
Recovering

Nonviolent

History

Civil Resistance
in Liberation Struggles

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Maciej J. Bartkowski



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Iran: Nonviolent Revolts, 1890–1906

Nikki R. Keddie

Nonviolent resistance has played an influential role in Iranian history since the late nineteenth century, in particular, by challenging unjust rulers and their subservience to foreign interests. Critically this has involved a recurring strategic alliance between sections of the clergy; the bazaar merchants; and the secular, generally modernizing and nationalist intellectual elite. Lacking real agreement on desired goals, this alliance has largely been based on the existence of common enemies—the ruling dynasty and its foreign supporters—and it has been potent in organizing around anti-imperialist themes such as concessions made to foreign business interests.

In this chapter, I focus on the period when this alliance was first forged during the Qajar dynasty (1794–1925) and, in particular, the tobacco protests of 1891–1892 and the subsequent constitutional revolution of 1905–1911. This alliance resurfaced during the Pahlavi dynasty, especially in the oil nationalization campaign of 1951–1953, in the antigovernment protests of the early 1960s, and even in the movement in 1978–1979 that overthrew the monarchy and ultimately heralded the Islamic revolution. All of these episodes involved, to a greater or lesser extent, efforts to throw off foreign control of the Iranian economy and to build an independent society and state.

The political and economic context for the protest movements of 1890–1911 was the close relationship between the ruling dynasty and foreign powers, particularly but not exclusively Russia and Great Britain. From the early nineteenth century, Russia and Britain competed with each other to control Iran. Both intervened in Iranian politics and economics, via bribes and threats, and militarily by protecting the throne. In addition, Russia,

Britain, and France received a number of economic and cultural concessions such as lucrative contracts and low tariffs on imports. The issue of these preferential tariffs aroused sporadic protests and petitions among Iranian *bazaaris* (a term covering merchants and craftspeople of the traditional bazaars) whose sales were adversely affected, but these protests did not suggest the scale of the revolts in the late nineteenth century.

Iran is hardly unique in having no major thinkers who promoted a philosophy of nonviolent resistance. Iranian history includes elements that glorify violence such as the celebration of ancient Iranian kings in the epic *Shahnameh*¹ and more recent nationalist admiration for various conquering rulers. The cultures of many nomadic tribes, who comprised much of Iran's population until the 1920s, involved using violence to protect migration routes and sometimes to assure rule over local settled populations. Violence toward women, slaves, and, at times, religious or cultural minorities was widely accepted. Countervailing trends were found in Sufi orders and poetry, including the work of the poet Jalal al-Din Rumi who endorsed the unity of humanity and discouraged enmity toward others. However, politically these trends usually advocated *quietism*, meaning accepting rulers or local leaders, no matter how oppressive. Those who wished to avoid violence were more likely to join mystical groups that concentrated on internal individual and group practices than they were to advocate resistance based on ideas that might seem to contradict the Quran. However, Iranians who did actively resist rulers or foreigners often drew on a familiar repertoire of nonviolent means, especially claiming sanctuary, closing bazaars, and mass demonstrations, although they did not renounce threats or use of violence.

The protest movements that I describe in this chapter did not on the whole reject violence, but drew on Iran's history of popular action to carry out various forms of nonviolent resistance. Furthermore, they were influenced by new religious movements that emerged in the nineteenth century and in turn helped to shape the protest campaigns of 1890–1911.

Quietism and the Challenge to It

For centuries the leading ulama (clergy) favored political quietism toward the dynasties that ruled Iran, notably the Safavids (1501–1722) and the early-nineteenth-century Qajars. However, in the mid-nineteenth century the new Babi movement became a serious threat to both royal and ulama power. Adherents believed that Sayyed Ali Mohammad of Shiraz was the Bab—the gateway to the Hidden Imam (who would return as the messianic Mahdi). In 1850 his imprisonment and execution provoked Babi uprisings that were ruthlessly suppressed. Those who followed the original teachings of the Bab, called Azalis, remained actively hostile to the Qajars and to the

ulama. Although some ulama became Babis or sympathizers, most remained united with the Shahs against the “apostate” Babis. In the 1860s, Baha’ullah, the half-brother of the Bab’s successor, declared himself the future prophet predicted by the Bab and created the Baha’i religion, followed by the great majority of Babis and new converts. Both Babis and Baha’i branches of the religion called for reform in human relations, but the Baha’is were more influenced by Western liberal ideas. Significantly for the history of nonviolent resistance, the Baha’is—even though their renunciation of violence was generally quietist, calling for acceptance of the powers that be—often advocated major constitutional and judicial reforms.

The Babis and Baha’is influenced several Iranian non-Babi reformers, who included men with ambassadorial or ministerial posts like Mirza Hosain Khan and Malkum Khan, the latter having had close contact with Babis in the Ottoman Empire. However, the Babis were officially seen as heretics since Muslims saw Muhammad as the last Prophet, and rejected later prophetic claims. This put Babis and Baha’is in a worse position in Muslim countries than Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians who were accepted as “people of the book” whose prophets preceded Muhammad. There were several anti-Baha’i pogroms in Qajar times, often instigated by leading ulama.

Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of Iranians dissatisfied with the authoritarian rule of the Qajars joined these religious movements, which helped open their minds to reformist and liberal ideas. As a result, both movements and Azali Babis in particular—often without revealing their religious affiliation—played a leading role in the 1906 constitutional campaign and influenced other non-Babi participants.²

Developments Leading to the Tobacco Protest of 1891–1892

Before the nationwide tobacco protest of 1891–1892, there were several lesser events that contributed to making Iranians believe that resistance, including nonviolent resistance, against selfish and autocratic rulers and foreign domination might be effective. There were numerous local protests, often involving women and minorities, against arbitrary acts by provincial governors or outrageous price rises. Traditional forms of nonviolent protest included taking *bast* (inviolable refuge) in shrines, mosques, and foreign legations; closing bazaars; boycotting foreign goods; and threatening, though not carrying out, violent acts. From 1830 on, groups of merchants and craftspeople in the urban bazaars petitioned the Shah or governors to reduce competition from foreign importers, which by treaty paid low tariffs and were exempt from some local taxes. These petition protests usually

failed as, given its long-term treaties, there was little the government could do short of risking war.

Sometimes successful, however, were local protest demonstrations, often by women, against high prices on basic foods, including flour and bread. It was widely believed that Islam integrated justice as a basic value (or equity), implying fair treatment, including economic fairness, for all. As a result, protests were often couched in demands for justice.³

In the early 1870s, nonviolent opposition resulted in canceling a huge concession giving control of nearly all Iran's economy to a British subject, Baron Julius de Reuter (of news agency fame). In return for payments to the treaty's negotiators and small royalties to the state, Reuter attained the rights to build all railways and streetcars, to create a national bank, to exploit most minerals, and to build other industrial and agricultural enterprises. A reformist Iranian prime minister, Mirza Hosain Khan, promoted this concession as a shortcut to modernization, but it was opposed by the Russians excluded from the deal, by many merchants, by a faction at court led by the Shah's favorite wife, and by the small group of progressive nationalists. Their influence was strong enough to force the dismissal of the Mirza Hosain Khan and to get the Shah to delay railroad construction (a condition of the concession) so that he had an excuse to cancel the concession.

Subsequently, however, in 1888, the British government used Reuter's claim for compensation for this cancellation to force the Shah, Naser al-Din Qajar (r. 1848–1896), to reinstate parts of the agreement. Granting the British-owned Imperial Bank of Persia the exclusive rights to issue bank notes for all monetary transactions in Iran was immediately unpopular with local merchants who lost out to the British monopoly on paper money. Even more resented was the concession granting a British company a monopoly on internal and external commerce in tobacco products throughout Iran. Merchants opposed it as taking away their profits in tobacco trading; ordinary Iranians opposed giving so much control over their lives and livelihoods to foreigners; ulama disliked the increased presence of foreigners and their ways such as gender mixing, odd dress, and modern non-Islamic ideas; and many saw it as a step toward foreign control of Iran.

Several strands of opposition began to coalesce. The Shah, after dismissing Mirza Hosain Khan, gave up all attempts at reform and discouraged education and foreign travel by Iranians. The modernizing reformers—some of whom had favored Reuter's concession, which was opposed by most merchants—now realigned themselves. Some reformers remained in the government and operated behind the scenes. Others, often living abroad, published articles or treatises favoring representative government and the rule of law and denouncing foreign concessions.

Some leading ulama responded to their followers' grievances and opposed increasing control of Iranian policies by foreign "unbelievers." One

of the critics of the Shah was Sayyed Jamal al-Din Asadabadi, known as Afghani but a born Iranian. In 1890, he had to take refuge in a shrine near Tehran where he continued to preach against growing foreign control and concessions, and taught followers such means as distributing pamphlets and forming secret organizations. Eventually, the Shah violated Afghani's sanctuary and marched him to exile in Ottoman Iraq in 1891. Despite his exile, Afghani remained a powerful voice for resistance to the Shah's policies.⁴

The Tobacco Movement of 1891–1892

In 1890 following Naser al-Din Shah's third trip to Europe, a concession granting all economic control over the growing, sale, and export of Iranian tobacco products was given, for a very low price, to a British subject. The concession was kept secret until, in late 1890, the Istanbul-based Persian-language newspaper *Akhtar* published a strong critique. Unlike most other concessions, this one covered a product already widely grown and used in Iran; hence, it was bound to arouse widespread opposition among merchants, shopkeepers, and landholders as well as ordinary people. Both men and women in Iran widely used tobacco in the form of water pipes and it was also an export crop. Soon the Shi'ite clergy, who had close familial and ideological ties to the bazaar classes, joined in an opposition that was strengthened by their outrage against the fact that a foreign Christian company now controlled Iran's tobacco trade.

Protests occurred in various cities once the tobacco company agents began to arrive and post deadlines for the sale of all tobacco to the company. The protests took mainly nonviolent forms, such as mass demonstrations that were often addressed by clerical leaders and refusal to sell tobacco. The first major protest occurred in Shiraz, where a leading cleric preached non-compliance with the order to sell tobacco to the company. In reprisal, the government expelled the movement's main religious leader, who went to Ottoman Iraq where he met with Afghani. Subsequently, Afghani wrote to the Iraq-based leading Shia cleric Hajj Mirza Hasan Shirazi, asking him to denounce the Shah and his sale of Iran to Europeans. At this time, Shirazi responded by writing privately to the Shah, repeating many of Afghani's points against the proliferation of concessions to foreigners.

Meanwhile mass demonstrations continued to take place in Iran. The Tabriz protests, where some participants threatened to kill company and royal representatives, were so threatening that the government decided to suspend the tobacco concession there. In Mashhad too, a few protesters threatened to kill company representatives. However, elsewhere in Isfahan, Tehran, and several other cities, the spreading mass protests were organized nonviolently, appealing for top ulama to stand against the concession.

The final step was a triumph of nonviolent resistance. A fatwa (decree) was issued in the name of the Iranian leader of the Shia community, Shirazi, based in Iraq, which he confirmed when his authorship was questioned. It said that all use of and commerce in tobacco, as long as the concession existed, was against the will of the Hidden Imam. The aim of the boycott was not to stop smoking as such, but to force the cancellation of the tobacco concession. This fatwa ensured the widening of civil disobedience. The boycott of tobacco began first in Isfahan by some of its leading clerics and quickly spread to major cities and towns all over Iran. In December 1891, the movement culminated in an amazingly successful national boycott on the sale and use of tobacco, observed even by the Shah's wives and non-Muslims. Those who reported this event were unanimous in saying that nobody in Iran could be seen smoking or buying or selling tobacco in this period.

Faced with the people's unity and an unprecedented level of compliance with the boycott, the government tried to end the company's internal monopoly while leaving unchanged its monopoly on tobacco exports. A mass demonstration to protest this in Tehran, in which several people were killed by government fire, was followed by even more massive nonviolent protests. This pressure forced the government to cancel the entire tobacco concession, despite its being saddled with a large debt for extortionate repayment to the tobacco company for claimed expenses.

This struggle suggested that victories against the autocratic government, even with foreign backers, might be won with little or no violence if merchants, ulama, elite and intellectual reformers, and ordinary people worked together with a single and specific goal in mind. While some violent incidents broke out, mainly in Tabriz and Mashhad, the movement remained predominantly nonviolent. The issue of ethnic groups and minorities was not important in the movement, except to the extent that non-Muslims were seen to observe the Islamically defined tobacco boycott.

One long-term impact of the tobacco movement was in originating a tactical and strategic alliance between some of the nascent group of Iranian modernizers. These included several Babis, secularists, and nationalists, with a large number of merchants threatened by Western economic domination, and a section of the ulama that disliked the growth of Western Christian and imperial control in Iran. This alliance was to reappear in the 1905–1911 revolution. The movement also pioneered tactics that were used again during the constitutional revolution: leaflets, mass demonstrations, and telegraph contact between Iranian cities and between Iran and the Shiite shrine cities in Iraq.

For a few years after the tobacco movement, the state managed to buy off some of the ulama with subsidies and by halting foreign concessions. However, the continuing underlying problems of autocracy in collusion

with imperialism meant that civil resistance, now inspired by the confidence and skills gained from the successful tobacco movement, was bound to reappear in even larger form and with more radical demands in the coming years.

Background of the 1905–1911 Constitutional Revolution

Between 1892 and 1905, discontent with the government grew. After a follower of Afghani assassinated Naser al-Din in 1896, Muzaffar al-Din (r. 1896–1907) was a weak Shah who instituted few reforms. Instead, he incurred large loans from Russia, used mainly to finance his extravagant European trips, and put Iranian customs under the control of an unpopular Belgian. Secret societies that involved reformers but also appealed to religious leaders formed and worked against Iran's autocracy and in favor of reform. Japanese victories in the Russo-Japanese War and the Russian Revolution of 1905, which granted a representative parliament, gave further impetus both to revolt and to parliamentary constitutional ideas in Iran.

In addition, a number of Iranian governmental figures and intellectuals proposed major reforms in governance. Their ideas influenced Iranians and prepared them for popular civil disobedience actions and revolt against autocratic government and foreign domination. Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (1812–1878) wrote plays, essays, and treatises against Iran's misgovernment, corrupt clergy, and the mistreatment of women that became known to many literate Iranians in Iran and the Caucasus. Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani (1853–1896) contributed to *Akhtar*, which was well known among literate Iranians in Istanbul and Iran. His writings were strongly critical of Iran's socioeconomic conditions, elites, and clergy. Mirza Malkum Khan (1833–1908), who created a Freemason-style group in Tehran, published in London a Persian-language newspaper, *Qanun*, which was smuggled regularly into Iran. It advocated the rule of law and representative government and attacked Iran's rulers. Afghani (1838–1897) advocated modernizing Muslim countries to combat British imperialism. He was influential in Egypt where his charismatic personality and ideas attracted an important group of young reformers. In Paris, in 1883–1884 he coedited a pan-Islamic newspaper distributed free throughout the Muslim world, and taught oppositionists in Iran such means as organizing secret societies and oppositional leaflets, making a significant contribution to the tobacco movement. Abd al-Rahim Talebof (1834–1911) wrote books in simple language that advocated secular reforms in education, government, and law. And finally, Zain al-abedin Maragheh'i, a merchant who lived mostly outside Iran, wrote the fictional *Travelbook of Ibrahim Beig*, bitterly critical of Iranian conditions, which was widely read, including in Iranian secret societies.

Thinkers such as these were influential among literate Iranians who were dissatisfied with Iran's economic poverty and backwardness and its subservience to Russia and Britain. Furthermore, the prior and continuing influence of religious dissidents, including Azali Babis, Baha'is, and reformist clerics, added to the receptivity of many Iranians toward secular reformers.

Also influential before and during the revolution were Iranian workers who migrated, usually temporarily, to the Russian Caucasus. While abroad they came in contact with trade unions and social democrats and, hence, were introduced to secular activism for reform or revolution.

Before the constitutional revolution, several secret and open reform-oriented political and cultural societies were formed in various cities. Prominent merchants founded societies to counter increasing European control of the country. In Tehran, they included non-Muslim Zoroastrian and Armenian merchants who helped finance new schools and a public library. Also in Tehran a group of liberal intellectuals, including a few in the government, formed the Society of Learning in 1897–1898. They helped found the National Library in 1904. Tehran reformers founded several schools while elite women set up the first girls' schools.

Azali Babis were prominent in such societies, including Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani and Shaikh Ahmad Rudi in Kerman. In later decades, these included the preachers Malek al Motakallemin and Sayyed Jamal al-Din Va'ez who was a Babi-influenced freethinker based in Isfahan. These two were prominent in the Islamic Society, which asked Iranians to boycott foreign goods and buy only goods produced in Iran. They later went to Tehran and were among the most prominent preachers early in the revolution adapting Islam to democratic constitutionalism, taking part in the founding meeting of the Revolutionary Committee, writing *The True Dream* (a book excoriating current conditions and proposing an ideal future), and, finally, meeting their deaths in the 1908 coup d'état.

In Tabriz young intellectuals, influenced by Western liberal writings and Caucasian social democratic ideas, founded a political society. They included Sayyed Hasan Taqizadeh who later rose to prominence as a social democratic leader. The modern school that they established was closed by orthodox clerics, but they went on to set up a bookstore selling modern books and, for a year, published a weekly journal whose readership extended to Tehran.

In 1902–1903 nonviolent protests began, as several secret societies became active in Tehran and elsewhere and distributed antigovernmental leaflets, called "night letters" because they were handed out during the night. A revived and powerful movement of ulama, courtiers, *bazaaris*, and secular progressives forced the dismissal in 1903 of Prime Minister Amin al-Soltan, who was blamed for the loans and concessions that were increasing Russian control over Iran.

The Shah appointed a reactionary relative, Ain al-Dauleh, as premier but protests continued against high prices, focusing on the Belgian official in charge of customs and the treasury. In May 1904, fifty-seven intellectuals linked to the National Library held a secret meeting where they established the Revolutionary Committee. Most attending agreed that the despotic government should be replaced by a more democratic one. Although the meeting was addressed by two Babi preachers and several members were Babis, they agreed not to attend any non-Islamic meetings that opponents could use as a pretext to attack them.⁵

Another secret society, the Secret Anjoman, formed in February 1905 and was supported by progressive clerics. One member invoked the model of the 1905 Russian Revolution. The Secret Anjoman's first published statement demanded a *majles* (parliament) and laws to curb the power of governmental ministers and the ulama.⁶ Secret societies grew and educated their members and others by reading and disseminating critical literature, including the *Travelbook of Ibrahim Beig* and *The True Dream*. It added to the discontent that critical Persian newspapers published abroad were now more easily available in Iran than under Naser al-Din.

Some, especially in the secret societies, began to plan action to install constitutional government. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 and the Russian Revolution of 1905 strengthened revolutionary sentiment. At the same time, Iranians saw an opportunity as the Russian state, occupied with war and revolution, would be unable to intervene in a movement that aimed at lessening Russian power in Iran. Additionally, the sight of the only Asian constitutional power defeating the main European nonconstitutional power made many Iranians see constitutions as a secret of strength.

The 1905–1911 Revolution

The Iranian revolution of 1905–1911, sometimes called the constitutional revolution, took place in two major stages. In the first stage (from 1905 to 1907), the opposition, using overwhelmingly nonviolent means, succeeded in establishing a constitution and *majles*. Mozaffar al-Din Shah died in 1907, and the next Shah, Mohammad Ali (r. 1907–1909), dissolved the *majles* and reoccupied Iran by force. Mohammad Ali was deposed through violent struggle and constitutional rule was restored, but the revolution was ultimately suppressed by Russian and British military intervention in 1911.

The revolution is often dated from December 1905, when Tehran's governor *bastinadoed* (beat the feet) of merchants he said were overcharging for sugar. As happened during the tobacco movement, the violence backfired against the government. A large group of *mollas* (a general term for mostly low-ranking clergy) and *bazaaris* took *bast* (sanctuary) in

Tehran's royal mosque. When government forces violated their sanctuary and dispersed them, they went to a nearby shrine and formulated demands for the Shah. Their numbers reached over 2,000. Their key demand was for a representative *adalatkhaneh* (house of justice), a kind of higher court representing various classes whose duties, mostly judicial, were not spelled out. This demand was a compromise between the traditional clergy, not yet ready to demand a constitution, and the constitutionalists. The *bastis* refused to disperse and bazaar strikes continued for a month, backed by ongoing popular nonviolent demonstrations. Under such pressure the Shah gave in. In January 1906, he agreed to the *adalatkhaneh* and dismissed the governor of Tehran, which the protesters had also demanded.

The Shah, however, took no steps to create the *adalatkhaneh*. Instead, the government exiled nationalist leaders, including Sayyed Jamal al-Din Va'ez, to distant cities. Several oppositionists again took sanctuary in Tehran's Friday mosque. When theology students tried to free an arrested preacher, a government officer killed a young theology student.⁷ Theology students then marched to commemorate this martyr and soldiers killed over 100 people. More oppositionists came to the Friday mosque and some cried "Long Live the Nation of Iran," which joined the more religious slogans. After this, the group moved en masse to take *bast* in Qom in July 1906. Revolutionaries used these mass *basts* to educate people about constitutional government and human rights.

In July, after getting permission from the British chargé d'affaires, a crowd, which by August reached 14,000 *bazaaris*, took *bast* in the British legation in Tehran. As a result, business was brought to a standstill. By now the *bast* had become a general strike, as almost a third of Tehran's commercial labor force was involved. Thousands of supportive women demonstrated outside the legation. In the evenings, the crowd heard the story of Imam Husain ibn Ali's killing at Karbala and identified with him.⁸

The mass participation of guild members, students, and radical intellectuals of the secret societies accelerated the formulation of new demands backed by ongoing political education of ordinary Iranians in public spaces through sermons, open discussions, and free exchanges of ideas about political rights and representation. Now the protesters demanded the dismissal of the prime minister and the establishment of a *majles* and discussed a constitution. The continuing massive protest, the failure of efforts to buy off its more conservative supporters, and defections within the government meant the Shah had to give in. In late July, the Shah dismissed the premier and accepted the *majles*. The two sides reached a final agreement on August 9, 1906, calling for a national consultative assembly, *majles*, to be elected right away.

Besides religious dissidents, secularists, and progressive clergy, the trade guilds were crucial to this success. The guilds organized and financed

the British legation *bast* and gained the right of major guild representation in the first *majles*. As occurred in the 1979 revolution, the heterogeneous nature of the revolutionary coalition brought further internal struggles.

The democratically organized and participatory nonviolent movement with its liberal and constitutional demands had finally won for itself an institutionalized space to turn its ideas into laws and practice. The first *majles* was quickly elected by a six-class system that gave great representation to the guilds. The first election by six "estates" ironically turned out to be more democratic in outcome than the subsequent universal male suffrage elections, which in practice resulted in landlord and elite domination, via intimidation of peasants.

The *majles* opened in October 1906 and assigned a committee to write a Fundamental Law, which the Shah signed when he was mortally ill in December 1906. In 1907 his successor, Mohammad Ali Shah, signed a longer Supplementary Law. These two laws formed the Iranian Constitution until 1979. Largely modeled on the Belgian constitution, it created a constitutional monarchy in which real power was supposed to lie with the elected *majles*. Equality before the law and personal rights and freedoms were guaranteed, subject to a few limits, despite objections by some ulama that minority religions should not have equal status with Islam.

The 1906 electoral law called for the formation of *anjomans* (councils) to monitor *majles* elections. In several cities, these *anjomans* remained in session by popular demand and took on new responsibilities, chiefly directed at defending democratic control of central and local governments. A 1907 law gave *anjomans* taxing and spending authority that made them into governing bodies.

In addition, nonofficial councils, also called *anjomans*, were formed throughout Iran—a vivid reflection of the enduring civic activism awakened by the nonviolent movements in the preceding years.⁹ Almost 200 *anjomans* were formed in Tehran and probably about 100 elsewhere. Iranians from outside Tehran living in Tehran also formed *anjomans*, the most important of which was the 3,000-member Tabriz *anjoman* of Tehran led by Taqizadeh. Most *anjomans* supported constitutional government and opposed Mohammad Ali Shah's attempts to limit it. Some *anjomans* represented trades, ethnicities including Iranian-Armenians, or religious groups such as Zoroastrians and Jews. There were a few conservative *anjomans*. The *anjomans* formed the main base of a new civil society.

A leading role in defending the revolution was played by the National Revolutionary Committee, which had ties to Caucasian social democrats and included several Azali Babis and editors of the proliferating revolutionary newspapers. Two members, the popular preachers Sayyed Jamal al-Din Va'ez and Malek al-Motakallemin, gave frequent fiery and educational speeches to enthusiastic crowds. There were several women's *anjomans*

that worked to set up schools, hospitals, and orphanages and to further women's legal rights.

In January 1907 the new and autocratic Shah appointed as his prime minister Amin al-Soltan Atabak, who had been prime minister through the tobacco revolt and after until his 1903 ouster. This aroused conflicts in the pro-constitutional camp. He was assassinated in August 1907 by a member of a far left group, though there is also evidence that monarchists too were planning his assassination. On August 31, 1907, Britain and Russia signed an agreement settling their conflicts and dividing Iran into a northern zone, open to the Russians; a middle neutral zone; and a southeastern zone, open to the British. The agreement clearly violated Iranian sovereignty over its territory despite the British and Russian claims otherwise.

The Shah, after an unsuccessful attempt on his life, took steps that culminated in a coup d'état. In June 1908 he demanded the arrest of several revolutionaries, the *majles* refused, and many informal civil society groups that gathered earlier in anjomans came to defend the *majles*. Taqizadeh, after heading a delegation to meet the Shah, counseled caution and convinced the anjomans to disperse. The Shah then ordered the Cossack Brigade, which formed in 1879, was led by Russian officers, and added to Russia's power in Iran, to fire on the *majles* and the adjoining mosque, a gathering place for constitutionalists. Among those killed were Azali Babi leaders, including Malek al-Mutakallemin and others. Two *mujtahid* leaders, Sayyid Abdullah Bihbahani and Mirza Sayyed Mohammad Tabataba'i, were arrested, beaten, and put under house arrest. Taqizadeh with several others took refuge in the British legation and then left temporarily for Britain.

The Shah sent tribal forces to restore autocracy throughout Iran. This led to counterviolence and guerrilla war, beginning with guerrilla insurgency in Tabriz, to restore constitutional rule. Constitutionalist forces from north and south took Tehran in July 1909. Mohammed Ali Shah sought refuge with the Russians before going into exile and his minor son was made Shah with a constitutionalist regent. A leading *mujtahid* who had backed the coup was hanged.

A second *majles* was elected, manifesting differences between the conservative moderates and the reforming nationalist Democratic Party, led by men like Taqizadeh.¹⁰ To deal with financial bankruptcy, the *majles* invited a US financial expert, Morgan Shuster, to be treasurer-general. However, in November 1911, Russia with British support sent an ultimatum demanding Shuster's dismissal and Iran's agreement not to engage foreigners without Russian and British consent. The *majles* refused but, as Russian troops advanced, the regent and moderate cabinet (mainly composed of members of the Bakhtiari tribal confederation) dissolved the *majles*, accepted the ultimatum, and dismissed Shuster. This marked the end of the revolution,

though the constitution theoretically continued, further *majleses* were elected, and some of the reforms authorizing more modern educational, judicial, and economic systems initiated later reform measures.

The revolution showed that great changes could be brought by nonviolent protests and demands. Even after the new Shah used violence, and British help to the opposition was superseded by Russo-British support for the dynasty, nonviolent protests nevertheless advanced reformist and democratic ideas. However, nonviolent action no longer sufficed to gain democratic ends in the face of armed reaction.¹¹

Iranian Attitudes Toward Violence and Nonviolent Resistance in 1890–1911

The tobacco movement and the first years of the 1905–1911 revolution showed that mass nonviolent resistance could yield victories against both an autocratic regime and foreign powers. However, later Iranian writers have generally highlighted issues other than the means of struggle used during the 1890–1911 period or the relative roles of nonviolent and violent resistance. In the Pahlavi period (1925–1979), the most popular writer on the revolution was Ahmad Kasravi, a secular populist nationalist who glorified the role in the revolution of the Azeri guerrilla leaders—Sattar Khan and Baqer Khan—and accused the nonviolent social democrat, Sayyed Hasan Taqizadeh, of cowardice.

Marxist scholars and their followers emphasized the role of social democrats in the revolution, including both guerrilla acts and nonviolent ones. Armenians and Georgian natives of both Iran and of the Russian Caucasus had a major role in the revolution, again both violent and nonviolent, and some scholars have studied and emphasized these.¹² Mehdi Malekzadeh, a scholar of Babi origin, wrote a book that gives due weight to Babi revolutionaries though he does not name them as such.¹³ The great British Orientalist, Edward G. Browne, published a book on the revolution in order to arouse British subjects against their own government's support for Russian policies after 1907. He also stressed the role of nonviolent protests.¹⁴

Some recent scholars have traced women's activities in the revolution. While some women did pretend to be men in order to join the guerrillas, nearly all women's other activities were nonviolent, from forming committees to raising money for national causes to writing newspaper articles and publishing the first women's newspaper.¹⁵ Recently, some scholars of Baha'ism have argued that one reason the Baha'is refrained from playing a more visible role in the revolution was so as not to taint the movement in the eyes of conservative Muslims and clerics and thereby undermine its unity.¹⁶

In the post-1979 period, defenses of the clergy, including attributing to them all advances achieved in the 1890–1911 period, have become common and censorship of views disliked by the ruling elite is even stronger than it was in Pahlavi times.

Today, when many Iranians want to encourage the use of nonviolent tactics in movements against the clerical and military regime, some Iranians emphasize the importance of nonviolent actions in the successes achieved in the 1890–1911 movements. This view has been expressed more in speeches than in treatises. Some writers contend that both the tobacco protest and the 1905–1911 revolution were overwhelmingly nonviolent and that their achievements were gained by nonviolent means. Most scholars would consider this an exaggeration, although certainly a great deal was achieved by nonviolent means, and these past nonviolent experiences constitute an important historical force within “receding and returning waves” of protracted social and political revolutions that Iran experienced ever since.¹⁷

The Heritage of Resistance

The resistance movements of 1890–1911 had a strong impact on national consciousness and collective identities. During the 1905–1911 revolution participants appealed to both Iran and Islam, but the growth of Iranian nationalist ideas during the 1890–1911 period greatly increased many Iranians’ national identification. Despite the Islamic ideology of the current regime during the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) and after, it has had to appeal largely to the Iranian identity that was first put forward in 1890–1911. The impact of civil resistance during 1890–1911 on subsequent nationalist strategies is ambiguous. Certain leaders, such as Taqizadeh, renounced popular struggle in favor of backing the rise to power of Reza Shah Pahlavi, crowned in 1925. They saw a strong, unifying military leader as necessary to counter the power of foreign countries, especially Britain. Reza Shah suppressed popular movements and nomadic tribes. When the World War II Allies forced him to abdicate in 1941, popular movements ranging from left to right reappeared and most backed Mohammad Mossadeq’s movement for the nationalization of oil. This movement used some of the tactics and strategy begun in 1890–1911, such as general strikes and boycotts, and involved more Iranians. Some participants also used violent means, including assassination, but Mossadeq’s successes should be attributed to the pressure of mass tactics. However, as in 1911, the popular movement was suppressed because of foreign intervention—in this case the 1953 coup against Mossadeq executed by the United States with British support.

Leaders who advocated violent tactics have retained an honored place in Iranian national consciousness, including Afghani, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani,

Mirza Reza (the assassin of Naser al-Din), and others. A number of histories and historical novels perpetuated such views. Even more striking is the almost universal valorization of periods in Iran's past when kings created large empires via conquest. There are competing Islamic and Marxist discourses, but these also often glorify men who made use of violent means and supported many elements of Iranian nationalism.

Such ideas came to include Islamic conquerors, like some Safavid rulers and the eighteenth-century conqueror, Nader Shah Afshar. Anti-monarchist and anti-imperialist countertheories often invoked violent revolts against foreign tyrants. The influential newspaper *Kaveh* (1916–1922) founded in Berlin by Taqizadeh and other Iranian progressives took the name of a legendary rebel from the *Shahnameh*, Kaveh the blacksmith. And Islamic thinkers often justified defensive holy wars against attackers, including the early-nineteenth-century Russians.

The heroes of such narratives were always men; women's roles tended to be validated only as martyrs and sufferers from religious oppression or as models of obedience. The latter is the image of Fatima, the wife of Imam Ali, invoked among others by the "revolutionary" Muslim, Ali Shariati. When the Islamic Republic needed women's help in the Iran-Iraq War, its leaders invoked Imam Husain's sister, Zainab, as a symbol of resistance to her Sunni captors. The growing nonviolent women's movement of the past two decades, supported by diaspora Iranians, has revived heroic stories of women's nonviolent resistance. They refer, without noting their religion, to the Babi poet and preacher Tahereh and the Baha'i writer of the constitutional period Tayireh as well as to the early-twentieth-century feminist Sediqeh Daulatabadi and the socialist secular Qajar princess Taj al-Saltaneh.

The Iranian revolution of 1978–1979 and the oppositional Green Movement of 2009–2010 revived and broadened the massive nonviolent means employed in the 1890–1911 period. In 1977 Shah Mohammad Reza, partly under US pressure, lessened restrictions on speech, and prominent intellectuals and others signed open letters and held poetry readings demanding reforms. In 1978 a series of escalating mass protests that occurred almost automatically at standard Shiite forty-day intervals weakened the government, which was further undermined by its violent repression of one demonstration and especially by a general strike that included the oil industry. Just as earlier movements made intensive use of the telegraph, so this one utilized cassette tapes of Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the religious opposition in exile in France. The government was overthrown with little use of violence in February 1979.

The Green Movement, in protest at the fraudulent vote count in the June 2009 presidential election, like earlier movements combined people of many different classes and viewpoints. It operated through massive protests, overwhelmingly nonviolent, in several cities. Like earlier movements it has used

the latest means of communication to reach and mobilize supporters—in the 1890–1911 movements, the telegraph and mimeographed leaflets; in 1978–1979, Khomeini’s cassette tapes; and currently, the Internet, including blogs, photographs and videos, text messages, and tweets. To date it has not brought important parts of the military to its side, nor does it have a unified program or clear leader, though some movements have succeeded without a single leader.

From 1890 to the present, many Iranians have seen nonviolent action as a tactical choice in certain situations rather than a philosophy. They have usually preferred nonviolent means of struggle when possible, given the population’s inability to win against the armed forces in a violent struggle. With past experience of traditional nonviolent means like boycotts, sanctuary, and general strikes, and successes in forcing concessions even from powerful opponents, Iran has experienced several predominantly nonviolent protests and revolts. When government forces have resorted to violence, however, some opponents have tended to adopt violent means, in 1908–1911 on a large scale and in other movements on a smaller scale. The current Green Movement has seen more insistence on nonviolent resistance than previous movements because of its better understanding of how strategic nonviolent tactics can work for the advantage of the seemingly powerless. Hence, today’s movements appear to have learned important lessons from the past resistance.

Notes

1. *Shahnameh*, or “The Book of Kings,” is the Persian-language epic written by Hakim Abul Quasim Ferdowsi Tusi in the late tenth century that chronicles Persian history and often its mythical past.

2. See Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press); and Juan R. I. Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Baha’i Faith in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). On the influence of Babis in the revolution, see Abbas Amanat, “Memory and Amnesia in the Historiography of the Constitutional Revolution,” in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009). See Vanessa Martin, *The Qajar Pact: Bargaining, Protest and the State in 19th-Century Persia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005).

3. See Martin, *The Qajar Pact*.

4. See Nikki R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891–1892* (London: Frank Cass, 1966); Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din “Al-Afghani”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982); A. K. S. Lambton, *Qajar Persia: Eleven Studies* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1989).

5. Three of the nine-person core of the Revolutionary Committee were Azali Babis while one member was both a Baha'i and Muslim *mujtahid* (religious leader, nowadays usually called an ayatollah).

6. The immediate background to the revolution is well covered by Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

7. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, part 2: *The Methods of Non-violent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), 208, writes that ordinary soldiers refused to fire on student Sayyid Husayn when he rushed the door, but an officer intervened personally.

8. Husain, the second son of Ali (Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law), was killed in the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE by the caliph's army. This martyrdom became a central event for the Shia community, which commemorated it annually.

9. In a few cases like Tabriz, the same anjoman played the official and popular roles.

10. Taqizadeh had to leave Iran after he was falsely accused of involvement in the 1910 assassination of the moderate clerical leader, Behbahani.

11. On the 1905–1911 revolution, see Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*; Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1989).

12. See Houri Berberien, *Armenians and the Constitutional Revolution, 1905–1911: The Love for Freedom Has No Fatherland* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001).

13. The best brief presentation of populist and nationalist writers on the revolution is Muhammad Reza Afshari, "The Historians of the Constitutional Movement and the Making of the Iranian Populist Tradition," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 3 (1993): 477–494. E. G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910); Mansour Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906–1911: Foreign Policy, Imperialism, and Dissent* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

14. Browne, *The Persian Revolution*; Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*.

15. On women in the revolution see Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*; and Mangol Bayat-Philipp, "Women and Revolution in Iran, 1905–1911," in *Women in the Muslim World*, ed. Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

16. See Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium*; and several chapters in *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (London: Routledge, 2008).

17. Michael Fischer, "The Rhythmic Beat of the Revolution in Iran," *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 3 (August 2010): 497–543; Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, eds., *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future* (New York: Melville House, 2010).

Appendix:

Conflict Summaries

This appendix has been compiled by the book's editor, Maciej Bartkowski, based on the information presented in the corresponding chapters of the book. Cases are arranged alphabetically. (Any omissions in the tables are either of the editor's own making or the information was not available.)

Key

Method and Type of Nonviolent Action

Nonviolent intervention

Disruptive

Creative

Noncooperation

Political

Economic

Social

Protest and persuasion

Length of the Campaign

Short: 1 day up to 4 weeks

Medium: 1 month up to 1 year

Long: More than 1 year

Level of Participation of People

Low: 1–100 people or less than 20 percent of the population

Medium: 100–1,000 people or between 20 percent and 50 percent of the population

High: More than 1,000 people or more than 50 percent of the population

Iran

| Main Campaigns | Action | Method/ <i>Type</i> | Date | Length | Level of Participation | Direct Impact | Long-Term/Overall Impact of Civil Resistance |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Petitions by merchants and craftspeople against economic privileges granted to foreign importers | Protest and persuasion | 1830 onward | Long | Medium | Petitions failed. Given its long-term treaties with foreign governments, there was little the government could do, short of risking war | Contributed to making Iranians believe that resistance, including nonviolent resistance, against autocratic rulers and foreign domination might be effective |
| | Articles and treaties advocating representative government and the rule of law and denouncing foreign concessions | Protest and persuasion | Prior to 1891 | | Medium | Forced the dismissal of the prime minister Led to the cancellation of the economic concession to a British subject, Julius de Reuter | |
| | Protests often involving women and minorities | Protest and persuasion | | | Medium | | |
| | Taking <i>bast</i> (inviolable refuge) in shrines, mosques, and foreign legations | Noncooperation/ <i>Social, Political</i> | | | Medium | | |
| | Closing of bazaars | Noncooperation/ <i>Economic</i> | | | | | |
| | Boycotting of foreign goods | Noncooperation/ <i>Economic</i> | | | Medium | | |
| Tobacco movement 1891–1892 | A leading cleric in Shiraz preached noncompliance with the order to sell tobacco to the foreign company | Protest and persuasion | 1891 | Medium | High | Galvanized people to protest The movement’s main religious leader exiled | A tactical and strategic alliance was formed between modernizers and merchants that played an important role in the 1905–1911 revolution The tobacco movement pioneered tactics that were used again during the constitutional revolution |
| | Protests in Shiraz, Isfahan, Teheran, and several other cities and appeals for the top ulama’s support against concessions | Protest and persuasion | 1891 | Medium | High | | |
| | The Iranian leader of all members of the Shia sect issued fatwa saying that all use of and commerce in tobacco, so long as the concession existed, was against the will of the Hidden Imam | Protest and persuasion | 1891–1892 | Medium | High | Fatwa ensured the widening of civil disobedience and a growing popular boycott of tobacco use and selling that was also observed by the shah’s wives | |
| | Boycott of tobacco | Noncooperation/ <i>Economic</i> | 1891–1892 | Medium | High | | |
| | Massive nonviolent demonstrations in Teheran | Protest and persuasion | | Short | High | Several people were killed, which backfired on the government and led to more nonviolent protests Protests and boycott forced the government to cancel the entire tobacco concession | |
| Main Campaigns | Action | Method/ <i>Type</i> | Date | Length | Level of Participation | Direct Impact | Long-Term/Overall Impact of Civil Resistance |
| | Formation of secret societies, the Society of Learning, National Library, and schools | Nonviolent intervention/ <i>Creative</i> | Between 1892 and 1905 | | | These institutions educated their members and others by reading and disseminating critical literature | |
| | Plays, essays, treatises, and newspaper articles critical of Iran’s misgovernance, corrupt clergymen, and the mistreatment of women | Protest and persuasion | Between 1892 and 1905 | | Medium | | |
| | Antigovernment leaflets known as “night letters” distributed | Protest and persuasion | 1902–1903 | | | | |
| Constitutional Revolution, 1905–1906 | A large group of <i>mollas</i> and <i>bazaaris</i> took <i>bast</i> in Tehran’s royal mosque to avoid government repression | Noncooperation/ <i>Social, Political</i> | 1905 | | High | When government violated their sanctuary, they went to another shrine and formulated the demand for a representative <i>adalakhaneh</i> (house of justice) | The resistance movements of 1890–1911 led to the growth of Iranian nationalist ideas, increased Iranians’ national awareness and collective identification, though impact of civil resistance on subsequent nationalist strategies is less clear |
| | <i>Bastis</i> refused to disperse | Noncooperation/ <i>Political</i> | 1905 | | High | The shah dismissed the governor of Tehran The shah did not establish an <i>adalakhaneh</i> , which led to further protests | |
| | Popular nonviolent demonstrations | Protest and persuasion | 1905 | | High | | |
| | Bazaar strikes | Noncooperation/ <i>Economic</i> | 1905 | Medium | | | |
| | Protesters took mass <i>bast</i> in Qom | Noncooperation/ <i>Social, Political</i> | March 1905 | Medium | High | <i>Bast</i> was used to educate people about constitutional government and human rights | |
| | Protesters took mass <i>bast</i> in the British legation | Noncooperation/ <i>Social, Political</i> | | | High | Thousands of supportive women demonstrated outside the Legation | |
| | General strike | Noncooperation/ <i>Economic</i> | 1906 | Medium | High | Business was brought to a standstill | |
| | Mass participation of guild members, students, and radical intellectuals of the secret societies | Protest and persuasion | 1906 | Medium | High | Formulation of new demands: dismissal of the prime minister and the establishment of a <i>majles</i> (representative parliament) | |
| | Mass protests | Protest and persuasion | 1906 | Medium | High | Failure of efforts by the shah to buy off conservative supporters Defections within the government Shah dismissed the premier and accepted the <i>majles</i> | |