

AP Comp Government & Politics  
Iran Chapter Summary

### **Impact of the Past**

#### Brief History

- For most of its history, Iran, was known as Persia (It was renamed in 1925 from Persia to Iran)
- Many languages are spoken in Persia; 50% spoke Farsi, 25% spoke a Turkic language, 20% spoke Persian related languages, and the remaining 5% spoke Arabic and other tongues

#### Geographical Features & the Role They Play

- Most of Iran is a plateau around 4,000 feet above sea level
- Persia was an important trade crossroad between the Middle East and Asia
  - Persia, being a trade crossroad, was a target for conquest
  - People who conquered Persia include: Greeks, Arab-Islamics, Mongols, and many others.

#### Arab Conquest

- The Arabs conquered the Byzantines for control of Persia in 637
- The Arabs brought Islam with them and two decades after the conquest of Persia most of its inhabitants were Muslim
- The conquest and adoption of Islam weakened social cleavages in Persia
- The Safavid dynasty in 1501 began to practice a version of Islam called Shia, which is now the only religion in Iran

#### Western Penetration

- England and Russia both pushed into Persia and spread their socioeconomic ideas
- Although never colonized by western powers, most of Persia's political and economic life was dependent on imperial designs
- In 1906-1907 the Constitutional Revolution brought the first constitution and elected parliament, called the Majlis

#### The First Pahlavi (1925-1979)

- Reza Kahn, a cavalry officer, seized power in 1921 and was crowned shah in 1925
- Kahn renamed the country to its present day name Iran
  - Iran is derived from the word Aryan which indicates the country's Indo-European roots
- Some of Kahn's accomplishments are: an effective army, a civil service, national bank, replaced traditional Islamic courts with civil courts, founded first Western-style university, and Iran's economy flourished
- In 1941 British forces exiled Reza Kahn from Iran, but before exiled Kahn abdicated for his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi
- After WWII the Soviets did not withdraw from Iran and set up a Communist government there

#### The Last Pahlavi

- Oil determined much of Iran's twentieth-century history
- Foreigners who wanted Iran's oil include: British, Germans, Russians, and Americans

- When oil prices quadrupled the Shah of Iran spent all of the money it made on it's military instead of helping the people, this led to the downfall of the shah
- Ayatollah Khomeini, a religious authority, was exiled to Iraq in 1964
  - Khomeini went to live in a Paris suburb, from there he spread his views of the Shah via cassettes that were distributed from mosques nation wide
- On January 15, 1979 the last Pahlavi left Iran

### **Key Institutions**

#### The Theocracy

- In 1979 a referendum ended two and a half millennia of monarchy and established the Islamic Republic of Iran
- In the Islamic Republic of Iran head of state and head of government are split between a standard president and a religious figure
  - The religious figure holds most of the power making Iran a theocracy
- The current principle power in Iran is the velayat-e faqih or the "Guardianship of the Islamic jurist"
  - In velayat-e faqih, the leading faqih (Islamic jurist) serves for life
  - The faqih's powers include appointing all of the major state and religious organizations, declaring war
  - The faqih has control over the judiciary, armed forces, security police, intelligence agencies, and media.
- The faqih is more powerful than the president and continually blocks any reform efforts

#### The Executive

- Iran's president is elected by popular vote for up to two four-year terms, like the United States president.
- The president holds no real power
  - The cabinet does the day to day governance like devising new laws and the budget and submitting it to parliament
  - The cabinet is appointed by the faqih

#### The Legislature

- Iran has a unicameral system called the Islamic Consultative Assembly or Majlis
- The Majlis consists of 290 deputies elected for four year terms
- The Council of Guardians is an institution that examines all candidates and each Majlis bill that it passes
  - Without Council approval the bill is vetoed and returned to the Majlis to be corrected
  - The Council of Guardians must approve all candidates, effectively trying to suppress reformists

#### The Parties

- Parties are legal under Iran's constitution but the government does not allow them
- Four tendencies that are present in Iran are: radicals, conservatives, reformists, and liberals
  - Radicals are the most extreme supporters of the Islamic Republic
  - Conservatives support the Islamic Republic but not as strong as the radicals
  - Reformists are the educated middle class, they want privatization of state enterprises, less Islamic supervision, and fewer powers for the Council of Guardians

- Liberals are the opposites of conservatives and represent democracy and civil rights

#### Iran's Democratic Potential

- If Iran removed the faqih and abolished the Council of Guardians then it would be a democracy with a president and legislature
- Iran has the greatest democratic potential in the Persian Gulf

#### Iranian Political Culture

- Iran wants to modernize but in their own way and not like the West
- It was long thought that secularization (less role for religion in government) comes with modernization which poses a problem for the theocracy of Iran

#### Islam as a Political Ideology

- Islamism is Islam turned into political ideology
  - Islamism is social, economic, nationalistic, and most of all religious
- Islamism is like communism in the way it preaches equality and no social class distinction

#### Democracy and Authority

- The well educated Iranians believe that Iran can work as a democracy and the theocracies strong hand should be destroyed

#### Persian Nationalism

- The Shah stressed Persian nationalism
- Persian Nationalism is strong in Iran even with the Islamic Revolution

#### Patterns of Interaction

##### Religion as a Political Tool

- Islamists used their religion as a tool; a recruiting and mobilizing device, a means of gaining authority and obedience, and a way to seize and consolidate power
- The Iranian people will eventually see the truth behind the Islamic Revolution and the theocracy will begin to lose its legitimacy

##### Moderates and Islamists in Iran

- Moderates and liberals in Iran have to stay quite and hidden in order to survive in the extremist environment that they live in
- The main difference between the conservatives and moderates is the question: free market or state controlled?
- Some of the strongest critics of the current regime are leaders from the Islamic Revolution

##### The Revolution Burns Out

- The mullahs run the bonyads, foundations originally set up to redistribute the wealth in Iran
  - The mullahs have become corrupt and made themselves rich while starving the country of wealth
  - This corrupt acts of the mullahs may bring an end to the Islamic revolution

#### What Iranians Quarrel About

##### Free Market or State Controlled Economy?

- Around 80% of the economy is controlled by political or religious leaders, most of this being the oil industry
  - Most of Iran's GDP comes from oil sales

- The main question that is quarreled over in Iran is should Iran's economy be a free market

#### A Veiled Debate on Islam

- A debate that is fought without words or actions is what kind of Islam will Iran have?
  - First there is a moderate kind that keeps out of most direct political involvement
  - The other kind is a militant kind that seeks to guide society by political means

#### Foreign Policy

- Iranians want to support other Shias mainly, but also support muslims as a whole
- Iran has many enemies surrounding their borders

#### The End of the Revolution

- Eventually the Islamic Revolution will end with the reformist as victors over the conservatives
- A big majority of Iranians see reforms as an urgent necessity and this will help reform the political system in Iran

#### Glossary of Key Terms

- Majlis- Iran's parliament
- Shah- A king, derived from Persian
- Mullah- A Muslim cleric
- Ayatollah- Top Shia religious leader
- Velayat-e faqih- Theocratic system devised by Khomeini
- Islamist- Someone who uses Islam in a political way
- Islamism- Islam turned into political ideology
- Fatwa- Ruling by Islamic jurist