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Why is the strategy of the Iranian revolution anti-West?

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Abstract

The Iranian revolution was a turning point in the growth of Islamism as an ideology. As with communism, a single country was never the target of the revolution. The Iranian government and its members are at the service of the revolution, not the other way round. By proposing the principle of "neither East nor West", Khomeini called on the Muslims of the world to follow the example of the Islamic Republic in the face of East-West imperialism and the communist-capitalist blocs. Iranian officials routinely claim that "uniting the ranks of Muslims against the enemies of Islam... is one of the most important goals of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The religion of Islam is a solution to save humanity, they argue. Moreover, the West and Western civilization are the root of all the problems of the Islamic world and Muslims. Imperialism, which the Iranians see as the West, is the source of all oppression. Confrontation with the West means saving Islam. Because Western values are not compatible with Islamic values. Understanding the significance of the Iranian revolution is a key to greater stability and peace in the region.

Keywords: Islamic Revolution, Iran, West, Clash of Civilizations, Islamism

Introduction

In February 1979, the Iranian revolutionaries were able to overthrow the monarchy in Iran. The goal of the revolution against the monarchy was to establish democracy, equality, social justice, and so on. A revolution that changed its course and goals completely after its victory. Less than two months after the victory of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, to determine the new system of governance, at the suggestion of Seyyed Ruhollah Khomeini (the founding

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father of the Islamic Republic and the leader of the revolution), a referendum was held on 30th – 31st of March, 1979, in which the voters had to answer with ‘YES’ or ‘NO’ to the following statement: “Changing the old regime to Islamic Republic.”.

Although some groups objected the wording and choice of alternative and boycotted the referendum, it was approved by 98.2% of eligible citizens, according to official results. No group campaigned for a No vote in the referendum. After announcing the result of the referendum on April 1st, Seyyed Ruhollah Khomeini announced the beginning of the rule of the Islamic Republic.

All parties opposed to the religious regime in Iran were suppressed, the political system became the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Iranian Revolution was called the Islamic Revolution. Just a few months after the victory of the revolution in Iran, Khomeini declared that:

Our officials should know that our revolution is not limited to Iran. The revolution of the Iranian people is the starting point of the great revolution of the Islamic world. The Islamic Republic government should do whatever is necessary to improve the management of the people, but that does not mean to deter them from the great goal of the revolution, which is to establish a global Islamic government. (Khomeini 2008 vol.8: 327)

The Iranian revolution was a political turning point, and its role was pivotal to the growth of Islamism as an ideology. Like communism, a single country was never the target of the revolution. The Iranian government and its members are in the service of the revolution, not the other way around. The revolution took place in Iran, but from the revolutionary religious people’s point of view, the goal of the revolution is not confined to the borders of Iran but spreading it throughout the Islamic world and non-Muslim countries, is the ultimate goal of the revolution.

Iran declared its revolution as Islamic, not just a Shiite one; it hoped to inspire Sunni Muslims as well. Although many Sunni militants saw Iran’s Shiite theology as anathema, the idea of a religious revolution was compelling and gave new energy and hope to the existing organizations.

By proposing the principle of *neither East nor West*, Khomeini called on the Muslims of the world to follow the example of the Islamic Republic in the face of East-West imperialism and the Communist-Capitalist blocs.

Khomeini had repeatedly stated that the policy of exporting the Islamic Revolution of Iran is a strategy that believes in exporting the teachings of the Islamic Revolution to other countries and with the aim of achieving similar examples in Islamic and non-Muslim countries (Arabi 2019).

In Khomeini's view, communism, and Western liberalism both seek to destroy Islam, and Muslims must unite to confront it: “Both are taking steps to strengthen the foundations of the Islamic nations' devotion and plunder their vast wealth and natural resources” (Arabi 2019)

During the unprecedented popular unrest in Arab world (known as Arabic Spring) in the Middle East, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stated in a February 21, 2011 speech that two simple remedies are required to solve the problems that afflict the contemporary Islamic World. According to Khamenei, “unity among Muslim [states]” and “The weakening of America” are the two necessary steps that all Muslims must take to secure a “bright” future for the *umma*ⁱ or the worldwide Muslim Nation (Vatanka 2011).

In the view of the leaders of Iran and the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, Islam is the solution to save humanity. Also, the West and Western civilization are the roots of all the problems of the Islamic world and Muslims. Imperialism, which in Iranian view means the West, is the source of all oppression. Confrontation with the West means saving Islam. Because Western values are not in line with Islamic values. Western civilization must be destroyed to save Islam. At present, the United States, Israel, and their allies are the representatives of the West.

The issuance of the revolution is necessary to create solidarity and unity among Muslims, and the Iranian revolution must be exported to other Islamic and non-Islamic countries.

In Iran, we want to get the answers to the following questions:

- *Why and how does Iran export the revolution?*
- *Why does the Islamic Revolution consider the West as its enemy?*

Why does Iran export the revolution?

In his speeches before and after the revolution, Khomeini repeatedly emphasized that their movement was an Islamic movement and was not limited to the borders of one country.

Khomeini believed that the Islamic revolution in Iran wasn't just for Iran itself but was part of a larger movement for Islam that transcended national boundaries. He drew parallels between the movement for Islam and the mission of the prophets, highlighting the universality of their message and its relevance to the entire world (Khomeini 2018).

Exporting the revolution is a principle in Iran's foreign policy that is inspired by the original Islamic teachings such as supporting the oppressed and denying the domination of tyranny and arrogance which seeks to free the oppressed from the shackles of arrogance and convey the message of the Iranian revolution to the world. The continuation of the revolution depends on its exporting (Yazdani and Akhjasteh 2012: 62)

Preserving the Islamic Republic of Iran as an achievement of the Islamic movement was one of the priorities of the Islamic Revolution, and accordingly, they must first preserve the Islamic regime of Iran in order to continue exporting the revolution. "Exporting the Revolution in the short term is a means of defending the Islamic Republic and ensuring its security, especially in the Persian Gulf, and in the long term, it is a means of establishing a world order under the umbrella of Islamic justice. It is its inclusiveness that it inspires Muslim and oppressed nations" (Najafi 1998: 112–113).

Iranian officials routinely claim that the "unification of the ranks of Muslims against the enemies of Islam has been one of the most important goals of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is another part of Khomeini's words about the export of the revolution: "We export our revolution to the whole world because our revolution is Islamic. There is a struggle for Islam to rule the whole world. And as long as there is a struggle against arrogance anywhere in the world, we are there" (Kalate Arabi 2018).

According to these views and the purpose of the Islamic Revolution, exporting the Islamic Revolution is a religious duty, the ultimate goal of which is the establishment of Islamic rule throughout the world and this means the destruction of all other civilizations and cultures.

How does Iran export the revolution?

In Khomeini's thought, with the development of the responsibilities of the Islamic system, the purpose of establishing such a system is defined at three levels: *national*, *regional (Islamic)*, and *global*. Therefore, his comprehensive approach to the Islamic political system is

extroverted and cosmopolitan. That is, he considers the effort to expand the influence of Islam in the world as the original responsibility of the Islamic State beyond national borders. The idea of export is the common ideal of most revolutions, although the type and the nature of such actions vary in their types. Tools and methods of exporting the revolution from Khomeini's point of view: "Supporting world liberation movements, media propaganda, holding seminars and congresses, training and sending money, admitting and sending students, strengthening embassies and increasing scientific research and cultural centers abroad" (Khomeini 1981)

A military force was needed to protect the Islamic Revolution from internal and external threats. The preamble to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic states:

Not only the Revolutionary Guards and the army of the Islamic Republic will be responsible for protecting and guarding the borders, but they will also be responsible for the mission of the school, namely jihad for the sake of God and the struggle for the expansion of the rule of the law in the world. (Falah Nezhad 2005:4)

Accordingly, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is a military organization that was formed in the first days after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 by the order of Khomeini. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps will continue to play its role in guarding the Islamic Revolution and its achievements. The Revolutionary Guards is not just a military entity, but a military, cultural, and economic entity that controls a large part of the Iranian economy and is responsible for overseas activities and the export of the Iranian revolution.

According to the seventh paragraph of the IRGC's statute, supporting the oppressed and liberation movements was one of the IRGC's duties, and on this basis, a unit of liberation movements was formed within the IRGC.ⁱⁱ

The Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or the Quds Force is one of the five forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran, which is responsible for foreign military activities. The main mission of the Quds Force is to organize, nurture, equip, and invest in Islamic revolutionary movements against the system of global tyranny and international Zionism and to confront the oppressive conditions against Muslims. In addition, the Quds Force is responsible for strategizing the system's foreign policies.ⁱⁱⁱ

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran has proved one of the most consequential events in the history of modern terrorism. The revolution led to a surge in Iranian-backed terrorism that continues, albeit in quite different forms, to this day. Less noticed, but equally significant,

the revolution provoked a response by Saudi Arabia and various Sunni militant groups that set the stage for the rise in Sunni jihadism.

Iranians believe that the Islamic Revolution in Iran has been the greatest motivator of Islamic political movements. Meanwhile, countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, the Arabian Gulf countries, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tunisia, Palestine, and North Africa have been directly affected and Syria, Nicaragua, and South Africa have been indirectly affected by the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

The activities of the Quds Force can be divided into eight categories: 1- Western countries 2- Iraq 3- Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India 4- Israel, Lebanon, and Jordan 5- Turkey 6- North Africa 7- Saudi Arabia 8- Former Soviet Republics.

Militias supported by Iran in at least 9 countries include:

1. *Hezbollah in Lebanon*
2. *Hezbollah Brigades in Iraq*
3. *Hezbollah al-Nujaba in Iraq*
4. *Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq in Iraq*
5. *Badr Organization in Iraq*
6. *Liwa Abu al-Fadhal al-Abbas in Iraq*
7. *Hezbollah al-Hejaz in Saudi Arabia*
8. *Houthis (Ansarullah) in Yemen*
9. *Liwa Fatemiyoun in Afghanistan*
10. *Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain*
11. *Islamic Movement (under the guidance of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky) in Nigeria*
12. *Muhammad's Army in Pakistan*
13. *Hamas in Palestinian*
14. *Palestinian Islamic Jihad.*

Why does the Islamic Revolution consider the West as its enemy?

Muslims call the civilized world Dar al-Islam; Dar al-Islam includes all the lands in which Islamic law is prevalent and a kind of Islamic government rules. This land is surrounded by Dar al-Harb on all sides; “Dar al-Harb is the residence of infidels who have not yet converted to Islam and have not submitted to the rule of the Muslims” (Isazade and Hassan 2016: 45).

For centuries, Muslims have been accustomed to the historical view that they consider their religion to be right and to offer it to other human beings as their sacred duty. They consider the realization of the Islamic Umma as the crystallization of God's will on earth and believe: “There is a state of war between the Islamic State and the neighboring infidels permanently and compulsorily; a war that ends only with the inevitable victory of the religion of Islam over infidelity and the entry of the whole world into Dar al-Islam.” (Isazade and Hassan 2016)

Iranian ideologues consider Western civilization and the United States to be the greatest threat to the existence of Islam. This stance has been taken by political Islamists throughout the delegation – Shiites and Sunnis – and is practically trying to transform Islam from a religion into an anti-Western and anti-American ideology. This divisive worldview, which espouses a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West, has had far-reaching consequences beyond Iran’s borders. The success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran galvanized both Shiite and Sunni fundamentalists and extremist Islamist movements. They sought to emulate Khomeini’s success in establishing a state defined by the boundaries of Islam. This analysis found significant overlaps between Iran’s worldview and that of Islamist groups worldwide.

Islamists have come up with three ways to confront the West:

1 – *Compatibility with Western-American civilization;* Compatibility from the Iranian point of view means accepting the authority and the absolute sovereignty of the opposite civilization and settling in it.

2 – *To engage and fight against that civilization;* in this way, wherever Western civilization steps in, Islamic civilization will confront it and engage in a hard and physical battle. From the

Iranian point of view, these two scenarios alone do not work and each of them suffers from a kind of deviation and fundamental problems.

3 – *The third scenario is the scenario of competition and domination* so that instead of engaging with the West or peace and coming to terms with it, we think of serious competition with Western civilization in all fields and turn the field from a confrontation to a scene of competition. This scenario is the strategy of the Iranians to confront Western civilization (Kothbi 2020).

The Iranian regime often justifies its anti-Western posture through a historical narrative that portrays Iran as a victim of imperialism and colonial exploitation. Historical events such as the 1872 Reuter concession, a contract between a British banker and the king of Iran; the 1892 Tobacco Revolt, a protest movement against tobacco, the concession granted by Iran to the UK; and the 1953 US-backed coup, have become part of the Islamic Republic's discourse. The regime has deployed this discourse as a means of cultivating anti-Western sentiment, as well as justifying the Islamic Republic's hostility towards the West in general and the US in particular (Kothbi 2020).

In the view of the leaders of Iran and the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, the religion of Islam is a solution to save humanity. Also, the West and Western civilization are the roots of all the problems of the Islamic world and Muslims. Imperialism, which the Iranians see the West, is the source of all oppression. Confrontation with the West means saving Islam. Because Western values are not in line with Islamic values. Western civilization must be destroyed to save Islam. Ahmad Rahdar, a member of the faculty of Baqer al-Uloom University (AS) says:

The decline and death of Western civilization will naturally be like its gradual emergence, and Western culture and civilization, led by the United States, has followed a path that will eventually, lead to its downfall. What is certain is that the Islamic Revolution of Iran has played a very significant role in accelerating the decline of the United States and the West, so that both independently and as a strong catalyst, it has been able to accelerate the defeat of the West and its civilization foundations. (Arabi and Ansari 2019)

Four decades on, Khomeini's words still resonate, and the ricochet effects of the Islamic Revolution are still felt in the region and beyond. Understanding the importance of the Iranian Revolution is key to wider stability and peace in the region.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran has proved one of the most consequential events in the history of modern terrorism. The revolution led to a surge in Iranian-backed terrorism that continues, albeit in quite different forms, to this day. The main problem of the West is not Islamic fundamentalism and extremism, and terrorist groups like al-Qaeda, but Islam itself. Islam is like a civilization whose followers believe in the absolute superiority of their culture, but the fact that they are weaker than the West at the moment, bothers them a lot and they feel inferior and despair about it.

Muslims are like communists. Both groups follow a monopolistic and totalitarian profession and claim to have definitive answers to all earthly and transcendental questions and issues. As Samuel Huntington puts it: "The concept of pacifism has no place in Islamic teachings and practices."

Notes:

- I. The term Umma is an Arabic word. It was used sixty-two times in the Quran, in both the Meccan and Medinan periods. Its most common meaning is that of a group of people or a community, and it also refers to a religious community or a group of people who follow God's guidance. Most usages of umma in the Quran, however, are not related to the community of prophet Muhammad.
- II. "Executive Regulations of Article 24 of the Employment Law of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps". In, *Research's center*. <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/114717> .
- III. "Quds Corps from its formation until today" (2021). In, *IRNA*. <https://rb.gy/0bfp9v> .

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