

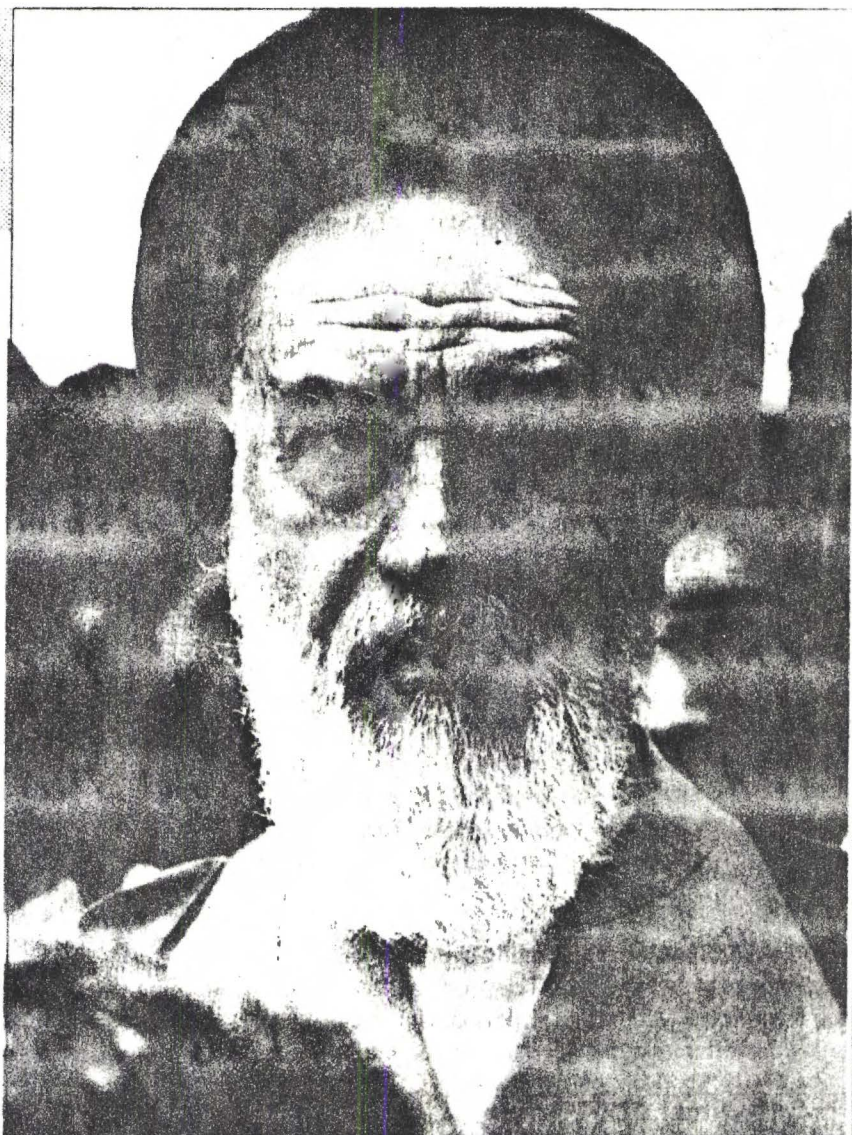
Ten Years that Shook the World

Imam
Ayatullah
Ruhullah
Musawi
Khomeini

The Prophet Muhammad shook the world. In only 10 years he received a spiritual calling, forged a new religion that spread over half of the civilized world, and founded a new governmental coalition that successfully challenged the greatest empires of his day.

Orthodox Muslims would never openly compare any contemporary figure with the revered founder of Islam. But there are remarkable parallels between the career of Ayatullah Ruhulla Khomeini. Imam Khomeini was an improbable world shaker. Old, frail, espousing values that seemed medieval to the Western world, he was not the figure people would immediately identify as revolutionary. But shake the world he did.

The Islamic revolution he led is a permanent benchmark on the road to the end of the 20th Century superpower era. It is proof to the Muslim world that Islam is a vital political and spiritual force in the modern world. In the revolution, and in the decade afterwards, Imam Khomeini gave the lie to some of the West's most cherished political beliefs: That economics and military power are the only things that matter in foreign policy. That religious doctrine cannot be a basis for governance. That nations must choose to ally themselves with one or the other of the great powers in order to function in the world. Imam Khomeini tweaked the noses of Washington and Moscow, kicked their shins, thumbed his nose at them, and walked away from the encounters with barely a scratch. Though a devoutly pious Muslim, it was his political irreverence that infuriated



the great powers.

Given the amount of energy spent in vilifying him, it is surprising that the leaders of the world never came to understand his appeal to his followers, or the secret of the strength of his leadership. Had they been able to do this, they would have understood him and his revolutionary appeal much better. He was, in formal Islamic terms, a *Marji' i-taqlid* - a "person worthy of emulation." The Prophet Muhammad is the ultimate person to be emulated. His personal life is documented and

forms a permanent part of Islamic cannon law. In modern Shi'a Islam, such a person is not elected or appointed. He achieves his position by attracting followers who are free to abandon him whenever they wish.

The relationship is a symbiotic one. The religious leader must guide his followers convincingly, using the precepts of Islam. But when matters are not specifically covered by religious law, he cannot stray too far in interpretation from community sentiment, or his followers will abandon him. In keeping

with this role, Imam Khomeini was not President or Prime Minister but Chief Jurisprudent of the country, charged with spiritual rather than

grumbled and railed at his decisions, there were few in Iran who could stand up to his argument.

Contrary to popular Western

group and in the next decision the other group. Since no faction ever became predominant, all were forced to work together.

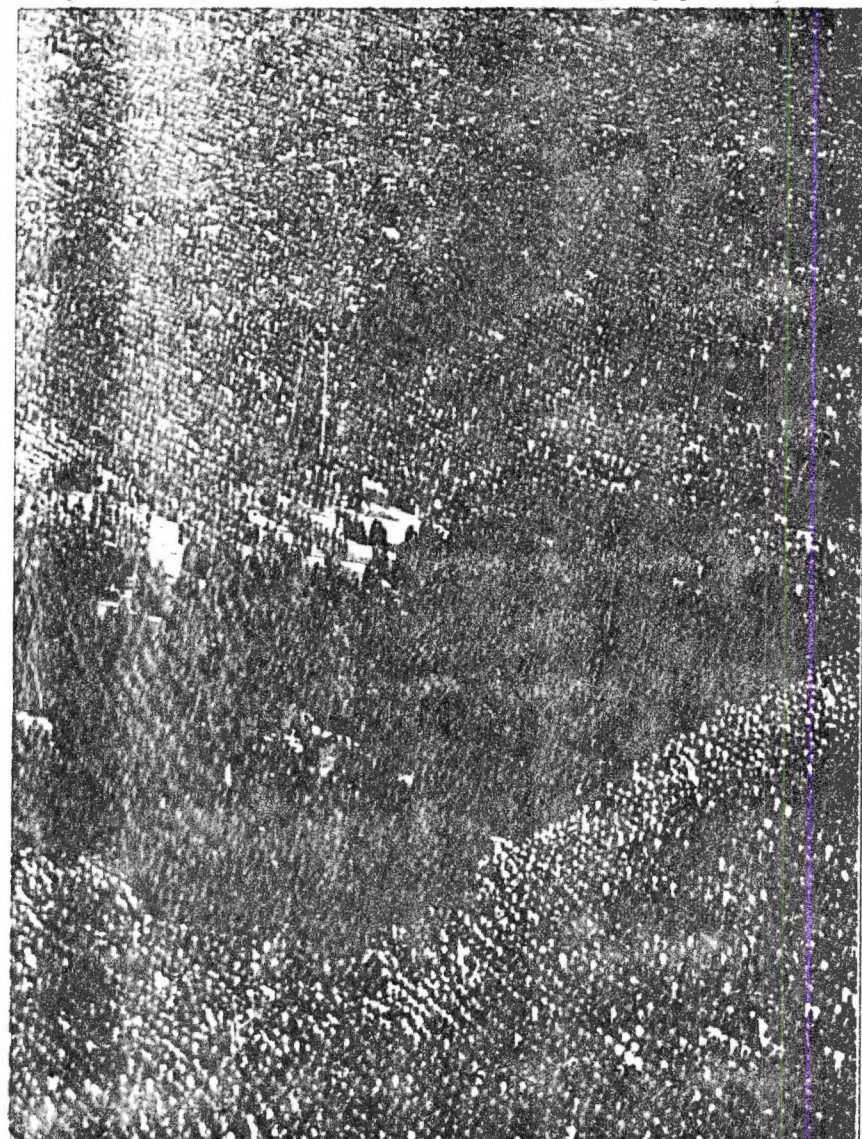
The result after 10 years is a surprisingly stable government. Iran has a functioning Constitution, several rounds of successful parliamentary elections, and a bureaucracy that continues its work without interruption despite a long war, super-power confrontations, and a number of assassinations and governmental disruptions. Imam Khomeini's greatest conviction, like that of the Prophet Muhammad, was that universal Islamic revolution was inevitable, and ordained by Allah. He was part of the century-long Islamic revival movement, and had personal knowledge of its most important leaders.

The Iranian revolution was the seal of the Islamic revival. It proved to Muslims everywhere that Islam could successfully challenge the West. Though some Muslims may be uncomfortable with the subsequent internal politics of Iran, the fact of the revolution continues to inspire the Islamic world, from Nigeria to the Philippines.

In the two decades following the Prophet's death, Islam spread from the Arabian peninsula to Spain in the West, and to the borders of China in the East. After centuries of decline, once again Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world today.

Imam Khomeini is dead, but the tremors of his passage through the world are likely to be felt for sometime to come.

This is an edited version of the article which was originally published in Pacific News Service, June 5, 1989, under the title "Ayatolla Khomeini Will Long Live on in Islamic Revolution". William O Beeman is an anthropologist at Brown University, US, specializing in the Middle East. He served as an adviser to the US State Department on Iran during the American hostage crisis in 1979.



political leadership.

The Prophet Muhammad's contribution to Islamic civilization was his creation of revolution. Imam Khomeini's genius was in his ability to show his followers how rapidly changing political events had religious relevance for them, in strict accord with the most basic Islamic tenets. He continually showed how everything taking place could be interpreted according to the laws of Allah. He was a master rhetorician and a consensus builder. His philosophy of governance was one of *tawhid*, or Unity. Though many

beliefs, he was not a dictator. He was rarely proactive in anything he did. Generally, he waited for events to take place, or waited for a crisis or confrontation requiring his adjudication. His genius lay in the ability at the point of crisis (such as the taking of the American hostages, which he did not initiate), to choose a religiously justified course of action which would move the Islamic revolution he founded, forward in the most propitious way. This often meant that he would balance opposing factions against each other. In one decision, he would favour one