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A Student's Guide to the Unique Iranian Theocracy

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Author's Introduction

Iran is one of the most discussed countries in international media and politics today due to its intent on becoming a regional nuclear power along with its tension with the West, especially the United States. This country has had a history of exploitation by the West. The inept leadership of Iran in the past coupled with strong influences from the West has created immense tension and an unfortunate gap in knowledge about one another. The leadership of Iran has had profound implications on its people and this guide reveals how the visions of these leaders along with Western thought and a strong devotion to religion (Islam), has transformed this country.

A successful revolution in 1979 allowed for a working government - one that still runs the country today. The Iranian government is one of the most intricate working governments in the world because it is founded in religious ideology and law. It is a Theocracy; a government run through the vision of god. Rulers of this government are believed to pursue god's vision on earth. In the case of Iran, Ruhollah Khomeini believed that the Sharia is god's word and that this word could be translated into a working government. This was to ultimately bring about the world his god envisioned - a government rooted in religious jurisprudence.

The direct involvement of god in government differs greatly from the Western style of government. It creates complexity in the modern world where technology and communication permeate through all facets of life and in which religion is not the mode of guidance for all people. A government that is trying to

enforce the word of god and a doctrine that is laden with tradition can be controversial and difficult to implement. Also, the borders in which this theocracy is set in, years prior to the revolution, was an absolute monarchy, with its proclaimed mission to become western and secular. Reza Shah attempted to take Attaturk's western-inspired modernization and secular model in Turkey, and bring it to Iran. This is a totally different from what Ruhollah Khomeini, the father of the revolution and the clerical establishment envisioned their government to be. Khomeini, too, understood power, relationships, and the modern world, and the rapid transformation in 1979 formed a government that had to appeal to all people in order to survive. So, a directly elected Parliament and the President work in conjunction with the higher powered assemblies (Guardian Council, Supreme Leader, etc.). In Iran, those who are elected by the people can be seen as the majority's voice and the true voice of the people, yet they hold positions that are given very little power in comparison to those above them. This relationship creates a unique web of communication and negotiation that often ends in a fruitless battle won by those who follow the vision of Khomeini and his school of thought. They are also those who have been appointed not elected by the people.

It is hard for change to occur when change is discouraged and tradition reigns supreme. Yet this government, with its largest population in its liberal youth, struggles to balance the tradition they believe is divine and crucial. This is partly due to the abundance of technology and wealth outside of the country and from a world community that has very divergent fundamental beliefs about government and policy, both foreign and domestic. There is an ongoing battle that

the clerical elite face to extinguish Western thought and technology from reaching and influencing its youth against its hard-line, traditional vision.¹ This occurs in the face of economic failure by the government and may be a deciding factor in whether this government in its current form will sustain its strong grip on power.

I wrote this guide because, as a student, I felt that there was extreme ignorance to the structure of the Iranian government and a skewed idea of how this country became what it is today. I want people to educate themselves about Iran and its place in the world and better understand how this anomaly of a government works. Only then are we able to understand why it interacts with the world the way it does. Without this simple information it is hard to understand why the West and the Iranian Government have such different outlooks and why they often viciously disagree.

Additionally, the events leading up to the revolution, the revolution itself, and the aftermath have been thoroughly documented, all of this information has not been combined into one easily readable guide. When I embarked on researching and writing on this topic, I wanted to bring information that is relevant into the hands of those who do not want to or need to sift through a myriad of different books and articles to find the simple information they want. Here I have not only done that work for you but attempted to write it in a language that everyone will be able to understand and learn from. I have felt that the story of this country, how it was created, and how its power structure works is crucial in understanding international politics today and a culture many of us know nothing about but seem to already have opinions on.

¹ Boroujerdi, *Iranian Islam and the Faustian Bargain of Western Modernity*

This guide provides an overview of the basic power structure, history, and vision of Iran. You can read this to enhance your knowledge of the subject in a way that is concise and easy to read, but be forewarned, this is by no means the whole story. There are hundreds of other parts of the government that are working to make the whole system cohesive and successful. The Iranian Theocracy, like any government, has intricacies that no one but those directly involved will ever know about. For those who want a general understanding of how the government began, why it was created, why it is moving in this direction, and who the key players are, I have provided that for you. If you want a more complete in-depth story I have provided resources I believe will give great information on your quest for knowledge on this subject. Remember: Iran is a country with strict censorship laws so information is not readily available and information that is written may be distorted. This is just another reason this government is so unique and hard to understand and why it has fascinated me and the many who have studied it.