

## 15.

### *Khomeini and Shi'ite Islamism*

The most dramatic example of politics and Islam in this century is the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty, rejected monarchy as un-Islamic, and established an Islamic Republic continuing to this day. This cataclysmic change brought about in 1978–1979 has fueled, more than any other, the American image of radical Islam. The dour visage of that elderly cleric, Ayatullah Khomeini, became in those years following 1978 as recognizable as that of the American president.

Sustaining the white heat of American-Iranian confrontation was the storming of the American Embassy in Tehran by radical Islamists on November 4, 1979, and its occupants taken hostage—in clear violation of international law and custom. Only 444 days later was this crisis resolved with the release of the remaining 52 American hostages on January 20, 1981, just hours after President Reagan's inauguration. Jimmy Carter—whose last years as president were clouded, and his reelection prospects probably dashed, by the challenges Islamic Iran had posed—was denied the solace of having the hostage release take place during his tenure.

President Reagan, too, was almost tripped up by Islamic Iran. The mid-eighties brought the “Iran-Contra” affair in which the administration, in violation of its stated policy, secretly provided arms to Iran in its war against neighboring Iraq. Then, when this undercover operation was revealed, the Reagan administration lurched in the opposite direction toward support of Iraq. This sufficed to force Ayatullah Khomeini into a decision “more deadly than taking poison” (as he put it) and sue for peace with Iraq on unfavorable terms.

Even the later crisis and war provoked by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait did not open the door for rapprochement between the United States and Iran. Although a few Americans now call for restored relations with Iran, evoking in some cases realist balance-of-power arguments and in others the belief that the Islamic Republic of Iran has mellowed, official U.S. policy continues to lump together Iraq and Iran as rogue states that must be held in check by a policy of "dual containment."

From the Iranian perspective the United States is the country that mounted a coup overthrowing a popular nationalist leader, Muhammad Musaddiq, as long ago as 1953 and thereafter supported an increasingly despotic shah. The U.S. is seen as the country that backed Iran's enemy, Iraq, during that brutal war lasting from 1980 to 1988 and has since been the principal outside power seeking to rein in, if not overthrow, its Islamic Republic. Ayatullah Khomeini's image of the U.S. as the "great Satan" still strikes a responsive chord among many Iranians.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran, in short, has had a distinctive impact on peoples and governments in Iran and elsewhere, Muslims and non-Muslims, because it was truly a revolution, not a coup and not simply a reshuffling of seats in the same old political game. And it was a revolution that succeeded and survived. The political system it brought into being has now lasted for some two decades.

Religio-political opposition movements may well threaten existing regimes, but their impact on history falls far short of what a revolutionary movement that seizes power will exert. The Islamic Republic of Iran has had a more substantial impact on both Muslims and even non-Muslims than those many religio-political opposition movements in this era that have never (or not yet) captured power. In sheer terms of effecting significant change, the Islamic Revolution in Iran may be compared to the radically different revolution achieved by Kemal Atatürk in creating the secular Republic of Turkey following the First World War. Both revolutions seized power and then implemented major changes.

The impact of the Islamic revolution in Iran not just in that country but throughout the Muslim world and beyond is even more striking given that it has taken place in the context of Shi'i Islam, which, it will be recalled, accounts for only roughly 15 percent of the world's Muslims. Moreover, many might claim—although the matter is not beyond dispute—that mainstream Shi'i political thought has been even more politically quietist than that of the majority Sunni community. Indeed, a principal thrust of Khomeini's writings was to counter this quietism and give high religious value to this-worldly political action. He presented such this-worldly polit-

ical action as a religious requirement. And his words sparked and sustained a revolution.

An equally important characteristic of this successful seizure of power in the name of Islam is that the leadership came from the ranks of the established Shi'i religious clergy. This is in sharp contrast with Islamism in the Sunni world. Neither Hasan al-Banna nor Sayyid Qutb was an *'alim*. Even though Mawdudi had the religious training authorizing him to claim that title, he avoided so presenting himself. The many other leaders of Sunni Islamist radicalism have been, with almost no exceptions, recipients of essentially secular (Westernized) education and engaged in modern-sector occupations. The number of Sunni Islamists trained as engineers or scientists, for example, has often been noted.

Most Sunni Islamist movements have manifested more than a little "anticlericalism" in the form of scoring the Sunni religious establishment for toadying to government. In some cases, as in Egypt, high-ranking official ulama have been directly challenged, or even assassinated. Here in Iran one finds the great exception—a successful revolution led by establishment clergy. Leading this revolution was the quintessential Shi'i Muslim cleric, Ayatullah Ruhallah Khomeini.

Who was Ayatullah Khomeini?<sup>1</sup> He was born in 1902 in the village of Khomein, located roughly 180 miles southwest of Tehran.

His mother was the daughter of a well-regarded Shi'i cleric, a *mujtahid*. Both his father and paternal grandfather were religious scholars as well. The family had landholdings and was well off by provincial standards. Tragedy struck early. When Khomeini was only four months old his father was killed in an ambush that almost certainly resulted from a vendetta pitting the Khomeinis against another leading family of the region. His mother must have been an indomitable woman, for she spent the next three years with wearying trips from Khomein to Tehran seeking justice, leaving the infant Khomeini in the care of a wet nurse. Eventually, the shah's government hanged one of the assassins.<sup>2</sup> Khomeini's mother died when he was fifteen.

Everything in Khomeini's family background pointed him toward a career of religious scholarship, and by all evidence this is precisely what he always wished to do. His early education was in his home town. Then at the age of eighteen he went to the nearby village of Arak to become a disciple of Ayatullah Ha'eri, the preeminent religious scholar of his time (*marja' al-taqlid*). A year later Ha'eri moved to Qum to revive a religious seminary (the Fayzieh) there that had fallen on hard times. Khomeini followed and was to remain with his mentor until Ha'eri's death in 1937. By the early 1930s Khomeini had become a teacher at the Fayzieh seminary.

In 1929 Khomeini married the daughter of a Tehran cleric. She was his only wife and they had seven children, five surviving infancy (two sons and three daughters). The daughters married into bazaar or clerical families. The sons assisted their father in his religious career of growing importance. The older son, Mustafa, died suddenly in 1977 while with his father in Najaf, Iraq.<sup>3</sup> The younger son, Ahmad, died in 1995. He had concerned himself with collecting and publishing the writings of his father.

Sometime after the death of Ayatullah Ha'eri, Khomeini's first mentor, Ayatullah Burujerdi, emerged as the preeminent Iranian Shi'i cleric. Khomeini accepted Burujerdi's religious leadership, remaining loyal to the man and his mission until Burujerdi's death in 1961. Interestingly, both Ha'eri and Burujerdi were classic examples of apolitical clerics. Both espoused accommodation with the existing Pahlavi regime. Yet, Khomeini had, it seems, so much internalized the operational code of the traditional Shi'i religious establishment that he accepted their leadership. His sustained political activism began only in the seventh decade of his life, after the death of the last of the two clerics who had served in turn as his marja' al-taqlid. Henceforth, he was available to become in his own right a marja' al-taqlid to others.

Yet, two decades earlier, a harbinger of Khomeini the political activist appeared. In August 1941 Britain and the Soviet Union intervened in Iran, forced Riza Shah into exile, and replaced him with his twenty-one-year-old son, Muhammad Riza Shah. Soon thereafter, Khomeini published an unsigned and undated tract entitled *Kashf al-Asrar* (Secrets Unveiled).<sup>4</sup> Ostensibly a defense of Shi'ism and the Shi'i religious establishment against a secularist-oriented book recently published, *Kashf al-Asrar* attacked the actions of Riza Shah—safe enough, it might be argued, following Riza's ouster by allied forces who remained to occupy Iran.

In *Kashf al-Asrar* Khomeini insisted that the only true model for worldly politics was "the government of God." God's law, i.e., Islam, is comprehensive. It covers everything "from the most general problems of all countries to the specifics of a man's family."<sup>5</sup> God, thus, is the only valid legislator, for He has given mankind all the legislation ever needed in His divine mandate, which are the rules of Islam.

Khomeini went on to give a more activist interpretation to that Qur'anic verse, "Oh ye who believe, Obey God, His Prophet and those in authority among you" (4:59), which has throughout the centuries been cited to buttress political quietism. Khomeini rebutted this venerable claim that one must obey one's rulers with exquisite irony:

Now we ask our God-given reason for judgment: God sent the Prophet of Islam with thousands of heavenly laws and established His government on the belief in the uniqueness of God and Justice. . . . Would this same God order men to obey Ataturk who has disestablished state religion, persecuted believers, oppressed the people, sanctioned moral corruption, and, in general, opposed the religion of God? Moreover, would he order us to obey (Riza Shah) Pahlavi who, as we all know, did all that he could to uproot Islam?<sup>6</sup>

Khomeini, in this book, however, stopped short of insisting on rule by the religiously learned (*velayat-e faqih*). "We do not mean to say that the shah, the ministers, the soldiers, and the dustmen should all be faqihs." Still, he did suggest that the religiously learned might well be members of the parliament (the majlis), or supervise such a body, and "these religious men would then elect a just sultan who would not disobey divine law nor practice oppression nor transgress against people's property, life and honor."<sup>7</sup>

Khomeini, thus, did not then declare monarchy as such to be un-Islamic. Nor did he rule out limited cooperation with government. The ulama, he wrote, "consider even this rotten administration better than none at all."<sup>8</sup>

Khomeini in *Kashf al-Asrar* was at his satirical best in attacking Riza Shah and the secularists for aping Western ways, e.g.,

The day everyone was forced to wear the Pahlavi cap, it was said, "We need to have a national symbol. Independence in matters of dress is proof and guarantee of the independence of a nation." Then a few years later, everyone was forced to put on European hats, and suddenly the justification changed: "We have dealings with foreigners and must dress the same way they do in order to enjoy greatness in the world." If a country's greatness depends on its hat, it would be a thing very easily lost!

While all this was going on, the foreigners, who wished to implement their plans and rob you of one hat while putting another on our head, watched you in amusement from afar. . . . With a European hat on your head, you would parade around the streets enjoying the naked girls, taking pride in this "achievement."<sup>9</sup>

The tone of *Kashf al-Asrar*, the bold assertion of the right and responsibility of the ulama to monitor government in order to assure conformity with God's Law, the powerful appeal to Islamic authenticity, and the scornful dismissing of alien (Western) way all prefigure themes to be found in the

powerful religio-political advocacy that Khomeini advanced from the 1960s until his death in June 1989.

At the same time, *Kashf al-Asrar* is restrained by comparison with Khomeini's ideology from the 1960s on. This tract reflected an effort by the ulama class, who had been badly battered by Riza Shah's Westernizing reforms, to regain some of the ground lost. Presented at a time when it was safe, even perhaps prudent, to attack Riza Shah, *Kashf al-Asrar* could be fitted into the accommodationist stance toward government that Burujerdi personified.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Hamid Algar maintains that Ayatullah Burujerdi himself had asked Khomeini to write *Kashf al-Asrar*, and that seems plausible.<sup>11</sup>

Khomeini remained attuned to the Burujerdi quietist line during the hectic period (1951–1953) in which Prime Minister Muhammad Musaddiq by nationalizing Iranian oil challenged the British presence and Pahlavi rule only to be overthrown by a CIA-backed coup in August 1953. One leading cleric, Ayatullah Kashani, did become politically active, first supporting Musaddiq and then at a critical moment turning against him, but Khomeini was not tempted to follow suit. Continued loyalty to Ayatullah Burujerdi was surely sufficient to explain Khomeini's choice.

A retrospective view of Khomeini's entire life and thought suggests another, equally important motive. Musaddiq represented and was largely supported by the more modern secular and Westernized elements of Iran. He and his supporters, while deserving support for their nationalist resistance to foreign manipulation, would be just as intent on downgrading the ulama role in society as Riza Shah had been (and his son Muhammad Riza Shah would prove to be), and he was gaining backing from that bastion of ulama strength—the bazaar.

The great popularity of Mosaddeq with the bazaar and his nationalist platform was making the bazaar-mosque political alliance obsolescent by providing the former with viable alternative secular leadership. . . . When Khomeini embarked on his bid for the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime around 1970, he had in mind to settle not one but two scores: to avenge himself and the Shi'ite hierocracy against the two Pahlavis, and to turn the tables on the Westernized intellectuals who, according to him, had cheated the hierocracy in all the important nationwide movements of the preceding century. As we now know, having ejected the Pahlavis, he wasted no time in initiating a massive *kulturkampf* against the Westernized intelligentsia.<sup>12</sup>

This tug of war between the ulama and the Westernizers (as old as the period of the Constitutional Revolution in the first decade of the twentieth

century) surely shaped Khomeini's thought and action not just during the Musaddiq period but throughout his life.

By the time Ayatullah Burujerdi died in 1961 Muhammad Riza Shah was no longer the timorous young ruler of the 1940s or the man who had fled his country in 1953 only to be brought back by an American-sponsored coup. He felt strong enough to engage in yet one more example of the kind of autocratic modernization program that powerful Middle Eastern leaders have often undertaken since the days of Egypt's Muhammad Ali. What came to be known as the "White Revolution," or the "Shah and People Revolution," involved a broad range of reforms including land reform, moves toward increased rights for women, and a barrage of actions intended to the clip the wings of the ulama. To Khomeini and to other clerics the nightmare of the Riza Shah era was returning.

The Shi'i clerics, however, were by no means alone in their antipathy to the Pahlavi regime. The shah built an increasingly powerful state but never won over adequate constituencies of Iranians dedicated to support the regime out of either interest or loyalty. Thousands of Irans received advanced higher education at home and abroad at state expense, but these young beneficiaries of Pahlavi largesse were overwhelmingly opposed to the shah's police-state despotism. He coddled the armed forces but did not show trust in its leaders, nor they in him. Beneficiaries of the land reform program did not gel into a significant group that could serve as a political asset.<sup>13</sup> Nor did the shah's measures in support of women's liberation produce any significant organizational muscle for the regime. It was a classic case of "uneven development," with massive and not totally ineffective social and economics changes alongside appalling "political underdevelopment."<sup>14</sup> In retrospect, it is easy to explain why the Pahlavi regime fell, but why was it an Islamic Revolution? And why was it led by Khomeini?

Khomeini entered the lists early against the shah's White Revolution. He was arrested, then released, then arrested again, and finally exiled from Iran in late 1964. He was away from Iran for somewhat more than fourteen years until February 1, 1979, when with the deliberation of a frail seventy-seven-year-old scholar he descended the ramp of the airplane that had brought him from Paris. Thereafter, he slowly made his way by motorcade from the Tehran Airport to the capital city along a route thronged with an estimated three million exultant Iranians. How did he do it? And from exile? Simply stated, "Khomeini is to the Islamic Revolution what Lenin was to the Bolshevik, Mao to the Chinese, and Castro to the Cuban revolutions."<sup>15</sup>

He possessed both ideology and organization. Even before the death of Burujerdi, Khomeini was gathering disciples from among the mullahs, and

he shifted into high gear thereafter. In the mid-1970s the not implausible claim was advanced that he had trained no fewer than five hundred mujtahids.<sup>16</sup> That he had a following among the ulama is clear. In those few years from Burujerdi's death until Khomeini's exile (1961–1964), the latter's brave defiance of the regime, as contrasted with the more muted protests of other clerics, ensured his standing among those of his religious profession.

He also, more surprisingly, won the following of those outside the ranks of the clergy, and this for a variety of reasons. First, the secular nationalists—the followers of the ill-fated Musaddiq—were less than united, and their several leaders underestimated the importance of Khomeini and the clerics. That these black-frosted men of religion might greatly influence the masses was to be expected, but the secular elite never dreamed that the clerics could actually organize and lead a political movement.

Second, the strong sense felt throughout Iranian society of being manipulated by a domestic despot working arm in arm with alien forces prepared the ground for a blending together of xenophobic nationalism (which Iran's history since the early nineteenth century certainly cultivated), traditionalism, and religious feeling. Religion and nationalism are readily merged in a Shi'i Iran surrounded as it is by threatening non-Muslim and Sunni Muslim neighbors. Even those workers and peasants following the Tudeh (Communist) Party could easily be swayed by Khomeini's message combining religion, nationalism, and populism.

Third, the radical writings of Ali Shari'ati had conditioned the young, and more particularly the educated young, to countenance the idea of a revolutionary movement led by Khomeini. Shari'ati, the son of a reform-minded cleric, was born in 1933 in a village near Mashhad in the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan. Shortly after his birth, the family moved to the city of Mashhad where Shari'ati was educated. After attending normal school in Mashhad he was by the age of nineteen embarked on a teaching career while being already heavily involved in pro-Musaddiq politics. He remained sufficiently active politically in the years after Musaddiq's overthrow to earn his first jail sentence in 1957. In these years, while continuing his teaching and writing, he had enrolled in the University of Mashhad, graduating in 1959 near the top of his class, which entitled him to a scholarship to study abroad. The government refused him permission to leave until a year later. He then enrolled in a graduate program at the Sorbonne, receiving his doctorate in 1964 and returning to Iran.<sup>17</sup>

Those Parisian years were crucial in the development of Shari'ati's ideology. He associated himself with the Algerian nationalist movement, the



Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), and wrote for its newspaper, *El Moujahid*. He embraced the revolutionary ideas of Franz Fanon and even undertook to translate his *Les Damnées de la Terre* (in English, *The Wretched of the Earth*) into Persian. He also translated Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare*. His contacts in person or through their writings with other Marxist, revolutionary, and third world ideologues shaped the development of his own thought. He presented a Shi'i Islam that was liberating and revolutionary by positing a distinction between "Alid" and "Safavid" Islam. The former was the pure Islam personified by Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad and in Shi'i Islam the first in the legitimate line of succession (the imams). What Shari'ati called Safavid Islam, by contrast, was the debased, quietist, and obscurantist Islam cobbled together by later clerics.

By this formulation Shari'ati had managed to make Islam—Alid Islam—the appropriate matrix of a revolutionary struggle in Iran (and, for that matter, all the Muslim world, or at the least the Shi'i Muslim world) of his day. He had presented a program that rejected the "Safavid" clergy as supporters of a repressive social system without falling into the trap of seeming to propose alien ideas and ways. Instead, his Alid Islam managed to nationalize (or, better, Islamize) third world revolutionary doctrine.

In those twelve years from his return to Iran in 1964 to his death in 1977, Shari'ati emerged as the political thinker attracting many Iranians (especially the young exposed to modern education in Iran and abroad) eager to escape what they saw as the incubus of the shah's regime. And the Shari'ati ideology paved the way to acceptance of Khomeini as revolutionary leader. All those agonizing contradictions such as atheistic Marxism versus politically impotent Islam or alien modernity versus stultifying nativism or religious versus secular were swept away as avoidable misperceptions. The right kind of Shi'i cleric, an Alid Shi'i cleric, would be able to rally all Iranians in the liberation struggle. Ayatullah Khomeini was seen as just such a leader.

By late 1978, such was Khomeini's popularity among Shari'ati supporters that it was they—not the clergy—who took the somewhat blasphemous step of endowing him with the title of Imam, a title that in the past Shi'i Iranians had reserved for the Twelve Holy Imams. Lacking both the theological concerns of the 'ulama and the sociological sophistication of their late mentor, Shari'ati's followers argued that Khomeini was not just an ordinary ayatollah but a charismatic Imam who would carry through the revolution and lead the community (*Ummat*) toward the long-awaited classless society (*Nezam-i Towhid*).<sup>18</sup>

What Ali Shari'ati himself would have thought of the Islamic Republic ushered in by Khomeini in 1979 was never to be tested. In and out of prison after his return from Paris, Shari'ati was finally banished from Iran in 1977. He flew to England where somewhat later he died under mysterious circumstances that strongly suggest a SAVAK assassination.<sup>19</sup>

Shari'ati's ideas not only disposed his many followers to embrace Khomeini but seemingly influenced Khomeini as well. Certainly Khomeini's own work increasingly emphasized the difference between the haves and the have-nots, the oppressors (*mustakbirin*) and the oppressed (*mustaz'ifin*). Moreover, Khomeini realized the need to appeal to other than the clerics, and he sensed the cardinal importance of Iran's secular educated youth. In one significant passage of his *Islamic Government* Khomeini preached:

You must make yourselves known to the people of the world and also authentic models of Islamic leadership and government. You must address yourselves to the university people in particular, the educated class. . . . The students are looking to Najaf, appealing for help. Should we sit idle, waiting for them to enjoin the good upon us and call us to our duties?<sup>20</sup>

Khomeini's most famous writing and the culmination of his mature political thought was his *Islamic Government*, first given as a series of lectures to seminarians at Najaf in 1970 and then issued as a short book in Persian, Arabic, and, in time, many other languages—122 pages in Hamid Algar's very able English translation from the Persian.<sup>21</sup> *Islamic Government*, available in a good English translation and with a manageably short text written in a clear, forceful style, merits a careful reading. One can better appreciate how he could keep his class, and his readers, on their toes with his pungent irony. The following may serve as examples:

1. Foreigners and *akhunds* (his dismissing term for government-supported quietist clerics) try to teach that "Islam consists of a few ordinances concerning menstruation and parturition . . . the proper field of study for *akhunds*" (p. 30).
2. The Islamic tax (*khums*) is intended to support the broad political and social purposes of Islamic government, not just for the upkeep of *sayyids*. "How could the *sayyids* ever need so vast a budget?" (p. 45).
3. "Since the range of thought of some people is confined to the mosque we are now sitting in . . . when they hear the expression 'consumption of what is forbidden,' they can only think of some corner grocer who is (God forbid) selling his customers short . . . (while) our

public funds are being embezzled; our oil is being plundered; and our country is being turned into a market for expensive, unnecessary goods by the representatives for foreign companies" (p. 115).

4. Islamic meetings such as Friday prayer in the mosque and the *Hajj* have social and political as well as devotional purposes, but the unaware "are only concerned about the correct pronunciation of *wa la al-dallin*" (last words of the *Fatiha* [Opening] of the Qur'an) (p. 130).

One can also appreciate the impact of his jeremiads:

1. "Rulers who establish centers of vice and corruption, who build centers of vice and wine-drinking, and spend the income of the religious endowments constructing cinemas" and "these profligate royal ceremonies" (p. 58).
2. "Are you taking from the rich what they owe the poor and passing it on to them? For that is your Islamic duty, to take from the rich and give to the poor. Your answer will be, in effect: 'No, this is none of our concern! God willing, others will come and perform this task.' Then another part of the wall will have collapsed" (e.g., the wall of the "Islamic fortress," p. 74).
3. Concerning the governmental ulama, "Our youths must strip them of their turbans. The turbans of these *akhunds*, who cause corruption in Muslim society while claiming to be *fuqaha* and 'ulama, must be removed. I do not know if our young people in Iran have died; where are they? Why do they not strip these people of their turbans?" (p. 145).
4. "O God, foreshorten the arms of the oppressors that are stretched out against the lands of the Muslims and root out all traitors to Islam and the Islamic countries" (p. 149).

The reader will also be struck by Khomeini's philippics against imperialism, Orientalists, Israel, and Jews. Given Iran's modern history, an ample measure of anti-imperialism is to be expected. Still, the exaggerated thrust of his many references offers a disturbing, if not indeed paranoid, image of a totally good Islam threatened since time out of mind by enemies from without and traitors from within. Examples:

1. "From the beginning the historical movement of Islam has had to contend with the Jews, for it was they who first established anti-Islamic propaganda. . . . This activity continues down to the present" (p. 27).

2. If Muslims had been properly prepared "a handful of Jews would never have dared to occupy our lands, and to burn and destroy the *Masjid al-Aqsa*" (p. 46). (It was, in fact, a deranged Australian Christian who set fire to the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.)
3. "The imperialists, the oppressive and treacherous rulers, the Jews, Christians and materialists are all attempting to distort the truths of Islam and lead Muslims astray. . . . We see today that the Jews (may God curse them) have meddled with the text of the Qur'an. We must protest and make the people aware that the Jews and their foreign backers are opposed to the very foundations of Islam and wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world" (p. 127).
4. "In our own city of Tehran now there are centers of evil propaganda run by the churches, the Zionists, and the Baha'is to lead our people astray and make them abandon the ordinances and teachings of Islam" (p. 128). See also p. 27 tracing imperialism against Islam back to the Crusades and pp. 139–142 claiming a British and then American imperialist masterplan over the past three hundred years.

Even complete neophytes to Islamic studies should also come away from a reading of *Islamic Government* with a feel for the author's closely argued scholastic style. They will see how the lectures, while filled with Islamic exegesis, work rigorously toward a here-and-now political agenda.

That political agenda can be simply stated: Islam provides a comprehensive sociopolitical system valid for all time and place. Thus, God is the sole legislator. Government is mandated in order to implement God's plan in this world. Individual believers are not permitted simply to suffer unjust rule in silence. They must actively work to realize God's plan in this world. The only acceptable form of this Islamic government is that directed by the most religiously learned. This is the guardianship of the faqih (*velayat-e faqih*). Thus monarchy or for that matter any other form of government is unacceptable. "Since Islamic government," Khomeini asserted, "is a government of law, those acquainted with the law, or more precisely, with religion—i.e., the *fuqaha*—must supervise its functioning. It is they who supervise all executive and administrative affairs of the country, together with all planning."<sup>22</sup>

The circle is complete. The case for an Islamic Republic ruled by the most learned faqih, or, failing an ability to determine at any time just who that might be, by a collective body of learned fuqaha is logically unanswerable given Khomeini's assumptions about God's plan for mankind and the ability of the just and learned faqih to administer that plan.

It remains only to point out what a radical change in traditional Shi'i political thought Ayatullah Khomeini managed to impose. The lasting impact on Iran and on Islam of Khomeini's message remains to be seen. This much can be affirmed now: Iranians responded to that message, and 1979 saw the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran. That event and Iran's history since then deserve, for better or worse, the rubric *revolutionary*.

