
*A Direct Flight to Revolution: Maududi, Divine Sovereignty, and the 1979-Moment in Iran**



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Abstract

This article explores the engagement of the Pakistani Jama‘at-i Islami (JI) with the Iranian Revolution. I argue that the Islamist JI was drawn to the events because it reflected a core concern and signature idea of Abu ‘l-A‘la Maududi, namely to establish the sovereignty of God (hakimiyya) on earth. My analysis of various travelogues and JI publications from the 1980s demonstrates that JI observers were deeply familiar with internal revolutionary dynamics and Iran’s Shi‘i identity. The prospect of seeing a proper Islamic system in action, with potentially global consequences for their cause, initially crowded out any sectarian concerns for the JI. At the same time, certain JI leaders began to voice criticism of what they perceived as rash revolutionary policies that differed from Maududi’s careful, irenic understanding of a proper Islamic revolution. They also took note of sectarian messages that damaged Iran’s ecumenical outreach. It was, however, the more general geopolitical climate in the Middle East and South Asia which forced the JI to publicly downplay its ties with Iran. By the late 1980s, being accused of harbouring affinities for the ‘deviant Islam’ of Shi‘ism was a charge that had to be avoided at all costs in Pakistan and beyond.

Keywords: Iranian Revolution; Jama‘at-i Islami; Abu ‘l-A‘la Maududi; *hakimiyya*; sectarianism; Islamism; Pakistan; Islamic Revolution

Mian Tufayl Muhammad (d. 2009) did not hesitate when the opportunity arose to observe divine sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) in action. The leader (*amir*) of the Pakistani Jama‘at-i Islami (JI) since 1972 and successor to the influential Islamist ideologue Abu ‘l-A‘la Maududi (d. 1979) was eager to obtain a first-hand account of what had just happened in Iran. In

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the spring of 1979 Pakistan's neighbour was undergoing the unprecedented experiment of Islamically transforming a powerful, quickly industrialising state. The JI itself had long dreamt of achieving an Islamic revolution and serving as its global "vanguard".¹ Yet, the Iranians had seemingly overtaken them. The ailing Maududi had acknowledged as much when labelling the Iranian Revolution as 'Islamic' and calling on all Muslims to "fully support the Revolution and to cooperate with it to the utmost extent possible".² Mian Tufayl Muhammad spelled out in an interview that he took Maududi's advice to heart, wasted no time, and received special permission to fly into Tehran's Mehrabad Airport on 22 February 1979, arriving there only three weeks after Ayatollah Khomeini himself.³ Along with the JI leader on board of the chartered plane was nothing less than a manifestation of the 'Islamist international'. The entire trip had been organised by the shadowy international organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) (*al-tanzim al-duwali li-l-ikhwan*), which also comprised representatives of the MB (including its branches in Europe and North America), the National Salvation Party in Turkey, the Jama'at-i Islami in India, the Masyumi Party in Indonesia, the Jama'at Shabab al-Islam from Malaysia and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya from the Philippines.⁴

The visit proved to be transformative. Muhammad recounted after his return the simplicity and down-to-earth attitude of the officials he met. He could not forget the dignified behaviour of those Iranians whom he observed at Tehran's vast Bihisht-i Zahra' cemetery. They had lost their relatives during the Revolution, yet Muhammad did not witness any tears, only hands lifted in supplication. The air was full of the word of God and greetings addressed to the Imams (*durud o salam*)—indeed an "impressive spiritual sight" (*ruh parvar manzar*).⁵ In an audience with Khomeini, the cleric's profound vision of the future made a deep impression on the JI leader. Ibrahim Yazdi (d. 2017), at that time the deputy prime minister of Iran's interim government and from April 1979 in charge of foreign affairs, personally took care of his Pakistani guests and entertained them in his house.⁶ He and Tufayl Muhammad discussed the Revolution and the worldwide Islamic movement late into the night. This was no "official" or "diplomatic" conversation, Muhammad stated. He described the experience as a "conversation not of tongues, but of hearts" (*hamare dil baten karte rahen*): "We felt like members of the same family, travellers in the same caravan, wayfarers to the

¹Maududi's understanding of revolution was a more gradual, top-down process that stayed clear of violence and radical ruptures but instead focused on 'properly' educating the elite. I will discuss this diverging approach in more detail below, demonstrating some of the tensions it caused with the Iranian revolutionaries. See S. V. R. Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 8–9.

²See the statement reprinted in the May 1981 (Rajab 1401) issue of the Arabic language journal *Ṣawt al-umma* (Voice of the Umma), published from Tehran.

³A. H. Qurayshī, 'Miyān Ṭufayl Muḥammad: Inqilāb-i Irān kī andarūnī kahānī biyān karte hen', *Urdu Digest* (March 1979), p. 26.

⁴See the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood periodical *al-Amān* 6 (9 March 1979), p. 18, which quoted the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Siyāsa*, dated 28 February 1979. Some further names of international delegates are provided in the JI journal *Asia*. See K. A. Ḥāmidī, 'Bāb-i inqilāb ham ahang va az khūd biḡānahīm', *Asia* 27, 11 (16 March 1980), p. 22. During the 1970s, MB branches from Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq heeded the call of the Egyptian MB to more structured, transnational cooperation. An 'International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood' was established in 1982. According to Lorenzo Vidino, the "experiment failed", however, due to travel and other restrictions imposed by authoritarian states and, most importantly, a reluctance of other branches to accept the pre-eminence of Egypt. See L. Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York, 2010), pp. 38–39.

⁵S. M. Ḥusayn, *Āyatullāh Khumaynī Qum se Qum tak* (Lahore, 1979), p. 535.

⁶See I. Yazdī, *Ākharīn talāsh-hā dar ākharīn rūz-hā (Maṭālibī na-guftah pīrāmīn-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī-yi Irān)* (Tehran, 1984).

same destination who were transporting their provisions to the same place”.⁷ Yazdi, in Muhammad’s estimate, was fully aware of the history of the Islamist struggles and realistic about the challenges ahead.⁸ Speaking on behalf of the JI, Muhammad saw the deputy foreign minister as a representative of a bright new dawn for Iran. The entire Iranian people was united behind Khomeini, who pursued an approach of ‘moderation’ (*i’tidal aur tavazun*) in the best possible way. The Iranian leader could rely on thousands of well-educated advisers who had been trained in the US and Europe and were now returning home in droves.⁹ Mian Tufayl Muhammad was confident that the Iranian revolutionaries would rise to the task of creating a proper Islamic system that reflected Maududi’s vision of *hakimiyya*. He saw them as “truth loving”, “extraordinarily diligent”, and “tolerant” people. Within a couple of weeks, they had managed to establish order in a country that was suffering from an onslaught on morals, a paralysed economy, an administration in turmoil, and an army that had “withered like leaves”. The Iranian population still had to deal with the impact which the death of “hundreds of thousands of martyrs” was exerting on countless families in the country. Getting a grip on such a situation was “nothing short of a miracle” and demonstrated that the Iranians “had truly obtained God’s help” (*Allah ta’ala ki ta’yid o nusrat*).¹⁰

This vignette underlines that the appeal of the Iranian Revolution in Pakistan was not restricted to the country’s Shi’i minority, which makes up roughly 15–20 percent of the country’s population.¹¹ Perhaps even more important, the JI’s admiration of the Revolution constituted an attitude that did not disappear overnight and is, in some form, still discernible today. Liaqat Baloch, the General Secretary of the JI since 2009, stated at a commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Iranian Revolution, held at a Shi’i seminary in Lahore in February 2019, that there existed many so-called democratic states in the Muslim world. Yet, each of them was nothing more than a cheap imitation (*charba*) of the West and its civilisation. Iran constituted the only exception. Khomeini, whom Baloch had personally met three times, had managed to establish a splendid system reflecting the teachings of the Qur’an and the model of the Prophet (*sunnat*). Until the end of time, Baloch claimed, the Islamic world would be trying to catch up to the Iranian example.¹²

⁷A. H. Qurayshī, ‘Miyān Tufayl Muḥammad’, p. 28.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹Yazdi himself played an important role in this regard. As Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi puts it: “The future cadres of the Islamic Revolution, leaders of Islamic student associations such as Ibrahim Yazdi, Abdolhasan Bani Sadr, Sadeq Qotbzadeh, and Mostafā Chamran, held regular meetings and communications with Khomeini. They helped Khomeini see himself as a part of a larger anticolonial struggle around the globe and express his political discourse in a language that was directly inspired by Shariati’s liberation theology. Issues of social justice and anticolonialism increasingly emerged as a central feature of Khomeini’s messages. A new political lexicon entered Khomeini’s declarations: sovereignty of the people, independence, representative government, and the right of self-determination.” See B. Ghamari-Tabrizi, ‘The Divine, the People, and the Faqih: On Khomeini’s Theory of Sovereignty’, in *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*, (ed.) A. Adib-Moghaddam (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 227–228.

¹⁰Qurayshī, ‘Miyān Tufayl Muḥammad’, p. 26.

¹¹For a discussion of the different stages of Shi’i reception of the phenomenon, see S. W. Fuchs, *In a Pure Muslim Land. Shi’ism between Pakistan and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2019), pp. 119–151.

¹²See the seminar held at the Jāmi’at al-Urwa al-Wuthqa ‘Inqilāb-i Irān ke cālis sāl’ and in particular Liaqat Baloch, ‘Inqilab e Islami Ke 40 Sall- Jnab Liaqat Baloch Sb’ (sic) (10 February 2019), available at http://www.islamimarkaz.com/web/video/topic_view/ODQwMA== (accessed 28 April 2021). In an earlier interview dating to the year 2000, Liaqat Baloch put blame on the Revolutionary Guards who had supposedly severely weakened Khomeini’s “entirely moderate leadership”. This power grab had lessened Iran’s appeal among Sunnis worldwide. See

Fostering a relationship through hakimiyya

This article analyses how the JI has engaged with Iran since the Revolution of 1979. I argue that the main reason for why certain influential JI leaders condoned the establishment of an Islamic Republic on the ashes of the Shah's monarchy has to do with Maududi's primary legacy. These JI thinkers perceived the new political system in Iran as an expression of his vision of an Islamic system in general and his promotion of *hakimiyya ilahiyya* (God's sovereignty) in particular.¹³ In February 1979, the editorial of the JI organ *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* saw Iran and Pakistan marching toward the fulfilment of this shared goal with envisioned global repercussions.¹⁴ As Muhammad Qasim Zaman has argued, the concept of *hakimiyya* is intimately associated with Maududi's tireless efforts of grafting this idea of the 'sovereignty of God' onto Islamic thought and spreading it via translations of his works in the Arab world and beyond.¹⁵ Maududi cherished the coercive power of the modern state and saw its "immense potential" if utilised as a "vehicle of individual moral transformation".¹⁶ The reach of this Islamic state, an entity with a strong purpose, was almost absolute, since it "seeks to mould every aspect of life and activity in consonance with its moral norms and program of social reform. In such a state no one can regard any field of his affairs as personal and private. Considered from this aspect, the Islamic state bears a kind of resemblance to the Fascist and Communist states".¹⁷ The idea of *hakimiyya* achieved wide proliferation in the course of the twentieth century to the extent of becoming a seemingly self-evident, 'natural' concept to many Muslims. This success meant transcending sectarian boundaries, too. Its influence is clearly manifested in the post-revolutionary Iranian constitution, two articles of which emphasise the sovereignty of God.¹⁸ I would like to highlight in this context that the Pakistani activists under discussion in this article were by no means naïve in their approach and their appreciation of Khomeini. They were deeply aware of the fact that Iran was a majority Shi'i country. They also had a good grasp, right from the beginning, that this was a revolution led by clerics.¹⁹ In other words, leaders of the JI were not fooled, as has been argued about the general Sunni reception, by the Revolution's supposedly ecumenical façade.²⁰ Yet, what rendered Iran ultimately attractive to members of the JI was their

S. M. Khālid, *Jab wo nāzim-i a'lā the. Islāmī Jam'iyyat-i Tulabāh-i Pākistan ke fīn nāzimū-i a'lā ke Interview, October 1972-October 1979* (Lahore, 2000), pp. 340–341.

¹³When I use *hakimiyya* in the following, divine sovereignty is implied unless stated otherwise.

¹⁴'Irān kī islāmī taḥrīk rustākḥīz', *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* (February 1979), pp. 29–34.

¹⁵M. Q. Zaman, 'The Sovereignty of God in Modern Islamic Thought', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25, 3 (2015), pp. 415–416. For some rather unconvincing attempts at downplaying Maududi's influence on Qutb, see S. Khatāb, *The Power of Sovereignty. The Political and Ideological Philosophy of Sayyid Qutb* (London, 2016), pp. 7–46, and also S. Damir-Geilsdorf, *Herrschaft und Gesellschaft: Der islamistische Wegbereiter Sayyid Qutb und seine Rezeption* (Würzburg, 2003), pp. 78–85.

¹⁶H. Iqtidar, 'Theorising Popular Sovereignty in the Colony: Abul A'la Maududi's "Theodemocracy"', *Review of Politics* 82, 4 (2020), pp. 25–26.

¹⁷Abu 'l-A'la Maududi, quoted in A. F. March, *The Caliphate of Man: Popular Sovereignty in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), p. 88.

¹⁸Zaman, 'The Sovereignty of God', p. 417.

¹⁹In this regard, they were far more perceptive of the developments on the ground than the European left, for example. Compare C. Castiglioni, "'Anti-Imperialism of Fools'? The European Intellectual Left and the Iranian Revolution", in *The Age of Aryamer: Late Pahlavi Iran and Its Global Entanglements*, (ed.) R. Alvandi (Chicago, 2018), pp. 220–259. For the JI's initially complicated relationship with the 'ulama, see Nasr, *Maududi*, pp. 110–111.

²⁰For a recent manifestation of the well-worn argument that Sunni groups failed to see the Shi'i dimension of the Revolution, see F. Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979: Als die Welt von heute begann* (München, 2019), pp. 52–53.

judgement that the Iranians had drawn the right conclusion from *hakimiyya*, which was nothing less than an “essential function of God”.²¹ Iran put into place an Islamic government (*hukumat-i Islami*). The revolutionaries under Khomeini’s leadership thus fulfilled Maududi’s second requirement, namely to give structure to the “universal viceregency of God”, the caliphate of man. This noble achievement initially crowded out any concerns about the potentially narrow Shi’i character of the Iranian state.²²

As a broader point, I hold that an examination of these linkages and intellectual cross-pollination is a far more productive and revealing, if more challenging, analytical lens than the one that the literature has usually applied, namely to investigate the reasons as to why Iran has ‘failed’ in its mission to export the revolutionary programme.²³ If we apply the latter criterion, then no sophisticated analysis is necessary to argue that the Iranian political system was not able to reproduce itself abroad. In my view, however, our investigation should not stop at this rather obvious observation. There are other avenues to explore: for example, the development of a “*lingua franca* of political Islam [...] across sectarian lines” in the form of a common conviction that “political sovereignty resides with the Almighty and his Will incarnate” has been noted by scholars only in passing.²⁴ Yet, this notion has not been seriously pursued so far and remains a major lacuna in the study of Islamism. Existing accounts have not revealed the intellectual labour which Pakistani thinkers and groups – Shi’is and non-Shi’is alike – invested in making sense of the Revolution.

In the following, I attempt at recovering several aspects of how the events of 1978–9 were interpreted in Pakistan. Building on the vignette with which I began the article, I would like to focus in the following on three aspects. First, I will discuss the continuing fascination with the Iranian Revolution on behalf of the JI. In order to elucidate this aspect, I would like to present two further travelogues, written in 1982 and 1983 respectively. The author of the first was a Pakistani journalist with close linkages to the party who travelled to Tehran for the third anniversary of the Revolution in 1982, while the second was written by the JI leader Syed As’ad Gilani (d. 1992), who had visited Iran on the same occasion in 1980 and 1983. In a second step, I will demonstrate how this positive image of Iran also developed cracks early and throughout the 1980s. A further early travelogue, written by the well-connected JI leader Khalil Ahmad Hamidi (d. 1994) as well as additional material from JI publications will demonstrate two points: another wing of the JI was less enthusiastic about Iran. Increasingly, these people became more sceptical about the strategies pursued by Iran’s revolutionary government. JI activists displayed sensitivity to what they perceived as palpable sectarian leanings that stood in contrast to the Revolution’s self-avowedly ecumenical character. A gathering of the most important worldwide Islamist movements in November 1989 in Lahore shows that, at this stage at the latest, a public split had occurred. The JI did no longer judge it opportune to consider the Iranians part of the ‘family’ but

²¹J.-P. Hartung, *A System of Life: Mawdūdī and the Ideologisation of Islam* (London, 2013), p. 102.

²²On the “limited popular sovereignty under the suzerainty of God” and the “dialectics between divine and popular sovereignty”, see March, *Caliphate of Man*, pp. 103–5. Compare also Hartung, *A System of Life*, p. 104.

²³R. K. Ramazani, ‘Iran’s Export of the Revolution: Politics, Ends, and Means’, in *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact*, (ed.) John L. Esposito (Gainesville, FL, 1990), pp. 40–62.

²⁴See E. Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, *Revolution and Its Discontents: Political Thought and Reform in Iran* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 90.

instead sided with exclusively Sunni allies. Speeches by attendees from Tunisia to Indonesia all hailed the fifteenth Islamic century, which had begun on 21 November 1979, as belonging to Islam. Yet, the Iranian Revolution was completely written out of this glorious history of the Islamic awakening. Participants set their minds on more narrow, intra-Sunni collaboration and attempts at building a united Islamist front. In the final and third step of this article, I will offer the explanation that this shift on behalf of the Jama'at should not only be seen in the light of financial constraints and the necessity to entertain good relations with the affluent Arab Gulf States. Instead, the social distancing from Iran received an impetus from local sectarian dynamics. Pakistan's main anti-Shi'i organisation, the Sipah-i Sahabah-i Pakistan (Army of the Companions of the Prophet, SSP), founded in 1985, was extremely worried about the possibility that the messages of the Iranian Revolution might actually transcend the sectarian divide and appeal to fellow Sunnis. The SSP labelled Khomeini and Maududi as intellectual brothers and criticised the JI for promoting the Iranian message, something the latter was at pains to deny.²⁵

The JI and the continuing appeal of the Revolution

In this first section, I argue that the JI did not abandon Iran with the onset of the Iran–Iraq war and the lack of Iranian support for the MB uprising in Syria—two events that are often credited with ‘exposing’ the Revolution as what it really was, namely a narrow, sectarian Shi'i project.²⁶ In order to make my case, I draw first on the book *Inqilab-i Iran. Kya khoya? Kya paya?* (The Iranian Revolution. What has been lost? What has been gained?). Its author was Muhammad Salah al-Din (killed on 4 December 1994), the outspoken editor of the JI periodical *Takbir*, which served as “major forum for the Jamaat”.²⁷ The former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (assassinated 27 December 2007) hailed Salah al-Din after his murder as a “journalist par excellence”, and as a man, who had “based his journalism on principles”.²⁸ This is a somewhat counterintuitive praise, given that Salah al-Din acted as an advisor to Pakistan's military dictator Zia ul-Haq (d. 1988) and was a vociferous opponent of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP).²⁹ He also attacked deliberations within the JI to make overtures to the ‘secularist’ PPP, urging his party to “return to its Mawdudian roots as an ideological party, not just a political instrument”.³⁰ Being himself an avid observer of Iranian politics from afar, Salah al-Din had finally received an invitation to

²⁵It is somewhat ironic that the SSP—while highlighting the danger of Shi'i literature flooding the world after 1979—displayed a significant level of mimicry in adopting and transcending Shi'i images and intellectual concepts. They copied the structure of Shi'i mourning sessions in venerating the Prophet's Companions and conceptualised them along lines that clearly resembled Shi'i veneration for the Imams. See S. W. Fuchs, ‘The Long Shadow of the State: The Iranian Revolution, Saudi Influence, and the Shifting Arguments of Anti-Shi'i Sectarism in Pakistan’, in *Pan-Islamic Connections: Transnational Networks Between South Asia and the Gulf*, (eds.) C. Jaffrelot and L. Louër (London, 2017), pp. 217–232.

²⁶R. Mathee, ‘The Egyptian Opposition on the Iranian Revolution’, in *Shi'ism and Social Protest*, (ed.) J. R. Cole (New Haven, Conn., 1986), pp. 263–265.

²⁷R. Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi and Political Islam: Authority and the Islamic State* (London, 2010), p. 166. See also M. A. Zūhaylah, ‘Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ek 'ahd kā nām he', *Takbir* (11 Dec 1997), pp. 25–26.

²⁸See ‘Gunmen Kill Pakistan's Top Journalist’, *UPI*, available at <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1994/12/04/Gunmen-kill-Pakistans-top-journalist/9526786517200/> (accessed 19 April 2020). For a condemnation of his assassination by his journalist peers, see ‘Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn kā qatl sacā'ī kā qatl he', *Takbir* (5 January 1995), pp. 38, 40.

²⁹Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution*, p. 203.

³⁰Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi*, p. 167.

Iran on the occasion of the third anniversary of the Revolution. The journalist made sure to provide a running commentary on this crucial experience by serialising it for the JI newspaper *Jasarat*.³¹ He was a far more critical observer of revolutionary Iran than Mian Tufayl Muhammad, whom we encountered above. Reflecting on his experiences upon his return from his trip in February 1982, Salah al-Din deplored the internal splintering that had occurred among the leading *‘ulama*. Not even the Shah himself had managed to create such a state of disunity. The oppression that some of the highest-ranking Shi‘i clerics faced at the hands of others not only “made the hearts of the faithful tremble” but had negatively impacted the modern-educated strata of society, preparing the way for future inroads by “communists” and the “godless” elements in Iran. Such criticism, Salah al-Din later remarked when his book came out, did not go down well with the vast majority of JI supporters. He revealed that his analysis in *Jasarat* had caused a storm of outrage, which manifested itself in countless letters and conversations taking issue with Salah al-Din’s supposedly unjustified and overly critical reading of Iran. Many of his interlocutors expressed their views with “firmness”, some even insulting Salah al-Din. They defended the conduct of Iran’s revolutionary government in every possible way and accused Salah ad-Din of having furnished an analysis “lacking any basis or knowledge” (*be bunyadi aur la ‘ilmi*) of the country.³² Salah al-Din was adamant to stress that he was by no means a strict opponent of Iran. Quite to the contrary. His friendly and indeed highly sympathetic analysis was meant to encourage the Iranians to make the necessary adjustments to their endangered Revolution. If they behaved wisely, Iran could still save herself. Salah al-Din implored God to “make Iran into the strong arm of the Islamic world and protect her from all potential dangers” (*khuda Iran ko ‘alam-i Islam ka mazbut bazu bana’ye, us se har tarah ke khatarat se mahfuz rakhe*).³³

Salah al-Din’s account is more than just a purely domestic analysis of the Iranian situation. For him, the Revolution was nothing less than a manifestation of Iran once again taking its rightful place in the world. The country’s intellectual production and its civilisation (*tahzib o tamaddun*) had always spread across borders and had never suffered defeat, even in times of Iran’s political subjugation. In the Indian subcontinent, it was perhaps Arab armies that had initially brought Islam to the area and Mughal administration that later rendered the religion politically dominant. Yet, since the time of the Mughal ruler Jahangir (r. 1605–27), the door had been opened to Iranian influence (*Irani asarat*). As a consequence, the entire subcontinent had been coloured by its civilisation, which had manifested itself in language, literature, customs, beliefs, ideas, and even clothing styles.³⁴ Salah al-Din was also clear that the Iranian Revolution was a unique event in world history. The French and Russian revolutions had happened at a time when there was no intensive meddling by foreign superpowers who tried to turn back the clock. In the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, each country “was an island, which was during a civil war to a large extent protected from the interferences of foreign influence” (*har mulk ek jazirah tha jo apni dakhili jang men bari hadd tak biruni mudakhalat se mahfuz tha*).³⁵ Beyond bravely facing a combined onslaught of Russia, the US,

³¹M. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, *Inqilāb-i Irān. Kyā khoyā? Kyā pāya?* (Karachi, 1982).

³²*Ibid.*, p. 7.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 12.

and Iraq, Iran had succeeded in instilling a compelling revolutionary attitude in its population. True, there were instances when the shouting of slogans had a somewhat “mechanical” ring to it, which Salah al-Din attributed to three years of incessant efforts.³⁶ Yet, these occasional lapses in attitude were duly compensated by many more instances of authentic and heartfelt fervour. During an audience with Khomeini, the Pakistani journalist noticed Iranian voices rising in such a unison and convincing way that even without being accompanied by musical instruments, they formed a terrifying and “magical” (*sühr-afirini*) melody.³⁷ The Supreme Leader exuded an incomparable gravity that affected everyone present. Each time when Salah al-Din encountered the relatives of martyrs, he was moved by their sincerity and how calmly they bore their grave fate.³⁸ He was particularly taken by the impressive propaganda machine the Iranians had managed to build. Iranian officials revealed to him that the government spent about ten million USD each year to foster the cause of the Islamic awakening.³⁹ The newspaper *Kayhan* had been turned from a rather modest, pre-revolutionary operation of 50,000 daily copies into a giant mouthpiece of the Iranian Republic. Its circulation had increased to 400,000 copies in several languages each day.⁴⁰

While chronicling contemporary Iran, Salah al-Din was not oblivious to the challenges of a wartime economy. After arriving on an afternoon flight, he noticed during the 32 kilometres transit from the airport to the former Hilton hotel that Tehran was definitely not a shining city on the hill. Instead, Iran’s capital resembled a realm of dark shadows. Lights were dim, flickering, and only far in between—all due to efforts to reduce energy consumption.⁴¹ The Pakistani journalist marvelled at how calmly the country met such intense challenges. Salah al-Din’s positive impression of Iran was not even curtailed by an incident that some of his fellow Pakistanis took very seriously when during the official commemoration of the anniversary of the Revolution, a group of school children marched by the invited guests. They wore masks that resembled those countries who were “conspiring” with the US and Israel against Muslims worldwide. A profound shock was in store for the Pakistanis once the group had passed them and they noticed that one of the children had a sign attached to his back with “Pakistan” written on it. Deeply offended, some of Salah al-Din’s fellow travellers staged a walk-out. Others were about to follow suit. They changed their mind only when realising that the bone of contention had been removed once the group came into sight the next time. Salah al-Din immediately launched into a spirited defence of the Iranians, arguing that this surely had only been the despicable “ill-judgement of an individual” since it did not reflect “official Iranian policy” (*yeh kisi ki shariat he. Hukumat-i Iran ki yeh policy nahin*). Salah al-Din’s evaluation was later confirmed by the handler of the Pakistanis, a man called Ganji Dost, as well as by the then foreign secretary of the Islamic Republic, Ali Akbar Velayati, who both emphasised the strong bilateral ties.⁴²

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 25. Velayati was Iran’s longest serving foreign secretary, in office from 1981 until 1997. For a reflection on his tenure, see ‘Iran, Islam, and the New World Order – Ali Akbar Velayati’, *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 4, 1 (1997), pp. 3–16.

Salah al-Din made it clear that he had never harboured illusions about Iran. For him and fellow JI sympathisers, it had been evident early on that the Iranian political project would not dissolve into a generic form of ecumenical Islam. The Pakistani journalist found it only natural that any Islamic government in Iran would be based on Shi‘i beliefs (*‘aqa’id*). Nevertheless, he along with all Islamic movements globally preferred a representative Islamic system to the Shah:

The reason for our support [of the Iranian Revolution] had nothing to do with shared articles of faith. In this regard, the Shah was a Shi‘i, too. The true reason for our backing was that we rejected monarchy (*mulukiyyat*) and were striving for an Islamic democracy (*Islami jumhuriyyat*). [The same applies] for our hatred of evil and our commitment to justice. The Islamic forces in Iran advanced their movement under the slogan of Allahu Akbar (*takbir*)—and this is our slogan, too.⁴³

The Revolution had been built on acknowledging the true “unicity of God” (*tauhid*) and had offered for the first time to the Muslim world an exit out of its misery of ungodly rulership, namely *mulukiyyat* and dictatorship (*amiriyyat*). Iran was the first Muslim country in which the religious scholars (*ahl-i madrasa*) had led a “truly popular revolution” (*mukammal ‘avvami inqilab*). This feat had not only closed the gap between the university-educated youth and the *‘ulama* but also endowed the worldwide Islamic movement with the inspiration that only by unity, faith and martyrdom the superpowers could be brought to their knees.⁴⁴ While Salah al-Din does not specify *hakimiyya* as the main criterion for his embrace of the Revolution, we can clearly glimpse it between the lines. In particular, his praise of the Revolution as offering a way out of the evils of ungodly systems clearly echoes Maududi. For the founder of the JI every man considering himself master (*malik*) over others would mean skirting dangerously close to assuming divinity: “This, in turn, had to be regarded a clear violation of man’s expected subordination to God and his acknowledgement of God’s absolute sovereignty”.⁴⁵ Salah al-Din continued to voice such views in the 1980s. In an editorial commenting on the visit of Sayyid ‘Ali Khamenei, then Iran’s president and the country’s current Supreme Leader, to Pakistan in 1986, the JI journalist underlined that the Revolution had opened a new door for Islam’s global dominance. Unfortunately, however, Iran had become the victim of Iraqi military aggressions. The drawn-out and brutal conflict diminished the influence of the message. Iran’s moral victories (*ikhlaqi futuhat*) in transforming society and establishing *hakimiyya* were now mostly confined to the country’s domestic territory.⁴⁶

The longing love of Syed As‘ad Gilani

The next Iran-related travelogue to consider is even more explicit in the connections that it draws to *hakimiyya*. It thus underlines that Maududi’s concept of sovereignty had not only “gained traction, inside and outside Pakistan” but that the JI was also careful to emphasise

⁴³Salah al-Din, *Inqilab-i Iran*, p. 37.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁵Hartung, *A System of Life*, p. 111.

⁴⁶M. Salah al-Din, ‘Sadrah Khaminah-i ka daurah-i Pakistan’, *Takbir* (23 Jan 1986), p. 5.

eager ownership of this ideological hallmark of Islamism.⁴⁷ Such a view is expressed by Syed As'ad Gilani (d. 1992), who had met Maududi for the first time in 1943.⁴⁸ After quitting his job in the labour department of the British administration in Delhi, he migrated to Pakistan in 1947 and immediately joined the JI. Gilani first worked as a journalist but after his Karachi-based newspaper *Jahan-i Nau* (New World) had been shut down by the government, he embarked on missionary work for the movement in East Pakistan in 1954 and was subsequently elected a member of the JI Shura Council in 1957. He later pursued higher education, obtaining inter alia an MA in Urdu from Karachi University in 1963 and an MA in Political Science from Punjab University in 1965. In 1971, Gilani became Amir of the Punjab province for the JI and was elected a member of Pakistan's National Assembly in 1985.⁴⁹ Vali Nasr has argued that Gilani was part of a wing of the JI who thought that "Mawdudi's ideas should be reinterpreted to allow the Jama'at to pursue a real revolution. If the Jama'at espouses an Islamic revolution, it should also commit itself to a revolutionary struggle. The examples of Iran and Afghanistan have proven to this group that revolution works".⁵⁰

Gilani's first encounter with revolutionary Iran took place in February 1980 as a member of the official JI delegation that travelled to Tehran in order to commemorate the first anniversary of the Revolution.⁵¹ In Gilani's view, the chartered plane of the previous year had heeded Maududi's direct call to congratulate "with sincerity" those who had brought about this achievement. His own journey one year later was not lacking behind in emotional exaltation. Even before touching down, Gilani was overcome by a "wave of joy" on the plane when strict *hijab* rules were announced to apply to all visitors to Iran. Gilani was also pleased to notice that gender segregation was duly practiced with female stewardesses only assisting female passengers. This sight alone brought home to Gilani that he was indeed on the way to "our spiritual home" (*ruhani vatan*).⁵² The 1980 Pakistani delegation, according to Gilani, was more than 300 members strong. Once installed in their hotel in Tehran, they met hundreds of like-minded representatives from every corner of the earth, an "Islamic international" as he put it in both English and Urdu. These were no simple observers but rather "revolutionary and ideological people" (*inqilabi aur nazariyyati log*) who were busy preaching or preparing the way for an Islamic revolution in their respective countries. In Gilani's perception, they all had a connection with the Islamic movement of Pakistan and were all "inspired by Maududi's thought" (*Maududi ki fikr se muta'assir*).⁵³ The striving for Islamic revolution was as constant a companion to them as their own heartbeat (*dharkan*). Consequently, the hotel was buzzing with conversations in the corridors, the rooms, the stairs, halls, coffee shops, restaurants, and lifts. Extracts from ideological literature and encouraging slogans were everywhere.⁵⁴

⁴⁷M. Q. Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan: A History* (Princeton, 2018), pp. 162–163.

⁴⁸S. A. Gilani, 'Maududi'. *Thought and Movement* (Lahore, 1978), p. 407.

⁴⁹R. al-D. Hāshimī, *Yād-nāmāh-i Sayyid As'ad Gilānī* (Lahore, 2008), pp. 369–371.

⁵⁰S. V. R. Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York, 1996), p. 75.

⁵¹A follow-up visit was only possible again in 1983. In 1981, the Iranian government had cancelled the festivities due to war with Iraq, while in 1982 Gilani was not able to secure a "no objection certificate" (NOC) from the Pakistani government. S. A. Gilānī, *Safāmāh-i Irān* (Lahore, 1983), p. 8.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 8, 54.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

Gilani acknowledged that Iran was a Shi'ī country, but why should Sunnis, given their overwhelming numerical majority, be afraid of this fact? His fellow Sunnis were advised to consider the situation of the remaining 44 Muslim countries in which their sect was at the helm—each one of these nations was ruled by kings and autocrats. In Gilani's narrative, what followed from such a painful introspection was the obligation for every Muslim in Pakistan to support the Iranian Revolution. This unexpected event was the fulfilment of a long ideological struggle. The JI was nothing less than “the eternal enemy of any ungodly sovereignty” (*ghayr Allah ki har nu'īyyat ki hakimiyyat ke azali dushman*). The movement's hostility toward such a model of rule would not be mitigated if Sunnis should commit the sin of opting for it:

We struggle against the idolatrous government and exhaust our lives to implement God's laws (*ilahi qavanin ke nifaz ke liye*). [...] We don't recognise the distinction between Arabs or non-Arabs, we only care for ideology and the goal. We recognise only truth and falsehood and know only ungodliness (*kufī*) and Islam.⁵⁵

In the Indian subcontinent, Maududi had been the greatest caller to Islam who emphasised that all created beings are God's slaves. The JI was in its nature a revolutionary movement that strove to establish this fundamental belief. Cooperation with any system that was based on laws not originating with Him was an instance of rebellion and contrary to faith.⁵⁶ Consequently, the war against every oppressive, tyrannical rule (*taḡhut*) has become “our way of life” (*maslak-i hayat*).⁵⁷ The JI shared this goal with the Muslim Brotherhood and, consequently, the two movements enjoyed a relationship of love and cooperation.⁵⁸ Sectarianism had no place in such a worldview, which required from Muslims only to cling to very basic and obvious Islamic principles in order to remain in the fold.⁵⁹ Maududi himself, Gilani claimed, had always tried to build bridges and to unite the opinion of Pakistan's 'ulama on such issues as a proper Islamic constitution, the 22 aspects of an Islamic state, or personal law.⁶⁰ Far from stoking the flames of conflict, JI activists, in Gilani's estimate, had set their mind on the possibility of an Islamic revolution wherever conditions were ripe. The JI members were not necessarily eager to bring it about themselves. At some point, they had expected it to occur in Pakistan, then Egypt looked rather likely. At other times, they had hope for Turkey, later signs had been pointing to Indonesia: “We turned our attention to all these cases, from wherever might come the revolution which we had been expecting for centuries”.⁶¹ Its surprising occurrence in Iran was no reason to be less enthusiastic. After all, when some Iranian friends conveyed the message to Maududi, the ailing JI leader despite his illness was “not able to contain himself from joy” (*musarrat se phule nahin samate the*). He immediately labelled it a “pure Islamic revolution”.⁶²

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46. See Zaman, ‘The Sovereignty of God’, p. 409.

⁶¹ Gilānī, *Safarnāmah-i Irān*, p. 46.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Gilani foregrounded the unique nature of the Revolution in Iran, which had no precedent or similarity. Yet, it was clearly an Islamic revolution since Muslims had spilled their blood in order to achieve it and those who had participated in it all professed the *shahada*:

An Islam built on Qur'an and Sunna cannot object to this revolution. Anyone who is versed with Maududi's philosophy of *mulukiyyat*, anyone who is capable of understanding ideology (*kasi mahir nazariyyah saz*), has to acknowledge this revolution as Islamic.⁶³

Khomeini was, in the truest sense of the word an "Islamic leader" whose thought transcends Sunni and Shi'i particularities or differences.⁶⁴ His insights drew on shared Islamist heritage with Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949), Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), and Ali Shari'ati (d. 1977) all represented in addition to Maududi's ideas.⁶⁵

For Gilani personally, the victory against the Shah reflected a desire that he had supposedly held since childhood. As soon as he became aware of the Iranian developments, he had yearned for nothing more than soaring through the air in order to behold the events: "Even if this revolution had happened at the South Pole, I would still have come. We were like longing lovers (*piyase cukoron ki tarah*) who reached for the water of life (*ab-i hayat*)".⁶⁶ In Iran, an organic and impressive ordering of society presented itself to the discerning observer: the youth served as the guardian of the Revolution (*pasdar*), the intellectuals (*danishvar*) as its protector (*muhafiz*), and the religious scholars (*'ulama*) as its hand and strong arm (*dast o bazu*). The veiled women acted as rear-guard while Imam Khomeini was of course the leader of the caravan. The qualitative difference to the remaining dictators in the Islamic world was obvious: Khomeini called himself the servant of the nation. The essence of the revolution was simplicity, frugality, fear of God, patience and humility.⁶⁷ As a result, the Iranian Revolution had turned Tehran into a "city of dreams" (*khabun ka shahr*) for every revolutionary. After hundreds of years, this time the story of Karbala had finally played out differently.⁶⁸ Imam Husayn (d. 680), the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was saved and his nemesis, the Caliph Yazid ibn Mu'awiya (d. 683), had died. Maududi's form of proper government (*khilafat*) had triumphed and oppressive kingship had passed away (*khilafat jit gai'i aur mulukiyyat mar gai'i thi*).⁶⁹ This was a message of utmost importance to other Muslim societies: if you are prevented from having a consensual system (*ijtima'i nizam*) or if you are far removed from its blessings, if you are dominated by a tyrannical ruler (*taghut*) who imposes

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

⁶⁴ S. A. Gilani, *Imam Khumayni: Da'wat, Tahrik aur Afkar* (Lahore, n.d.), p. 13.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19. For an overview of these influential twentieth-century Islamist thinkers, see R. L. Euben and M. Q. Zaman (eds.), *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden* (Princeton, NJ, 2009).

⁶⁶ Gilani, *Safarnamah-i Iran*, p. 50.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ For an exploration of the events at Karbala, which are formative for Shi'i self-understanding, see N. Haider, *Shi'i Islam. An Introduction* (New York, 2014), pp. 66–80.

⁶⁹ Gilani, *Safarnamah-i Iran*, p. 51. Compare also, Gilani, *Imam Khumayni*, p. 17. Maududi conceptualised *khilafat* in the following way: "His recourse to the Qur'an enabled Mawdu'di, first, to dissociate his own particular notion of *khilafat* from the historical caliphate in the succession to the Prophet Muhammad, and, second, by introducing the concept of *khilafat* to establish a relationship between God and man on the question of authority and sovereignty. The notion of *khilafat* he was referring to was theological rather than historical, it was the concept of *khilafat allah*, that is, the believing man's trusteeship of God on earth, in opposition to *khilafat rasul allah*, which is the historical Caliphate in the succession to Muhammad." See Hartung, *A System of Life*, pp. 105–106.

ungodly laws and stipulations (*ghayr Allah ke qavanin o zawabit*) on society, it is not possible from this position to reach the “abode of happiness” (*manzil-i falah*).⁷⁰ Such a system that does not acknowledge God as the true owner of sovereignty (*hakimiyyat ka haqiqi malik*) can never be transformed in a gradual and slow fashion. It is definitely not enough to only cut off its head. The roots of *taghut* run deep and it clings to society like an octopus, which means that it will always again raise its head given the many groups, from capitalists to worldly ‘*ulama* and the media, that are benefitting from its ways. Only a thorough and “radical” revolution can be the proper answer to this issue.⁷¹ This was a lesson that Iran’s population had truly taken to heart.

One decisive consequence of the returned rightly-guided caliphate (*khilafat-i rashida*), established in Iran, was that the Revolution should not be seen as an isolated event but rather as the stimulating promise and first manifestation of global change to come:

Now in the rose-garden of Islam (*gulistan-i Islam*) spring has begun. The deep-red flowers of martyrdom are opening themselves everywhere. We greet the martyrs of Iran. We know that the blood of the martyrs lets the flowerbed of Islam bloom. We are also convinced that all oppression will be destroyed. And Islam will be the religion of the entire world.⁷²

Watching the sectarian signs on the wall: the JI exercising social distancing from Iran during the 1980s

As I have argued in the introduction, the Jama‘at-i Islami never cut itself completely off from Iran. Yet, the 1980s saw at least a public shift away from the post-revolutionary regime. Gilani’s unashamedly pro-Iranian stance was gradually pushed to the background within the JI.⁷³ Vali Nasr sees a partial explanation for this development in the fact that the party became financially more dependent on the monarchies of the Persian Gulf during the 1980s. Due to the Iran–Iraq war and the deterioration of the Gulf states relations’ with Iran as a consequence, the JI’s ties with the Islamic Republic became “strained” too.⁷⁴ In this section of the article, I will flesh out two types of criticism of Iran. First of all, certain voices within the Jama‘at began to take issue with the chosen path of revolutionary change. They pointed out that Iran should have heeded the more gradual example pursued by Maududi. Instead of opting for the sort of ‘radical’ transformation from above lauded by Gilani, they should have taken the message of revolution from below to heart. Maududi’s understanding of revolution was not one of rupture but rather of careful, patient struggle. This way, Iran would have managed to pursue a truly sustainable path. Second, JI observers also noted incongruences within Iran’s supposedly ecumenical message. Similar to what we have already encountered in Muhammad Salah al-Din’s narrative, there were undeniable instances of Iran propagating a message that appealed primarily to Shi‘i sensibilities. It is important to note, however, that these critiques continued to be uttered in a careful and balanced manner. They ran parallel to the more positive, even enthusiastic reception of Iran discussed above.

⁷⁰Gilānī, *Safarnāmah-i Īrān*, p. 62.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, pp. 67–81, 90–91. Compare also Gilānī, *Imām Khomeynī*, pp. 15–16.

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷³Personal conversation, Salim Mansur Khalid, Lahore, March 2019.

⁷⁴Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution*, p. 61.

We still need more research to estimate when a definite shift took place. Yet, we can say with confidence that an official distancing had occurred by the end of the 1980. I will discuss this phenomenon in connection with an international seminar which the JI held in Lahore in November 1989. On this occasion, an Islamist international was assembled that contained neither Shi'is nor any representatives from Iran.

In praise of revolutionary mercy: how to win the (Muslim) population's hearts and minds

An editorial in the JI periodical *Asia* from 13 September 1981 provided an in depth analysis of the domestic Iranian scene. The authors reiterated that no Muslim would have the license to be indifferent to the Revolution. The Jama'at-i Islami had never stopped praying for its success. Yet, there was also a serious danger lurking that could prove fatal for the global Islamic awakening and the mission of establishing *hakimiyya*. Since the Revolution had labelled itself as Islamic from the beginning, any failure to reach its lofty objective, any instance of falling short would not only be a matter of concern for the people of Iran but rather for the entire project of implementing Islam. In case it foundered, non-Muslim observers would not blame it on individuals but rather take it as proof that Islam itself was not capable of fulfilling its promises.⁷⁵ The challenge that the revolutionaries had faced was to combine an uprising against the Shah with a "mental revolution" (*zihni inqilab*). Their most pressing issue was not a lack of enthusiasm. The willingness of the Iranian people to sacrifice themselves has been without any comparable example in history, the editorial claimed. The sheer speed of the events, however, had given a false sense of the robustness of faith within society as a whole: like abundant rain falling on grain, "only the upper layers get wetted while below everything remains dry".⁷⁶ Outwardly the bureaucracy had changed course and was humming the new tune. Yet, many civil servants were blocking true transformation and had, instead, managed to mould the revolution to their reactionary desires. *Asia* deplored in particular that the Iranian Revolution had fallen in the same trap as the Russian and Chinese revolutions: the victors had cast aside any message of mercy (*rahmat*) so that their movement was overtaken by fascism (*fista'yat*). The Revolution needed to proceed with moral tenderness (*ikhlaqi narmi*), a certain magnanimity (*wus'at-i zaraf*), rule of law (*pabandi-yi a'in*) and consent (*ravadari*). If it was necessary to shed blood by the tens of thousands, then the label of 'Islamic' was not justified. Iran ran the risk of descending to the level of an 'ordinary revolution' (*'amm inqilab*). The example of the Prophet Muhammad should be the guiding star: it was his habit (*sunnat*) not to take revenge after capturing Mecca. This was the example for which the Islamic Republican Party should be striving instead of the widespread utilisation of firing squads and handing out death penalties.⁷⁷ What becomes obvious here is a fundamental difference in how the JI and Iran conceptualised a proper Islamic transformation. Maududi had defined such a remaking of society as an "irenic process", which would almost naturally come into being once the elite had undergone appropriate Islamisation.⁷⁸ The founder of the JI distanced himself from violence, radical ruptures

⁷⁵'Allāh ta'ālā Irān ko apnī hifz o amān men rakhe', *Asia* 30, 27 (1981), p. 7.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

⁷⁸Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution*, pp. 13–14. See also Hartung, *A System of Life*, p. 166. A group within the JI around 'Abd al-Ghafur Ahmad also saw dangerous implications for the domestic Pakistani scene if the

or class war. As Maududi summarised the goals of the party in the 1950s: “first of all it brings intellectual change in the people; secondly [it] organises them in order to make them suitable for a movement. Thirdly, it reforms society through social and humanitarian work, and finally it endeavours to change leadership”.⁷⁹ When the new Iranian regime went into full blown cleansing (*tahir*) mode and targeted its opponents, first leftist Islamists such as the Mojahedin-e Khalq and later the communists, the JI was not comfortable condoning these measures.⁸⁰ Such scruples in dealing with leftist opponents are somewhat surprising given the JI’s own behaviour. From the 1960s, the organisation had increasingly perceived the left as a serious threat and began to equate socialism with ‘atheism’. In 1970, the JI even coined the term *socialism ka qabristan—Pakistan, Pakistan* (Pakistan—the graveyard of socialism).⁸¹ It was, however, the (unruly) student wing of the JI, the Islami Jami‘at-i Talaba (IJT), which from the early 1980s began to engage in full-blown and brutal campus violence across the country.⁸²

How broad is the Iranian tent? Sectarianism and the new regime

Members of the JI were not only worried about the Iranian Revolution opting for speed instead of thorough Islamisation, however. They also began to articulate the concern that Iran might stray from a non-sectarian outlook. As Mian Tufayl Muhammad underlined in an article in 1982, a true Muslim government that operated on the promise of God’s *haki-miyya* was supposed to strengthen brotherhood and unity (*ittihad*) among Muslims worldwide. There was no justification to discriminate in the distribution of public goods based on sect.⁸³ Some early red flags were already raised by Khalil Ahmad Hamidi, who had travelled to Iran on the occasion of the Revolution’s first anniversary in 1980. Hamidi was a JI leader who was particularly well-connected to the Middle East. As the head of the Dar al-‘Uruba, he was in charge of rendering Maududi’s oeuvre into Arabic while also

party highlighted the Iranian model too much: “They believe that the Jama‘at has gained from its commitment to the electoral process and see no benefit in rekindling revolutionary fervour in the party that has already routinized its revolutionary zeal. The position of this group is strengthened by the ever-present power and influence of Mawdu-di’s teachings among a great number of both the rank-and-file and the leadership.” See Nasr, *Mawdu-di*, p. 75.

⁷⁹Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 8–9. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt promoted (at least in its public statements and initially) a similar programme: “the principal role of the Society was to be one of education (*tarbiyya*) of the people to the truth; ‘when the people have been Islamized, a truly Muslim nation will naturally evolve’”. See R. P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York, 1993), p. 308.

⁸⁰‘Allāh ta‘ālā Irān ko apnī hifz o amān men rakhe’, pp. 8–9. On the conflict with the Mojahedin-e Khalq, see E. Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven, Conn, 1989), pp. 206–223.

⁸¹H. Iqtdar, ‘Jama‘at-e-Islami Pakistan: Learning from the Left’, in *Beyond Crisis: Re-Evaluating Pakistan*, (ed.) N. A. Khan (London, 2010), pp. 240–264.

⁸²For the emergence of student violence in the context of Karachi, see L. Gayer, *Karachi: Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City* (London, 2014), pp. 53–77. It should be pointed out that the IJT during the 1970s began to develop an understanding of revolution that remarkably differed from its mother organisation: “The tales of patriotic resistance and heroism in East Pakistan gave it an air of revolutionary romanticism. The myths and realities of the French student riots of 1968, which had found their way into the ambient culture of Pakistani students, provided a paradigm for student activism which helped the IJT articulate its role in national politics and to formulate a strategy for mobilizing popular dissent”. See Nasr, *Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution*, p. 68, and compare also H. Iqtdar, *Secularizing Islamists? Jama‘at-e-Islami and Jama‘at-ud-Da‘wa in Urban Pakistan* (Chicago, 2011), pp. 75–79. Unfortunately, the scope of this article does not permit me to investigate in more depth the alternative conception of revolution advanced by the IJT and how this might have led to a different appraisal of Iran. Liaqat Baloch, for example, whom we encountered earlier, had been elected president of the IJT in 1977 and 1978, shortly before the Iranian Revolution. I hope, to pursue this line of inquiry in my ongoing research on the global history of the Iranian Revolution.

⁸³M. T. Muḥammad, ‘Islāmī kā siyāsī nizām’, *Asia* 31, 9 (1982), p. 12.

translating publications by the Muslim Brotherhood into Urdu.⁸⁴ In 1963, he had acted as an interpreter for Maududi when the latter met Khomeini on the occasion of the Hajj. The same year Hamidi also wrote a piece in *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* that severely criticised the Shah for his “secularising policies”. As a consequence, the Pakistani government shut down the magazine, banned the JI and arrested senior leaders, including Maududi.⁸⁵ Hamidi’s international connections extended to other Shi’i authors as well. In Tehran, he reconnected with his “old friend” Sayyid Hadi Khosroshahi (d. 2020), whom he had first encountered during the Hajj in 1968.⁸⁶ Khosroshahi had translated the writings by Maududi and influential Muslim Brotherhood figures, such as Sayyid Qutb, into Persian.⁸⁷ Hamidi cherished many aspects of his trip, such as when visiting the Husayniyya Irshad, a religious centre in Tehran that had served as the intellectual opposition to the Pahlavi regime. Hamidi reminisced on the impact of the Iranian intellectual ‘Ali Shari’ati, who had given influential speeches there, comparing his achievements to what Sayyid Qutb had done for the Arab world.⁸⁸ To the Pakistani visitor, it was a moving experience to be seated in the midst of Shi’is, yet to feel completely at home. He did not perceive any of the usual (sectarian) Shi’i slogans prevalent in Pakistan, which he explained by the fact that the Iranian Revolution was built on solid and progressive Islamic principles: Shari’ati had raised a “revolutionary generation” that was very close to the Qur’an, the *sunna*, and universally accepted Islamic teachings.⁸⁹ Yet, Hamidi also expressed some concerns. He listened with interest to a later lecture by Mehdi Bazargan (d. 1995), who had resigned as prime minister in 1979 as a reaction to the takeover of the American embassy in Tehran. Bazargan elaborated on themes very dear to his Pakistani guest: he criticised how Iranians had been turned into lovers of life under the Shah, which meant that they were afflicted with the curse of servitude (*ghulami*) to an ungodly system. Everyone who was in a similar position should adopt the principle of migration (*hijrat*) to be free from an environment in which something else than God dominated (*ghayr Allah ke tasallut*). In other words, Bazargan made *hakimiyya* a cornerstone of his lecture.

⁸⁴ See ‘Khalil al-Hāmidī... Hamzat al-waṣl bayn “al-Ikhwān” wa-Islāmīyī Bākistān’, *Al-Jazeera*, 28 January 2017, available at <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/icons/2017/1/28/-همزة-الحمادي-خليل-باكستان-وإسلامي-الإخوان-بين-الوصل> (accessed 23 April 2020).

⁸⁵ Khomeini had attended a lecture by Maududi on the “duties of Muslim youth in contemporary times”. He had publicly praised Maududi and later that evening the two men conversed for half an hour at Maududi’s hotel with the help of Hamidi. See Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution*, pp. 154, 253, fn. 29. Compare also Gilānī, *Safamāmah-i Irān*, p. 87.

⁸⁶ Khosroshahi had inter alia served as the first ambassador of the Islamic Republic to the Holy See. He passed away after being infected by Covid-19 on 27 February 2020. See ‘Ibtilā-yī shumār-i bīshtarī āz maqām-hā-yī Irān bih Kurūnā’, *BBC Persian*, 27 February 2020, available at <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-51657363> (accessed 23 April 2020).

⁸⁷ Hāmidī, ‘Bāb-i inqilāb’, p. 12. In 1959, Khosroshahi translated Qutb’s influential *Social Justice in Islam*. In the introduction to this translation, Khosroshahi inter alia praised the Egyptian as the “greatest Islamic thinker of the age”. He later explained that pre-revolutionary Shi’i Islam did not have comparable ideological resources, which made it necessary for young Shi’i Islamist to draw on (Sunni) writings from Egypt and Pakistan. See Y. Ünal, ‘Sayyid Qutb in Iran: Translating the Islamist Ideologue in the Islamic Republic’, *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 1, 2 (2016), pp. 42–43, and also S. Bohdan, “‘They Were Going Together with the *Ikhwan*’: The Influence of Muslim Brotherhood Thinkers on Shi’i Islamists during the Cold War”, *Middle East Journal*, 74, 2 (2020), pp. 243–262.

⁸⁸ For ‘Ali Shari’ati’s connection with the Husayniyya Irshad, see A. Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian. A Political Biography of Ali Shari’ati* (London, 1998).

⁸⁹ Hāmidī, ‘Bāb-i inqilāb’, p. 13.

Hamidi, however, saw narrow-mindedness at work in the midst of this positive appearance. He took issue with the fact that the examples quoted in the speech were exclusively taken from the Shi'i tradition and the Shi'i Imams. Hamidi would have liked to hear the inclusion of Sunni experiences of *hijrat*, of jihad, and martyrdom, too. Such an inclusion, he stated, would increase the appeal of the Revolution to Iran's own Sunni minority and non-Shi'i audiences abroad.⁹⁰ Such a still very nuanced critique gave way to much more vicious denigrations of the basis on which the Revolution had been erected. In 1984, the JI periodical *Asia* decided to reprint a long article by the Indian Deobandi scholar Manzur Nu'mani (d. 1996). According to Qasim Zaman, he is "best known for a book entitled *The Iranian Revolution, Imam Khomeini, and Shi'ism*, which he wrote late in life and which became a best-seller not just in South Asia but also in many other parts of the Muslim world". Nu'mani wanted to warn his fellow Sunni Muslims not to be fooled into thinking that Shi'ism could be seen as a part of Islam.⁹¹ In the contribution reprinted in *Asia*, Nu'mani investigated Khomeini's political vision and reached the conclusion of it being purely built on Shi'i thought. There could be no more talk about Iran having undergone a "pure Islamic revolution" (*kehalis islami inqilab*). This was a deception, as was the slogan still proclaimed at international conferences "Only Islamic revolution, neither Shi'ism nor Sunnism" (*thaura islamiyya la shi'iyya la sunniyya*).⁹² Why did a JI publication decide to provide a platform to such explicit polemics? I would argue that this must have had to do with internal Jama'at debates. A group within the JI around 'Abd al-Ghafur Ahmad (d. 2012), for instance, predicted dangerous implications for the domestic Pakistani scene if the party highlighted the Iranian model too much: "They believe that the Jama'at has gained from its commitment to the electoral process and see no benefit in rekindling revolutionary fervor in the party that has already routinized its revolutionary zeal".⁹³ Nu'mani's arguments were seen as useful because the Indian Deobandi scholar clearly showed that Khomeini was working toward a political system that could not be squared with Maududi's understanding of *hakimiyya*. Instead of establishing a universal Islamic system, Khomeini had presented the narrow theory of *vilayat-i faqih*, the guardianship of the jurist. This implied that it was the prerogative of Shi'i scholars who had reached the highest cycle of independent legal reasoning (*mujtahids*) to take the reins of government into their hands during the occultation of the twelfth Shi'i Imam.⁹⁴ Nu'mani argued that Iran intended to bring not only Muslim majority countries but the entire world under this exclusivist Shi'i sectarian model.⁹⁵

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁹¹Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, p. 132.

⁹²M. Nu'mānī, 'Ek haṭṭ ke javāb men', *Asia* (13 May 1984), p. 20.

⁹³See Nasr, *Mawdudi*, p. 75. On 'Abd al-Ghafur Ahmad, see 'Ghafoor Ahmed brings together politicians in death', *Express Tribune*, 27 December 2012, available at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/485662/ghafoor-ahmed-brings-politicians-together-in-death> (accessed 17 October 2020).

⁹⁴For a more detailed discussion on *vilayat-i faqih*, see A. G. Sabet, 'Wilayat al-Faqih and the Meaning of Islamic Government', in *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*, (ed.) A. Adib-Moghaddam (New York, 2014), pp. 69–87.

⁹⁵Nu'mānī, 'Ek haṭṭ ke javāb men', p. 20.

Writing Iran out of the revival narrative: the international seminar of 1989

It seems as if these anti-Shi'i sectarian messages were bearing fruit during the latter half of the 1980s. This surely had to do with the general hardening of conflict in this area in Pakistan as well as other parts of South Asia and the Middle East.⁹⁶ A striking manifestation of how the 'Islamist international' moved on and side-lined Iran is provided by a seminar that the JI hosted in Lahore on 11 November 1989 in order to discuss the questions and challenges facing the 'Muslim World'. More than 30 Islamist organisations sent high-ranking representatives. Among them was the founder and leader of several (subsequently banned) Islamist parties in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan (d. 2011), the vice-leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Mustafa Mashhur (d. 2002), Rachid al-Ghannouchi of Tunisia, and the Palestinian scholar and activist in the Afghan jihad 'Abdallah 'Azzam (d. 1989).⁹⁷ The experience of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan that had been completed in February of the same year loomed large in almost all of the speeches. For many participants, the success of the Mujahidin showed that the way forward for the Islamic community was not international conferences and appeals to the UN but rather a decisive striving on the "path of jihad".⁹⁸

There was no single reference to Iran during the entire seminar, however. It almost appeared as if the Revolution had never happened. Mashhur, for example, hailed the Afghan Mujahidin as "our guiding light" and predicted that their model could be suitable for "liberating" Muslims elsewhere, be it in Palestine, Eritrea, or Kashmir. In order to truly appeal to the non-Muslim world, however, a real-life model of a functioning Islamic state was necessary. "Theoretical reflections on government" (*riyasat ka kitabi aur zabani tasavvur*) entertained by his fellow Islamists were not enough.⁹⁹ In other words, the actually existing Islamic Republic in Iran was seemingly no longer an option for the Egyptians as a model of inspiration. Abdul Hadi Awang of the Malaysian Islamic Party echoed the lack of an "exemplary Islamic country" (*misali islami mamlakat*).¹⁰⁰ 'Abdallah 'Azzam spread hope about the nearness of Islam's global domination. He channelled Maududi when arguing that it rested upon every single Muslim to carry out his or her individual responsibility. In case this was achieved, then the major responsibility of the "establishment of religion" (*iqamat-i din*) would come into being very quickly.¹⁰¹ Even for one of their 'bread and butter' topics the Iranians were not given the slightest credit by the participants. Take the case of the Palestinian Muhammad Siyam, who was a former vice-chancellor of Gaza University. This Muslim Brotherhood member and the PLO's representative at the meeting in Lahore deplored a general lack of solidarity with Palestine among Muslims.¹⁰² The final speech by

⁹⁶For a detailed analysis, see Fuchs, *In a Pure Muslim Land*, pp. 152–185.

⁹⁷On Erbakan, see E. Özdalga, 'Necmettin Erbakan: Democracy for the Sake of Power', in *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey*, (ed.) M. Heper (Lanham, MD, 2002), pp. 127–146. On Ghannouchi, see A. Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (London, 2017). For 'Azzam's global role, see T. Hegghammer, *The Caravan. Abdallah Azzam and the Rise of Global Jihad* (Cambridge, 2020).

⁹⁸A. A. A'vân, 'Ālam-i Islām ko dar pesh masā'il aur challenge', *Asia* 38, 50 (1989), p. 10.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, p. 20. For the role which *iqamat-i din* played for the JI, compare I. Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India. The Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islami* (Princeton, NJ, 2009), pp. 195–202.

¹⁰²A'vân, 'Ālam-i Islām ko dar pesh masā'il aur challenge', p. 15. For an argument about how support for Palestine "represents a crucial part of the Islamic Republic's DNA", see S. A. Alavi, *Iran and Palestine: Past, Present, Future* (Milton Park, 2020), p. 165.

Qazi Hussain Ahmad (d. 2013), who had succeeded Mian Tufayl Muhammad as the JI's Amir in 1987, highlighted the efforts of all those leaders to arrive at the Alhamra Arts Council on Lahore's Mall Road. Some had come from war zones, others despite the opposition of their home governments. For Ahmad, the seminar increased the impression of a united *umma* while also driving home the point that a global Islamic revolution (*'alami islami inqilab*) was close at hand.¹⁰³ A revolution, to be sure, in which the Iranian model was not supposed to play any role.

As we will see in the next and final section of this article, the JI had good reasons to practice social distancing from Iran in an increasingly polarised sectarian marketplace. Conflicts between Sunnis and Shi'is had spiked since the mid-1980s and the JI had a reputation of being too soft on the Shi'is. It was precisely the party's Islamist stance and its early embrace of the Revolution that some of its opponents used to denigrate Maududi and his followers.

The afterlife of an affinity: The SSP and the danger of an Islamist axis with Iran in Pakistan

The close early relations between Pakistani Islamists and revolutionary Iran, as demonstrated by the three travelogues and other material that I have discussed, was not lost on other Sunni groups in Pakistan. Chief among them were Deobandi scholars affiliated with the anti-Shi'i sectarian group of the SSP.¹⁰⁴ An anonymous but extensive pamphlet published by the group in the early 2000s and entitled *Do bha'i. Abu 'l-A'la Maududi aur Imam Khumayni sansani khiz inkishafat* (Two Brothers. Sensational Revelations about Abu 'l-A'la Maududi and Khomeini) sums up this kind of reasoning, which also betrays clear influences from Nu'mani's writings.¹⁰⁵ The publication accuses both Khomeini and Maududi of engaging in revisionist polemics against the Prophet's Companions that undermined their status and exalted role. Khomeini's "true" position on the issue – as opposed to official Iranian statements that emphasised Muslim unity and sectarian harmony – could supposedly be deduced from *Kashf al-asrar* (The Revealing of the Secrets), Khomeini's first major political work that had already been published in the early 1940s. Discussing why the names of the Imams were not mentioned in the Qur'an, Khomeini answered in this book that they must have been removed by power-hungry people, who thus corrupted the Qur'anic text, and also mentioned how the first two Caliphs Abu Bakr (d. 634) and 'Umar (d. 644) had acted against the Qur'an.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the author of the pamphlet could point to instances in the JI's organ *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* where Maududi voiced harsh reservations even against the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*rashidun*). He attacked their understanding of jihad, accused Abu Bakr of not having grasped

¹⁰³ A'vān, 'Ālam-i Islām ko dar pesh mas'āl aur challenge', p. 22.

¹⁰⁴ On the origins of the group, see M. A. Zahab, 'The Sunni-Shia Conflict in Jhang (Pakistan)', in *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation and Conflict*, (eds.) I. Ahmad and H. Reifeld (Delhi, 2004), pp. 135–148. See also M. Q. Zaman, 'Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shi'i and Sunni Identities', *Modern Asian Studies* 32, 3 (1998), pp. 689–716.

¹⁰⁵ *Do bhā'ī. Abū 'l-A'la Maudūdī aur Imām Khumaynī sansanī khiz inkishāfat* (Karachi, n.d.).

¹⁰⁶ R. Brunner, *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung* (Stuttgart, 2001). For further examples of how these passages from Khomeini's work were used in polemical texts in Pakistan, see H. M. N. Qāsim, *Ḥayāt-i A'zam Tāriq: Sanī-yi General-i Sipāh-i Shaḥābah (Raḥī Allāh 'anhum), Ghāzī-yi Islām, Muḥāfiḥ-i Nāmūs-i Shaḥābah Ḥaḥrat Maulānā Muḥammad A'zam Tāriq (Madda Zillahu Al-'āle) ke muḥāḥḥil ḥālat-i zindagī* (Fayḥālabād, 1998), p. 118, and Z al-R. Fārūqī, *Khumaynūzm aur Islām* (Fayḥālabād, 1984), pp. 140–141.

the subtlest aspects of Islam and emphasised that the rulings of the Rashidun had not attained a canonical status within Islamic law. With this unwarranted and indeed reckless criticism, as the Deobandi authors saw it, Maududi added fuel to the fire stoked by the Shi'is in their rewriting of early Islamic history.¹⁰⁷ Shi'i magazines eagerly cited these examples when protesting against the so-called 'Sahaba Ordinance' passed by Zia ul-Haq's government in 1980, for example.¹⁰⁸ Religious scholars affiliated with the SSP saw clear signs that Maududi and Khomeini acted on the same motivation. By claiming "practical wisdom" (*hikmat-i 'amali*) in deducing correct Islamic rulings, they both allegedly attempted at making the case that they had access to some form of revelation (*wahi*).¹⁰⁹ While such a claim, according to the pamphlet, was even more ridiculous in Maududi's case given his lack of proper *madrassa* training,¹¹⁰ the blasphemous goal was the same one that lay behind Khomeini's concept of *vilayat-i faqih*: the two "brothers" wanted to have a free hand in fundamentally reshaping Islamic law according to their own (base) desires.¹¹¹ They did not consider Islam to be a religion (*mazhab*) but rather reconceptualised it as a revolutionary ideology (*inqilabi nazariyyah*) and as a political programme (*siyasi la'thah-i 'amal*) in order to accrue worldly power for themselves.¹¹²

In order to show that this overlap was not merely accidental, the authors of the pamphlet pointed out the close contacts between Khomeini and Maududi. The latter had always made it clear that he considered the Shi'is to be brothers whom Sunni Muslims could marry and whose funerals one should attend.¹¹³ *Do bha'i* featured reprints from Pakistani newspapers in which Maududi's son, Ahmad Faruqi Maududi, related that after his father's death at a hospital in Buffalo, NY, in September 1979, he had immediately received a phone call from the Iranian ambassador in Washington, D.C., who also dispatched a representative with a personal message from Khomeini. The two men's relationship had been a "very longstanding" (*bahot purane*) one. Khomeini had supposedly championed the translations of Maududi's works into Persian to be used in the *hauza* in Qum. Ahmad Faruqi also highlighted the meeting between the two men in Mecca in 1963, to which I have referred earlier. Finally, the Pakistani Islamist had expressed the wish before his death that a similar Islamic revolution might occur in Pakistan.¹¹⁴ According to Ahmad Faruqi, the difference between Iran and Pakistan was that his fellow countrymen remained "profoundly ungrateful" (*muhsin kush*) toward his father's decade-long activism. Pakistanis remained unmoved whereas the Iranian

¹⁰⁷ *Do bhā'ī*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126. In fact, section 298-A of Pakistan's Penal Code specifies that any insult to Muhammad's wives, the members of his household (*ahl al-bayt*), the Rashidun or the Sahaba "shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may be extended to three years, or with a fine, or with both". See O. Siddique and Z. Hayat, 'Unholy Speech and Holy Laws in Pakistan – Controversial Origins, Design Defects, and Free Speech Implications', *Minnesota Journal of International Law* 17, 2 (2008), pp. 303–385.

¹⁰⁹ For further criticism of Maududi's pretensions to be the "reader of the prophetic mind" (*mizāj shanās-i rasūl*), see also A. U. Qasmi, 'God's Kingdom on Earth? Politics of Islam in Pakistan, 1947–1969', *Modern Asian Studies* 44, 6 (2010), pp. 197–253.

¹¹⁰ *Do bhā'ī*, p. 25.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42, 129.

people had eagerly responded to Khomeini's leadership, demonstrating that they were "a people with a soul" (*ek qaum thi jis ke andar jan thi*).¹¹⁵

Why did the SSP release such a pamphlet in the early 2000s? The publication can be read as an internal Sunni debate on Islamic law and the nature of the Hanafi school, which Maududi aimed to transcend. Yet, the pamphlet also speaks to broader sectarian dynamics on display since the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The downfall of Saddam Hussein and the new assertiveness of Shi'i actors in the country stoked old fears held by the region's Sunni-majority states. They accused Iran of working toward finally completing the long-held dream of exporting the Revolution to Iraq and beyond.¹¹⁶ Constant intellectual labour by producers of sectarian literature since the 1980 has not remained without effect. In certain circles, it is today no longer seen as necessary to carefully demonstrate why particular Shi'i beliefs could be 'problematic' for Sunnis. Instead, these authors take it for granted and obvious that Shi'is are outside the fold.¹¹⁷ Simply demonstrating, then, that the political thought of Maududi and Khomeini showed remarkable similarities was supposedly sufficient to disqualify the former as a bedfellow of deviant Islam.

Conclusion

In this article, I have made a first foray in the Jama'at-i Islami's complex relationship with post-revolutionary Iran. On the one hand, I have highlighted that the JI had a remarkably persistent positive attitude toward Iran. While expressing admiration for the Islamisation of secular laws, imposing the veil, and restructuring of society along the lines of the Islamic Republic, it was the issue of *hakimiyya* that truly captured the attention of certain influential voices within the party. In their view, the divine government, envisioned by Maududi as a necessary outflow of acknowledging God's sovereignty, was on the cusp of being put into reality in Iran. Members of the JI were fully aware of sectarian differences and did not fall for a supposedly ecumenical, generic Islam promoted by Iran. Yet, these intra-Muslim differences were simply irrelevant when the fight against an idolatrous system was at stake. At the same time, JI members operated with a markedly different understanding of revolution than their Iranian neighbours. They urged caution and advocated a less violent, less radical break with the pre-revolutionary past. If hearts and minds were not truly won to the cause of an Islamic system, the danger of missing the target was all too real. Finally, we have also seen that the JI could not free itself from the wider geopolitical and sectarian changes among Sunni populations in the Middle East and South Asia. Suddenly, their affinity to Iran became a true liability that was exploited by religious forces opposed to the JI.

This public cooling of relations should not be overemphasised, however. This article has shown that *hakimiyya* was the crucial axis around which shared Sunni and Shi'i Islamist discourses revolved. Divine sovereignty provided a shared idiom, a true Islamist *lingua franca*, and enabled the legibility of political projects pursued independently by the Pakistani JI and revolutionary forces in Iran. Anachronistic sectarian lenses have all too often led us to

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

¹¹⁶See Y. Nakash, *Reaching for Power: the Shi'a in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton, NJ, 2006) and Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that wasn't* (Palo Alto, Cal, 2013).

¹¹⁷Compare Fuchs, 'Long Shadow of the State'.

treat Sunni and Shi‘i Islamists as distinct and even opposed actors. Instead, *hakimiyya* is a prime example of how a concept has become entrenched, has been circulated, and built upon by both Shi‘i and Sunni interlocutors. Islamist thought in the twentieth century is first and foremost remarkable for overcoming confessional boundaries. We are well advised to pay more attention to this ecumenical universe, while at the same time exploring carefully as to how and when it shattered and frayed. Even the shared commitment to *hakimiyya* and a direct flight to Tehran could ultimately not prevent the epochal event of the Iranian Revolution being written out of history in 1989. Why the JI shifted course again, deciding to acknowledge Iran’s pioneering role several years later, and what role its student wing, the IJT, played in this story, still remains to be investigated.

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