ABSTRACT OF THE Ph.D. THESIS

THE RELATION BETWEEN RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT IN IRAN AFTER THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION (1979)

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The Iranian Revolution in 1979 transformed Iran from a monarchy under the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini, an aging cleric, as the leader and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. After the French and Russian revolutions, it has been called the third revolution in the world. It was unique for its surprise created throughout the world. It lacked many of the customary causes of revolutions such as defeat in war, financial crisis, peasant rebellion or disgruntled military in which produce profound change at great speed and overthrow a regime thought to be heavily protected by a lavishly financed army and security services. It replaced an ancient monarchy with a theocracy based on Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (Velayat-e Faqih). This revolution as a revolution without borders was chanting “Neither East nor West but Islamic Republic”. It introduced itself as a seamless revolution in the world and proclaimed to have a new way of ruling for the world’s countries especially the third world and Islamic countries. Through integration of republicanism and religion, it was to rule religion on elective and democratic institutions, in other word, confining liberalism to religious injunctions. From its inception, the Islamic Republic was to create conditions under which may be nurtured and protected the noble and universal values of Islam. To achieve this mission, unelected institutions such as the Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council were created and empowered with the ultimate authority over national affairs.

The present research is to survey relation between religion and government in the Islamic Republic of Iran. For this purpose, it has been focused on the roots of the Iranian Revolution victory along with a diverse coalition of political parties and groups such as liberals, communists and fundamentalists. consolidation of the Islamic power during the first years of the revolution through two chief events of the US embassy taking hostage on November 4, 1979 and international conflict of Iraq’s invasion to Iran on September 22, 1980 and eliminating dissent parties and groups and solidifying religious sovereignty on
the country. Power structure according to the constitution including elective and non-elective institutions and related amendments in offices leadership, legislature, executive, guardian council and other parts are on the major focus of this study. Nevertheless, it was on 6 June 1989 that Iran changed domestically and internationally with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Three tendencies emerged in Iran’s political sphere, pragmatists stressing the need for a greater focus on the economy, hard-liners insisting that their mandate from God empowered them to disregard popular aspirations, and reformers stressing the need for a more tolerant theocracy began to battle one another for influence and power. Moreover, the philosophy of Jurisprudence (Velayat-e Faqih) and its pro and anti views and its compatibility with democratic parameters have been examined. Another significant issue of the Islamic republic of Iran is its foreign policy especially towards the region countries and in this regard, Iran’s relation with them and having ideological influence on them in the name of exporting its revolution have been discussed. Whereas Iran has been called as the “axe of evil” by the Bush administration after September 11, 2001, this research is to discuss its international and domestic effects on Iran. Today the Islamic Republic stands at a crossroads. As Iran nuclear program matures and becomes the subject of international scrutiny, another dynamic is entering the debate: public opinion. This debate and defend of it has been the significant and main strategy of Iran’s foreign policy, therefore, these themes as the controversial parts of Iran’s foreign policy have been discussed.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on library research, both primary and secondary sources have been used to understand and explain the Islamic Republic of Iran. The primary sources include the original writings and the correspondents by the authorities of Iran like leadership, president, the parliamentary debates, press… and numbers of articles, which have been written in both Persian and English. The secondary sources include the researches based
on religious, political, revolutionary and Islamic studies … related Iran both in Persian as well as in English carried on by Iranian and foreign scholars as well. The memoirs and biographies of Iranian authorities especially Ayatollah Khomeini, have been formed the major sources of research material. Regarding this, I have largely studied and used the Islamic Revolution Documents Centre, War Documents and Foreign Ministry ones. Also, internet articles and website, Iranian Press especially in the first years of the revolution have been used. It is noticeable that Parliamentary debates from Parliament Library and Iran’s National Library have been considered. Furthermore, I as an Iranian have been quite familiar with all circumstances and it helped me to have a more realistic view towards realities. The research has seven chapters including:

**Chapter I: Introduction and Research Methodology**

It has attended to introduction of research and its aims, in order to find out mutual relation between religious and government in Iran contemporary after 1979, and also its methodology.

**Chapter II: The Roots of Iranian Islamic Revolution**

This chapter contains discussions on the roots of the revolution, concerning theories such as conspiracy- modernization- economy and religion, political space after the Coup (1953) and its impact on the 1979 revolution, uneven progress and political underdevelopment, open and underground activities of diverse political groups such as liberals, communists and fundamentalists, and at last triumph of the revolution in 1979.

**Chapter III: Consolidation of the Islamic Republic**

In this chapter, two sections have considered. In section I, consolidation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the US embassy-taking hostage by a group of Iranian students on November 4, 1979 and beginning of 8 years Iran-Iraq war on
September 22, 1980 and its impact on consolidation of the Islamic republic, and approbation of Iran’s constitution on 3 December 1979 has been debated. in section II: examining power structure including non-elective institutions (the leadership, guardian council, expediency council…) and elective institutions (the presidency, parliament, assembly of experts), their possibilities and restrictions.

**Chapter IV: Political Factions in Islamic Republic of Iran**

Section I: emerging three political factions including conservatives, Pragmatists, Reformists, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and their views towards domestic and international affairs. section II: Furthermore, the concept of Velayat-e Faqih (Jurisprudence) as a type of Shiite Islamic government, the philosophy of Velayat-e Faqih (Jurisprudence) as the thrust issue of Iran’s political structure and its compatibility with democracy have been debated.

**Chapter V: Iran’s Place in the Region**

In this chapter Iran’s policy in the region as an appropriate place to export, its revolution has been focused. Concerning this, Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), Iraq after Saddam, relation between Iran and the Persian Gulf countries, The Arab East and Eurasia has been discussed.

**Chapter VI: Iran’s Dilemma**

Section I: Iran’s position in international community with especial reference to attacks of September 11, 2001 and calling Iran as the “Axis of Evil” by the Bush administration and in Section II: Iran’s challenging nuclear program and its policy towards international community have been debated.
Chapter VII: CONCLUSION

Toward the end of his life, Ayatollah Khomeini reemerged as the leader of a populist revolution and an Islamic Republic that pledged to remake the entire region into its image. A coalition that featured clerics, westernized intellectuals, defiant students, middle-class professionals, and traditional merchants would be held together by a cleric who came to personify Iran’s struggles and tribulations. Ayatollah Khomeini offered something to everyone: he was a religious leader who would redeem the prophetic quest for construction of a pious order; a Third wordlist with a determination to emancipate his state from America’s encroaching capitalist empire; a modernist with an appreciation of democratic ideals, a defender of women and the oppressed; and always, a Persian nationalist seeking to restore Iran to its rightful place.

Despite the clerical determination to assume power, a look back at Iran in 1979 actually reveals the influence of the secular forces. The first post-revolution prime minister of Iran was Mehdi Bazargan, who despite his revolutionary disposition was a true democrat. The liberal movement led by the venerable National Front with its strong nationalist credentials commanded substantial support among the middle class and was strongly represented in the new provisional government. Even the radical Left still had a growing audience, particularly among the youth and industrial workers. The discursive message of the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), with its mixture of Marxism and Islam, still lured many university students. The Fadayan-e Khalq could still mobilize hundreds of thousands for their demonstrations, and their newspaper enjoyed widespread circulation. Even the Communist Party, the Tudeh, with its long history of struggle against the monarchy and claims of economic justice, proved tantalizing to an intelligentsia attuned to the cause of Third World liberation.
The original draft of the Islamic Republic’s constitution was a further rebuke to Ayatollah Khomeini’s vision of theocratic absolutism. Modeled along the lines of the French constitution, the Iranian document encompassed provisions for a strong presidency, an elected assembly, and individual rights. The notion of clerical monopoly of power and the subordination of the popular will to the dictates of a Supreme Leader was markedly absent. Despite vague assertions of Islam’s importance to the nation, the document was not just progressive but reflected the influence of the secular parties and leftist forces. Unlike the divided secular opposition and the quietist ayatollahs, Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters had long honed their organizational skills through decades of exile and oppositional activities. Through the effective use of mosques (Iran’s only nationwide network), the creation of shadowy organizations with their own militias and effective manipulation of external crises. Through domination of the revolutionary committees overseeing local affairs, appropriation of the defunct regime’s wealth, and mobilization of their zealous supporters, Ayatollah Khomeini and his allies fashioned a parallel regime with more authority than the tentative and moderate provisional government. While the government continued to issue orders, the secretive Council of the Revolution, was busy countermanding its decisions. In addition, the American embassy proved a tantalizing target. On Sunday, November 4, 1979, a group of Iranian students took over the U.S. embassy in Tehran, beginning a crisis that would last 444 days. In the midst of the enveloping turmoil, Iran held elections for parliament and for the Assembly of Experts, which was to evaluate the draft constitution. In the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, the clerical hard-liners and their political party, the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), came to dominate the new parliament, further buttressing their encroaching institutional dominance. In a similar vein, the Islamist forces captured the majority of seats in the Assembly of Experts, ensuring them a commanding voice in the revision of the constitution. The new constitution created the unprecedented theory of velayat-e faqih whereby a
religious leader would oversee all national affairs. This office, had virtually unlimited responsibilities and was empowered to command the armed forces and the newly created Revolutionary Guards, dismiss any elected official, countermand parliamentary legislation, and declare war and peace. The new office was subject neither to elections nor to the scrutiny of the elected institutions and the larger public. Islamic law was to displace the existing legal codes, circumscribing individual rights and prerogatives. A Guardian Council, composed mainly of clerics, was to vet all legislation, ensuring their conformity with Islamic strictures. The constitutional arrangement guaranteed that Ayatollah Khomeini’s reinterpretation of Shiism would remain the ideology of the state and that only those devoted to his vision would command critical institutions. On December 3, 1979, a frenzied public in a national referendum duly ratified the new constitution, with its antidemocratic provision. At every step of the way, the clerical militants had exploited external crises to accelerate the pace of the revolution and purge the regime of undesirable elements.

On September 22, 1980, yet another international conflict convulsed the republic. Saddam took the catastrophic decision to invade Iran, beginning one of the longest and most destructive wars in the modern history of the Middle East. The Iran-Iraq war was unusual in many respects, this was a war waged for the triumph of ideas, with Ba’athist secular pan-Arabism contesting Iran’s Islamic fundamentalism. As such, for Tehran the war came to embody its revolutionary identity. The themes of solidarity and sacrifice, self-reliance and commitment not only allowed the regime to consolidate its power but make the defeat of Saddam the ultimate test of theocratic legitimacy. As an ideologically driven state, Iran never defined the war in terms of territory lost or gained but as a spiritual mission seeking moral redemption. For the clerical rulers, Iran had been attacked not because of its provocations or territorial disputes but because the Islamic Republic embodied a virtuous order. This was an infidel war against the Islamic revolution, the “Government of God,” and the sublime faith of Shiism.
Having dismissed the elected president and silenced their clerical detractors, hard-liners unleashed a reign of terror that was to disenfranchise the remaining secular opposition forces – the old elite had to be forcefully removed before the new one could ensure its political hegemony. This was essentially the end of the revolutionary promise of a progressive, inclusive society that embraced pluralism while remaining loyal to its religious traditions. This process of consolidation of the revolution soon moved beyond the political elites as Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed his own cultural revolution. The universities were closed for two years as their curriculum was altered, television and news media bombarded the populace with Islamic propaganda, and the women who had made up such a critical part of the revolutionary coalition were forced to wear strict religious dress. Every aspect of public life had to conform to Islamic strictures, with loyalty tests and ideological standards determining admission to universities, the civil service, and the armed forces.

Ayatollah Khomeini implemented the Islamic ideology that he had spent decades developing and refining, and he created a new constitutional system with clear redlines and an elite loyal to his vision, which ensured that the Islamic Republic would survive his passing. Iran would now be guided by activist clerics and a strict interpretation of Shiite Islam. Alternative ideologies such as liberalism or secularism and politicians and clerics challenging of the velayat-e faqih were simply excluded from the councils of power. To be part of the ruling echelon one had to be committed to the Islamic Republic and its mission of salvation. On June 6, 1989, the founder of the Islamic Republic died. The simmering conflicts that had been held in check by Ayatollah Khomeini’s authority now became all too evident, his disciples soon lapsed into an intense factional struggle as contending interpretations of Islam, differences over economic policy, and Iran’s role in the international community dissolved the unity of the clerical elite. In essence, the tensions between the regime’s
revolutionary ideals and its practical requirements burst to the surface, bedeviling Iran’s new rulers. Without Ayatollah Khomeini available to resolve these disputes, stalemate and deadlock became the new currency of Iranian politics.

Three political tendencies emerged in the struggle for the leadership of the Islamic Republic, all led by very different clerical politicians. The hard-liners, united by their contempt for democratic pluralism and their determination to sustain Ayatollah Khomeini’s divisive legacy, would ultimately settle on Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as their standard-bearer. The more moderate and pragmatic elements within the clerical hierarchy would coalesce around Iran’s ultimate political insider, Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. These more tempered clerics believed that the perpetuation of Islamic rule mandated a greater attention to the economic deficiencies of the state and integration into the global economy. The pragmatists would press for a degree of cultural freedom and normalized relations with states that Ayatollah Khomeini had long castigated. Finally, the Islamic Republic featured a dynamic cadre of clerical and intellectual reformers who stressed that the legitimacy of the state was contingent on the vitality of its representative institutions. Also drawing on Ayatollah Khomeini’s legacy, they emphasized the elected branches of the state and the importance of popular will in charting the national course. Muhammad Khatami would emerge as the most important, but by no means the only, representative of this cohort. These factions would now battle one another for influence and power, as the Islamic Republic’s institutions were increasingly pitted against each other. The point remains that these three broad factions are likely to challenge one another for control of the Islamic Republic, and despite the ebbs and flows of their political fortunes, they will determine Iran’s future. However, the difference between the reformers and the hard-liners was their interpretation of the prerogatives of the office and the extent to which it must accommodate popular imperatives. For the hard-liners the powers of the Supreme Leader were immune from electoral scrutiny. For the reformers the absolutism of the office
contravened the democratic spirit of the constitution. Tensions and contradictions that such an order inevitably provoked would be resolved through compromises that democracies are particularly capable of forging.

In foreign policy as with most revolutionary states, Iran has journeyed from being a militant actor challenging regional norms to being a pragmatic state pursuing a policy based on national interest calculations. However, Iran’s journey has been halting, incomplete, and tentative. Through the 1980s, under the Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran thrashed about the Middle East, seeking to undermine established authority in the name of Islamic redemption. Ayatollah Khomeini’s successors would wrestle with the legacy, as they sought to integrate the theocracy into the global society. From Rafsanjani to Khatami to Ahmadinejad, Iran’s presidents would seek, balancing vision with the mandates of the international community. The best manner of understanding Iran’s regional policy is to envision three circles: the Persian Gulf, the Arab East, and Eurasia. Given the fact that Iran’s oil is largely exported through the Persian Gulf, the theocracy eventually appreciated the need for stability in this critical region. As such, ideological crusades and threat against the Gulf sheikdoms ended, and Iran accepted the prevailing status quo. In a similar vein, the theocratic regime recognized the futility of antagonizing its powerful Russian neighbor, and did not inflame the Islamic sentiments in the former Soviet bloc. As the two powers cultivated favorable economic and strategic relations, Iran was provided further incentives for a policy of moderation. However, in the more distant Arab East that neither bordered Iran nor offered it lucrative commercial opportunities, Tehran behaved in a zealous manner and allowed its animosity toward Israel to condition its strategy. The fact remains that Iran’s excessive ideological posture toward this region did not infringe on its tangible interests, limiting the need for caution and pragmatism. The Islamic revolution was a struggle between good and evil, a battle waged for moral redemption and genuine emancipation from the cultural and political tentacles of the profane and
iniquitous West. Iran is a country of contradictions and paradoxes. It seeks to lead the region while remaining largely suspicious and disdainful of its neighbors. A perennial struggle between aspirations and capabilities, hegemony and pragmatism has characterized Iran’s uneasy approach to the Middle East.

In his 2002 State of the Union address, President Bush effectively closed off the possibility of a new chapter in U.S.-Iranian relations, denouncing the Islamic Republic as a member of an axis of evil, along with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and Kim Jong Il’s North Korea. Bush described Iran as a “major sponsor of terrorism,” and once more condemned the “unelected few” who suppress a restive populace. In the meantime, important changes were taking place within the theocratic state that further diminished prospects of a rapprochement. The United States had not only failed to reward Iran’s constructive behavior but was once more beating the drums of regime change and pressing the international community to embrace its sanctions policy. Washington’s new reliance on democratization as a means of dealing with security challenges like proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism did not bode well for an Iranian regime whose politics were distinctly reactionary. For the hard-liners, the United States was the source of all of Iran’s problems, and for the pragmatists it was the solution to the theocracy’s mounting dilemmas. As Iran’s nuclear program matures and becomes the subject of international scrutiny, another dynamic is entering the debate: public opinion. Far from being a source of restraint, the emerging public sentiment is that Iran, as a great civilization with a long history, has a right to acquire a nuclear capability. The recent disclosures of the sophisticated nature of Iran’s nuclear program have been a source of pride for a citizenry accustomed to the revolution’s failures and setbacks. Iran’s experience during the past quarter-century with war, sanctions, and estrangement from the international community has fostered a population that is somewhat unresponsive to external pressures.
The reality remains that the Islamic Republic never evolved into a pure totalitarian state such as Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. As the revolution settled into a more predictable pattern of governance and as the regime’s detractors were eliminated from the scene, the differences and divisions among Ayatollah Khomeini’s disciples began to surface. To be sure, Iran’s factions may submerge their differences and defend the regime when it is challenged by student protests or American threats, but the core disagreements within the elite remain unabridged. The Islamic Republic may not be a big tent, but it is still a tent with diversity of views and opinions. The simmering tensions between clerical leaders and the popular base of the regime and its constitutional pledges and republican mandates ensured divisions and rivalries. Even within its restrictive confines, the Islamic Republic would always feature robust and lively debate. Iran today is a nation in search of an identity, a state that oscillates between promises of democratic modernity and retrogressive traditions. The call for representation and the rule of law, for accountability and equality, have transformed the average Iranian from a passive observer politics into an active agent of change. The resilience of the forces of progress stems from their diversity. Clerical reformers, disillusioned youth, a burden middle class, women seeking emancipation, and intellectuals yearning for freedom of thought have come together in their demand for a government responsive to its citizenry. In essence, the struggle in Iran is not a simple conflict between the people and the clerics. Iran’s factional politics, ideological divisions, and political rivalries are much more complex and nuanced.

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