

Revolution in Iran

Parviz Daneshvar





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I dedicate this work to the memory of
all those Iranians who
gave their lives for
their country

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3) That merit rather than connections be recognized as the basis for promotion and responsibility. (*U.S.E. Documents*, Vol. 7, Document No. 76-10017, p. 73)

Empress Farah's recommendations not only showed the extent of the problem facing the Shah in 1976 but that those recommendations must have been ignored. The date of the CIA reports is also significant, for at the time the Shah was still very much in charge.

INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS

It is often said that Iran is a 1000-family country. If the 1000 refers to the number of elite families, it is a great exaggeration. Below the Shah and his family, there were only 'a relatively small group of elite families which wielded power and influence not only in politics but also in business, commerce and the professions' (*U.S.E. Documents*, Vol. 7, Documents No. 76-10017, p. 20). They held key positions within the government, political appointments and private pursuits. They moved from one to the other and indeed kept their monopoly of important posts. Bill has estimated that the top national elite families numbered no more than 40, with an additional 150-60 provincial families whose influence was deep in a relatively limited area (Bill, quoted in *U.S.E. Documents*, Vol. 7, Document No. 76-10017, p. 21).

One of the key players in the Shah's political system was his longest serving prime minister, Amir Abbas Hoveyda. Hoveyda was appointed to the post after the assassination of Hassan Ali Mansur in 1965. He survived his 13 years of tenure not only because of his complete subservience and obedience to the Shah, but because of his ability 'to manoeuvre among conflicting personal ambitions of other officials who were in at least covert competition for his job; to avoid any serious errors in interpreting and carrying out the Shah's wishes; and, perhaps more important, the ability to play second fiddle to the Shah' (*U.S.E. Documents*, Vol. 7, Document No. 76-10017, p. 11).

Hoveyda came from humble origins. His father, having served as a secretary to a Bahai leader, entered the diplomatic service. Hoveyda's affiliation to Bahaism, a religious sect regarded by the *ulama* as heretical, was something that was not openly publicized. However, his religious background did much damage to the Shah's standing amongst the *ulama*. Hoveyda's rise to power illustrated a rare case of upward mobility in the Iranian system. It was widely believed at the time that

he owed his prominence to his affiliation to Bahaism and informal contacts, rather than purely to his abilities and experience. However, while this may be true in part, it was mainly his close friendship with Hassan Ali Mansur and his membership of the same *dowreh* as Mansur which contributed to his success.

The word *dowreh* is widely used in Iran to describe an informal but regular gathering of people who have a common purpose or interest. The group's common factor may be anything - political, religious, professional, family or simply poker or bridge playing. What is significant about the *dowreh* is that its members may come from different social backgrounds. The *dowreh* is a normal means of exchanging ideas and information in a society which is addicted to gossip because of lack of public information and free media. Some prominent *dowrehs* were known to be affiliated to foreign governments, and several *dowrehs* were associated with Freemasonry. Some very prominent and influential politicians were known to be Freemasons and members of *dowrehs*; these included Hossein Ala, Manouchehr Eqbal and Dr Jafar Sharif-Emami. It was also significant that when Eqbal was prime minister in 1958, eleven members of his cabinet belonged to a *dowreh* associated with Freemasonry, the Hafez Club (*U.S.E. Documents*, Vol. 20, Document No. A-351, pp. 16-17).

Hoveyda had become a member of the *dowreh* that Mansur had organized in 1959. That *dowreh* had been formed from a 'youngish group of middle-level bureaucrats interested in the problems of the Iranian development' (*U.S.E. Documents*, Vol. 7, pp. 11-20). Within two years, it became a progressive club and had received the Shah's approval; by 1964 it had developed into the Iran-e Novin Party, which was later headed by Hoveyda who succeeded Mansur in 1965. The *dowreh* system shows the importance of such institutions in the formation of the political elite and the Iranian political system. One *dowreh* was the 'French-doctorate group', which met weekly for 25 years. In a 'three-year period its eleven members included a prime minister, three cabinet ministers, three ambassadors, the director of the NIOC and the president of the Teheran Chamber of Commerce' (*U.S.E. Documents*, Vol. 7, Document No. 76-10017, p. 20).

The Iran-e Novin Party (INP) remained the largest party in the country. Ostensibly, the Mardom Party was in opposition to the INP, but neither the Shah nor the prime minister tolerated the criticism of its party chief, Nasser Ameri.

Despite its lack of influence over foreign policy, the INP wielded power throughout the country through its network of influential members in high places. According to the US embassy in Teheran,