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President Carter and the Shah of Iran, toasting each other at a state dinner (in Tehran) on New Year's Eve, 1977. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

The still-exiled Ayatollah, who had moved to France in late 1978, finally had a way to air his views. He told the world's media that, among other things, he despised the Shah and considered America to be "the Great Satan." He'd been listening when journalists filed reports about Carter's visit to Iran in late 1977 / early 1978. He knew the American had been touched by these ancient words of a Persian poet:

Human beings are like parts of a body, created from the same essence. When one part is hurt and in pain, others cannot remain in peace and quiet. If the misery of others leaves you indifferent and with no feeling of sorrow, then you cannot be called a human being. (Translated Lines from "Bani Adam," by Saadi Shirazi, the famous medieval-era poet.)

At the very moment President Carter quoted those words, Iranians were not allowed to have public rallies since the Shah had banned them. At the very moment the President was praising Iran's monarch, other Iranians were in prison (or dead) because of civil-rights abuses.

Khomeini wondered aloud whether Americans, and their leader, felt no sorrow for the abused Iranian people. If so, why were they "indifferent" to their plight? At least 30,000 Americans were working in Iran, at the time of the state dinner. Did they not realize what was going on in Iran?

Anyone believing that an 80-year-old man - who mostly lived-on onions, garlic and yogurt - could not lead a revolution would have grossly misjudged Rouhallah Khomeini. A religious leader, his slogan was "No easterly, no westerly, one Islamic republic."

People in the West did not know Khomeini. Leaders in the West did not understand him. Caring not a wit about Western opinions, the Ayatollah wanted to revolutionize life in Iran. He wanted to turn his country into an Islamic Republic.

Khomeini's words, spoken or written in Paris, had a fairly direct line into his country. When they became known, Iranians began to act on them.

Angry students, supporting the Ayatollah's position, stormed the American embassy on the 4th of November, 1978. The Shah's forces killed many of them, including children as young as thirteen.

The Shah's hold on power - although it had been brutally enforced - was not just fraying. It was being ripped apart as millions of people demonstrated against him.

At the beginning of 1978, President Carter had just declared that Iran was one of America's closest allies:

We have no other nation on Earth who is closer to us in planning for our mutual military security. We have no other nation with whom we have closer consultation on regional problems that concern us both. And there is no leader [referencing the Shah] with whom I have a deeper sense of personal gratitude and personal friendship. (President Carter at the State Dinner in Iran, December 31, 1977.)

One year later - at the beginning of 1979 - President Carter's great friend and ally, Shah Reza Pahlavi, had no choice but to leave his country. With so many people against him, and strikes paralyzing Iran, the Shah was unable to govern. **

On the 16th of January - after 2500 years of unbroken monarchical rule - Iran's last Shah, and his family, were allowed to enter Egypt. Two weeks later, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Tehran in triumph. Millions greeted

him, shouting:

He is our leader!

In the Ayatollah's briefcase was the draft of a new Constitution. It outlined the basis for a very different Iran - one that would become a theocracy, governed by Islamic law.

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Media Stream



Ayatollah Khomeini at Home in France

Image of Ayatollah Khomeini, talking with journalists outside his home in Neauphle-le-Chateau (France), online courtesy sajed.ir.

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ARGO - Students against the Shah

Image of Iranian student demonstrators, on the 4th of November 1978, online courtesy Sajed.ir.

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ARGO - Mass Demonstrations against the Shah

Photo of mass demonstration, in Tehran, online courtesy Sajed.ir.

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Iranian Women against the Shah

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ARGO - Demonstrators vs The Shah's Army

Image of protestors versus the Shah's soldiers, taken in 1978, online courtesy Tebyan.net.

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Ayatollah Khomeini Returns to Iran - February 1, 1980

Image of Ayatollah Khomeini, 1 February 1980, online courtesy sajed.ir.

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ARGO - Black Friday, September 8, 1978

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Shah Leaves Iran - Islamic Revolution

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Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution

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