

After Khomeini: Iran under His Successors

Said Amir Arjomand

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 268 pages.

Drawing on the sociology of revolution, Arjomand's book is set on explaining the political developments of Iran and its rollercoaster-like domestic and foreign policy realities during the past two decades. According to the author, the greatest misconception about post-revolutionary Iran is the notion that the revolution ended with the establishment of a "Brintonian" Thermidor through the rise to power of the pragmatist president Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1989-97) and/or the reformist president Khatami (1997-2005). In contrast, "this book argues that the Islamic revolution did not end with Khomeini's death and that there was no return to 'normalcy' the day after. Massive revolutionary violence abated while the revolution continued" (p. 5).

Chronologically assessing the post-Khomeini era, chapter 1 deals with Khomeini's trend-setting Islamic/political vision before and after the 1979 revolution. His succession and further attempts at routinizing his charisma through the establishment of the dual leadership – between Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Khamenei – are treated in the second chapter. Chapter 3 analyzes the pragmatist orientation of Hashemi-Rafsanjani's presidency, in response to which both the new hardliners and the reformists emerged as major political contenders, with the reformists' rise and eventual demise treated in chapters 4 and 5 of the book. The highly original chapter 6 deals with the integrative socioeconomic and political consequences of the Iranian revolution, especially as they relate to the formation of the country's new political class: the ruling clerical elite, the lay second stratum, and the

consolidation of the military-security-commercial circles, the political implications of which, as demonstrated in chapters 8 and 9, have made possible a marriage of convenience between the hardliners and the clerical elite led by Khamenei. Also explained, in chapters 7 and 10, are the shifts in Iranian foreign policymaking, mainly by reference to how these were conditioned by the interaction between Iran's domestic political realities and America's Middle Eastern policies. Furthermore, Arjomand argues, the post-2005 era constitutes a return to an aggressive foreign outlook replacing the Khatami era's Dialogue of Civilizations, notably visible in the regime's reinvigorated hostility toward Israel and its handling of the nuclear program.

The book deals with the subject in two important ways: first, acting as the background and enriched by parallels drawn from the other great social revolutions, is the notion that the analysis of revolutionary contexts must be based on much longer timeframes, thus dismissing the characterization of the Iranian case as a historical anomaly. Second, constituting the bulk of the work, Iran's post-revolutionary politics are seen as the *intended* consequences of the fundamental principles of the Islamic revolution put forth by Khomeini's vision of the Islamic Republic, namely, theocratic government, participatory democracy, and populist social justice. The interplay of the latter principles, in conjunction with the historical contingencies associated with the struggles toward consolidating the new political order, have been responsible for determining the patterns of sociopolitical action, and thus, Iran's constitutional politics to date.

Combining the conceptual tools borrowed from the eminent Islamic thinker Ibn Khaldun and Weberian ideal-types, Arjomand adopts a widened and dynamic conception of *'asabiyah* to include revolutionary solidarity. Thus although the revolutionary transformation continues unrelentingly in Iran, the original, radical, and all-encompassing ideology, at the heart of the revolutionary *'asabiyah*, has faded into the background. The major political groupings contending for power – reformists, pragmatists, and hard-liners/clerical elites – developed a transformed solidarity based on each group's shared formative life experiences, material and ideal interests, and rallied around a different founding principle of the revolution. Distinguishing between the smaller club of the regime's ruling clerical elite and the far larger club of the clerical and lay second stratum, Arjomand notes that while in the former case a pre-existing *esprit de corps* enabled it to rally around the revolution's theocratic element, among the latter there emerged two factions espousing diametrically opposed positions. Those whose solidarity

was entrenched during the revolution's bloody first decade and the war espoused the principle of populism/social justice and thus formed the hard-liners; those who later espoused a new synthesis of tradition and modernity and an anti-ideological reading of Islam rallied around the democratic/republican principle of the revolution and formed the reformists.

As of 2004, Iran's new political class is a composite group comprised of the ruling clerical elite and the lay second stratum's hard-line elements, mainly drawn from the military-security establishment. This political class has learned to share power in networks of economic clientelism and the neo-patrimonial balancing act of the supreme leader. While this "power-sharing" arrangement may have been equally beneficial to both parties in the past, in recent times the military-security-commercial establishment's power has risen exponentially, as is visible in the latter's staged electoral coup of June 2009 that decimated the revolution's democratic/republican basis and established an "elective clerical monarchy" (p. 187). This daring move, however, has caused a split among the ruling clerical elite, forming a cleavage that may ultimately lead, argues Arjomand, to the complete takeover of power by the hard-line lay second stratum.

While Arjomand accounts for the hard-liners' rise around the banner of populism/social justice, as the intended consequence of the revolution, he conceptually downplays the contingent role of Khomeini and his ruling clerical elite, who, lacking Khomeini's charisma and authority, tried desperately to bolster their grip on power against the forces of pragmatism and reformism by unleashing the mighty power of the military-security-commercial establishment. Nevertheless, *After Khomeini* may indeed prove to be a conceptually ground-breaking work of great interest to both lay people and specialists in Iranian, Middle Eastern, Islamic studies, and the sociology of revolution. Its account of the transformation of Shi'ism into a state religion and its partial "Sunnitization" will undoubtedly be of value to students of Islamic studies. The work constitutes an invaluable contribution to a genuine theoretical understanding of post-revolutionary and post-reformist Iran, insofar as it seeks to uncover the complex interplay of the intended as well as of the unintended consequences of the 1979 revolution.

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