

0. SURRENDER at the IRANIAN EMBASSY - Story
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By February of 1979, after the Ayatollah Khomeini had returned to Iran, members of the armed forces who were loyal to the Shah were defeated by rebels and guerillas on the city streets. Supporters of the Ayatollah - and there were many millions - were encouraged when they heard their leader say: **

Victory is near. Do not be afraid. If we are killed, we will go to heaven. And if we kill, we will go to heaven. This is the logic of Islam because we are in the right.



Supporters of the Ayatollah Khomeini, gathering in Tehran in 1979, demonstrate in favor of their spiritual leader and his Iranian Revolution. Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Death sentences against the Shah's loyalists were passed, then carried out. By April, with the Ayatollah in charge, Iranians voted on this question:

Should Iran become an Islamic Republic?

Although they did not have the specifics, on how the government would run, 99% of the voting public agreed. The Ayatollah's dream would come true - Iran would become an Islamic state.

People in the West, including government leaders, were stunned. Inside Iran, however, this result was no surprise. The depth of hatred against the Shah - and the rampant corruption and favoritism which had characterized his years of power - caused many Iranians to desire change.

There was also something else the Iranians wanted. They demanded the Shah must return to Iran, to stand trial for the alleged crimes he had committed during his 37-year reign. There was little doubt that such a trial would result in a guilty verdict. There was also little doubt on the sentence which would be imposed. The former ruler would hang.

As a result, the Shah did not return.

A major question loomed, however. Where would he live? Egypt was never intended to be the Shah's final residence. Although he wanted to live in America, the U.S. government knew that admitting the Shah would cause even more problems between the two countries. President Carter refused his friend entrance to America.

Western embassies operated in Tehran, through the first ten months of 1979. Employees in the American embassy continued business - somewhat as usual - although the mission was not supervised by an Ambassador. Bruce Laingen, as US chargé d'affaires, was the senior official.

Then ... an event occurred which had the potential to further imperil US/Iranian relations. The Shah publicly revealed what he had known for several years ... he had cancer. By late October, 1979, he needed treatment. His preference, and that of his doctors, was medical care in America.

Laingen - the most-senior government official with firsthand information on events transpiring in Iran - warned decision-makers against admitting the Shah to the States:

... with the power of the mullahs growing, admission of the shah, even on humanitarian grounds, might provoke a severe disturbance.

Not everyone who held a federal-decision-making job agreed with Laingen (or even cared what he thought). In the end, President Carter decided the Shah could be treated in a New York City hospital. The former ruler arrived, via private plane, on the 22nd of October, 1979.

To this day, the record is unclear whether physicians actually believed the Shah's medical condition was life-threatening when he began treatment on American soil. What is clear, however, is the decision to admit him had disastrous consequences.

Less than two weeks later, Iranian students - angry that America had admitted Pahlavi for medical treatment - stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Their original plan was to stage a "sit-in" for a few days.

When Laingen sought help from an Iranian government official, Ebrahim Yazdi reminded the American about his prior warnings. Yazdi had personally warned Laingen that admitting the Shah could result in an attack on the embassy.

Only the Ayatollah could call-off the attack, but he was in the holy city of Qom. Laingen had no choice. He gave the order to surrender the embassy.

Six Americans, who were working elsewhere on the embassy campus, were processing visa requests from Iranian citizens during the take-over. Working close to a Tehran street, those six individuals were able to escape their office, undetected.

For nearly 90 days - thanks to the help of senior Canadian-government officials in Iran - they remained undetected.

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Media Stream

تا شاه گفن نشود
این وطن وطن نشود

ARGO - Anti-Shah Slogan

Photo of slogan, popular during the Iranian Revolution, online courtesy Tebyan.net.

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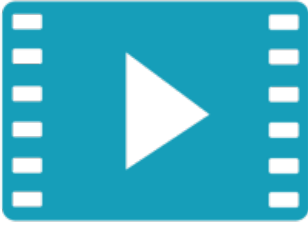
جمهوری اسلامی، به گفتن خصمی،
ایجاد باید کرد.
زندانی صحابی، به گفتن خصمی،
آزادی باید کرد.
روزم شاهنشاهی، به گفتن خصمی،
ایستاد باید کرد.
این شاه آمریکایی، به گفتن خصمی،
احد ام باید کرد.

ARGO - Death Penalty Demanded for Shah

Slogan during the Iranian Revolution, online courtesy Tebyan.net.

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President Carter Announces Embassy Hostages Captured

Video clip of President Carter's announcement to the American people, regarding the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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