

THE IRAN REVOLUTION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE REVIVAL OF ISLAM

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ABSTRACT

The Iranian revolution presents a milestone in the history of the Islamic world as it created the first Islamic state. Despite the fact that the revolution occurred in Shia Iran, it also reverberated in the Sunni world and influenced the internal political development in many Arab countries by inspiring Islamic activism. Before the revolution, it had been obvious for quite some time that secular Arab nationalism had failed in protecting Muslims against foreign invasions. The revolution had a strong influence on Sunni fundamentalists, encouraging them to organize mass movements. The Iranian revolution, however, did not have an ideological impact on the Sunni Muslims, as they viewed it as a project which had the purpose of strengthening Shiism in the Muslim world at the expense of Sunnism. The revolution thus did not solve the problems within the Islamic world, nor did it help to improve the relationship between the West and the Islamic world.

Keywords: Iran, Iranian revolution, Khomeini, Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, revival of Islam, the West and the Islamic world, Islamic civilization

L'INFLUENZA DELLA RIVOLUZIONE IRANIANA SULLA RINASCITA ISLAMICA

SINTESI

Nella storia del mondo islamico la rivoluzione in Iran rappresenta una tappa fondamentale, dal momento che venne creato il primo stato islamico. Nonostante il fatto che la rivoluzione sia avvenuta nella parte dell'Iran sciita, ci furono anche ripercussioni nel mondo sunnita e, inoltre, ispirando l'attivismo islamico ha influenzato lo sviluppo politico interno in molti paesi arabi. Prima della rivoluzione era da parecchio tempo evidente che il nazionalismo arabo secolare ovvero laico non è riuscito a proteggere i musulmani dalle invasioni straniere. La rivoluzione ha avuto una forte influenza sui fondamentalisti sunniti, incoraggiandoli a organizzare movimenti di massa. Tuttavia, la rivoluzione iraniana non ha avuto un impatto ideologico sui musulmani sunniti, in quanto venne da loro considerata un progetto con lo scopo di rafforzare nel mondo musulmano lo sciismo a scapito del sunnismo. La rivoluzione quindi non è riuscita a risolvere i problemi all'interno del mondo islamico, né ha contribuito a migliorare il suo rapporto con l'Occidente.

Parole chiave: Iran, rivoluzione iraniana, Homeini, sciiti, sunniti, rinascita islamica, Occidente e mondo islamico, civilizzazione islamica

INTRODUCTION

In this study we focus on the history of the events surrounding the Iranian Islamic revolution. The Iranian Islamic revolution can be seen as a turning point in the history of the Islamic world. The study presents a historical perspective on its influences on the Sunni world and its failure to establish a positive world image of Islam in the post-revolutionary time. In the introduction, we outline the main contributions of the Islamic world to the world civilization. Then we discuss the reasons for the rise of Islam after the Second World War and detail the events leading to the Iranian revolution and the influence of the revolution on the revival of Islam. Taking into account this influence and contemporary political and social development in the Islamic world, we present our view of the future of Islam.

The contribution of the Islamic civilization to the world of art and science is immense. For almost half a century, Baghdad was one of the most important cultural centres, a place in which the Greek and Persian-Arab worlds converged and where the scientists and scholars from the whole world came together. Thanks to the Arabs, Europe became familiar with the works of ancient philosophers, the findings and inventions of Islam, as well as with the art and science of ancient India and China. Many great scientists originated in the Islamic world, such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) Al Razi, Al Masudi, Al Biruni, Al Tusi, etc. Their inventions helped to change the world.

The contribution of Islam to the world of art is visible in the variety of artistic styles. The art of the Umayyad laid the foundations on which the majority of artistic styles of later dynasties evolved. The Muslims built their mosques under the influence of Hellenistic and Persian art. They were inspired by the old Christian basilica, which they developed in accordance with the first oratory of the Prophet.

These were the foundations which created the famous masterpieces such as the Dome of the Rock, the Great Mosque of Damascus, and the mosques in Kufa and Basra. Literature also played an important role in art. The sacred tradition of the Quran and Hadith assumed a special position in literature. One of the greatest prose writers in Arab literature was the Persian writer Al Mukafa. Arab fairy tales are best exemplified by the famous collection of fairy tales *A Thousand and One Nights*.

During the so-called Arab Renaissance, poetry, in particular, witnessed a heyday at the Abbasid court. Poets glorified the love of life and sung songs of love and wine. One of such poets was Omar Khayyam, who was the author of about 600 four-line verses called the rubaiyat. The Persian epic poet Ferdowsi also has to be mentioned since he was the author of the most famous Persian book entitled *The Book of Kings* (Shahnameh). Shahnameh is an epic poem which describes the history of Persia from its mythical beginnings to the Arabic

conquest. The poets who belong to literary greats were also Rudaki (Abu Abdollah Jafar), Nizami, Abu Nuwas, and Attar of Nishapur (Farīd al-Dīn). The greatest poets from the time of the Mongol invasion (13th century) were Saadi and Hafez. This was also the time of Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (Rumi), a mystic poet who is considered as the founder of the order of the Whirling Dervishes (Pishvai, 2007, 60–62). The miniature, which was for a long time used only in manuscripts, is an inseparable part of Persian literary art. The rich tradition of the caliphate was continued by the Ottoman Turks and Persia in the time of the Safavid dynasty. At the same time in India, many exceptional art works were created under the rule of the Mughal dynasty.

The history of the Islamic world started almost 1400 years ago with conquests. These were followed by the Christian reconquest, which culminated in the time of imperialism. The Crusades, the situation in Spain at the end of the 15th century and the state of European civilization can be seen in the light of a clash between the western (Christian) civilization and the Islamic civilization. With the rise of European countries in the 19th century, countries such as the Great Britain, France and Russia started to occupy territories of the Islamic world. There were several reasons for the fact that the Islamic world was easy prey of European countries and that the Islamic civilization became only a shadow of its former glory. The most important reasons were corruption, incompetent rulers, disharmony in the Islamic world (Sunni v. Shia), political instability, slow reforms, lack of general technological progress and an extremely aggressive colonizing politics by European countries. That was also the period of the glorification of European history. The West became the centre of the world and the Near East (the Islamic world) became marginalized. This resulted in researchers focusing their research on other parts of the world. As a result, the world was divided into the West, the East, and the marginalized third (the Near East, Africa) (Mamdani, 2004, 28–29).

The discovery of oil reserves made the situation for the Muslims even worse. Western European corporations, increasingly joined by American ones, endangered the natural wealth as well as the sacred Islamic places (Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem and also Baghdad). This became even more disturbing for the Muslims than economic exploitation (Potočnik, 2015, 306).

The relations between the two civilizations were even worsened by the crisis in Turkey after the First World War. In the year 1920, Ottoman Turkey was defeated as the last of the great Islamic empires. The Turks themselves abolished the Sultanate in 1922, which also meant the end of the Caliphate. Many Muslims were upset by the miserable end of the period of the Caliphate, which had lasted almost 13 centuries (since 632) – the end which was caused by the imperialist forces and domestic (Turkish) modernists. The Caliphate was a symbol of Muslim unity, progress and identity. Another blow to

Islam was dealt by the creation of the Jewish state in 1948, which started several wars between the Jews and the Palestinians, and resulted in the conflict between the USA and Islam.

CAUSES FOR THE RISE OF ISLAM

The long period of colonial oppression by the western countries caused the strengthening of Arab nationalism. The Egyptian president Nasser, in particular, was successful in encouraging Arab nationalism. When the Israeli army attacked their Arab neighbours following border fights in the Six-Day War from the 5th to the 10th of June in 1967, and occupied the Sinai peninsula and the West Bank, the Golan Heights and Gaza, the Israelis were convinced that after 2000 years they succeeded in freeing Jerusalem. 300 000 Palestinians were exiled into the neighbouring Arab countries, mostly to Jordan. The exile and humiliation were harsh for the Arabs and gave rise to the Palestinian resistance movement. The victory in the Six-Day War became a victory of religious Zionism, which kept getting increasingly influential (Sachar, 2007, 600–603).

The devastating defeat of the Arabs also meant that Arab nationalism did not live up to the expectation of providing a nationalistic ideology that would enable the construction of a strong Arab identity. Religion again started to assume the role of a national self-defence mechanism – wars waged in the name of God (Ayubi, 1991/1994, 59, 222; Wright, 2006/2007, 38–39).

At the end of the 1970s, religion entered politics in a big way. The most visible examples of that were the invasion of the Soviet troops in Afghanistan and the fights with the Mujahedin who fought in the name of God, as well as the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini as the head of the first Islamic state of Iran. The daily life of the Iranians became increasingly influenced by religion and god as a reaction to their previous life, which was marked by government corruption, rising inflation, inequality between the rich and the poor and increasing western influence on the country. The people of Iran had their hopes raised for a new society which would eschew corruption and would present equal opportunities for its citizens, a society based on brotherhood, unity and love. From the perspective of the average Iranian citizens, the revolution would thus present a radical change in the course of the history of Iran. At that time, Afghanistan also saw the emergence of political Islam. When the Soviet Union attacked the country in order to help the ruling communists, the Afghan resistance was motivated by the defence of Islam and not some kind of nationalistic ideology. This can be understood in a wider context of the US support for regime change in Arab states. Blagojević and Ščekić observe that “Islam became an important ideological weapon of the USA against the communist, secular and nationalist Arab regimes” (Blagojević & Ščekić 2017, 539). The fight

against the Soviets in Afghanistan was also fought in the name of God. The religion of Islam increasingly turned into a fight for national and cultural independence. As a result, Islamic fundamentalism as a rejection of the western style of life and emphasis on the cultural, national and cultural identities, became stronger.

Today's social-political situation in the Muslim world emerges as the result of different events and influences: historical, political, social, economic and religious. The causes for the rise of Islam in the 1970s are the following:

1. Identity crisis

The return to religion was caused by rapid and radical social changes as the result of modernization. In urban environment, the individual lost his/her traditional identity and sense of purpose. The emergence of great social differences was an ideal basis for strengthening a religion such as Islam – a religion in which the world is understood through socially oriented ethical systems. The result was the increase in personal religiousness. People started to visit mosques, pray, fast, spread religious programs and dress according to the rules prescribed by Islam. Women started to cover again (Huntington, 2005, 136).

2. Resistance against the politics of secularism

The occupation of the major part of the Islamic world by the great European powers in the 19th and 20th centuries gave rise to domestic anti-colonial resistance movements in which Islam, especially in the initial phase, played a central role. These movements were understood as part of jihad – the holy war (Kepel, 1994/1995, 18; Peters, 1979, 39–104).

Western countries had an important influence during the period of colonialism, when they brought western values to the Muslim world and attacked Islam. Taking this into account, the Muslim world argued that the best defence against the aggressive western policies lied in the return to the authentic Islamic roots and culture. The resistance against the policies of the West influenced the strengthening of political Islam through the creation of moderate as well as radical and militant fundamentalist movements. All these movements wanted to establish the so-called Islamic state – a state and social system in which all aspects of life would be regulated by Islamic law (sharia). All the fundamentalist movements had the same goal, the only difference being the method considered appropriate for achieving this goal (Šterbenc, 2011, 105).

Moderate fundamentalist movements tried to achieve Islamic law through peaceful activities within the border of their own states and undertook the Islamization of society through gradual social change. Only gradually, the process of Islamization would result in an Islamic state. Contrary to moderate movements, the radical (militant) fundamentalist movements tried to achieve the Islamic state through destroying the existing regimes,

with the use of violence and immediate armed action. The majority of moderate and radical fundamentalist movements were Sunni (Šterbenc, 2011, 109, 110).

Sayyid Qutb, one of the most important ideologues of Islamic extremism, wrote in his book *Milestones* that Islam was on the brink of annihilation and that jihad was necessary to achieve social justice as an armed fight against injustice and repression by non-Islamic governments and against the neo-colonialist West. According to him, this fight was obligatory for all Muslims, and those unwilling to participate were to be proclaimed as God's enemies and killed. After his death, his ideology was assumed by many extremist organizations. Abdullah al-Azzam and Osama bin Laden transformed his ideas and integrated them into a global jihad ideology (Esposito, 2013, 68).

Abdullah al-Azzam, also known as the emir of global jihad dismissed negotiation and talks and embraced armed resistance. He proclaimed the fatwa that jihad was the duty of every Muslim who was able to fight. The cult of jihad and martyrdom was the central message of his work. After his death in an explosion of his car by a car bomb, his ideology was continued by Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda (Esposito, 2013, 68–69). After the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, Afghanistan and Pakistan became the main centres for the globalization of jihad, and the Taliban and Al-Qaeda started to offer refuge to all their allies (Esposito, 2016, 237).

Radical fundamentalist movements emerged mostly in Egypt. The best-known was the movement Islamic Jihad, which was based on the assumption that the Egyptian regime was a nonbeliever. This necessitated the removal of its leader and a general revolution which would lead to the establishment of an Islamic state. In 1981, the assassination of the President Anwar el Sadat was carried out, but his killing was not followed by a general revolution. Egypt got a new president Hosni Mubarak, who fought against Islamic jihad and other radical movements with fierce repression. Other Arab countries also saw the emergence of radical movements named Jihad: In Alger, two militant groups (Armed Islamic Group and Islamic Army of Salvation) emerged after the outbreak of a civil war in the 1990s, and they fought against the bureaucratic-military system through terrorism and killings. In Iran, there was a successful Islamic revolution from 1978 to 1979, which raised the expectations of all Muslims. This was the first modern attempt to realize the ideas of political Islam in practice. However, despite the fact that Iran became an Islamic state based on political Islam and thus encouraged fundamentalists all over the world, it never became a real example for fundamentalist movements in the Sunni part of the Muslim world due to doctrinal differences between the Sunni and the Shia (Šterbenc, 2011, 111–113).

According to Huntington (2005, 144–145) the Islamic revival is the result of the bad reputation and loss of

power of the West: as the West was losing its superiority, its ideals and institutions were also losing their appeal. Islamic revival was also helped by the oil discoveries in the 1970s, which increased the wealth of many Muslim countries and enabled them to evade inferiority and subjugation. The Saudi, Libyan and other governments used the oil wealth for the financing of Islamic revival. This new gained wealth gave the Muslim countries new momentum in attempting to spread Islam beyond their borders.

HOW DID THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION INFLUENCE THE REVIVAL OF ISLAM?

Iran was an important provider of oil and thus an important factor in American oil policy. When the Iranian premier Mossadegh nationalized oil reserves and overthrew the pro-American Shah in the 1950s, the US intervention deposed him from his position and enabled the return of the Shah. Mossadegh became a national hero, while the Shah kept his rule through oppression and being a pawn of the USA (Potočnik, 2015, 185).

In the 1960s, the Iranian Shah Reza Pahlavi continued with the development of the country following a Western model. The centralization of the power was parallel to the stabilization of the country caused by the harsh repressive action of the authorities against the opposition. The Shah was a dictator who controlled all the aspects of life through the violent force of his secret police Savak. This provoked hatred from the Iranians across different social strata (Potočnik, 2006, 74).

The shah gradually became more and more hated by the Iranian citizens. The Shia clergy, on the other hand, cultivated a close relationship with the people. The resistance against the colonial control of Iran by Russia and the Great Britain in the 19th century, and later by the USA, united the people of Iran under the leadership of the clergy.

The participation of the mullahs in Iranian politics was always a common part of political life. In 1906, the mullahs supported the movement which encouraged the constitutional revolution, forcing the ruling dynasty to proclaim the constitution and form a legislative body according to the European model. In the previous centuries, it had been the mosques which provided people with a safe space to utter their disappointment with the current rulers. This continued to the time of the Shah Mohamed Reza (Mansfield, 2013, 152–153).

When the Shah began with partial agrarian reforms and the dismantling of the traditional role of the imams, he, like his father before, incurred the wrath of the Shia clergy. To make the situation even worse, the Western forces deposed the premier Mossadegh because of their oil interests and left the country at the mercy of the West once again. The discontent of the masses first culminated in the first half of the 1950s. The situation even worsened in the following years. On the 5th of June



Image 1: Friday's prayer at Imam's square in Esfahan (Photo: Dragan Potočnik)

1963, an unrest erupted all over the country and was violently suppressed by the army. According to some data, the army killed as many as 15 000 people in three days (Lipušček, 1982, 31).

In the 1960s, the political atmosphere in the country became more and more tense. In 1964, the Shah exiled the Ayatollah Homeini (Rūḥallāh Khomeynī) due to his massive criticism of the ruling government.

AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI

Khomeini was an Iranian religious and political leader. He was born in 1902 and died in 1989. Ruhollah Khomeini was born to a family of religious scholars in the small town of Khomeyn (Khomein) (Pishvai, 2007, 113–121).

When Ruhollah was five months old, his father was murdered and he was raised by his mother and aunt. They both died when Ruhollah was 15 years old.¹

In 1921, Khomeini finished his education in Arak and followed his teacher to the Iranian holy city of Qom, where he graduated from Islamic sharia law, philosophy and mysticism. In 1963 he was given the religious title of Ayatollah. The same year he criticized the Shah Pahlavi at a religious gathering in Qom, after which he was imprisoned and later exiled into Turkey (Moin, 1999/2009, 31–36, 103–130).

In Turkey he stayed less than one year, and then he moved to the Shia holy city of Najaf in Iraq. There he remained until January 1978. Afterwards he found refuge in the French city of Neauphile le Chateau, where he founded a government in exile. After 15 years of exile, Khomeini returned to Tehran in 1979 and for the next ten years led the Islamic revolution (Qadiri, 2008, 41–44).

In Iranian history, there are many examples of the positive influence of the clergy on the social situation, so the Iranians accepted the criticisms targeted at the Shah's regime by Ayatollah Khomeini from his exile. The

¹ Kayhan International, 21. 8. 1978: Return of the mosque, 4.



Image 2: Iran – a country with more than 2500 years of tradition (Photo: Dragan Potočnik)

Shah became more and more hated by the Shia clergy due to his negative attitude to religion and his control of society through the violent secret police Savak.

In addition to the clergy, the opposition also included students and intellectuals who disapproved of the violent suppression of the opposition and the development of the country following Western role models. The demands for the Shah's government to stop spending money from oil sales became increasingly stronger (Fischer, 1980/2003, 190).

The Iranian social movement set several goals, one of which was to overthrow the dictator Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. Khomeini wanted to re-establish the importance of religion, Islam, which was weakened by the western way of thinking and living. In his book *Islam and the Revolution* he wrote: "Unfortunately, the real Islam existed only for a short time after its beginning. The Omayyads and then the Abassids damaged Islam greatly. The ruling Shahs of Iran continued in this way

and completely distorted Islam, turning it into something completely opposite [...]" (Horrie, Chippindale, 1991).

The goal was to turn Iran into the first Islamic republic, a first fundamentalist republic in the history of Islam. The republic would be led by a religious ruler responsible for ideology, policy and spiritual life. It was to be a theocratic republic with the ruling ideology of Islam according to the holy book of Quran. Its economic goals were "a good life following the moral rules of Islam, a universal brotherhood and justice, appropriate sharing of wealth and private freedom within the social norms" (Lipušček, 1982, 126).

In 1971, the Shah organized a spectacular celebration of the 2500-anniversary of the Persian empire. He invited monarchs and presidents from all over the world to the big celebration with the purpose of displaying the glorious past and the glamorous present of Iran.² However, his attempt to encourage national pride through the ostentatious show failed, and the public opinion

² Kayhan International, 12. 10. 1971: Celebrations round the World, 3.

turned against him even more. Many, including Ayatollah Khomeini, reacted with harsh criticism, and turned to the millions of impoverished Iranians.

In his wish to modernize the country, the Shah tried to change the Iranians. The country was influenced by imports of western music, style of dressing and general behaviour in public. Many Iranians experienced this as an attack on their identity. They expressed their dissatisfaction in the newspapers and through street demonstrations (Fischer, 1980/2003, 187–188; Moin, 1999/2009, 163–164).

As a result of the increasing problems in the country in the 1970s, the Shah's regime became even more paranoid and repressive. The political opponents were tried in court martials in extra-judicial trials (Fischer, 1980/2003, 188, 193).

At the beginning of 1977, it became obvious that the Iranian economy was in deep trouble. The Shah's unrealistic ambitions started to erode the state sources, which led to economic and social problems. The spread of corruption, the rise of inflation and the increase in inequality between the rich and the poor fostered a discontent among the people.

In January 1978, Tehran was visited by the US president Jimmy Carter, who called Iran "*an island of stability*". This was the time of the first revolutionary spark, provoked by a newspaper article attacking Ayatollah Khomeini for his backward ideas and connections to Iraq. On the 7th of January 1978, there was an eruption of demonstrations, which strengthened the resolve of Khomeini's followers (Moin, 1999/2009, 186).

There were also big protests in Qom, which were dispersed by the police, who killed several protesters. Even worse protests followed on the 18th of February in Tabriz, and the police had to intervene again. The protests culminated on the 20th and 30th of March in the city of Yazd, and spread to all the larger cities. From then on, the spark erupted into a fire of revolution that could no longer be stopped.

In the summer of 1978, the situation became even worse and the protests spread widely. When a cinema burnt to the ground in the city of Abadan in the south of the country, 377 people died in the fire. The Shah tried to blame the religious fundamentalists and anti-reform radicals, who, in turn, blamed the Shah's secret police Savak. On the same day, new fires were set in Shiraz and Rezaieh. The reporter of the newspaper Kayhan International wrote that since the beginning of demonstrations, 29 cinemas had been attacked in Tehran and other cities. Another target of the attacks were restaurants, as a bomb

was planted in the restaurant Maxim in Shiraz as well as in the restaurants Hatam and Khansalar in Tehran.³

The death of innocent people convinced the Iranians that the Shah was only an American pawn who did not care about the national interests and the lives of ordinary people. Anti-government protesters also destroyed banks as the symbol of economic exploitation and police stations as the symbol of political oppression. They demanded the abolishment of interest rates, and the introduction of the traditional way of dressing. They also demanded the Shah's resignation and the arrival of Khomeini as the new leader of an Islamic state.⁴

On the 27th of August, the government was dissolved and replaced by a new government called the Government of National Reconciliation. To gain the alliance of the clergy, the new president of the government introduced some reforms, such as the abolishment of the monarchic calendar⁵, the prohibition of gambling houses, etc. These reforms, however, did not change anything, as the demonstrations and fighting continued. As a result, the whole country fell into deep chaos.⁶

Foreigners were leaving Iran and the Shah was losing his power despite the support by the USA and Great Britain. Due to his failing policies and the US meddling in the politics of Iran, it became clear that radical changes were about to happen.⁷

In September 1978, the wide boulevards of Tehran were flooded with protesters chanting slogans against the Shah. The opposition united nationalists, socialists, Marxists and the clergy, which integrated all these groups. With its network of mosques all over the country, the clergy was the only group that had the potential of integrating the opposition. It promised justice, the end of corruption and the cultural purification of the country, claiming that the only way to achieve that was through religion. The traditionally religious people of Iran were suspicious of atheist socialism coming from the Soviet Union, while nationalism as an ideology was too weak to prevail over religion as a uniting force. Soon it became clear that both nationalism and socialism failed to engage the Iranian people, and religion – Islam – was the only idea that was considered worth fighting for. The people were prepared to defend this new ideology with their lives.

The West had been closing its eyes to the bloody suppression of the opposition by the Shah. One of the reasons for this was the strength of the unions, which had ties to the Communist party. But the spilled blood only intensified the protests, and the protesters chanted in the name of God. The slogan of the demonstrators

3 Kayhan International, 21. 8. 1978: Holocaust, 1.

4 Kayhan International, 22. 8. 1978: Great Terror is here, 1.

5 During the Shah's rule, Iran used three calendars: imperial, Gregorian and Islamic. The imperial calendar starts with Cyrus's foundation of the Iranian monarchy in 559 B.C. Islamic calendar deducts 622 years from the Gregorian calendar (the migration of the prophet from Mecca to Medina). Today only the Islamic calendar is used in Iran.

6 Kayhan International, 12. 8. 1978: Martial law, curfew follow Isfahan riots, 1.

7 Kayhan International, 21. 10. 1978: New protest wave sweeps province, 3.

was *"God is great"*, and *"God, God, Khomeini"*. People believed in a new beginning and wanted to create new history and society based on unity and brotherhood.

The Iranian revolution transformed Iran from a kingdom ruled by the Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi into an Islamic republic under the rule of the religious leader Khomeini. Khomeini returned to Iran from his exile in Paris on the 1st of February 1979. He was greeted by a crowd of a million people on the streets of Tehran. Khomeini was finally successful due to the rift between Europe and the USA. Even the European countries were not united – France wanted an agreement for Iranian oil, with Italy and Germany also negotiating, because they thought that Khomeini would have a moderate policy with regard to oil.

The main causes for the Iranian revolution were primarily in the Shah's political mistakes and in the failure of other political parties. The Iranians resented the Shah for his authoritarian behaviour and open flirtation with the United States of America, as well as corruption, elitism at the court and the failure of his over-ambitious economic programs. The Shah also failed in negotiations with the Shia religious leaders and focused instead on the suppression of leftist groups, thus increasing the popularity of Khomeini's radical and populist policies. Other opposition parties (secular and modern Muslims, liberals and the left) were also blindly self-assured and neglected the rising influence of Khomeini.

The anti-Shah coalition was very diverse in its ideological views and political orientation, ranging from the Muslim Ayatollahs to liberal bourgeoisie, the leftist and Marxist movements to the members of the illegal Communist party. Their differences at first did not prevent them from a united resistance against the hated ruler, but later they became a great obstacle for the stability of the new order in Iran.

Soon after the departure of the last Iranian monarch, Iran experienced deep social-economic change. The Islamic republic abolished the monarchy, which had been in existence for several centuries. The leading positions in Iran were assumed by the Ayatollahs, the highest members of the clergy. The highest position in the country with unlimited authority was assumed by the Ayatollah Khomeini until his death in 1989. He became the main political and spiritual leader of Iran, and after the new constitution, all the regulations were based on the Shia Islamic religion, which has dominated Iranian society ever since.

Khomeini carried out democratic elections and was named the supreme leader, thus obtaining both political and religious authority. The West thought that Khomeini would become an ally, but he turned his back on them, transforming his religious power into political power and proclaimed western imperialism as the main enemy. Most western leaders, in particular the Americans, could

not understand how Khomeini, who was still very little known in 1979, could gain such wide support in such a large country, so they had completely underestimated him (Potočnik, 2015, 197–199).

The revolution brought independence to Iran, turning the country into a thorn in the side of global imperialistic interests of the USA. The main force opposing the imperialist interests of the USA was Islamism.

DID THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION BRING THE REVIVAL OF ISLAM?

The Iranian revolution was carried out by the Shia Muslims, but it also resonated strongly with the Sunni Muslims, as it had become clear that secular Arab nationalism could not protect the Muslims from foreign interventions (Rogan, 2009, 393). It had a significant influence on the internal political development of numerous Arab countries and inspired Islamic activism. The new Iranian government wanted to export the revolution to Arab countries, particularly those with Shia population (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait). By emphasizing justice for Palestine, Khomeini wanted to activate Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia.⁸ The problem for Khomeini was that he was Iranian and not Arab, and that he was a Shia Muslim, not a Sunni Muslim.

The Shia Muslims were particularly discriminated in Saudi Arabia, as the Wahhabism proclaimed them as heretics and polytheists. The majority of the Shia Muslims populated the eastern province, a region in which the oil industry with its poor workforce was situated. Most workers had no benefits from Feisal's modernizing reforms, i.e. they had no access to health and social services and were excluded from the army and certain other professions and educational institutions. The success of the Iranian revolution turned many Shia Muslims into Islamic rebels who started protests with the support of Iran, but the demonstrations and strikes by the Shia Muslims were suppressed by the National Guard and several people were killed. There was also a growing discontent among the Wahhabi religious scholars, who were concerned about the transformation of Saudi society, the loss of Islamic values and the relationship with the West. This was the time when Islamic rhetoric started to replace previous leftist and nationalist tendencies in the Islamic world (Al-Rasheed, 2010, 141; Wehrey, 2013, 6–7).

Although the authority of the Saudis was threatened by both secular Iraq and Islamist Iran, they chose the side of Iraq in the war which was started by the attack of Saddam Hussein on Iran in 1980. They financially supported Iraq, viewing it as the lesser of two evils. They also felt threatened by the stabilization of the communist government in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion in 1979, since they considered atheist communism as

8 On the problem of Palestine and American consistently pro-Israeli policy in the United Nations, see Šterbenc, 2016.

the greatest enemy of Islam. A communist invasion of a Muslim country caused opposition all over the Arab world and legitimized the fight against the Soviet Union. The Saudis began to finance Afghan Mujahedin (fighters against the enemy of Islam) and allowed their citizens to leave for training centres in Pakistan. The fear of communism also brought the Saudis closer to an alliance with the USA (Al-Rasheed, 2010, 152–154).

As a result, the influence of the Iranian revolution was felt in other Arab countries, and numerous Islamic movements started an armed resistance against their secular governments and foreign invaders. The Islamists hoped to create an Islamic state which would be based on the sharia, the law of God. They were inspired by the Iranian revolution and the creation of the Islamic republic of Iran. In Egypt, the Islamists assassinated the president Sadat, while in Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood started a civil war against the regime of Al Assad. In Lebanon, a Shia Islamist organization Hezbollah was formed, proclaiming jihad against Israel and the USA. The Sunni Muslims in Afghanistan proclaimed jihad against the external and internal enemies: the Soviet occupation forces and the communist government of Afghanistan, which was openly hostile to Islam. Saudi Arabia saw this as an opportunity to spread Wahhabism in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other Muslim countries, thus limiting the influence of the Iranian revolution. Through the interference of several important forces, the regional crisis in Afghanistan transformed into a global crisis, which in turn caused a renewed jihad against the USA and its western allies (Mamdani, 2004, 119–140; Nasr, 2006, 154–156; Norton, 2007/2009, 34–36, 135–138).

The USA lost an important ally in the region with the overthrow of the Iranian shah. Khomeini's proclamation marking the USA as the "Great Satan" threatened the future role of the USA in the Near East and the Middle East. As a result of the Iranian revolution, the USA was forced to forge closer ties with Iraq, thus turning it into a central point in the American strategy for the region of Anterior Asia. The main purpose of this was to limit Iranian nationalism and the influence of the Iranian revolution, which also led to the US support of Iraq in the war against Iran (Crist, 2012/2013, 95–105, 358–363; Mamdani, 2004, 129–140).

Islamists in the Western Bank and in Gaza carried out a prolonged jihad against the Jewish state with the purpose of recreating Palestine under an Islamic government. However, the military success of Hezbollah resulting in the withdrawal of the Americans and Israel and the victory of the mujahedin in Afghanistan over the Soviets in 1989 failed to produce a new Islamic government. Both Lebanon and Afghanistan became mired in civil wars long after the defeat or withdrawal of the external enemies. Nevertheless, there were activities to prepare Arab society for an Islamic government. New Islamic organizations emerged and Islamic values became more visible – younger men began to grow beards

and women increasingly began to cover their hair, while secular culture started to give way to Islamic revival (Rogan, 2009, 437–438).

THE FUTURE OF ISLAM

The Islamic revolution in Iran contributed greatly to the revival of the Islamic world, despite the growing conflict between the Shia and the Sunni Muslims after the revolution, but it could not solve the problems inside the Islamic world. In the period following the revolution, the relationship between the West and the Islamic world deteriorated. Many people still associate Islam with religious obsession, repression, and non-democracy and believe that the defensive Islamic culture is the reason for the halting progress of some Arab countries. As Kayaoglu and Kaya (2012) note the visible negative attitudes towards Muslims, especially in the last decade, require a detailed analysis of Islamophobia as a cultural, political and religious phenomenon. The main element of Islamophobia is the negative evaluation of the mentality of the people who live in the Islamic world – their views, education and sense of responsibility – rather than the lack of capital fear. This fosters the fear that Islam might remain in a perpetual state of crisis (Kung, 2007, 646–647).

Many Muslims hope that the next few years will change the negative image of Islam, replacing it by an image of hope and trust. They also wish for a co-existence of democracy and Islam, thus reducing the power of theocratic rulers who are responsible to God rather than to their people and the rule of law. Such a democratic system would entail a division of power, a government independent of religious leaders, the freedom of religion and legal opposition. It should be taken into consideration, however, that the creation of modern states, national identity, political legitimacy and appropriate economic and social institutions takes time – the modernization of the West, for example, took several centuries, while the process of modernization was often accompanied by resistance and revolutions (Esposito, 2016, 301).

Contrary to the gradual modernization of the West, the process of modernization in the Muslim world was much more abrupt and was first imposed by the colonial regimes and western elite. The process of gaining independence after the Second World War and the lingering influence of European colonialism often hindered the self-determination of the people. Muslims only had a few decades (contrary to centuries in the West) to face the religion and social challenges of modernity, and that process was additionally slowed down by the authoritarian regimes, die-hard elites and the global policies of democratic western states supporting authoritarian regimes for their own gain (Esposito, 2016, 302).

The main problem of development and long-term stability in the Muslim world is not Islam or Islamic

movements, but the conflict between authoritarianism and pluralism. In this light, the western countries should concentrate on political, social and economic changes in Muslim countries, rather than on religion. The foreign policies of modern states have been focussed mainly on the religious dictators and extremist groups, while their main goal should be the stabilization of the situation instead of dwelling on religious and cultural differences. For the majority of Muslims, the conflict with the modern world is not a religious problem, but a political one. Furthermore, we have to start considering the Muslim countries individually, in light of their own specific problems, and not just as the "Muslim world". Many American and European political figures are caught in a vicious circle - in their wish to fight Islamism they support weak authoritarian governments which contribute to the instability and anti-American sentiment and incite terrorism (Esposito, 2013, 196).

CONCLUSION

The revival of Islam from the 1970s on was a reaction to modernization and to the economic and political failure of secular colonial elites, offering resistance to western threats. Constant meddling by the West and its wish to control the Muslim world has created a constant conflict and bolstered Islamic identity and the rise of militant groups fighting in the name of the "holy war" or jihad. Due to the "invocation of God", the fighting of these groups is even more brutal and unpredictable, because the fighters believe that they are protecting Islamic faith from non-believers by rejecting modernity and returning to the roots of their faith. The radical movements want society to be founded on religious rules, and they try to achieve that by any means available, even the use of force. The invasion and aggression by the West thus resulted in the strengthening of their

religion and a growing conflict between the Shia and the Sunni Muslims.

One of the important reasons for the revival of Islam and the emergence of Islamism and the strengthening of religious identity was the catastrophic defeat of the Arab army by Israel in 1967. The Egyptian president Naser tried to encourage Arabs by bolstering Arab nationalism, but the defeat brought disillusionment and the feeling that Arab nationalism was a failed ideology. Arab nationalism and Islamism had a common goal – to gain independence and establish a policy of sovereignty, allowing the countries to manage their own resources for the good of their own people rather than for the benefit of rich foreign investors. The US policy, however, is committed to preventing countries achieving sovereignty if this could hinder its global plans and the interests of the big capital. Noam Chomsky rightly calls this policy the "mafia approach", an approach which is exemplified by the US interventions to overthrow disobedient leaders of such countries, showing the rest of the world how threats to the US economic interests are dealt with (Chomsky, 2003, 181–183). One example of such policy in the Islamic world was the coup against the Iranian premier Mosaddegh and the return of the Shah Reza Pahlavi to power, which were supposed to protect the economic interests of the West, but resulted in the Islamic revolution in 1979.

The Iranian revolution was undoubtedly a turning point in the history of the Islamic world. It created the first Islamic state – the Islamic Republic of Iran. It represented the victory of Islamism, i.e. political Islam, over secular regimes which tried to emulate Soviet-style socialism or western-style free market democracy and which suppressed Muslim movements. Although the Islamic revolution was achieved by the Shia Muslims, it also contributed to the Sunni Muslims' realization that secular Arab nationalism failed to protect the Muslims against foreign invasions.

IRANSKA REVOLUCIJA IN NJEN VPLIV NA PREPOROD ISLAMA

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POVZETEK

Revolucija v Iranu predstavlja prelomnico v zgodovini islamskega sveta, saj je vzpostavila prvo islamsko državo. Predstavlja zmago islamizma oz. političnega islama nad sekularnimi režimi, ki so se formirali v 50-ih in 60-ih letih 20. stoletja. Ti so iskali svoj navdih pri sovjetskem socializmu ali zahodni demokraciji.

Z zrušitvijo iranskega šaha z oblasti so ZDA izgubile enega največjih zaveznikov na tem območju. Američani so se zato tesneje povezali z Irakom, ki je tako postal središče ameriške strategije na območju Prednje Azije. S to potezo so seveda želeli zadržati iranski nacionalizem in vplive iranske revolucije. Nova iranska oblast je namreč želela izvoziti revolucijo tudi v arabske države, posebej na tiste s šitiskim prebivalstvom v Iraku, Savdski Arabiji, Bahrainu in Kuvajtu.

Čeprav se je revolucija zgodila v šiitskem Iranu, je močno odmevala tudi v sunitnem svetu in tako vplivala tudi na notranji politični razvoj v številnih arabskih državah in navdihnila islamski aktivizem. Že nekaj časa je bilo namreč jasno, da je sekularni arabski nacionalizem doživel propad, ko ni bil sposoben niti obraniti muslimanov pred tujimi vdori. Revolucija je močno navdihnila sunitske fundamentaliste v smislu organizacije množičnega gibanja, vendar jih v vsebinskem smislu ni prepričala, saj so suniti na iransko revolucijo gledali kot projekt, katerega cilj je krepitev šiizma v muslimanskem svetu na račun sunizma.

Vsekakor je islamska revolucija v Iranu močno vplivala na preporod v islamskem svetu, kljub temu, da je po revoluciji prišlo še do večjega razkola med šiiti in suniti. Žal ni rešila težav znotraj islamskega sveta, niti ni pripomogla k izboljšanju odnosov med Zahodom in islamskih svetom. Islam še naprej mnogi povezujejo z obsedenostjo s preteklostjo, represijo, nedemokracijo. Verjamejo, da je prav defenzivna islamska kultura kriva za nerazvitost nekaterih arabskih držav, in da problem ni pomanjkanje kapitala, ampak mentaliteta ljudi, ki tam živijo – njihovi nazori, nivo izobrazbe in čut za odgovornost. Iz tega izhaja tudi bojazen, da lahko islam ostane v trajni krizi.

Ključne besede: Iran, revolucija v Iranu, Homeini, šiiti, suniti, preporod islama, Zahod in islamski svet, islamska civilizacija

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