

CHAPTER  
**33**

## Section 4

## HISTORYMAKERS

# Ruholla Khomeini

## *Traditional Revolutionary*

*"We don't say that the Government must be composed by the clergy but that the Government must be directed and organized according to the divine law, and this is only possible with the supervision of the clergy."—Khomeini, Unveiling the Mysteries (1941)*

Voicing the centuries-old principles of Islam, Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini used today's technology to lead a long-distance revolution. In an increasingly secular world, he ruled his nation by religious law.

Khomeini was born in 1902 in Persia, which is modern Iran. One grandfather and his father both were ayatollahs. This title, which means "the Sign of God," is given to Iran's religious leaders of the Shi'a branch of Islam. This is the religion of more than 90 percent of Iranians.

In 1907, Khomeini's father was killed while on a pilgrimage when the boy was five years old. Young Khomeini was raised by his mother and an aunt, who taught him that it was his duty to protect Islam. He studied in Qum, a city sacred to Shi'a Muslims. Until 1962, Khomeini concentrated on studying and teaching the principles of Islam. He trained more than 1,000 of Iran's Muslim clergy.

Khomeini believed that Muslim clerics should play a leading role in an Islamic state. He read *The Republic*, the description of an ideal government by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. In this work, Plato argued that a wise ruler—a philosopher-king—was the best choice to lead a people. Some think this idea influenced Khomeini, though the idea that a Muslim state should be governed by Muslim law was squarely in the Islamic tradition. Khomeini crystallized his thinking in the 1941 book *Unveiling the Mysteries*. He blasted the shah, Iran's ruler, for attacking the Muslim clergy, destroying Islamic culture, and giving in to Western powers. Khomeini later made similar charges against the shah's son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, who ruled from 1941 to 1979.

Khomeini's opposition to Shah Pahlavi began in earnest in 1962. That year, Khomeini led the Islamic clergy in a large-scale strike to protest a new law. The law said that witnesses in Iranian courts no longer had to swear on the Qur'an. Khomeini also protested the shah's "White Revolution," a program meant to modernize—and Westernize—Iran. In

1963, Khomeini told a crowd of 100,000 that the shah should be overthrown. When Khomeini was arrested, riots broke out across the land.

In 1964, the shah exiled Khomeini. He stayed briefly in Turkey but lived from 1965 to 1978 in Iraq. Nevertheless, he maintained his attacks on the shah. Followers tape-recorded his lectures and smuggled them back to Iran. While he criticized the shah's policies, Iranians were frustrated that the wealth earned from selling oil benefited only a few.

In 1977, Khomeini's oldest son died. Many thought that the shah's secret police had killed him, although it was never proven. Later, Khomeini called for the army to depose the shah. As a result, the shah pressured Iraq to expel Khomeini, who later moved to France. Contacting followers by phone, Khomeini persuaded more than 180,000 members of Iran's clergy to call for strikes. As protests grew, the shah lost control of his country. In January of 1979, he fled. On February 1, Khomeini returned in triumph, greeted by millions along his route from the airport to Teheran, the capital city.

Though Khomeini had no formal title, he was effectively the ruler of Iran for ten years. He worked to make Iran reflect "the image of Muhammad." He banned influences such as coeducational schools, Western movies, and Western television shows. He also led Iran in a long and bloody war with its neighbor, Iraq. His will, read at his death in 1989, said "he was proud to be trying to implement the rules of the holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet."

### Questions

1. **Using Sequential Order** Prepare a chronology of Khomeini's life.
2. **Recognizing Main Idea** How does the quotation at the top of the page reveal Khomeini's thinking about religion and government?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** What Western ideas or methods did Khomeini use to achieve his goals?