

Iran tries to balance past, present

Professor criticizes 'paranoid' American policies

By Greg Hough
Emerald Reporter

When the Ayatollah Khomeini returned to his home country of Iran in February 1979 after sixteen years of exile, it marked the culmination of a dramatic and radical political revolution that changed the face of global affairs.

After Khomeini became leader of Iran 10 years ago this month, replacing the ousted Shah of Iran, he formed a new "Islamic" government based, in part, on principles of the ancient religion of Islam.

From the start, the Khomeini government spoke and acted aggressively against Western capitalist nations, particularly the United States, whom the Ayatollah called "the great Satan." During the tense period of 1979 to 1981, when 52 American hostages were held at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, much of the world soured toward the new regime.

For several years before Khomeini came to power, there was a growing amount of resentment toward the Shah, who had been toppled from power once before, in 1953, only to be reinstated the same year in a U.S.-backed coup.

According to Masoud Kheirabadi, an adjunct professor of international studies at the University, the American government was "paranoid" that the budding government of Muhammad Mussadiq was an aid to communism and to Soviet Russia.

Kheirabadi, a native of Iran, graduated from the university in the Iranian capital of Tehran in the early 1970s, and left the country in 1976. He returned for an extended visit in 1984-85 while at work on a doctoral dissertation.

Kheirabadi said the Shah, who died in exile in 1980, triggered revolutionary revolt in Iran by ignoring social and economic problems, and by trying to westernize a mostly Muslim population.

"By living in Iran," Kheirabadi said, "I could see that when (the Shah) was celebrating his '2500 Years Of Iranian Monarch,' there were people in the cities who were starving."

But, Kheirabadi added, the United States was on the Shah's side, creating a wave of resentment among Iranians.

"Modern American foreign policy has been to support people who are good for them, whether (those people) are good for their countries or not," Kheirabadi said. "The Americans saw the Shah as an ally in containing communism; he helped fight communism in Yemen and Somalia — and also helped Israel against its Arab enemies."

Things had changed quite a bit when Kheirabadi last saw Iran — some for better, some for worse, he said.

On the brighter side, he said, the CIA-supported "SAVAK" secret service of the Shah's



Photo by Mark Yien

Population growth and low-key Western influences have changed Iran for better and worse, says International Studies Professor Masoud Kheirabadi.

time had been dismantled, and people generally felt less bullied and spied upon by the state.

But Kheirabadi said he remembers seeing increased urban blight in Tehran. The city's population, he said, doubled from six million to 12 million in just nine years.

"I found the traffic a mess," Kheirabadi said. "Of course, it wasn't good before, but now it's much worse. No one really follows the traffic signs — the stop signs, or one-way signs. People don't pay attention, because there are too many cars for the narrow little streets."

Though the Islamic government has been highly critical of Western culture, Kheirabadi said this has not kept Iranians from getting American and European cultural goods.

"They may not display it in the window like they did before, but if you go to the end of the shop, they have a place that you can actually see (fashions) and purchase," Kheirabadi said. "I saw a lot of Michael Jackson people — kids dressed like Michael Jackson — walking around (the) city of Shiraz, and they had all this greasy hair, and leather jacket, and shiny shoes."

Kheirabadi said political and economic forces are causing Iranian leaders, including the 87-year old Khomeini, to reassess and reform. The biggest factor toward change, he added, was a long and costly war with Iraq, which was stopped by a truce last summer.

Kheirabadi predicted the effects of war, plus the rise of more moderate political factions in Iran, will lead to change in the government's direction.

"From an economic point of view, it's going to be a more free system — a system which allows people to participate in foreign trade. There'll be less control by the government," Kheirabadi said.



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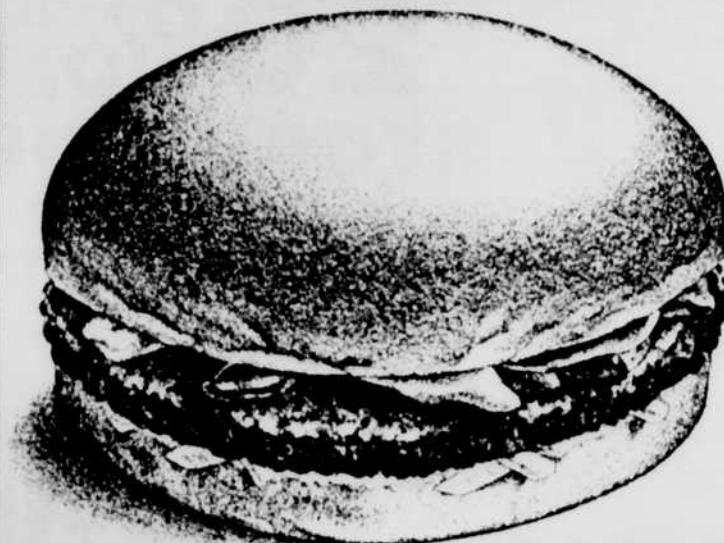
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