

been due to the development of its vast oil resources, the historic land of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers is heir to ancient civilizations mentioned frequently in the Old Testament of the Bible. During this century, archaeologists have located and identified ancient population centres in the north and the south of the country. The violent overthrow of Babylon is described there with accuracy and dramatic force. Other civilizations flourished during the many centuries before the birth of Christ. Invading armies—Greek, Persian, Parthian, Roman and Sassanian—campaigned throughout the land and ruled it spasmodically. A new era began in 635 A.D. when crusading Arab armies conquered it in the name of Islam. Mesopotamia, the forerunner of modern Iraq, has remained Arabic and Muslim ever since.

A century of achievement and splendor began in 749 A.D. when Baghdad became the seat of the Caliphate under the Abbasid leader. Subsequent centuries of fragmentation and decline led to Mesopotamia becoming a province of the Ottoman empire. The defeat of Turkey by the Allied powers in the First World War resulted in Britain, which had sent forces into the area during the war, becoming the mandatory ruler. Frontiers of the new state were established without regard for ethnic and religious groupings. This accounts for the large Shi'a and Kurdish components. Both proved barriers to national unity.

The independence of Iraq was recognized in 1932. The monarchy established by the British mandatory authorities before independence was overthrown in 1958 in a violent revolution led by politically-minded army officers. The brutal murder of the King during the coup incensed the Shah who had been his personal friend. Revolutionary policies of the new regime increased Iranian resentment of border concessions Iran was obliged to make under foreign pressure during the British mandate. Iraqi control of navigation in the Shatt-al-Arab estuary providing a boundary between Iraq and Iran at the head of the Persian Gulf became a source of constant friction between the two countries. Sea lanes leading to the main ports of both Basra, in Iraq, and Abadan and Khorramshahr, in Iran, pass through the Shatt which is formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates in Iraq and the waters of the Karun river in Iran (the fertile territory at the junction of the two Iraqi rivers, according to local legend, was the site of the Garden of Eden).

Iran's superiority

A steady build-up of Iranian military clout enabled the Shah to assert military superiority in the Gulf zone following the departure of British forces in 1971. The Shah seized the opportunity to negotiate the 1975 treaty with Iraq which recognized a median line in the Shatt as the international boundary at the head of the

Gulf. Concurrent cessation of Iranian military assistance to Kurdish tribesmen in Iraq established a rare season of tranquility in Iranian-Iraqi relations. This was shattered abruptly with the overthrow of the Shah's regime by revolutionaries led by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979.

Unlike neighbouring Mesopotamia, Iran was successful in maintaining its independence with few interruptions for more than 2,500 years of recorded history. The Persian people are believed to have originated in India. Ethnically, they are distinct from the Semitic peoples. Persian racial characteristics inspired the myth of Aryan supremacy.

Invasions of Persia by Alexander the Great, Arab, Afghan and European armies (Russian and British forces occupied Iran during World War II) were resisted and repulsed. The eras of greatest achievement for the Persians were guided by powerful dynasties which extended Persian influence abroad while establishing peace and security domestically. The Achaemenid (550-330 B.C.), Sassanian (226-650 A.D.) and Safavid (1500-1722 A.D.) dynasties made distinctive political and cultural contributions to international development and civilization.

The ambition of the late Mohammed Reza Pahlavi to elevate the dynasty founded in 1925 by his peasant-born father to the level of achievement of the great Persian dynasties inspired his efforts to modernize his country and make its influence felt throughout the world.

January 26, 1963, was an auspicious day in the life of Reza Shah. In a national referendum held that day, voters gave overwhelming support to his "White Revolution" reform program based on land reform, women's suffrage, literacy and health campaigns employing educated army conscripts, profit-sharing by workers in industry and other progressive measures. In addition to winning the right to vote, women were encouraged to abandon the traditional black *chador* which covered their bodies and concealed their faces. For the first time during his turbulent 21 year reign, the Shah found himself empowered to remove the vestiges of feudalism which had enabled a reactionary alliance of hereditary landlords, politically-minded clerics and rich merchants to block reforms.

"White Revolution"

Even with violent opposition, including assassination of the Prime Minister, an assassination attempt on the Shah himself, mob-led riots and anti-reform demonstrations, the "White Revolution" was launched successfully. The reform program gained momentum. Despite a shortage of personnel capable of directing and controlling the ambitious program, effective use of the nation's increasing oil revenues permitted simultaneous strengthening of the armed forces. When British protective forces withdrew from the Gulf, the Shah moved to fill the vacuum while maintaining strong de-