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von hkhatib

in Außenpolitik,
Bürgerkriege

Kommentare (1)

Syria's Present Anticipates A Future Sunni-Flavoured Iran

by *Hakim Khatib*

When the Iranian revolution embarked against Muhammad Reza Shah's regime in the late 70s, it wasn't a social revolution aiming at changing the society, but rather a political one with legitimate demands similar to what Syrians once were looking forward to achieve in 2011. When all this started in Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the most central and inspirational figure in the Iranian revolution was still in exile. This is a story that happened 35 years ago and we cannot but see the rhyming of its events with the current Syrian imbroglio.

In 1975 the regime of the Shah took further steps to consolidate its power over Iranian people. It abandoned the existing two-party system and introduced a single political organization – the Resurgence Party. While the sole party was gaining more control over territory and population, it threatened groups previously enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy from the government, namely the bazaar merchants and religious clerics (Ulama). Like in Syria, the Iranian one-party regime benefitted from its apparatus to keep people in check and to enforce its policies – while at the same time glorifying the monarchy at the expense of Islamic scholars, controlling bazaars and reducing Islam in daily life. These policies angered both the Ulama and bazaar merchants triggering an alliance between them against the regime.

The alliance between opposition forces and Ulama was to add pressure to liberalize and perhaps to topple the regime of the Shah. Westernized urban professionals, students from the new secular universities and theological seminaries, bazaar merchants and Ulama were protesting actors against the Shah. Many of them were driven by political, economic and social factors; quite few were driven by religious motivations.

Introducing court reforms for trials of political dissidents and releasing political prisoners due to US pressure didn't help the Shah much. The Iranian regime's violations of human rights and its use of torture against political prisoners were staggering much like what we see in the Syrian regime's torture chambers and prisons. The opposition factions became emboldened to speak out organizing themselves into professional associations and student organizations, publishing pamphlets and distributing manifestos criticizing the regime's violation of human rights and demanding freedom of press and assembly and escalating its activities by resurrecting old political organizations and forming new ones, notably the National Front and the right wing of the Ulama.

The religious clergy didn't have an action plan against the Shah. Indeed, the majority of them thought that it was not their place to partake in political activities. While some opposition forces were reformist believing in restoring the constitution and establishing a constitutional monarchy under the shah such as Mehdi Bazargan, a reformist politician and a representative of the forces of the secular National Front, some were more intransigent and militant, such as Khomeini, accepting no deal with the Shah and aimed at overthrowing him and installing a new system.

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Khomeini's proposal was to create an Islamic state modeled on the Quran and the community of the prophet and led by the men of religion because their knowledge of Islamic law is vital for managing the affairs of state. Although Khomeini's proposal was declined by the majority of opposition forces, his words found resonance during the momentum of the revolution across Iran attracting more people on his side.

Many urban workers were recent migrants from the countryside living in crowded shantytowns in and around Tehran. Marginalized in their rural areas and not yet fully incorporated into urban life, they were receptive to the calls for protest by the spokesmen of Islam. Working classes joined students, merchants and Ulama in streets against Shah's repression. Exactly as in Syria, demonstrators' cries for reform, freedom and restoration of the constitution took a more radical tone demanding the death of the Shah and the return of the Khomeini. More religious terms started to slip into protestors' slogans replacing the older "non-religious" ones. The revolutionary protests reached a peak during the ten days of the month Muharram, a period of ritual mourning for the death of Imam Husain important in the Shiite calendar. Framing anti-regime protests in this ceremonial period firmly puts the whole revolutionary movement in religious framework.

After the Shah had left Iran for his own good in January 1979, the triumphant Khomeini was welcomed by huge crowds as he returned in February to Iran. This point in specific was a decisive juncture in the Iranian trajectory towards the future. Should Iran now be dominated by religious establishment or secular elites or both? In an attempt to answer this question about Iran's future orientation, thousands of lives were lost. Now we know the answer – the religious establishment won.

Khomeini appointed Bazargan as a prime minister to bring political order and economic stability, but the latter failed to do so effectively due to his limited powers compared with a ruling organization known as the Council of the Islamic Republic, which issued laws and decrees to constantly veto Bazargan government's policies. Transformation into religious frameworks continued starting from schoolbooks to the highest forms of education, enforcing Islamic teachings in social life and creating a religiously coloured rhetoric in media and political discourse.

Universities closed for two years in an attempt to review all educational subjects so they comply with Islamic teachings. We see the same changes happening in Syria especially in rebel-held areas and refugee camps inside and outside the Syrian borders. All non-religious books were substituted by religious or religiously coloured ones. Should Syria avoid the scenario of Afghanistan when warlords had control on specific regions and continued their attempt to violently keep hold on them, Syria is more likely to move in the direction of a Sunni, perhaps more fragmented, Iran in the Middle East.

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Ein Kommentar zu "Syria's Present Anticipates A Future Sunni-Flavoured

Iran

g | 13. Aug. 2015 um 11:39 |

#1

This is a decent summary of the Iranian revolution, however the articles not once touches down on why or how the author believes Syria might become a sunni version of Iran, a notion that is entirely unsubstantiated and wrong.

ANTWORTEN

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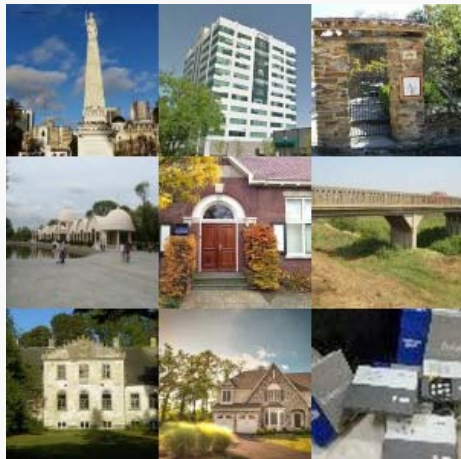
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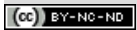
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