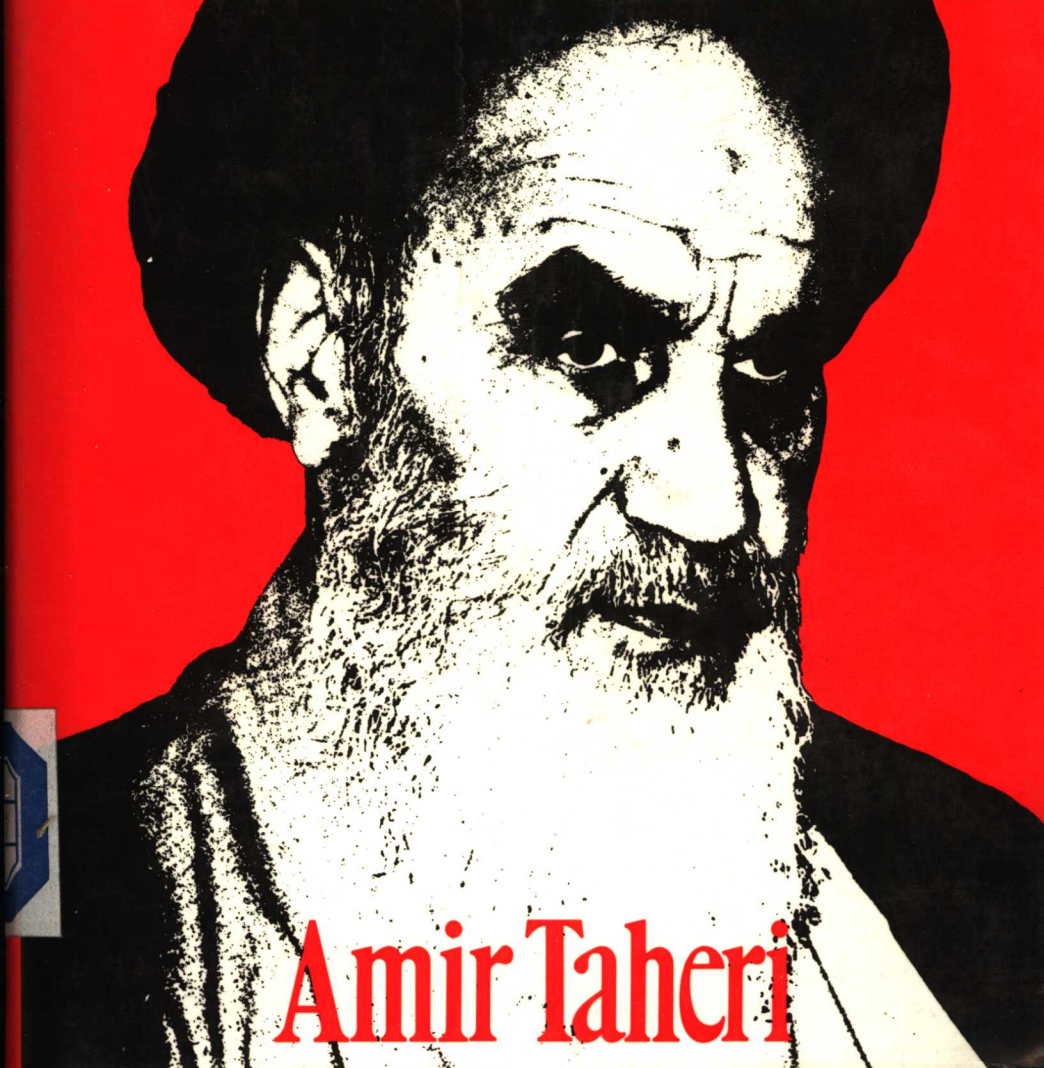


THE SPIRIT OF ALLAH

KHOMEINI AND THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION



Amir Taheri

The Spirit of Allah



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*In the name of Allah,
the Merciful,
the Compassionate*

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The revival of Islam: Khomeini in Qom in 1979 (photo: Camera Press)

The Immortals: the Shah's guard (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

An uneasy alliance: Khomeini and Shariatmadari (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

Allah, Qu'ran, Khomeini: revolutionary women in a street demonstration (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

The party of Allah: Hojat at Islam Hadi Ghaffari (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

The balancing act: Khomeini with Bazargan and Rafsanjani (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

Fighting 'Satan': women rounded up by the Imam's Committees (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

'Judge Blood': Ayatollah Sadeq Khalkhali (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

Helping the Ayatollah: Marxist-Leninist guerrillas (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

Moment of revenge: Militants with the corpse of Hoveyda (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

The spiritual son: Abol-Hassan Bani-Sadr (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

The endless war: a victorious mullah poses on Iraqi corpses (photo: Abbas-Magnum)

Chronology

- 1902 Ruhollah is born in Khomein
- 1903 Sayyed Mostafa, Ruhollah's father, dies in a brawl
- 1906 Mozaffareddin Shah promulgates a constitution in which mullahs are given power of veto on all legislation
- 1910-11 Struggle between the constitutional government and the despotic Mohammad-Ali Shah, who is eventually deposed. Hojat al-Islam Shaikh Fazlollah Nuri, the standard bearer of fundamentalist mullahs, is hanged in Tehran
- 1918-19 Foreign troops occupying Iran leave the country. Ruhollah moves to Arak and attends a theological seminary. Then follows Shaikh Abdul-Karim to Qom where he settles
- 1921 A coup d'état is led by Sayyed Ziaeddin and Reza Khan
- 1922-26 Reza Khan achieves supreme power. He arranges his own election as the King of Kings, founding the Pahlavi dynasty
- 1927-40 Reza Shah pursues his secularization campaign; revolts by mullahs are brutally suppressed and the central government imposes its authority throughout the country; the wearing of the veil is prohibited and mullahs are forced to shave and wear a kepi instead of the traditional turban
- 1941- British and Soviet troops invade and occupy Iran. Reza Shah is forced to abdicate and goes into exile; his son Mohammad-Reza is sworn in as Shah

- 1942 Khomeini publishes the first edition of his *Kashf al-Asrar* (*Key to the Secrets*)
- 1949 Grand Ayatollah Borujerdi leads an extended seminar on the political role of the clergy. Ruhollah is present and sides with the activist faction
- 1951 Premier Haj-Ali Razmara is assassinated by a member of the Fedayeen of Islam organization. Mossadeq takes over as Premier and the Shah gives the royal assent to a bill nationalizing Iran's oil industry. Relations are severed with Britain and the Royal Navy imposes an embargo on Iran's oil exports
- 1952– Mossadeq and the Shah are locked in a struggle for power. Ayatollah Kashani sides with Mossadeq at first but later abandons him for the Shah. Khomeini is active alongside Kashani
- 1953–54 The Communist Tudeh Party flexes its muscles. The Shah–Mossadeq rivalry comes to a head. The Shah leaves the country, but is returned after an army coup organized with US and British support
- 1955 A new oil agreement is concluded with major British, American and French companies. SAVAK comes into being and Communists are hunted down. A 600-strong network of pro-Soviet officers is uncovered within the armed forces
- 1959 The Shah and US President Eisenhower sign a military agreement which the Shah interprets as an American guarantee for his own regime
- 1960 Borujerdi opposes a moderate law on land reform and is supported by other mullahs. The Shah gives in by asking the government to annul the act. Khomeini publishes the first edition of his *Towzih al-Masayel* (*Explication of Problems*) and begins to be known as an ayatollah
- 1961–62 Bazaari elements opposed to the Shah establish contact with Khomeini. Borujerdi's death leads to a struggle for succession and Ayatollah Hakim Tabataba'i emerges as victor. Khomeini assumes the title of Grand Ayatollah

- 1963 Khomeini launches his campaign against the Shah and the latter's reform projects aimed at distribution of land among peasants, emancipation of women and the opening of local government posts to non-Muslims. Khomeini is arrested and taken to Tehran. This leads to mass riots in Tehran and several other cities. Many are killed shouting: 'Hail to Khomeini'.
- 1964 Khomeini is released from prison but kept under house arrest in Tehran. He is eventually allowed to return to Qom where he resumes his attacks on the government. He singles out for criticism a law extending diplomatic immunity to American military personnel in Iran. He is arrested and forced into exile in Turkey
- 1965 Premier Hassan-Ali Mansur is assassinated on the orders of Khomeini's aides in Tehran. Amir Abbas Hoveyda takes over as Prime Minister
- 1966 Khomeini quarrels with the Turkish authorities over their refusal to allow him to wear his religious dress and obtains permission to leave for Iraq after several months of residence in Izmir, Ankara, Istanbul and Bursa. He settles in the holy city of Najaf
- 1967 The Muslim world is shaken by the defeat of the Arabs by Israel. Ayatollah Mohammad-Baqer Sadr meets Khomeini and suggests an Islamic struggle against the Jewish state
- 1968 Khomeini resumes his seminary and attracts new students; his circle grows thanks to his radicalism
- 1969-71 Khomeini makes repeated calls on Iranians to rise against the Shah but is ignored. He particularly denounces the twenty-fifth centenary celebration of the Persian Empire. His aides in Tehran expand their organization and create secret cells in a number of cities
- 1972-76 Khomeini's lectures attract more and more students in Najaf. Anti-Shah students come to visit him from Europe and the United States. He publishes the first edition of his *Valayat-e-Faqih (The Regency of the*

Theologian). A more polemical version is also published under the title of *Hokumat-e-Eslami (Islamic Government)* and is an attack on the theories of Grand Ayatollah Kho'i

- 1977 Yazdi advises Khomeini to intensify his anti-Shah campaign, claiming that the new US Administration of President Jimmy Carter wants the Shah to go. Khomeini issues an edict 'deposing' the Shah. The Shah and Carter exchange state visits
- 1978 The daily *Ettelaat* in Tehran publishes a fake letter insulting Khomeini. There are riots in Qom and, later, in Tabriz and a dozen other cities. Hundreds are killed in clashes with the security forces. Khomeini calls for the overthrow of the Shah and is expelled from Iraq. He goes to France and continues his attacks on the Shah as the tide of revolution sweeps everything in its path
- 1979 Khomeini returns from exile two weeks after the Shah leaves Iran and is greeted by millions. Bakhtiar's Cabinet disintegrates and the revolution is victorious. In a referendum, the people approve the formation of an Islamic Republic. The American Embassy in Tehran is raided and occupied by revolutionary students who seize the diplomats there hostage. Hundreds of former officials are executed
- 1980– Executions continue. The coalition formed under Khomeini begins to suffer serious divisions. Iraq invades Iran and scores major early victories. Bani-Sadr is elected President but a general election gives control of Parliament to his rival Beheshti. An abortive attempt by a US task force to free the hostages fails in the Tabas desert making the future of the captives look bleak. But secret talks between Beheshti and Carter, through special emissaries, lead to a final accord on the release of the hostages
- 1981 The American hostages are released twenty minutes after Reagan is sworn in as the new President of the United States. The struggle between Bani-Sadr and Beheshti comes to a head. Khomeini backs Beheshti,

who emerges victorious. Bani-Sadr concludes an alliance with the Mujahedeen who launch an armed insurrection and, later, murder over two thousand mullahs and top officials, including Beheshti. Bani-Sadr is deposed as President, flees to France and joins the opposition to Khomeini. Iran scores victories in the war with Iraq and Khorramshahr is liberated

1982-83 The new wave of repression, begun in the previous year, is intensified and between 5000 and 10,000 people, mostly supporters of the Mujahedeen, are executed. The number of political prisoners tops 40,000

Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari is accused of involvement in a plot to kill Khomeini and is 'defrocked'. Ghotbzadeh is executed on a similar charge. Iranian forces carry the war into Iraqi territory but soon run out of steam. The mullahs consolidate their hold on power and purge their former allies in the fight against the Shah.

The top leaders of the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party are arrested and charged with high treason. Thousands of militants patrol the streets of major cities to impose 'Islamic' rules of dress and behaviour

1984-85 Khomeini is reported in poor health and orders a session of the Assembly of Experts which has the constitutional duty of choosing his successor. A tentative agreement is reached on Ayatollah Montazeri but deep divisions remain. The war continues in stalemate after reaching new depths of horror with the Iraqis' use of chemical weapons against Iran's child soldiers. The mullahs are deeply divided on almost all aspects of economic and foreign policy. Khomeini announces the 'annulment' of all laws passed before the revolution. But the decision is quietly forgotten and most of the old laws are applied in the absence of agreement on new ones. Khomeini orders an intensification of efforts to 'export' the Islamic Revolution, first to other Muslim countries and, later, to the whole world. Khomeini's thirty-page testament is deposited in a safe at the Islamic Majlis (Parliament) in Tehran with orders for it to be published within hours of his death.

Introduction

In Search of the Imam

One autumn day in 1977 two reporters on the staff of the Iranian newspaper I edited invited me to hear a cassette which they took to be a 'master coup' by SAVAK, the Shah's notorious secret police. The cassette was simply marked 'A Religious Sermon'. It began with a solemn voice¹ which introduced the speaker in the following terms: 'The Supreme Guide of the Islamic Nations, the Smasher of Idols, the One who Humbles Satan, the Glorious Upholder of the Faith, the Sole Hope of the Downtrodden, the Exalted Chief, the Vicar of Islam and of Muslims, the Regent of the Hidden Imam, His Holiness Grand Ayatollah Haj Sayyed Ruhollah Mussavi Khomeini, May Allah Grant Him Eternal Life.'

The sermon that followed did indeed sound like a SAVAK fabrication designed to discredit the Shah's most vociferous critic. Its theme was the alleged collusion between the Shah and 'the Jews and the Cross-worshippers' first to 'humiliate and then to eliminate' Islam in Iran. The Shah, the preacher's voice continued, was 'plotting to make Muslims accept the rule of the foreign enemies of Islam,' and had even commissioned a portrait of Imam Ali, the fourth Caliph, which showed the Commander of the Faithful with blue eyes and a blond beard.

When we listened to the tape, we all agreed that it was the work of an actor imitating a *rowzeh-khan* (a preacher). How could Khomeini ignore the real economic and political issues of the country and make this direct appeal to the basest sentiments of fanaticism among the illiterate masses? Khomeini was, in his own way, an intellectual, we argued. He would not antagonize the intelligentsia by taking a deliberately obscurantist line.

The sermon, however, was genuine. It struck the very note of

anger it had been aimed at. It frightened the 'little people' of Iran's sprawling, ill-equipped cities. Khomeini told them that not only were they being cheated of a decent life in this world, but by remaining silent witnesses to 'the crimes of the Shah against the Prophet and his descendants' they were now risking the loss of the next. The Shah had tried to teach the 'little people' how to live and had failed. Khomeini set out to teach them how to die and quickly succeeded. The astonished intelligentsia, opposed to the Shah for different reasons, at first waited and watched as the revolutionary storm, stirred by Khomeini, gathered force. Then they too joined the legions of 'the downtrodden' that the exiled Ayatollah brought onto the streets of Tehran.

In only a few months Khomeini was the undisputed leader of an unusual revolution. And on 11 February 1979 this frail-looking octogenarian, who had been chased out of his home and forced to leave the country fifteen years earlier, became the new ruler of Iran. But even then few Iranians knew much about Khomeini. They had observed the shape of his face in the full moon and thanked Allah for the blessing. They had listened to his passionate messages broadcast by the Persian service of the BBC from London. They had killed and died for him, as he had asked. And yet they hardly knew their new 'Imam'.

In 1968, when preparing a series of articles on the power struggle among the Grand Ayatollahs following the death of Grand Ayatollah Hakim in Iraq, I had made some inquiries about Khomeini among the mullahs in the holy cities of Qom and Mashhad. Almost to a man they dismissed him as an idealist who had condemned himself to life-long exile as a result of his uncontrollable passion. In Iran in those days the makers of history had to be recruited from among sober cynics; there was no room for passionate zealots like Khomeini.

In 1977 I resumed my inquiries about Khomeini both in Iran and Iraq with a view, which must now seem utterly naive, to help bring about a reconciliation between him and the Shah. Once Khomeini had seized control of Iran, my journalistic curiosity concerning his life and thoughts immediately became a moral necessity. I had to get to know this almost total stranger who had captured the imagination of my compatriots with his discourse and who was now changing beyond recognition the Iran I had grown to love above everything else. Over the next six years I put together the many pieces of a huge jigsaw, and at times my task was a mixture of detective work and social archaeology. Khomeini