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Analysis of Modernization in Iran under Reza Shah Pahlavi

In his book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Samuel Huntington discusses why it is a difficult task for monarchical governments to modernize their nations. Essentially, he argues that political order in changing societies occurs very rarely and that it is an ideal rather than a reality. When Reza Shah became the ruler of Iran he tried to modernize his newly created state but failed to do so. (Change so that thesis is more imbued with next paragraph). Huntington’s theories about modernization explain why this happened.

According to Huntington, the most important result of modernization is obviously stability. He disagrees with the traditional definition of modernization that states that economic development will lead to increase in education and creates a civil society. Huntington believes that increase in wealth and education leads to a public demand for participation in government, then to the public questioning authority, and ultimately instability and violence. He says a dilemma arises when monarchies attempt to implement reforms to centralize the government in order to modernize; although these reforms stimulate social and economic change, they also undermine the authority of the monarchy and this is turn cause instability. Huntington believes that a state needs to create institutions as it develops. Institutions are important to modernization and development because they increase legitimacy but do not necessarily undermine authoritative power. Institutions, such as political parties, offer a way for people to participate in government but in way that an authoritative government can regulate. Of course, in a monarchical regime political parties hardly exist and this hinders modernization. (Fix this transition) An example of a failure to modernize is in Iran during Reza Shah’s reign.

Reza Shah Pahlavi attempted to modernize Iran by implementing reforms that would change societal and economic problems. Pahlavi came to power after he led a rebellion supported by the British against the weak Qajar dynasty. Though xenophobic sentiments were rampant throughout the country, Pahlavi still ruled with the guiding hand of Britain. He tried to employ reforms in Iran, but these severely decreased his popularity and therefore his power because these reforms were more in the interest of the British than in the interest of Iran. When Britain realized that Pahlavi’s power was being questioned they deposed and replaced him, proving that Pahlavi’s attempt at modernization was a failure. Iran could not modernize under Reza Shah’s reign for many reasons. As Huntington described, Pahlavi was not able to modernize the state because he did not establish proper legitimacy throughout Iran. Pahlavi seized power and declared himself to be emperor. He turned tribes in Iran against each other so he could take power away from tribal leaders. In this way he increased central authority but decreased his regime’s legitimacy. Pahlavi set up initiatives to decrease the influence of his opponents and completely eradicated political parties. His main goals at economic modernization also failed, because as Huntington said, they created instability and violence. Pahlavi took on the task of building a Trans-Iranian Railroad but this increased drastically the wealth of only a few, created only low paying jobs, and ended up costing the government a lot of money. Riots quickly followed and were brutally shut down, once again decreasing Pahlavi’s popularity.

By attempting to modernize Iran under his monarchical regime, Reza Shah failed to realize that in a rapidly changing society political stability is almost impossible under a monarchy. Essentially, Huntington asserts that for a monarchical government to successfully modernize a nation the government has to either decrease its power or decrease its legitimacy and Pahlavi chose the latter of the two leading to his eventual downfall.