

## Khomeini's Thoughts on Jews and Israel

By Michael Curtis

The strife and turmoil in Iran that resulted in the extraordinary spectacle of the sudden collapse of the Shah, the disintegration of the Bakhtiar government, the daily mass demonstrations and the bloodletting are largely the result of the uncompromising and intransigent attitude of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who has claimed to embody the true legitimacy and authority in that divided country. Equally astonishing has been his call, indeed demand, for an Islamic Republic in conformity with Islamic doctrine, which is to be the basis of a new political system.

It remains unclear what the nature of that Islamic Republic is to be, but the Ayatollah's vision of the world has been documented in his writings and lectures (published in Arabic) and also in speeches (published in Persian in 1975). While his advocacy of the enforcement of flogging, stoning and cutting off of the hand for misdeeds are practices not unknown in Libya and, to a lesser degree in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, his Islamic Republic would reach further into the social fabric than even Libya has yet travelled. As he states in his *Islamic Government* (published in English by the U.S. Joint Publications Research Center, Springfield, Va., Jan. 19, 1979) the Islamic canonical law will be the basis for "a complete social system."

As he has long maintained in theory, women are to be prohibited from teaching at boys' schools or working in government offices. The ruler is no more than the executor of God's command and decree. Government and administration—and also Iran's

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law courts—are to be in the hands of the mullahs. Representative government is denied and Western influence attacked. The "enemies of Islam," who have led to laxity in the country's moral fibre include Iran's ethnic and religious minorities, predominantly the Baha'is, members of a different religious sect, and, above all, the Jews and the Christians. (Iran also has a large Kurdish minority. Many of them are Sunnis, as opposed to the Ayatollah's — and Iran's — majority Shi'ite doctrine.)

In his writings, Khomeini does not always differentiate between Jews and Israel. In the foreword to *Islamic Government* he states that the Islamic movement, both historically and at present, "was afflicted with the Jews when they started their counter activity by distorting the reputation of Islam, by assaulting it and by slandering it." He admonishes fellow Muslims for not adhering to the Qur'anic phrase ("Prepare for them all the force and the horses you can muster so that you may scare away the enemies of God and your enemies.") Had Muslims been ready to fight under all circumstances, "it would not have been possible for a handful of Jews to occupy our land and to damage and burn our Al Aksha Mosque without being faced with any resistance." For Khomeini, the allegation that "Zionists" burnt the Mosque persists. The Mosque must not be repaired; the traces of the crime must remain.

In addition, he declares, the Muslim world must be warned against the forces of colonialism and its agents, "the treasonous (*sic*) rulers, Zionism and atheistic materialism which are collaborating to distort Islam." Khomeini sees the Jews "tampering with the Qur'an and distorting its phrases in new editions which they have published in occupied territories and other parts." "We

must expose the treachery," he writes, "and must shout at the top of our voices so that we may make the people realize that the Jews and their foreign masters seek to snare Islam and pave the way for Jews to dominate the entire world."

It is particularly against Israel and the United States that Khomeini rails. Israel and the Jews (whose connection with Persia is older than Islam) are responsible for Iran's desecration and are the basic cause of Iran's moral and religious evils. In his collection of lectures entitled *Khomeini and the Movement* (1970) he declares:

Israel does not wish that the Qur'an exist in this kingdom; Israel does not wish that the mullahs of Islam exist in this country . . . Israel through its evil agents . . . has dealt a blow to us. It strikes at you, the nation; it wishes to seize your economy; it wishes to carry off your commerce and agriculture . . . The Qur'an bars its way—it must be removed . . . The Iranian government of the Shah in pursuance to the purposes and schemes of Israel has humiliated us and continues to do so . . .

Politically, Khomeini holds, there is no legal justification for Israel, which "usurped a Muslim people's land." Indeed, part of Khomeini's opposition to the Shah stemmed from the Shah's policy of "support for Israel." "By maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel and granting economic aid to that country the Shah is going against the interests of Islam and the Muslims," he declared in an interview in *Le Monde* of May 6, 1978. He strongly urged Muslims throughout the world "to unite and fight their enemies, including Israel." In an interview with *Der Spiegel* (January 22, 1979) he stated, ". . . we shall break all relations with Israel because we don't believe there is any legal justification for its existence. Palestine belongs to the Islamic space and must be returned to Muslims."

Khomeini warns of the Zionist danger and the Anglo-American colonialism that supplies the Israeli entity with the mainstays of life. Behind all the enemies of Iran—and Islam—he declares in his collection of speeches (1975)—lurks the United States

which supports Israel and its wellwishers; it is America which gives Israel the power to turn Muslim Arabs into vagrants; it is America which directly or indirectly imposes its agents on the nation of Iran; it is America which considers Islam and the glorious Qur'an a source of harm to itself and wishes to remove both from its path.

The Islamic Republic, Khomeini has declared, will put an end to the old close relationship between Iran and the U.S. It will ban the use of Iran for intelligence monitoring of the Soviet Union and remove the country from all regional defense pacts, including CENTO.

His attitude toward the future of the Jews, the Christians, the Zoroastrians, the Armenians (he has condemned the Baha'is for their "support of the Shah") is by no means clear. His Islamic government, he told *CBS News* in an interview on January 14, 1979, will retain the existing provisions regarding the participation and representation of the religious minorities and their right to work in governmental agencies. Even the Baha'is will be "recognized" he has said, provided they become a *religious*, and not a "political" minority group. Yet, one cannot help draw the parallel with former Islamic systems from the 7th century on in which non-Muslim communities were given the status of "protected peoples" (*dhimmis*). It remains to be seen whether Islamic doctrine will really form the basis of political reality in Iran or whether that doctrine will be subordinated by more moderate and Western-educated political leaders to the needs of economic modernization and political development.