

## Imam Khomeini Shakes the World



On the first day of February, 1979, an Air France jet touched down in Tehran carrying a famous passenger on a journey of historic importance. When that passenger emerged from the plane, he looked on his native country for the first time in nearly 15 years. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had been in exile since 1964, and now he was returning with a single aim in mind. He did not have to wait long. By the time he got to Iran, the Shah had already left the country, bowing to extreme political pressure. In his place, a moderate politician named Shahpur Bakhtiar had assumed the duties of prime minister and head of state. By February 11, only 10 days after the ayatollah's return—and 27 years ago today—Bakhtiar and the other remnants of the Shah's government had been chased from power, and a provisional government backed by Khomeini had assumed control of the country. Few events since have had such grave repercussions for the United States. Born in central Iran in 1900, Khomeini was nearly 80 when he returned in triumph. His conflict with the shah stretched back over decades. Before the 1950s he had been generally satisfied to advance his religious convictions by teaching young scholars at the Faiziyeh Theological School, in Qom, Iran, training them to follow his mystical, ascetic ways. In 1951, however, he watched with interest as the reformer Muhammad Mossadegh garnered vast popular support for a nationalistic approach to government. When Mossadegh was deposed by an American-backed coup and the shah's personal rule was restored, Khomeini understood that there remained a latent demand for sterner leadership. Gradually he waded deeper into politics, surreptitiously meeting with activist clerics and learning from their experiences. And at the beginning of the 1960s he became the most visible antagonist of Shah Pahlavi. In a series of confrontations with the government, he spoke forcefully against the shah, his accommodating attitude toward the West, and his policy of directing Iran's oil resources toward the United States and Britain. The rivalry between the two leaders came to a head in 1963 and 1964. In 1963 the Shah sent troops to Qom to storm the religious academy where Khomeini taught. Until then Pahlavi had successfully undermined his opponents in labor unions and political parties but had left the clergy largely untouched, even though some of them harbored equally defiant sentiments. The government soldiers meant to stifle Khomeini's students' revolutionary tendencies, but they had the opposite effect. The killing of two unarmed students ignited widespread public anger. Forty days later Khomeini led huge crowds in rituals of mourning for the slain students, and the gatherings broke into ongoing riots. The following year the situation deteriorated even further, as Khomeini came to the forefront of Iranian politics by leading rallies denouncing a military pact with the United States. In November it became clear to

Pahlavi, his ministers, and his American allies that Khomeini's activism must stop. Faced with a number of options, among them covert assassination, the shah chose to banish Khomeini from Iran. On November 4, 1964, he and his son were taken to the airport in Tehran and flown from there to a Turkish air force base. 22 bahman Khomeini spent about a year in Turkey but soon received permission from Iraq's government to move there. He lived in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq, until 1978, his hostility toward the shah and the United States unabated. Sympathetic activists smuggled his writings into Iran, copied them, and distributed them among the populace—especially among students. Understanding the menace Khomeini still posed, the shah pressured Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to expel him. When Hussein complied, Khomeini left for Paris; there, in the first weeks of 1979, he prepared to return home. As Iran fell into economic crisis and popular opposition to the shah mounted, Pahlavi, who had been diagnosed with cancer in 1974, ceded control of the Iranian government to the moderate Bakhtiar and left for Egypt. By the time Khomeini returned to Iran, Bakhtiar's government was tottering. Less than a week after his homecoming, Khomeini formed a provisional revolutionary government in direct opposition to the regime. When the military refused to crush Khomeini's uprising, Bakhtiar's government fell apart. On February 11, Khomeini's followers declared victory on Iran's state radio. With his fundamentalist regime in place, Khomeini adopted a militantly anti-American stance on foreign policy. On November 4, 1979, student followers of his seized the American embassy in Tehran, taking 66 American spies and dealing a fatal blow to the struggling Carter presidency. In 1980 the Ayatollah's government mounted a massive invasion of neighboring Iraq, leading to the protracted and bloody struggle that defined much of America's involvement in the Middle East during the 1980s. Though Khomeini himself died in 1989, his followers control Iran to this day and continue to embrace his antagonistic attitude toward the United States and the West. In 2005 Iran elected a new president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Before he became president, Ahmadinejad was mayor of Tehran, but before that he was a foot soldier in Khomeini's fundamentalist revolution. Five former hostages have identified him as one of the students who seized the American embassy. According to one journalist, the Iranian president's political philosophy can be stated simply: "Ahmadinejad sees his role as promoting the same platform of global jihad he has been actively participating in since 1979." And the latest battle over Iran's nuclear capability is a strong sign of that. Thus Khomeini's seizure of power influences global politics to this day, and the heirs of his revolution continue to threaten the interests and security of the United States.

**Overthrow of the monarchical system and triumph Of the Islamic revolution** On 19 Bahman 1357, Air Force personnel swore allegiance to the Imam at his residence (the Alavi School in Tehran). Shah's army was on the verge of total collapse. Many faithful soldiers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) had already deserted their military bases by the decree of Imam Khomeini, and had joined the people's ranks. On 20 Bahman, the "Homafaran" rose up at the most important air base in Tehran. Royal Guard was dispatched to suppress them. The Tehran Martial Law Commander, extended the curfew hours to begin at 4 P.M. Bakhtiar called a Security Council meeting, and issued the order of the coup d'etat, arranged by Huyser to take place. Meanwhile, Imam Khomeini, in a message, asked the people of Tehran to dash into the streets, to prevent the conspiracy that was about to take place, and to actually cancel the martial law. A flood of men, and

women, young and old poured into the streets and began to build bunkers. The people disbanded the first row of tanks and detachments of motorized brigade as soon as they moved from their bases. The coup d'etat was nipped in the bud. And so, the last stronghold of resistance of the Shah's regime was broken up, and at dawn of 22 Bahman, the radiating sun of victory of Imam Khomeini's movement and the Islamic Revolution dawned and the end of the long-standing system of oppressive monarchy was declared.