

# **Meaning of Expediency from Imam Khomeini's Point of View<sup>1</sup>**

By Mohammad Mansour-nejad

This concept is a relatively unprecedented and novel phenomenon in Shiite political and administrative perception. It was discussed and emphasized in a totally clear and key manner in the Islamic Republic of Iran by His Eminence Imam Khomeini and that too nearing the end of his lifetime.

Despite various interpretations offered by Islam and different Islamic sects of expediency (common good or interest) nevertheless “from the Shiite point of view and on the basis of the principles outlined by His eminence Imam Khomeini, the concept of common expediency (good) has the potential of being discussed and elaborated on in a fundamental and exhaustive manner.” It means that while the regime is theocentric, yet the people and their demands become important as well and ‘Vilayat-e-Faqih’ or the rule of the supreme jurisprudential authority of the land forms the basis of the administration’s actions.

Now after this brief introduction, we undertake analyses of Imam Khomeini’s point of view on the subject.

## **Imam Khomeini and Expediency**

All of Imam Khomeini’s opinions on expediency can be grouped under the below sub-headings;

### **1- Expedience (interests) of the Country**

Now that by the Grace of God and enterprise of the glorious nation, the country’s destiny has fallen into the hands of the people and the legislators are from the people and elected to the Islamic Consultative Assembly by them without interference of the government and feudal lords of the provinces; and it is hoped that with their devotion to Islam and the “country’s expedience (interests)”, any deviant activity is thwarted. Thus, my will to the nation for the present and the future is that with their firm resolve and commitment to the commandments of Islam and the “country’s expedience (interests)” in every

---

<sup>1</sup> The article has been summarized and translated by International Affairs Department of the Institute.

election, they elect to the legislative assembly legislators who are devoted to Islam and the Islamic Republic and who belong mainly to the society's middle and deprived and weaker classes and who do not deviate from the straight path neither towards the west nor to the East and neither do they tend towards deviant schools of thought and individuals who are educated and well-informed of the current Islamic issues and policies.

## **2- Expedience (interests) of Muslims**

“My exile to Turkey and from there on to Iraq is no cause for anxiety because it took place in the line of duty and for defending the laws of Islam and ‘the interests (expedience) of Muslims and to check the influence of foreigners in Islamic states and to put a stop to injustice and tyranny.’”

## **3- Expedience (interest) of Islam**

“The beloved people of Iran who are truly the brilliant manifestations of Islam's history in modern times must for God's sake endeavor to bear hardships and pressures so that the country's higher authorities carry out their main duty which is to promote Islam in the world. They should demand from them to take into consideration fraternity and cordiality within the framework of ‘interest (expedience) of Islam and Muslims.’”

“In Islam, the expedience (interest) of Islam is one of those issues that have priority over everything and we all have to be subject to it.”

“His eminences, the gentlemen should bear in mind that the regime's expedience (interest) is one of those critical affairs that to neglect it could at times lead to the defeat of cherished Islam. Today the world of Islam recognizes the Islamic Republic of Iran's political system as a panacea for all its problems. The interest (expedience) of the political system and the people is one of those critical issues that to challenge it could possibly jeopardize Islam and the earth's downtrodden in both the near and distant futures. This with the help and backing of billions of dollars disbursed by their local and foreign agents could result in the American-brand of Islam of the arrogant and imperialists emerging victorious. I implore the Almighty God to grant succor to the gentlemen at this sensitive juncture.”

## **Ruhollah Musawi Al-Khomeini**

In reply to a letter of a number of legislators of the Consultative Assembly about the regime's Expediency Council, Imam Khomeini writes:

“With greetings of peace, what you have written about is quite correct. God willing I have decided that in all areas the situation should be made such that we all act according to the constitution. All that has been accomplished in recent years was in connection with the (Iran-Iraq) war. The interest (expedience) of Islam and the political system demanded that the blind legal entanglements be untied immediately for the benefit of the people and Islam. I thank you all for bringing this to my notice and pray for the well-being of all of you.”

“...one of the most critical issues in today's turbulent world is the role of time and place in 'Ijtihad' analytical thought and the type of decision-making. The regime determines the practical philosophy of dealing with polytheism and internal and external difficulties; and these seminary student discussions in theological schools that are within the theoretical framework not only lead to nowhere; rather, they drag us into dead-ends that culminate in the apparent violation of the constitution. At the same time that you should devote all your energies to make sure that no Islamic law is violated—and may God forbid the day that such a thing should occur—you must strive to ensure that Islam is not God forbid accused of being powerless in solving the world's intricate economic, military, social and political problems...”

### **4- Expediency (interest) of the Downtrodden**

On this subject too, Imam Khomeini believes that: “the expediency (interests) of the wretched downtrodden, veterans of the (Iran-Iraq) war and families of the martyrs and the prisoners of war and the missing in action and the war-wounded and in a single phrase the expediency (interests) of the miserable poor and shanty-town dwellers should be given priority over the expediency (interests) of those who stayed in the comfort of their homes and dwellings; and over the expediency (interests) of the wealthy and affluent who shied away from going to the frontline, engaging in Jihad and practicing piety and over the expediency of those who are hostile towards the Islamic political system.”

## 5- Meaning of Expedience

Imam Khomeini's reply to late Ayatollah Meshkini concerning the constitution's addendum:

"...concerning the constitution's addendum, the gentlemen are free to take whatever action they deem to be 'expedient.' I shall not interfere. Only concerning the (issue of) leadership, after all we cannot leave our Islamic political order without an overseer. We need to elect an individual who defends our Islamic honor in the world of politics and deception."

"From the beginning I believed and insisted that the condition of religious authority of 'Marja'iyat' was not necessary. A just 'Mujtahid' religious authority that had the endorsement of the respected experts' assembly countrywide would do. If the people voted for the Assembly of Experts in order to appoint a just and impartial 'Mujtahid' religious authority for leadership of their administration; and when they (the experts) also appoint an individual to take charge of the leadership, then inevitably he (the leader) enjoys the acceptance of the people. In this case, he becomes the people's elected custodian and his ruling is binding."

## 6- Analyses of 'expediency' from Imam Khomeini's point of view

A number of points can be enumerated concerning 'expediency' from Imam Khomeini's point of view as below:

**First:** is that among the instances of expedience that were categorized in the previous section, one instance was of 'Islam' and another was of 'the political regime' so that with the construal that one can have from political regime, it could be applied to expediency (interest) of religion or people or to the sum of the two. On this basis, Imam Khomeini's viewpoint is this that it binds the ruler and the people together and does not lead to emphasis on rule of the qualified religious authority in exclusion of the people or vice versa. Other instances of 'expediency' (interest) is that of the state, the Muslims, the wretched downtrodden, etc...and in his opinions concerning the Expediency Council too, he at times lays emphasis on 'expediency' in general terms while at times he mentions it with the suffixes of 'political regime', people and Islam. In sum, in Imam Khomeini's thinking, in terms of importance and emphasis, the expedience (interests) of the people is on par with the expedience (interest) of Islam and rather more so.

**Secondly**, by proposing the Expediency Council of the political regime alongside the ‘Guardian Council’ and rather further than the Guardian Council, Imam Khomeini showed that determining expediency (interest) is not necessarily clear injunctions and fundamental decrees and framework of the tertiary religious injunctions that are deductible; rather, at times it is likely that expedience (interest) is distinct from the tertiary religious injunctions. In other words, he (the Imam) has considered a special position for ‘intelligence’ alongside ‘tradition’ and for scholars in the general sense alongside religious scholars in the specialist sense and reckons them to be the basis and source of reference for determining expedience (interest).

**Third:** His Eminence Imam Khomeini succeeded in paying more attention to the subject of expediency (interest) because:

*Firstly*, before that, he solved the political regime’s obligation with the idea of absolute rule of the qualified Islamic jurisprudential authority or ‘Velayat-e-Faqih’ and as was pointed out earlier, the subject of expediency (interest) is modeled on the political system; and *secondly*, he was in charge of the political regime’s management for an entire decade and was quite well-versed with the vacuum’s, problems, challenges and bottlenecks. It was here that he judged that the ways to fill the vacuums was to give importance to expediency (interest) and establish a council for that purpose.

**Fourthly**, taking into consideration Imam Khomeini’s emphasis on the country’s interests (expedience), on the Muslims and the abject downtrodden on the one hand and appointment of a religious authority who would succeed in securing those interests if necessary even by temporarily suspending the secondary religious injunctions and laws, one can conclude that even though the concept of ‘expediency’ (interest) from the religious aspect is more comprehensive than the concept of expediency (common good) from the general aspect, however, according to Imam Khomeini’s thought and in addition to it, one can speak emphatically on the concept of general expediency (common good) and devise and establish laws and ordinances for the Islamic political regime based on it.

**Fifth:** by putting forward the idea of general (public) expediency (common good) the slogans “either God or people,” “either religion or the masses,” and “either Divine Law or mankind” become baseless as well because as an expert on religion and one whose entire efforts are directed towards implementing the

Divine laws, Imam Khomeini forcefully defends the society's rights and demands. This reveals that laying emphasis on theocentrism does not necessarily lead to repudiation of people and their demands or the other way round, laying emphasis on people's rights does not lead to repudiation of theocentrism. This point was emphasized for the reason that at one time in the west's brief history, they spoke of the sovereignty of religion of the Middle Ages and public expediency (good) was neglected; and at one time they spoke of public (general) expediency (interest) and religion was treated unfairly. Thus, the aforesaid emphasis reveals Islam's ability to coordinate and synchronize these two fields.

Sixth: An important point that could be enumerated with reference to Imam Khomeini's other thoughts is that His eminence considers absolute authority of the Islamic jurispudent meaning the authority to issue administrative decrees to be centered around public interests (expediency) as well. This implies that the concept of expediency (interests) is the limits of the absolute authority of the Islamic jurispudent. For instance we read from Imam Khomeini's statements that:

“If we say that the Infallible Imam has authority with regard to a man divorcing his wife or with regard to selling off or confiscating her wealth and properties even though it is not necessitated by expediency (public interest or common good), however this does not hold true concerning the ‘Faqih’ qualified Islamic jurispudent and he does not enjoy such an authority.”

Or we read in another section that:

“The ruler of the Islamic society is in a position to take action on issues on the basis of the general expediency (common good) of Muslims or according to the expediency (interests) of individuals under his administrative control. This authority is on no account authoritarian; rather, in this matter the expediency (interests) of Islam and Muslims has been taken into consideration. Thus, the Islamic society's dominant thought too just like its actions, is subject to the expediency (interests) of Islam and Muslims.

If general expedience (common good) is the basis of the administrative decree, then considering that general expedience (common good) of Islamic society is linked collaterally with the religion, it is possible that this expedience (good) becomes totally compatible with clear religious injunctions. In this case, it demands a specific type of administrative order; and it is possible that general

expediency (common good or public interest) require an order that Divine Law does not say anything about it so that in this case:

“Administrative order is established and whereas in the third case, even if there is a conflict in Divine law between the general expediency (public interests) and religious injunctions, it may lead to temporary suspension of the religious injunction if a crucial expediency lies ahead; and the administrative order based on expediency (interest) takes precedence over the initial injunction. This advantage and ability of the Islamic ruler and administrative order is precisely the thing that is interpreted as absolute authority of the supreme Islamic jurisprudential (‘Vilayat-e-Motalq-e-Faqih’) vis-à-vis limited authority.”

Seventh: the final point in this section is presentation of the initial query on the article’s introduction and the research’s hypothesis which is that whether from the point of view of religion the people’s interests (expediency) and the common good can enjoy a fundamental position and gain relevance or not? The hypothesis was that from the Shiite viewpoint and on the basis of His eminence Imam Khomeini’s principles, the concept of common good (expediency) is capable of being discussed and explained in an essential and fundamental manner. With the explanations based on His Eminence Imam Khomeini’s viewpoints on the principle of expediency, now the task of answering the aforesaid question and test of the hypothesis is not a very difficult. One can give a positive answer to that question and say yes, based on His Eminence Imam Khomeini’s viewpoint, general expediency (common good) has the potential of being discussed in a fundamental manner at the same time that it emphasizes God, religion and ultimate Islamic objectives.

## **Conclusion**

At the end of the article, as the outcome of the discussion, we refer to the unique characteristic of Imam Khomeini’s thought. One of the general conclusions of the discussion is that the concept of ‘general expediency’ is a term that has its origins in political philosophy and is as old as political thought. In the course of history, this subject has been critiqued and examined from numerous philosophic, theological, economic angles.

The unique characteristic of Imam Khomeini’s thought lies in that at present he is the foremost Shiite thinker to focus on the concept of expediency both quantitatively and qualitatively. Although His Eminence in his theological, religious and jurisprudential discussions seldom concentrated on this subject,

yet in the position of Islamic ruler and from the standpoint of a Shiite politician, he thought it necessary to highlight the discussion on expediency particularly in the last years of his lifetime. His eminence Imam Khomeini's skill lies in that he placed 'the interests (expediency) of Islam' alongside 'expediency (interests) of Muslims' and viewed the political regime's expediency (interests) along with 'the state's expediency' and the expediency of the wretched downtrodden became an important subject for him. On the one hand, his skill lies in that he bridged the unbridgeable gap between the creature and the Creator. His audience is neither God nor man; rather, his audience is both God and man and he sees them on the same wavelength; rather based on Imam Khomeini's spiritual and mystical principles, man could be regarded both as manifestation of Divinity and the vicegerent of God.

On the other hand, His Eminence Imam Khomeini has responded to the fundamental question that normally blocks the path to general expediency (common good) in religious societies and that is in a situation in which the people's interests (expediency)—that is recognized both rationally and by the Islamic society's scholars—is deemed to be incompatible with Islam's laws. In Imam Khomeini's opinion, by putting forward the idea of absolute authority of the supreme Islamic jurist in which the ruler enjoys absolute administrative authority based on general expediency (common good), these administrative orders are capable of implementing and taking care of people's rightful interests (expediency) even at the cost of temporary suspension of religious laws. Of course this temporary suspension too lasts as long as it is considered expedient and it could possibly last for centuries.

With this methodology, Imam Khomeini succeeded in establishing amity between the heavens and the earth, the creature and the Creator, religion and intellectual faculty, tradition and intellectual faculty as well as between general expediency (common good) and religious thinking; and also, while adapting the strong points of others, he keeps away from their weak points. The general expediency (public interests) of people does not comprise a particular stratum in order that for instance, it makes an exception of a particular group or that it gives preference to a particular individual over general expediency (common good). Also, while he has not viewed man cynically and simply from the standpoint of instincts and mischief and has not reckoned the wicked attributes as the central theme of societal efforts and social services, Imam Khomeini has viewed the people respectfully, favorably and with trust and confidence and



therefore, the research's hypothesis attains a proper foundation and source and becomes justifiable. Thus, from the Shiite standpoint and on the basis of Imam Khomeini's principles, general expediency (public interest) or common good has the potential of being put forward and discussed and explained in a fundamental and essential manner.