

The Years of Struggle and Exile, 1962–1978

The emphases of the Imam's activity began to change with the death of Burujirdi on March 31, 1961, for he now emerged as one of the successors to Burujirdi's position of leadership. This emergence was signaled by the publication of some of his writings on *fiqh*, most importantly the basic handbook of religious practice entitled, like others of its genre, *Tauzih al-Masa'il*. He was soon accepted as *marja'-i taqlid* by a large number of Iranian Shi'is. His leadership role was, however, destined to go far beyond that traditional for a *marja'-i taqlid* and to attain a comprehensiveness unique in the history of the Shi'i *ulama*.

This became apparent soon after the death of Burujirdi when Muhammad Riza Shah, secure in his possession of power after the CIA-organized coup of August 1953, embarked on a series of measures designed to eliminate all sources of opposition, actual or potential, and to incorporate Iran firmly into American patterns of strategic and economic domination. In the autumn of 1962, the government promulgated new laws governing elections to local and provincial councils, which deleted the former requirement that those elected be sworn into office on the Qur'an.

Seeing in this a plan to permit the infiltration of public life by the Baha'is, Imam Khomeini telegraphed both the Shah and the prime minister of the day, warning them to desist from violating both the law of Islam and the Iranian Constitution of 1907, failing which the *ulama* would engage in a sustained campaign of protest. Rejecting all compromise measures, the Imam was able to force the repeal of the laws in question seven weeks after they had been promulgated. This achievement marked his emergence on the scene as the principal voice of opposition to the Shah.

A more serious confrontation was not long in coming. In January 1963, the Shah announced a six-point program of reform that he termed the White Revolution, an American-inspired package of measures designed to give his regime a liberal and progressive facade. Imam Khomeini summoned a meeting of his colleagues in Qum to press upon them the necessity of opposing the Shah's plans, but they were initially hesitant. They sent one of their number, Ayatullah Kamalvand, to see the Shah and gauge his intentions.

Although the Shah showed no inclination to retreat or compromise, it took further pressure by Imam Khomeini on the other senior *ulama* of Qum to persuade them to decree a boycott of the referendum that the Shah had planned to obtain the appearance of popular approval for his White Revolution. For his own part, Imam Khomeini issued on January 22, 1963 a strongly worded declaration denouncing the Shah and his plans. In imitation, perhaps, of his father, who had taken an armored column to Qum in 1928 in order to intimidate certain outspoken *ulama*, the Shah came to Qum two days later. Faced with a boycott by all the dignitaries of the city, he delivered a speech harshly attacking the *ulama* as a class.

On January 26, the referendum was held, with a low turnout that reflected the growing heed paid by the Iranian people to Imam Khomeini's directives. He continued his denunciation of the Shah's programs, issuing a manifesto that also bore the signatures of eight other senior scholars.

In it he listed the various ways in which the Shah had violated the constituent, condemned the spread of moral corruption in the country, and accused the Shah of comprehensive submission to America and Israel: "I see the solution to lie in this tyrannical government being removed, for the crime of violating the ordinances of Islam and trampling the constitution, and in a government taking its place that adheres to Islam and has concern for the Iranian nation."¹ He also decreed that the Nauruz celebrations for the Iranian year 1342 (which fell on March 21, 1963) be cancelled as a sign of protest against government policies.

The very next day, paratroopers were sent to the Fayziya madrasa in Qum, the site where the Imam delivered his public speeches. They killed a number of students, beat and arrested a number of others, and ransacked the building. Unintimidated, the Imam continued his attacks on the regime.

On April 1, he denounced the persistent silence of certain apolitical *ulama* as "tantamount to collaboration with the tyrannical regime," and one day later proclaimed political neutrality under the guise of *taqiya* to be *haram*.² When the Shah sent his emissaries to the houses of the *ulama* in Qum to threaten them with the destruction of their homes, the Imam reacted contemptuously by referring to the Shah as "that little man (mardak)."

Then, on April 3, 1963, the fortieth day after the attack on the Fayziya madrasa, he described the Iranian government as being determined to eradicate Islam at the behest of America, Israel, and himself as resolved to combat it.

Confrontation turned to insurrection some two months later. The beginning of Muharram, always a time of heightened religious awareness and sensitivity, saw demonstrators in Tehran carrying pictures of the Imam and denouncing the Shah in front of his own palace. On the afternoon of 'Ashura (June 3, 1963), Imam Khomeini delivered a speech at the Fayziya madrasa in which he drew parallels between the Umayyad caliph Yazid and the Shah and warned the Shah that if he did not change his ways the day

would come when the people would offer up thanks for his departure from the country.^{[3](#)}

This warning was remarkably prescient, for on January 16, 1979, the Shah was indeed obliged to leave Iran amidst scenes of popular rejoicing. The immediate effect of the Imam's speech was, however, his arrest two days later at 3 o'clock in the morning by a group of commandos who hastily transferred him to the Qasr prison in Tehran.

As dawn broke on June 3, the news of his arrest spread first through Qum and then to other cities. In Qum, Tehran, Shiraz, Mashhad and Varamin, masses of angry demonstrators were confronted by tanks and ruthlessly slaughtered. It was not until six days later that order was fully restored. This uprising of 15 Khurdad 1342 (the day in the Iranian calendar on which it began) marked a turning point in Iranian history. Henceforth the repressive and dictatorial nature of the Shah's regime, reinforced by the unwavering support of the United States, was constantly intensified, and with it the prestige of Imam Khomeini as the only figure of note – whether religious or secular – willing to challenge him.

The arrogance imbuing the Shah's policies also caused a growing number of the *ulama* to abandon their quietism and align themselves with the radical goals set forth by the Imam. The movement of 15 Khurdad may therefore be characterized as the prelude to the Islamic Revolution of 1978–79; the goals of that revolution and its leadership had already been determined.

After nineteen days in the Qasr prison, Imam Khomeini was moved first, to the 'Isfahabad military base and then to a house in the Davudiya section of Tehran where he was kept under surveillance. Despite the killings that had taken place during the uprising, mass demonstrations were held in Tehran and elsewhere demanding his release and some of his colleagues came to the capital from Qum to lend their support to the demand. It was not, however, until April 7, 1964 that he was released, no doubt on the assumption that imprisonment had tempered his views and that the movement he had led would quietly subside.

Three days after his release and return to Qum, he dispelled such illusions by refuting officially inspired rumors that he had come to an understanding with the Shah's regime and by declaring that the movement inaugurated on 15 Khurdad would continue. Aware of the persisting differences in approach between the Imam and some of the other senior religious scholars, the regime had also attempted to discredit him by creating dissension in Qum. These attempts, too, were unsuccessful, for early in June 1964 all the major *ulama* put their signatures to declarations commemorating the first anniversary of the uprising of 15 Khurdad.

Despite its failure to sideline or silence Imam Khomeini, the Shah's regime continued its pro-American policies unwaveringly. In the autumn of 1964, it concluded a status of forces agreement with the United States that provided immunity from prosecution for all American personnel in Iran and their dependents.

This occasioned the Imam to deliver what was perhaps the most vehement speech of the entire struggle

against the Shah; certainly one of his close associates, Ayatullah Muhammad Mufattih, had never seen him so agitated.⁴ He denounced the agreement as a surrender of Iranian independence and sovereignty, made in exchange for a \$200 million loan that would be of benefit only to the Shah and his associates, and described as traitors all those in the *Majlis* who voted in favor of it; the government lacked all legitimacy, he concluded.⁵

Shortly before dawn on November 4, 1964, again a detachment of commandos surrounded the Imam's house in Qum, arrested him, and this time took him directly to Mehrabad airport in Tehran for immediate banishment to Turkey. The decision to deport rather than arrest Imam Khomeini and imprison him in Iran was based no doubt on the hope that in exile he would fade from popular memory. Physical elimination would have been fraught with the danger of an uncontrollable popular uprising. As for the choice of Turkey, this reflected the security cooperation existing between the Shah's regime and Turkey.

The Imam was first lodged in room 514 of Bulvar Palas Oteli in Ankara, a moderately comfortable hotel in the Turkish capital, under the joint surveillance of Iranian and Turkish security officials. On November 12, he was moved from Ankara to Bursa, where he was to reside another eleven months.

The stay in Turkey cannot have been congenial, for Turkish law forbade Imam Khomeini to wear the cloak and turban of the Muslim scholar, an identity which was integral to his being; the sole photographs in existence to show him bareheaded all belong to the period of exile in Turkey.⁶

However, on December 3, 1964, he was joined in Bursa by his eldest son, Hajj Mustafa Khomeini; he was also permitted to receive occasional visitors from Iran, and was supplied with a number of books on *fiqh*. He made use of his forced stay in Bursa to compile *Tahrir al-Wasila*, a two-volume compendium on questions of jurisprudence. Important and distinctive are the fatwas this volume contains, grouped under the headings of *al-amr bi 'l-ma'ruf wa 'l-nahy 'an al-munkar* and *difa'*.

The Imam decrees, for example, that "if it is feared that the political and economic domination (by foreigners) over an Islamic land will lead to the enslavement and weakening of the Muslims, then such domination must be repelled by appropriate means, including passive resistance, the boycott of foreign goods, and the abandonment of all dealings and association with the foreigners in question." Similarly, "if an attack by foreigners on one of the Islamic states is anticipated, it is incumbent on all Islamic states to repel the attack by all possible means; indeed, this is incumbent on the Muslims as a whole."⁷

On September 5, 1965, Imam Khomeini left Turkey for Najaf in Iraq, where he was destined to spend thirteen years. As a traditional center of Shi'i learning and pilgrimage, Najaf was clearly a preferable and more congenial place of exile. It had moreover already functioned as a stronghold of *ulama* opposition to the Iranian monarchy during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906–1909. But it was not in order to accommodate the Imam that the Shah arranged for his transfer to Najaf.

First, there was continuing disquiet among the Imam's followers at his forced residence in Bursa, away from the traditional milieu of the Shi'i madrasa; such objections could be met by moving him to Najaf. Second, it was hoped that once in Najaf, the Imam would either be overshadowed by the prestigious *ulama* there, men such as Ayatullah Abu 'l-Qasim Khu'i (d. 1995), or that he would challenge their distaste for political activism and squander his energies on confronting them.

He skirted this dual danger by proffering them his respect while continuing to pursue the goals he had set himself before leaving Iran. Another pitfall he avoided was association with the Iraqi government, which occasionally had its own differences with the Shah's regime and was of a mind to use the Imam's presence in Najaf for its own purposes. The Imam declined the opportunity to be interviewed on Iraqi television soon after his arrival, and resolutely kept his distance from succeeding Iraqi administrations.

Once settled in Najaf, Imam Khomeini began teaching *fiqh* at the Shaykh Murtaza Ansari madrasa. His lectures were well attended, by students not only from Iran but also from Iraq, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Persian Gulf states. In fact, a mass migration to Najaf from Qum and other centers of religious learning in Iran was proposed to the Imam, but he advised against it as a measure bound to depopulate Qum and weaken it as a center of religious guidance.

It was also at the Shaykh Murtaza Ansari madrasa that he delivered, between January 21 and February 8, 1970, his celebrated lectures on *vilayat-i faqih*, the theory of governance that was to be implemented after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution. (The text of these lectures was published in Najaf, not long after their delivery, under the title *Vilayat-i Faqih ya Hukumat-i Islami*; a slightly abbreviated Arabic translation soon followed).

This theory, which may be summarized as the assumption by suitably qualified *ulama* of the political and juridical functions of the Twelfth Imam during his occultation, had already been put forward, somewhat tentatively, in his first published work, *Kashf al-Asrar*. Now he presented it as the self-evident and incontestable consequence of the Shi'i doctrine of the Imamate, citing and analyzing in support of it all relevant texts from the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (S)⁸ and the Twelve Imams (A)⁹

He emphasized also the harm that had come to Iran (as well as other Muslim countries) from abandoning Islamic law and government and relinquishing the political realm to the enemies of Islam. Finally, he delineated a program for the establishment of an Islamic government, laying particular stress on the responsibilities of the *ulama* to transcend their petty concerns and to address the people fearlessly: "It is the duty of all of us to overthrow the *taghut*, the illegitimate political powers that now rule the entire Islamic world."¹⁰

The text of the lectures on *vilayat-i faqih* was smuggled back to Iran by visitors who came to see the Imam in Najaf, as well as by ordinary Iranians who came on pilgrimage to the shrine of Hazrat 'Ali (A). The same channels were used to convey to Iran the numerous letters and proclamations in which the

Imam commented on the events that took place in his homeland during the long years of exile.

The first such document, a letter to the Iranian *ulama* assuring them of the ultimate downfall of the Shah's regime, is dated April 16, 1967. On the same day he also wrote to prime minister Amir 'Abbas Huvayda accusing him of running "a regime of terror and thievery."¹¹ On the occasion of the Six Day War in June 1967, the Imam issued a declaration forbidding any type of dealing with Israel as well as the consumption of Israeli goods.

This declaration was widely and openly publicized in Iran, which led to the ransacking of Imam Khomeini's house in Qum and the arrest of Hajj Sayyid Ahmad Khomeini, his second son, who had been living there. (Some of the unpublished works of the Imam were lost or destroyed on this occasion). It was also at this time that the Shah's regime contemplated moving the Imam from Iraq to India; a location from which communications with Iran would have been far more difficult, but the plan was thwarted.

Other developments on which the Imam commented from Najaf were the extravagant celebrations of 2500 years of Iranian monarchy in October 1971 ("it is the duty of the Iranian people to refrain from participation in this illegitimate festival"); the formal establishment of a one-party system in Iran in February 1975 (the Imam prohibited membership in the party, the *Hizb-i Rastakhiz*, in a *fatwa* issued the following month); and the substitution, in the same month, of the imperial (shahanshahi) calendar for the solar Hijri calendar that had been official in Iran until that time.

Some developments were met with fatwas rather than proclamations: for example, the Imam rejected as incompatible with Islam the Family Protection Law of 1967 and classified as adulteresses women who remarried after obtaining a divorce under its provisions.¹²

Imam Khomeini had also to deal with changing circumstances in Iraq. The Ba'th Party, fundamentally hostile to religion, had come to power in July 1967 and soon began exerting pressure on the scholars of Najaf, both Iraqi and Iranian. In 1971, as Iraq and Iran entered a state of sporadic and undeclared war with each other, the Iraqi regime began expelling from its territory Iranians whose forebears had in some cases been residing there for generations. The Imam, who until that point had scrupulously kept his distance from Iraqi officialdom, now addressed himself directly to the Iraqi leadership condemning its actions.

Imam Khomeini was, in fact, constantly, and acutely aware of the connections between Iranian affairs and those of the Muslim world in general and the Arab lands in particular. This awareness led him to issue from Najaf a proclamation to the Muslims of the world on the occasion of the hajj in 1971, and to comment, with special frequency and emphasis, on the problems posed by Israel for the Muslim world.

The Imam's strong concern for the Palestine question led him to issue a *fatwa* on August 27, 1968 authorizing the use of religious monies (*vujuh-i shar'i*) to support the nascent activities of *al-Asifa*, the armed wing of the Palestine Liberation Organization; this was confirmed by a similar and more detailed

ruling issued after a meeting with the Baghdad representative of the PLO. [13](#)

The distribution in Iran, on however limited a scale, of the proclamations and fatwas of Imam Khomeini was in itself enough to ensure that his name not be forgotten during the years of exile. Equally important, the movement of Islamic opposition to the Shah's regime that had been inaugurated by the uprising of 15 Khurdad continued to develop despite the brutality unhesitatingly dispensed by the Shah. Numerous groups and individuals explicitly owed their allegiance to the Imam. Soon after his exiling there came into being an organization called *Hay'atha-yi Mu'talifa-yi Islami* (the Allied Islamic Associations), headquartered in Tehran but with branches throughout Iran.

Active in it were many who had been students of the Imam in Qum and who came to assume important responsibilities after the revolution, men such as Hashimi-Rafsanjani and Javad Bahonar. In January 1965, four members of the organization assassinated Hasan 'Ali Mansur, the prime minister who had been responsible for the exiling of the Imam.

There were no individuals designated, even clandestinely, as Imam Khomeini's authorized representatives in Iran while he was in exile.

However, senior *ulama* such as Ayatullah Murtaza Mutahhari, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Bihishti (d. 1981), and Ayatullah Husayn 'Ali Muntaziri, were in contact with him, directly and indirectly, and were known to speak on his behalf in important matters. Like their younger counterparts in the *Hay'atha-yi Mu'talafa-yi Islami*, all three went on to perform important functions during and after the revolution.

The continued growth of the Islamic movement during Imam Khomeini's exile should not be attributed exclusively to his abiding influence or to the activity of *ulama* associated with him. Important, too, were the lectures and books of 'Ali Shari'ati (d. 1977), a university-educated intellectual whose understanding and presentation of Islam were influenced by Western ideologies, including Marxism, to a degree that many *ulama* regarded as dangerously syncretistic.

When the Imam was asked to comment on the theories of Shari'ati, both by those who supported them and by those who opposed them, he discreetly refrained from doing so, in order not to create a division within the Islamic movement that would have benefited the Shah's regime.

The most visible sign of the persisting popularity of Imam Khomeini in the pre-revolutionary years, above all at the heart of the religious institution in Qum, came in June 1975 on the anniversary of the uprising of 15 Khurdad. Students at the Fayziya madrasa began holding a demonstration within the confines of the building, and a sympathetic crowd assembled outside.

Both gatherings continued for three days until they were attacked on the ground by commandos and

from the air by a military helicopter, with numerous deaths resulting. The Imam reacted with a message in which he declared the events in Qum and similar disturbances elsewhere to be a sign of hope that “freedom and liberation from the bonds of imperialism” were at hand.¹⁴ The beginning of the revolution came indeed some two and a half years later.

- ^{1.} Sahifa-yi Nur, I, p. 27.
- ^{2.} Kauthar, I, p. 67; Sahifa-yi Nur, I, p. 39.
- ^{3.} Sahifa-yi Nur, I, p. 46.
- ^{4.} Interview with the present writer, Tehran, December 1979.
- ^{5.} Kauthar, I, pp. 169–178.
- ^{6.} See Ansari, Hadis-I Bidari, p. 67.
- ^{7.} Tahrir al-Wasila, I, p. 486.
- ^{8.} For maintaining readability, (S) which is an acronym for “Salla (a)llahu alayhi wa aalihi wa sallam” is used throughout the book to denote “May peace and benedictions of God be upon him and his family.” It is used for Prophet Muhammad.
- ^{9.} For maintaining readability, (A) which is an acronym for “Alayhi (alayhim) al-salaam” is used throughout the book to denote “May peace of God be upon him/her/them.” It is used for the Prophets, Imams, and saints.
- ^{10.} Vilayat-i Faqih, Najaf, n.d., p. 204.
- ^{11.} Sahifa-yi Nur, I, pp. 129, 132.
- ^{12.} Imam Khomeini, Risala-yi Ahkam, p. 328.
- ^{13.} Sahifa-yi Nur, I, pp. 144–5.
- ^{14.} Sahifa-yi Nur, I, p. 215.

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