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ANTI-WESTERNISM AS A CRITERION FOR PRETENDING TO BE REVOLUTIONARY IN IRAN AND ITS APPLICATION AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL IN REMOVING POLITICAL RIVALS

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Abstract

What has been less visible to observers over more than Iran's thirty years political events or, in other words, what was actually formed the motivation power of government system after the 1979 revolution, was located under the shadow of a vast tree of religion, is a kind of xenophobia and, in its particular form, is anti-Western. It can be argued that the contents, capacity and role of this religion without any "anti-Western" anticipation were useless and deficient to the Iranian Shiite rulers.

The basis of the discussion in this article is the context in which a kind of anti-modernization grew from within and became the dominant discourse of society headed by traditional clergy.

What is being discussed in this article is to fingers on the main stimulus and the central tool of production of legitimacy, and its role and application in conjunction with the political ideology of rule in Iran. In this regard, the present article seeks to explain how this primary stimulus has evolved and how it is used as a political tool but in the form of ideology.

Key words

Anti-Western, anti-modernization, Islamic radicalism, theocracy, extremism, holy values.

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1. Introduction

From the beginning of the Shiite mullah's rule in Iran, it is always talked of "Shi'a theocracy" (Trofimov, 2015), Shi'a political ideology (Thiessen, 2009), Islamic radicalism (Richards, 2003), the exploitation of religion (Abrahamian, 2004), etc.

On this basis, there is the question of what connection can be seen between the regime's such

character on the one hand and its West hostility on the other.

The relationship between anti-Westernism and religion can be explained at least in such a way that the religious institution specifically in the case of Iran theocracy government after the revolution, could not and cannot be turned into a political tool for the government without borrowing a motorized motivation from outside of itself. Essentially, it can

be said that religion as a powerful institution, by the conditions of time, has come out in the context of the practice of producing and cultivating a discourse, can act within itself and provides its strength, stability, the power of action and purposeful orientation through this way.

The relationship between a religious skeleton and the force that drives this skeleton can be likened to one device so that religion is the body of that device, and the political motivation is considered as a driving force. This engine is the driving force behind political Islam in our era, and especially since the collapse of the Eastern bloc, is extreme anti-Westernism.

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979 was formed in a non-friendly context with the western advocates of the former regime, new governors were willing or unwilling to define their political identity with a kind of anti-Westernism.

A decade after the Iranian revolution and the establishment of a new regime, when the "collapse of the East" came to an end and the "cold war" ended, the jihad against the "Dar al-Harb idols" was also ended and because of the radical Sunni Islam that was yesterday's alley of the west. It was now necessary to enter a war and jihad with a new enemy that was united before. On the other hand, the Western world needed a new enemy in order to continue to survive, continue the cycle of reconstruction and the advancement of its internal and external policies.

Hence, "the true Islam" following its "real predecessor" – Salaf al Sadeqin – from one side, and Western Farunyt – arrogance, on the other hand, came to the scene to do not stop the cycle of human slaughter and destruction. Samuel Huntington spoke of the clash of civilizations this time between Western civilization and Islam as their peak.

Consequently, the Iranian Shiite government, which introduced itself as the gonfalonier of the fight for the West arrogant for a decade, could not stand back from this anti-Western carriage. Even though there were these Sunni extremists and jihadists now threatened Western interests anywhere in the world. The Shiite regime of Iran must continue to insist on its anti-Western identity, maintaining its borders with the Sunni world and kept the official slogan of "Death to America," because it considered itself the "Almighty" of Islam and the hopes of the disadvantaged throughout the world.

A significant difference amongst all those various anti-Western Islamic groups on the one hand and the Iranian government, on the other hand, was that these groups did not identify themselves with any country. They did not speak of any government or nation and in every part of the world, even in the most concentrated western cities, they could form

themselves and take their actions under the name of Islam and with the slogan of "Allah Akbar". These were the terrorist cells that, at least in appearance, were not linked to any government, and therefore they were responsible for their actions and did not target the preventive results of these measures by Western governments for a particular country.

The actions, positions, threats and verbal attacks of a United Nations member state, but in the eyes of the world and international law, is ultimately a different case from the case of jihadist groups. In this situation, any unconsidered speech can even have adverse consequences and results for the national interests of a country. However, this was not something that Iranian rulers had been worried about since they were in power in Iran from the beginning and throughout their rule.

It is now nearly four decades that the Shiite regime of Iran has continued its survival by assuming "anti-Western" positions as a political tool. Although under international pressure and the crushing sanctions of the Western world, it had to be "Flexible Heroic", but this system of governance in its entirety is aware of a fact. It's that the "anti-Western" positions, albeit only in words but not in practice, remain the most important source of legitimacy of the state, and in the end, the most successful political means to deal with the profound economic, social, cultural and the political problems in today's society of Iran.

In the past forty years, many political analysts have emphasized the ideological nature of the Iranian government, the sectarian behavior of this government and its interventions in other countries of the Middle East. During this time, domestic reformers also struggled to maintain their acceptance of the ideology and the sectarian nature of the government, indicating its differences with the Western world as subordinate, temporary, and conditional. They tried to make a bridge between this government and the Western world and show that their ideology and anti-Westernism were two separate issues so that they could be both a true Shiite and a friend of the West.

However, the relationship between these two is beyond these. Like the one above, "anti-Westernism" is the driving engine that keeps the political identity of the government alive. This engine is embedded in the body of "religion". What more emphasis is placed on the ideology of this regime and sectarianism and to foster sectarian disagreements. What is less talked about is the inseparability of this "being ideological" and that "being anti-western". Separating these two in a theoretical discussion and looking at them, apart from each other, and finally looking at the relationship between these two can bring us a better

understanding of the political identity of the current Iranian government.

2. Anti-Western backgrounds in Iran

The Iranian community had begun to call for modernization since the Qajar era (Baker, Saldanha, 2009). The effects of this contact between the two very different worlds of that day had different aspects of their own.

On the one hand, part of the ideas related to liberation and social progress were inspired by Western ideas and Western experiences in their societies. To some of the intellectual elites of the community, these ideas were accepted, and the use of those experiences was worthwhile and, in some cases, desirable. In the early years of growing contact with the West, the first group of expedition students traveled to European countries (1845) and the "Dar-alfonoon School" was established (1851). However, on the other hand, for another section of the elites, the West was the enemy of Muslim nations.

The relationship between the colonial European countries and the colonized Asian and African societies is based on the opposition's reactions to this relationship. These objections grew in various ways. In the Islamic societies, part of the leaders and religious affiliates were among the forerunners of these objections.

Among the same section of the opposition to the West, there was a group that called for the awakening of Muslim nations through resistance to the colonialism of Europeans and the preservation of their values for the purpose of the independence and pride of these nations.

However, there was another category, whose only concern was their loss of social power and social standing among the people. They did not care about the awakening of the nations, nor worried about their independence and pride. For them, the entry of "alien" into "privacy" was accompanied by a threat to their traditional and long-standing interests.

Aside from coherence to the first or second category, the opposition to "Frankish unrestrained" – the common idiom of that time – was sitting in a boat, and they resisted to this "threat" with every initial motive.

Shiite leaders who have long claimed that "ruling" is their right, historically, they have carried a particular pessimism with what they do not know. Therefore, they always fear a new belief, a different thought with their common arguments, a new school or a new way of life. They always deny anything that

is unknown to them because it could be a threat to Shiite thought.

For this reason, during the Constitutional Revolution in 1906, the first positions of the Shiite leaders were based on their fear of losing their political, economic and social status in the then Iranian society. However, they quickly realized that they could not go against the open opposition to that movement. They did not oppose the constitutional movement in its entirety but tried to change it. This change was, in fact, a turning point in the demands of a libertarian, inspired by "modernity" (Mashruteh means constitutional), to the terms and conditions that ensure the implementation of "Sharia" (Mashroueh – religious law). They also succeeded in so many ways.

After the Constitutional Revolution, the struggle between the advocates of modernism and the opponents of modernism intensified further. At the end of the Qajar era, the great interest of some of the political and cultural elites of the society was evident in the Western culture, and their efforts found its apparent phenomenon to enter their values which were well-liked by this culture. In the middle of such a war and controversy, Reza Khan Sardar Sepah emerged.

Pahlavi the father and then his son and the agents of that rule appeared in the role of representatives of a kind of imported modernism in the social life of Iran. Some analysts believe that the actions associated with this modernization were not "popular with the Iranians" (Matin-Askari, 2012). The Pahlavis propagated a kind of extremism of "self-interpretation" of modernism. Instead of trying to understand the conditions for the growth of alienation and class hatred among the people, the Pahlavis tried to promote the symbolic aspects rather than its original aspects with a superficial understanding of the features of modernism.

This understanding was mostly based on the assimilated conception type of Western culture, based on the elimination of appearances of the recession and the stagnation of the Iranian community (Wright, 1989), rather than an attempt to attain the progressive values and evolution of modernism experienced by Western societies. According to Robin Wright, "Westernization became synonymous with modernization in a country with a civilization that dated back thousands of years" (Wright, 1989).

During the reign of Reza Shah, there were many civilization efforts and much effort for new urbanization, but at that time, the prevailing perception of modernism was based solely on activities, such as urbanization, bridge building, dam building and so on, not to promote the level of participation and social responsibility, economic security, or

fundamental political developments, including the participation of people in decisions that directly deal with their lives. Of course, the establishment of a national railway was a valuable step in facilitating communications, but at the same time finding a "suspicious" book with a person could have led to the imprisonment of that person. Immigration from the countryside to the cities was a desirable or inevitable way to find work, but the gathering of curious and questionable young people to discuss the causes of European progress and the recession of Islamic countries could have been a suspicious and threatening move. Even the establishment of modern universities, which was a manifestation of European progress, was seen as a positive step, but the young student spirit of questioning and taboo-breaking would face government resistance.

Pahlavi, the son, was a kind of father's path. Urban, industrial, and military innovations went through different stages one by one, but intellectual innovation and social-cultural development were not popular with governments.

Despite all, the masters of religion in all these years had a great deal of space and therefore, they performed the realities of the world for the people whatever they wanted.

It is clear that the freedom of expression and the formation of assemblies and the collective activity are the indisputable rights of the peoples of every society. But, how was that at the same time that student's small and limited groups and meetings were under the shadow of fear and prosecution the leaders, missionaries, agents and clerics of the religious organization enjoyed a great deal of freedom, and even many of them were financed by the government?

Mohammad Reza Shah's regime, even with the "instrumental use of religion" (Moazzami, 2013) and its affiliated institutions to overcome their more serious enemies, which were mostly "left-wing threats" or "liberals" (Moazzami, 2013) and progressive and national forces, it had a superficial understanding of Western modernism whose actions ultimately led to exacerbate the contradictions of that regime with the religious community. Mirsepassi (2004, p. 76) believes that "the Pahlavi regime was both proud and deeply conservative, and Iranian intellectuals did not value any of these two attributes". Mirsepassi (2004, p. 77) even emphasizes "an aggressive reaction to modernity" among Iranian "intellectuals".

In addition, the dominant discourse on the intellectual revolutionary atmosphere on a global level in decades after World War II, which was under the intellectual influence of the "Left Camp", was not ineffective to forming the process of an extreme

Anti-Westernism in Third World countries, such as Iran.

Regardless of whether an intellectual-minded stream had religious foundations or Marxism, credibility and reputation were taken from its anti-Westernism. Here the purpose is not to question or criticize this "anti-Western", but rather, it is a reference to a kind of blind Anti-Westernism, not a consciousness one. It even brought progressive and libertarian intellectuals close to religious currents with retrogressive trends.

Thus, both religious and secular intellectuals tried to condemn the appearance of Western civilization and pretending to avoid these appearances. In this way, they could show to being pro-people. The famous work of "Westernization" was published by the famous writer "Jalal Al Ahmad" during this period.

Due to socio-economic disadvantages, especially influenced by historical changes in society and the transformation of texture from rural to urban life, gradually, the significant number of dissenters was added. Several factors and reasons in the society made conditions that the masters of the religious system to able to place this massive dissatisfied people as their audience and move them toward a kind of "pessimism" against "foreign West" and "their assistants" as the cause of these black days of people, and finally introduce a kind of "return to genuine religious traditions" as a way of salvation for them.

It is somewhat unreasonable to claim that "dissatisfaction" began only with the observation of appearances and the encounter with the manifestations of Western civilization, and was continued only for this reason. It is more logical to state that the economic and social deprivations described in the description of "alienation growth" in the above line would have led to the growth of this alienation between the lower and upper classes of society and in its advanced conditions. This alienation became a form of hatred and a sense of revenge. An Israeli who spent several years at Shah's time working in Abadan – Iran's largest oil refinery located in this oil-rich city – described the city as "the poorest creatures on earth" (Kinzer, 2003).

Under these conditions, those who could exploit this alienation between the more affluent classes and the disadvantaged classes, with this unique skill, distorted this border and turned the border between "tradition" and "modernity". They were dependent on a particular religious/political current which was formed during decades.

Thus, it can be said that the grounds for the growth of a kind of alienation and ultimately hatred in the face of growing social economic gaps among the people arose before the 1979 revolution, as part

of Iran's policy analysts believe that "the Iranian revolution was mass-based and transformative of basic socio-cultural and socioeconomic relationships in Iran" (Gürbüz, 2003).

This is, of course, a general condition that every society experience more or less in its life cycle. Ankony (1999 p. 121) defines this type of alienation on the basis of social gaps "a condition in social relationships reflected by a low degree of integration or common values and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals, or between an individual and a group of people in a community or work environment".

If we look at different societies from this perspective, then the specific characteristics of these societies over and above the general situation must also be considered, which distinguishes each society from another society.

These specific characteristics are associated with the level of awareness of the people and the development of their social knowledge in a continuous link. These characteristics also relate to the nature and role of the intellectual elite of the community, in such a way that it affects economic, political, military and cultural intellectual powers, and at last, it affects the process of public opinion.

3. The Xenophobia subject in the hands of the clergy and the deformation of this subject

3.1. Confrontation between tradition and modernity

Political or religious culture is not a phenomenon that a government can create easily or shortly, but a government, for its particular purposes, can highlight the values and norms within that political or religious culture that can grow in the society. In a planned way, the government emphasize them. In other words, a state machine or political power exploits the existing ideological or cultural capacities in society and tries to build its foundations on solid ideological ground.

Governmental extremist anti-Semitism or anti-alien, in the period after the establishment of the Islamic state of Iran - is often used as a mechanism by forces that are not located in the center of power but on the sidelines of the center or even entirely marginal. The forces and elements that are at the core of power are aware of the internal conditions, external pressures, regional developments, and so on. They even, at sometimes, ride on extremist waves that are out of their control or placed against actions taken even though they do not logically agree. But forces

that have less direct responsibilities and are marginal, using extremism subject, try to attack the center of power, to get the power out of their rivals, and to gain full influence or entering the main core of power in order to become partners in economic and political dominance. It is also a process that begins with trying to survive, and finally, its ultimate goal is to grab all the leverages of economic and political power.

Specifically, authoritarian circles adorned with religion, often regarded as part of the power structure, but not at the decision-making center, use the "xenophobia" to drive public attention to this discourse that "aliens" threatening against "holy" and "transcendental" religious values. At the same time, they induce people that it is the religious leaders who guard those values against "threats". This "xenophobia" in the early stages is a process of self-proving, continues to be at the later stages of the goal of consolidating power, and ultimately, it aims to enter the main core of power.

The Anti-modernism, which became part of the property of the Islamic clerics and served their purposes since Constitutional Revolution, gradually set itself in the Iranian society as a principle of the political culture, and played a significant role in the political arena of Iran.

This anti-modernization intensified continuously by the traditional clergy until it became one of the clergy's instruments for strengthening its position in the Iranian society.

While the entrance of Western culture into the Iranian society was not the root of the public dissatisfaction, it could have been one of the factors of it, not all of them. Nevertheless, the role of the traditional clergy during all 70 years between the Constitutional Revolution and the anti-royal revolution of 1979 was to point out this case and amplify this anti-modernism.

M. Thiessen (2009, p. 19) writes: "The Iranians were caught between two very different worlds: a traditional one, and a modern one. An important aspect of this feeling of alienation was the influx of Western influences into Iran".

But the more fundamental point was that religious circles led the feeling toward such an impression that "a disease poisoning Iranian culture, something they had to get rid of " as soon as possible (Thiessen, 2009, p. 20).

This was one of the main levers of this traditional clergy in their ride on the wave of the 1979 revolution and their rapid takeover of the revolution.

It should also be recalled that in the early 1960s, a collision between a part of the traditional clergy which had moved away from its traditional base for

a while earlier and annexed itself to the revolutionary clergy on the one hand and the ruling apparatus on the other hand occurred.

This collision, eventually leading to the May 22th event (15th Khordad), was one of the historical manifestations of the collision between this part of the traditional clergy and the government. The traditional clergy, who propagandized hatred of modernism, and the government that regarded itself as the masterpiece of the interpretation and dissemination of modernism in Iran.

Another factor that should not be ignored is the existence of a conflict of interests in the Western world and helping some of the proprietors of those interests to the religious circles and provoke Anti-Western sentiment in Islamic countries to confront other interests.

After World War II, widespread and unbridled domination of Europe declined, but instead, the enormous economic and political power “beyond the waters” and, moreover, the growing dominance of such power became more perceptible than before. After the aftermath of the world war, two superpowers gradually came to power, as two skyscrapers in a city holding other city buildings in their shadows. This was not so appealing to the “powerful past” Europe. Thus, from the 1950s and 1960s, the Islamic radical currents emerged in Muslim countries that attacked America as the leader of the “Western” dominance. These currents benefited from friendship with Europe and, most notably, Britain, insofar as the slogan “Death to England” on the streets of Tehran in 1952–1953, began to turn into “Death to America” in 1978–1979.

3.2. Metamorphosis of Westernization and its transformation into a political cutting weapon

After the 1979 Revolution, known as the “Bahman Revolution”, this political culture became a political tool serving the totalitarian groups. These groups needed such a tool to overcome political rivals in the internal power struggle in Iran. Hatred deriving from anti-modernism and its synonym for anti-Westernism (according to the traditional religious community) was now a seemingly “revolutionary” dominant discourse within the scope of Iran’s social-political atmosphere and transformed into a crashing and powerful machine that could take any movement out of its way. This led to the foundation of the post-revolutionary type of radicalism in Iran’s political and social life.

Due to this, for the new conquerors of all large and small squares of cities and towns, there was no

reason to give up such a massive crushing machine and suffice their old and traditional tools.

In the meantime, however, another factor was involved in the preservation and continuation of this anti-Westernism. This factor was the role of the seemingly leftist revolutionary forces that were deceiving by new conquerors and accompanying them in providing firewood for the fire of the anti-Western.

There are several questions around such a claim, including:

- If they did not, was not the situation the same today as it is now?
- Can it be said that these revolutionary leftist forces played an effective role?
- Were their analyses and their positions in that time and in relation to the events of that historical period inevitable, or is there any other way to imagine?

These are some questions that deserve to be presented in a discussion, separated from this essay.

4. The consequences of Anti-Westernism process

The power struggle in the form of “radical growth” of the type of anti-Western religious extremism has had profound and lasting effects on the internal and external political conditions of Iran and, hence, on the security and national interests of the country.

This kind of radicalism in these more than thirty years has had many harmful consequences for both the Iranian people and the entire Middle East region. On the horizon of the future, it is also challenging to predict a clear situation.

This kind of extremism that today’s people are struggling with, in its early forms and in the midst of the rise of the lower level people of urban communities in February 1979 in the hope of a better life, was combined with a kind of inclusive revolutionary without purpose and specific content. However, at the core of that primary forms, an unquestioning will, if not very planned but determined to take all power, was created before the February 1979 period. It was the will that since the first day after the revolution launched its killing machine with the execution of military officers and top officials of the kingdom system. It attempted decisively to eradicate the opponents and even in many cases “sinful and innocent together”, insofar that even in the words of the famous “revolutions also eat their own children.” This determined will to destroy anything except itself has attempted to eliminate everything on its way. The only thing it didn’t care about during these forty

years was the national interest, prosperity and social progress of Iran's people.

The results of such an anti-Westernism in this long time were among other things, a change in many of the political equations, at least in the Middle East. These were not regarding building up and serving human beings but rather aimed at promoting violence, hatred, destruction, chaos, and extremism.

By insisting on the continuity of this approach, directly and indirectly, this anti-Westernism helped to strengthen many reactionary governments and various reactive currents in the region, it pleased the artillery industry of the great world powers and contributed to the killing and destruction of many people in different countries of the Middle East.

5. Conclusion

The radicalism referred to as the "post-revolutionary type", had to protect and reproduce itself in order to survive. The ruling power in Iran, using its own special "extremism" tool, continues to move in the same direction over four decades and it is fully aware that returning from, or even procrastinating in this way, can wrap its life up and put into the archive of history.

It looks supposedly today that Iran's current system is supporting and protecting "divine holy values". However, the reality is that, if we remove the denouncing Western culture, declaring hostile attitudes and verbal attacks and slogans against the West from this "divine holy values", there is almost nothing left to issue to the leaders and political elites of Iran's ruling apparatus to provide. What remains of these "holy values" are the religious debates within the religious schools, the ethical recommendations of the preachers and the establishment of traditional ceremonies among the people. But this is not what the nowadays rulers of Iran want.

The role of religion, or better to say more precise and realistic, the religion utilization factor in order to legitimize the ruling power is not only undeniable but also the basis of the current ruling system in Iran.

However, this "religion" itself, as a huge container to place external elements, in its soul, cannot alone be a source of thought or an origin of movement or transformation. This huge dish, or this bulky thousand-year-old ideological machine, uses countless concepts and tools that are considered in today's world. Without any kinship or reasonable relationship with these concepts and literary instruments, the religion captures them and brings them under its tent, and after that, it has used them, it throws them out like trash.

What is related to the "Iran" case is that a mixture of anti-Western sentiments inherited from intellectuals of the period after Shahrivar 1320 (September 1941), as the main source of a "political identity" on the one hand and "Shi'ite" traditions reserved in a tough and impenetrable castle for "rule", on the other hand, formed the basis of a state apparatus that has managed to survive in its entirety for almost forty years. For such a system of governance, there has never been a possibility to dilute the main plot, nor to dare to modify its Islamic appearance and abandon the claims of its "Shiite paradise".

A special type of anti-Westernism today is given in the form of "sacred religious values" to a society with a rich cultural background. However, the connection between this anti-Westernism and those religious values is not based on any reasonable logic. In fact, this anti-Westernism is just a political tool that has put a group to be in power for nearly four decades.

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