

and Bin Laden, but the general climate of the 'war on terror' offered US conservatives an opportunity to advance their plan to reconstruct the Middle East. The logic was this. The best defence against Islamic extremism was for Muslim states to become prosperous liberal democracies. 'Regime change', as it was politely termed, in Iraq would provide a model which its neighbours would emulate and everyone would live happily ever after (and, no small point, the West's access to Arab oil would be guaranteed).

In 2003, the United States and Britain, with token support from a handful of other nations, invaded Iraq and changed the regime. Unfortunately, the result was a rapid degeneration into what, if the violence had followed fewer fault lines, would be called civil war. The Americans were treated, not as liberators, but as oppressors. Former supporters of the Saddam regime started a guerrilla war against the occupying forces and attacked Kurds and Shi'ites. Groups such as Al-Qaeda joined in. It was hoped that the Shi'ites would welcome the US intervention: after all, it offered an historical opportunity to restore the balance after the Saddam regime had privileged Saddam's fellow Sunnis and members of his tribe. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani attempted to persuade the many Shi'ite parties and factions to form a common front for elections and to resist the temptation of retaliation against Sunni violence, but, when order was not restored and the perpetual violence produced some thousand dead every month, he gradually lost influence to more radical voices, such as that of the young cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. Al-Sadr comes from a powerful clerical dynasty; his father, the Grand Ayatollah Muhammad al-Sadr, was murdered in 1999 by agents presumed to be acting for Saddam. Al-Sadr wanted to create an Islamic Republic; al-Sistani took the more moderate position of arguing that simply allowing democracy to take its course would create a polity which would reflect the Islamic culture of the majority of its people.

If Iraq does manage to create a stable democracy within its 2006 borders, Shi'ites will be the largest religious bloc and clerics such as al-Sadr will enjoy considerable influence. If Iraq breaks up, Shi'ites will have their own state. In either case, Iran will have considerably expanded its power. It may also shortly acquire an effective nuclear weapon. Although

the government of President Ahmadinejad (who was a radical student leader at the time of the Revolution) faces considerable economic difficulties, the thirtieth anniversary of the Iranian Revolution will see the ayatollahs firmly in command.

However, it is worth remembering the spiritual agenda of the Revolution. The ayatollahs largely won the political battle, but their political success seems to have had the opposite of the desired impact on personal piety. Individual beliefs are always hard to measure and attendance at Friday prayers does not have quite the status for a Muslim that church attendance has for a Christian, but nonetheless mosque attendance is a useful measure and it shows a significant decline since the fevered days of the Revolution (Kazemipur and Rezaei 2003). Compared with Indonesia and Pakistan, where claimed weekly mosque attendance was over 50 per cent in 2003, Iran's 28 per cent is low; of Muslim populations studied in the World Values Survey, only Albania's participation rate is lower (Tezcur et al. 2006). The imposition of a theocracy seems to have generated considerable resentment of what is now seen as government meddling in private lives and to have created a society in which people grudgingly conform in public but defy the puritans in private (Elliot 2006).

## Lebanon

The other country in which the Iranian Revolution had a major impact was Lebanon. The term 'Lebanon' was used during Ottoman rule to refer to a vaguely defined region centred on the Mount Lebanon range. Most inhabitants were Maronite Christians; there was a smaller population of Druze, adherents to an offshoot of Islam. The Greater Lebanese State was created by the Allied powers after the First World War, and was administered by France under a League of Nations mandate. In recognition of the deep-seated religious and ethnic differences, the French created a government that allocated parliamentary seats, government offices and civil service appointments to the main population groups in proportion to their size. When the various factions subordinated their

differences long enough to drive out the French, they repeated that model of allocation in their constitution for the new independent state. What destabilized it was the unevenness of economic development.

In the 1950s Lebanon prospered as the banking and commercial centre of the Arab world. The largely Christian elite amassed great fortunes but insisted on low levels of taxation and blocked social reform initiatives that would have redistributed some of that wealth to the predominantly Muslim poor. In the absence of a strong welfare state, most Lebanese continued to identify far more with their ethnic group and their traditional leaders than with the national society. In 1958 civil war broke out when the Maronite president, Camille Chamoun, rigged parliamentary elections and won himself an unconstitutional second term of office. Nasser's Egypt backed the left-wing and Arab nationalist rebels. US military forces intervened in the war and the Druze army chief, General Fouad Chehab, was installed as president. Chehab 'strengthened the educational system, built roads, and spurred economic development, giving priority to manufacturing over services. Most importantly he tried to build a sense of Lebanese national identity that transcended sectarian loyalties' (Paul 1993: 530). In that he failed. Although the economy boomed in the 1960s, there was little growth in national consciousness.

The second collapse of the state of Lebanon was triggered by the arrival of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Expelled from Jordan, the PLO established its headquarters in Beirut and expanded its guerrilla bases in southern Lebanon, close to the Israel border. With 300,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the PLO was a powerful force, deeply resented by conservative Lebanese who saw it as a threat to Lebanon's sovereignty and an encouragement to Israel to attack its northern neighbour. In 1975 civil war broke out, Muslims, Druze and Palestinians fighting the Maronites. In 1976 the Syrians intervened, first backing the Maronites and then turning against them. The Lebanese army broke up along sectarian lines. The state disappeared and rival militias divided the country into sectarian enclaves.

In 1978 Israel invaded southern Lebanon and set up a puppet army officered by Lebanese.

area and protect northern Israel. In 1982 Israel again invaded and this time pushed as far as Beirut, where, with help from the Maronites, they attempted to destroy the PLO presence in the refugee camps in the southern suburbs. For two months, Israel bombarded the camps and inflicted massive civilian casualties. The United States brokered a ceasefire that saw the PLO fighters and leaders withdraw. For a time US forces were active in supporting a largely Maronite government as it tried to impose some sort of authority on the chaos, but, with Syrian support, the opposition groups forced the United States to withdraw. Gradually Syria extended its reach and imposed peace. In 1989, after fourteen years of civil war, massacres of civilians, car bombings and hostage taking, the United States and Saudi Arabia managed to arrange a settlement which retained the principle of a sectarian division of state power but shifted the balance so that Muslims were given half the seats in the parliament and the powers of the Muslim prime minister were increased to balance those of the Christian president. Although central government was slow to regain control and the sectarian warlords remained a powerful obstacle to the creation of a stable state, the ceasefires have held for a decade.

The Lebanese crisis offered the Iranian fundamentalists a perfect export market for their revolutionary Islam. Here was a large population of Muslims who believed that they were oppressed by Christians. The country was periodically invaded by Jews from the south. The Western powers, directed by the Great Satan, frequently interfered in its affairs.

In 1921, Shi'ite Muslims were about 19 per cent of Lebanon's population and their part in the sectarian division of power was correspondingly small. But between 1956 and 1975 they grew rapidly to form 30 per cent of the population. Originally concentrated in the Beka'a region of Lebanon, one of the poorest parts of the country, and later moving in large numbers to the slums of Beirut's southern suburbs, the Shi'ites benefited least from Lebanon's prosperity. When civil war broke out in 1975, Shi'ites formed a militia, Amal (Hope), under the leadership of professional middle-class people such as the American-trained lawyer Nabbi Berri. Amal was reformist, and when the Syrians imposed peace Berri took his place in the cabinet. But, inspired by the Iranian Revolution,

one faction of Shi'ites rejected Amal's reformism and retreated to the Beka'a valley, where, reinforced by a large contingent of Iranian Revolutionary Guards, they took over a Lebanese army barracks and transformed it into a well-armed fortress. This became the base for Hezbollah – the Party of Allah.

The Hezbollah manifesto declared that the movement 'abides by the orders of the sole wise and just command represented by the supreme jurisconsult who meets the necessary qualifications, and who is presently incarnate in the Imam and guide, the Great Ayatollah Ruhollah al-Musawi al-Khomeini' (Kramer 1993: 545). Its aim was not just to conquer Lebanon but to create an all-encompassing Islamic state. The urgency of this mission derived from the imminence of the end times. Kramer quotes one of Hezbollah's leading clerics as saying, 'The divine state of justice realized on part of this earth will not be confined within its geographic borders and is the dawn that will lead to the appearance of the Mahdi, who will create the state of Islam on earth.' And the key to that, according to the manifesto, is the destruction of the United States: 'We are proceeding toward a battle with vice at its very roots and the first root of vice is America' (Kramer 1993: 545).

What made Hezbollah remarkable was the commitment of its followers and the willingness of religious leaders to legitimate its acts of terror. Young men and women committed suicide in order to kill large numbers of people. In spring 1983, sixty-nine people were killed in a suicide car bomb attack on the US embassy in Beirut. In two attacks in October the same year, 241 marines and fifty-eight French paratroopers were killed the same way. Many of the volunteers were women. In March 1985 a teenage member of a female Shi'ite guerrilla group drove a car loaded with dynamite into an Israel army position in southern Lebanon; twelve soldiers were killed and fourteen wounded. Two months later, her mother and brother were invited to Iran, where they were received by Ayatollah Khomeini. A major street in Tehran was named after this heroine of Islam.

What motivated the rank-and-file Partisans of God seems clear enough: social deprivation and social chaos put them in the market for a new explanation of, and solution to, their troubles. Their lack of stake in the world, even in the small world of the Lebanese Shi'ite community, made a radical and

millennialist ideology attractive. Shi'ism, with its veneration of Ali and Hussayn, gave pride of place to the martyr and that status was open to anyone. The only requirement was piety; no one was excluded because they had not been born into the right family.

Hezbollah's clerical leaders were doubly excluded. As Kramer points out, they were drawn from a very narrow age band. Like their elders they had gone to study at the theology colleges of the shrine cities in Iraq, but they had been expelled in the 1970s without completing their education. When they returned to Lebanon without formal credentials they found themselves spurned by the Shi'ite religious leadership: 'they became a disgruntled mass, uncertain of their allegiance. When Iran's emissaries arrived in the Beka'a valley in 1982 and issued the clarion call to make a revolution, these young clerics rushed to pledge their loyalty to Khomeini and assume positions of leadership in Hezbollah' (Kramer 1993: 453). The home town of Sayyid Mohammed Hussayn Fadlallah, one of the most respected Hezbollah leaders, was close to the border with Israel and was frequently overrun. He moved to a Shi'ite slum in east Beirut, but lost his first pulpit to Maronite-Palestinian fighting in 1976 and moved as a refugee to the southern suburbs. There he built a new mosque with no help from the Shi'ite establishment.

During the 1990s Hezbollah built a strong base of popular support in southern Lebanon. Like the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Somali Union of Islamic Courts that drove the warlords out of Mogadishu in 2006, Hezbollah won over many people by its ability to provide the most basic function of a state where the nominal state had failed. It provided law and order. Like the Muslim Brothers in Egypt it provided basic social services where none existed. And in contrast to Amal, it was honest. In 2006, now led by Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, it much enhanced its standing by fighting a month-long war with Israel, during which it fired some 4,000 rockets at target towns and cities in northern Israel. When the UN organized a ceasefire *The Economist* magazine put the words 'Nasrallah wins the war' on its front cover. Hezbollah immediately set its fighters (and its increased income from foreign donors) to rebuilding the villages flattened by the Israel army and air force, and started to campaign for a new

government in Lebanon that would reflect its new strength and popularity.

## Constraints on the Revolution

The creation of an Islamic Republic in Iran, the victory of Hamas over the secular Fatah movement, the popularity of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the return of the Taliban to southern Afghanistan, the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the possibility of a Shi'a breakaway in southern Iraq may seem to signify great fundamentalist success and they are considerable achievements, but that success should not be exaggerated.

Islamic fundamentalism displays a number of weaknesses (some of which we shall see again in discussing Protestant fundamentalism in the next chapter) and faces a number of major obstacles that constrain the movement. First, there is the perennial problem for zealots of balancing their core wish for religious purity with the alliances and accommodations needed for political success in this world. To gain power, the zealots must often compromise their religious principles, which both alienates some potential supporters and causes considerable tensions within the activist core. To augment its strength against the Karzai regime (and its Western supporters) in Afghanistan, the Taliban in 2006 paid warlords to provide fighters – militarily sensible, but hardly expanding the ranks of the faithful.

Second, once in power, fundamentalists find themselves pressed by conventional security and foreign policy imperatives to compromise their principles. Iran and its Lebanese client Hezbollah support Syria, even though that country has a history of violently suppressing Islamist movements and of treating its Shia minority harshly (Dekmejian 1995: 108–12). At the height of the Revolution, Iranian radicals denounced all Muslim states for failing to live up to the fundamentalist's extreme standards. But in late 1984 the Ayatollah Khomeini announced that Iran should establish diplomatic relations with all states except the United States, Israel and South Africa (Halliday 1986: 104–5).

Third, there remains considerable tension between the ambitions of the activist core and those who support them. A historian of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt concluded, 'Although religion formed the basis of its ideology, it drew wider public support on account of its cultural outlook and socio-economic programme and its commitment to issues which appeal to national sentiments' (Bari 1995: 146). When success has been the result of being better at performing secular functions than their secular rivals, there is considerable potential for resentment and frustration. Many of the Palestinians who shifted from Fatah to Hamas in the 2006 elections to the parliament of the Palestinian Authority did so in appreciation of Hamas's greater anti-Israeli militancy and honesty and not because of a desire to live in an Islamic state.

These two points combine to remind us that zealots are not free of the burden of office. With power comes responsibility. The sacred purpose of the movement may trump all else for its activist core, but the mass of supporters will judge it by its success in delivering the mundane and material benefits it promised. Bin Laden can posture on behalf of the Caliphate but President Ahmadinejad and Hamas have to answer for their performance in office.

Fourth, fundamentalism is weakened by the internal divisions of Islam. Muslims are not all the same. Leaving aside competing social or national identities (of which more in a moment), Muslims are divided into, for want of a better word, sects and those sects do not always agree. Khomeini's treatise, 'Islamic Government', draws heavily on specifically Shi'ite sources of authority, which alienates Sunnis. Even when there is nothing of substance to separate sects on any specific issue, the fact that they are separate on others is often enough to prevent concerted action. The civil war in Iraq has seen Sunnis and Shi'ites slaughter each other with as much enthusiasm as either has attacked the Americans.

Being dogmatic and doctrinaire, fundamentalists exaggerate small differences. Or rather, for the fundamentalist few differences are small. Hence fundamentalist movements are always fissile. Terrorist organizations share the same tendency. Operating without the usual constraints of a legal system and being used to deploying fatal violence, terrorists

often become hysterical. The least suspicion of a colleague, the smallest insult or a personal quarrel are quickly seen as treason, and last year's hero of the Revolution becomes this year's traitor. Fundamentalism and terrorism together create a potent mixture: it attracts sacrificial levels of commitment but is highly volatile. In 1994 Munzer Hassan Rammal, a leading figure in Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, was reportedly assassinated by Iranian intelligence for maintaining contact with Islamic groups of which Iran disapproved. In 1999 a leading Algerian fundamentalist was murdered, apparently by colleagues unhappy that he was involved in peace talks with the government. Wright's detailed account (2006) of Islamic Jihad in Egypt and Al-Qaeda offers many examples of bitter rivalries and internal factionalism.

Natural tendencies to factionalism are amplified by national and ethnic rivalries. In principle, all the major world religions (with the exception of Judaism) are universalistic. Fundamentalisms are especially universalizing, in that they wish to reassert the primacy of religious considerations above all others, including those of ethnic and national boundaries. One of the failures the fundamentalist wishes to repair is the neglect of missionary work. Another is the insult to God of the true faith having to take second place to such mundane considerations as tolerating diversity. The true faith must supersede all else, including national or ethnic divisions. As Khomeini put it, 'As far as Islam is concerned there is no question of Kurds, Turks, Fars, Baluchi, Arab or Lor or Turcomen. Islam embraces everyone and the Islamic Republic observes the rights of all groups under Islamic justice . . . Everybody shall enjoy the protection of Islam' (Halliday 1986: 102). We might add that some populations – the Kurds, for example – enjoyed it a lot less than others. In practice Khomeini's universalism had more to do with consolidating Iran than subordinating the nation-state to the interests of universal Islam, which was firmly snubbed when the constitution for the Islamic state was drawn up: the president must be Iran-born of Iranian parents. In addition to the diversion of nationalism, fundamentalism is vulnerable to ethnic divisions. The first concerted Muslim opposition to the Afghan regime came from the Islamic Society of Afghanistan, which had been founded by Islamic jurisprudence teachers from Kabul University. In exile in Pakistan in

the late 1970s, the movement split along ethnic lines. One strand was led by a Tajik, the other by a Pashtun.

The natural tendency of extremism to fission, amplified by other sources of identity such as nationality and ethnicity, is encouraged by external manipulation. In the mid-1990s, the Afghan exiles in Pakistan were divided into some 170 armed groups. Pakistan used the offer of financial aid to simplify this to six groups. Under the pretence of trying to consolidate the opposition further, Saudi Arabia created a seventh (Wright 2006: 99–102). Iran backed its favourites.

Finally it is worth noting the resilience of the nation-state. It is true that many of the nations that emerged, first from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and then from the Western retreat from imperialism, were somewhat arbitrary creations – lines drawn on maps – but the power of the idea of the nation-state is such that remarkably few of those confections have collapsed, and when they have it has not been to merge into units that transcend nationalities but to fragment into smaller, more coherent, states.

## Conclusion

In the words of one of the best studies of the Iranian Revolution, fundamentalism is a reaction to ‘the dramatic reduction in the chances of the traditionalist milieu to reproduce itself culturally under conditions of rapid urbanization, industrialization and secularization’ (Riesebrodt 1993: 9). To which we might add that external military intervention adds its own powerful anxieties. For success the environment needs to be fertile; there needs to be a popular religious culture. And there needs to be a strong, external, immediate stimulus. The former is a necessary condition. Consider Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the wars that followed the break-up of Yugoslavia, the Bosnians, refused weapons by the West, readily accepted financial and military assistance from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. A volunteer force of jihadis (mostly Saudis) was a useful addition to the Bosnian Muslims’ fighting strength, but it failed utterly to Islamicize the Bosnians (Kohlmann 2004). The guns and the warriors were gratefully accepted; the

primary agenda of asserting the Shari'a or imposing the Caliphate was rejected.

And even in religiously traditional settings, responding to the immediate external stimulus is so powerful a part of the movement's appeal that it seems unable to transcend it. The southern Lebanese and the Shi'ites support radical Islamic movements because these serve a fairly conventional and secular need to defend or promote the interests of a people who are in part defined by their religion but who are also defined by tribal, ethnic, regional and national ties. Those local interests severely hinder the development of any sense of international fellowship. The universal mission is effective at the level of a small number of activists; a few thousand young men (many of them unusually rootless and alienated) are recruited from English and American suburbs for the jihad in Afghanistan, Bosnia or Iraq. It is accepted at the level of rhetoric; expelling the crusaders from the sphere of Islam and destroying the Zionist state are added to the language which justifies the many local wars of Islamic fundamentalism. A leaflet issued by Islamic Jihad during the Palestinian intifada in 1988 said, 'What is now taking place in the Holy Land is not just a battle for the Palestinian people alone. It is battle for the future of the entire Umma [all Muslims]. It is a battle against the foreign arrogance and colonial hegemony over the world' (Milton-Edwards 1996: 201). But national liberation struggles in the 1960s against imperialism failed to coalesce into an effective international movement, and what we can easily miss if we use the inflated language of a 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1996) is that the wars that create openings for fundamentalism remain largely local. In trying to make sense of their desperate circumstances the residents of Sadr city in Baghdad may be temporarily drawn to a fundamentalist analysis, but this is largely because they see the fundamentalist response as the most effective riposte. What they immediately want is peace, stability and order. In December 2006 the Union of Islamic Courts in Somalia called on Muslim jihadis to join them in their drive to take over the entire country and to protect it against a possible Ethiopian invasion. That Ethiopia is primarily Christian may allow the Courts to attract some external Islamic support – an effect that Huntington called the 'kin syndrome' – but for the vast

majority of Somalis who support the Courts their ambitions extend no further than their borders.

The greatest constraint on fundamentalism is the unnatural character of fanaticism. As the Chinese Maoists discovered, permanent revolution is impossible. It is a commonly observed fact of life in revivalist religious groups and in radical political parties that radicalism wanes and revolutionary fervour becomes institutionalized (Bruce 1996: 78–80). Religion taken too seriously is too rich a diet for most people for long. Life has to go on. There are children to be raised, crops to be tended, oil to be pumped out of the ground and sold, goods to be manufactured and traded, and fish to be caught. Even zealots grow weary of living life at the edge.