

Revolution. Although both have dropped in popularity since the early Muslim enthusiasms of 1979, they still represent the *only* Islamic government taken seriously as such abroad, and still evoke various degrees of admiration among educated and urban groups. Their admirers are not Islamists, however, but include many who see Khomeini as the first Muslim revolutionary who has effectively stood up to the West, especially the US, while keeping equally independent of the USSR. This independence plus Khomeini's reputation for simplicity, probity, and egalitarianism, give him an appeal beyond Islamist circles, even among many who dislike some things about the Islamic republic.

Notes

1. Claude Cahen, 'La changeante portée sociale de quelques doctrines religieuses', *L'Elaboration de l'Islam* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961).
2. Gilles Kepel, *Le Prophete et Pharaon: Les mouvements islamistes dans l'Egypte moderne* (Paris: La Decouverte, 1984); English editions (under the title *The Prophet and the Pharaoh*) have been published by al-Saqi Books, London, and University of California Press, Berkeley (1985).
3. 'The Islamist Movement in Tunisia', forthcoming, *The Maghreb Review*, special issue honoring Albert Hourani, and the sources and interviews therein. The MTI internal document and useful articles are in *Sou'at* (Paris), V (April, 1985), issue 'Islamisme aujourd'hui'.
4. See especially Peter B. Clarke and Ian Linden, *Islam in Modern Nigeria* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1984).
5. See the Introduction and relevant chapters of Juan R. I. Cole and Nikki R. Keddie (eds.), *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

3 The Iranian Revolution: Uneven Development and Religious Populism

FRED HALLIDAY

Introduction¹

The Iranian Revolution has been one of the epic events of post-war history, involving remarkable levels of political mobilisation, international crisis, and political brutality. Contrary to the expectations of many, the apparently stable regime of the Shah was overthrown in 1978–9 and a new post-revolutionary system successfully established and maintained. Yet beyond its importance for the history of modern Iran and of the world as a whole, the revolution has posed analytic questions of considerable complexity, both for those who seek to relate it to the overall course of modern Iranian history, and for those who want to compare it to other modern revolutions. If the Iranian upheaval deserves the name 'revolution', defined in terms of levels of mass mobilisation, destruction of an existing political and social order, and the establishment of a distinctly new order, then it would seem to be an unusual variant of this type of social event, a development as atypical as it was unexpected.

It is, however, worth remembering that all revolutions exhibit characteristics that are unexpected, that they can upset the schemata of social analysis as much as they overthrow established

systems of power. The French Revolution challenged many of the rationalist assumptions of the Enlightenment. Antonio Gramsci, himself a Communist leader in Italy, called the Russian Revolution 'the revolt against *Das Kapital*' because of the manner in which it appeared to defy the economic determinism that had underlain much previous Marxist thinking. The Iranian Revolution was certainly an original event, but it is advisable to be more than a little cautious about specifying precisely where this originality lies.

A tentative discussion of this revolution's originality can serve two functions: to prevent facile assimilation of the Iranian case into preconceived schemata of Iranian history or the sociology of revolutions; and at the same time to rescue it from the claim that the Iranian Revolution is a wholly original process, a *sui generis* revolution to which available concepts of historical analysis and rational explanation cannot be applied. A proper emphasis upon the novelty of the Iranian Revolution can be balanced by some comparative caution, by suggesting that not all that has occurred in Iran is unique or as resistant to external comprehension as many would suggest. Such an endeavour is always limited and the sociology of revolutions is an area of considerable theoretical contention.

Analysis must confine itself to the fall of the *ancien regime* and its immediate aftermath, but the novelty of the Iranian Revolution can be said to reside, in the first instance, in the role played within it by religion and in particular by what is loosely termed 'religious fundamentalism'. For the first time in modern history (that is, since 1789), a revolution has taken place in which the dominant ideology, forms of organisation, leading personnel, and proclaimed goal have all been religious in appearance and inspiration. This in itself would mark off the Iranian from other revolutions of the modern era. Given the manner in which Islam seeks to legislate for many areas of social activity, this religious imprint has involved an attempt to transform the law, culture, polity, and social practices of Iran to conform with a model supposedly elaborated in the seventh century AD.

Moreover, other features of the ideology of the Iranian Revolution may be obscured by the religious emphasis, but these in fact derive from it and can also serve to distinguish the Iranian case. The first is that the Iranian rejects ideas of historical progress:

Ayatollah Khomeini explicitly proposes a return to an earlier model of social and political practice and a rejection of almost all that the modern world stands for. Such historical and ideological throwbacks have been seen in other revolutions and nationalist movements – the past provides convenient legitimisation for many. But the Iranian case is far more than this, because such a regression is the basis of the whole revolutionary programme. In the proper sense of the word, the Iranian revolution is therefore a comprehensively *reactionary* revolution, restoring to the term its original, astronomical, meaning of a return to a previous order. A second consequence follows from this: while economic and material factors and aspirations played a part in the Iranian revolution, the leaders were reluctant to recognise this and have tended to reject the idea of material improvement. Khomeini has tried to lower the material aspirations of the population according to his ideal of generalised austerity, in which Western consumer goods are rejected, and in which the faithful can live in a state most conducive to religious devotion.² Khomeini on one occasion declared that the goal of revolution was not to provide the people with cheap melons. On another, he told President Bani-Sadr that the American embargo during the hostages crisis would not be detrimental to the population: 'In the time of the Prophet, they ate only one date a day.' Thirdly, while the Iranian Revolution has articulated nationalist themes of assertion and rejection, it was undertaken in the name of universalistic religion and laid comparatively little stress on Iran as a national entity. Its universalism was more pronounced than that of France or Russia. This was evident both in the cultural shift accompanying the revolution, where many features of the indigenous Iranian culture were rejected along with the values of the West, and in the projection of Iran as the first part of an insurgent Muslim community to overthrow its oppressors.³

A fourth ideological peculiarity followed from this, namely the rejection of history. Far from vaunting the heroes and strugglers of earlier generations, as other revolutionary and nationalist movements have tended to do, Khomeini appeared to regard almost all the earlier leaders of Iranian oppositions, secular and religious, as obstacles to his legitimacy which derived from the Islamic leaders of the seventh century, the Prophet Muhammad, and the founders of Shi'ite Islam.⁴ This religious legitimacy accounts for the fifth ideological feature of the Iranian revolution, namely the fact that

while a mass uprising, it cannot be considered a democratic revolution even in theory.⁵ Khomeini's writings and the constitution of the Islamic Republic made clear that ultimate power rests with the divinely-inspired religious authority, the *faqih*, who can override all elected bodies and can dictate his views to the faithful. Khomeini has tended to suggest that this is not a problem since the faithful and the *faqih* will not be in contradiction; but were such an unexpected event to occur then he is in no doubt that it is the *faqih* who has superiority. The Iranian Revolution therefore rejects historical progress, material improvement, national assertion, historical legitimation, and democratic sovereignty – five themes which, however violated in practice, have been at least formally invoked by modern revolutions from 1789 onward.

Yet this fundamentalist religious character is not, even in its appearance, as all-encompassing as might be assumed. First, Khomeini's ideas are fundamentalist in their claim to derive everything from sacred texts, but they are not fundamentalist or traditional if these terms are meant to imply that Khomeini's views are inherited from the past. Both the ideas themselves, and, even more so, the political and social effect they have, are novel ones, dependent upon modern social conditions and modern political debates upon which they draw, without attribution.⁶ Second, it is possible to pose the same questions which arise when any set of radical ideas finds a mass following and makes an impact on history. Which social groups supported these ideas, and for what reasons? What were the determining factors in the history of the country concerned which enabled the movement to gather force at the time it did? Why was it possible for this opposition to defeat the established state? What kinds of social and political change have accompanied its triumph? The Islamic revolutionaries have their own answers to these questions which usually involve divine agency. Others may be hesitant about accepting these answers, even while they view them with interest for what they tell us about the intentions and ideology of those who directed the revolution itself. Different responses may, therefore, be suggested.

Abstracting for a moment from its religious character, the Iranian Revolution appears more familiar. It was made by a wide-ranging alliance of social groups, drawing its support from dissident sections of the civil service and trading communities, and from much of the poor urban population. They were mobilised

against a dictatorial political regime by a charismatic leader and by an ideology of revolutionary legitimacy.⁷ In other words, the Iranian Revolution developed in the context in which populist movements have arisen in many other Third World societies. Even the religious character of the revolution is, in historical perspective, not so unique. History is replete with instances of rebel movements challenging temporal rulers in the name of God, and of clerical leaders organising such movements. The aspiration to create a sanctified order on earth runs through much of the history of medieval Europe and the Middle East and through that of nineteenth-century China. Newly-urbanised populations in other countries have been known to turn to religion as a means of responding to the tensions of their new environment. In Iran itself, the *mullahs* have been at the forefront of other protests in modern times, specifically the 1891 Tobacco Protest and the Constitutional Revolution of 1906–8.⁸ What is unique about the role of religion in the Iranian Revolution is that it became prominent in the latter half of the 1970s and, even more so, that it succeeded in overthrowing the established regime.

However, the originality of the Iranian Revolution lies not only in its religious character. If Iran's upheaval was unique in the prominence occupied by this 'traditional' feature, it was equally so for the opposite reason: the 'modern' character of the event. If the Iranian Revolution was the first contemporary instance to be religious in orientation, it was also the first ever 'modern' revolution. This 'modernity' is evident in four respects. First of all, the revolution took place in a society far more socio-economically developed, in major respects, than was Russia in 1917 or China in 1949. Half of the population lived in urban areas, per capita income was over \$2000 and, however unevenly this was distributed, it meant that most Iranians living in the cities were materially better off than a decade before. It was not the *sans-culottes* who made the revolution, but people who had benefited materially from a process of a rapid capitalist modernisation.⁹ Second, in contrast to all other Third World revolutions, the Iranian Revolution took place in the cities. Many of those who participated in it may have been peasants (that is, of rural origin), but it was an urban event, produced by the conditions of the major cities in the 1970s. The contrast with China, Vietnam, and Cuba is evident. Thirdly, and again in contrast to other Third World revolutions,

the Iranian upheaval was carried out by political confrontation, not by armed conflict. Thousands of people died in the last months of the Shah's regime, but they were mainly unarmed demonstrators, not guerrillas. Only in the last days of the Shah's regime was armed confrontation the dominant form of resistance: the preceding months were dominated by the street demonstration and the political general strike, forms of opposition associated with schemata of revolution in the most advanced capitalist countries.¹⁰ Finally, the fall of the *ancien regime* happened without it having been weakened in any external confrontation, which is normally believed to be necessary for the removal of authoritarian regimes. Neither defeat in war nor serious international economic pressure assisted the advance of the Islamic revolutionaries, and they themselves received no significant help from abroad.

From the perspective of twentieth-century revolutions, these 'modern' features are as original as the Islamic character of the Iranian case. *It can therefore be said that the originality of the Iranian Revolution resides neither in its 'traditional', nor in its 'modern' character but in the interaction of the two.*¹¹ It is this combination which accounts for both the success and the peculiarity of the Iranian Revolution in its initial stages, but it may also be the increasing disassociation of the two which has complicated the establishment of a post-revolutionary order.

The course of the Revolution

The events that led directly to the fall of the Shah spanned a period of little more than one year. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had been on the throne since 1941 and had been an autocratic ruler since 1953 when, with the assistance of the United States and Britain, a military *coup* had overthrown the nationalist government of Mohammad Mosaddeq. Since that time, there had been only sporadic open opposition to the regime, with the exception of the period 1960–3, when nationalist politicians and a section of the clergy led by Ayatollah Khomeini had protested at the Shah's control of political life and the reforms he was instituting. After over a decade of apparent calm, marked only by minor urban guerilla activities, the opposition became more active in 1977, circulating critical statements and holding protest meetings. In January 1978

street protests began, organised by religious students in the city of Qom protesting at a newspaper article which insulted the exiled Khomeini. For the next few months there were successive protests and strikes in the main urban centres of Iran, in which the local clergy usually played an important organising role, and in which the bazaars, the historical centres of trade and finance, gave support by going on strike.

The regime did not appear to be in mortal danger, however, until September 1978 when, at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, the traditional religious processions rallied over 1 million people in Tehran for what became political protests. The imposition of martial law, on 8 September, followed by the shooting of demonstrators, only temporarily stemmed the protest movement, and in October a wave of strikes began. Although at first organised for economic demands, or as protests at press censorship, these strikes set in motion a process which led to a nationwide political general strike in late November and December. The first victims were the oil fields. This blocked off Iran's export earnings and deprived the armed forces of diesel fuel. On 5 November, under pressure from a restive military leadership, the Shah appointed a military government. But it lacked political cohesion and was in any case unable to end the strikes. It was forced to permit a new round of street demonstrations in early December to mark the traditional Shi'ite festival of Ashura, at which the demand was made more clearly than ever before that the Shah must depart. By this time, Khomeini had become not only a symbol of opposition but also an increasingly active leader; from his base in Paris he insisted on no compromise with the Shah or those in any way associated with him.

On 15 January 1979 the Shah left Iran, leaving behind a demoralised and divided army, and a government headed by former opposition leader Shahpour Bakhtiar. A committed secularist and a courageous individual, Bakhtiar overestimated both his own political resources and the loyalty of the army. He also underestimated the degree to which he had discredited himself by being seen to accept his office from the Shah. Khomeini refused to negotiate with the Bakhtiar government and, after returning to Iran on 1 February, he pronounced Mehdi Bazargan head of a rival government. For ten days Iran had two governments; but on 10 and 11 February, following pro-Khomeini mutinies in the

garrisons of Tehran, groups of armed civilians seized control of government buildings and military camps. The army command declared itself neutral in the conflict between Khomeini and Bakhtiar; the latter and his associates, together with remnants of the royalist court, either fled or were arrested.

The new Bazargan government then proceeded to institutionalise the post-revolutionary regime. On 30 March a referendum proclaimed Iran to be an Islamic Republic. In November 1979 a new Islamic constitution was similarly passed by referendum, and Khomeini was officially accepted as the *faqih* or supreme judicial authority with extensive powers. In January 1980 Abol-Hassan Bani-Sadr was elected president and, following the election of a *majlis* or parliament, dominated by the Islamic Republican Party, it selected as prime minister Mohammad Ali Rajai, an opponent of Bani-Sadr. These institutional developments were, however, over-shadowed by other processes and crises: the virtually undisputed dominance of Khomeini as leader of the new republic weakened any other political forces and encouraged factionalism among those eager for his support; meanwhile, the deterioration of the social and economic structures of the country, combined with increasingly antagonistic international relations, impeded effective attempts to create a new and viable post-revolutionary order.¹²

Beyond those unique characteristics that comprised its paradoxical traditional/modern originality there are many remarkable features of this revolution. One was its suddenness: despite the underground opposition of the 1960s and 1970s, and despite the socio-economic tensions associated with the uneven and rapid economic expansion, the years prior to the revolution were not marked by major political or social unrest. Neither was the upheaval preceded by a significant economic crisis, such as a recession affecting substantial parts of the population. Nor did this crisis develop inside Iran as a result of conflict with other states: the frequently observed pattern of revolution following war or comparable international challenges to the power of a state was not evident in Iran. Few people, whether observers or participants, were conscious even six months before the Shah fell that the regime was in serious trouble, and even the pronouncements of the Ayatollah Khomeini indicated a progression in his confidence, as he made more militant demands in response to the course of

events in Iran itself. Yet the revolution was not a chance event: it defeated not a decayed autocracy but what had appeared as one of the stronger and more decisive Third World states, one, moreover, that enjoyed considerable support from abroad. Although it is necessary, in the light of subsequent events, to revise the picture of the Shah's regime as one at the zenith of its power, it would be a mistake to underestimate the combined force of the revolutionary pressures which were necessary to overthrow the established Iranian state. In a condensed and preliminary form, there are five central areas in which the causes of the revolution may be discerned.

Rapid and uneven economic development

In the two decades prior to the revolution Iran had undergone substantial socio-economic transformation and had made considerable advances in becoming an industrialised capitalist society.¹³ Yet Iran had, in previous decades, undergone relatively little transformation, and the accelerated changes of the 1960s and 1970s both produced exceptional tensions within the society, and sustained certain pre-capitalist or pre-industrial sectors that were to facilitate the upsurge of 1978.

The main reason why the revolution occurred was that conflicts generated in capitalist development intersected with resilient institutions and popular attitudes which resisted the transformation process.

The impetus for economic expansion came from Iran's oil industry, the revenues of which rose from \$45 million in 1950 to \$1.1 billion in 1970 and, following the multiplication of prices by OPEC, to \$20.5 billion in 1976. By the late 1970s, per capita income in Iran was over \$2000, industrial output was growing at over 15 per cent a year, and up to half the population was living in the towns. Urban Iran appeared to be enjoying widespread prosperity, virtually no social groups in the cities suffered a net fall in income. But the very process of transformation, misnamed 'modernisation', was itself contradictory.

This oil-fuelled growth generated its own problems. First, the availability of oil revenues subsidised many areas of the economy and so enabled them to remain uncompetitive and unproductive. Oil assisted economic changes, but it also subsidised inefficient

sectors, fostered a large service sector and state apparatus, and gave the Iranian government the illusion that it could dispense with the disciplines that developing societies without oil had to respect. Although much of the change was real, there was also much that was illusory. Even in its own terms, however, the oil boom could not last, and the period 1977–8 saw a relative slowing down: GNP stagnated in these years; inflation increased, particularly in rents; certain commodities grew scarce; and power cuts occurred, angering urban-dwellers. There was no widespread hardship, but the slowing down had political effects, as entrepreneurs lost confidence, and as the government enforced price controls on merchants to combat inflation. The decision of the cost-cutting Amuzegar government to suspend state subsidies to the clergy in 1977 must also have had its consequences.

More important for the mass of urban poor, however, were the inequalities and tensions associated with the boom itself; while the gap between rural and urban incomes began growing in the late 1960s, there were also increasingly pronounced inequalities in the urban areas themselves. By the mid-1970s it was calculated that the top 10 per cent of the population accounted for 40 per cent of expenditure; in addition, the urban poor suffered from the housing shortage, with the result that some had to spend up to 70 per cent of their income on rents. The population of some cities doubled in a decade: the migrants may have had higher incomes in the cities, but they lost the support systems of village society. To make matters worse, there was widespread corruption, involving members of the royal family. On top of the unevenness of the expansion, there was the unevenness of the transformation itself; that is, the fact that together with the industrialisation and partial modernisation, the transition was not taking effect. In agriculture the land reforms of the 1960s produced a cash-crop sector tied to the urban economy, but far more of the land was cultivated in family-sized units relatively isolated from the rest of the economy. The towns had a long tradition of commercial and religious institutions grouped around the bazaars which, in the face of the changes from above, adapted to them but retained their independence and their hostility to the Shah's state. There was a high degree of industrialisation, with two and a half million people employed in manufacturing of some kind – a very high figure by Third World standards, representing about a quarter of the total labour force.

Yet, the great majority of these were in small artisanal units, retaining the production processes and cultural values of an earlier epoch.

Comparable dichotomies could be observed in the fields of distribution and finance; despite the emergence of a modern banking system and of modern retail outlets, a substantial degree of the financial and commercial activity remained under the control of the bazaar, which had in the past controlled these sectors. The bazaar merchants resented their relative demotion by banks and new retail systems; yet their absolute position improved greatly with the expansion of economic activity in the country, so that the two-thirds of retail trade they retained enabled them to lend to those whom the banks regarded as unacceptable. It was the bazaar that had traditionally financed the religious institutions – the mosques, shrines, and religious schools.¹⁴ This was, then, a sector that combined considerable influence in the country with a deep antagonism to the economic structures and to the regime that was trying to reduce the area in which the bazaar merchants could manoeuvre. It was one component of an explosive triangular partnership that also incorporated the clergy and the urban poor, the latter retaining the values of the pre-industrial society. The transformation of Iranian society therefore preserved and even promoted institutions of economic and social activity that acquired new potential for opposition within the altered context created by this transformation.

The political weakness of the monarchy

The Shah's personality helped weaken not only the army but also the state. The role of the individual in history is not only as instigator and agent, but also as a weak link in a system of political power. This factor alone cannot explain the Iranian Revolution, any more than the characters of Louis XVI and Nicholas II can explain the fall of the Bourbons and Romanovs. But the Shah's grandiose distance from the realities of Iran helped introduce those development programmes which created the socio-economic context of the revolution; his ignorance of conditions in the country, together with his tendency to withdraw into silent meditation and his paralysis of will, were ill-suited to his coping with the crisis of 1978.¹⁵ He seems to have known from about 1974 that he had

cancer, and this may account both for the recklessness of some of his projects and for the fatalism he displayed in his final months of power. If such speculation is possible, one could argue that no monarch could have saved the regime in the last few months of its existence, but that an autocrat of a different stamp might have been able to prolong its existence or take effective corrective measures early in 1978. Whatever importance this personal factor has, it certainly seems to have contributed to the unexpectedly rapid disintegration of the regime.

In certain respects, the Pahlavi regime never enjoyed widespread legitimacy. Both the Shah and his father had come to power through military *coups*, and both ruled through political dictatorship. By the time of his fall, the Shah had had many thousands imprisoned and tortured. Khomeini's designation of the Shah and his father as 'usurpers' therefore struck a chord in Iranian political life, although the precise interpretation of this term may have varied, depending on whether it was alternative secular forces that were seen as having been displaced (the 1906 Constitution, or Mosaddeq) or rather the legitimate leading role of the clergy. Both Pahlavis were also seen as illegitimate because of their reliance on foreign support. Certainly, the attempts by the Shah to generate intermediate institutions of legitimation in the post-1960 period were a failure; the *Majlis* and the parties in it were phantoms, and neither Pahlavism, as a national ideology stressing the pre-Islamic past, nor authoritarian concepts of *farmandari* or 'commandism' were widely accepted. Yet the quality of the Shah's political illegitimacy was not constant: the dictatorship of the 1950s, and the prospects of economic improvement of the 1960s and early 1970s seem to have produced at least some tacit acceptance. But the ironic consequence of the greater boom of the mid-1970s was that it undermined this tacit acceptance by highlighting the inequalities and the corruption inherent in the regime. Nor was this just a matter of concern to the urban poor and the bazaar merchants: it exposed one of the fatal weaknesses of the regime, namely, the alienation of large sectors of the middle class. Despite the fact that these people benefited from the regime, and could have had little expectation of improvement without the Shah, they failed actively to support his government. Nor can this alienation be attributed solely to the fact that the regime was a dictatorship which denied the rich and educated a voice in affairs

of government, reflecting the specific fissures produced in the favouritism of the court and the distribution of oil wealth. In this respect, Iran differed from Franco's Spain and Pinochet's Chile: while the material improvement offered to the middle class was also far greater, the separation of those in power from the middle class was far greater in the case of Iran. The result was that the Shah failed to mobilise an active social constituency in his period of success and was thus left isolated throughout the course of the revolution.

This fissure helps explain another important feature of the revolution, the demoralisation of the army. One cause of this was the form that the confrontations of the revolution took. Huge unarmed crowds assembled, backed by the disconcerting and potentially hegemonic ideology of Islam. This was a threat any army would have had difficulty resisting in the absence of an occasion to take the offensive. The army, with its corrupt top officer corps and mass of conscripts beneath, was also liable to such political demoralisation. Khomeini himself devoted considerable attention to this issue, making appeals that would be most likely to undermine the army while seeking to avoid bloody confrontations. Another important factor was the conduct of the Shah himself; he failed to give strong leadership in the final months. When he left the country in January 1979 the army leadership was divided. The crisis of the final days was settled because, in the face of Khomeini's movement, the top army leadership signed a secret agreement with the opposition.¹⁶ Yet beyond all these factors lies the fact that the army was, from the beginning, isolated in Iranian society: it was the instrument of the Shah. It had never fought a successful war and lacked any martial legitimacy. The gap between the majority of the middle class and the regime meant that in Iran, in contrast to other countries where armies have seized power to pre-empt revolutions, the military lacked the political and social support which an active political constituency can provide.

The broad coalition of opposition forces

Skocpol's study of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions forcefully contests the idea that revolutions are purposive activities in which a group of people consciously organise to overthrow a regime.¹⁷ It points out that revolutions arise in situations of structural crisis for the society in question, and that those who initiate

revolutions are not necessarily those who ultimately wield power in the post-revolutionary order. All revolutions produce groups who say the cause has been 'betrayed'. In Iran, the liberals and guerrillas who were openly contesting the regime in 1976 and 1977 were displaced in January 1978 by the clerical and bazaar forces; indeed, even within the Islamic forces the leadership gradually passed from cautious clergy like Sharriat-Madari and from reformist Muslim militants like Bazargan and Bani-Sadr to the more fundamentalist clergy of the Khomeini-Beheshti variety. At the same time, the revolution was not carried out by a political party. One of the proudest claims of the Islamic militant was: 'Our greatest strength is our lack of organisation.'¹⁸

The broad and rapidly congealed coalition of forces that overthrew the Shah was strong precisely because of its diverse and spontaneous character; it was also one of the causes of the factionalism and paralysis of the post-revolution period. On the other hand, political organisation did play its part in the Iranian Revolution. The secular political parties were small and played only a secondary or even marginal role in the events of 1978-9; even when they participated they were forced to join the dominant Islamic trends. Far more important were the organisation of the clergy themselves which, based on each locality of the city and with centres in the mosques and shrines, were able to use religious networks to mobilise the population. These religious networks may have been decentralised and, initially, not designed for political purposes, but they acquired a leading organisational role in the crisis of 1978 and had, by the latter half of the year, acquired in Khomeini a determined and appealing leader. Behind the clergy there also lay the underground Fedayin-i Islam grouping, a militant sect founded in the 1950s. There is reason to doubt if Khomeini himself was a member, but some of the leading clerical figures were, and they had been determined for over two decades to wrest power from the Shah. The case of the Iranian Revolution demonstrates the possibility of purposive action in a revolutionary situation: it was the clergy who directed the struggle throughout.

The social forces that responded to the movement varied: in the first clashes of 1978 the main components were theology students and bazaar merchants, but these groups, far more in touch with the population than the secular parties, were able to call on the urban poor who formed the foot-soldiers of the major demonstrations in the latter part of the year. Parallel to these protests the

students and parties continued their actions, and in the final weeks of the regime it appears that significant numbers of middle-class people also joined in the demonstrations. The slogan raised in the final weeks was simple enough: 'Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic'. The one commanding aim was to oust the Shah: many who doubted the suitability of Khomeini none the less supported the movement in the hope that it could achieve the desired aim. Among the secular and middle-class forces many hoped that once the Shah had gone they could deflect the movement away from its clerical patrons. This enabled such people to support the movement with appropriate optimism, but it represented an underestimation of the strength of the religious forces.

The resulting relationship between social classes and political leadership was an example of the combination of traditional and modern forces in the Iranian revolution. The revolution mobilised large numbers of people representing various social groups. Without a mobilisation of such numbers and the arousing of insurrectionary consciousness in these social groups, the revolution would not have succeeded. The strikes that paralysed the country from October 1978 on became a great and unified exertion of social power by different classes in pursuit of a defined political goal. Yet these classes acted in the name of, and under the leadership of, an Islamic force that denied the relevance of class forces and class goals. The post-revolutionary period showed that the workers and merchants, despite the power they had demonstrated in the revolution, were unable to wield their power independently of the religious authorities, let alone in opposition to them. Subsequent accounts would argue either one side of this process or the other – that this was an Islamic revolution brought about by the exertions of an undifferentiated body of believers, or that the revolution was a proletarian upheaval later betrayed and crushed by a usurping and counter-revolutionary clergy. Neither of these appears to be sufficient. The strength, as well as much of the tragedy, of the Iranian Revolution lay in the manner in which both aspects were combined.

The mobilising role of the Islamic religion

In the Iranian Revolution the Islamic element is a reflection of several factors which, together, produced the unique result of a twentieth-century state run by the clergy along lines derived from

the Koran and Islamic law, and in which the major influence is in the hands of a personage who is constitutionally designated as the interpreter of holy texts. One negative factor played its part in giving prominence to Islam as an ideology of opposition, namely, the destruction by the Shah and his father of the *secular* opposition forces that had mobilised protest movements in earlier decades.¹⁹ Even the guerrilla groups, the *Fedayin* and *Mojahidin*, were at a low ebb by the mid-1970s. The result was that, as in other societies where secular forms of protest are blocked off, religion in Iran became a symbol and an organising centre for a protest that might otherwise have taken a more conventional secular form. Had Mosaddeq not been kept inside Iran and subsequently died, he might have developed some of the allure of the Ayatollah Khomeini.

This 'vacuum' theory is not, however, sufficient. Several other factors have to be taken into account. First, in all its forms Islam claims to be able to legislate for the whole of human activity. In Islam there is no formal distinction between church and state. The very concept of the secular is theoretically excluded, and all social ideas must be legitimated by derivation from the holy texts. In terms of political theory this assertion finds its expression in the attempt to define an 'Islamic' concept of government. In social activity, Islam prescribes modes of behaviour for everyday life and human relations. Like Judaism and Hinduism (though not Christianity), it has concepts of clean and unclean and stipulates ritual activities for each day. As a result, the call for an Islamic society or Islamic policy is far more deeply rooted in the basic doctrine of Islam and in the historical consciousness of Muslim societies than comparable Christian claims. Islamic countries have in practice often exhibited a wide gap between the religious and secular domains, but this has not altered the theoretical overlap of the two upon which Islamic thinkers can draw.

A second factor is the ideological ductility of Islam in general, and in Shi'ite Islam in particular.²⁰ While considerable energy is expended by believers and non-believers alike in arguing which political principles can be derived from Islam, both the evidence of interpretation and the fluid formulations of the Qur'an itself suggest that Islamic theory allows a wide range of derivations. These latter depend on the external circumstances of the time, and the concerns of individual interpreters. The doctrine does not enjoin a specific course of action but it does provide themes that

can justify such courses. One possible line of interpretation is what one may term the *demotic* (as opposed to *democratic*). Islam does not have a religious hierarchy and the position of its clergy depends to a considerable extent upon popular assent. At the same time some of the themes of Islam can serve the cause of popular mobilisation: emphasis on the common concerns of the community of believers, opposition to tyrants, and support for struggle.²¹ The very plainness of Islamic prayer meetings, in contrast to the ceremonials of Christianity, confirms this *demotic* tendency. Because all such policies claim to be derived from the word of God and are interpreted by those with authority, they are not at all democratic, but can still serve the purposes of political mobilisation.

In Shi'ite Islam there are further dimensions of this demotic and undemocratic potential. In Sunni Islam the *caliph* or his equivalent is the head of state. The *caliphs* were direct descendants of the Prophet and since they embodied temporal and religious power, in theory at least, there was no problem of deciding how legitimate government was to be ensured. Born of a division in the early Islamic movement, Shi'ism holds that the twelfth Imam went into hiding and it believes in the occultation or *gheiba* of God's representative on earth, the Imam. It also lays great stress on the sufferings of Shi'ites at the hands of unjust rulers, and upon the cult of the Shi'ite martyrs, Ali and his sons, Hassan and Hussein. Both these factors combine to permit the idea that Shi'ism is an ideology which rejects temporal order, a permanent dissidence *vis-à-vis* both orthodox Sunni Islam and established state authorities. Other interpretations are, of course, possible. Conservatism and political quietism are just as reconcilable with Shi'ism: it is neither inherently radical or compliant. For over a century after Iran became an officially Shi'ite State in 1502 the clergy was properly integrated into the state structure. Shi'ism in sixteenth-century Iran served the function of Protestantism in Elizabethan England – as a state religion designed to distinguish the monarch's realm from other states, in Iran's case Ottoman Turkey. But this arrangement broke down in the eighteenth century and from then on there has tended to be opposition between state and *ulema*, a clash that reached its height at the turn of the twentieth century.²²

Within the many variant and contingent consequences of the original Shi'ite theory, two have had particular political pertinence – one institutional, the other ideological. The institutional

consequence concerns the financial bases of the clergy: in Sunni Islam, where the state is legitimate, the faithful pay their *zakat* and a further levy known as the *khoms* (fifth) is paid directly to the clergy. This means that the clergy are independent of the state in a manner unique in the Muslim world, and that the populace is able to make the religious personnel responsive to their demands. In Iran in the 1960s and 1970s there existed a religious establishment of several thousand mosques and shrines, several tens of thousands of *mollahs*, and a network of *madrases* (religious schools). Mainly funded by *bazaaris*, these were independent of the Shah's control.²³ Ideologically, this link with the people meant that the clergy had little room for improvisation or change. Reflecting the concerns of a conservative constituency, the Iranian *mollahs* were far less concerned to face the intellectual challenges of the modern world than their more autonomous counterparts in the Arab Sunni countries.²⁴ One of the central Shi'ite debates concerned the status of authority in the period of the *gheiba*: while one school accepted temporal authority or advised a process of patient dissimulation or *taqiye*, others advocated a political role for the clergy and derived this course of action from certain Qur'anic principles. It was this latter option that Khomeini was to embrace. In popular Shi'ism, there also lay ideological themes that could be used for political advantage. One was the theme of martyrdom and sacrifice, celebrated every year in the passion plays commemorating the death of the Shi'ite leader Hussein in the seventh century. The other was the belief in a future golden age, a time when the Twelfth Imam would come and create a just society upon earth. If the former was conducive to extremes of political militancy in a revolutionary period, the latter provided a theological goal that enabled many to hope that an Islamic Revolution would indeed create a new and better society on earth. By failing to specify the characteristics of such a society, Khomeini maintained the support of a wide range of social groups, all of whom could believe in his perfect society.

Revolutions require organisation and ideology, and both were provided in some measure by Iranian Shi'ism in its traditional form. But revolutions also require leaders, and in Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini the Islamic movement found such a person. Khomeini had a history and a personality appropriate to his role. He had opposed the Shah in the early 1960s and had been exiled in 1964. He was known to be honest and courageous; he spoke in

clear, uncompromising, and often cruel tone. He also exhibited shrewd political judgement; he saw that his greatest asset was to have nothing to do with the Shah's regime, and he kept his intentions for the future regime as vague as possible in order to maximise political support. He also found the proper moment to strike – mobilising his supporters for the final push in late 1978, skilfully weakening the army, and returning to seize decisive control of the Iranian state.

Khomeini was in many respects the epitome of a charismatic leader. He came to the fore during a time of rapid social change and tension, and appeared to be exempt from the sinful and compromising world around him. He also appropriated the religious title of Imam, which suggested that his role was analogous to that of the returning Twelfth Imam. One reason for his assuming this title was that it circumvented the problem of his not being the senior ayatollah. But it also invested him with a religious authority which suggested he had God-given powers. There are certainly many who seem to have believed not that he was the Twelfth Imam, but that he would none the less introduce a just society as promised in the Shi'ite dramas.²⁵ He himself never claimed to have the specific attributes of the Imam in Shi'ite doctrine – the ability to transmit the word of God as conveyed by angels, the power to effect miracles, and the quality of being *ma'sum* (immune from sin). But the position of *faqih*, or supreme interpreter of the law, where both interpretation and law are invested with religious authority, certainly raised him well above other mortals and members of the Shi'ite clergy. Assuming this religious legitimacy had been established *before* the revolution, the very success of this venture appeared to strengthen his authority and the aura of God-given power he sought to cultivate.²⁶

It is in this context that the thought of Khomeini became particularly influential. Khomeini belonged to that minority faction within Iranian Islam who held to the activist interpretation of the Shi'ite dilemma: he criticised monarchy and thought the clergy should play a leading role. Yet even his thought developed in response to the potential effect it might have. His early writings of the 1940s were critical of monarchy, but did not condemn it outright. Even in the 1960s he accepted the 1906 Constitution. His lectures on Islamic government, published in 1971, reject monarchy and advocate the concept of *velayat-i-faqih* (*velayat* means



government or legal authority, and *faqih* is the standard Islamic term for someone who interprets the law). The concept of the *faqih* as elaborated by Khomeini is therefore a forthright attempt to solve the Shi'ite problem of legitimacy. In 1978, however, he went further and openly rejected the 1906 Constitution. Instead he developed the concept of Islamic Republic, his idea of the society Muslims should try to recreate.

For all its invocation of the past, however, the concept of the Islamic Republic is like many of Khomeini's other ideas: a skilful fusion of Qur'anic and modern themes with the Shi'ite hope of a just society to be created by the returning Imam. He divides societies into two categories of people – the *mostazafin* and *mostakbarin* (literally those made weak and those made big) – two Qur'anic terms which are used in the populist sense of 'oppressed' and 'oppressor'.²⁷ His attacks on *fesad* or corruption certainly have a Qur'anic moralism about them: the main charge on which many of the Shah's supporters are executed is of 'spreading corruption upon the earth'.²⁸ Yet the term corruption would, in the eyes of many poorer Iranians, include more secular derelictions as well. Even Khomeini's relation to nationalism is ambiguous because in the first period of his rule he virtually never mentioned the word *Iran* at all, laying stress instead on Islam and on the need to recreate the Islamic 'Universal State'. Yet much of his diatribe against the West and Western values had an unmistakably nationalist ring, and followed what some secular Iranian intellectuals had been saying for a long time.²⁹ It picked up on the influence of Franz Fanon that had been mediated to Iran via the thought of Ali Shariati, the lay Muslim philosopher whose writings had a great impact upon the younger generation.³⁰ The war with Iraq that began in September 1980 forced Khomeini to lay greater explicit stress on nationalist themes: just as Stalin was forced by the German invasion of 1941 to evoke the greatness of Mother Russia, so Khomeini turned to mobilising support in the name of Iranian patriotism. Even the *faqih* and the role of the Imam epitomise standard populist leadership themes.³¹

Where Khomeini has not accommodated secular forces is in what may be termed his attitude toward modernity: in contrast to some earlier Islamic thinkers such as al-Afghani, who did emphasise the need for Islam to come to terms with science and democracy, and who openly acknowledged the ductility of Islamic thinking, Khomeini has re-asserted the hostility of Islam to mod-

ern ideas and the need to re-establish authoritative doctrinal purity in all matters.³² Yet even this misleading traditionalism is, as we have seen, not a product of some purely doctrinal derivation, but an accommodation to the popular mood in Iran itself and of the way in which the clergy is sensitive to this. Indeed, both the political strength of the Islamic movement in Iran and the particular theological interpretations that emerged in the 1970s were made possible only by the new socio-economic conjuncture in which the clergy found themselves. In sum, the transformation of Iran, with the unevenness and transitional features already discussed, provided the context for the fusion of a discontented urban coalition with the opposition current within the clergy. What might otherwise have been a more recognisable populism, a movement of the oppressed against the oppressor and in search of a perfect society, was shaped and was given that organisation and ideological confidence with which to prevail by the clerical forces led by Khomeini.

The ambivalent international context

At first glance international factors seemed to play an atypically minor part in the course of the revolution itself. The Iranian state had not been weakened by any foreign military defeat or comparable external challenge to its prestige and capacity to govern.³³ Neither the opposition movement nor the Shah enjoyed active foreign support in the final months of the contest. Indeed the absence of any financial or other material backing for the opposition, and the failure of the United States more actively to intervene on the Shah's behalf, are among the most striking characteristics of the whole process.

The Iranian Revolution was in a very definite sense an international event. It had deeply unsettling effects on the West Asian region, both westward, where it appeared to challenge the rulers of Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, and stimulate Shi'ites in Lebanon, and eastward, where it encouraged the Islamic forces fighting the revolutionary Afghan government which came to power in April 1978. After the revolution, Iran extricated itself from the alliance system that the United States had created in the region and became embroiled in two major international conflicts: the fifteen-month dispute over the American hostages, and the war with Iraq that began in September 1980. The Iran crisis of

1946 was (together with Poland) one of the two issues which started the Cold War. The rejection thirty-five years later of the Yalta arrangements by the populations of the two countries introduced a major element of international uncertainty in the 1980s.

Yet the revolution was international in another overt sense, namely in the manner in which Iranians perceived it. Despite the revolutionary universalism posed by Islam, it was felt as a nationalist movement against the political, economic, and cultural influences of the West, and of the United States in particular. This perception was reinforced by one of the most enduring features of Iranian political culture, the belief that political events are determined by a foreign hand. This is as true of the Shah and his supporters, who blamed the revolution on a Western conspiracy to 'bring' Khomeini to power, as it was of Khomeini and the forces associated with him, who regarded the Shah as *sag-i Carter* ('Carter's dog'), and who continued after the Shah's departure to uncover foreign conspiracies at every turn of events. There was a considerable degree of foreign influence in Iran prior to the revolution, and in this sense the perspective of the revolutionaries had justification; but the real interference was far less than was supposed and pointed to the prevalence of that collective paranoia which is such a strong feature of Iranian political life. It fosters such a debilitating atmosphere of helplessness that, far from enabling Iranians to emancipate themselves from foreign domination, it all too often incapacitates them. Although such conspiracy theories are common in many societies, their particular virulence in Iran owes much to the pattern of foreign policy domination in earlier decades: never a formal colony of any European power, Iran did not therefore pass through the clear break with foreign authority that independence involves. Moreover the patterns of semi-colonial control used by Britain, Tsarist Russia and later the US – influencing ministers, fostering dissension in the provinces, suborning the military – were precisely those most likely to engender a conspiracy mentality among Iranians.³⁴ Once this was coupled with the intense exposure to foreign influences at the everyday level in the 1960s and 1970s, and to the fact that the Shah himself *had* been brought back by American covert assistance in 1953, it was less surprising that a simplified picture of foreign control should persist and should substitute for more accurate, but intellectually more demanding, analyses.

Essentially, foreign forces shaped the revolution in at least three respects. First, the whole context in which the upheaval occurred was one of socio-economic transformations under which Iran was increasingly integrated into the world market and exposed to the economic, social and cultural influences of the West. The rate of Iran's oil output – over 6 million barrels a day – was dictated not by a rational calculation of what revenues Iran could most effectively absorb but by the demands of other countries for greater supply. The political and military build-up of the Shah's regime was made as a result of strategic decisions made in Washington. The cultural gap between the Westernised middle class and the class of new migrants in the major towns was one of the underlying tensions that helped ignite the revolution. Above all, oil revenue was important as external revenue, introducing revenue into the society without any comparable transformation of its socio-economic and productive structures.³⁵ Unregulated oil revenues progressively dislocated the regime from its social context and thereby rendered Iran more vulnerable to a sudden upsurge from below.³⁶

A second international factor was the Shah's reliance on foreign support in 1953 and his visible friendship with the United States, together with his quiet but overt sympathy for Israel. This support certainly facilitated his control of Iran in the 1950s and 1960s but in the longer run, like the oil revenues, it undermined his internal bases of support and encouraged the belief that he could dispense with a loyal domestic following. For this reason, the United States was unable to intervene to save him. The pattern of such interventions, from Vietnam to Iran in 1953 shows that an action of this kind requires certain internal conditions to succeed, and such conditions – a sympathetic middle class or a motivated, repressive army – were absent by the time the full dimensions of the crisis had become clear.

The third aspect was US policy in the 1977–9 period. Certainly, it would be a mistake wholly to exclude those factors to which the Shah himself draws attention – the Carter human rights policy and the confusions of US policy-making in the final weeks.³⁷ Yet, these were not the determinant factors. Those issues upon which US critics focused attention – human rights violations and the high level of arms sales – were not those most prominent in the complaints of Khomeini and his followers; the subsequent vicissitudes of Islamic justice do not suggest that a desire for due process

or improved prison conditions was paramount in the minds of those who flocked to the Ashura demonstrations. What can be said is that the Carter policy on human rights reinforced the internal process of political decompression in Iran in 1977 that the problems of the 1974–6 boom had created, and through which certain liberal politicians were able to begin some public activity. It was this example of secular forces that contributed to the feeling among the *bazaaris* and *mollahs* that they too could now be somewhat bolder.

The events of 1978–9 themselves show little signs of having been influenced by US policy. Until early November 1978 the American government did not see that Iran was undergoing a revolution and by that time no course of action, except the dispatch of substantial numbers of troops, would have staved off defeat. The constraints upon the latter were internal to US society – the post-Vietnam reluctance to engage in foreign wars – and also in Iran's strategic position. Such an action, as Brezhnev warned in November 1978, would have run the risk of Soviet intervention in accordance with the Soviet interpretation of their 1921 treaty with Iran. The overriding reason why such a course of action was impossible, however, was the crumbling of the Shah's own regime and of his own determination. There remains the question of whether, in the final days, the United States could have achieved some compromise between Khomeini and the army commanders which would have stemmed the full tide of insurrection that followed.³⁸ This too is an unlikely scenario since there was little incentive for Khomeini to accept it, and once in power, Khomeini in fact did not respect the agreement on immunity of top commanders which he had signed in early February. Therefore, despite the fact that the revolution was affected by both the realities and the myths of Iran's international context, the actual course of events took place on a stage from which, for a variety of reasons, foreign states were for the most part excluded.

Conclusions

Three general conclusions seem relevant to the over-all issue of religion and politics, and of how exemplary the Iranian Revolution may be of other upheavals in the contemporary world.

(1) *The unique combination of 'modern' and 'traditional' in the Iranian Revolution had both institutional and ideological features*

The modernity of the revolution was above all accounted for by the transformation of Iranian society in the 1960s and 1970s, the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, and the demographic and social tensions this produced. Without this transformation, the Islamic movement could have arisen again, as it had in the 1890s, 1900s, and early 1960s, but it would have been much less likely to succeed. The destruction of the imperial regime and the neutralisation of its foreign support were made possible by the great force with which the urban movement erupted, a force derivative of this transformation. Even in ideological terms, the movement reflected the world environment, both in the themes it invoked and in the manner in which the enemy was viewed. At the same time, the movement drew on traditional forces which had survived and even flourished in the years of transformation. In the cities, the bazaars (and the link of bazaar and mosque) gave the opposition a rallying point and an organisational backbone. The clergy provided an ideology of resistance and the principles for an alternative society. The political culture of the mass of the urban population continued to be characterised by religious beliefs and an acceptance of the role of the clergy in political life.

(2) *The Iranian Revolution was, only to some extent, a religious revolution: the values, personnel, goals were all defined in religious terms, and the society which has subsequently been created is one which its creators argue is modelled on the Koran and the Islamic law*

Undoubtedly, religious beliefs and the specific interests of the clergy made indispensable contributions to this revolution. Yet the image of an 'Islamic Revolution' is too simple. First of all, the concept of religion is itself variable: in Islam it encompassed far more than in Christianity, where the principle of a division between church and state has existed for some centuries. The doctrine of Islam does not admit the secular: though a separation of secular and religious has come to prevail over the centuries, it has been far easier for those who wish to re-assert the comprehensive

claims of Islam over all areas of social and political life to do so. Second, the factors enabling the clergy to challenge and overthrow the Shah were eminently secular ones. Thus the Iranian Revolution has more in common with other societies than the specifically religious dimension will permit. Material living conditions, opposition to royal dictatorship, and hostility to foreign influence all played important roles in preparing the Shah's downfall. Third, even the very ideology and programme of the revolutionaries contained many themes common to other revolutionary situations: re-establishment of national independence, expropriation of the rich, punishment of the guilty and corrupt, and redistribution of wealth. The decisive manner in which Khomeini's forces took control of the state and consolidated their hold by the creation of a set of new revolutionary institutions was eminently intelligible to anyone aware of what is involved in the establishment of a new state power.

(3) *The paradoxical unity of the 'modern' and the 'traditional' in the Iranian Revolution accounted for the success of the Shah's opponents, but this unity did not long survive the monarch's fall*

The history of post-revolutionary Iran is to a considerable extent that of a growing dislocation of these two components. The attempt to create a clergy-dominated or hierocratic society, based on allegedly seventh-century principles, in the last quarter of the twentieth century has encountered many problems that permit no easy resolution. The impact of the revolution and its aftermath on the economy has been to lower living standards throughout nearly all of the urban society and to provoke considerable unemployment and inflation. The defiance of all outside powers and the call for the spread of Islamic revolution has led the regime into a full-scale war with Iraq, with enormous loss of life and considerable disruption to the economy. The imposition of a new form of centralised rule, dominated by the clergy, has generated widespread opposition from political forces who supported the overthrow of the Shah, but who do not support the establishment of an Islamic Republic, ruled by the *faqih*. These three dimensions of reality – the economic, the international, and the political – therefore present external limits to the plan of creating an Islamic Republic.

The Iranian Revolution achieved great levels of mobilisation and political impact in the struggle against the Shah and in the immediate post-revolutionary aftermath. Once difficulties arose, and the broad united front that had toppled the Shah broke up, Khomeini was able to establish a regime built in his own image and successfully to crush the various opposition forces he faced. The success of the Iranian Revolution lay not, therefore, only in the destruction of an old regime, but in the successful establishment of a new one, different in many significant respects from that which it had replaced. If it shared more than it admitted with the Pahlavis, it was none the less built on very different systems of power, social support, and values. Yet, while this regime survived its first few years, it remained unclear whether its long-run stability was assured.

The hopes raised by the Iranian Revolution were extremely high, and it is not the only revolution to have disappointed its original supporters, let alone to have failed to create a perfect society on this earth. The post-revolutionary history of Iran has not only showed the limitations of the solutions offered by the Islamic clergy, but also forced Khomeini to stress an archaism inherent in this thought: the appeals to blood and sacrifice, the persecution of enemies and former allies, the brutal imposition of discriminatory Islamic codes of behaviour for women, the callous neglect of human life in the war with Iraq, and the incitement to persecute sexual and religious deviants. All these and more are the themes and policies to which the Imam resorted in order to implement his programme.

Through the revolution Iran became the site of a competition between the theological and the material, the clerical and the secular. The first round certainly went to the theological and the clerical. But how far these forces could sustain their advance in the face of material problems and an inability to meet many of the basic needs of the population remained an open question.

Notes and references

1. An earlier version of this chapter was published in the *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 36, no. 2, Fall/Winter 1982/3. I am grateful to Hamza Alavi and Nikki Keddie for their most helpful comments during the revision. The revised analysis was completed before the publication of Said Arjomand's pioneering article 'Iran's Islamic Revolution in comparative Perspective' (*World Politics*, April 1986) which touches upon many of the points raised here. Despite its too

*
through
religion
children
5-10-70
structure

failure
of
Islam
just?

Q. Was
Khomeini
a materialist?

- easy dismissal of class factors in the revolution (pp. 400–2), and its espousal of the fallacious continuity between millenarian and secular revolutionary thinkers (p. 411). Arjomand's article is a major contribution to understanding of the Iranian revolution.
2. Karl Griewank, *Der neuzeitliche Revolutionsbegriff* (Weimar, 1955), ch. 1.
 3. Thus Radio Ahvaz, broadcasting in Arabic on 1 September 1980: 'This awaiting universal Islamic state will demolish all tyrannical thrones built on the corpses of the oppressed. The sword of justice will claim all charlatans, agents, and traitors.' See my 'Iranian Foreign Policy Since 1979: Internationalism and Nationalism in the Islamic Revolution', in Juan Cole and Nikki Keddie (eds), *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (London, 1986).
 4. One exception is the nineteenth-century Shi'ite writer Mullah Ahmad Naraqi, an exponent of the *Usuli* school which did emphasise the powers of juridical authorities in Islam. But Naraqi did not extend this to include full political power, as Khomeini was later to do (Said Amir Arjomand, 'The State and Khomeini's Islamic Order', *Iranian Studies*, vol. XIII, nos. 1–4 (1980), p. 154). What is striking is that Khomeini does not invoke the precedent of those conservative writers who opposed the secular constitution of 1906. Indeed, while he exhibited an initial tolerance of the 1906 Constitution, he seems later to have regarded the whole period of the Constitutional Revolution as an embarrassment.
 5. This point has been well made by Mohammad Ja'far and Azar Tabari, 'Iran: and the Struggle for Socialism', *Khamsin*, 8, 1981.
 6. Sami Zubeida, 'The ideological conditions for Khomeini's doctrine of government', *Economy and Society*, vol. II, no. 2 (May 1982).
 7. Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, (Princeton, 1982), pp. 530–537.
 8. For a guide to the earlier role of the clergy in Iran see Nikki Keddie, *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society*, (London, 1980) and her *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Iranian Tobacco Protest of 1891–92* (London, 1966). Strictly speaking Islam does not have a clergy in the sense of an ordained body of men. But in this text I have used the term 'clergy' interchangeably with the word *ulema*, literally 'those who know', the standard Arabic Muslim term, and the word *mullah*, the word normally applied to Shi'ite clergy in Iran. Iranians themselves tend not to use the word *mullah*, but to talk of the *akhund*, a slightly derogatory term for an ordinary clergyman, or of the *ruhaniyat*, the body of religious personnel. Higher-ranking clerics are called *mujtahids*, meaning that they have the authority of *ijtihad*, independent judgement on holy matters, whilst the highest ranking are called *ayatollah*, literally 'sign of God'. For a general discussion of Iranian terms for the clergy see Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet* (London, 1986), pp. 231–2. Given the absence of any established hierarchy, the designation *ayatollah* is a result of promotion and reputation within the Islamic institutions. Prior to the revolution it was a term confined to a small number of clergyman, of whom Khomeini was neither the

- senior nor the most learned. The term *Imam*, applied to Khomeini, represents a verbal inflation, but is an honorary title and, at least officially, does not indicate any claim to his being one of the line of Twelve Imams of the Shi'ites believe are the true followers of Mohammad.
9. We do not yet have the detailed information necessary to establish who were 'the faces in the crowd' that made the Iranian Revolution, that is, a precise evaluation of the social forces behind the revolution. While it appears, from the very size and superficial appearance of the demonstrators, that members of all social groups participated, it is much less clear what the proportions were. Some initial indications are given in Farhad Kazemi, *Poverty and Revolution in Iran* (London, 1980). He suggests that it was second-generation migrant industrial workers, not the poorest inhabitants of shanty towns, who participated most in the revolutionary protests. The poorest sections were still outside the social networks that would have drawn them into the demonstrations of late 1978. For an important, earlier study of this issue see Ervand Abrahamian, 'The Crowd in Iranian Politics, 1905–53, in Haleh Afshar (ed.), *Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil* (London 1985).
 10. The demonstrations in the last months of the Shah's regime, involving up to 2 million people in Tehran, and several million more in provincial towns, were the largest protest demonstrations in human history. States have mobilised larger numbers in supportive marches – as in China's Tien An Men Square – but such crowds have never before been seen in an oppositional context.
 11. The terms 'modern' and 'traditional' have been subject to considerable criticism. Their use here does not denote acceptance of a more general picture of social development as being conceivable in terms of a unilinear progression from one to the other. They are used here in a more figurative sense, to distinguish characteristics of Iranian society associated with its past from those resulting from the changes of the last decade.
 12. No full account of the revolution has yet been written, but surveys are included in Abrahamian, and in Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* (New Haven, 1981). Also of interest are Robert Graham, *Iran: The Illusion of Power*, Second Edition (London, 1979), Mohammed Heikal, *The Return of the Ayatollah*, (New York, 1981), and L. P. Elwell-Sutton, "The Iranian Revolution: Triumph or Tragedy", in Hossein Amirsadeghi, ed., *The Security of the Persian Gulf* (New York, 1981). The best eyewitness account is Paul Balta and Claudine Rulleau, *L'Iran Insurgé* (Paris, 1979). On post-revolutionary developments the outstanding study is Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, London 1984. Bakhtiar's own account is given in his *Ma Fidelite*, Paris, 1982. See also my interview with him in *MERIP Reports*, no. 104, March–April 1982.
 13. Graham provides invaluable analysis of many aspects of the economic change; see also my *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (London, 1979), and the references contained therein. On rural conditions, see

- Eric Hooglund, *Land and Revolution in Iran, 1960–1980* (Austin, 1982). A general economic overview is given by M. H. Pesaran, 'Economic Development and Revolutionary Upheavals in Iran', in Haleh Afshar (ed.), *Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil*.
14. The merchants of the Tehran bazaar were particularly incensed in 1976 when the municipal authorities proposed to build a new urban highway that would have passed through the middle of the bazaar area.
 15. American Ambassador William Sullivan complained bitterly of the Shah's indecisiveness, a characteristic foreign observers had noted during the crisis of the early 1950s. One British journalist who met the Shah in September reported that the monarch flatly refused to believe there were any slums in Tehran, a fact evident to the most casual observer. Some pertinent observations are given in Fereidun Hoveida, *The Fall of the Shah*, (London, 1980).
 16. The army chief of staff, General Qarabaghi, was allowed to retire to his home and later went into exile. More mysterious was General Fardust, the former chief of the Shah's private intelligence service, who reportedly became head of SAVAMA, a new state security organization.
 17. Theda Skocpol, *State and Social Revolution* (London, 1979), pp. 14–18. Skocpol's own reflections on the Iranian revolution are in 'Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution' in *Theory and Society*, May 1982. She points to the sociological weakness of rentier states and the mobilising potential of Shi'a Islam as special factors enabling the Iranian revolution.
 18. Ibrahim Yazdi, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic, in interview with the author, Tehran, August 1979.
 19. An important comparative perspective on the 1979 revolution is given by the Mosaddeq period when secular nationalism and a mass Communist movement predominated: see Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh, 1964). The clergy at that time gave some support to Mosaddeq, but turned against him in 1952 and did not oppose the 1953 *coup*. Khomeini never mentions Mosaddeq's name in a positive light and argues that his fall was a result of his abandonment of Islam.
 20. For discussion of this issue see Said Amir Arjomand, 'Shi'ite Islam and Revolution in Iran', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Summer 1981). Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power* (London, 1982), ch. 9, and Hamid Algar, 'The Oppositional Role of the Ulama in Twentieth Century Iran', in Nikki Keddie (ed.), *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*, (Berkeley, 1972). Also indispensable is the work of Akhavi, cited in n. 22 below.
 21. Muslim radicals find confirmation in certain verses of the Koran which are supposed to reinforce their orientation: for example, 'We willed that those who are being oppressed would become the leaders and the rightful inheritors of the world' (*Sura Qesas*, 5); 'Very soon the oppressors will know how they are going to be punished' (*Sura XVIII*, V, 227). The word used for 'oppression', *dhulm*, is the conventional Islamic word for tyranny.

22. An extremely shrewd and careful discussion of these points is contained in Shahrough Akhavi *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran* (Albany, New York, 1980). Akhavi demonstrates the contingency of Islamic thought and hence the availability of a wide range of equally valid 'interpretations'. On Islam as a state religion under the Safavis, see I. B. Petrushevsky, *Islam in Iran* (London, 1985), ch. XIII.
23. A careful study of the organisation and curricula of the Qom *mad-rases* in the mid-1970s is given by Michael Fischer in *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1980).
24. Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*, pp. 126–7. He quotes one reforming *mollah* who denounced *avam zadigi*, the effects of mass mindlessness, and said it was better to be affected by 'floods, earthquakes, snakes, and scorpions' than to be subject to the will of the masses on matters of reform.
25. Some of the theorists of Islamic revolution have developed a concept of a just or unitary society, based on the Islamic concept of *touhid*, or unity of God and man. These writers include the lay theoretician Ali Shariati and former President Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr. But it does not seem that Khomeini ever accepted this concept, and he laid much greater stress on the need to implement the rules of Islamic jurisprudence.
26. In the post-revolutionary period Khomeini was officially described by three titles: Imam, Leader of the Revolution, and Founder of the Islamic Republic. These three sources of his legitimacy represented religious authority, the aura of success, and the programme he sought to implement. His frequent designation as 'Imam of the Islamic Nation', where 'nation' is a translation of the word *umma*, illustrates the ambiguous character of constituency he was meant to represent – Iran, or a wider Islamic world.
27. Khomeini's main writings are contained in *Islam and Revolution*, translated and annotated by Hamid Algar (Berkeley, 1981).
28. The charge of being a *mofsid fi'l arz* ('spreader of corruption on earth') is one common charge in such cases. The other is that of being *mohareb be khoda* ('declaring war on God'). If concepts of legitimacy are essential in mobilising populist coalitions, so too are concepts of denying legitimacy to the other side. Khomeini's favourite term for the Shah was *Taghut*, a term usually derived from an Arabic root meaning to tyrannise. In fact, *Taghut* has a different root, meaning idol or a false god. In later terminology Khomeini was referred to as the *Bot shekan*, the 'Idol Smasher', with the Shah as the first idol to be broken, Carter the second, Bani Sadr the third, and it was hoped, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein the fourth. *Bot* is a Persian language equivalent of *Taghut*.
29. In particular, the writer Al-i Ahmad, whose work *Gharbzadegi* ('intoxication with the West'), was very popular among university students in the 1970s. Although the son of a *mollah*, Al-i Ahmad himself was rather anti-clerical in his writings. For an account of his ideas see Mottahedeh, pp. 287–315.

30. On Shariati see Fischer, *Iran*, Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, and Mangol Bayat-Phillip 'Shiism in Contemporary Iranian Politics: The Case of Ali Shariati', in Elie Kedourie and Sylvia Haim, (eds), *Towards a Modern Iran* (London, 1980). Shariati too was quite anti-clerical, and is regarded by most religious authorities as an unlettered upstart. His writings fall into the mainstream of Third World cultural and nationalist writings of the 1970s. He died in London, in 1977. See his *On the Sociology of Islam* (Berkeley, 1979).
31. One exceptional element in Khomeini's populism is his use of irate paternalism, as he threatens to chastise and punish his followers. This is of course partly a note of Qur'anic punitiveness which will be familiar to his audience, but contrasts with the rhetoric of other secular populists. In a speech in August 1979 he declared: 'When we broke down the corrupt regime and destroyed this very corrupt dam; had we acted in a revolutionary manner from the beginning, had we closed down this hired press, these corrupt magazines, these corrupt parties and punished their leaders, had we erected scaffoldings for the hanging in all the major squares, and had we chopped off all the corrupters and the corrupted, we would not have had these troubles today'. But he goes on: 'I beg forgiveness from almighty God and my dear people.'
32. See Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion*, pp. 27-8, where the Muslim reformer Malkam Khan discusses how to justify modern principles in Qur'anic terms.
33. Skocpol, pp. 19-24, outlines a theory of the international dimension of revolutions on which I have drawn here.
34. For the earlier decades of the century see the classic E. Brown, *The Persian Revolution* (London, 1909); for the early 1950s see Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup* (New York, 1980), a vivid account of the American and British roles in preparing the 1953 *coup* that re-installed the Shah.
35. Hossein Mahdavy, 'Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: the Case of Iran', in M. A. Cook (ed.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East* (London, 1970) and Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran, 1926-1979* (London, 1981).
36. Skocpol stresses the growing autonomy of the state as another central feature of the revolutions she describes. While in my view she overstates the disassociation of ruling class and state apparatus, she none the less indicates a feature of revolutionary situations which contributes to explaining why, at a particular time, an existing state is overthrown. See n. 16 for her application of this thesis to Iran.
37. In his post revolutionary memoirs, the Shah seeks to ignore the growing crisis in his country and focuses uniquely on the role of the US mission to Iran in the last days of his reign: *The Shah's Story* (London, 1980).
38. William Sullivan argues that some accommodation with Khomeini might have been possible in early 1979, but that this was excluded by

an unrealistic 'hard line' being pursued by Brezezinski, the President's National Security Adviser: in 'Dateline Iran: the Road Not Taken', *Foreign Policy*, Washington, no. 40 (Fall 1980) and his *Mission to Iran* (New York, 1981). The best accounts of US Iranian relations are in Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience in Iran* (New York: 1980) and Gary Sick, *All Fall Down, America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*, London 1985. See also my discussion of variant US accounts in MERIP Reports no. 140, May-June 1986.