



Imam Khomeini's Political Thought

Professor John Northman, University of New York



The following article discusses different aspects of Imam Khomeini's (RA) political thought:

The political thoughts of Imam Khomeini (RA) are a part of his macro ideas being influenced by different aspects of his thoughts.

Given the fact that Imam Khomeini was a multi-dimensional personality who authored numerous works in mysticism, jurisprudence, philosophy, theology, and politics, and in view of his being the founder and leader of the Islamic Republic, obviously, his political thoughts encompass all concepts that have some governmental and societal applications.

The most central concepts of his political thought are the following: the relationship between religion and politics, justice, freedom, independence, democracy, legalism, culture, Muslim unity, the interest of Islam and Muslims, global invitation to Islam, its expansion, revitalization of national - Islamic identity, foreign policy based on Islamic ideals and defending the oppressed and dispossessed throughout the world.

Thought is an idea or opinion produced by thinking or occurring in the mind. Political thought is a collection of ideas and opinions that shape, in a rational, logical, and demonstrative method, the development of political life. In fact, it refers to thinking about politics at any level of conceptualization and articulation. It can be descriptive and explanatory and a political thinker is one who can argue about his ideas and opinions demonstratively and logically in a way such that his thoughts are no longer considered to be merely his personal ideas and preferences.

The political thoughts of Imam

Khomeini (RA) are a part of his macro ideas being influenced by different aspects of his thoughts. Given the fact that Imam Khomeini is a multi-dimensional personality who authored numerous works in mysticism, jurisprudence, philosophy, theology, and politics, and in view of his being the founder and leader of an Islamic thought-based system, obviously, his political thoughts encompass all concepts that have some governmental and societal applications. Imam Khomeini(RA) is one of the greatest contemporary Muslim thinkers; he is one of the history-making men of the Islamic world.

He was a great thinker having full knowledge of various branches of science. This trait of him made him a multi-dimensional personality.

Many people who engage in politics and political issues have written books and articles about Imam Khomeini's political thoughts. Obviously, we cannot, for the sake of brevity, delve into all angles of his political thought. Therefore, we will make very brief and cursory references to some of the angles of Imam Khomeini's thought and we request the reader to refer to special books in this regard in order to find more details.

The most brilliant and outstanding features of Imam Khomeini's political thought can be enumerated as follows:

1. The relationship between religion and politics: One of the central concepts in Imam Khomeini's thought is the relationship and interplay between religion and politics in a way such that we find the cornerstone of his political thought in the very relationship. The belief in the necessity of a government

and in defending the necessity of the existence of a political system in society is among the basic and fundamental discussions in Imam Khomeini's political thought. He was one of the scholars who firmly believed in the necessity of establishing a political system during the period of occultation. He, by presenting rational and textual proofs, proved that, firstly, the very existence of a government is essential for human society. Secondly, society stands in need of an acceptable government at all times including the time of the occultation of the infallible Imam (AS), and efforts must be made to solidify it.

2. Justice: Justice is one of the key concepts underscored by the late Imam Khomeini (RA). It is considered to be the most pivotal socio-political orientation of the political system from his perspective. In his theoretical and practical stance, Imam Khomeini considers the establishment of equity and justice in society as one of the most important objectives of the political system: "God, the Exalted and Glorified, says that 'We sent Our apostles with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the balance that men may conduct themselves with equity and that social justice may prevail among them.'" Indeed, one of the characteristics of Imam Khomeini's politics is that he maintained that government is not but a tool for actualization and materialization of justice and spirituality in society because if justice is established in society, man is enabled to move towards growth and prosperity. Similarly, if society is deprived of justice, it will also be deprived of prosperity and salvation.

3. Freedom: Freedom was one of the main mottos of the Islamic revolution and one of the concepts that Imam Khomeini defended fundamentally. He termed freedom not as a motto and political tool but as a basic human right. He maintained that it is man's basic right to be free and it is immaterial whether the freedom has anything to do with others i.e. civic and social freedom or individual freedom which includes freedom of belief, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, freedom of parties, and freedom of press. In fact, it is clear that these freedoms will not be unlimited and unconstrained. According to Imam Khomeini (RA), these freedoms are limited to the point where they harm the interests of the country. Imam Khomeini (RA) considered religious and country rules, which are derived from Islam, as the border of freedom, and said that there was a border between freedom and conspiracy in the world and in all countries.

4. Independence: Independence in all areas, absence of affiliation, negation of aliens' intervention, severance of strangers' influence, not being under others' supervision, and sovereignty of the country are definitions that Imam Khomeini(RA) gives for independence.

5. Democracy: Democracy, people's role in determining their destiny and their active presence in various political and social arenas are other pivotal aspects of Imam Khomeini's political thought. When it comes to a nation's role in determining its destiny, Imam Khomeini says: "We do not intend to impose something on Muslims. Islam does not allow us to be dictators. We

are obedient to the people's vote. Whatever the vote of the people is, we follow it. God does not authorize us, and the Prophet does not authorize us to impose something on Muslims."

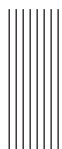
6. Conformity to law: Conformity to law is one of the basic principles of Imam Khomeini's political thought. According to him, acting upon the law is obligatory upon each and every individual in society regardless of his position and rank. In his government, it is not the person but the divine law that matters. Everyone should be subservient to the law irrespective of who he is. Imam Khomeini believed in the rule of law to such an extent that, in his view, even the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was obedient to it.

7. Culture: Imam Khomeini (RA) is one of the most influential thinkers of the present era in the contemporary history of Iran. He considers culture as the basis and pillar for political and economic issues. He was of the opinion that if cultural problems are addressed and man is educated properly, all other problems will be solved: "So, culture is a man-making factory. The Prophets also came for the same purpose. They came to mend the man..." According to Imam Khomeini, a complete and man-making culture exists only within Islam, and educating society and people is possible only through the Islamic culture. Educating a nation depends on whether or not that nation's culture is a good culture. You should endeavor to make the [Iranian] culture an independent Islamic culture."



8. Unity: Unity among various strata of people is another constituent of Imam Khomeini's thoughts in the world of politics. He considered unity to be the secret behind the victory of the Islamic revolution. He believed that unity was one of the blessings of the Islamic revolution which led to the dignity of the Iranian nation and the Islamic Ummah.

9. Maslahah (public good): Imam Khomeini(RA) believed that according to Islam, those in charge of the religious government cannot act according to their own opinions nor can they persist on them; rather everything happening in the government should be on the basis





of divine laws. Of course, a qualified Islamic ruler is allowed to act according to the public interest of Muslims or that of his own government. During his lifetime, Imam Khomeini (RA) reiterated many a time that he would take action wherever he found the act in the interest of Islam and Muslims.

10. Invitation to Islam: Invitation to Islam and expansion of Islamic teachings among various nations are other key concepts within Imam Khomeini's political thought. His invitation of Islam to Gorbachev, the ex-leader of the communist party of the former Union of Socialist Soviet Republic can be viewed from this angle: "You

must invite non-Muslim strata... to the advanced and justice-seeking religion of Islam."

11. Revival of Islamic identity: The revival of Islamic identity is another pivotal area within the political thought of Imam Khomeini. He considered the revival of Islamic – national identity as a secret behind the independence and sovereignty of a country. It is a barrier to global powers' hegemonic and expansionist policy. He used to emphasize this by saying: "No form of independence is achieved until and unless we know and believe in ourselves."

12. Foreign policy: Foreign policy, a policy governing rela-

tions with foreign countries, the way the Islamic states should interact at the international level, and defending the rights of the oppressed and the downtrodden all over the world are some of the features characterizing Imam Khomeini's political thought. Nafy-e Sabil (no domination over Muslims) [18] is one of the important jurisprudential rules of Islam which denies non-believers any rule and authority over Muslims. Based on this jurisprudential rule, Imam Khomeini (RA) strongly opposed any kind of hegemony and intervention on the part of non-Muslim countries over Muslim affairs. Imam Khomeini's opposition to imperialism, to the imperial powers' domination over Muslims, and to Muslims' dependence on them was in line with the same objective.