



# The 15th of Khordad Uprising

Imam Khomeini's arrest on the 15th day of the Iranian month of Khordad (June 5, 1963) by the government of Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi, the despotic Shah of Iran, started a powerful whirlwind that resulted in the downfall of the monarchical system in Iran 15 years later.

## Historical Background

Six months earlier, in January 1963, Iran's Shah had announced a set of so-called reforms under the name of the "White Revolution". The six-point plan was claimed to be preparing Iran for further progress and development and called for land reforms, nationalization of forests, empowering the pri-

vate sector, electoral changes, and establishment of an anti-illiteracy campaign. However, the anti-religious and Western nature of the program was clear for religious figures including Ayatollah Khomeini.

Talks between these religious figures and the representatives of Shah all ended without any result as Shah refused to clarify the dimensions of the program.

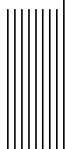
Finally, Ayatollah Khomeini and other religious figures decided to boycott the referendum on White Revolution. Two days later, the Shah took an armored column to Qom and delivered a harsh speech attacking the religious figures as a class. The referendum was carried out and the program was approved

despite the opposition it received for its flaws.

## The Arrest

on June 3, 1963, Imam Khomeini delivered a speech at the Feyziyeh Seminary of Qom in a ceremony held to commemorate the anniversary of Ashura or 10th of Moharram, marking the tragic martyrdom of Imam Hussein (AS) in Karbala, in which he strongly criticized the Shah's government for its anti-Islam policies and drew parallels between the tyrant Umayyad ruler Yazid, by whose order Imam Hussein was killed, and the Shah.

Addressing a large gathering of people, students, and religious scholars, the late Imam exposed



the treasons of the Pahlavi regime to the Iranian nation. He pointed out: "They are against the foundations of the divine religion of Islam and the ulema and their aim is to destroy Islam and the ulema. O People! you should know that our Islam and country are threatened. We are deeply concerned about the situation of Iran and the state of the Shah's despotic regime."

Two days later and at four o'clock in the morning the Shah's security forces and armed agents surrounded Imam Khomeini's house in the city of Qom, arrested him, and sent him to the capital city of Tehran.

Imam Khomeini was first kept at a Tehran detention center but was finally transferred to Eshrat Abad Garrison on June 23.

Two days before his arrest, Imam Khomeini had delivered a speech during the mourning day of Ashura at Feiziye Seminary School in Qom.

Thousands of people listened to Imam Khomeini's critical speech on the wrong policies of the Shah and especially his support for Israel. Imam Khomeini warned the Shah to learn a lesson from the fate of his father, Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was dethroned by the British government and died in exile on the remote Mauritius Island, off the Southeast coast of the African Continent.

The arrest of the Ayatollah was confirmed by the SAVAK, Iran's secret service, later in the same day.

Seyyed Mostafa, the elder son of Imam Khomeini informed senior clergies and religious authorities of Qom of his father's arrest. Then in the early hours of the day, he headed to the courtyard of the Shrine of Hazrat Masumeh while accompanied by some of the followers of Imam Khomeini. Soon the news

of the Ayatollah's arrest reached the public in Qom causing many to gather at the Shrine and around the Feiziye Seminary School. Imam Khomeini's elder son and some other senior clergies gave lectures on the incident. Other Grand Ayatollahs and religious authorities gathered at Ayatollah Sheikh Morteza Ansari's house whose father founded the Qom well-known Seminary School. They consulted and exchanged views on the issue of Imam Khomeini's arrest to decide how to react. Some suggested that in order to ward off a possible attack of the security forces on the people, the senior clergies and Grand Ayatollahs join the public at the Shrine's courtyard. But they delayed doing so and the angry people who had left the courtyard clashed with the security forces and the Shah's soldiers on Tehran Avenue. The violent clash left some people dead and wounded. People carried the dead bodies to the courtyard of the Hazrat Masumeh Shrine. Now the tension was in its full scale. Soon soldiers were deployed in all parts of the city and military jet fighters created a sonic boom above the city by breaking the sound barrier. In the capital city of Tehran, however, things were developing in a wider span.

### Uprising

On June 5, 1963, the Iranian people, wearing particular white clothes used for burying the dead as a sign of their readiness for dying for their cause, staged massive demonstrations against the US-backed Shah, following news of the detention of the Father of Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini (RA) in the aftermath of his bold exposure to the public of the evil nature of the Pahlavi regime. The regime

attacked the people and brutally suppressed them, martyring and wounding a large number of Iranian Muslims. The historical uprising known as the "15th of Khordad Uprising" marked the starting point of the Islamic movement which was to change Iran's destiny. Though Imam Khomeini was exiled a year later, the movement culminated in his eventual return home and the triumph of the Islamic Revolution on February 11, 1979. Following the Revolution, Imam Khomeini ordered the day to be marked as a national mourning day on the Iranian calendar. The news of Imam Khomeini's arrest spread rapidly throughout the capital. Shop owners and merchants closed their shops and all gathered in Bazaar. Universities were also closed and students alongside people drew together on the streets surrounding the Tehran University and started rallying towards 24 Esfand Square (presently Enghelab Square) where the police stopped them.

In other parts of the capital city including the central districts, dispersed assemblies of people gradually joined together to form a large demonstration. While soldiers and security forces were trying to suppress the big wave, the demonstrators went on chanting: "Either Khomeini or death! and "Khomeini, Khomeini, May God protect you! May your bloodthirsty enemy dies!"

On the other hand, a group of demonstrators who started their rally from the vegetable marketplace toward the Shah Square (presently Qiyaam Square) seized a police station and then headed toward the Arg Square where Tehran's main Radio station and propaganda organization were located. Many joined these demonstrators at the

Boozarjomehri Street (presently 15 Khoradad Street) and the streets and alleys surrounding Bazaar.

The disorganized crowds were moving along in different directions. This added to the confusion of the soldiers and security forces who were trying to disperse the demonstration. The military commanders issued orders urging soldiers and security agents to completely suppress the protest demonstration. Many soldiers were brought in from other garrisons near Tehran to help effectively stifle people's movement.

A violent clash broke out in Bazaar between demonstrators and soldiers and the Shah's army began killing people causing massive bloodshed. Soon the Shah's paratroopers were deployed on military trucks to help the police. They surrounded the demonstrators and killed many by opening fire from their machine guns. The government of Assadollah Alam had declared a curfew and martial law, earlier in the day, in Tehran and Qom. Lieutenant General Nematollah Nassiri, the chief of Tehran police, was also appointed as the military commander of Tehran.

The Shah, on the other hand, had given the responsibility of suppressing the demonstration to General Gholam Ali Oveisi, the Imperial Guard Commander.

By noon, the crowd thinned out as many wanted to say their prayers and to further reinforce. This let General Oveisi reorganize his forces and prepare them for the afternoon when people again took to the streets to continue their protest. It was in Sabzeh Meidan and Bazaar neighborhoods where General Oveisi's forces attacked the demonstrators and sprayed them with

their machine guns.

The news of Imam Khomeini's arrest also reached the people in Varamin, a city in the vicinity of Tehran. A large group of shroud-wearing demonstrators from the city rallied toward Tehran to join their colleagues. But the Shah's soldiers stopped them near Bagher-Abad Bridge and killed many of them.

Similar incidents took place in Tabriz, Shiraz, and other important cities.

In Shiraz, a group of prominent religious figures like Sheikh Majdeddin Mahallati and Seyyed Abdul-Hussein Dastgheib were arrested and transferred to Tehran. The demonstration the following day in the city turned into bloodshed and martial law was put in place. Many people were also arrested.

The government figures put the number of those killed on June 5, 1963, in Tehran and Qom only at 86. But it is said that on this day hundreds were killed and their bodies were buried secretly in mass graves.

The Shah's forces managed to suppress before evening an unplanned uprising sparked by the

arrest of Imam Khomeini. The slaughter did stop the protest but the Shah's regime started teetering on the brink of its fall. The government blamed foreign elements for the large-scale protest.

The high-ranking clergies and religious authorities in Qom, Mashad, and Najaf in Iraq condemned the heavy-handed suppression of people by the Shah's regime. In their statements, they also called for the rapid freedom of Imam Khomeini and other senior clergies.

Other high-ranking clergies, in a move to show their protest to the Shah against the arrest of grand clergies and the killing of people, head to Tehran. They reaffirmed Imam Khomeini's religious authority and his role as grand clergy or source of emulation.

The government wanted to execute Imam Khomeini to put an end to the protests. However, the move by the religious authorities to introduce Imam Khomeini as a grand clergy (Marja') reminded the Shah that his killing was unconstitutional.

The popular uprising of June 5, 1963, failed to achieve great ends. But it did pave the way for the formation of a movement that in less than two decades deposed the Shah and dismantled the imperial system in Iran.

Imam Khomeini designated the day as a public day of mourning to rekindle the memory of those who were martyred on this day.

The late Imam recounts this day as the prelude to the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

He says in one of his poems: "I expect his reappearance since mid-Khoradad" referring to his wish for the appearance of the Shiite twelfth Imam Mahdi (AS) who is in a state of occultation.

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