

Anti-Westernism in Cold War Iran: Contexts and Driving Forces in the Second Pahlavi Era

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Abstract

The phenomenon of anti-Westernism in contemporary Iran is considered a significant subject in the analysis of twentieth-century political and intellectual developments. Focusing on the Second Pahlavi era within the broader context of Cold War rivalries, this article examines the grounds and factors influencing the formation and expansion of anti-Western discourse in Iran. The primary research question explores how the political, security, social, and intellectual developments of this period led to the reinforcement of anti-Western attitudes within Iranian society. This study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology, with data collected through archival research, historical documents, scholarly literature, and relevant analytical sources. The findings indicate that a constellation of domestic and international factors contributed to the emergence of this discourse. On one hand, the intervention of Western powers in Iran's internal affairs—particularly during the 1953 coup (28 Mordad)—and the expansion of U.S. political and economic influence within the Iranian governance structure fostered a deep-seated distrust toward the West. On the other hand, Cold War ideological rivalries, the rise of leftist movements, the political and security constraints imposed by the Pahlavi regime, the establishment of security apparatuses such as SAVAK, and specific state policies—including the White Revolution and the Status of Forces Agreement (Capitulation)—also played a pivotal role in shaping this discourse. Furthermore, the surge in nationalist sentiments and the emergence of nativist (Gharbzadegi-related) intellectualism among certain thinkers helped reinforce the intellectual foundations of anti-Westernism. Consequently, anti-Westernism in Second Pahlavi Iran can be understood as the product of a complex interaction between international Cold War conditions and domestic socio-political transformations.

Keywords: Anti-Westernism, Cold War, Second Pahlavi Era, 1953 Coup, Nativist Intellectualism, Iran-West Relations.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problem and Question

Political and intellectual developments in Iran in the decades following the **1953 coup d'état (28 Mordad 1332)** indicate that *anti-Westernism* gradually emerged as a significant component of Iran's political and intellectual discourse. This phenomenon was evident not only among certain intellectuals and political groups opposed to the Pahlavi regime, but also—albeit implicitly and indirectly—within certain aspects of the regime's cultural policies and official discourse. At the same time, the structure of the international system during the Cold War and the rivalry among major powers significantly shaped the political and ideological orientations of peripheral states, including Iran.

Despite numerous studies on Iran's encounter with the West, relatively few have examined the relationship between the emergence of anti-Western discourse in Iran and the broader international context of the Cold War through systematic analysis of historical evidence. Accordingly, the central aim of this study is to investigate the contexts and factors that contributed to the formation and intensification of anti-Western discourse in Iran during the Second Pahlavi period and to explain its relationship with the structure and dynamics of the Cold War international system.

The main research question guiding this study is therefore:

To what extent were anti-Western discourses and movements in Iran during the Second Pahlavi era shaped and strengthened by the political and ideological dynamics of the Cold War international system?

This study hypothesizes that the expansion of anti-Western discourse in Iran during the Second Pahlavi period cannot be explained solely by domestic factors, such as dissatisfaction with state policies or cultural reactions to Western-oriented modernization. Rather, it emerged and intensified within the broader context of ideological and geopolitical rivalries of the Cold War international system and through its interaction with Iran's internal sociopolitical developments.

1.2. Research Method

This study adopts a **historical-analytical approach**. Data were collected through library research, including historical documents, newspapers from the Second Pahlavi period, and the intellectual works of contemporary thinkers. The collected materials were analyzed using **historical and discourse analysis methods**.

By drawing upon both domestic and international documentary sources, the research seeks to identify and explain the internal and external contexts that contributed to the emergence and expansion of anti-Western discourse in Iran during the Second Pahlavi era.

1.3. Originality and Significance of the Study

Previous studies on anti-Westernism in Iran have largely focused on the intellectual, cultural, or social dimensions of this phenomenon, while paying comparatively limited attention to its

relationship with the structure of the Cold War international system. The originality of this research lies in examining the formation and expansion of anti-Western discourse in Second Pahlavi Iran within the framework of the interaction between domestic developments and the geopolitical and ideological conditions of the Cold War.

Drawing on historical documents as well as domestic and international scholarly sources, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the contexts and factors that shaped this discourse. In this sense, the present research contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between modern Iranian political and intellectual developments and the broader structures of power within the international system.

1.4. Literature Review

A considerable body of scholarship has examined the encounter between Iranians and the West and the emergence of anti-Western discourses in modern Iran. A review of this literature, however, suggests that the relationship between these discourses and broader international developments—particularly the political and ideological climate of the Cold War—has received comparatively limited attention. Existing studies can generally be classified into three main categories.

The first category consists of studies that explore the historical and intellectual dimensions of Iran's encounter with modernity and the West. Abbas Milani, in *Modernity and Anti-Modernity in Iran* (1998), analyzes the formation of modernity—particularly political modernity—in Iran, with a primary focus on the views of intellectuals. Similarly, Mehrzad Boroujerdi in *Iranian Intellectuals and the West* (1996), Ahmad Ashraf in *Iranian Identity: From Antiquity to the End of the Pahlavi Era*, Farzin Vahdat in *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* (2002), Ervand Abrahamian in *A History of Modern Iran* (2008), Hossein Bashiriye in *Obstacles to Political Development in Iran* (1991), and Zhand Shakibi in *Pahlavism, Orientalism, and Anti-Westernism* (2017) have each examined Iran's encounter with the West from historical and sociological perspectives. Despite the significance of these contributions, relatively little attention has been devoted to the connection between anti-Western discourses in Iran and the international context of the Cold War.

The second category includes studies that focus on the cultural and psychological foundations of xenophobia and anti-Western attitudes in Iranian society. Among these, Seyed Shams-al-Din Sadeghi's article, "An Introduction to the Causes of Xenophobia and Foreign-Hostility in Contemporary Iranian Political Culture," draws on the ideas of scholars such as Ahmad Ashraf and Mehdi Bazargan, while also referring to the intellectual perspectives of Ahmad Fardid, Ali Shariati, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Dariush Shayegan. This work attributes the emergence of xenophobic tendencies to factors such as fatalism, tendencies toward extremism, and social distrust. Nevertheless, the study adopts a largely theoretical approach and does not rely extensively on historical documentation for its analysis.

The third category comprises studies that analyze the reactions of Iranian intellectuals and elites to Western civilization. In this regard, an article derived from Reza Kavand's doctoral dissertation, "*A Typology of Iranian Intellectuals' and Elites' Approaches to Western Civilization*," investigates patterns of Western orientation and Western rejection in Iranian intellectual thought, addressing issues such as the interpretation of modernism in Iran and the role of elites in modernization programs. In addition, several academic theses—such as Farina Afrasiabi Navan's study, "*The Approach of the Second Pahlavi Regime toward Western Culture and Civilization (Modernity)*," and Roghieh Azizpour Marzouni's thesis, "*Intellectuals and Anti-Westernism in Iran from the 1950s to the 1990s*"—have examined various aspects of the encounter between the Iranian state, intellectuals, and the West. However, these studies also rely primarily on library sources and make limited use of historical documents and foreign archival materials to analyze the international dimensions of the phenomenon.

Overall, a review of the existing literature indicates that although numerous studies have addressed Iran's encounter with the West and the phenomenon of anti-Westernism, relatively little attention has been paid to analyzing this phenomenon within the framework of international developments—particularly the geopolitical and ideological environment of the Cold War—and through systematic use of historical documentation. Addressing this gap constitutes one of the main objectives of the present study.

2. Concepts and Theoretical Framework

To engage with the main argument of this article, it is necessary to clarify several key concepts that play a central role in the present analysis.

2.1. Gharbzadegi (Westoxification)

The concept of *Gharbzadegi* (commonly translated as *Westoxification*) refers to a set of intellectual, cultural, and social reactions to the penetration of Western civilization and values into non-Western societies. The term denotes a condition in which uncritical imitation of Western cultural, social, and intellectual models leads to a form of cultural and intellectual dependency.

In Iran, some of the earliest written critiques of Western civilization can be found in the works of intellectuals active during the Pahlavi period. In the early 1920s, Hossein Kazemzadeh Iranshahr opposed what he described as the "unconditional adoption of European customs and civilization" (Kaveh, no. 1, 1920). Similarly, Ahmad Kasravi employed the term "Europeanism" to criticize the cultural consequences of Western influence in Iranian society (Peyman, no. 1, 1933).

Following the Second World War, such critiques acquired a more systematic theoretical formulation. In 1949, Khalil Maleki introduced the concept of *colonial dependency* (*este'mārzadegi*) to describe the intellectual and political subordination of peripheral societies (Fattahi & Leilayi, 2022, p. 146). Subsequently, Ahmad Fardid conceptualized *Gharbzadegi* as a

philosophical critique of the foundations of Western modernity—a concept that later became widely disseminated in Iran’s intellectual and political discourse.

2.2. Anti-Westernism

Anti-Westernism refers to a constellation of attitudes and discourses that emerge in opposition to the values, institutions, and intellectual foundations of Western civilization. In contemporary Iran, this discourse has often been accompanied by calls for a return to religious, cultural, or national traditions.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a segment of Iranian intellectuals—drawing on philosophical critiques of Western modernity—reconsidered the relationship between tradition and modernity. In this context, the ideas of philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Henry Corbin influenced certain Iranian thinkers and contributed to the emergence of intellectual currents that emphasized cultural authenticity and criticized modern rationality.

Karamatollah Rasekh categorizes anti-Westernism as a form of conservative orientation, identifying its key characteristics as opposition to liberalism, democracy, individual freedom, and individualism, alongside tendencies toward authoritarianism, centralization, and elitism (Rasekh, 2013, p. 51).

2.3. Nativism (Indigenism)

Nativism refers to an intellectual and cultural approach that emphasizes a return to the historical and cultural roots of non-Western societies and seeks to redefine cultural identity in response to Western influence. This concept gained prominence in many developing countries after the Second World War and manifested in ideas such as “return to the self” and the “indigenization of modernity” (Qezelsafli, 2014, pp. 280–282).

Within this framework, critics of the West did not necessarily reject all Western achievements; rather, their critique primarily targeted the philosophical and cultural foundations of Western civilization. Mehrzad Boroujerdi characterizes Iranian nativism by features such as xenophobic nationalism, a conspiratorial worldview, and a tendency toward anti-Westernism (Boroujerdi, 1999, p. 37).

During the Pahlavi period, debates over indigenization and resistance to *Gharbzadegi* were not confined to intellectual circles but also appeared in official state discourse. Mohammad Reza Shah, while emphasizing the adoption of Western science and technology, repeatedly stressed the necessity of preserving Iran’s cultural identity and avoiding cultural Westoxification (Pahlavi, 2010, pp. 79, 224).

3. Iran within the Context of Cold War Rivalries

Following the end of the Second World War, the international system entered a phase of ideological and geopolitical rivalry between two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—commonly referred to as the Cold War. This rivalry extended beyond military and

political arenas to encompass economic, cultural, and propagandistic dimensions, as each bloc sought to expand its sphere of influence across different regions of the world.

The Middle East, owing to its geopolitical location, energy resources, and proximity to the Soviet Union, became one of the primary arenas of competition between the Eastern and Western blocs. Iran, in particular, acquired a special position in the strategic calculations of major powers due to its location along the southern borders of the Soviet Union and its role in regional security arrangements. The Azerbaijan crisis in the late 1940s and the subsequent withdrawal of Soviet forces from Iran constituted the first clear manifestations of Cold War rivalry in Iran's political landscape.

In the years that followed, the United States pursued a range of economic and political initiatives aimed at containing the spread of communism in countries surrounding the Soviet Union. One notable example was the **Truman Doctrine's Point Four Program**, introduced in 1949 to provide technical and economic assistance to developing countries and implemented in Iran in the early 1950s. Beyond their economic objectives, these programs carried significant political and ideological functions and were embedded within the broader strategy of communist containment. Within this context, Iran became a major site of cultural and ideological competition between East and West. Educational, cultural, and media activities conducted by both blocs sought to influence public opinion and intellectual elites. Over time, this environment contributed to the emergence of diverse intellectual and cultural responses, including the development of critical discourses toward Western civilization and the rise of anti-Western tendencies among segments of Iranian intellectual and political circles—a process that will be examined in the subsequent sections of this article.

4. Contexts and Causes of the Emergence of Anti-Westernism in Iran

Following the Second World War, and particularly from the 1940s onward, Iran became deeply embedded in a series of major international and domestic transformations. The interaction of these developments gradually contributed to the emergence and consolidation of an anti-Western discourse among various political, religious, and intellectual groups. Experiences of indirect colonialism, economic dependency, and both overt and covert interventions by Western powers—alongside the ideological rivalry of the Cold War, the authoritarian and pro-Western policies of the Pahlavi regime, and the rise of nativist critiques of modernity—collectively created a set of objective and subjective conditions in which “the West” came to be questioned not merely as a geographical entity but as a system of power relations, cultural patterns, and political order.

Within this context, the **1953 coup d'état (28 Mordad)** represents a decisive turning point in the formation of deep distrust toward Western powers, particularly the United States. This distrust, reinforced by the broader dynamics of the Cold War, intensified political repression, continued economic and cultural dependency, and the rise of nativist intellectual discourses, gradually crystallized into a coherent anti-Western narrative among different social and political actors. The

following sections examine the most significant factors contributing to the formation of this discourse across four major dimensions.

4.1. The 1953 Coup d'État and Western Intervention

The coup d'état of 19 August 1953 (28 Mordad 1332) against the national government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh occupies a central place in the historical memory of Iranians as one of the most significant examples of direct Western intervention in the country's internal affairs. This event not only altered the configuration of domestic political power but also gradually came to symbolize the negation of Iranian national sovereignty by the governments of the United States and Britain, thereby becoming a focal point in the emergence of anti-Western discourse (McGlinchey, 2021, p. 27; Vatandoust, 2017, p. 46; Ghanei, 2002, p. 222).

At the international level, the coup can be understood within the framework of Cold War containment policies and geopolitical rivalries. From the perspective of Washington and London, the nationalization of Iran's oil industry not only threatened their economic interests but also raised concerns—amid the tensions of the early 1950s—about the possible expansion of Soviet influence and leftist movements in Iran. Consequently, a coordinated intelligence operation was designed and implemented to overthrow Mosaddegh's government. This operation, known in American and British records by code names such as **“Operation Ajax,”** has since been documented in various diplomatic sources (McGlinchey, 2021, pp. 28–30).

Indeed, the roots of anti-Western sentiment in Iran can be traced back to earlier encounters between Iran and the West since the nineteenth century; however, the military coup against Mosaddegh significantly intensified these sentiments (Göksel, 2019, p. 38).

Declassified documents from the U.S. Department of State indicate that policymakers were aware of the potential long-term consequences of such intervention. The principal objective of American and British cooperation in removing Mosaddegh and restoring the authority of the Shah was to prevent Iran from “falling into Soviet hands” and to contain the spread of communism (Vatandoust, 2017, p. 181; Mousavizadeh, 2005, p. 127). In a top-secret memorandum dated 26 November 1952, Henry Byroade—Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs—suggested to his superior, Freeman Matthews, that a replacement for Mosaddegh should be considered due to concerns about the growing proximity between the prime minister and the Tudeh Party (NARA, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, 1950–54 Central Decimal File, File: 788.00/11-2652).

Some documents even referred to the coup as a **“Western plan executed by Eastern actors,”** while warning that such an action could generate long-term hostility toward the United States within Iran (Vatandoust, 2017, pp. 195–196). In other words, even within strategic calculations, there was awareness that interference in Iran's national sovereignty might produce enduring resentment and distrust toward Western powers.

Domestically, the coup resulted in the restoration of monarchical authority and the suppression of nationalist and popular political forces. The visible support of the United States and Britain for the Shah's return reinforced the perception among many Iranians that the country's political sovereignty had become aligned with the interests of foreign powers. This experience later became a central reference point in the narratives of religious, nationalist, and leftist groups, who cited it as a clear example of **neo-colonialism** and the denial of Iran's political independence (Ghanei, 2002, pp. 223–225).

In summary, the 1953 coup—symbolizing foreign intervention and the negation of national will—formed the core of widespread distrust toward the West. In the political imagination of many Iranian actors, relations with Western powers increasingly came to be interpreted as synonymous with domination, dependency, and threats to national sovereignty. Over time, this historical experience became one of the principal pillars of anti-Western discourse in Iran.

4.2. Cold War Ideological Rivalry and the Expansion of Leftist Movements

The emergence and expansion of leftist ideological currents in Iran—particularly after the establishment of the **Tudeh Party in 1941**—provided an important intellectual and ideological foundation for the spread of anti-imperialist and anti-Western ideas. The Tudeh Party, which emerged within the relatively open political environment following the Allied occupation of Iran during the Second World War, employed Marxist-Leninist discourse to criticize the West primarily as an imperialist capitalist system and to portray the United States and Britain as leading forces within this unequal global order (Yazdani, 2021, p. 276).

At the international level, Iran's geopolitical position made it a significant arena in the strategic rivalry between the Soviet Union and the Western bloc. American policymakers feared that continued political and economic instability—particularly during Mosaddegh's government—could facilitate the expansion of Tudeh Party influence and ultimately lead to the establishment of a Soviet-aligned regime in Iran. In the memoirs of **Kermit Roosevelt**, one of the architects of the coup operation, such concerns are explicitly mentioned as a major justification for American intervention in the overthrow of Mosaddegh's government (Roosevelt, 1953).

Documents from the U.S. Department of State likewise confirm this assessment. One such document emphasized that the continuation of the existing political situation in Iran might result in a “**decline of Western democratic influence**” and create opportunities for **communist domination**. Within this strategic framework, American policymakers regarded intervention to stabilize the monarchy and prevent the rise of leftist forces as a geopolitical necessity. Kharaazi, drawing upon various historical documents, also demonstrates that the United States and Britain took seriously the Soviet Union's potential capacity to support the Tudeh Party, mobilize certain ethnic groups such as Kurdish movements, and exploit social unrest in Iran—developments

perceived as significant threats to Western interests in Iran and the broader Middle East (Kharaazi, 2001, p. 84).

However, this ideological rivalry produced a dual outcome. On the one hand, it strengthened leftist and anti-imperialist discourses that portrayed the West as a system of domination and exploitation. On the other hand, the actual intervention of the United States in the 1953 coup and its subsequent support for the Pahlavi regime appeared to validate these anti-imperialist claims in the eyes of many segments of Iranian society. In this way, Iranian leftist discourse—by linking the lived experience of the coup and political dependency to broader theories of imperialism—played a significant role in consolidating and deepening anti-Western narratives.

In conclusion, the ideological competition of the Cold War not only created the geopolitical conditions for Western intervention in Iran but also provided the conceptual and analytical framework through which various political actors interpreted “the West” as a system of domination. As a result, it contributed significantly to the intellectual foundations of anti-Westernism in modern Iran.

4.3. Political and Security Restrictions under the Pahlavi Regime

Another major factor contributing to the formation and consolidation of anti-Westernism in Iran was the authoritarian and security-oriented political structure of the Pahlavi regime—particularly in the period following the 1953 coup—and its close association with the direct and indirect support of Western powers. With the Shah’s return to power, the process of concentrating authority increasingly in the hands of the monarch intensified, while representative and participatory institutions were progressively weakened. Sariolghalam notes that after the coup, the Shah gradually obtained effective control over the three branches of government, the armed forces, and the strategic decision-making apparatus of the state, resulting in an increasingly restricted political environment (Sariolghalam, 2010, p. 120).

During this period, the activities of independent and critical political parties were severely limited or banned. The press operated under strict supervision and censorship, and many nationalist, religious, and leftist activists were imprisoned, exiled, or pushed to the political margins. In his analysis of Iran’s political structure under the Pahlavis, Gasiorowski emphasizes that the post-coup system evolved toward a form of “**monarchical authoritarianism**,” in which organized opposition was suppressed under labels such as “communism,” “reactionary forces,” or “threats to national security” (Gasiorowski, 2019, p. 77).

One of the most important instruments of this security structure was the **Organization of Intelligence and National Security (SAVAK)**, established in 1957 with the close cooperation and supervision of American, British, and Israeli intelligence services (Modirshaneh-Chi & Zare, 2021, p. 25; Pahlavi, 2010, p. 205). SAVAK quickly became a symbol of political repression and social control. In the discourse of the regime’s opponents, it was frequently portrayed as evidence

of the government's dependence on Western powers and its prioritization of regime security over the rights and freedoms of citizens. The memoirs of Mohammad Reza Shah themselves suggest that he viewed the establishment and strengthening of this organization as part of the modernization of state governance and alignment with Western security standards (Pahlavi, 2010, pp. 205–210).

These political and security restrictions had significant consequences for the development of anti-Western sentiment. On the one hand, the closure of legal and peaceful avenues for political participation pushed many critics toward more radical forms of protest and opposition. On the other hand, the visible association between the Pahlavi regime and Western powers—especially the United States—gradually intertwined opposition to the government with criticism of “the West.” For many opposition groups, the West was perceived not only as the principal supporter of the monarchy and its repressive apparatus but also as a political and cultural model that threatened Iran's identity and independence.

Consequently, the repressive and security-driven policies of the Pahlavi state—developed and reinforced with Western support—became firmly embedded in the opposition's perception as characteristics of a **“dependent regime.”** This perception created a powerful psychological and emotional foundation for the acceptance and expansion of anti-Western discourse.

4.4. Pro-Western Policies of the Regime and the Reaction of Social Forces

Alongside political repression, the particular form of modernization and Westernization pursued during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah became another major factor in strengthening anti-Western tendencies among various social groups. From the 1960s onward, the Pahlavi government implemented a project in which economic development, administrative and social reform, and strategic alignment with the West were framed within a broader model of **“top-down modernization.”** Although these policies produced economic growth and the expansion of infrastructure in certain sectors, the gap between these reforms and the values and expectations of important segments of society generated strong critical reactions.

One of the turning points in this regard was the adoption of the **Capitulation Law in the 1960s**, which granted judicial immunity to American military personnel and advisers stationed in Iran. Critics viewed this measure as a serious violation of Iran's judicial and political sovereignty and interpreted it as evidence that the country had effectively become a “protectorate” of the United States. The strong reaction of political clerics—particularly Ayatollah Khomeini's well-known speech condemning the law—illustrates the depth of this sensitivity (Alvandi, 2017, p. 45; Pahlavi, 2010, p. 205). In later revolutionary discourse, capitulation was highlighted as a symbol of **“national humiliation”** and the regime's “Westoxification,” thereby reinforcing anti-Western sentiments among religious and nationalist circles.

The **White Revolution** (1963) and the broader package of reforms implemented within this framework—including land reform, profit-sharing for industrial workers, and especially the extension of voting rights to women—must also be understood within this context. Although these reforms were designed to modernize Iran’s socio-economic structures and were encouraged in part by the United States, many religious and traditional forces perceived them as a “**Western**” and **anti-traditional project** (Shahriari, 2017, p. 275). From the perspective of these critics, the regime was implementing an imitative version of Western modernity rather than relying on indigenous and religious models, a process they believed would weaken moral and religious values, deepen social inequalities, and increase dependence on foreign powers.

In the economic sphere, Iran’s growing dependence on oil revenues and its unequal relations with Western corporations constituted another important source of anti-Western criticism. The **1954 Consortium Agreement** and subsequent oil contracts were viewed by the government as steps toward stabilizing foreign exchange revenues and promoting economic development. However, critics interpreted them as a **renewed transfer of national resources to Western companies** and evidence of continuing economic colonialism (Sami’i, 2012, p. 59). The regime’s official rhetoric of an “independent national policy” often appeared inconsistent with its extensive reliance on foreign powers in military, security, and economic spheres, a contradiction that further increased skepticism regarding the government’s true orientation (Pahlavi, 2010, pp. 212–214).

Within this broader context, the role of **nativist intellectuals and critics of Western modernity** became particularly significant. Figures such as Ahmad Fardid, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Ali Shariati each articulated, through distinct conceptual frameworks, profound critiques of Westoxification, mechanistic modernity, and the spiritual crisis of Western civilization, while simultaneously emphasizing the necessity of a “**return to the self.**” Fardid, influenced by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Henry Corbin, interpreted the West as the manifestation of nihilism and technological domination and called for the revival of Islamic wisdom and spiritual traditions. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, in his influential book *Westoxification*, used a powerful literary style to criticize economic dependency, cultural imitation, and the erosion of Iran’s Islamic-Iranian identity, describing Westoxification as a form of “**cultural plague.**” Shariati, meanwhile, combined religious concepts with radical egalitarian ideas to offer a revolutionary interpretation of Islam in which the West appeared as an exploitative and unjust system opposed to an authentic and emancipatory Islam (Fardid; Al-e Ahmad, 2009; Shariati, 1982; Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 116).

These nativist and revivalist discourses—grounded in criticism of Western modernity and the affirmation of religious-national identity—rapidly gained influence among students, politically active clerics, and younger intellectuals. In conjunction with existing political, economic, and cultural grievances, they contributed to the formation of a broad anti-Western front in which religious groups, nationalists, and significant segments of the intelligentsia—despite their differing

languages and motivations—converged in their critique of the West and of the regime’s Westernizing policies.

5. Conclusion

An examination of historical sources, archival documents, and the political developments of the Second Pahlavi era indicates that anti-Westernism in Iran was not merely an emotional or cultural reaction. Rather, it emerged from the interaction of multiple structural, political, and ideological factors operating at both domestic and international levels. At the international level, the policies of the Western bloc during the Cold War—particularly the strategy of containing communism—played a central role in shaping an environment in which Iran was perceived as a strategic bulwark against Soviet expansion. Within this framework, direct and indirect interventions by the United States and Britain in Iran’s political affairs—from the 1953 coup d’état to continued support for the Pahlavi regime—were justified as part of a broader geopolitical strategy. These interventions, however, contributed to the formation of a widespread perception of the West as a source of domination and political instability.

At the domestic level, following the coup, the Pahlavi regime attempted to consolidate its legitimacy by relying in part on religious institutions as a counterweight to leftist movements associated with the Eastern bloc. The government sought to strengthen religious forces in order to contain the spread of Marxist ideology. Yet this strategy ultimately produced unintended consequences. Religious institutions, drawing upon their indigenous and religious legitimacy, increasingly criticized the regime’s state-led modernization and pro-Western orientation. As a result, they gradually emerged as one of the principal centers of resistance to the government’s Westernizing policies. In this way, the regime’s efforts to curb leftist influence inadvertently contributed to the growth of religious and traditionalist anti-Western discourse within Iran’s intellectual and social landscape.

From a historical perspective, the early roots of anti-Western sentiment can be traced to Iran’s experience of occupation during the Second World War and later to the movement for the nationalization of the oil industry. In that context, demands for economic independence symbolically transformed into a broader struggle between Iranian society and Western powers over national sovereignty. Although the monarchy initially expressed support for the national movement, the subsequent confrontation between the Shah and Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh—combined with Western concerns regarding the potential alignment of nationalist forces with leftist movements—ultimately culminated in coordinated Western action against the national government. This development effectively generated two major centers of anti-Western sentiment: one among nationalist and religious forces, and another among leftist and secular intellectual circles.

In the aftermath of these developments, the regime attempted to mitigate the political consequences of these divisions and maintain its stability by moving closer to certain religious currents and by instrumentally employing religious discourse as a source of legitimacy. However, this policy also contributed to the intensification of anti-Western attitudes. The growing influence of religious institutions facilitated the emergence of traditionalist and nativist intellectuals who not only criticized Western political influence but also extended their critique to the philosophical and cultural foundations of Western modernity. Consequently, the critique of the West expanded beyond the sphere of politics and entered the broader domain of intellectual and cultural discourse. Ultimately, anti-Westernism during the Second Pahlavi era was shaped both by the internal contestation between pro-Western and anti-Western forces within Iranian society and by the global bipolar structure of the Cold War, which positioned Iran as a key arena of ideological and geopolitical rivalry between East and West in the Middle East. The roots of anti-Westernism during this period can therefore be understood as the result of the intersection of three interrelated domains:

- **Political and security factors:** Western intervention in Iran's political affairs and the perceived dependency of the Pahlavi regime.
- **Social and cultural dynamics:** Resistance by religious institutions and the emergence of traditionalist and nativist intellectual discourses.
- **Global ideological context:** The direct impact of Cold War competition between the Eastern and Western blocs.

The interaction of these three domains ultimately contributed to the erosion of the Pahlavi regime's legitimacy, the expansion of popular protest movements, and the convergence of religious, nationalist, and intellectual forces around a shared anti-Western discourse. This convergence later became articulated within the ideological framework of the **1979 Iranian Revolution**, first in the form of a call for **"independence from Western domination"** and subsequently in the broader revolutionary concept of **"resistance to global arrogance."**

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