PART TWO

STATE, SOCIETY, AND ECONOMY IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST
V. The Iranian Revolution: The Multiple Contexts of the Iranian Revolution

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Abstract

The Iranian Islamic Revolution, the only continual regime constituted by a modern fundamentalist movement, shares many of the characteristics of the Great revolutions. The causes of the Iranian Revolution are indeed very similar to those of the classical ones—namely the breakdown of a modernizing autocracy torn by internal contradictions between various processes of economic and social modernization that gave rise to many new modernized economic and professional classes, but denying them any political autonomy, any autonomous access to the political center, at the same time uprooting them from wider sectors of peasant and urban population—very much in a rather typical third world way, pushing them into the slums of the cities. The Khomeini Revolution also developed in the context of the expansion of modernity, and it built on many of the structural and organizational aspects of modernity—especially of course in the use of the media and modern organizational methods for the mobilization of the masses. It was also fully imbued by some of the institutional and ideological premises of modernity. Not only did it adapt such modern political institutions as parliament or presidency—to which there is no reference in any pristine Islamic vision—but it did also emphasize in modern ways such themes as equality and political participation far beyond what could be found in such vision or visions. At the same time the Iranian ulama felt utterly alienated from the Shah’s secular regime, and modernizing ideology. Their basic cosmological orientations were radically anti-modern, or rather more exactly anti-Enlightenment and anti-Western. It was this distinct combination of modern and anti-Enlightenment and anti-Western cosmological visions, as developed in the framework of new globalizing and inter-civilizational visions, that distinguished the Iranian Islamic revolution from the classical ones, bringing out some of its paradoxical similarities