



## **Reading and Misreading the Iranian Revolution**

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### **The Fall of the Shah**

#### **A Counter-Factual History**

- The nature of the Islamic Republic that replaced the Pahlavi monarchy
- The Tehran Hostage Crisis and the presidency of Jimmy Carter
- Iran-Iraq War
- Gulf War of 1991

#### **Why did we misread the Revolution in Europe and the United States?**

- Why were American and British decision-makers so reluctant to see that the fall of the Shah was coming?
- Why were some intellectuals celebrating the fall of the Shah?
- Why were other intellectuals so reluctant to acknowledge that they had gotten the Revolution wrong?

### **The American Misreading**

#### **The United States and Iran in the Cold War**

- US support for the 1953 coup that made the Shah an absolute monarch
- Shah's autonomy from the United States in the 1970s
- Failure to support Iranian reformists

#### **Jimmy Carter and the Shah**

- The end of uncritical support for the Shah under Jimmy Carter
- The myth that Carter abandoned the Shah
- The Shah's refusal to use force to hold on to power

### **The British Misreading**

#### **Britain and Iran after Empire**

- Britain had lost its oil monopoly in Iran in 1951 and never recovered
- Popular perception of Britain as all powerful versus reality of a declining power
- Focus on commercial contracts and ignorance of social and political dynamics

#### **The Labour Party and the Iranian Revolution**

- Growing criticism of the Shah in Britain itself amongst the Left and Amnesty
- Failure of Whitehall and Labour ministers to understand the fragility of Shah's regime
- BBC Persian's role in the Revolution

- Browne Report commissioned by Lord Owen.

## The Intellectuals' Misreading

### Contacts with the Iranian opposition in the West

- Shah's visit to Berlin in 1967
- Confederation of Iranian Students in Europe and the United States
- Radicalization of Iranian student groups: speaking of armed struggle and Westoxification in Persian and of human rights in English, German and French
- Failure of the Western Left to understand the significance of the Shah reforms or the anti-liberal authoritarianism of the Iranian opposition

### Foucault and the Iranian Revolution

- Michael Foucault's critique of modernity and his attraction to Khomeini
- Foucault and the seductions of Islamism
- Foucault, unlike much of the Left, was correct that the Iranian Revolution was anti-modern
- Foucault ignored the danger of clerical rule for democracy, women's rights and minority rights

## The Triumph of an 'Anti-Imperialist' Revolution

### Revolutionary Terror

- Executions of the Shah's generals and officials (15 February 1979)
- International Women's Day (8 March 1979)
- Execution of Hoveyda (7 April 1979)
- Closure of Ayandegan (8 August 1979)

### An 'Anti-Imperialism of Fools'?

- Richard Falk, Andrew Young, and the celebration of Khomeini
- Fred Halliday and 'Islam with a fascist face'
- Edward Said and America's Islamophobia

## Misreading 'Women, Life, Freedom' in 2023

### Context of Iran's 2022 uprising

- Women: secularism vs. Islamism
- Life: prosperity vs. corruption
- Freedom: liberalism vs. authoritarianism

### Our 'culture wars' and Iran's *enqelab*

- Anti-Americanism and the reluctance of the Left to criticize the Islamic Republic
- Islamophobia in the West and the issue of mandatory veiling
- Making it about us: Feminism and Kurdish rights

## References and Further Reading

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