“IRANIAN NATION” AND IRANIAN-ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY

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I. a. Introduction

The Iranian revolution of 1978/79 has made the term “Islamic fundamentalism” popular world-wide. Since Ayatollah Khomeini’s triumphant return to Iran in February 1979, the world knows that “Islam” can stand not only for a belief system, but also for a highly dynamic political ideology based on the presumed fundamentals of this belief system. Khomeini’s arrival in Teheran marked the turning-point of a revolution that had before been mainly led by leftist groups (some of which also showed a committment to Is-

1 This paper has been written during the academic year of 1995/96 within the framework of the research group Nationalism: Comparative Studies, as part of the project ‘Europe in the Middle East: Political Key Concepts in the Dialogue of Cultures’, a joint research program of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, and supported by the Volkswagen Stiftung. Here I would like to thank all the research group’s members for the many interesting and stimulating discussions in which I could take part during that year, and to which this paper owes a lot. My special thanks go also to Raoul Motika (Heidelberg) with whom I had very helpful discussions at various stages of this paper.

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lam), with the religious forces only gradually gaining momentum. After February 1979 the religious forces systematically seized and consolidated the political power within the newly-shaped state. Their last rival, the communist Tudeh Party, was eliminated from Iranian political life in 1983.

Besides the historical fact that the Iranian Revolution was not predominantly Islamic at its beginning and in its earlier stages, it soon became clear that “Islam”, or the ideology bearing its name, was not the revolutionary government’s only ideological driving force. There were other factors, as well, determining the course of Iranian government politics. One of these was, during the struggle for power against the various leftist groups, the necessity to take over parts of their ideology (resp. ideologies), nominally at least, in order to neutralize these political rivals ideologically, thereby often giving new interpretations to single ideological issues. Another important long-term factor was that the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), just like Iran before the Revolution, happened to be a nation state among other nation states, and therefore could not help pursuing a policy of “national interest” (however this is actually defined).

Several studies have dealt with nationalist tendencies of Iranian politics after the Revolution contradicting the universalist claims inherent in Iranian-Islamic ideology. Most of these studies have investigated aspects of Iranian national policy which can be subsumed under “Realpolitik”, e.g. the need to tame rebellious ethnic minorities who want to split up the nation; organizing national defense against the Iraqi invasion in September 1980; or doing business with countries to which the IRI is ideologically opposed. Other aspects include such well-known facts such as that the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, according to its constitution, has to be an Iranian citizen of Iranian descent. One study has

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2 This is the main reason why I prefer to call this revolution, more neutrally, *Iranian* (instead of *Islamic*).

3 It has already often been described how this was done. E.g. E. Abramovian, *Khomeinism*, London 1993, in his chapter on May Day (pp. 60-87), gives a detailed account of how this socialist tradition was incorporated into the IRI’s political culture, and at the same time deprived of its original meaning.

4 E.g., F. Halliday: ‘Iranian foreign policy since 1979: Internationalism and