

The Impact of the Islamic Revolution of Iran on International Relations

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The victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 is considered an important political and international development. The transnational essence of the Islamic Revolution, the international position of Iran, and the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf all indicate that the Islamic Revolution has been an event of international significance. Thus, the study of the causes and the process of this Revolution and its theoretical and practical impacts on international relations seem to be a logical necessity.

Anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran Celebrated in other Countries



The Essence and Nature of the Islamic Revolution

The Islamic Revolution of Iran may be defined in three different ways; first, a socio-political event pertaining to a particular time and place; second, a way of life and thinking and a socio-political discourse with particular connotations; and third, a political system referred to as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Each of these concepts and definitions has different theoretical implications and influences on International relations.

The Islamic Revolution proved to be a fundamental change in the political, social, cultural, and economic structures of the Iranian society that took place as a

result of a collective stand of the Iranian nation that was based on Islamic ideology and under the leadership of the late Imam Khomeini over the period January 1978 to February 1979. It was, therefore, a phenomenon caused by certain particular incentives and objectives making it one of the greatest revolutions of the world.

Islam-Oriented

Undoubtedly, one of the most important characteristics of the Islamic Revolution that distinguishes it from other revolutions of the world is being Islamic in essence. Unlike other revolutions of the 20th Century, this revolution was based on an

ideology and, therefore, as the ideology of the Islamic Revolution Islam had a decisive role in determining people's incentives and objectives and was also the cause of mobilizing revolutionary masses during the course of the struggle.

Moreover, the leadership of the movement was with the late Imam Khomeini who was a Muslim scholar while most of those who participated in the movement were from among the people motivated by religion, and contrary to the focal ideas of these schools of thought this Revolution took place as a result of the close correlation and compatibility between religion and politics.



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Being Cultural in Essence

Another outstanding characteristic of the Islamic Revolution of Iran is its cultural essence, which is admitted by all the views on the causes, motives, and objectives of this Revolution. Being cultural in essence reflects upon two factors: a) the decisive role of cultural elements, motives, and objectives in the formation movement and victory of the revolution; and b) a return to the traditional and indigenous culture, values, and norms of Iran. Thus, even though the Islamic Revolution of Iran did benefit from modern instruments for overthrowing the monarchial regime, it was not in any way related to modernity and was rather founded on the pure Islamic culture of Iran, making it distinct from modern contemporary revolutions.

The cultural nature of the Islamic Revolution of Iran did not merely cause problems for theories on revolution but also challenged the positivistic paradigm that dominated international relations. This was because these theories do not give any credit to non-materialistic structures in international relations. Even the newly emerged existing cultural theories did not consider any determining role for indigenous and traditional cultures that did not fit into such discourses as secularism and modernization. Therefore, unlike the prevailing materialist civilization of the contemporary world the Islamic Revolution of Iran started and became victori-

ous on the basis of the Islamic culture.

This characteristic of the Islamic Revolution challenges the ontological and anthropological principles of international relations. Non-instrumentalist rationality-based spirituality undermines the very basic hypothesis of the existing main trend - the theory of rational selection - in international relations, since the behavior of the revolutionary masses of Iran in 1978 and 1979 does not fit into the above-mentioned theory, which professes minimum cost for the attainment of most profitable objectives.

Peacefulness

Political violence being one of the accepted elements of all revolutions makes the Islamic Revolution of quite peaceful in comparison to other great revolutions of the world. Unlike other revolutions, it was not based on the use of militancy and

guerrilla warfare for enforcing political change in the structure and organization of the state, and rather it drew its power from the commitment of the unarmed masses and cultural and religious elites. In other words, the revolutionaries were armed with soft power rather than armaments. The power that sprung from Islamic thoughts and teachings and manifested in the form of the collective will of the nation to overthrow the monarchial regime.

The peacefulness of the Islamic Revolution practically upset the traditional theories on international relations as regards the role of military and hard-power and made room for the introduction of ideationalism in international relations; theories that emphasize and focus on normative power and non-material structures.

Independence

The aim of the revolutionary movement of the Iranian people was both freedom from internal tyranny and liberty from the influences of foreigners or national independence. These two goals were clearly manifested in the slogan "Esteqlal, Azadi, Jomhuri-ye Eslami" (Independence, Freedom, and the Islamic Republic). However, the independence the people of Iran sought was not merely political and economic independence and rather they were after cultural independence and reconstruction of their cultural identity.

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The Discourse of the Islamic Revolution

The Islamic Revolution of Iran was not merely a historical event and/or socio-political phenomenon; it was a political and cultural discourse. It was a set of interconnected logical predicates that create a particular thought and way of life and make certain behaviors and norms possible. Therefore, the Islamic Revolution was not merely a historical event to have come to its end on February 11, 1979, but has rather been a set of cultural, political, social, and religious ideas, predicates, beliefs, concepts, and notions that could give meaning to man's social life and recreate his socio-political behaviors and norms.

As a result, the victory of the Islamic Revolution was not its end for which reason it continues to prevail. This means, all the characteristics, concepts, and values of the Islamic Revolution have been recreated and continue to prevail in the discourse of the Islamic Revolution. Thus, it is an Islamic, cultural, spiritual, discourse based on non-instrumentalist and non-materialistic rationality.

Besides, as a political discourse, it comprises four aspects that tend to increase its impact on international relations. It may, therefore, be said that the discourse of the Islamic Revolution is a transnational, universal, liberating, and inspirational discourse in the area of

international relations.

Universality

The discourse of the Islamic Revolution, which defines concepts on the basis of Islam, is universal in nature looks for re-defining man, human life, and Islamic socio-political order. Thus, the expanse of the coverage of discourse of the Islamic Revolution is the entire humanity irrespective of race, ethnicity, color, and nationality. The universality of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution along with its qualities of being liberating and transnationalism can ensure its acceptability in both homogeneous Islamic and heterogeneous non-Islamic societies.

The spread of Islamic Revolu-

tions does not in any way imply its coercive or physical transfer in the form of revolutions in other societies and, on the contrary, owing to the very essence of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution, it refers to it being welcomed by those societies after perceiving its essence and truth.

Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Islamic Republican system of Iran is the link between the two concepts of the Islamic Revolution as a socio-political event and phenomenon and the Islamic Revolution as a political-cultural discourse. Thus, the most important outcome of the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran was the establishment of an Islamic Republican system of government that gave rise to a new socio-political order. In other words, the Islamic Republic is a system through which the Islamic Revolution would continue to be manifested. The question is how a socio-political event would be reproduced within the context of a political system? The answer to this question is that the Islamic Revolution of Iran would continue through the reproduction of discourse of the Islamic Revolution within the framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This may be explained by stating that based on a reciprocal process of empowerment between structures and agents the discourse of the Islamic Revolution (structure) reproduces the Islamic Republic of Iran (agent)

and in return, the Islamic Republic of Iran reproduces the said discourse through the revolutionary norms and attitudes adopted by it; implying that while being complementary none can survive in the absence of the other. Should the discourse of the Islamic Revolution cease to act as a social structure and ideational system, the Islamic Republic of Iran will lose its meaning and identity. By the same token, if the Islamic Republic stops acting revolutionary the discourse of the Islamic Revolution cannot be reproduced. Thus, the Islamic Revolution is reproduced and continues to live by way of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In other words, so long as the Islamic Republic continues to exist and act in a revolutionary manner the Islamic Revolution will continue to endure. It is for this reason that after more than three decades of the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution it is possible

to talk of its existence and impacts in the present times.

The Impacts of the Islamic Revolutions on International Relations

In its three different senses (a socio-political phenomenon, political and cultural discourse, and the Islamic Republic of Iran) the Islamic Revolution has had certain significant impacts on international relations. In other words, theoretical and practical impacts have, in turn, influenced theories on international relations and the process of theorizing either directly or indirectly. Therefore, in order to examine the theoretical impact of the Islamic Revolution, it is important to scrutinize them individually. The most important of these impacts on international relations include: revival of political Islam and Islamic awakening, formation and reinforcement of Islamic movements, increased role of the Islamic world and the Middle East in international relations, the revival of the role of religion and religious ethics in international relations, ideological confrontation, the revival of the role of culture, identity and clash of civilizations in international relations, degeneration of the political notion of nation-state and nationalism, deconstruction of the international system, challenge to instrumentalist rationality and/or unity of rationality, destabilization of the liberal-secular culture and values dominating the international system and destabilization of secularism.

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