

Four Upheavals in History

Status of the Islamic Revolution and the Historic Role of Imām Khomeinī in the Contemporary World

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With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of relations among countries of the world, transnational and regional dependency of countries on one another gradually increased. Subsequent to the rivalry among great industrial powers then emerging in Europe, a new division in their essential formation appeared. Domination escalated and promoted to the extent that military occupation, formal colonization and ordered appointment formed the principal structure of international relations in its conception at the time. On one hand, throughout the period of influence of the said transformations the relations among countries became more complex and intense everyday in such a way that the ruling class in the countries under domination becomes more durable and firm commensurate to its compliance with the wishes of the dominant powers. On the other hand, the periodic movements for independence and struggles of the nations for deliverance from domination, though succeeded in shaking the then evolving order in the world, were incapable of effecting fundamental and infrastructural changes in the structure and operation of the international relations. As such, cleavage among the countries became wider everyday. Due to this further fragmentation, the power and capability of the backward countries to exert influence in important international issues diminished.

During the initial years of the twentieth century, the world bore witness to two fundamental transformations in international relations. First, the share of the backward countries in important international decisions decreased. Second, the strategic rivalries among the European countries intensified. The intensification of these rivalries finally led to the occurrence of two world wars, the Second World War in particular. Amid the dire consequences of the Second World War, the world witnessed the appearance of a new order

foreboding the bipolar system arrangements under the leadership of America in the Western camp and the ex-Soviet Union in the Eastern camp. This important and historic event, which set up new design of the world politics, had some ensuing outcomes:

First, the unknown countries of the Third World as subjects were transformed into role players in the relations of the rival independent variable poles.

Second, such a trend could inevitably tone down zeal for independence among the countries of the world.

Third, the technical concept of 'independence' turned to mean a sort of dependency on one of the power poles and keeping aloof from the other pole. This statement does not mean denying the endeavors of the national and religious leaders of the diverse countries in the world, rather, the point is we should know that none of the abovementioned events led to the presentation of an independent doctrine in the international system. Even the steps undertaken in India were not a model for revolution in other countries. It is because the leadership of Gandhi had no movement and motive for the export of revolution in itself. Secondly, in view of the constant traditions, culture and civilization of India, it had utmost emphasis on the creation of a political-populist structure based upon passive and seclusion-oriented individualism innate in the Hindu tradition. In the end, negation of one of the two main poles of power in the East and West was the objective of political endeavor of the humanist Hindu society.

In the same vein, the struggles of the Maoist peasants (village versus city) in China were in the first place not in pursuit of the realization of independence of the countries in the world. Secondly, more than consolidating the anti-Western capitalism front in the world, it became a factor in creating cleavage within the leftist camp of the East. Due to incapability in its political and international choices, it was initially isolated from among the leftist and radical groups and then it became weak in the global level.

As a result, in a brief study of the historical developments in the political systems and units of the world and the expanding relations among states particularly after the first Industrial Revolution, French Revolution, American independence, and the dominance of the colonial system in the world, the more it was nearer to the twentieth century and the First World War, the chance of coming into existence of sovereign and steadfast countries against the wishes and inclinations of European industrial countries was less and rare. Such was the state of affairs until finally, with the victory

of the Bolsheviks in 1917 in Tsarist Russia; the formation of the former Soviet Union; the fundamental transformations in many geopolitical regions of the time; the outbreak of the Second World War; and the powerful rise of America in the political scene of the world, the inclination for independence in many Third World countries commenced. Yet, apart from what have been said earlier, the existence or establishment of a government independent from the wish of the superpowers was no longer possible in practice. Of course, as stated earlier, it did and does not suggest the absence of transformation in the world of politics. For, we have been witness to the ostensible independence of so many countries. We have seen various movements of nationalist and non-nationalist, religious and secular genuine forces. Nevertheless, what is important and the point of this article is as follows:

First, none of the struggles led to the creation of sovereign political units especially in the initial part of the twentieth century;

Second, in case of the existence of inclination for independence, it was still incapable of creating a sovereign political unit vis-à-vis the superpowers;

Lastly, with the absence of an experienced and independent model for revolution and achieving independence, the developing countries were wandering only within the circuit of dependency on one pole to another. The world indeed became the chessboard of the superpowers. The disappointed and disillusioned intellectuals and revolutionaries were on the verge of surrender.

In this tortuous, long and winding journey, in terms of the importance of geopolitical regions the world was subjected to profound transformations and necessarily assumed a particular form for itself. On account of the importance of a region for one of the two powers, its possible influence there exacerbated while control of a region became important. In terms of management in those regions, in view of the importance of countries, they appointed more dependent personnel office.

In broader dimensions, among these regions the Persian Gulf was identified as the most important region of the world and Iran among the countries of the region as the most important country existing in the Western bloc. In substantiating this hypothesis, it is enough for us to review the distant and recent past accounts of our country (Iran) from the time of the coming to power of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey up to the time of the disintegration of the former Soviet Union. A historical study shows that during these long years among the Third World countries, there has not been any country as much as Iran in involvement in the international conflicts and developments. The more precise meaning of this statement in the world of

politics is that if in any part of the world the possibility is ever imagined of the occurrence of revolution and establishment of a government independent from the dictate and approval of the superpowers, in view of its geopolitical importance in the region, its neighborhood with the main rival of the West (i.e. the erstwhile Soviet Union), and its dominance in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz region in the most complex era of international relations throughout human history in the most strategic region of the world and in the most important Third World country for the Western bloc and America, in the case of Iran, which was named as the gendarme of the region and “island of stability,”¹ even to imagine revolution was impossible.

With such a conviction, it can indeed be said that Imām Khomeinī did not stage a revolution in Iran. Rather, he made an outburst, which in his own words, was “an outburst of light”—a great outburst that only the great prophets of God were able to do so throughout history. After a five-century stormy period in which the scroll of ecclesiastical authorities was complex in the West while the pure Muḥammadan Islam was isolated from the political scene in the East, he again introduced religion, labeled by Karl Marx as “the opium of the masses”, as the most pivotal factor in the movement of nations in the political scenes of the world.

He transformed religious beliefs into factors of great ardor and sensational resurgence in a country and in face of a government that had undoubtedly the most dependent political structure on the West in the contemporary history of Iran. What Imām Khomeinī had done did not end here. In fact, he achieved a greater success. He offered a model for the independence of nations in the world, and not a model for dependency. It was a task, which none of the prominent thinkers and statesmen of the world was capable to perform, and it was accomplished through the reliance on, and use of, the most forgotten instrument in the world, i.e. ‘faith’. He planted a sapling which no storm can be able to uproot. By relying on this weapon and reviving the love for martyrdom, he became the only individual at least in the past two centuries, who formally and openly humiliated all the heads of *kufir* in the political scene, pushing to the ground the arrogance-tainted nose of the West. The dominance of his discourse cast a shadow on most thinkers. Zbigniew Brzezinski borrowed from the Imām’s message to Gorbachev the idea of the breakup of the Soviet Union. In imitation to him the Pope brought

¹ US President Jimmy Carter told the Shāh in Tehran on January 1, 1978: “Iran is an island of stability in one of the most troubled areas of the world. This is a great tribute to you, Your Majesty, and to your leadership and to the respect, admiration and love which your people give to you.” *New York Times*, January 2, 1978.

politics again into the Christian world. Above all, through him Islam began to experience a new spring. He set up a revolution, which in the words of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Āyatullāh Sayyid ‘Alī Khāmene’ī, is “not known in any part of the world without his name”. With the exception of the prophetic mission of Moses (‘a), the Interlocutor with God, more than two thousand five hundred years ago, Jesus Christ (‘a) two thousand years ago, and finally the Muḥammadan outburst of light fourteen centuries ago, no other event and revolution in the world is comparable to his revolution with respect to substance, value and profundity. The only difference among these outbursts of light is that the great prophets (‘a) attained this important achievement through revelation [*waḥī*] and inspiration [*ilhām*] in the case of the Imām. For, he was nourished by the school of the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) and the Infallible Imāms (‘a). His revolution was a successful attempt to restore the authentic Islam and invite the people of the world toward this truth. The theoretical sources of political-religious thoughts of that great and sagacious sage can be known amid the Qur’anic verses, and the words and tradition of the Messenger of God (ṣ) and the Infallible Imāms (‘a).

The greatest mission of the thinker of the present time and particularly the Islamic theological seminaries is—through a meticulous study of the stances and directives of that great sublime model—to revive the illustrious early period of Islam and guard the light of guidance that he set ablaze.