



### Nader Shah retreated from nation-building?

Yes! Nader Shah had no cultural policy. He dreamed of an Eastern Islamic Empire, and his close associates were mostly Afghans and Sunnis who did not believe in Shia Islam. The second figure was Reza Shah, who also tried to halt Shia nation-building. He not only turned his back on this nation-building but also on Shia Islam. He disrupted the Shia nation-building process, but because Shia Islam had become intrinsic to Iranian society, neither Nader Shah nor Reza Shah could succeed, which is why both their dynasties were short-lived.

The result of Shia nation-building was that a figure like Imam Khomeini could effectively utilize and guide the existing capacity. The movements of Nader Shah, Reza Shah, and later Mohammad Reza Shah, along with the radical modernism that came to Iran, opposed this Shia nation-building. The superiority of the Islamic Republic over these movements lies in its ability to revolutionize and establish a system and civilization because it reinstated the natural process. Imam Khomeini's skill was at seeing Shia Islam and nationality as a continuum, avoiding any inherent conflict between the two.

### How can we balance nationalism and Ummah-ism?

It's a very difficult task. These two concepts do not easily align and there are inherent conflicts. For instance, even now, some within the country question why we invest so much in other Islamic countries that are neither Iranian nor Shia. In my view, one figure who has successfully maintained this balance is Qassem Soleimani. He was both a patriot and an international figure of resistance, a Shia and an Iranian, and everyone considered him one of their own. He was an extraordinary individual.

### So, reality surpasses theory and we can observe it tangibly?

Yes, it is tangible. Soleimani didn't invent anything; he discovered that there is an inherent balance within the Islamic Revolution. More precisely, Soleimani wasn't an exceptional figure who just presented a balanced interpretation of the Revolution; he embodied the Revolution itself. Anyone deviating from this balance faces difficulties.

### If we trace the process of nation-building you mentioned through subsequent historical periods, we see this concept manifesting in critical moments such as colonial encounters and invasions from the north and south. Based on this, when conflict arose between colonial powers and Iran, which element of Iranian identity did colonialism most strive to eliminate?

The first thing colonialism attempts to do is to disrupt this balance. It does not want this issue to persist, as it is dangerous for colonial powers. The balance between identity and civilization is a threat. In the face of colonialism, we see Islamic awakening, which is the root of the Islamic Revolution.

At every stage of colonial intrusion, there has been a corresponding identity-based Islamic awakening, showing that the Islamic community is vibrant and resistant to exploitation. Unlike African or East Asian societies, Iran's Islamic society is alive and responsive. When enemies have invaded militarily, there has been a military response; when they have invaded culturally, the response has been cultural; and when they have invaded politically, the response has been political. Today, their incursion is civilizational, encompassing military, political, cultural, and economic elements, with stronger software. Consequently, the Islamic awakening's response must also be civilizational.

### You view history as a series of "evolutionary ruptures" and believe that Nader Shah and Reza Shah created significant breaks. Following them, colonialism introduced a second rupture, sustaining its impact for 50 years until the historical self-awareness achieved through the Islamic Revolution ended it. However, we must acknowledge that colonialism afflicted Iranian society and continues to evolve in new and complex forms. In this context, how should we understand this phenomenon to prevent further ruptures? How should a historically self-aware Iranian confront it?

Ruptures are never absolute. Even during the Pahlavi era's disruption, there was continuity, and the Shia community did not disintegrate. If we were to identify who more astutely sought to destroy

the Iranian nation, it would be Reza Shah. He aimed to eradicate religion, correctly understanding that completing this task was essential to creating a rupture.

During Mohammad Reza Shah's reign, the rupture was mainly political, with attempts to undermine religion through cultural efforts. However, both underestimated the power of religion. They believed they could reverse-engineer the Safavid initiative and change Iran's religion. However, changing a religion is not an easy task; it is not something to be taken lightly. Meanwhile, the clergy seized the opportunity, preserving the religious aspect of society. They thought they could impose a secular interpretation of religion, unaware that Shia Islam is constantly evolving and regenerating. Shia Islam is essentially a comprehensive movement, continuing its work independently. They did not anticipate that Shia Islam would emerge so strongly and manifest itself as a national revolution. Our intellectuals also failed to understand the people's true nature.

The current Islamic movement in Iran is entirely inspired by Shia teachings, which enabled it to balance diverse opinions effectively. Many Salafi movements are rooted in Wahhabism, whereas Shia Islam in Iran sought to return to its principles. Additionally, alongside the jurisprudence and teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt, we have philosophy, mysticism, and Islamic civilization. These elements combined to shape a unique movement.

### Why has Iran, despite being one of the world's major powers at certain times, never been a colonialist?

Examining both ancient and modern history reveals that Iranians, even when they were among the world's most powerful nations, largely refrained from colonialism and barbarism. Unlike many empires, Iranian conquests seldom left a legacy of poverty, exploitation, and savagery. In ancient times, Iran stood against the colonial expansions of the Greeks and Romans. During the 10th and 11th centuries, they opposed Portuguese and Spanish aggressors. In later centuries, they endured much suffering at the hands of Western imperialists, especially the British. More recently, Iran has been a staunch opponent of American bullying and excessive demands, striving

to remain a proud and dignified nation. This has been particularly evident through the global revolution known as the Islamic Revolution, which defends the identity and character of Iran and other Muslims.

The study of Iranian colonialism encompasses the millennia-long story of a nation that has neither been a dominator nor submissive, remaining vibrant and active to this day. Consequently, the body of work on Iranian colonial studies, and more specifically Iranian Islamic colonial studies, seeks to develop and evaluate a native perspective on this global phenomenon. Colonial powers, alongside their territorial conquests, focused on eradicating the identities of their colonies and imposing new ones, marking a new era in their global strategy. This included efforts to globalize European languages, such as replacing Persian with English in India and promoting French in parts of the Mediterranean and Asia. This focus should not be confused with the natural spread of some languages as the scientific lingua franca; rather, it underscores the critical role of academic studies in the process of colonial domination.

In this context, the significant and complex field of "Orientalism" should not be overlooked. This 19th-century Western initiative aimed to understand the East from a Western perspective, portraying Eastern peoples as primitive and irrational. Such depictions justified Western paternalistic superiority and domination. This perspective justified the supposed need for entities like the East India Company, symbolizing Western superiority and the early efforts of Orientalism. Consequently, the implementation of colonialist ideologies pushed the West forward while keeping the East in a state of backwardness. From this perspective, colonial studies, both consciously and subconsciously, can address one of the most critical questions for Eastern societies regarding their relative underdevelopment compared to Western societies—a question that encompasses much of the Eastern identity and character.

Thus, understanding Iranian colonialism can clarify why Iranians, even at their most powerful, generally avoided colonial exploitation and barbarity. The primary reason for backwardness, stagnation, and sometimes decline in various civil sectors is the pervasive and pernicious phenomenon of colonialism.

### What are the driving forces behind the civilization-building of Iranian identity?

The identity that leads to our civilization has two main pillars. The first pillar is bringing religion from the margins to the center, opposing secularism. Currently, the clergy holds power, and the

religious fabric of society remains strong. The Islamic Revolution has significantly contributed to this. The scholars of Qom, the Assembly of Experts, religious teachings, and the deep-rooted presence of Shia Islam in Iranian society collectively moved religion from the periphery to the center. Although religion was on the margins back then, it had the power to critique the status quo effectively. Consequently, the Shah felt compelled to visit religious sites like Mashhad and Mecca and support religious institutions. His father, who ignored these aspects, was quickly rejected by the people.

The social base of the revolution started with small Quranic and religious gatherings. Initially, it began in high schools and then spread to universities. In Isfahan, teachers were the leaders of the Revolution, followed by merchants. Contrary to communist narratives, the working class and peasants were the last to join. The cultural sector dominated the Revolution because it was not class-based. Workers showed their support in the final years, mainly to assert their labor rights. The cultural sector dominated the Revolution because it was not class-based. Workers showed their support in the final years, mainly to assert their labor rights. The second pillar is "resistance to domination," which has not developed as much as the first. Resisting domination requires a deep understanding of colonialism. Today, there are fair-minded researchers in the West documenting the crimes of colonialism.

### How do you evaluate the status of the decolonization movement in the world?

A powerful decolonization movement has emerged in the West. Numerous associations have been formed, and they are unwilling to comply with colonial norms. Although the decolonization movement was initially dominated by Marxists, today other academic streams are also seriously addressing this issue. Half of our recently published collection on colonial studies is composed of original works, while the other half includes works by researchers in this field. Some books and writings related to decolonization are dominated by leftist perspectives. However, thanks to extensive scholarly efforts, the Islamic Revolution has reached a level of understanding that allows us to view colonialism independently without being aligned with either the left or the right.

Since this movement is based in Iran, we have named it "Iranian Colonial Studies." It seems we are at the beginning of this journey and need to mature further. Our focus is on filling a 45-year gap in this field. There has been significant neglect in this area, and one of our tasks is to monitor the existing efforts. We must make every effort to thoroughly and comprehensively introduce and promote the foundational aspects of Shia identity without hesitation.



Soleimani was not an exceptional figure who just presented a balanced interpretation of Iran's 1979 Revolution; he embodied the Revolution itself.

