

1980

About the Role of Islam in Iran

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Summary:

Stasi report outlines the history of Islam in Iran as well as Ayatollah Khomeini's personal history and foreign policy statements in an attempt to better understand the Iranian government and its likely foreign policy.

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About the role of Islam in Iran

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1:

Especially three reasons are forcing us to an intensive occupation with this topic:

- The Iranian antiimperialist and democratic revolution which led to the abolishment of the Shah- monarchy and the reign of the foreign imperialists, was conducted under the leadership of the Shiite clergy with its Ayatollah Khomeini on top. For the analysis of the internal situation and for the prognosis of its possible development as an Islamic republic the occupation with the Shiite Islam and its history is vital. The occupation with the Shiite Islam and its history is vital for the analysis of the internal situation and for the prognosis of its possible development.

- Further the new foreign policy in its crucial points can also be explained from objective conditions like for example the international balance of power, the internal forces like the liberal bourgeoisie as well as from ideological fundamentals of the Islamic Shi'ism.

- Doctrines emerge how in social and political discrepancies or revolutionary situations (in some circumstances also in counterrevolutionary situations) religious forces can mobilize the masses in a short time.

2:

93% of the population of Iran are Muslim, of which 95% belong to the Shiites that represents one of the two mainstreams. The Shiites are described as the followers of the Imam Ali, one of the cousins of the prophet Mohammad. (Shia in Persian means something like grouping.)

The Shiites are the biggest sect within the Islam. Outside of Iran they primarily live in Iraq, Pakistan, Oman, in the eastern parts of Turkey, in Lebanon and in East Africa. The Shiites like the Sunnites (the representatives of the Islamic mainstream) accept the Coran. One of their central beliefs is the return of the Imam Mehdi who was murdered in 871 AD.

There is no fix hierarchy within the Shiites cloth, however a certain and recognized hierarchical definition takes place. The ordinary clergymen are called Mullahs. After further theological studies one can achieve the title Ulema. The respected Ulemas are called Modshetehiden. From their midst the ones with the greatest authority name themselves Ayatollah. The Ayatollahs elect one Grant Ayatollah who is the head of the Shiite religion. There are also different currents - moderate or conservative - for example the Ayatollah Schariat-Medavi as well as the radicals Khomeini and Taloghani.

Religious centers of Shi'ism are the cities of Qom and Meshed.

In order to properly evaluate the social role of Shi'ism and its cloth, it is necessary to consider the following principles:

- Unlike the rest of the Muslims, the Shiites don't believe in the determination of all material through God, they rather consider the Islam as a religion that is able to creatively progress. This kind of approach can be best seen in the great flexibility of the Iranian Shi'ism towards the assessment on the current commandments. Therefore, when assessing Khomeini it's not enough to look at his values in the sixties.

- The Shiites always understand their doctrines as a struggle against their oppressors which in their belief represents some kind of atonement towards the murder of their religious models.

- At mass announcements in December 1978 Khomeini was declared by the masses to some kind of Imam (upon whose return the Shiites have been waiting). Due to this declaration Khomeini's invocations gain a justiciable character towards the Shiite believers in Iran.

Due to the enforced capitalistic development in Iran and the associated reduction of religious traditions the Shiite cloth lost more and more influence over the social life in Iran.

The Shiite high cloth often acted in opposition to the ruling regime because their own interest had been limited or cut short. The Iranian history offers a variety of such examples where clergymen took the lead over mass movements. Thus the uprising of 1848 - 52 against the arbitrary rule under the guidance of the cloth is still appreciated by many Iranians. In terms of the revolutionary events from 1905 to 1911 the cloth supported the endeavor of the masses for an establishment of a constitution.

From 1950 to 1953 the Iranian people fought against the foreign oppression and dependence, supported by parts of the cloth under Ayatollah Kashani. By announcing the possibility of declaring a holy war against the disbelievers in Iran, he supported the wish of the people to have a liberated homeland from the foreign oppressors.

June 1963 entailed with its revolutionary contentions the separation of the Shiite cloth from the Shah- Regime. Despite the Shah's attempts to reintegrate the cloth into the regime, the opposition under Khomeini grew. In the current contentions this spiritual opposition was able to decide upon the content and form of said contention due to their strong influence over the masses. Major reasons for this power of determining are the strong influence of Shiite traditions among the population, certain democratic tendencies of the Shiite worldview and the constant connection with nationalistic, antiimperialist forces.

After the Shah established a regime of comprehensive terror against every opposition in the beginning of the sixties, the divinity of the mosques offered the only possibility for an occupation against the Shah. In the tradition of Shi'ism, the mosques form important centers. Like this the political ideas to overthrow the Shah could only be developed in close proximity with the Islamic laws which are widely accepted by the masses. With the continuation of the struggle the need to develop models for resolutions for the construction of an Islamic republic has to be addressed by the cloth.

The roots and backgrounds of the current religious Shiite expressions of the political development in Iran can be observed as followed. "After bitter years of colonial and economical oppression and dictation by the European powers and the USA", the "retrieved self- confidence of the Muslims" took place (epd from 11. 2. 1964). In 1953 the Mosaddegh government nationalized the Anglo-American petroleum companies in

Iran. As a result this government was overthrown by with the help of American and British intelligence agencies. The now by the Shiite leader Khomeini appointed Prime Minister Bazargan was chief of the by Mosaddegh nationalized petroleum companies. Just like the newly by Khomeini appointed chief of general staff of the Iranian military forces Gharani was the commander-in-chief of the army under the Mosaddegh government. After the subversion of the Mosaddegh government the exploitation rights of the American, British and French petroleum companies were reinstated in concession treaties, combined with a corresponding dependence of the monarchical Shah- Regime. In 1963 the Shah declared the so called white revolution. A reform program to accelerate the capitalistic development. Hence the religiously motivated Shiite resistance applied strongly again as it contradicted the interest of the cloth.

Looking back at those years, according to an estimation made by the PRAWDA (ND from the 25. 1. 79), the urgent socio-economic problems have been ignored for many years which worries the majority of the population, the national bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, the youth as well as the religious leaders of the country. Khomeini declared his resistance against the Shah's white revolution as early as 1963. In 1963 approximately 9.000 demonstrators were shot in demonstration in Teheran. Khomeini went into exile, where he began to praise the Islamic revolution in Iran. In the course of the Shah's reform program towards the development of capitalism, among others the property of the Islamic clergymen in Iran was dispossessed. The Shah didn't "succeeded in engaging the influential Shiite cloth into the white revolution ever since". The cloth blames the Shah for breaking the Iranian constitution which, in its general outline, permits the clergymen the right to a say (HORIZONT 5/79). The Turkish Prime Minister Ecevit states in an interview over the Shah's withdrawal that the Shah "made an attempt for industrialization without considering the political and social consequences".

3:

Around the turn of the century, Ruholla Khomeini was born in the Islamic province Khomeini. Khomeini's father was killed in the revolutionary disputes of 1905 to 1911. His father and grandfather who both carried the title Ayatollah, raised the young Ruholla Khomeini in the spirit of the Islam. Khomeini learned from them that the enforcement of the Islamic doctrines can be best achieved through the struggle against its enemies. At a young age Khomeini already visited the holy city Qom and became a well-known Ayatollah there. After the Grand Ayatollah Borudsherdi died, Khomeini became his successor.

In a book published in 1941 by Khomeini, he summarized his attacks against the monarchy under the Shah's father. In 1963 Khomeini was arrested after a sermon about "freedom, independence and the struggle against the foreign supremacy" and sent to prison for a short amount of time. Powerful demonstrations however enforced his release. 1964 Khomeini was banished after a publication against the privileges of US- military advisors in Iran. It wasn't until 1978 that an anti-Khomeini article in an Iranian daily newspaper became the triggering moment for the contention in Iran, in the course of which Khomeini emerged as the symbol of movement. Khomeini put down his principles about the role of the Islamic religion in the state during his exile in Iraq in the late sixties in his book "the Islamic government". (his utterances in the 1970ies also have to be taken in to account- need to be regarded as a process). There he wrote: "It weren't the laws of the Eastern and the Western bloc that made the moon landing possible, because those are contradictory laws. In my view they are both behindhand as they are not capable of implementing the moral virtues in their society. The material progress which they achieved was borne by the spiritual progress. In Islam, state means to carry out the laws which god assigned to the prophet and to subject to them." In an Islamic republic, there is no separation of state and religion.

The Shiite leader Khomeini's attitude towards the Tudeh Party is known to be as

followed. The future form of government consists of the opinion of the majority of the people. The Marxists are only a "drop in the ocean" and are never to force their will on the people in arrogance. Khomeini therefore doesn't see any possibility to cooperate with them on a governmental level. Nevertheless they are free to advocate their own views and convictions. The positions of the Shiite leader Khomeini towards the Jewish people or Israel are portrayed as follows: In his book "The Islamic government" Khomeini explains that the world Judaism is planning a "complot against the Islam". This needs to be stopped by all means. To the press Khomeini states: "The Arabic states should not allow the existence of the state of Israel is to be sanctioned. We don't believe in any kind of legal basis for the existence of Israel. Palestine is part of the Islamic realm and as such has to return to the Muslims."

Prime Minister Bazargan is said to be person of integrity, pious, highly intelligent and to stand up for the civil liberties who also happens to an anti- communist by conviction. Under Mossadegh he was, as previously mentioned, the chief of the nationalized petroleum companies, he was principle of the University of Technology, he is a physician and chemists and he wrote many books about the popularization of the Shiite Islam in spirit of a reformation and adaption to the new times. He can be regarded as the most leading theoretical head of a reformation of the Shiite Islam which took place over the last 15 years although the breadth masses haven't realized that yet. For his new cabinet, he installed "downright technocrats", specialists, so in the event of a formation of Islamic republic, no one would be able to villainize it as a return to the middle ages. Bazargan is regarded as a representative of the liberal bourgeoisie that sees its goals to be achieved with the fulfillment and has no interest in continuing the revolution.

4:

In a TV and Radio interview on the 18th of February 1979, Khomeini said that the superpowers were first against him and his movement and are now, after the complete and fast victory, trying to obtain a good relationship to him. Even the Soviet Union was against him, though less extreme than the USA. In this context, it is important to have a close look at the contradictory statements made by Khomeini about for example the relationship with the USSR.

The new Iran wanted to establish ties to all countries, however there will be no special relations with the western countries and the focus of foreign policy remains, like demanded by the Coran, on the relations with Islamic States, ahead the relations with Palestine. He claims to have always had good relations with the PLO and they support each other. This is very positive for foreign relations. The "Islamic counterrevolutionary opposition" in Afghanistan opposes a huge problem for Khomeini.

On the 19th of February, the leader of this Islamic counterrevolutionary opposition send a telegram to Khomeini against the new progressive state power in Afghanistan. We can stay tense about Khomeini's reply.

As a substitute for the US- military, Khomeini and Bazargan want to groom the French militias.

5:

- Observations of western intelligence activities: According to a publication of the US- magazine "Washington Post", the US- government commissioned American intelligence agencies to monitor all Islamic movements and organizations (there are approximately 500 Mio. supporters of the Islam) and to continuously report to them in detail as a lesson from the events in Iran (ND 22.1.1979). The US- intelligence agency were thoroughly mistaken and even rejected a detailed report by the Israeli intelligence agency from June 1978 where severe riots in Iran have been predicted,

justifying their actions by constituting that the Shah- regime will last at least another 10 years.

The position of the Tudeh Party to the current events in Iran

In the country itself, a conflict inflamed between the left groups. The people's party, founded in the country itself in 1941, happens to be the successor of the communist party in Iran which existed since spring 1920 and fought illegally since 1931 until 1937 when the entire organization was entirely destroyed by the then Shah- Regime. The people's party of Iran had its most successful combat sector so far in 1945/46. At that time, the party encompassed around 100. 000 members and hold great authority and popularity within the crowds due to their consistent struggle against oppression and exploitation. Its members and sympathizers could mainly be found with petroleum workers, intellectuals and the military. They were the initiators for democratic organizations of the workers and peasants, the youth and women of Iran. Thus the central associated labor union council of laborers and workers was founded under their command and which encompassed around 300. 000 members at that time.

In 1949 the people's party was banned by the Shah. Nevertheless they understood how to play an active role in Iran's political life from 1951 to 1953 during the administration of civil- democratic Prime Minister Mossadegh. In connection to the military coup in 1953, mainly organized by the CIA, they suffered severe setbacks and great losses. They were antagonized as the main enemy by the Shah- Regime and therefore suffered the biggest losses of all the political forces in the opposition. All illegal party organizations were smashed. At great costs, in 1972 the Tudeh Party managed to rebuild single smaller party branches in the country. So far the Tudeh Party has not yet been able to establish a mass basis however they have no small impact on important social forces like petroleum workers and parts of the intellectuals.

Demands of the communists

In December 1975 the people's party released a new party program which revealed a scientific analysis of the situation and the current contradictions. The recent developments in Iran confirmed all of this. In this program, the party came to the conclusion that overthrowing the Shah- Regime is the unconditional requirement for path of development for the national Interests of the Iranian people. Therefore they invoked the formation of an anti-dictatorial front. The party program also includes further immediate objectives which correspond to the demands of a national democratic revolution and that were specified and updated in an invocation of the central committee of the people's party on the 4th of September 1978.

Among other that included:

- Formation of a government of national coalitions and establishment of the republic;
- Freedom to all political prisoners, punishment of the main culprits of the crimes of the old regime;
- Protection of the democratic liberties, elections for a constitutive convention and acceptance of the new constitution;
- Deportation of all US- advisors and announcement of the military treaty with the US, termination of the enormous arms purchases, withdrawal from the imperialist military pact CENTO and annexation to the group of the states, not bounded by a pact;

- Creation of Iran's full sovereignty over its petroleum

Current role of the Tudeh Party

Even though the people's party of Iran weren't numerically the strongest oppositional forces against the Shah due to the yearlong brutal oppression, said party program played an important role in the spiritual preparation of the current developments in Iran. Outbound from the content of this program, the Tudeh Party supported those solutions of the central forces of the people's party super headed by the Shiite leader Ayatollah Khomeini which showed an antiimperialist objective and objectively correspond to the national interests of the Iranian people. The people's party also acted along these lines towards the representatives of the civil national front who as well know joined Ayatollah Khomeini and he therefore demanded them to form a unity front.

Nureddin Kianouri, the first secretary of the ZK of Iran's people's party, explained in an interview on the 8th of February: So far, the leader of the other political organizations and parties refused to officially cooperate with the people's party in such a unity front.

In the field, however, the unity front has already been achieved "on the battlefields of the streets, the factories, the universities and in the villages". The struggle to overcome the current difficulties and to establish a new Iran shall draw his unity closer. In a statement from the 12th of February 1979, the ZK of the people's party called for vigilance, unruffled preparedness for battle and action unit in order to consolidate the historic victory against all inner and outer resistance and to make it irreversible. (Extract from "What and How" 3/79)

Observations on further internal events

Such groups and movements as the MODJAHEDING and the FADAJIN advocate as armed groups which influence the petroleum workers, the complete dissolution of the army (which Khomeini and Bazargan need though against the Left) and the generation of a "people's army".

How exactly the contentions will develop is unclear at the moment. It is very likely that Khomeini will prevail against these groups as well due to his massif influence.