westernization process described above. Having been a soldier himself, Reza placed the military at the center of his effort, and its development also pushed the government to create Western institutions. The Iranian army grew into a vast conscript force and proudly displayed its expensive new weapons at public parades. More than ten thousand miles of new roads and over a thousand miles of railroad were constructed in order to facilitate the movement of men and material around the country.⁶² As the power of the central government in Tehran grew, Iran's tribes became increasingly subject to state domination. By the early 1930's, Reza's control over the country's interior was certain. The country was pacified at gunpoint. In addition to purely military

⁶² Road and rail construction can be gauged by comparing figures offered by the Statesman's Year-Book. See John Scott-Keltie and Mortimer Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 58th Edition*, p. 1170-1171, in the Statesman's Year-Book Online Archive, <http://www.statesmansyearbook.com/sybarchives> (accessed April 24, 2011); Mortimer Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 78th Edition*, p. 1027, in the Statesman's

pursuits, Reza Shah embarked upon an ambitious building campaign, constructing a number of new schools, hospitals, and factories. Even Iranians themselves were made to change, as traditional modes of dress were abolished and men and women were forced to abide by new national dress codes. Throughout the 1920's and 1930's, Reza Shah courted foreign powers to assist him in his efforts. He acquired arms and technological assistance from various European states, including Italy, Czechoslovakia, France, Britain, and Germany. Beyond looking to Europe, he sought to draw the United States into Iranian affairs in order to offset British and Soviet influence.

Of his numerous European engagements, his ties to Germany would prove most consequential. By the late 1930's, Germany had become Iran's premier trading partner. This undeniable link, along with Reza's apparent affinity for Europe's fascists⁶³, paired with the politics of World War II to doom Reza Shah's rule. Germany's success in Europe and seemingly unstoppable advance into the Soviet Union led to a marriage of convenience between Britain and the Soviets. Iran's geographical position and oil resources made it critical to the Allied war effort. War materials bound for the Soviet Union could be shipped through Iran year round, thanks to its warm water ports. The country also served as a natural barrier between British India and a possible German advance through the Middle East. Because of Reza Shah's recalcitrance, his refusal to accede to Allied demands to expel German nationals and allow the passage of war materials through the country, a joint British and Russian force invaded Iran on August 25, 1941. The operation was a total success for the Allies and an unmitigated disaster for the Iranians. Reza Shah abdicated on September 16, 1941. He was taken into custody by

Year-Book Online Archive, <http://www.statesmansyearbook.com/sybarchives> (accessed April 24, 2011).

⁶³ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 106-107.

the British and moved, eventually, to South Africa, where he died on July 26, 1944.

The above overview of Iranian history illustrates the broad trajectory of the country during a crucial period of transformation that lasted half a century. In the most general terms, Iran moved politically from being ruled by an autocrat with limited authority to being ruled by an autocrat with unchecked authority. This is, of course, an egregious oversimplification. A crucial development, perhaps *the* development, that opened the door for Reza Shah to take power was the emergence of nationalism in Iran. With a basic chronology of events in Iran established, this study will now seek to present the origins and tenets of Iranian nationalism, as well as to uncover varying strains of it within the country.

II. Rousing the Slumbering Lion: Proponents and Opponents of Modernization in Iran

The Iranian State in 1921: A Snapshot

Iran, as it existed in 1921, posed significant challenges to the centralizing and modernizing ambitions of any reformer. The size and topography of the country, as well as its climate, when combined with a dearth of traversable roadways, made it difficult to control from the center. The heterogeneity of its population in terms of ethnicity or tribal affiliation exacerbated the problem of command. Compounding this further was the general underdevelopment of the country. With few reliable roads in place, the government had little influence beyond Tehran. Much of the country had little interaction with the state at all, let alone on a regular basis. This lack of authority made the extraction of resources, primarily tax revenue, quite problematic. Imposing order on such a place, and with limited means, was not to be an easy task.

Because of its climate and geography, Iran has often been compared to a natural fortress.⁶⁴ Its land area of 628,000 square miles makes it the 17th largest country on earth. This means it is larger than the combined territories of France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal, virtually all of Western Europe. To contrast Iran with its neighbors, it is 68 percent larger than Iraq and Afghanistan combined.⁶⁵ The sheer size of the country is made even more problematic by its topography. Mountains ring the country on all sides, and even run parallel with its southern coast. These ranges act as a natural barrier between Iran and its neighbors, and leave the country "ill-suited to maneuver warfare, whether conducted by ancient armies or modern armored and

⁶⁴ Ward, *Immortal*, 7; Friedman, George, *The Geopolitics of Iran: Holding the Center of a Mountain Fortress* (Austin: Strategic Forecasting, Inc., 2009).

mechanized ground forces."⁶⁶ Transportation difficulties created by the presence of Iran's mountains were made more difficult by the lack of navigable waterways. As a result, the population of the country was broken up into a multitude of small, isolated villages. Even by the 1950's, when the country's population was nearly twenty million, the mean size of a village was approximately 250 people.⁶⁷ One of the few peripheral areas without mountains is a plain in the southwestern corner of the country, along its southern border with Iraq. Even here, the ground is swampy and poses challenges to transportation. If its mountains act as natural walls, the swamps of southwestern Iran serve as a moat. The center of the country, inside the mountainous ring, is made up of two large deserts. The northernmost, called the Dasht-e Kavir, is known for having a salty crust that covers a layer of thick mud. It is entirely possible for an individual to break through the surface, fall into the mud, and drown in the middle of the desert.⁶⁸ Further north, along the Caspian coast, the region is made up of dense, almost impenetrable forests interspersed with swamps.⁶⁹ It is almost as though the forces of nature conspired to make the country's geography as challenging as possible.

The rugged terrain of Iran is matched with an inhospitable climate. Half of the country's territory receives less than ten inches of rain per year.⁷⁰ When rain does fall, the tall mountains and narrow valleys make flooding a problem. This is often the case in verdant region of northern Iran, where dense fog also works to hinder travel. Generally, the country is arid, and this dryness allows for the presence of significant amounts of dust

⁶⁵ Friedman, *The Geopolitics of Iran*.

⁶⁶ Ward, *Immortal*, 7.

⁶⁷ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 11.

⁶⁸ Ward, *Immortal*, 9, Friedman, *The Geopolitics of Iran*.

⁶⁹ Ward, *Immortal*, 8.

⁷⁰ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 11.

in the atmosphere. At times, the air is so full of dust particles that visibility is negatively impacted, a condition known as a "brownout." Dust storms, which can be severe enough to impact military operations by damaging weapons and equipment, are also a common occurrence. Most pervasive, however, is the excessive heat of Iran's summers. In some areas of the country, this can mean daytime temperatures of more than 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Even the healthiest individuals can be physically active only for a short time in such oppressive heat, and the dryness of the country makes access to water that much more important.⁷¹

In 1921, Iran's population was estimated at between eight and ten million people. Around three million of those were believed to be nomadic, including an Arab population of more than 250,000, almost 725,000 Turks, and more than 650,000 Kurds. Owing to the lack of an official census at this time, exact numbers are unknown.⁷² In any case, estimates suggest that the tribal contingent formed a significant percentage of the population, perhaps more than a third and likely no less than fifteen percent in 1920.⁷³ The presence of these sizable, often non-Persian speaking, minority groups posed a challenge to nationalist leaders who sought to impose uniformity on the population, particularly the Persian chauvinism endorsed by many nationalist leaders at the time.⁷⁴ Accustomed to their autonomy, Iran's tribal population resisted the central government's efforts to expand its authority. Their goal was to protect their way of life and their independence from the government officials who viewed them as a symptom of Iran's weakness.

⁷¹ Ward, *Immortal*, 7-9.

⁷² Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 58th Edition*, 1164-1165.

⁷³ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 29.

⁷⁴ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 107-109.

A 1921 list of Iran's major cities and their supposed populations provides more insight as to the state of the country. Even the most generous figures of the fourteen principal cities of the country, when added together, amount to just over one million people.⁷⁵ The overwhelming majority of the country's inhabitants were rural. Moreover, Iranians have been characterized as "mountain dwellers" due to the inhospitable climate and geography of the lowlands.⁷⁶ Most of Iran's citizens were, not just far removed from urban centers, but dispersed into virtually self-sufficient, isolated communities scattered throughout the country.⁷⁷

The far-flung villages and citizens of Iran were bound together by only the most rudimentary transportation infrastructure. In 1921, there were just 150 miles of railroad in the entire country.⁷⁸ The utter inadequacy of this amount is obvious when compared to the 30,000 miles of track that the United States possessed in 1861.⁷⁹ Until 1903, little more than 300 miles of "carriageable" road existed.⁸⁰ Additional roads were constructed in the first decades of the twentieth century, but there were still fewer than 2,000 miles of roadway in 1925, and much of it was in poor condition.⁸¹ Many of these were constructed by Russian and British companies that were often permitted to charge travelers tolls.⁸² The weak central government was unable to secure the few roads that existed, making any sort of travel fraught with the threat of attack by bandits or unruly

⁷⁵ Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book*, 58th Edition, 1165.

⁷⁶ Friedman, *The Geopolitics of Iran*.

⁷⁷ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 11.

⁷⁸ Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book*, 58th Edition, 1170.

⁷⁹ John MacDonald, *Great Battles of the Civil War* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1988), 22.

⁸⁰ Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book*, 58th Edition, 1170-1171.

⁸¹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 146.

⁸² Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book*, 58th Edition, 1171.

tribesmen.⁸³ The difficulty of movement and mortal peril involved with it only served to further isolate remote settlements.

The weakness of Iran's central government complicated matters of geography and demographics. Financially, the country was in dire straits in 1921. The most reliable method of acquiring revenue was through a tariff on imports. This was, in no small part, because the collection of tariffs was conducted by Belgian officials, professionals, rather than poorly trained or corrupt local officials. Tariff duties, however, were not determined by the will or needs of Iran's government, but by treaties that it had been forced to sign with Europeans. Collecting taxes was problematic due to the political clout of powerful landowners and corrupt officials. Those with the means to do so avoided paying taxes as much as possible, while collectors routinely siphoned off funds intended for the government.⁸⁴ As a result, the bulk of the tax burden fell upon the laboring classes. To make matters worse, the country had enormous debts in the form of loans from Russia and Britain and was behind on payments for most of them.⁸⁵ Income from oil amounted to approximately £600,000, a mere fraction of what it would eventually reach.⁸⁶ The government simply did not have the ability to efficiently extract revenue from the population on a consistent basis.

Education in Iran was also troubled. In 1920, there were just 10,000 students attending roughly 180 non-religious schools nationwide.⁸⁷ Even when religious institutions, called *maktabs* or *medressehs*, are considered, enrollment climbs only to

⁸³ For example, see Hassan Arfa, *Under Five Shahs* (London: John Murray, 1964), 104-105.

⁸⁴ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 114-116.

⁸⁵ Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 58th Edition*, 1167.

⁸⁶ Boroujerdi, "Triumphs and Travails of Authoritarian Modernisation in Iran," 148.

⁸⁷ John Scott-Keltie and Mortimer Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 57th Edition*, 1139, in the Statesman's Year-Book Online Archive, <http://www.statesmansyearbook.com/sybarchives> (accessed April

50,000.⁸⁸ Around 50 students were enrolled in a special college designed to train diplomatic officers. For the most part, higher education was achieved under European tutelage. Medical, language, and science oriented institutions were staffed by instructors recruited from Europe.⁸⁹ Iran simply did not have the trained personnel to operate a modern educational system. Given that the only criteria necessary to serve as a teacher were to be at least twenty years old and to show good conduct, and since most Iranians, if they had received any education at all, received minimal instruction in the fields of religion and language, the dearth of indigenous experts is understandable.⁹⁰ Women's education, which had made advances in the early twentieth century, remained undeveloped due to clerical and popular opposition.⁹¹

Industrialization, essentially, had not taken place. The few factories that existed, including a sugar refinery and match factory, were inoperable due to lack of maintenance or their not being profitable in the face of cheap imported goods.⁹² Even by 1925, there were less than 20 modern plants, and only 5 employed more than fifty workers. Nationally, fewer than 1,000 people were employed in modern factories.⁹³ The legendary Persian carpets of the country were manufactured by hand, and virtually all other exports were either agricultural products or raw materials. Iran possessed an abundance of mineral wealth, but this was similarly underdeveloped.⁹⁴ In all likelihood, the lack of industrial development was a product the logistical difficulties posed by the combination

24, 2011);

⁸⁸ Matthee, "Transforming Dangerous Nomads," 315.

⁸⁹ Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 58th Edition*, 1166.

⁹⁰ Matthee, "Transforming Dangerous Nomads," 315, 319.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 319; Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 183.

⁹² Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 137.

⁹³ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 146-147.

of Iran's topography and inadequate transportation network. It was simply impossible to make the widespread construction of factories profitable given the challenges of moving raw materials and finished products to and from locations around the country.

The underdeveloped state of Iran took its toll on the population. Only in the early twentieth century did the government begin to concern itself with the issue of public health. Prior to this, the only hospital facilities in the country were operated by European and American missionaries. The government's early efforts to promote public health, such as attempts to encourage vaccination, taxes on opium, or establishing credentials for medical professionals, amounted to little. In 1922, 4,287 deaths were recorded in Tehran. Only 30 of these, less than one percent, were attributable to old age. A year later, this could be said for 41 out of 4,588 deaths. 1,113 of the dead, roughly a quarter of the total number, were infants less than a year old.⁹⁵ By comparison, there were 11,944 deaths in Sheffield, England between 1837 and 1842. 1,146 during this period, nearly a tenth, were attributed to "decline" or "decay of nature," presumably euphemisms for old age. Infants less than a year old numbered 2,983, or one quarter of the total amount.⁹⁶ In terms of infant mortality, early twentieth century Tehran was comparable to England during the Industrial Revolution. Where they differed was that, in spite of the perils of factory life, a person born in England was more likely to survive to old age than a citizen of Tehran. While statistics for rural Iran are not available, they are not likely to have been any better. In 1924, 323 of the country's 905 physicians practiced in Tehran for a ratio of one doctor to every 680 people. This left 582 doctors for the remainder of the

⁹⁴ Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 58th Edition*, 1168.

⁹⁵ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 63-64.

⁹⁶ E.P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 325-326.

country, a ratio of one to 16,800.⁹⁷

When Reza Shah began his rise in 1921, the odds were stacked against him. In terms of climate and geography, the country was rugged and inhospitable. The population was diverse and fractious, with communities independent by virtue of their physical isolation, and aided in defense of their independence by the natural fortifications afforded by high mountain walls and narrow passes. Without reliable roads to facilitate troop movements, the Tehran government faced difficulty simply moving forces from place to place. Resources were scarce. The country's leaders were in no financial position to maintain a large army, and the complete lack of an industrial base forced them to look abroad for war materials. Iranians, themselves, were ill-equipped to bring about the type of radical transformation that Reza and other reformers had in mind. Most were virtually uneducated, essentially illiterate, with little or no connection to the nuances of European notions of modernity. Beyond this, they were unhealthy and impoverished, fortunate to survive childhood and unlikely to reach old age. It was from this situation, a veritable debacle among nations, that Reza hoped to build a modern and cohesive state. When viewed along these lines, what he managed to accomplish is truly remarkable.

The Iranian Ideological Milieu

The genesis of Iranian nationalism predates the Constitutional Revolution, lasting from 1906 to 1911, with which it eventually became intertwined. As was mentioned briefly above, throughout the nineteenth century, Western economic and educational penetration of Iran permanently and fatally altered the relationship between the Qajar dynasts and Iranian society. In response to the threat posed by European commerce,

⁹⁷ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 64.

historically dispersed bazaar merchants began to recognize themselves to possess common interests and later became known as the traditional middle class or bazaaris. Historically, the bazaaris had close ties to the *ulama*, the Shi'i clergy, who opposed Western influences and saw the shah as a rival for power.⁹⁸ Clerical power stemmed from the fact that most Iranians were Shi'i and religious leaders of that sect were often viewed as models of righteous behavior, were seen as qualified to interpret religious law and doctrine, and were supported by compulsory religious tithes.⁹⁹ They also found an unlikely ally in a newly emerged social class, the modern intelligentsia. These individuals, though few in number, were the recipients of a secular, Western education, either in Europe or through European and American mission schools, and spoke of the benefits of Western ideas, such as liberalism, nationalism, and even socialism.¹⁰⁰ Members of this developing class left their mark on the Persian language as well, by introducing new words using Western terms like, *despot*, *parleman*, *demokrat*, and by reinterpreting old words to fit new concepts, such as equating the old word for monarchy with the new connotation of "despotic monarchy," or transforming *mardom*, people, into a value-laden expression of "the People."¹⁰¹

The spread of both bazaari sentiment and the ideas of the budding intelligentsia were no doubt facilitated by the commercial endeavors of foreigners, such as the construction of roads and telegraph lines.¹⁰² Furthermore, the presence of these foreign agents and their activities spoke to the grievances of Iran's aforementioned groups. Their

⁹⁸ Nikki Keddie, "Introduction," in *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 7-8

⁹⁹ Keddie, *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan 1796-1925*, 6-9.

¹⁰⁰ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 50-51; William Spencer, *The United States and Iran*, (Brookfield: Twenty-First Century Books, 2000), 31.

¹⁰¹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 50-51.

economic ventures threatened the welfare of the bazaaris, and the concessions made to them offended the intelligentsia. Events beyond Iran's borders also worked to spread these new ideas. News of the Russo-Japanese War, the first example of a Western state meeting defeat at the hands of a non-European power, and the subsequent Russian Revolution of 1905 created an atmosphere in which liberal and patriotic concepts could find traction.¹⁰³ The cooperation between the bazaaris and intelligentsia, the traditional and the modern, in opposing the Qajar grant of an 1890 monopoly on tobacco to a British company represented the beginnings of a partnership that would ultimately pave the way for the rise of Reza Shah.¹⁰⁴ It was an ungainly alliance between two groups whose noticeably different interests coalesced when it came to opposing foreign intrusion and the corruption of the reigning dynasty.

Iranian nationalism is closely linked with constitutionalism because they appeared at the forefront of the political scene at the same time. It was, after all, during the early days of the revolution that the phrase "nation of Iran" was first shouted on the streets of Tehran.¹⁰⁵ Even a brief survey of scholarship dealing with the period reveals that there is a general tendency to use the terms "nationalist" and "constitutionalist" interchangeably or, at the least, to bind them together so tightly that one would assume that they refer to the same phenomenon.¹⁰⁶ This is not the case. Constitutionalism refers to a broader reform movement of which nationalists were an enthusiastic participant. Not all constitutionalists were nationalists. There were clear differences between the latter and

¹⁰² Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*, 77.

¹⁰³ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 9.

¹⁰⁴ John Limbert, *Iran: At War With History*, 78.

¹⁰⁵ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 82.

¹⁰⁶ Examples abound; see Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*, 82-83; Ward, *Immortal*, 91-124; or Martin Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion: Soviet Imperialism and Iran* (New York: Praeger Publishers,

the traditional element of the former, those who, would now be considered Islamist, that will be discussed below. For the sake of clarity, this study will use the term "reformer" when speaking generally of the advocates of the constitutional movement.

What these reformers believed must first be considered. In their ideology there were both foreign and domestic components, and their objectives were contradictory. An overarching theme was the resentment of Western encroachment while pursuing a policy of Westernization and equating it with modernity.¹⁰⁷ Iranian reformers, in general, sought to strengthen the country through a particular type of political modernization, specifically the centralization of the government around a parliamentary body. Although the past glories of the Persian Empire were a part of Iranian nationalist mythology, many of the trappings of traditionalism were no longer desirable. The nomadic way of life practiced by many tribal groups and unrestrained absolutist monarchy were seen to have no place in the country's future.¹⁰⁸ The Fundamental Laws, one of the earliest acts of the Iranian majlis, or parliament, were passed in December 1906 and stripped the shah of his power to make treaties or concessions, take out loans, or adjust the budget.¹⁰⁹ Beginning with the commercial capitulations of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, the Middle East had become increasingly economically subservient to Europe, which brought with it the granting of special rights and privileges to non-Muslim Europeans in the area. Moreover, economic domination opened the door for outright intervention, as was the

1988), 26-27.

¹⁰⁷ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁸ Stephanie Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran: Rural Conflict and the New State, 1921-1941* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 17.

¹⁰⁹ "The Fundamental Laws of Persia," Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, <http://www.iranrights.org/english/document-204.php> (accessed April 16, 2010).

case in Egypt in 1882.¹¹⁰ In the Iranian context, the Qajar shahs demonstrated a penchant for using loans and concession revenue to finance their excessive and opulent lifestyles while the majority of the country languished in abject poverty. One shah, in 1896, borrowed the equivalent of twelve million dollars from Russia in order to take a vacation to Europe.¹¹¹ That the Fundamental Laws tackled the fiscal irresponsibility of the monarchy directly cannot be unexpected. It is evident in that these provisions were simultaneously anti-monarchical and anti-colonial, revealing the broader theme of curtailing traditional "backwardness" while eliminating foreign influences.

These ideas appealed to the modern intelligentsia, those typically referred to as nationalists, but they comprised but a small portion of the Iranian population. Iranian nationalism can be separated from the wider constitutionalist movement along these grounds. Nationalist ideology sought more than Westernization in the material or political sense. Many nationalists, regardless of their own religious views, were vehemently anti-clerical. These individuals saw the clergy, not only as enemies of reform and progress, but as intellectually incapable of handling modern affairs not explicitly mentioned in the Quran. In order to undermine clerical influence and allow for the success of future reforms, Islamic tradition, venerable as it was, would need to be replaced in the public sphere by modern secularism.¹¹² The outwardly anti-religious bent had little appeal to a great many of their allies among the bazaaris and Shi'i clergy, the

¹¹⁰ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004), 50, 59, 92-100. Cleveland notes that the earliest Capitulations were made during a period of Ottoman primacy and were designed to encourage trade. When European power increased and eclipsed that of the Ottomans, the Capitulations were exploited to the benefit of European merchants and to the detriment of the Ottoman economy.

¹¹¹ For example, see: *Ibid.*, 144; Abraham Yeselson, *United States-Persian Diplomatic Relations* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1956), 86.

¹¹² Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 22-25.

ulama. In fact, many leading clergymen opposed the constitutional reforms and sided with the Qajar shahs, labeling constitutionalism as a heresy.¹¹³ American observers in Iran, even if sympathetic toward the reformers' struggle, were skeptical at the prospects for their success in a country with a largely illiterate population and no heritage of non-autocratic government. In late 1906, the American ambassador, Richmond Pearson, wrote from Tehran that he and his colleagues expected that "nothing substantial and permanent will grow out of this sudden movement for reform."¹¹⁴ Several provisions in the Supplementary Fundamental Laws (1907) attest to the compromises made to traditionalist interests, notably the declaration of Shi'ism as the official religion, prohibition of religious minorities from serving as government ministers, and grant of veto power to the *ulama* over any laws deemed irreconcilable with the principles of Islam.¹¹⁵ Such compromises, however, could not solve the problems of the underlying ideological divide within the heterogeneous coalition whose combined efforts were necessary for the success of the new government.

Even within the ranks of Iran's nationalists, there was no single, universally accepted, doctrine. They were united, broadly, behind a concept of national revival, but as one historian says, "differences in detail prevented a workable and durable synthesis."¹¹⁶ Among the ranks of Iran's nationalists were the anticlerical secularists, those who held Islam responsible, to some degree, for the country's woes. Their radical stance forced them to tone down their rhetoric in order to draw upon the multitude of

¹¹³ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 37.

¹¹⁴ United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the annual message of the president transmitted to Congress December 3, 1906* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1906), 1216-1217. (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1906v02>)

¹¹⁵ "The Supplementary Fundamental Laws of Persia," Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, <http://www.iranrights.org/english/document-205.php> (accessed April 16, 2010).

Iranians that the ulama could mobilize. Less numerous were those who attempted to reconcile Islamic belief with Western ideas, and whose goals were often shared with reformers in the clergy.¹¹⁷ Between their limited numbers and internal divisions, the nationalists were essentially powerless to effect real political change. More importantly, nationalist mythology remained confined, largely, to the realm of elite culture, while the majority of the population remained under the sway of the ulama and Islamic symbolism.¹¹⁸

If Iran was anything prior to Reza's emergence in the 1920's, it was a state divided. Proponents of constitutionalism were not only divorced from supporters of the Qajar monarchy, but were also split into rival parties.¹¹⁹ Different political factions had their own allies, and the various tribal groups were affiliated with both Iranian and foreign patrons.¹²⁰ The failure of the constitutionalist program to create the desired centralized state and the headway it made in destroying the old political order left an undeniable vacuum where some manner of political authority should have existed.¹²¹ Between the revolution and Reza's rise, Iran was subject to invasion and occupation by British, Russian, and Ottoman forces during the Great War, even though the country remained, officially, neutral. What nominal central authority that existed was further eroded as national leaders allied themselves with or fought against foreign powers, accelerating the political disintegration of Qajar Iran. Governments rose and fell,

¹¹⁶ Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921*, 5.

¹¹⁷ Azar Tabari, "The Role of the Clergy in Modern Iranian Politics." in Nikki Keddie, ed. *Religion and Politics in Iran*, 55-56.

¹¹⁸ Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921*, 7.

¹¹⁹ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 43-44.

¹²⁰ Stephanie Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran*, 17-18.

¹²¹ Homa Katouzian, "Riza Shah's Political Legitimacy and Social Base, 1921-1941," in Stephanie Cronin, ed. *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941* (London: Routledge,

oscillated between supporting the Entente or Central powers, and some nationalist leaders went so far as to establish a separate government in exile. Even the Armistice failed to bring about order. The ineffectual Qajar rulers were powerless to remove British troops from their soil, and the vast countryside was left under the control of any number of tribal or rebellious groups who were essentially unchecked by the Tehran government.¹²² It was this void, and the awareness of it by most Iranians, that allowed Reza Shah to step in with the general approval of the population.

At first thought, it may seem odd that a Cossack officer, a representative of the force that had been commanded by Russian officers until 1917 and attached to the Qajar shahs, would become a champion of Iranian nationalism. Reza's alleged words could account for this, explaining his skepticism toward foreign powers: "I saw the destinies of Iran's forces determined by Russian officers, who intervened directly in all the affairs of the army and compelled the Iranian officers to accept their dictatorial ways."¹²³ In any event, what is important is how Reza Shah co-opted preexisting nationalist sentiment and reconciled it with his own program. If earlier nationalism was interested in constitutionalism and representative government, Reza Shah's brand of nationalism was concerned, ultimately, with advancing the interests of the Pahlavi dynasty.¹²⁴ This is not to say that he acted primarily with his own benefit in mind, though some scholars point to his vast landholdings and fortune deposited in banks as though they are out of character

2003), 16.

¹²² For an overview of Iran's experience in the Great War and immediate aftermath, see: Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*; Ward, *Immortal*; Abrahamian, *Iran*. These offer an analysis of the political, military, and social developments of the period, respectively.

¹²³ Shams Pahlavi, *Khaterat-e Reza Shah Pahlavi* [Memories of Reza Shah Pahlavi] (Tehran: 1948) quoted in L.P. Elwell-Sutton, "Reza Shah the Great: Founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty," in George Lenczowski, ed., *Iran Under the Pahlavis* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 6.

¹²⁴ R.K. Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 4 (Autumn, 2004): 554, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4330062> (accessed September 25, 2010).

for a political figure and insist that this is the case.¹²⁵ More accurately, he likely equated a stable executive with a stable state, a logical assumption if one considers the merits of Qajar rule. That he, a ruler with unchecked power, sought to enrich himself financially can hardly be considered a surprise. It would be more remarkable if he did not.

In general, Reza Shah offered a vision acceptable to nationalists and many other segments of the population when he stepped onto the political stage in 1921. From the onset of the coup that eventually propelled him to power, he had stated that his primary objective was the establishment of a strong central government. He professed loyalty to the shah but was hostile to the court advisors, whom he blamed for the decay of the country.¹²⁶ This alleged loyalty would change a few years later when the opportunity to seize the throne presented itself, but it can hardly be seen as a critical point of departure. There is a difference, however, between an individual working with others to overthrow a government and an individual working to gain a position of power. In his climb from Cossack to shah, and even after taking the throne, Reza forged and broke political alliances with Iran's various factions.

The first of these partnerships was with the Reformers' party (*Hizb-i Eslah Taleban*), which was, in spite of its name, dominated by conservatives, namely landed aristocrats, merchants, and the ulama.¹²⁷ Thanks to a law that introduced universal male suffrage, the Reformers could draw upon a vast pool of votes from Iran's traditional

¹²⁵ For example, see Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah: The Plunder of Iran, 1921-1941* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 3-4. From dedication through bibliography, no attempt is made to take on a nuanced or neutral tone when discussing Reza Shah.

¹²⁶ Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910-1926* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 88.

¹²⁷ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 95.

sector, the countryside.¹²⁸ By allying with the majority party, Reza was able to expand his power and appeal. The ulama and their followers approved of his public appearance at and participation in a religious festival.¹²⁹ In exchange for catering to the concerns of the conservatives, such as releasing several of their supporters from prison or supporting their political ambitions, Reza was rewarded with more power, a larger budget for the military, and declarations of martial law in tribal areas. This marriage of convenience was shattered, however, when Reza pushed for conscription. The landed aristocrats were not thrilled at the prospect of their pool of labor being diminished, and the ulama were aghast at the thought of young men being confined to a state institution and indoctrinated with secularism.¹³⁰ Still, Reza's accomplishments, even in this early phase, were substantial enough to catch the attention of the international community. An American newspaper cited the removal of Russian soldiers from Iran, the quelling of domestic rebellions, and the increasing prestige of the army, and attributed them all to the work of "one man."¹³¹

Undeterred, Reza aligned himself, next, in 1924, in a coalition that included the Revival party (*Hizb-i Tajadod*), dominated by genuine reformists, typically Westernized intellectuals, and the more radical Socialist party (*Hizb-i Sosiya*list). This combination marked the resurgence of nationalism in Iran.¹³² More importantly, it allowed Reza to begin his reshaping of the country. His early dealings with the Reformist party were simply a means to an end, that of securing his own authority. The most dangerous

¹²⁸ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 121.

¹²⁹ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 95.

¹³⁰ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 131.

¹³¹ "Persia Finds Prosperity in One-Man Rule," *New York Tribune*, November 25, 1923. Note: The exact date of this article is uncertain due to marks on the print. The month and year are identifiable, but the day is in question.

opponents he faced, in his opinion, were the clerics.¹³³ Both parties advocated Westernization and modernization, including the adoption of a secular, Western model of education.¹³⁴ In order to make the new partnership a majority in the majlis, Reza used his strengthening military, the control of which had been bestowed upon him by his former conservative allies, to manipulate the elections in tribal areas.¹³⁵ For the nationalists, this must have been a critical moment. After having argued that the state could only succeed with a strong, centralized military, to then be given the opportunity to promote their agenda with the assistance of the military must have vindicated their beliefs. Once in place, the new nationalist majority began to implement the reforms they felt necessary to transform Iran from a backwater to a modern state.¹³⁶

It was during this time period that Reza moved to eliminate the Qajar dynasty. In the spring of 1924, Iran's nationalists, influenced by developments in Turkey, lobbied for the creation of a republic.¹³⁷ Worth noting, and that will be discussed below, is that not all of Iran's nationalists supported this effort, equating it with a dictatorship under Reza. Naturally, it was also opposed by the ulama and the traditional elements of Iranian society. Much of this animosity stemmed from the abolition of the Caliphate in neighboring Turkey around the same time that a republic was proclaimed. To many, "republic" was synonymous with "godless secularism."¹³⁸ Protests soon broke out decrying the innovation of republican government. In a backroom deal, Reza agreed to speak out against republicanism and in favor of constitutional monarchy, while

¹³² Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 95-96; Abrahamian, *Iran*, 121.

¹³³ Limbert, *Iran*, 86.

¹³⁴ Keddie, *Qajar Iran*, 85.

¹³⁵ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 132-133.

¹³⁶ Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 35-36.

¹³⁷ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 42.

conservatives agreed to turn against the Qajar shah. Shortly thereafter, in 1925, the Revival and Reformist parties passed a bill to abolish the Qajar dynasty and leave the state, temporarily, in the hands of Reza. In another example of *quid pro quo*, Reza immediately repaid his conservative allies by banning the sale of alcohol and outlawing gambling, along with several other provisions. When the time came to select a new shah, there could hardly be any doubt where the electors would turn. Out of two-hundred sixty votes, only three did not support the creation of the Pahlavi dynasty.¹³⁹ The reigns of power were firmly in the hands of Reza Shah.

The parties and allies that Reza used to bring himself to power were soon cast aside. In 1927, he crushed the Communist (*Tudeh*) and Socialist parties and imprisoned many of their leaders, eliminating the conservative Revival party soon after. By 1932, even the unflinchingly loyal Progress Party, which had gone through several incarnations and had become known as the Progressive Party (*Hizb-i Taraqqi*), was banned due to the shah's concern that it could become a source of opposition.¹⁴⁰ Independent newspapers and labor unions were suppressed in 1927 as Reza relied more and more upon the state security apparatus and his own power to maintain control.¹⁴¹ From this point on, the Iranian public was locked out of politics while the shah exercised unrestrained power. One historian has wryly remarked that "[b]y the end of his reign, he had killed not only his former enemies, but the people who had helped him in his rise to power."¹⁴² Reza Shah began to lose supporters, even among the ranks of devoted nationalists.

The perpetual goal, really the *raison d'être* of the nationalist, is the preservation or

¹³⁸ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 96.

¹³⁹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 134-135.

¹⁴⁰ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 100.

¹⁴¹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 138-139.

establishment of a state. Without it, debates over the finer points of politics or policy are irrelevant. In the early days of Reza's rule, the early 1920's, the intelligentsia had rallied behind the Cossack officer, seeing in him, rightly or wrongly, shades of the constitutionalist movement. After the chaos and disorder of the previous decades, virtually all Iranian social classes, those opposed to him, and even the tribes at an early point, had a reason to support Reza Shah.¹⁴³ He may have aroused opposition at various times, but between political cunning, personal prestige, and the realization that anarchy was likely to happen without a strong leader, it had been easier to attract supporters than opponents, at least, early on. After his coronation in 1926, Reza took his state-building endeavor to the next level. At the core of his program of modernization and centralization was his stated belief that "a strong army is the only means of saving the country from the miserable state of its affairs."¹⁴⁴ Eventually, Iranians would discover exactly how central the military would be to the new shah's vision of the state.

Domestic Challenges to the Central Government

The opponents of constitutional rule were the Qajar shah and his allies. After Reza's 1921 coup, it was clear that the Qajars had been, more or less, defeated. The opponents of national sovereignty were the foreign imperialists who sought to control the country, but they could not be challenged until Iran came to become a modern, centralized state. The biggest and most immediate challenges came from rebel groups and the country's sizeable nomadic populations. Their defeat and subjugation would be

¹⁴² Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 110.

¹⁴³ M. Reza Ghods, "Nationalism and Reza Shah," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 1 (Jan., 1991): 35-45, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283413> (accessed September 25, 2010).

¹⁴⁴ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 93-94; Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran*, 3-5.

the first objective of the central government of Reza Shah.

Prior to the constitutional revolution, tribalism had long been an acknowledged and accepted factor in Iranian politics. Not only were the Qajar shahs of tribal origins, as were their predecessors, but the royal court had nomadic traits as it shifted from summer homes to Tehran in the winter months.¹⁴⁵ Qajar Iran's military was wholly inadequate to monitor the country and suppress insurrection, even after attempts were made during the nineteenth century to strengthen the force. This left most power in the hands of tribal leaders and landowners, who could supply fighters when asked by the shah and were permitted to collect taxes to compensate for their expenses. Iran's tribal levies, when fully mobilized, could number as many as eighty thousand well-equipped, expert fighters, but the loyalty of these men was to their own leaders, not the central government.¹⁴⁶ Even with the establishment of constitutional government in 1906, however, tribal contingents still exerted considerable power. The royalist forces enjoyed the support of many tribal groups for a time, while the constitutionalist cause was taken up by the Bakhtiyaris, a prominent non-Persian speaking tribal confederation in southwestern Iran. Demonstrating the fickle nature of the tribal levies, they withdrew their support of the Qajar shah when he could no longer pay them. Bakhtiyari backing of the constitution stemmed, not from affinity for the reformist program, but from a grievance against the shah and ambitions to gain power in the new government.¹⁴⁷ The tribe would use its role in the revolution as a springboard to establishing itself for a time as a national political force and its members holding multiple government posts, including the position of prime

¹⁴⁵ Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ Ward, *Immortal*, 65.

¹⁴⁷ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 98-100; Keddie, *Qajar Iran*, 60.

minister in 1909 and from 1912 to 1913.¹⁴⁸

Tribal politics came into play again during and after the First World War, the time during which "the strength and the autonomous tendencies of the tribes and of local powers vis-à-vis the central government took on an unprecedented magnitude."¹⁴⁹ The British, Russians, Ottomans, and Germans all sought and manipulated tribal allies to suit their needs during the war. After the armistice, the British recognized Iran's vulnerability and, frightened by the specter of communist expansion, floated the possibility of using their client tribes to establish states in strategic locations in the event of a Russian invasion of the country and capture of Tehran.¹⁵⁰ With their fluid loyalties and military power, Iran's tribes posed a serious challenge, even an existential threat, to the weak central government of the Qajars.

In addition to tribal groups, Iran was plagued by various other ideologically driven or regionalist movements that posed a threat to central authority. The Jangalis of Gilan and the National Democratic Party (*Firqeh-i Demokrat-i Azerbaijan*) of Tabriz are two notable examples. The Jangalis, also known as the Committee of Islamic Unity, were led by Mirza Kuchik Khan and operated out of Gilan.¹⁵¹ This movement, founded in 1915, had pan-Islamist roots and was "opposed to large landlords, to the central government, and to tsarist Russia, and aimed at taking over all Iran, not breaking off from it."¹⁵² Kuchik is depicted, even by his opponents, as an earnest nationalist and Muslim on

¹⁴⁸ Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran*, 18; Stephanie Cronin, "Riza Shah and the Disintegration of Bakhtiari Power in Iran, 1921-1934," in Stephanie Cronin, ed. *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941* (London: Routledge, 2003), 241-243.

¹⁴⁹ Kaveh Bayat, "Riza Shah and the Tribes: An Overview," in Stephanie Cronin, ed. *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941* (London: Routledge, 2003), 213.

¹⁵⁰ Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran*, 19; Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 46.

¹⁵¹ Abrahamian, *Iran* 111.

¹⁵² Keddie, *Qajar Iran*, 70-71.

a mission to remove foreign powers and liberate the country from its corrupt central government.¹⁵³ It must be recalled that, even if these goals seem to correspond with those of the constitutional revolution, the Jangalis were just one of many entities who opposed the existing government in Tehran. Moreover, the nationalism of the group appears not to have been so absolute. At one point they turned down an offer from a Tehran political faction to advance on the city and establish a government on the grounds that their primary interests were local autonomy.¹⁵⁴ Even more damning, Kuchik Khan accepted Bolshevik assistance for his cause, including the presence of the Red Army, which he only rejected when communist influence threatened to take control of the movement.¹⁵⁵

The revolt of the National Democratic Party in Tabriz was similar to the Jangali effort. Led by Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani, a former member of the majlis, this group was militantly opposed to foreign interventions into Iranian affairs but also had distinctly regional concerns.¹⁵⁶ Unlike Kuchik Khan, Khiabani refused to accept a Soviet presence in Iran and even fought against the pro-communist German consul in Tabriz.¹⁵⁷ Quite importantly, the movement was also driven by Khiabani's intense hatred for the British and his conviction that the central government served as their pawn. Aside from opposing foreign influence, the group's platform was largely centered on Azerbaijani grievances, mainly that its sacrifices during the revolution were not rewarded with the financial and political benefits that it deserved and that representatives of the central government sent

¹⁵³ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 48-49.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁵⁵ Keddie, *Qajar Iran*, 72; Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion*, 40-42; Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*, 152-154; Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 94.

¹⁵⁶ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 57.

¹⁵⁷ Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*, 155-157.

to Azerbaijan should be selected in accordance with the wishes of the local population.¹⁵⁸

Tehran's rule was not to be considered legitimate until their demands were met.¹⁵⁹

Because of the nature of its revolt, the National Democratic Movement cannot be seen wholly as a separatist movement, per se, but one that advocated the recognition of an element of local autonomy.

The strength and autonomy of these groups were antithetical to the centralizing ambitions of nationalists. Not only did they take power from the hands of the Tehran authorities, but they provided foreign powers with accomplices to extend their influence in the country. The tenuous nature of their allegiance to Tehran and the rivalries between them did nothing to alleviate the widespread instability in Iran. Exactly how widespread disorder had become, how utterly impotent the central government had become, is astonishing. General Hassan Arfa lists twenty-two insurrections of different natures, be they tribal, criminal, or driven by political motives, underway in the country on the eve of the coup that elevated Reza Shah to the national stage.¹⁶⁰

In early 1921, American officials in Tehran recognized the extent of the chaos and its potential for inviting foreign, specifically Soviet, intervention, and suggested that if the Iranians could have the assistance of "at least thirty experienced American officers" to lead their military then local revolts could be crushed and, revealing their primary concern, Bolshevik influence could be minimized or negated "above all."¹⁶¹ The British also realized that the status quo was unsustainable and, under the terms of the hated 1919 Anglo-Persian treaty, sent military advisors and equipment to the country. Even if the

¹⁵⁸ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 113.

¹⁵⁹ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 57.

¹⁶⁰ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 439-446.

¹⁶¹ United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1921*

treaty reduced the country to a protectorate, as several American officials seemed to believe was the case,¹⁶² the military commitment made by Britain reflects its interest in building a viable Iranian state. To put the matter more bluntly, the British needed an Iran with the capacity to maintain internal stability, as this was the only way to ensure that the country would not have the sort of discord that could invite or facilitate communist expansion. That the desire to create a powerful centralizing authority would be a common interest between the British and Iranian nationalists is an ironic twist, but more importantly, foreign observers and Iranians saw the development of military power as the key to accomplishing this goal. As Reza Shah's rule would show, military force would be instrumental in forging modern Iran.

Reforming the Armed Forces: A Brief Overview

Before delving into the development of the armed forces under Reza Shah's rule, it is necessary to say a few words about the development of the Western-styled military both in Iran and the Middle East in general. By the late nineteenth century there was no question as to who dominated the globe. Western, primarily European powers, had established vast empires that encompassed the world. Their military might was unsurpassed, unrivaled by anything that non-Europeans could muster. Granted, there were examples of Europeans being handed shocking defeats by "primitive" opponents, the Zulu triumph at Isandlwana in 1879 being one example, but these were the exception to a well-established rule. Even the Japanese victory over the Russians during the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, or the difficulties faced by the British in putting down the Boers in

(Washington, DC: GPO, 1921), 633. (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1921v02>)

¹⁶² United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1919*

the 1880's could be quantified. The Boers were of European descent, and the Japanese had applied the lessons of Europe in developing their power. In order to close the military gap between the Europeans and themselves, Middle Eastern leaders sought to build modern armies that could hold their own on the field.¹⁶³

European advisors and weapons had been brought to Egypt during the reign of Ali Bey al-Kabir, a Mamluk who ruled from 1760 to 1773, but it was under Muhammad Ali (1805-1848) that "the first sustained program in the Middle East of state-sponsored Europeanization of the military" occurred, primarily with French support.¹⁶⁴ In the late nineteenth century, forty-eight American Civil War veterans of the Union and Confederacy were summoned to Egypt by Ismail Pasha to modernize his military. The ruler had paid close attention to reports of the fighting in America and was impressed by battlefield accounts and the might of the country's industry. The officers he brought to Egypt were tasked with the wholesale modernization of the armed forces, a reform and reequipping effort that ranged from training, to organization, to the construction of fortifications, to the acquisition of modern arms. These Americans even went so far as to lead Egyptian armies in the field.¹⁶⁵

Elsewhere in the region, Ottoman Sultan Selim III had sought to update his military using the European model and created an entirely new infantry corps called the *Nizam-i Jedid*, or New Order, in 1797. The force eventually expanded to twenty-three

(Washington, DC: GPO, 1919), 698-719. (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1919v02>)

¹⁶³ For more information on the development of European inspired militaries around the world, see David B. Ralston, *Importing the European Army: The Introduction of European Military Techniques and Institutions in the Extra-European World, 1600-1914* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996). For a study of military modernization in the Middle East, see Majid Khadduri, "The Role of the Military in Middle East Politics," *The American Political Science Review* 47, no. 2 (Jun., 1953): 511-24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1952036> (accessed 12/06/2011).

¹⁶⁴ Cleveland, *Modern Middle East*, 64-74.

¹⁶⁵ Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East: 1776 to the Present*

thousand men but was ultimately doomed by its novelty, on one hand because it was not easily integrated into the rest of the armed forces, and on the other hand because of the opposition it generated from traditional sectors of the population.¹⁶⁶ Reforms were inevitable, however, and the Ottoman military continued to evolve, at varying rates, from the 1820's until World War I.¹⁶⁷ In the late nineteenth century, a German advisor was sent to Istanbul where he served for more than a decade.¹⁶⁸ His influence can be seen in the Ottoman armies that took the field in 1914. A great many of the weapons used by the Ottomans, small arms and artillery alike, were of German origin. Most infantrymen carried some variant of a German designed Mauser into combat. Even the Ottoman navy included ships that were purchased from their European allies.¹⁶⁹

Like other powers in the region, Iran also turned to Europe for assistance in creating a national army. As early as 1801, a treaty was negotiated with the British in which Iran would receive material and advisory support in the event of an attack on the country by France or Afghanistan. When war broke out with Russia and the shah appealed for assistance, Britain was loathe to do anything that might undermine its improved relations with the other European powers and the pact collapsed.¹⁷⁰ Real efforts to construct a Europeanized military began under Qajar prince Abbas Mirza (1789-1833), who, as governor of Azerbaijan, saw the frequent defeats of Iranian armies at the hands of the Russians as definitive proof that changes were necessary in order for

(Gainesville: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 193-209.

¹⁶⁶ Cleveland, *Modern Middle East*, 62-64.

¹⁶⁷ Ralston, *Importing the European Army*, 43.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁶⁹ H. P. Willmott, *World War I* (Gainesville: Covent Garden Books, 2006), 74, 77.

¹⁷⁰ Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*, 39-40.

the country to defend itself.¹⁷¹ He was so convinced of the deficiency of Iran's forces that he forced Russian prisoners to train his men in European techniques and even formed a unit around a core of deserters from the Russian army.¹⁷² As early as 1807, the Treaty of Finkenstein between France and Iran compelled Napoleon to send officers to his new ally in order to reform the military forces there and to reconnoiter an invasion route to India. For the French, the partnership was mainly anti-British, but the Russian foe was the most pressing matter for the Iranians. Under the treaty, a cannon foundry was constructed, soldiers trained, and fortifications were established, but these activities would be short lived. Later that year, France signed a treaty with the Russians that essentially annulled the previous agreement with Iran.¹⁷³

Not discouraged, Abbas Mirza turned back to the British for assistance in creating what he also called the *Nezam-e Jadid*, or New Order, at roughly the same time such efforts were taking place in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷⁴ The fact that new Ottoman and Qajar armies sprang up under the same moniker suggests a common outlook. One cannot assume that military developments were based simply on a transmission from Europe to the Middle East. Throughout history, the Iranians and Ottomans were frequently at war.¹⁷⁵ It is entirely likely that, as these neighbors observed one another and met on the battlefield, they would learn lessons and borrow whatever models they deemed useful. The shifts between French and British support created a force in Iran that seemed to be a composite of influences. The Iranian army's weapons were British, its infantry and

¹⁷¹ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 2.

¹⁷² Ward, *Immortal*, 66.

¹⁷³ Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion*, 13-14; Keddie, *Qajar Iran*, 21-22; Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*, 40.

¹⁷⁴ Ward, *Immortal*, 67.

¹⁷⁵ For an overview of these conflicts, see: Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*, 13-32.

cavalry mixed French uniforms with traditional Iranian garb, and its artillerymen were adorned with British uniforms and had only been forced to become clean-shaven after an unfortunate man's beard had been set ablaze by an errant spark. The army simply fused Western appearances with Iranian traditions without any real attempt at adapting doctrine or command practices. Without experts trained in the European style of command, logistics, or technological expertise, the New Order was at a severe disadvantage and suffered accordingly.¹⁷⁶

When rushed into battle against the Russians between 1804 and 1813, what little success the reformed Iranian army enjoyed was overshadowed by the magnitude of its failures. A European observer bemoaned the utter lack of order and discipline of Iran's military, from the task of raising, equipping, and maintaining an army to its handling on the ground.¹⁷⁷ To be fair, however, Abbas Mirza's forces performed admirably against a larger Ottoman army, defeating it at the Battle of Erzurum in 1821, but this episode stands out as an anomaly. From this early experience a pattern would ultimately emerge through the nineteenth century. Iran would send officers abroad for training, such as to Austria in 1829, or host European officers, as it did British and French missions in 1836 and 1839, respectively, before engaging in combat without making adequate preparations. These expeditions inevitably resulted in Iranian defeat due to insufficient training and preparation, and might actually have witnessed the military becoming more and more unready with each campaign.¹⁷⁸ Subsequent reform attempts produced elements that would shape later military developments, moving toward national unity and material self-sufficiency, but the Qajar dynasty was generally too weak to put together

¹⁷⁶ Ward, *Immortal*, 67-68.

¹⁷⁷ Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*, 44-45.

the sort of broad-based transformation of society necessary for the desired modernization to take place.¹⁷⁹ Tehran's lack of authority made it impossible to put together a force that could shift the balance of power on a domestic or international level. The most significant and enduring military developments to take place before the rise of Reza Shah were set in motion by foreigners.

Three military organizations would prove critical for the future of the country. In chronological order of their development, these were the Iranian Cossacks, the Gendarmerie, and the South Persia Rifles. The Cossacks were the result of a strange confluence of Iranian royal and Russian interests. A Qajar shah visiting Russia in 1878 was significantly impressed by the Russian Cossacks to request some of their officers to be brought to Iran to organize a royal guard.¹⁸⁰ The Persian Cossacks were established, trained, and led by Russians while Iranians filled its ranks. For a time, the unit was well-disciplined and well-paid, but funding soon dried up and the brigade shrank from more than a thousand to just two hundred men. In 1884 the Cossacks were sent a new officer, Russian, of course, who set about expanding the roster and increasing professionalism. By the time of the Constitutional Revolution, the unit was the only viable military force in the country. With its Russian officers, the force was typically seen by Iranians as the tool of a foreign power.¹⁸¹ Even Mohammad Reza Shah would concede in a 1961 book that this was the case and describe its formation as a type of Russian infiltration, going so far as to say that the foreign domination his father felt while serving under them would

¹⁷⁸ Ward, *Immortal*, 67, 76-81; *Ibid.*, 46-49.

¹⁷⁹ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 3; Ward, *Immortal*, 69; Chris Paine and Erica Schoenberger, "Iranian Nationalism and the Great Powers: 1872-1954," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 37, (May, 1975): 3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3011252> (accessed September 25, 2010).

¹⁸⁰ Keddie, *Qajar Iran*, 41.

inflare his sense of patriotism and nationalism.¹⁸² During the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, the Cossacks opposed the reform efforts and sided strictly and violently with the monarchy. Only with the Bolshevik Revolution did the unit cease to serve the interests of the Russians, yet its legacy remained linked with the concept of autocracy.¹⁸³

The Gendarmerie was, in many ways, a response to the influence of the Cossacks. Animosity between the units could be attributed to their differing outlooks and was manifested in a variety of ways.¹⁸⁴ The origins of the Gendarmerie lie in 1912, when an American financial advisor sent to Iran in the wake of the Constitutional Revolution, W. Morgan Shuster, found the country to be in such a state of anarchy that taxes could not be collected. In order to provide the central government with the means to gather resources from the population, Shuster saw to it that a Gendarmerie was established, originally under the command of a British officer. The new organization fell in line with nationalist objectives, giving the central government a viable instrument of rule over the country. In response to this newly asserted authority, the Russians refused Gendarmerie agents access to their sphere of influence in the northern portion of the country and had Cossack forces physically resist Shuster's efforts to collect taxes from their clients.¹⁸⁵ The Gendarmerie came to be led by Swedish officers, as Sweden was a minor enough power that the British and Russians would tolerate the country having a presence in Iran.

¹⁸¹ Ward, *Immortal*, 82-85.

¹⁸² Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, *Mission For My Country* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), 33-38.

¹⁸³ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 53; Keddie, *Qajar Iran*, 67-70.

¹⁸⁴ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 54. Arfa recounts the rivalry coming to light when observing the Cossacks marching, in good order, to the tune of their band, while a Gendarmerie band attempted to disrupt the procession by loudly playing a waltz.

¹⁸⁵ Arthur C. Millspaugh, *Americans in Persia*, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1946), 18; United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the annual message of the president transmitted to Congress December 7, 1911* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1911), 682. (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1911>)

As the Gendarmarie developed, it evolved into a mounted force with roughly ten thousand soldiers nationwide by the outbreak of the First World War. Most of the personnel appears to be primarily of tribal origins. One regiment was mainly composed of Kurds, Azerbaijani Turks, and Bakhtiari, while another was characterized as being primarily Turki-speaking.¹⁸⁶ The Gendarmerie tended to have a nationalist outlook, something reinforced by the decision to mix men from different regions when making units. Because of this, it was viewed skeptically by the British and the Russians. During the war, many of its members, incensed by the Allied violation of Iranian neutrality, joined the armed resistance against the British and Russians.¹⁸⁷

In order to protect its interests in Iran during the First World War, mainly the preservation of a buffer zone between Russia and India and assurances that the Tehran government would remain pliable, Britain established a military force roughly corresponding to the Cossack brigades. The South Persia Rifles, created in 1916, were charged with fighting the tribal and nationalist forces who resisted British occupation of the country.¹⁸⁸ Nearly half of the five thousand men initially incorporated into the unit were merely a Gendarmerie force that was absorbed wholesale. Later, five hundred of them would be dismissed for their hostility toward Britain.¹⁸⁹ Toward the end of the war, the South Persia Rifles captured their nemesis in the region, Wilhelm Wassmuss, a German tasked by his government with organizing a rebellion, much as Col. Lawrence

¹⁸⁶ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 19, 28-29. While it is not surprising, given the historical martial prowess of Iran's tribes and "nationalizing" goal of the Gendarmerie, that tribesmen would be recruited, it seems remarkable that tribal manpower seems so readily available. More research needs to be done on the actual composition and construction of the Gendarmerie at this time.

¹⁸⁷ Ward, *Immortal*, 107-117.

¹⁸⁸ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 54.

¹⁸⁹ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 41.

had in Arabia.¹⁹⁰ Most importantly, the force was used by Britain as a steppingstone to gain additional influence over the country, but also helped to spark the coup that led to Reza Shah's ascendance. In 1919, a treaty between Britain and Iran was proposed that would have given the British advisory positions over the country's military, as well as granted them a monopoly on arms supplies and the ability to dismiss most of the Cossack officers. Although the treaty was never ratified, the Russians responded to this perceived threat by occupying areas in their sphere of influence in the northern part of the country and supporting separatist groups, raising the ire of many Iranian leaders, including Reza Shah.¹⁹¹

The aforementioned three armed forces, combined with the earlier reform attempts of the nineteenth century, reveal the trajectory of military development in Iran. There are the parallel themes of foreign and domestic efforts, the interests and influences of foreign powers and the contrasting ambitions of Iran's leaders. Each party worked to develop a force loyal to itself. Even more critical is the fact that Iran lacked the ability to develop a military force with the ability to keep foreigners at bay. Political and technological reasons both had a hand in this and would continue to do so into Reza's reign as Shah. After the demise of the Qajar dynasty in 1925, the Pahlavi shah would make a valiant and vain attempt to construct the military that Iran's leaders had wanted for more than a century. A force would be developed whose power to crush domestic unrest was unsurpassed in modern Iranian history and whose successes within the country would lead to a fatal overestimation of its potency.

¹⁹⁰ Keddie, *Qajar Iran*, 67.

¹⁹¹ Anthony H Cordesman, *After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East* (New

III. (Re)Shaping Military and Society in Reza's Iran

A Force in Transition: The Military of Reza Shah

When Reza and his co-conspirators launched their coup in early 1921, Iran's military was virtually nonexistent. The Cossacks, consisting of roughly 8,000 Iranian officers and soldiers, and a foreign contingent of British officers, the Russians having been dismissed in 1920, were primarily paid for by the British. The South Persia Rifles, organized in two brigades, could muster 190 Iranian officers, 5,400 other ranks, and about 300 commissioned and non-commissioned officers from Britain and India.¹⁹² Numerically, the largest force in the country was the Gendarmerie with roughly 10,000 men.¹⁹³ Although an Anglo-Persian Military Commission recommended in 1919 that Iran take command of the Cossacks and South Persia Rifles, and also that the armed forces be expanded to 43,000 men, this had still not happened by 1921. Neither had an air force been developed, as had been suggested.¹⁹⁴ Recruits for the military were procured through a nineteenth century system, characterized by one historian as a primitive form of conscription, known as *bunichah*. The *bunichah* system required different areas of the country to provide a certain number of men based on the amount of land under cultivation.¹⁹⁵ The term itself was derived from the word *bunah*, which referred to an agricultural unit.¹⁹⁶ Voluntary enlistment was also permitted. This system

York: Westview Press, 1993), 388.

¹⁹² Scott-Keltie and Mortimer Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 58th Edition*, 1167

¹⁹³ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 43.

¹⁹⁴ Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 58th Edition*, 1167-1168.

¹⁹⁵ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 3-4.

¹⁹⁶ Stephanie Cronin, "Conscription and Popular Resistance in Iran, 1925-1941," *International Review of Social History* 48 (1998): 452.

would linger on into the early years of Reza's command until replaced by a new type of conscription.¹⁹⁷

According to Hassan Arfa, the rifles, machine guns, and artillery of the army were of various types and ammunition was in short supply. Many tribal fighters were better armed than the government troops.¹⁹⁸ Artillery purchased from Europe was unusable because Iranian soldiers "were quite incapable of handling them," likely from lack of training. During training exercises, the artillerymen were forced to borrow carriage horses from the royal stables because they did not have their own animals to tow the guns.¹⁹⁹ Even after Reza Shah began reforming the military, it was in such a dire state after years of neglect at the hands of the Qajars that campaigning soldiers sometimes ran out of ammunition and were forced to confiscate both rifles and ammunition from nearby civilians.²⁰⁰ These deficiencies can be tied to the overall weakness of the Qajar regime. In Stephanie Cronin's terms, "the condition of the army was, more generally, symptomatic of the profound failure of the Qajar state to embrace the measures necessary for its own survival."²⁰¹ Quite simply, Iran lacked the institutions necessary to support a centralized military force, let alone an expansive Western army. The fragmentation of the state under Qajar leadership is an even greater symptom of this failure.

Although it would take more than four years for Reza to work his way to the throne, his position as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Minister of War gave him considerable influence over the military almost from the onset of the 1921 coup. The reforms he implemented were rapid and radical. By December 1921, Iran's dual military

¹⁹⁷ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 3, 121.

¹⁹⁸ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 114.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

forces, the Cossacks and the Gendarmerie, were unified under a single command by Army Order Number One.²⁰² Britain had the South Persia Rifles disbanded rather than be assimilated into Reza's new army. Also unified were the various officer training schools, those for the Cossacks and Gendarmerie, into a single institution.²⁰³ Further stressing the Iranian-oriented nature of the new regime, most foreign officers were dismissed from their positions, apart from only a few Swedes and refugees from Russia who had taken up Iranian citizenship.²⁰⁴ These acts all worked to bolster the position of the central government. A single military force, considering Iranian history, may have been a gamble, but the benefits it offered in the way of a clear hierarchy and chain of command were worth the risk. Establishing a single military academy would allow for the creation of a single curriculum and ensure that cadets would receive a standardized program of indoctrination. The removal of foreign officers meant the removal of at least one source of foreign influence. On the whole, these reforms were intended to enhance the control of the central government over the military, from the classroom to the battlefield.

In order to become a viable force, as well as a truly national force, the military would need to grow in size and scope, drawing recruits from the entire population. Even before the unification of the Cossacks and Gendarmerie, Reza, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Minister of War, Prime Minister from 1923 to 1926, and with powerful political allies, had ambitions to create an army of one hundred thousand men.²⁰⁵ Such

²⁰¹ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 7.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 91-95.

²⁰³ Ward, *Immortal*, 131-132.

²⁰⁴ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 92-93; Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 54-55.

²⁰⁵ Michael P. Zirinsky, "Imperial Power and Dictatorship: Britain and the Rise of Reza Shah, 1921-1926,"

an expansion required, obviously, manpower, and also consumed additional financial resources. Universal conscription was instituted in 1926 and gradually spread across the country as it could be enforced. Conscription provoked widespread resistance that was largely suppressed by 1930.²⁰⁶ Under the terms of the conscription law, all males were subject to twenty-five years of military service upon reaching the age of twenty-one. Only two of these years, however, were to be active. By drafting young men from rural areas into national service, discharged soldiers, exposed to life beyond their home villages, could be sent back to the periphery when the men's terms ended and would contribute to "the breakdown of provincial isolation."²⁰⁷ Military service was so widely believed to be instrumental in nation-building that building a small professional army was never even proposed.²⁰⁸ The large sizes of, and threats posed by, the British and Russian armies almost certainly helped to convince Iranians that their security required a similar large force.

Although one of the goals of conscription was to foster a sense of national identity, and, indeed, even non-Muslims were expected to perform military service, it was not always applied evenly. Early on, it was only applied in Tehran, Qazvin, and Hamadan before being expanded elsewhere. Government officials tasked with finding recruits would often accept bribes to either permit or exempt an individual from military service, and were even known to hold a family's domestic servants for ransom in exchange for an eligible recruit from their household. Religious minorities, as well,

International Journal of Middle East Studies 24, no. 4 (November, 1992): 647.

²⁰⁶ Stephanie Cronin, "Riza Shah and the Paradoxes of Military Modernization in Iran, 1921-1941," in Stephanie Cronin, ed. *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941* (London: Routledge, 2003), 43.

²⁰⁷ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 56.

²⁰⁸ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 125.

appear to have been unfairly targeted. In Shiraz, a disproportionate number of Jews were drafted, and reports claim that recruiters in Kerman took every available Zoroastrian.²⁰⁹ For the most part, however, compulsory service changed the face of the military and made it more representative of Iran's ethnic composition. Traditionally, military recruits were ethnically Turkish or Azeri.²¹⁰ Tribal levies served in homogenous units commanded by a chief from their own group. Reza's reforms changed this system. Even when tribal forces were summoned to support the military, they were placed in ethnically mixed units led by an officer.²¹¹ The expansion of government power into the Iranian periphery allowed for the integration of tribesmen and various minorities into the military.²¹² While the implementation of conscription targeted "the poorest and most defenseless sectors of society,"²¹³ it was widespread enough to shift the burden of military service to a wider variety of ethnic groups than had existed under the Qajars.

Overall, the implementation of conscription brought the military from 40,000 men in 1926 to around 127,000 in 1941.²¹⁴ With the full mobilization of reserves, this number increased to almost half a million.²¹⁵ In terms of manpower, Reza Shah's army was radically different from the tiny force of the Qajars. Far from the meager combination of Cossacks and Gendarmerie forces that made up the military in 1921, by 1941, Iran's army had grown to nine divisions and six independent brigades and regiments, including one

²⁰⁹ Ward, *Immortal*, 145-146.

²¹⁰ Cronin, "The Paradoxes of Military Modernization," 44.

²¹¹ Ward, *Immortal*, 137.

²¹² For a detailed study of conscription and resistance to it from various sectors of Iranian society, see Stephanie Cronin, "Conscription and Popular Resistance in Iran, 1925-1941," *International Review of Social History* 48 (1998): 451-471.

²¹³ Ward, *Immortal*, 145.

²¹⁴ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 136.

²¹⁵ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 57.

that was completely mechanized.²¹⁶ Much of this growth took place during the 1930's, as is illustrated by the table below.²¹⁷

Iranian Military Manpower

Year	Manpower
1920	Cossack Brigade: 202 officers, 7,856 other ranks South Persia Rifles: 190 officers, 5,400 other ranks Gendarmerie: 242 officers, 8,158 other ranks
1925	All ranks: 28,000
1930	All ranks: 40,000
1935	Army: 1,507 officers, 30,872 other ranks Other: 2,488 officers, 68,952 other ranks
1940	3,200 officers, 116,800 other ranks

The mission of American Arthur Millspaugh, sent to Iran in 1922 with the task of putting the country's finances in order, played an integral role in making military expansion economically feasible, just as the employment of military force made the collection of taxes possible. The processes are directly linked and mutually enabling.²¹⁸ Millspaugh wrote that he recognized, based on the experiences of Morgan Shuster, that taxes could not be collected without military force. Not only this, but he could not create a separate gendarmerie to exact taxes as Shuster had. Military force had been

²¹⁶ Mortimer Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 78th Edition*, p. 1027, in the Statesman's Year-Book Online Archive, <http://www.statesmansyearbook.com/syarchives> (accessed April 24, 2011).

²¹⁷ Figures derived from *The Statesman's Year-Book* as follows: 1920: Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 57th Edition*, p. 1140, Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 43; 1925: John Scott-Keltie and Mortimer Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 62nd Edition*, p. 1195; 1930: John Scott-Keltie and Mortimer Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 67th Edition*, p. 1173-1174; 1935: Mortimer Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 72nd Edition*, p. 1204; 1940: Mortimer Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 77th Edition*, p. 1025. Note: 1935 "Other" figure includes Gendarmerie, frontier guards, and local militia.

²¹⁸ See Finer, "State- and Nation-Building in Europe," 96.

monopolized by Reza Shah.²¹⁹ Millspaugh was, however, not averse to using force in order to get what he wanted. The expansion of government power through the military's exploits brought new areas under control and made them liable to taxation. It also allowed the military to confiscate land and pillage at leisure. Much of the proceeds collected enriched the shah personally.²²⁰

A bureaucracy patterned after Western models was created to oversee administrative affairs. This allowed resources, financial and material, to be collected and handled more efficiently. Through tariffs, taxation, and the seizure of land acquired through the state's administrative apparatus, and, later, oil royalties, the government raised additional funds needed to finance the expansion of the military.²²¹ Still, the corruption of the Qajar era persisted and, combined with mismanagement, caused even this additional revenue to be inadequate to the military's needs, and pay was often withheld to soldiers. An American dispatch from 1930 even noted that when the amount of money spent on the armed forces was compared to their quality, it suggested that graft was occurring somewhere in the government.²²² For example, a 1932 order for aircraft from a British factory cost £200,000. A subsequent decision to mate the British airframe to an American engine, as well as to purchase ten spare engines brought the total to £331,000. The purchasing mission, however, was allocated £1.5 million.²²³ One historian has estimated that of £18,412,000 designated for the purchase of European and American weapons between 1928 and 1941, roughly £4.5 million had been spent, with

²¹⁹ Arthur Chester Millspaugh, *The American Task in Persia* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 46.

²²⁰ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 104-115.

²²¹ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 59-61, 113-119.

²²² Thomas, Report No. 28940, "The Persian Army," August 8, 1930, G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1671/File 5900, National Archives, College Park, MD.

²²³ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 297.

the remainder likely going into the private accounts of the shah and his associates.²²⁴ Eventually, it was necessary for Reza Shah to address the most egregious cases of corruption and improve the financial situation, but misconduct continued in spite of these efforts.²²⁵ The regularized collection of taxes and tariffs, and also the appearance of new taxes, enhanced the power of the central government at the expense of merchants who had traditionally been able to skirt the authorities.²²⁶ Millspaugh later wrote that Reza's taxation policies were ruinous, enriching a few individuals while harming the majority.²²⁷ The favoritism shown toward a privileged few at the expense of the majority would eventually contribute to the shah's downfall.

At times, more than half of the Iranian budget was dedicated to military spending, but a precise figure cannot be identified due to the profits from oil not being recorded. Some estimates say it could have been as much as two-thirds of state expenditures.²²⁸ Official budgets, excluding oil revenues, show defense spending to have consumed, on average, slightly more than a third of state funds.²²⁹ Education received just one-fourteenth of the amount bestowed upon the military.²³⁰ While Millspaugh reported that military spending was unreasonable, he admitted that the security it provided against rebellion made his mission possible. Tensions between Reza Shah and the Americans over disproportionate defense spending eventually brought about the termination of the mission in 1927.²³¹ The table below looks only at the official Ministry of War allocations

²²⁴ Ibid., 303.

²²⁵ Ward, *Immortal*, 147.

²²⁶ Limbert, *Iran*, 86.

²²⁷ Millspaugh, *Americans in Persia*, 34.

²²⁸ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 99-101.

²²⁹ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 57.

²³⁰ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 100.

²³¹ United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1927*

of the Iranian budget during Reza's reign. It does not include money designated for military-related areas, such as road or rail construction, road guards, or military education. In this sense, it provides the lowest possible figures for defense expenditures.²³²

Military Budget by Year

Year	Total Expenditures	Ministry of War	Percent of Total
1925-1926	235,277,913 krans	100,253,000 krans	42.6
1926-1927	253,556,720 krans	100,253,000 krans	39.5
1927-1928	282,079,189 krans	98,789,033 krans	35
1928-1929	451,707,725 krans	111,918,104 krans	24.7
1930-1931	414,813,904 krans	152,339,897 krans	36.7
1931-1932	373,000,000 krans	179,000,000 krans	47.9
1932-1933	421,399,870 rials	153,079,980 rials	36.3
1933-1934	506,904,460 rials	183,729,980 rials	36.2
1934-1935	621,282,665 rials	203,729,980 rials	32.8
1935-1936	750,827,790 rials	223,729,980 rials	29.7
1936-1937	1,000,008,484 rials	243,729,980 rials	24.3
1937-1938	1,248,031,737 rials	309,408,380 rials	24.7
1938-1939	1,527,018,564 rials	354,408,380 rials	23.2
1939-1940	2,613,481,987 rials	415,408,380 rials	15.8
1940-1941	3,210,973,027 rials	463,729,980 rials	14.4

(Washington, DC: GPO, 1927), 536-537, 549-555.

(<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1927v03>)

²³² Note: Rials replaced krans in 1932 at an even exchange rate. According to 1941 Statesman's Year-Book, 17.1133 rials = \$1. Figures derived as follows: 1925-1926: Great Britain, Foreign Office No. 416/77, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 19, July to December 1925, p. 16, No. 19 (Hereafter GB-FO); 1926-1927: GB-FO416/113, *Annual Reports on Persia*, 1927 to 1931 inclusive, p. 42, No. 243; 1927-1928, 1928-1929: GB-FO416/113, *Annual Reports on Persia*, 1927 to 1931 inclusive, p. 40, No. 179; 1930-1931, 1931-1932: GB-FO416/113, *Annual Reports on Persia*, 1927 to 1931 inclusive, p. 62-63, No. 227; 1932-1933, 1933-1934: GB-FO416/92, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 34, January to June 1933, p. 49, No. 370; 1934-1935, 1935-1936: GO-FO416/93, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 38, January to June 1935, p. 261, No. 147; 1936-1937: GB-FO416/94, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 40, January to June 1936, p. 81, No. 46; 1937-1938, 1938-1939: GB-FO416/96 *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 44, January to June 1938, p. 32, No. 93; 1939-1940, 1940-1941: GB-FO416/98, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 48, January to December 1940, p. 93, No. 38; 1941-1942: GB-FO416/99, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 49, January to December 1941, p. 8, No. 46.

1941-1942	4,323,911,676 rials	565,121,564 rials	13
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1924 negotiations between representatives of American oil companies and those of the Iranian government regarding road and rail construction offer additional insight as to Reza's intentions. Foreign observers felt that Iran's long-term economic interests would be best served by first developing a robust road network capable of handling motorized vehicles. Reza Shah's government, however, was primarily interested in developing a railway that would connect the Caspian to the Persian Gulf. The American consul in Tehran, Bernard Gotlieb, felt that the perceived military advantages of having the two ends of the country linked by a direct line was behind this desire. Regarding the financial burden and effort required for the undertaking, Gotlieb confessed, "I do not believe the Persian Government realizes the immense costs of such a project."²³³ Three years later, construction of the Trans-Iranian Railroad would begin, and would ultimately prove to be the most expensive single enterprise of Reza's reign. Upon its completion in 1938, the railway was estimated to have cost more than two billion rials, the equivalent of more than \$140 million.

The special attention given to railroads does not mean that road construction was ignored. In 1925, nearly ten million rials were allocated solely for highway construction projects, and a Ministry of Roads was created in 1930 to oversee the development of the country's road network.²³⁴ From 1923 to 1938, more than fourteen thousand miles of highway were constructed, much of which followed the migration routes of nomadic

²³³ United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1924* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1924), 554-555. (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1924v02>)

²³⁴ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 134-135.

tribes. Placing roads in these locations permitted the Iranian army to interdict tribal groups as they relocated, rather than be forced to venture into unfavorable mountain terrain.²³⁵ The construction of roads and railways where they would be militarily advantageous rather than economically beneficial, together with the amount of financial resources dedicated to them, reveals the focus of Reza's regime to have been on military pursuits. Not only was a significant proportion of the budget set aside solely for the development of the country's army, but expensive civil engineering projects were initiated with military applications in mind. Worth noting, however, is that the transportation infrastructure created under Reza Shah, while a marked improvement over the state of affairs under the Qajars, remained primitive by modern standards. As Amin Banani notes, "in 1941, were an American or a western European to have traveled by road to Iran, he would have found it difficult to believe that any attempt had been made at road improvement."²³⁶ There simply was no miracle cure for Iran's material underdevelopment.

The Iranian army under Reza Shah may have increased exponentially in size and developed a centralized academy for officers, but its training generally remained poor and military capabilities suffered for this. Reflecting the sorry state of education in general, commanders of military units were instructed to teach their soldiers how to read, write, and perform basic math. Even with these directives, the national illiteracy rate remained around ninety percent after Reza Shah's abdication 1941.²³⁷ It appears as though officers were either unable to or neglected to carry out their orders. One must wonder how effective a modern military force could be when the majority of its soldiers

²³⁵ Ward, *Immortal*, 136.

²³⁶ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 135.

were unable to read either a simple training handbook or complex instruction manual.

In 1922, the year after Reza took power, there were just 612 schools of all kinds, meaning state, private, elementary, and beyond, and 43,025 students nationwide.²³⁸ By 1930, the numbers had risen to 1,048 elementary schools with 126,052 students. Five years later, in 1935, there were 1,336 elementary schools and 170,077 students.²³⁹ Between 1936 and 1940, the country saw an increase from 4,901 schools and 257,051 students to 8,237 schools and 496,960 students.²⁴⁰ This statistical improvement did not yield substantive results. At the time of his abdication, just one percent of the population attended elementary school, and education was never made compulsory.²⁴¹ Most new schools were built in urban areas, and teachers assigned to the countryside resisted their appointments as a type of exile.²⁴² A 1937 British report that Iranian aircraft had begun dropping propaganda leaflets on unruly tribesmen noted the uselessness of this tactic. Most of the country's population, especially the vast majority of nomadic tribesmen, was virtually illiterate.²⁴³ The development of Iran's education system represents another example of Reza Shah's attempt to overcome the circumstances he inherited, and it, too, would be a transformation left incomplete.

Time spent on classroom instruction reduced the amount of time that could be spent turning conscripts into soldiers. Generally, combat training was done under actual

²³⁷ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 103.

²³⁸ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 108.

²³⁹ Mathee, "Transforming Dangerous Nomads," 318.

²⁴⁰ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 108.

²⁴¹ Mathee, "Transforming Dangerous Nomads," 334.

²⁴² Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 104.

²⁴³ GB-FO416/95, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 42, January to June 1937, p. 69, No. 87.

combat conditions while putting down rebellions around the country.²⁴⁴ This meant that units would be experienced in the sort of campaigns that they would be most commonly faced with, namely insurrections. What they would be wholly unfamiliar with was conventional combat, battle between states in which modern weapons, tanks, and aircraft would be pitted against similar weapons, tanks, and aircraft. According to British military attaché Lt. Col. Dodd, training improved through time, although not as much for soldiers in the provinces.²⁴⁵ As late as 1940, another British military attaché observed that soldiers from Tehran performed maneuvers that were both too limited in scope to be of much use and too short in duration, possibly out of political concerns.²⁴⁶

Officers seemed to fare better than the rank and file. In 1923, forty-six officer candidates were sent to Europe for training.²⁴⁷ Over the next ten years, Iran would continue to send groups of officers to train abroad.²⁴⁸ Top graduates from Iran's military academies were sent to St. Cyr, the French military academy, to study.²⁴⁹ One of these young men was Hassan Arfa, who later rose to the rank of General, and whose memoirs provide a fascinating glimpse into Iranian affairs in the early twentieth century. As a young officer, Arfa was sent to train in Switzerland, and later to France with a group of about sixty officers, where he and his comrades received instruction from Europeans.²⁵⁰

Within Iran as well, numerous military academies were constructed to train the country's leaders. In 1922, the Cossack training facility was merged with another

²⁴⁴ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 130-131.

²⁴⁵ GB-FO416/92, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 34, January to June 1933, p. 45, No. 19.

²⁴⁶ GB-FO416/98, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 48, January to December 1940, p. 263, No. 186.

²⁴⁷ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 130.

²⁴⁸ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 55.

²⁴⁹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 136.

military school to create a unified military academy. This school soon acquired such a reputation for quality that many Iranians who would typically have sent their sons to study abroad opted, instead, to enroll them in the military academy.²⁵¹ A year later, in 1923, three schools were organized in Tehran to cultivate officers for future service. Primary and secondary military schools were established to raise boys as young as seven years old in a martial environment. After graduation from the intermediate school, boys would be sent to the Cadet College.²⁵² Later, military schools were established in all of Iran's provinces.²⁵³ In spite of these innovations and efforts, little more than two thousand officers were academy graduates by 1941.²⁵⁴ These few graduates were insufficient to change the corrupt culture of the Iranian officer corps. Moreover, by 1941 there were roughly 3,200 officers and 116,800 other ranks in the Iranian army, a ratio of 1:36.5.²⁵⁵ In the United States around the same time, this ratio was 1:13.²⁵⁶ Not only were there too few academy-trained officers to influence the general state of the officer corps, but commanders themselves were faced with high numbers of poorly trained, poorly educated soldiers.

Under the Qajars, generalships were handed out by the shah, and were sometimes bought, sold, or inherited. Decidedly civilian individuals, including infants, were listed upon the rolls of officers. Unit commanders were notorious for using their positions to achieve personal profit, selling commissions, discharges, and even rations to their

²⁵⁰ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 62-64, 162-164.

²⁵¹ Matthee, "Transforming Dangerous Nomads," 315-316.

²⁵² Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 129.

²⁵³ Matthee, "Transforming Dangerous Nomads," 322.

²⁵⁴ Ward, *Immortal*, 146-147; Matthee, "Transforming Dangerous Nomads," 322.

²⁵⁵ Mortimer Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book, 78th Edition*, p. 1027, in the Statesman's Year-Book Online Archive, <http://www.statesmansyearbook.com/sybarchives> (accessed April 24, 2011).

²⁵⁶ David Evans, "An Overly Large Officer Corps Is Costing Us a Penny," *Chicago Tribune*, March 25,

subordinates.²⁵⁷ The situation did not improve dramatically under Reza Shah. Corruption remained so endemic that Mohammad Reza Shah addressed it explicitly in one text, saying that even his "father's vigorous efforts did not entirely stamp out corruption."²⁵⁸ The fact that this admission could not be omitted speaks volumes. Other accounts support the claim that Reza Shah was aware of problems of discipline and training, and also that he took steps to rectify them.²⁵⁹ Ironically, when it came to corruption, Reza was likely the worst offender.²⁶⁰ On top of this, he tacitly approved of his former Cossack colleagues' pursuit of personal wealth.²⁶¹

If corruption was inherited from the Qajar period, the new regime created its own pitfalls. Political reliability, under the first Pahlavi ruler, was paramount over merit, and ambitious officers worked to intrigue their way to promotion and profit or to discredit their opponents who sought the same. As a result of frequent dismissals and reassignments, the military was in constant disarray, lacking enough competent leaders to organize an effective system of logistics or even to gain the trust of the rank and file.²⁶² During many of its operations within the country, the undisciplined government soldiers looted, requisitioned, and extorted from the locals openly and at will.²⁶³ The deficiency of command, the ineffective leadership of the officer corps, is manifest here. More relevant to the military's performance in combat conditions, capable, independent leaders were suspect in such an environment. One commander was even suspended because the

1988.

²⁵⁷ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 6.

²⁵⁸ Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country*, 310-311.

²⁵⁹ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 226.

²⁶⁰ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 145-154.

²⁶¹ Ward, *Immortal*, 147.

²⁶² Cronin, "The Paradoxes of Military Modernization," 41, 46-47.

²⁶³ Ward, *Immortal*, 135.

shah felt that he was trying to acquire too much influence.²⁶⁴ When war came, it is entirely possible that the best officers in the country, those most able to lead troops against an invasion, had been brushed aside by those more adept at political maneuvering than leadership.

In terms of weapons procurements, the Iranian military under Reza had begun to take on the semblance of a viable force. Small arms confiscated from tribesmen and others purchased from European suppliers initially filled the need.²⁶⁵ Facilities were also established to allow for copies of European rifles to be built within Iran, although this was on a limited basis before the early 1930's.²⁶⁶ In order to service existing weapons, as well as to develop production capabilities, European technicians were hired. In late 1923, a German engineer was brought in to do both of these tasks, though a weapons factory was not built under his leadership.²⁶⁷ Eventually, however, Iran was able, primarily with German assistance, to produce arms domestically at the rate of twenty-five rifles and fifty thousand rounds of ammunition daily.²⁶⁸ By 1939, a machine-gun factory was under construction, although it is unclear whether or not it was finished before the Anglo-Soviet invasion in 1941.²⁶⁹ While not a full-fledged arms industry, this was a step toward self-sufficiency and independence, albeit a small one. It was of more symbolic than practical benefit. By the late 1930's, parading units were seen by American observers to be outfitted with machine guns and automatic rifles, as well as an assortment of horse-drawn

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 149.

²⁶⁵ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 131-132.

²⁶⁶ Will Fowler, Anthony North, Charles Stronge and Patrick Sweeny, *The Illustrated World Encyclopedia of Guns* (London: Hermes House, 2008), 423.

²⁶⁷ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 132.

²⁶⁸ Ward, *Immortal*, 148.

²⁶⁹ GB-FO416/98, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 48, January to December 1940, p. 191, No. 166.

and mechanized artillery pieces.²⁷⁰ Still, a significant amount of artillery was antiquated, and cavalry, much of it anachronistically armed with lances, remained central to military planning.²⁷¹ British officials in Iran shortly after the invasion of 1941 reported observing a division of cavalry of which each regiment had machine guns and four artillery pieces, but few motorized vehicles.²⁷² Iran's small arms and artillery, consequently, can be seen as emblematic of the military in general. Steps toward modernization had been made and aspirations, however unrealized, had been unleashed, but the core of the force was still thrown together ad hoc and constructed around relics of the past.

The purchase and acquisition of armor and motorized vehicles are also revealing. In 1924, in addition to small arms and ammunition, military vehicles from Germany began arriving in Iran.²⁷³ These supplemented a collection of French tanks and tractors and a pair of British armored cars.²⁷⁴ Eventually, the bulk of Iran's armored vehicles, fifty AH-IV tankettes and fifty TNH tanks, were of Czechoslovakian origin.²⁷⁵ The TNH tanks were the export variant of a type used in Europe during World War II, most notably by the Germans, who designated it the Panzer 38(t), until it was phased out in 1942.²⁷⁶ The relative quality of these vehicles is worth noting and their procurement by Iran should be seen as a political statement by Reza Shah. Even if limited in number, possessing modern tanks, practically the same as those operated by European states, allowed the Iranian government to lay a claim to having a modern army.

²⁷⁰ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 288.

²⁷¹ Ward, *Immortal*, 142.

²⁷² GB-FO416/99, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 49, January to December 1941, p. 93, No. 40.

²⁷³ Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941*, 281.

²⁷⁴ Ward, *Immortal*, 141.

²⁷⁵ Cronin, "The Paradoxes of Military Modernization," 45.

²⁷⁶ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 291; David Miller, *Illustrated Directory of Tanks and Fighting*

Political posturing in lieu of practicality is a recurring theme in the purchase and deployment of armored assets. In the mid 1930's, a significant diplomatic dispute between the United States and Iran began after several American newspapers described Reza's rise in terms of a stable boy to king story.²⁷⁷ So incensed was the shah over this perceived insult that a contract with the Indianapolis based Marmon-Herrington company for another delivery of armored cars was cancelled. Even with this cancellation, Iran could still field twenty-four armored cars, of which four were supplied by British Rolls-Royce and the remainder by Marmon-Herrington, on the eve of the Allied invasion of the country in 1941.²⁷⁸ Still, the fact that an order for vital military hardware could be cancelled outright, not simply delayed or given to a rival company, is startling and raises questions of "why?" The answer seems to be that these vehicles were of greater symbolic importance than practical use. As early as 1924, the early days of Reza's relevant period, Rolls-Royce armored cars operated in Tehran and "constituted a 'potent argument' in political crises."²⁷⁹ While they were conspicuously included in military parades, these and other vehicles were noticeably lacking from the battlefields around the country.²⁸⁰

The reasons for this absence reveals the true nature of Iran's military under Reza Shah. First, the vehicles had not been properly maintained to ensure that they could operate in combat conditions. Second, the transportation infrastructure of the country, at least early on, could not guarantee that they would even be able to arrive at remote locations where they might be needed. Finally, the lack of maintenance and poor roads

Vehicles: From World War I to the Present Day (Osceola: Zenith Press, 2000), 38-39.

²⁷⁷ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1936. The Near East and Africa Volume III* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936) 356-370. (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1936v03>)

²⁷⁸ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 287, 291.

²⁷⁹ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 132-133.

meant that deploying armored cars would be a task fraught with peril, and the vehicles were "too valuable a political asset in the capital to risk in warfare with the tribes."²⁸¹ To reiterate the point more bluntly, *having* armored cars was more important than being able to use them. Presenting the appearance of having a modern military was more important than actually operating like one. Reza Shah's mechanization efforts were primarily symbolic reforms, not wholesale transformations of the Iranian army. Even into the 1930's, most soldiers deployed around the country were moved by civilian transports, not military trucks.²⁸² The window-dressing of a few tanks, trucks, and armored vehicles may have won approval within Iran, but powerful neighbors with tanks, trucks, and vehicles of their own would not be so easily impressed by the display.

The development of Iran's air force further illustrates the politics of arms procurement and deployment as well as the divergence between the practical military and the unrealistic ideal force. Air power had made great strides during the Great War and post-war demonstrations suggested that, in the future, battles would be won from above. In neighboring Iraq, the British Royal Air Force proved instrumental in crushing revolts and, by 1922, became the primary tool of British military power in the country.²⁸³ Iranian leaders, apparently taking notice of this, began building an air force in 1923 and within a few years had collected a number of French, German, and Russian aircraft, each of which was accompanied by instructor pilots from their corresponding countries. Later, purchasing agents sought out British and American airplanes and parts.²⁸⁴ In time, the force would be outfitted almost entirely by British companies, and an aircraft assembly

²⁸⁰ Ward, *Immortal*, 143; Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 287-289.

²⁸¹ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 133.

²⁸² Ward, *Immortal*, 148.

²⁸³ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 60.

plant near Tehran would be administered by experts and technicians imported from Britain.²⁸⁵

Almost as soon as they attempted to establish one, Iranian leaders found that operating an air force was a difficult undertaking. Not only are trained personnel necessary for virtually every aspect of maintaining and flying an airplane, but proper facilities are needed for maintenance and storage. Iran lacked both personnel and facilities, a situation that was not eased by the country's unforgiving climate and terrain and the relatively primitive state of aviation in the early twentieth century. In the early days, aircraft were lost to accidents as quickly as they were being purchased from Europe.²⁸⁶ The wide range of machines flown and subsequent problems with the availability of spare parts, the lack of trained personnel, primitive conditions, difficulties with Iran's weather and absence of a meteorological service all contributed to a situation in which, by 1930, only thirty aircraft were operable nationwide.²⁸⁷

In the opinion of American officials, even in 1940, the Iranians did not possess the skills to successfully operate a modern air force.²⁸⁸ These were not simply technical skills, the ability to keep an aircraft mechanically sound, but the knowledge of how to actually fly an airplane. During one flight, a terrified pilot informed General Hassan Arfa that the mountain they had intended to fly over was, in fact, higher than the ceiling of the German aircraft that he was piloting. With insufficient room to turn around, the pair continued on a collision course with the mountain until spared by a fortuitous current of

²⁸⁴ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 134.

²⁸⁵ Ward, *Immortal*, 143.

²⁸⁶ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 296.

²⁸⁷ Ward, *Immortal*, 143.

²⁸⁸ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1940. The British Commonwealth, the Soviet Union, the Near East and Africa Volume III* (Washington, DC: GPO,

air that lifted them over the peak with little more than a few feet to spare.²⁸⁹

The transition to purchasing mainly British aircraft, essentially a move to homogenize the air force, streamlined logistics and allowed Iran to increase the number of serviceable craft to 154 by 1936, and to 245 by the Allied invasion of the country in 1941. It also allowed for aircraft to be manufactured in the country, albeit under British supervision.²⁹⁰ Because of the aforementioned difficulties, foreign assistance was necessary to initiate and facilitate the development of an air force. Assistance, however, can very easily become an unhealthy dependence or allow for a foreign power to exercise influence to bolster its own interests. Moreover, it provides the seller, or patron state, an additional political interest in the purchasing country, as Hassan Arfa, whose brother was tasked with buying airplanes for the country, points out.²⁹¹ This would be the case between Britain and Iran. Evidence suggests that Iranian officials were discouraged from contracts with American companies by individuals with pro-British inclinations.²⁹²

Even if Iranian efforts to work with American companies bore few fruits, the fact that they attempted to court the United States illustrates the political challenges faced by Reza Shah. In early 1940, Iranian officials contacted an American diplomat and expressed their interest, not simply in aircraft produced in the United States, but in American technicians to service these planes and their related factories. The American was skeptical of the official explanation provided for the personnel shift: that the acquisition of American planes would warrant the adoption of a new system. Instead, he

1940), 657. (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1940v03>)

²⁸⁹ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 259.

²⁹⁰ Cronin, "The Paradoxes of Military Modernization," 45; Ward, *Immortal*, 143.

²⁹¹ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 233.

²⁹² See Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 297-303, for details of this argument.

felt that the shift reflected Soviet pressure on the country.²⁹³ His suspicions were justified. The aggressive policies of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe and Scandinavia had unnerved the Iranians, who offered in 1940 to work with the British to develop defensive plans against their powerful northern neighbor.²⁹⁴ Even a treaty between Iran and the Soviet Union signed that same year made concessions to the Russians so that the status quo remained worrisome, even if tensions had been somewhat eased.²⁹⁵

In December 1940, prior to Operation Barbarossa, the 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, diplomats from those two countries attempted to negotiate an alliance. Among Stalin's territorial demands that Hitler could not accept, was, essentially, a call for control of Iran and its oil.²⁹⁶ As previously noted, the Iranians were suspicious of their northern neighbor's intentions and were willing to work with the British to defend themselves. An alliance with Britain, however, was dangerous. With the outcome of the war in Europe still uncertain, such an arrangement could potentially incur the wrath of Germany, whose economic links with Iran had grown exponentially prior to the war. More critically, the 1921 Soviet-Iranian treaty of friendship permitted the Soviets to invade the country if it was used "as a base of operations against Russia," which spoke directly to British activities at the time.²⁹⁷ By 1940, the threat posed by a Soviet Union increasingly bellicose in Europe demanded action, and in this case Iran attempted to use the United States in lieu of Britain as a counterbalance. American involvement would

²⁹³ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1940*, 639-642.

²⁹⁴ Ward, *Immortal*, 152.

²⁹⁵ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1940*, 629-630.

²⁹⁶ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 809-10.

²⁹⁷ Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion*, 44-45.

draw a third party into the political scene while reducing British influence and allaying Soviet concerns.

In spite of skepticism regarding the impetus for Iran's interest, the United States was willing to consider offers, but seemed overwhelmed by the requests placed upon it. American officials placed the Iranian diplomats in contact with representatives of aircraft manufacturers and expressed a willingness to arrange additional contacts if necessary.²⁹⁸ What they could not handle were the substantial numbers of aircraft that were requested. Reza Shah wanted fifty heavy bombers and thirty fighters in addition to ten fighters already purchased from the Curtiss aircraft company.²⁹⁹ With America increasing its own stockpile of armaments while simultaneously working to fulfill foreign orders, particularly those made by the British, already in place, there was simply no way to provide Iran with the aircraft it desired and it would not accept models that were available but that had not been adopted by the United States.³⁰⁰ Delivery, according to one estimate, might not even have been possible eighteen months in the future.³⁰¹

A fascinating "what-if" scenario emerges when one considers the specific types of aircraft that Reza Shah desired. American documents name the requested fighters as either "Curtiss P 46" or "North American 73."³⁰² These references can be interpreted to represent projects by the Curtiss and North American companies that were still in their experimental phases, the XP-46 and NA-73X, respectively. The first, the Curtiss design, was found to have decent performance but limited operational range and was not placed

²⁹⁸ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1940*, 644.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 646-647.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 647-650.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 655.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 647.

into production after trials.³⁰³ The second would go on to become the legendary P-51 Mustang, often regarded as the greatest fighter aircraft in history, and would continue to serve the air forces of more than fifty countries decades after its first flight.³⁰⁴ While the state of Iran's military was so poor that these aircraft would not have made much of a difference in opposing the Allied invasion,³⁰⁵ one cannot help but imagine the spectacle of Iranian Mustangs tangling with British Spitfires in the skies above the desert. Still, it bears repeating that these were highly technical aircraft whose modern technology required a level of skill and precision that, not only did the Iranians not have, but that made manufacturing engines difficult even for the United States.³⁰⁶ Hypothetical fantasies aside, this episode also illustrates the role of arms procurements in political maneuvering. Courting American companies would allow Reza Shah to shed the British, placate the Soviets, draw in the United States, and continue to impress at home. Britain, however, would not remain idle while Iran worked to escape its influence. Additionally, the fact that Iran sought aircraft so cutting-edge that they had not even been put into mass production attests to Reza Shah's obsession with appearances. That both aircraft were largely untested prototypes, that they were expensive, that Iran would field relatively few of them, and that their maintenance would be substandard were irrelevant. What was important, again, was the projection of power, not its possession.

Although the further thirty fighters desired by Iran would never materialize,

³⁰³ "Curtiss XP-46," Virtual Aircraft Museum, http://www.aviastar.org/air/usa/curtiss_p-46.php (accessed December 2, 2010).

³⁰⁴ David Mondey, *The Concise Guide to American Aircraft of World War II* (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1996), 196-204.

³⁰⁵ American officials knew this to be the case and equated delivering the aircraft desired by Reza Shah with giving the Soviet Union a gift in the event of an invasion. See: United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1940*, 656.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 653, 657.

delivery of the ordered Curtiss fighters was scheduled to begin in early 1941.³⁰⁷ This scheduling would prove overly optimistic, as shipment of the aircraft was delayed repeatedly, pushing back delivery until much later in the year. British influence and interference played a large role in this. Britain had halted shipments of aluminum aircraft parts to Iran out of fear that they would end up in German hands.³⁰⁸ This paranoia eventually spread to the United States, prompting the Americans to use the Neutrality Act as a means to temporarily withhold delivery of Iran's Curtiss Hawk aircraft.³⁰⁹ At one point, the American minister in Iran was bluntly asked by his superiors whether or not he felt that war materials sent to the country would be sent to the Germans or Soviets.³¹⁰ Because examples of the Curtiss Hawk had been provided to France and Norway before the war, had performed admirably, and were now commandeered by Germany in some way, this was a plausible concern. It would not be until May 20, 1941, that permission was given to dispatch the ships carrying the aircraft.³¹¹

Even after permission to ship Iran's fighters had been granted, British officials contacted the Americans to request that no further airplanes, parts, or war materials be sent to Iran for fear that they would be used against British forces in the region.³¹² The reason cited for this request was that Iranians had always been anti-British, and recent German successes against the Soviets made it entirely possible that their forces might reach the Caucasus and the Iranian frontier. American diplomats understood this concern

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 657.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 658.

³⁰⁹ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1941. The British Commonwealth; the Near East and Africa Volume III* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1941), 355-358. (<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1941v03>)

³¹⁰ Ibid., 358.

³¹¹ Ibid., 359.

³¹² Ibid., 360.

but felt that their offerings to Reza Shah were too meager to improve significantly the effectiveness of the military, and that stopping shipments would have a negative impact on a relationship that might become important in the near future. Furthermore, they were confused as to why Britain continued to operate an aircraft factory in Iran and why the British planned on beginning production of Hurricane fighters, much more advanced than the aging Hawk, while urging the United States to remain on the sidelines and keep antiquated but desired materials out of Iranian hands. The British admitted that their position might, on the surface, seem illogical, but emphasized their need to keep Reza Shah "sweet" and to keep their technicians in the country.³¹³ By late July, the British had conceded that delivery of parts could proceed uncontested.³¹⁴ Although the effort to halt the shipment of aircraft to the Iranians failed, Britain's delaying tactics succeeded. Already, on July 11, 1941, the British Chiefs of Staff had begun exploring the possibility of taking military action in Iran in conjunction with the Soviets, which would occur in August of that year.³¹⁵ When the invading British forces reached the Ahvaz airbase, they seized nine Hawk fighters still in their shipping crates due to the delay in delivery.³¹⁶

Conscripting the State: The Military and Iranian Society

In September 1938, the American Legation in Tehran cited an article in the *Journal de Tehran* celebrating Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Crown Prince of Iran. The article itself featured several pictures of the prince with the caption "His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince Practicing the Profession of a Soldier," and described his

³¹³ Ibid., 361-365.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 364-366.

³¹⁵ Winston Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950), 477.

³¹⁶ Ward, *Immortal*, 158-159. The tenth fighter, the only assembled example, was spared when an

martial training. Mohammad Reza was heralded as, not just an example for Iran's youth, but an example for all Iranians, as well as the recipient of "so perfect an education." The dispatch stated that this presentation of martial ability was intended to build the Crown Prince up as a "worthy successor" to the throne and pointed out that his associates were mainly military officers.³¹⁷ Altogether, these documents speak volumes as to the role of the military in the public sphere during the reign of Reza Shah. Four critical themes are present here: martial prowess as a legitimizing factor in a ruler, the existence of a military elite, the importance of the military to Iran as a whole, and the need for Iranians to behave as soldiers in the service of the nation.

Portraying royalty as skilled warriors was not necessarily a Pahlavi innovation. Consider the warrior kings of the *Shahnameh*, such as Rostam who was "an elephant in strength" and who "plunged the world in blood."³¹⁸ The concept of the soldierly shah can be seen as an emanation of the Iranian tradition of charismatic leadership. Iran's leaders "ruled by force of individual personality" and needed to display royal charisma, *farr* in Persian, to be considered legitimate. A new dynasty, such as that which Reza Shah began, needed to assert this trait in order to be accepted.³¹⁹ By defeating the rebellious tribes and groups that threatened the central government, Reza Shah boosted his military prestige and his legitimacy. In November, 1924, he personally led a force to confront a rebellious leader, who promptly surrendered.³²⁰ His successes were rewarded, in the earliest phases of his rule, with expressions of gratitude and the grant of political

American technician caught in the middle of the attack used it to flee to Iraq.

³¹⁷ Moose, Dispatch 1400, Press Campaign to Popularize Crown Prince," September 13, 1938, G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1661/File 3100, National Archives, College Park, MD.

³¹⁸ Abolqasem Ferdowsi and Jerome W. Clinton (translator), *In the Dragon's Claws: The Story of Rostam and Esfandiyar from the Persian Book of Kings* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 1999), 40.

³¹⁹ Limbert, *Iran*, 47.

power.³²¹ This led to the establishment of a cult of personality around him, one that connected him, rhetorically, to the heroes of the past and that caused even his opponents to emphasize his strengths over his shortcomings. At his coronation in 1925, Reza surrounded and adorned himself with the weapons and armor of past leaders, including "the sword of Nader Shah [who had reunited the country in 1736 after a period of anarchy and has been called the Napoleon of Persia] and a royal scepter, which the Shah wore, while other artifacts of royalty not worn...included the swords of Shah Abbas the Great and Shah Ismail, Nader Shah's bow, and Shah Ismail's armor."³²² In all subsequent public appearances, the new shah wore a military uniform.³²³

Reza Shah's Iran was dominated by a military elite. This is not to say that officers were disproportionately represented in the government. Iran's cabinets remained mainly civilian during Reza's time as prime minister, and became even more so following his coronation.³²⁴ Instead of having disproportionate representation, the military had disproportionate power. Civilian leaders found that their authority did not extend over military officers, whose interference in administrative affairs was so pervasive that several provincial governors even resigned their positions.³²⁵ In fact, Reza's very rise to power was facilitated by military commanders who threatened to take action against civilian leaders who opposed him.³²⁶ When areas were placed under formal military rule, local commanders spearheaded modernization efforts, such as in Shiraz where one officer oversaw the demolition of property to allow for street widening. Other occasions saw

³²⁰ Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 30.

³²¹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 131.

³²² Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 32-33, 42.

³²³ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 136.

³²⁴ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 187.

³²⁵ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 99.

gangs of soldiers forcibly conscripting civilians to work on construction projects, and exempting those who could bribe their way out of it.³²⁷

Aside from the distinction between military and civilian leadership, Iran's armed forces were divided internally between a core of privileged elites and the non-elite personnel. Generally, this can be understood in terms of the rift between the country's senior officers and the bulk of its forces. Most junior officers came from the lower end of the middle class and felt that the military could be used as a way to improve their social status. In reality, their prospects were hampered by the fact that most senior positions were monopolized by Reza Shah's allies.³²⁸ Another rift existed between the officer corps and the common conscript. As the supreme military leader of the country, Reza's conduct established a dangerous precedent for his officers to follow. He diverted state funds into his private account and acquired enormous tracts of land through extortion or murder.³²⁹ It has even been speculated that the construction of the Trans-Iranian Railroad was motivated, in part, by a desire to connect his agricultural holdings in the north with markets in the south.³³⁰ If his personal example was not enough, he also created a bank specifically for the military that allowed "additional opportunities for shady deals."³³¹ The old Cossack officers, Reza's former comrades who commanded the new military, were essentially free to abuse their power in the pursuit of material wealth.³³² Officers enjoyed a higher standard of living than most Iranians, could buy land at discounted

³²⁶ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 194-195.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 199-200, 208-210.

³²⁸ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 104.

³²⁹ For a particularly illustrative, if biased, account, see Majid, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 145-154.

³³⁰ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 102.

³³¹ Ward, *Immortal*, 147.

³³² *Ibid.*, 147.

prices, and had access to an impressive club in Tehran.³³³ The military was Reza's darling and its leaders, well aware of this, took full advantage of their favored position.

After reversing years of foreign occupation and the near disintegration of the state, it is little wonder that the Iranian military would be celebrated as an emblem of the nation. Reza Shah's government portrayed the armed forces as critical to the existence of the Iran. Additionally, steps were taken to make the military an instrument of national indoctrination while simultaneously giving it a more distinct "Iranian" character. A speech delivered by the shah in 1931 to students headed abroad illustrates perfectly the presentation of the military to the public:

You will render full service to your country only when you have served in the army. Military service is one of the essential duties as a patriot, especially of the student class. Military service strengthens the spirit and prepares the mind for work. It is my opinion that students completing the middle schools and even those finishing the higher courses should serve in the army for a time, even though for a shorter period than is ordinarily required. Thus, they will be able to render more satisfactory service and provide more useful to the country and to the protection of its interests. Then you and the Crown Prince will be equal in my sight.³³⁴

It was through armed service that one became an Iranian. The military was the conduit to citizenship. Apart from speeches, this position was made explicit by the expansion of conscription. The same year that Reza Shah made the above speech, he rescinded an earlier concession made to the ulama and demanded that all theology students serve in the military upon completing their studies.³³⁵ There could be no exemptions from national service. In 1939, the Crown Prince made a speech that declared the military career to be

³³³ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 136-137.

³³⁴ Quoted in Alvin J. Cottrell "Iran's Armed Forces under the Pahlavi Dynasty," in George Lenczowski, ed., *Iran Under the Pahlavis* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 393.

more important than any other.³³⁶ National service was something that every Iranian should perform because it was the highest duty that one could do.

Framing citizenship in terms of military service elevated masculinity at the expense of Iranian women. Although the prospect of conscripting women during wartime was discussed in 1938, nothing seems to have come of the proposition.³³⁷ Iran's women were deprived of full citizenship by the rhetoric of Reza Shah's regime because they could not perform military service. Much has been made of the improvements in the status of women during Reza's reign, and there is certainly much to be said for the reforms in family law, education, and such that benefited Iran's female population³³⁸ The elevation of the military and veneration of military service as an aspect of citizenship, however, means that the policies regarding women must be seen in a different context. Simply put, women were intended to produce citizens, not necessarily to become citizens themselves. Prior to the rise of Reza Shah, around the time of the Constitutional Revolution, Iranian reformers stressed the need for women to be educated in order to better train their children. A mother who had been indoctrinated with nationalist ideology would, as primary caregiver, pass those lessons along to her children. Faced with a fractious political climate and little national unity, reformers hoped that women's education would help to create a "homogenous national culture [that] could reinforce the

³³⁵ Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 60.

³³⁶ GB-FO416/97, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 46, January to June 1939, p. 10, No. 5.

³³⁷ 416/96-96.

³³⁸ See Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi, "Expanding Agendas for the 'New' Iranian Woman: family law, work, and unveiling," in Stephanie Cronin, ed. *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 157-180; Shireen Mahdavi, "Reza Shah Pahlavi and women: a re-evaluation," in Stephanie Cronin, ed. *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941* (London: Routledge, 2003), 181-192.

necessity of obedience to authority at an early age."³³⁹ In 1924, an Iranian reformer wrote that "[women's] greatest responsibility in society is to create a family and maintain a household."³⁴⁰ Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet notes that what a woman was to maintain was "a home that instilled the virtues of conformity, obedience to men, and patriotism."³⁴¹ The dominant position of the male in Iranian society was reinforced by Reza Shah's elevation of the military, not challenged by it.

A book published in Iran in 1947 entitled *The Twenty-Five Years History of the Imperial Iranian Army* further illustrates the presentation of the military in public discourse.³⁴² Although it deals with the period after Reza Shah's abdication, considering both its temporal proximity to the first Pahlavi shah and his son's admission that "my father influenced me more by far than has anyone else,"³⁴³ it may be assumed that it is indicative of the state of affairs during Reza's reign. Through and through, the book is a piece of propaganda designed to aggrandize the Iranian military. When presented in images, units are in parade formations, proudly displaying their arms, while surrounded by an adoring public. The captions to these pictures only serve to embellish the heroism and grandeur of the soldiers. A column of tanks parading in single file is artfully described as navigating "handsomely" and "with order."³⁴⁴ Elsewhere, the shah and his officers are surrounded by adoring crowds of Iranians young and old, male and female, even clergymen. Repeatedly, king and cohort are described as beloved.³⁴⁵ Reza Shah, even after his abdication and death, is presented as the father of the Iranian army and of

³³⁹ Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*, 181-183.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

³⁴² Zabihullah Rezvani Ghadimi, *Tarikh-i 25 Salah-i Artesh-i Iran* (Tehran: Aryan, 1326/1947).

³⁴³ Pahlavi, *Mission For My Country*, 45.

³⁴⁴ Ghadimi, *Tarikh-i 25 Salah-i Artesh-i Iran*, 178.

Iranian independence.³⁴⁶ The military, led by a soldierly shah, is a source of pride and the object of affection. When this presentation is considered in conjunction with the aforementioned article from the *Journal de Tehran*,³⁴⁷ the effort, on the part of the government, to portray the armed forces as an emblem of Iranian statehood is made clear.

In conjunction with elevating the merits of military service and the role of the armed forces, Reza Shah's Iran was marked by the imposition of martial order upon the civilian population as well. This was especially noticeable when it came to Iran's children. In 1923, an article in a journal titled *Pahlavi*, which typically covered military topics, discussed the merits of sports, their benefit to the body, and the need to create a culture of health that would, in turn, create a healthier civilization. Not long after this, in 1927, a law was passed that made physical fitness an essential part of the country's academic curriculum for schoolchildren, both male and female. Around the same time, an Iranian version of the Boy Scouts, and later the Girl Scouts, was chartered with the purpose of advancing virtuous behavior and a culture of fitness. Scout leaders, of course, were expected to behave in accordance with nationalist ideals. One intellectual celebrated scouting as "an effective way to promote physical and spiritual fitness in the interest of forging a more industrious and powerful citizenry."³⁴⁸

The existence of scouting and fixation on a culture of health, when combined with other factors, such as the presentation of scouts in public discourse, reveals the government's attempt to impose military structure upon the civilian population. Like

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 184, for example.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 3.

³⁴⁷ See footnote 317.

³⁴⁸ Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, "Cultures of Iranianness: The Evolving Polemic of Iranian Nationalism," in Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee, eds., *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 172-73.

soldiers, scouts marched in parades attended by the "beloved shah."³⁴⁹ Even youths who were not involved in scouting were expected to show such order. Before scouting was made compulsory in 1939, male students in Tehran were subject to weekly parades and drills under the supervision of army officers. Senior boys around the country were expected to drill in preparation for parades commemorating Reza's coup.³⁵⁰ Such measures suggest that the central government's interest in education was inspired, in part, to "imbue [students] with a sense of 'authority.'"³⁵¹ School children paraded for the shah in each town he visited, and these parades were said to be a real source of pleasure for him.³⁵² Coinciding with the conscription of boys into scout troops in 1939, older boys became "required to spend four hours a week in military drill, weapon familiarization, and indoctrination courses," taught by army officers, as an essential part of their studies.

During a 1938 "Youth Festival," the Crown Prince and his brothers, all wearing scout uniforms, observed a parade of boy and girl scouts, along with cadets from Tehran's military schools. During the event, the scouts performed fire-fighting and first aid drills before closing the ceremonies with a "demonstration of mass physical training by over 2,000 youths."³⁵³ The Iranian press further appropriated the scouts into national mythology in the titles of the many articles published about them: "Our Youth," "Our Girls," "Our Prowess at Swimming."³⁵⁴ By making Iran's youth, *our* youth, as they were

³⁴⁹ Ghadimi, *Tarikh-i 25 Salah-i Artesh-i Iran*, 187.

³⁵⁰ GB-FO416/93, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 38, January to June 1935, p. 106, No. 47.

³⁵¹ Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 63.

³⁵² GB-FO416/95, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 42, January to June 1937, p. 139, No. 52.

³⁵³ GB-FO416/96, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 44, January to June 1938, p. 41, No. 25.

³⁵⁴ GB-FO416/98, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 48, January to December 1940, p. 262, No. 185.

claimed, morally upright, physically strong, deferential to authority, and disciplined, they would be well suited to serve, not just as soldiers, but as productive citizens of the Iranian nation. That the Cossack turned king, Reza Shah, would take a strong interest in and derive so much joy from the process can hardly be a surprise.

The adults of Iran may not have been made to march for the shah's amusement, but they were not spared the militarizing efforts of the new regime. These could be seen in the Pahlavi push for social standardization. Reza Shah's *vahdat-i melli*, or "national unity," campaign aimed at creating a national culture based on the primacy of "Persian" culture.³⁵⁵ Across the country, non-Persian-speaking schools and presses were gradually whittled away and replaced with Persian variants.³⁵⁶ The Society for Public Guidance, a copy of European fascist propaganda ministries, worked to change place names of non-Persian origin. In 1935, the government attempted to remove Arabic and Turkish words in an attempt to create a distinctly Iranian language.³⁵⁷ The units and ranks of the military were also renamed with Persian titles in an effort to eliminate traces of foreign influence from the national force.³⁵⁸ Honorific titles were similarly abolished, weakening social distinctions in what can be seen as a move to foster a spirit of fraternity among Iranians. All of these measures were taken around 1935, the year that "Persia" was renamed "Iran," a name with a racial, not regional, connotation.³⁵⁹

The drive for standardization did not end with attempts to bolster the use of the Persian language or to assert Iran's purported connection to the birthplace of the mythical Aryan race. Perhaps nowhere is Reza Shah's arbitrariness and quest for uniformity more

³⁵⁵ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 107.

³⁵⁶ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 163-164.

³⁵⁷ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 107.

³⁵⁸ Ward, *Immortal*, 140.

evident than in the creation of a national uniform. By dictating what Iranians wore, Reza felt he could further undermine the power of the clergy while simultaneously modernizing the average citizen. The precise wording of the Uniform Dress Law, passed December 28, 1928 is an astonishing and chilling example of authoritarianism in practice:

Article I. All male Iranian subjects who are [not] required to wear special clothing in conformity with service in the government shall wear uniform clothing within the country; and all government employees, whether civil or judicial, shall, when on government duty, wear civil or juridical clothing, as officially prescribed, and at other times they shall wear the uniform attire.³⁶⁰

Exemptions were granted only to members of the clergy and theological students on the condition that they could verify their positions.³⁶¹ For students, verification entailed the successful completion of an examination in their particular field.³⁶² The imposition of a dress code also deprived the tribes, whose clothing reflected their affiliation, of a form of expression. The array of costumes and colors that were seen to decorate Tehran's streets before Reza's coronation³⁶³ were banished to history, replaced with hats, jackets, shirts, and pants that lacked "distinguishing marks" and "off-putting colors."³⁶⁴ Clothing was further standardized, and nationalized, in 1930 when a law was passed requiring schoolchildren and government employees to wear clothing whose cloth was made in Iran.³⁶⁵ Women, too, were subject to the shah's plans, and were unveiled in 1935,

³⁵⁹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 143.

³⁶⁰ Quoted in Houchang E. Chehabi, "Staging the Emperor's New Clothes: Dress Codes and Nation-Building under Reza Shah," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3 (Summer/Fall 1993): 209-39, p. 213.

³⁶¹ Kashani-Sabet, "Cultures of Iranianness," 170.

³⁶² Chehabi, "Staging the Emperor's New Clothes," 214.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 224.

³⁶⁴ Kashani-Sabet, "Cultures of Iranianness," 170.

³⁶⁵ Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 48.

forcibly, if they refused to comply.³⁶⁶ These steps were undertaken to create a new type of Iranian, a *modern* Iranian, who looked, thought, and acted in the same manner as their compatriots. Reza Shah seems to have seen civilians as a branch of the military, things to be commanded and controlled. Although they were not under arms, Iranian civilians were fashioned to look like an army. It was this encroachment upon the very bodies of individuals that would lead to the event that may very well have started the decline of Reza's rule.

³⁶⁶ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 110.

IV. An Imperfect Balance: The Failure of Reza's Modernizing Campaign

The Seeds of Discontent: Opposition to the Rule of Reza Shah

Reza's efforts to reshape Iran into a modern state, more accurately, into what he thought a modern state should be, were not simply accepted without objection. The mandate that he had secured for himself had all but vanished by 1941, his pool of supporters had evaporated as his authoritarianism and brutality grew. This thesis has already discussed tribal opposition to the centralizing impetus of Iran's reformers and the existence of other groups that struggled against the Tehran government. Both of these elements predated Reza Shah's rule and could even be seen as contributing to his seizure of power. What ultimately is indicative of his failure is the manner in which Iranians came to resist him.

Broadly, there were three social sectors that became disenchanted with Pahlavi rule. First, the more traditional minded sector of Iranian society, the bazaaris, landed aristocracy, and the ulama, were unhappy with Reza Shah's push for the secularization of the public sphere and developments that eroded their authority, including conscription and dress codes, the impact of taxation on their livelihoods, and assaults against traditional social distinctions. Second, the new middle class and intelligentsia resented his developing despotism and appetite for wealth. Third, was the military itself. It was noted above that there was a difference between the elite officers who surrounded the shah and the junior officers and conscripts who filled out the ranks. Just putting on the uniform did not disconnect an officer from his political ideals, nor did military service erase one's social origins from a conscript's memory. Not only did Reza Shah's policies

speak to these innate factors, but his violent approach toward the slightest hint of opposition placed soldiers squarely between a leader they increasingly despised and a population that they did not. Almost from the moment he launched the 1921 coup, Reza relied on muscle and manipulation to expand his power, gaining and losing allies along the way. Over the course of his rule, however, he developed more enemies than friends. As early as 1931, American diplomat Charles C. Hart warned of coming trouble. There was no question that opposition existed, that much was certain, but what remained to be seen was when exactly it would crystallize.³⁶⁷

Considering the animosity between the ulama and their supporters and Iran's modernizing nationalists, it is only logical that Reza Shah's rule would offend the traditional element of the country's population. In the years preceding Reza's appearance on the political stage, a wave of anti-clericalism swept the budding intelligentsia. Their enthusiasm for the new "religion" of Iranian nationalism was instrumental in helping push through many of the reforms of the early Pahlavi era. Around the time of his coronation, a nationalist periodical stated bluntly that "the root of our evil is not insecurity, it is the class of the clergy. If this root is not attacked soon, all the gains of the army and the army itself will vanish."³⁶⁸ Statements such as this illustrate the antipathy that Iran's modernizers felt for the clerical class and show, in part, why Reza's secularizing efforts could gain traction.

Virtually every aspect of Reza Shah's rule undermined the power of the ulama in some way. The creation of a secular education system deprived them of influence over children, conscription loosened their hold on young men, the secularization of the legal

³⁶⁷ Hart, Dispatch 970, December 12, 1931, G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1661/File 3000, National Archives, College Park, MD.

system pulled them further from the lives of adults, and so on. The response of the clerics, if Iran is viewed through the prism of 1979, is quite surprising. For the most part, they did nothing.³⁶⁹ There were, however, two notable exceptions to this. Foremost, Sayyid Hassan Mudarres, a cleric from Isfahan and leading member of the Reformist party, from the start was an outspoken critic of conscription and of the possible establishment of a republic with Reza at the helm in 1924.³⁷⁰ After Reza Shah's coronation, in the subsequent shifting of political alliances and dissolution of political parties, Mudarres was driven out of politics altogether.³⁷¹ He later died, under mysterious circumstances, after an incident at the Imam Reza shrine at Mashad in 1935. The incident is another prominent, yet rare, example of the ulama forsaking quietism. In July 1935, the main preacher of the shrine took Reza's government to task, not only for its transgressions against Islam, but for its systemic corruption and economic policies, notably high taxes. A crowd of people soon gathered to protest the "evil shah," and were only dispersed by gunfire that left hundreds dead.³⁷² This incident was seen by many to mark a turning point in Reza Shah's reign and will be discussed in greater detail below.

With the ulama largely silent, the traditional middle class lacked the leadership necessary to mount an organized opposition. After Reza's abdication, his opponents emerged with vociferous complaints against the nature of his rule, his disrespect for religion, excessive taxation, and elevation of the military over all else, but these were left unspoken while he was in power. The expenses of military modernization drastically

³⁶⁸ Quoted in Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 51.

³⁶⁹ Keddie, *Religion and Politics in Iran*, 60. Keddie categorizes the clerical response to Reza's policies for the duration of his rule as an "unhappy silence."

³⁷⁰ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 111, 131-134.

³⁷¹ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 100.

³⁷² Abrahamian, *Iran*, 152.

increased the tax burden on the bazaaris, making them more inclined to turn against the regime.³⁷³ Mounting resentment against the shah's policies manifested itself in the actions of individuals or communities. "Common people," not elites, were most willing to voice displeasure. Iranians in rural areas, being more removed from government officials, appear to have only followed dress codes when absolutely necessary. One village, for instance, was said to have just a single, communal Pahlavi hat, the government mandated male headgear, which would be worn by an individual going to town.³⁷⁴ Still, these acts of resistance remained independent and uncoordinated. A British official, in 1938, noted that "although discontent with the present regime is almost universal...mullahs have for several years now been so oppressed that they have to a large extent lost their former influence and, in the absence of leaders, no overt opposition seems at all probable."³⁷⁵ Iran's traditionalists, though numerous, remained a silent majority. Their frustration with the Pahlavi monarchy, while potent, simply did not have a real outlet and was not channeled into organized political action.

Reza Shah's relationship with the landed aristocracy was more complex. When it came to Iran's landed gentry, his policy was to "divide the upper-class families, co-opting some and pushing aside the others."³⁷⁶ He associated himself with them through his own wealth and intermarriage, reduced their tax burden by placing agricultural taxes upon cultivators rather than landowners, and appointed many of his aristocratic allies to government positions. At the same time, he abolished the old titles in the name of eradicating social distinctions and forced many landholders to sell their property at low

³⁷³ Ibid., 151-152, 193-194.

³⁷⁴ Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 48, 53.

³⁷⁵ GB-FO416/96, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 44, January to June 1938, p. 57, No. 33.

prices.³⁷⁷ Confiscated land often found its way into his own possession.³⁷⁸ Those aristocrats who aroused Reza's ire faced serious consequences. The more fortunate were imprisoned, others were simply killed. As Ervand Abrahamian observes, "[f]or members of the old upper class, life was certainly not poor, but it could easily turn nasty, brutish, and short."³⁷⁹ Given this climate of uncertainty, where individuals must live with the prospect of incarceration or death if they offend the ruler, it is easy to understand how the landed aristocracy would not necessarily harbor feelings of goodwill toward Reza's regime. While Reza Shah retained supporters from the upper echelon of Iranian society until the end of his rule, there were still many members of the aristocracy who were not troubled by his departure.

The goodwill with which the intelligentsia and nationalists of Iran viewed Reza Shah also dissipated over time. Far from bringing about a genuine transformation of the country's politics, Reza's leadership preserved the patrimonial order and merely introduced a new type of elite. Iran's parliamentary body, the majlis, was supervised by the military and functioned as little more than "a rubber stamp for the shah's policies."³⁸⁰ It was also packed by his supporters from the upper classes. Landowners accounted for more than one quarter of majlis seats in 1939, an increase from the eight per cent that they had occupied in 1909.³⁸¹ Graduates of Iranian or foreign colleges could only progress so far through the bureaucratic ranks. Only the shah's favorites could rise to the top. Moreover, in 1933, a new deal was cut with the British regarding the Anglo-Iranian

³⁷⁶ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 149.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 143, 149-150.

³⁷⁸ Millspaugh, *Americans in Persia*, 34.

³⁷⁹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 150.

³⁸⁰ Ward, *Immortal*, 135.

³⁸¹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 149-150.

Oil Company.³⁸² This new agreement, the shah's quest for personal wealth, and his intolerance for dissent worked together through the 1930's to drive away supporters.³⁸³ Lacking both real opportunities for advancement and the legal means for political expression, frustrated Iranians went underground. A clandestine fascist group was formed and operated in the country until 1937. At that point, its twenty members were discovered and its leader, a junior officer in the army, was executed for encouraging a coup against the shah.³⁸⁴ Another alleged plot, discovered the same year and possibly related, saw four junior officers executed and as many as six hundred people arrested.³⁸⁵

More consequential was the growth of communism in Iran. Labor unions were banned in the country in 1927, and between that year and 1932, one hundred fifty labor organizers were arrested.³⁸⁶ Iranian communists, at home and abroad, organized strikes among students and workers and circulated Marxist tracts and antimonarchical propaganda.³⁸⁷ The government struck back in 1937, the same year that it clamped down on the aforementioned fascists, by arresting a large group of communists, who would later become immortalized as "the Fifty-three." During the trial of the group leader, a disillusioned former nationalist named Taqi Arani, the accused scathingly remarked that "[i]f you wish to adopt...the Western way of life, you must also adopt Western political philosophies."³⁸⁸ Many of those arrested later formed the core of the Tudeh, Iran's

³⁸² Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 117.

³⁸³ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 153.

³⁸⁴ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 112-113.

³⁸⁵ GB-FO416/95, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 42, January to June 1937, p. 11, No. 11.

³⁸⁶ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 139.

³⁸⁷ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 114.

³⁸⁸ Quoted in Abrahamian, *Iran*, 162. For a full account of the arrests and trials, see pp. 155-162.

communist party.³⁸⁹ Even as communists, the Fifty-three retained strong nationalist underpinnings. They emphasized Iranian unity and the need for a strong central government. Even those who were of minority origins shared these values, and Arani himself, an ethnic Azeri born in Azerbaijan, had once written of the need to eliminate the Turkish language in Iran for the sake of national unity.³⁹⁰ Reza Shah's policies did little to discourage communist and other dissident groups from existing. His abuse of power, his tendency to favor urban centers over rural areas, the corruption of the new government, the lack of political freedom, all of these factors and more helped to facilitate unrest. In short, his apparent betrayal of true nationalist and modernist principles, drove the intelligentsia into action.

Even within the military, personnel unhappy with Reza's rule took action. Several examples have already been cited above. Resistance, however, began almost as soon as the 1921 coup ended. In the first year after the coup, Reza worked to undermine the influence of the Gendarmerie by unifying the armed forces and promoting only Cossack officers into positions of authority.³⁹¹ Not all Gendarmerie leaders accepted their second-class positions without objection. One of the more serious incidents of resistance was that of Colonel Mohammad Taqi Khan Pasyan. Colonel Pasyan was an officer in the Gendarmerie, a nationalist who led soldiers during the Great War and enjoyed widespread popularity due to his reputation as a talented and effective leader.³⁹² Although he initially supported the 1921 coup, he was dissatisfied with what he saw as the continuation of corruption and the patterns of traditional Qajar rule. Following the

³⁸⁹ Limbert, *Iran*, 87.

³⁹⁰ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 115.

³⁹¹ Ward, *Immortal*, 132.

³⁹² Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 88.

May 1921 replacement of Reza Shah's co-conspirator, Sayyid Zia Tabatabai, as Prime Minister by Qavam al-Saltanah, Pasyan took action. Qavam had been arrested for corruption by Pasyan just a short time earlier. As the new premier, he saw to it that the colonel was dismissed.³⁹³ Upon receiving this news, Pasyan decided to rebel and arrested potential opponents while working to recruit additional fighters until he commanded nearly four thousand men.³⁹⁴

This force embodied the threat posed to Reza Shah by the Gendarmerie, by its political, military, and democratic strength and appeal, in the early days after the coup.³⁹⁵ With the bulk of its own military busy in Gilan, the Tehran government encouraged tribal forces around Pasyan, which it continued to rely upon to offset the weakness of the developing army, to rise up in rebellion. Colonel Pasyan's four thousand soldiers were strained trying to confront these threats and he was killed during a battle with Kurdish fighters in October 1921. His death removed a powerful and attractive potential rival from Reza's path.³⁹⁶ In this case, too, the central government was unable to confront a serious threat through its own military means. In fact, Tehran's armed forces were busy fighting the Jangalis and could not confront both enemies at once. Reza's reliance on tribal forces in lieu of his own reveals the general weakness, albeit early on, of Iran's forces. Between 1921 and 1926, the Qajar practice of recruiting tribal levies continued out of military necessity, even as the government dreamed of establishing control over the country.³⁹⁷ Not long after Pasyan's death, in early 1922, Major Abu'l Qasim Khan

³⁹³ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 95-100.

³⁹⁴ Ward, *Immortal*, 130.

³⁹⁵ Cronin, "The Paradoxes of Military Modernization," 49.

³⁹⁶ Ward, *Immortal*, 130.

³⁹⁷ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 121-124.

Lahuti led a rebellion at Tabriz that was supported by many former Gendarmes.³⁹⁸ After government forces scattered his troops, he fled to the Soviet Union and became a poet.³⁹⁹

In the wake of the Pasyan and Lahuti uprisings, through 1922 and 1923, several plots to overthrow Reza's regime were allegedly discovered by the police. Although there is considerable evidence that suggests that the conspiracies were in reality fabrications designed to eliminate Reza's, and others', political rivals, the fact that they could be constructed at all is revealing.⁴⁰⁰ The displeasure of the former Gendarmes must have been well known for such fabrications to be possible. Hassan Arfa was in Tabriz during the early days of Lahuti's rebellion. The Gendarmerie officers, he remembered, spoke openly of their resentment at being placed under the command of "ignorant" Cossacks.⁴⁰¹ As the chief of the "ignorant Cossacks," Reza embodied a system that the Gendarmerie opposed. When framed in these terms, essentially that the new leader had little trust or respect for the ex-Gendarmes, their opposition to him is understandable.

Reza's flirtation with republican government in 1924 also sparked opposition from the military. Once again, the rift between former Cossacks and Gendarmes was a central issue. The Cossacks supported Reza's efforts, owing to the loyalty they felt to one of their own. It was not a reflection of their historical connection to representative government, as they had none. Quite simply, they sided with their leader. Among officers, the opposition was similarly personalized. Ex-Gendarmes resisted the establishment of a republic along two primary grounds. One camp, mainly sophisticated

³⁹⁸ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 146.

³⁹⁹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 119.

⁴⁰⁰ Stephanie Cronin, "Opposition to Reza Khan within the Iranian Army, 1921-26," *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 4 (Oct., 1994): 724-50, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283674> (accessed March 9, 2010), 729-733.

⁴⁰¹ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 128. See pp. 127-132 for a full account of Arfa's trip to Tabriz.

officers loyal to the Qajar dynasty, were loathe to support the machinations and pretensions of "ignorant Cossacks." The others were no friends to the Qajars, but felt that a republican government constructed under such circumstances would amount to a dictatorship under Reza. They opposed, not the idea of a republic, but the ambitions of Reza Shah.⁴⁰² Despite being deprived of high-ranking leadership positions, former Gendarmerie officers and soldiers found ways to resist. Groups of men passed resolutions stating that they would not fight to establish a republic. Others opted to remain passive and stayed in their barracks during the crisis. The rank and file, in particular, because of their ties to the ulama, were vehemently opposed to the republican project. They openly defied orders and, at least on one occasion, physically assaulted individuals who voiced support of Reza's plans. One historian has even noted that if army officers would have been forced to follow through on their threat to march on Tehran following Reza's resignation, many of their soldiers would not have followed them.⁴⁰³

Although the military became the central pillar of Reza's rule, the common soldier did not necessarily reap the benefits of their new importance. Especially in the early days, the average conscript continued to be poorly treated, poorly fed, and poorly paid. So many men died in the Tehran garrison in 1931 that medical officers were brought in to oversee their treatment.⁴⁰⁴ Because the ills of the Qajar system persisted into the new army, even the increasing budget was not sufficient to match its expansion. By the time corrupt officers siphoned off what money they wanted, there was not enough left to pay the common soldier. Left to fend for themselves, the soldiers turned on Iran's civilian

⁴⁰² Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 157-158.

⁴⁰³ Cronin, "Opposition to Reza Khan within the Iranian Army," 736-741.

population, extorting and looting to fulfill their needs. Occasionally, they would desert or ignore their officers.⁴⁰⁵ This continued abuse led to uprisings that finally culminated in 1926.

That year, a series of mutinies erupted as soldiers protested their mistreatment. Officers numbered among the participants, including one who sought refuge in a mosque to escape a commander who wanted to extort from him a share of the money that he was assumed to have extorted from his men.⁴⁰⁶ The fact that a senior officer would automatically assume that his subordinates were *also* corrupt illustrates how widespread the abuse of power in Reza's army truly was. Initially, the central government relied upon force, or the threat of it, to put down these rebellions. In 1926, however, faced with simultaneous insurrections around the country, Reza Shah addressed the roots of the unrest and made a personal effort to bring about more tolerable conditions. The situation stabilized by the end of the year as conditions for soldiers began to improve, but Iranians, including the shah, were shaken by the mutinies and the thought of what might have happened if the armed forces disintegrated.⁴⁰⁷ While there would not be any subsequent uprisings of the 1926 scale, isolated acts of rebellion or resistance continued to take place, such as in 1941 when an aircraft performing in a parade abruptly changed directions and flew to the Soviet Union.⁴⁰⁸ Still, the absence of organized resistance did not indicate that all was well, as events in the summer of 1935 would reveal.

On July 10, 1935, the custodian of the Imam Reza shrine in Mashad delivered an impassioned sermon to worshippers there. It was the twenty-fourth anniversary of a

⁴⁰⁴ Cronin, "The Paradoxes of Military Modernization," 45.

⁴⁰⁵ Ward, *Immortal*, 135, 146-147, 149.

⁴⁰⁶ Cronin, *The Army and Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran*, 173.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

Russian bombardment of the shrine. Emotions were running high. The cleric condemned the national dress codes imposed by the shah, particularly the mandatory unveiling of women, corruption, and high taxes.⁴⁰⁹ His message struck a chord with the audience. People began tearing up their hated Western caps, and when the police were sent to disperse the crowd, they were rebuffed with stone throwing. Army units were called in to serve as reinforcements and attempted again to disperse the crowd the next day. A scuffle broke out and, in the heat of the moment, the commander of the troops gave the order to fire. Dozens were killed before the army withdrew for the day, leaving the crowd and the instigators in possession of the mosque. The next day, the number of protestors had grown larger and had begun to invoke Imam Hussein against the shah. Even more people packed into the shrine over the next few days while government leaders tried to negotiate an end to the standoff. Finally, the military forced open the doors and sprayed the crowds with fire from machine guns, bringing the episode to a close. More than a hundred people were killed, with hundreds more wounded.⁴¹⁰ For several reasons, it would be remembered as a watershed moment.

The Mashad incident is more than just an example of clerical opposition to Reza Shah's policies. Iranian soldiers numbered among the dead, and not by the hands of the protestors. Two soldiers were executed by their own officers because they refused to fire on civilians. Another committed suicide.⁴¹¹ Several officers were later arrested because of the lack of discipline among the rank and file-- namely because the conscripts were

⁴⁰⁸ Ward, *Immortal*, 271.

⁴⁰⁹ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 152.

⁴¹⁰ GB-FO416/93, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 38, January to June 1935, p. 40-43, No. 26.

⁴¹¹ Ward, *Immortal*, 140.

reluctant to kill their countrymen.⁴¹² The local garrison was even disarmed, confined to their barracks, and given a feast, while machine guns were kept trained on them, because they were known to sympathize with the protestors.⁴¹³ Beyond showing the brutality of Reza Shah's regime, the Mashad episode reveals tensions within the military. Obedience was not necessarily assured, and the regime realized this. Some men would rather die than serve as Reza Shah's enforcers. Moreover, the incident signaled the emergence of a noticeable gap between the government and the populace. Iranians began to circulate rumors that the Pahlavi dynasty would soon fall, and American diplomat Burton Y. Berry warned that the government was "getting onto precarious ground."⁴¹⁴ More subdued dispatches still pointed out that the shah had lost considerable popularity because of the massacre and also that it was the most serious incident faced by Reza Shah yet.⁴¹⁵

Considering the earlier words of diplomats, essentially warnings, regarding Reza's character, the Mashad massacre could almost be expected. In 1934, American diplomat George Wadsworth scathingly branded the shah a violent "oriental despot" who would crush everything he distrusted. Even worse, Wadsworth noted, Reza lacked pity and demonstrated brutality in a distinctly "occidental" way.⁴¹⁶ Reza appeared to straddle the worst of two worlds. After the Mashad shootings it became obvious, as one historian has written, that "the gulf between the shah and his army and the Iranian people had grown

⁴¹² Hornibrook, Dispatch 512, "Meshed Riots," July 21, 1935, G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1659/File 2700, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴¹³ GB-FO416/93, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 38, January to June 1935, p. 42, No. 26.

⁴¹⁴ Barry, "Memorandum," Enclosure #1 to Dispatch 512, "Meshed Riots," July 21, 1935, G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1659/File 2700, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴¹⁵ Hornibrook, Dispatch 518, "Meshed Riots," July 25, 1935, G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1659/File 2700, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴¹⁶ Wadsworth, Dispatch 1656, "Current Teheran Rumor and the Questions of Dynastic Succession in Persia, Including an Interim Report on the Bakhtiari Arrests," February 10, 1934, G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1661/File 3000, National Archives, College Park, MD.

irredeemably wide."⁴¹⁷ Foreign diplomatic reports from the country took notice of this gap. In eastern Iran, one 1938 British report noted, discontent with Reza's regime was universal.⁴¹⁸ An American report the same year expanded on this, saying the shah was secure only because civilians feared him, and that his policies guaranteed further dissatisfaction in the future.⁴¹⁹ Two years later, in 1940, the British military attaché in the country warned that German propaganda had an attentive audience in the vast numbers of unhappy Iranians.⁴²⁰ This was something echoed by American diplomats, who claimed that the country's economic malaise had led to unprecedented complaining and that German and Soviet propaganda was expected to cause serious trouble.⁴²¹ These reports point to a number of reasons for discontent, but the personalized nature of the shah's rule left him as the target for dissatisfaction. Whether the cause of unhappiness was corruption, violence, repression, economic misery, or more, the shah was ultimately held responsible.

A letter written by an American official in Tehran in January 1941 speaks to how poor the relationship between Reza Shah and his people had become. The letter stresses that German and Soviet propaganda was being circulated throughout the country. With anti-regime sentiment growing rapidly, the author warned, a German-sponsored revolution seemed imminent. The author was not simply being melodramatic. With the

⁴¹⁷ Ward, *Immortal*, 140.

⁴¹⁸ GB-FO416/96, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 44, January to June 1938, p. 57, No. 33.

⁴¹⁹ Engert, Dispatch 1254, "Observations regarding the Coup d'Etat. The Shah and his Achievements," March 14, 1938, G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1661/File 3000, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴²⁰ GB-FO416/98, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 48, January to December 1940, p. 252, No. 182.

⁴²¹ "Report on the Economic and Commercial Conditions in Iran," December 1940, G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1663/File 3850, National Archives, College Park, MD.

help of several diplomatic officials, the author had constructed a secret transmitter to use during the anticipated impending crisis, and offered a list of potential frequencies that could be used to communicate in the event of an emergency. Expecting the worst, they had rigged the unit to run off a car battery. After describing these preparations, the author ominously writes, "no doubt that you grasp what is in our minds here."⁴²² What was in their minds was that the Pahlavi regime's days were numbered, that the government and population had ceased to work together and would soon come into open conflict. This letter, written months before the Allied invasion of Iran, shows that opposition to Reza Shah and his cohorts had become so great that the entire house of cards would come crashing down with a breath. In this estimation, they were correct. Where they were wrong was the source. It was not through the work of German propagandists that Reza's rule was brought to an end, but by Allied intervention in the summer of 1941. If Iranian society had become a powder keg, the guns of the British and Soviet armies would provide the spark.

The Matter of Performance: Reza's Army in Action

The performance of Iran's armies in the field illustrates how the military and other reforms enacted by Reza Shah impacted the national security of the country. The armed forces were able, either by force or the threat of it, to defeat domestic opposition, but were wholly unable to repel invasion by powerful foreign powers. More importantly for the question of military effectiveness, the army did not emerge victorious from every battle with tribal or domestic opponents. Success was never guaranteed. Defeats still

⁴²² Unknown, Letter dated "January 12, 1941," G-2 Geographic File for Iran, Record Group 165, Box 1663/File 3850, National Archives, College Park, MD. Document is a letter to unidentified recipient. The

occurred and the government preferred to engage in combat only as a last resort. As will be shown, the military under Reza Shah was primarily a political tool designed to coerce and deter opponents into cooperation, as its success on the battlefield could not be guaranteed. In the words of one historian, "[w]ar in Iran was as much about the threat of force as the use of force."⁴²³ To rephrase the matter more generally, and perhaps more eloquently, Reza constructed his armies in accordance with a later adage that states that "power perceived is power achieved."⁴²⁴

While it is generally accepted that Reza Shah was able to overcome the traditionally fractious nature of Iran to forge a cohesive modern state, this was not a mission accomplished solely or principally through combat. Stephanie Cronin goes so far as to say that the army had "little or nothing to do with the government's victory [over the tribes,] which resulted from a combination of factors, including a lack of unity among the tribes, their shortage of ammunition, and the political handling of the situation by the Tehran authorities."⁴²⁵ This is a slight overstatement. While it is true that the military weakness of the Iran inherited by Reza Shah would, expectedly, force the new regime to explore alternative methods of exercising influence over peripheral areas, the role of the army in putting down internal challenges cannot be ignored. By virtue of its existence and the development of it by Reza Shah, the Iranian military certainly played a part in politicians negotiating solutions to conflicts. The Iranian army might never have achieved decisive victories over the central government's many domestic opponents, but its importance as a political tool cannot be overstated.

final pages of the letter are missing, making author unknown.

⁴²³ Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 31.

⁴²⁴ Quotation from character played by Ernie Hudson in *The Substitute*, DVD, directed by Robert Mandel (Santa Monica: Lionsgate Entertainment, 1996).

Combat operations against tribal and domestic opponents faced a number of difficulties apart from the issues discussed above. In the early 1920's, tribal forces were better armed than Reza's military, they operated in remote areas where they had a clear advantage, and the presence of government forces, due to the lack of discipline, meant robbery and violence would take place in the area, further alienating and inciting the very people that Tehran was trying to pacify.⁴²⁶ These factors, together with the state of the armed forces at this time, meant that military campaigns were not a preferred method of subjugation but a last resort. An aim of this study, however, is to assess the military effectiveness of Iran's forces, not the tribal policies of the Pahlavi dynasty.⁴²⁷ The performance of the Iranian military in confronting domestic opposition is of primary interest.

It is useful to distinguish between tribal opposition and opponents motivated by ideological or political reasons. If the goal of Reza Shah and his supporters was to incorporate the tribal population into a modern state, their goal regarding those who threatened the state, or the ruling regime, on an ideological basis was destruction, not assimilation. The foremost political threat faced by Reza Shah had been posed by Kuchik Khan's movement in Gilan, discussed in chapter two. With Soviet assistance in 1921, Kuchik Khan's Jangali forces made a move on Tehran that was repulsed by Iran's Cossacks. The deflection of the Jangali attack bought enough time for the government to secure the withdrawal of Soviet forces from the country.⁴²⁸ Even with the Gilani rebels, Reza Shah did engage in negotiations, but only with those on the political right, and

⁴²⁵ Cronin, "The Paradoxes of Military Modernization," 44.

⁴²⁶ Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran*, 23-24, 26.

⁴²⁷ For more on this topic, see: Stephanie Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran: Rural Conflict and the New State, 1921-1941* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

possibly only to further fragment the uprising, which was rife with internal dissension of its own.⁴²⁹ After a group of Jangalis violated a cease fire and killed Iranian soldiers, Reza ordered an attack and scattered the remaining fighters. Kuchik Khan froze to death while fleeing government forces, officially ending the Gilan Republic.⁴³⁰ Critical to understanding Iran's military efficacy is the fact that victory came only after the opponent had been weakened politically. More revealing is that the Jangalis had divided their fighters into three groups, a physical fissure to complement the political rift, which allowed them to be confronted and destroyed piecemeal.⁴³¹

A rough evolution of Iran's military can be seen when its performance against the various tribes is examined. As stated, the first few years of Reza Shah's rule saw the armed forces as unreliable and often outgunned by tribal fighters.⁴³² Years of ineffectual Qajar rule had left the military impotent and given little respect by both its opponents and its members. As a military officer, Hassan Arfa recognized that, "[w]hen dealing with tribes authority is inseparable from prestige."⁴³³ In the early days of Reza's rule, Iran's army would suffer the consequences of its poor reputation. Arfa recounts a stark report given to him in 1921 by the survivor of a defeat at the hands of tribal forces. Reports that Kurdish fighters, under the command of the notorious Simko, were preparing to attack were ignored by the Iranian commander.⁴³⁴ When the rumors proved accurate, the government soldiers were wholly unprepared and were driven back before being forced to surrender. Between battlefield deaths and the massacre of prisoners, less than half of

⁴²⁸ Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion*, 45.

⁴²⁹ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 89.

⁴³⁰ Ward, *Immortal*, 131.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴³² Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran*, 23.

⁴³³ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 120.

the five hundred men survived.⁴³⁵ Arfa also tells of personal defeats suffered at the hands of Simko's Kurds in 1921. The first of these came as Iranian soldiers attempted to move on Kurdish positions. Simko's men recognized their enemies' plans and launched an attack, killing more than two hundred men and forcing them to retreat.

Arfa notes that, even though they were outnumbered, his soldiers fought courageously. The problem was that there was not enough ammunition for the British Lee-Enfield rifles that his men carried, while Russian and French weapons and ammunition were plentiful throughout the countryside. In order to survive, the soldiers were forced to requisition French Lebel rifles and ammunition from civilians while their own ammunition made its three weeks-long trip, via horse-drawn wagon, from Tehran. The second defeat came not long after the first. Arfa attempted to relocate what remained of his command into a more favorable position. Unfortunately for these soldiers, the Kurds had been informed of the movements and ambushed Arfa and his men. Nearly half of the government detachment would be lost in the ensuing firefight, including Arfa's personal orderly, who delayed his own retreat to help his commander remove a prized saddle from a dead horse.⁴³⁶ In 1926, a garrison at Sardasht was attacked and routed by tribal fighters.⁴³⁷ These experiences highlight the difficulties that Iranian soldiers faced in the first years of Reza's rule. Without sufficient ammunition, modern rifles are useless. With commanders who ignore possible intelligence or risk lives to recover personal property, bravery is wasted. Altogether, with insufficient numbers, insufficient arms, and deeply flawed leaders, the military faced unfavorable odds against a better led, better

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 118.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 118-119.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 122-125. Chapter six of Arfa's book is dedicated to tribal campaigns and offers additional anecdotes and details.

equipped, and better informed foe.

Still, it would be wrong to say that the military was ineffective. In the end Reza Shah did prevail over tribal opponents. Battlefield victory and defeat were interspersed, with a preponderance of neither. Iran's armies neither rolled across the countryside like a steamroller nor invariable fell, waiflike, before the slightest hint of opposition. The difficulties faced by the early small detachments of soldiers sent to put down revolts led Reza Shah to supplement these forces with his own tribal allies. The advantages afforded by these seasoned fighters were increased exponentially by the use of aircraft that allowed nomadic tribes to be located and met where the government would have the upper hand. As new roads extended from Tehran deeper into the countryside, the Iran's forces were able to dispatch more soldiers, more quickly, to more remote locations. Reza Shah's grip on the country was tightened with every new mile of the fourteen thousand miles of roads that were constructed between 1923 and 1938.⁴³⁸ By 1932, Iran's tribes had been subdued enough, by armed force or political maneuvering, for the government to create a department within the Ministry of the Interior tasked with creating a sedentarization plan.⁴³⁹

A progression can be seen in the development of the Iranian military when considering the developments between 1921 and the 1930's. Originally ill-equipped, shown little respect, and forced to deal with the primitive conditions of the country, the force became better equipped, better respected, and saw the condition of the infrastructure improve markedly. Still, most of these changes were tied to perception. In public discourse, the military was presented as a heroic force that put down tribal

⁴³⁷ Bayat, "Riza Shah and the Tribes," 216.

⁴³⁸ Ward, *Immortal*, 136-139.

uprisings, while the reality was that tribal levies were needed to assist government forces into the early 1930's. Training continued to be poor and logistical problems went unaddressed.⁴⁴⁰ What was most important was that Iran's armed forces looked like a modern army, and with each year this appeared to be, more and more, the case. A 1936 British report remarked that the Iranian government had "erected an imposing facade of guns for which there are no shells, of aeroplanes they cannot maintain, of vehicles they cannot drive, and of mechanical devices they cannot comprehend."⁴⁴¹ The invasion of Iran by Britain and the Soviet Union in 1941 would show that behind the facade of modernity, the foundation and framework of the military were anything but sound.

On August 25, 1941, the shortcomings of Iran's armed forces were dramatically exposed by the Allied invasion, dubbed the "unhappy event of Shahrivar (August)" by Iranians.⁴⁴² It seems as though the outcome of such an attack was expected by international observers. Recall that American officials had viewed aircraft deliveries to Iran as handouts to the Soviet Union in the event of an invasion, a statement the author dryly finished with, "the Iranians are not last-ditch fighters."⁴⁴³ At other times, repeatedly, Americans had noted deficiencies in Reza Shah's armies. Its armored cars were vulnerable to modern weapons, much of its artillery was antiquated, its men prone to disorder, and its aircraft either in disrepair or unarmed. On the eve of the invasion, American diplomats saw the Iranian army for what it really was: built for internal

⁴³⁹ Bayat, "Riza Shah and the Tribes," 216-217.

⁴⁴⁰ Cronin, "The Paradoxes of Military Modernization," 45-46.

⁴⁴¹ Annual Report, 1935, Knatchbull-Hugessen to Eden, 28 January 1936, FO 371/20052/E1147/1147/34, quoted in Cronin, "The Paradoxes of Military Modernization," 47.

⁴⁴² Ward, *Immortal*, 153.

⁴⁴³ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1940*, 657.

security, not international defense.⁴⁴⁴ One went so far as to make a bold and frighteningly accurate prediction regarding the country's immediate future. Allied demands would be refused, he speculated, Iran would be invaded, its armies would offer brief resistance, and the shah would likely lose the throne.⁴⁴⁵ Winston Churchill was more cautious, concerned with the well-being of British nationals in the country and the security of the country's infrastructure, mainly airfields, railways, and oil fields. Still, the ultimate success of the operation was never in doubt, and reinforcements were planned if resistance was stronger than expected.⁴⁴⁶ The Soviets seem to have harbored few reservations as to the likelihood of victory. The discipline and order of Red Army soldiers in the occupation force, their strangely gracious dealings with Iranian officials, and the quality of the personnel, Persian speakers who were familiar with the culture, whom they dispatched to the country⁴⁴⁷ suggest that Soviet planning had progressed far beyond the scope of military operations. It is practically unthinkable that the Soviet Union would not be aware of the strength of Iran's armed forces, in large part because of the penetration of the country by communist agents.⁴⁴⁸

Iran was caught unprepared for the Allied assault. In spite of the long-standing enmity between Iran and the Soviets, no modern fortifications along the northern border had been constructed before 1940.⁴⁴⁹ Iran's armies have been characterized as only being "at a medium state of alert," with weapons being secured in armories and soldiers continuing the routine of sleeping in and cleaning their barracks. A commander even

⁴⁴⁴ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 288-290.

⁴⁴⁵ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1941*, 398.

⁴⁴⁶ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 478-480.

⁴⁴⁷ Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion*, 59.

⁴⁴⁸ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1940*, 626.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 626.

entertained his subordinates with stories of tribal campaigns, keeping them up late into the night. British reconnaissance flights were ignored, without even a single fighter sent to chase away the intruder.⁴⁵⁰ Eventually, tens of thousands of reservists were activated, but they were never assigned to active units and would play no role in defending the country.⁴⁵¹ Full-scale mobilization never took place. The explanation offered by the younger Pahlavi, Reza's son, for this apparent reluctance to prepare for the Allied onslaught highlights the rift between Iran's leadership and society, reality and the propaganda that those in power seemed to believe. According to Mohammad Reza Shah, the shah was surrounded by advisors who lacked the courage to tell him the truth.⁴⁵² Nobody wanted to be the bearer of bad news, either to state what should have been obvious about the coming invasion or to point out the unfavorable condition of Iran's armies.

Hassan Arfa served on a Supreme War Council tasked by the shah in early 1941 with preparing a defensive plan in the event of an invasion. Arfa sought to use the country's geography in conjunction with strategic withdrawals to delay the enemy advance, perhaps buying time for a negotiated settlement. Another officer formulated a defensive scheme that involved protecting the entire northern border against attack. The latter was accepted, Arfa says, corroborating Mohammad Reza Shah's claim, because nobody wanted to admit that the army was incapable of protecting the territorial integrity of the country. He goes on to say that Reza Shah most likely knew that such a defense was impossible, but that he viewed its adoption as necessary to maintain morale.⁴⁵³ Even

⁴⁵⁰ Ward, *Immortal*, 155.

⁴⁵¹ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 277.

⁴⁵² Pahlavi, *Mission For My Country*, 70.

⁴⁵³ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 273-274.

Iranian officials seem to have been unwilling to recognize the severity of the situation. In a meeting with an American diplomat, one such official said that British aggression was "unthinkable" and that the Soviets were too preoccupied with the Germans to attack but, if they did, Iran's forces could meet the challenge.⁴⁵⁴ So, while civilians with the means to do so were evacuating border regions,⁴⁵⁵ Hassan Arfa's report, made just weeks before the invasion, that British hospitals in Iraq were increasing their accommodations and armored units were operating along the border, was dismissed by the Chief of Staff.⁴⁵⁶ When Allied soldiers began streaming across the border, the prime minister refused to wake the sleeping shah, and then waited until he had finished his breakfast to deliver the bad news.⁴⁵⁷ There can be little wonder why Iran's army was caught by surprise and overwhelmed.

As for the battlefield performance of Iran's forces during the invasion, there is remarkably little to say. Even Mohammad Reza Shah, successor to the throne, conceded that "the resistance of the Iranian armed forces was completely ineffective" and had virtually ceased even before the official cease fire signed three days later.⁴⁵⁸ Another pro-Pahlavi text claims that Reza's armies were suited for "normal duties" but could not offer the Soviets and British anything more than "token resistance."⁴⁵⁹ Other works describe the force as having "melted away in an instant"⁴⁶⁰ or "hardly fired a shot in the defense of the country."⁴⁶¹ Power was so centralized in the person of the shah, he

⁴⁵⁴ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1941*, 404.

⁴⁵⁵ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1940*, 622.

⁴⁵⁶ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 278.

⁴⁵⁷ Ward, *Immortal*, 156.

⁴⁵⁸ Pahlavi, *Mission For My Country*, 70-71.

⁴⁵⁹ Elwell-Sutton, "Reza Shah the Great: Founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty," 49.

⁴⁶⁰ Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 119-120.

⁴⁶¹ Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah*, 377.

dominated the government to such an extent, that officers were generally not willing to act independently. As one historian has argued, "the entire country depended directly on Reza; the shah was too insecure to delegate authority."⁴⁶² When Reza Shah was finally informed of the attack, he ordered that Tehran be defended, but gave no instructions to units that had already been engaged.⁴⁶³ In fact, Iran's units had been placed in defensive positions before the invasion and were forbidden to move. The only force that did relocate found itself, because of the inflexibility of other units, easily outflanked and unable to retreat because its equipment could not be transported. Hassan Arfa assumed that the absence of instructions for soldiers or to destroy strategic bridges or railways meant that the shah had no desire to put up a real defense.⁴⁶⁴ Arfa simply could not accept that the institutional and material deficiencies of the military could cause such paralysis. Iran's forces were too poorly led to put up any effective, coordinated resistance.

There are examples of the Iranians offering considerable resistance to the invaders, such as the intense fighting in defense of Abadan, Khorramshahr, or in the western mountains. It must be pointed out, however, that these were isolated incidents and were led by local commanders operating on their own initiative.⁴⁶⁵ These cases were not the rule. Courage alone cannot be considered a substitute for effective leadership and adequate preparation. Even when led by competent commanders, Iranian soldiers were still too poorly trained and ill-equipped to resist the overwhelming British and Soviet attacks. British consul Sir Clarmont Skrine recalls these areas as putting up a fight, but

⁴⁶² Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 100.

⁴⁶³ Ward, *Immortal*, 167.

⁴⁶⁴ Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 277, 298.

⁴⁶⁵ Ward, *Immortal*, 156-162.

notes that the majority of Iran's forces were either routed without difficulty or easily outmaneuvered.⁴⁶⁶ This view is echoed by Winston Churchill, who remarks that the country's oil fields, the first objective, were "easily captured," that certain areas, as Hassan Arfa would agree, would have been a "definite obstacle" if seriously defended, and sums up the hostilities in a letter to a British general by saying that "Persian opposition is not very serious."⁴⁶⁷

Aside from isolated pockets of vigorous resistance, however, Iran's forces fell by the wayside with little fanfare. The deficiencies of the officer corps were exposed as commanders fled to safety.⁴⁶⁸ One even had ammunition taken off transports to make room for his personal furniture before a retreat. Others stripped off their uniforms and escaped to Tehran.⁴⁶⁹ Without leaders, poorly trained and demoralized soldiers deserted in droves. The rout was so complete that commanders in Tehran questioned if they still had any soldiers under their command.⁴⁷⁰ Many of those who attempted to resist found that they faced unexpected difficulties. In Tabriz, armorers and quartermasters had no rations for their soldiers and could offer each only five rounds of ammunition.⁴⁷¹

A wartime book published in Britain dealing with the air war in the Middle East between 1940 and 1942 devotes little more than a page to the invasion of Iran. By contrast, the affair in Habbaniya, Iraq, receives eleven pages of lurid detail. There are no accounts of harrowing encounters with Iranian aircraft or even ground fire, and the piece has a decidedly lighthearted tone to it, remarking that British bombers "regaled the

⁴⁶⁶ Clarmont Skrine, *World War in Iran* (London: Constable & Company, 1962), 77-78.

⁴⁶⁷ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 481-483.

⁴⁶⁸ Cronin, "The Paradoxes of Military Modernization," 48.

⁴⁶⁹ Ward, *Immortal*, 164, 167.

⁴⁷⁰ Cronin, "The paradoxes of Military Modernization," 48.

⁴⁷¹ Ward, *Immortal*, 167.

populations" of Iran's cities with the "informing literature" of Allied propaganda.⁴⁷² This is not the hallmark of a hard-fought campaign. Britain's ambassador to the United States informed the American Secretary of State on August 26th, the day after the invasion began, that the operation had been successful, "without serious incident," and that Iranians in Tehran felt that the nation's defense effort had been staged by the shah with the matter of occupation planned with his consent.⁴⁷³ In any case, it was a miserable showing, described eloquently in Winston Churchill's eulogy for the operation: "Thus ended this brief and fruitful exercise of overwhelming force against a weak and ancient state."⁴⁷⁴ Mercifully, the war in Iran was over almost as soon as it began.

The vaunted Iranian military, Reza Shah's darling, whose guns, tanks, and aircraft consumed so much of the country's budget for two decades could not even muster a sufficient defense to convince its citizens, including Hassan Arfa, that it made a genuine effort to combat the invaders. Of such potency was the mythology of the strong national army-- the allegedly valiant force that subdued the tribes and forged a modern nation with blood and iron-- that nobody could fathom its true weakness and ineptitude. In the midst of an otherwise total defeat, the success of his regime's propaganda was Reza Shah's only victory. The political posturing involved with building Iran's army had served its purpose and convinced the population of its power. Unfortunately for the shah, his eventual acceptance of his own propaganda would doom his rule. The modern army that he had labored for nearly two decades to build did not even exist. After continuing to politically antagonize the Allied occupation force, Reza Shah abdicated as Soviet soldiers entered

⁴⁷² Philip Guedalla, *Middle East 1940-1942: A Study in Air Power*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1944), 155-156.

⁴⁷³ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1941*, 426.

⁴⁷⁴ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 482.

Tehran. He would die in exile, under the watchful eye of the British, in July 1944.⁴⁷⁵

Conclusion: Semblance over Substance

Reza Shah came to power in a state lacking central authority and soon adopted the nationalist program of modernization via the establishment of a strong government with the power to forcibly unify and alter society. To Reza, this could only be accomplished through the force provided by a strong national army. This force was to be the central pillar of the state, both symbolically and materially. At times, more than half the budget would be consumed by defense-related spending, to the detriment of the social and economic development of the country. The 1935 budget, for example, set aside 223,729,980 rials for the Ministry of War while the Ministry of Education received 31,798,250 rials, little more than a tenth of what was spent on defense. Just two million rials were to be used for hospital construction in Tehran.⁴⁷⁶ In spite of its favored position, the military that developed during Reza's reign had serious shortcomings. Far too many ills of the Qajar period, the endemic corruption and political wrangling, were permitted to persist as the armed forces grew in strength. Illiterate conscripts spent more time receiving primary education than learning how to be soldiers. Though their numbers were increasing, there remained a dearth of competent professionals in the officer corps. In 1941, fewer than 2,100 officers had graduated from Iran's military academies⁴⁷⁷ out of the more than 3,000 total officers within the military. Materially, Iran's forces fared better than ever before. Modern weapons, tanks, and aircraft had been added while the

⁴⁷⁵ Ward, *Immortal*, 169; Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century*, 121.

⁴⁷⁶ GB-FO416/93, *Further Correspondence Respecting Persia*, Part 38, January to June 1935, p. 256-257, No. 122.

⁴⁷⁷ Ward, *Immortal*, 147.

capability for domestic arms production had begun to develop. Still, equipment remained in short supply, was poorly maintained, and had few well-trained individuals to operate them. Even as the country faced invasion, many frontline soldiers were still equipped with training rifles.⁴⁷⁸ The personnel and other factors combined to mean that the Iranian military was more impressive on the parade ground than on the battlefield.

The projection of the appearance of strength was a cornerstone of Reza Shah's regime. If the sophisticated modern aircraft and vehicles purchased by Iranian officials seemed extravagant, it was by design. By having modern military hardware, Reza Shah could claim the prestige of possessing the same arms operated by powerful Western nations. When shopping for new aircraft in the United States, Iran would not settle for less capable export models, instead demanding only those that the Americans had adopted for themselves. Reza did not care if even the Americans found it difficult to fly these planes. Possession trumped practicality. These expensive weapons were far too valuable, not in a monetary, but in a symbolic sense, to risk losing on the battlefield. Consequently, armored cars and aircraft were kept close to Tehran in the first years of Reza's rule, where they would be most visible and therefore politically beneficial. In contrast to his reputation, when confronting tribal opponents, Reza Shah was loathe to apply armed force. A military solution to tribal rebellions ran the risk of potentially endangering the prestige of the armed forces if the government troops were defeated. Instead, Reza focused on achieving negotiated settlements until circumstances turned in his favor. By using these tactics, he was able to wear down tribal resistance until the military supremacy of the government was assured. 1932 marked the beginning of the Ministry of the Interior's oversight of efforts to sedentarize Iran's tribes. Prior to this,

⁴⁷⁸ Pahlavi, *Mission For My Country*, 71.

settlement of the tribes was a purely military effort.⁴⁷⁹ Against the Allied invasion a decade later, however, such an approach was useless. Iran's parade-ground army was overwhelmed, in many cases before it could even contemplate resistance. When it did resist, it invariably succumbed to the vastly superior firepower of the British and Soviet armies. Granted, the combined Anglo-Soviet armies were larger, better armed, better equipped, and more experienced than anything the Iranians could muster, but the rapidity with which Iran's forces disintegrated is astonishing. The military strength that Reza Shah had presented was little more than a facade.

The triumph of semblance over substance extended far beyond simply the shape of Iran's armed forces. More than being favored politically and financially, the military was venerated in public discourse. Reza Shah's legitimacy was drawn, in part, from his martial prowess. He presented himself, possibly even fancied himself, as the warrior king. A part of grooming the Crown Prince for the throne was his military instruction, and his participation in scouting and military drill were flaunted. To Reza Shah, military service was an integral part of citizenship, and conscription ensured that young men from around the country would be drawn into the machinery of the state, but the veneration of masculinity relegated women to second-class status. In books and parades, the armed forces were presented as the protectors of Iranian sovereignty, as magnificent examples of the strength of the new Iran. The civilian population was groomed to serve as literal soldiers or as figurative soldiers in the service of the state. Iranian boys were obligated to join scouting organizations that emphasized physical fitness and martial discipline.⁴⁸⁰ The handling of weapons and military drill became as much a part of their education as

⁴⁷⁹ Bayat, "Reza Shah and the Tribes," 217.

⁴⁸⁰ Matthee, "Transforming Dangerous Nomads," 326.

academic subjects and were taught to them by army officers. Iran's adults, while not forced to parade, were still expected to serve the state. National dress codes ensured a standard of uniformity among the population, with Reza Shah seemingly willing Westernization into being by making Iranians appear more Western. Reza Shah's government sought to use the military as a model for society, thinking that the military would serve as a conduit to modernize the population.

Foreign observers were aware of the shortcomings of Reza's modernization program. Western newspaper articles wryly commented on the presence of railroad stations without rail service, financial districts that lacked buildings, and opera houses that were without operas.⁴⁸¹ Generally, Reza Shah's reforms have been characterized as falling short of the "depth and breadth" of those in Turkey, as "the old social structure and the traditional patrimonialism were strongly protected" during his reign.⁴⁸² The traditional Qajar elite were simply replaced by a new privileged class of military officials.⁴⁸³ Without creating outlets for political expression, by stifling a free press, refusing to tolerate any indication of dissent, and banning political parties, he left Iranians without a voice or a role in politics. Resentment was left to build up, frustration left to fester and grow, just below the surface. Occasionally, such as Mashad in 1935, the dissatisfaction felt by many Iranians boiled over.

In 1938, an American diplomatic report had made a remarkably accurate assessment of the state of affairs in Iran. The military stood at the center of the state and represented the vanguard of modernity. Reza Shah sought, not to expand the country's

⁴⁸¹ "Shah Instituted Host of Reforms," *New York Times*, September 16, 1941.

⁴⁸² James A. Bill and Robert Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East*, 5th ed. (Stanford: Longman, 1999), 143-44.

⁴⁸³ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941*, 57.

borders or to align it with a stronger power, but to remain neutral while assuring the sovereignty of the state. Although he admired the accomplishments of the fascist and Nazi movements, and even though German economic penetration of the country was widespread, the shah was unlikely to allow either of these factors to influence his policies toward Europe. At home, the shah was secure in his position, supported by the best army east of Turkey, and feared by the civilian population. But all was not well within the country. Reza Shah's policies had generated considerable resentment that showed no signs of abatement. Moreover, because there was no free press and because there were no political parties, he had lost touch with his subjects. The basic political dynamics of the country needed to change.⁴⁸⁴

Iranian politics *did* change, but not because Reza commanded it, and not along the lines necessary to win popular support. After the Allied invasions humiliated Iran's armed forces, Reza Shah's rule began to unravel. To win the favor of the Iranian public, the British broadcast propaganda exposed the shah's abuses of power.⁴⁸⁵ The world watched as the drama unfolded. One newspaper article, written September 15, 1941, discussed the shah's increasing unpopularity, even rehashed rumors that Reza was making preparations to flee the country.⁴⁸⁶ A day later, not knowing that he had abdicated, another paper reported that Iran's tribes were uniting in opposition to him.⁴⁸⁷ When his abdication was announced, a British paper referred to his reign as "a detested rule."⁴⁸⁸ A few days later, another newspaper tried to make sense of Reza's departure.

⁴⁸⁴ Engert, Dispatch 1254, "Observations regarding the Coup d'Etat. The Shah and his Achievements," March 14, 1938.

⁴⁸⁵ Abrahamian, *Iran*, 165.

⁴⁸⁶ "Britain Hunts Tehran Entry to Seize Nazis," *Chicago Daily News*, September 15, 1941.

⁴⁸⁷ "Iran is Regarded as Allied Bastion," *New York Times*, September 16, 1941.

⁴⁸⁸ "Abdication of the Shah," *London Times*, September 17, 1941.

After twenty years of autocracy, it reasoned, the Iranian people had grown tired. Since the military was the key to the shah's power, its destruction took his power with it. The Allied invasion simply allowed the Iranian people to have their own way.⁴⁸⁹ Obviously, these reports reflect the wartime needs of the Allies. Britain and the Soviets needed a reliable and compliant partner in Iran, and Reza lacked the temperament to play that role. His reign was likely doomed the moment the invasion began.

The aforementioned 1938 American report, while accurate, did not anticipate a military invasion of the country. It was, however, strangely prophetic. Although it contended that Reza Shah was secure, it warned that the country's politics needed to change. If not, it predicted, the Crown Prince would be challenged for power.⁴⁹⁰ As stated earlier, Mohammad Reza Shah emulated his father. With a few exceptions, the policies of the younger Pahlavi looked quite similar to his predecessor. If Iranian politics remained unchanged from the policies of Reza Shah, the 1938 report cautioned, the population needed only organization, leadership, and a common objective to cause havoc.⁴⁹¹ Almost half a century later, this prognostication proved correct. Reza Shah would lose his throne over military miscalculations before the consequences of his modernization program fully developed, but he had unwittingly unleashed forces that would eventually bring about the end of 2500 years of Iranian monarchy.

⁴⁸⁹ "The Revolution in Iran: Our New Middle Eastern Block," *Sunday Times (London)*, September 21, 1941.

⁴⁹⁰ Engert, Dispatch 1254, "Observations regarding the Coup d'Etat. The Shah and his Achievements," March 14, 1938.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

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