



# Imam Khomeini; unrivaled architect of change

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## OPINION

"In the world, there is no democracy better than our democracy. Such a thing has never before been seen."

— Imam Khomeini

There is an old saying that says that one thing that is permanent in this world is change. Indeed, the saying holds true as one reads history in depth. For countless millennia, humanity had been subject to so many changes in the world around it. It is possible to discern changes in lifestyles, economics, technologies, politics, governance, ideologies, as well as morality and spirituality. Right now, the world is changing at a much faster pace than ever before, so fast that only those who are observant can actually take notice. What might have been around, or what has been a fact yesterday, may be obsolete tomorrow. What used to be done by hand yesterday will be done at the push of a button or a switch the next day.

However, not all change is good. As one observes the world around him, it can be safely said that the world has taken a turn for the worse. Capitalists and imperialist powers have dominated the world economy, at the expense of the poorer countries who are exploited and left poor in spite of the more developed nations' prosperity. Corruption and graft are more of the norm today than the exception. Racism and prejudice have barred millions of oppressed peoples from realizing their full potentials as legitimate human beings. Materialism and its dregs have placed humanity at the forefront, and human greed has had many people wanting more and more; and in their quest for getting more, they resort to even the most devious means. Millions of innocents have been killed in wars. Morals have been disappointedly loosened, and it has been difficult to shield the young from the harsh realities of adult life.

As for the Muslim world, it is sad to admit that the present situation is not very pleasant. Discriminated because of misunderstandings regarding Islam, subjected to suspicion and charges of being terrorists and supporters of terrorist acts, and even hatred among each other have taken the Muslim Ummah farther and farther away from what the Blessed Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) had hoped for his fellow Muslims. The 9/11 attacks of 2001 and their repercussions in the Muslim world in the years after have further made clear that Muslims are in need of an honest evaluation of themselves as followers of Islam. Perhaps, they may have to think more deeply of their place in the world order and more importantly, of Islam's role in the world of constant change. What is Islam's role then? And what kind of change does it want to foster? It must be recalled that during the Middle Ages in history, while the world moved blindly in ignorance, it was Islam and Muslims who made many advances in science, technology, medicine, the arts, and many other spheres. It was the Muslim scholars who preserved and kept alive the works of the ancient philosophers and other great minds. Muslim leaders made conquests that built up a great Islamic empire. Islam had spread to so many lands, and its influence was felt. Indeed, Islamic civilization had flourished at the time when the rest of the former civilized world was suffering from the Dark Ages. It is very sad to think that while other countries in the world have advanced using what the Islamic world gave them as a springboard, Muslims themselves, at present, are at odds with each other, are mired in poverty, are discriminated against, and have the world pitted against them. So, how would Islam fit in the scheme of things? The great Ayatollah Imam Ruhollah Khomeini perhaps has the answer. From the time he awakened to the terrible realities that were happening in his beloved Iran and the rest of the world, he made it a mission to speak out

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and fight against all the oppression, all the strife, all the evils that a materialistic, capitalist, imperialist, immoral, unscrupulous, greedy world order was inflicting on humanity. He had lived through two World Wars, the Cold War.

Imam Khomeini successfully fulfilled his plans for Iran through the glorious Islamic Revolution of 1979 and showed the world that his country could stand by itself without reckoning with the world powers. He decried the fact that countries with a Muslim majority were veering away from Islam in their rush to adopt the ways of their Western neighbors. He, as a Muslim leader, knew that Islam has a destiny to fulfill, a major role to play in the world's affairs, both at present and in the future. It saddened him that Muslims have for the most part, forgotten that they have a responsibility, a jihad for Allah Almighty that they are obliged to fulfill. He said:

"Islam's jihad is a struggle against idolatry, sexual devi-

ations, plunder, repression, and cruelty. The war waged by [non-Muslim] conquerors, however, aims at promoting lust and animalistic pleasures. They care not if whole countries are wiped out and many families left homeless. But those who study jihad will understand why Islam wants to conquer the whole world. All the countries conquered by Islam or to be conquered in the future will be marked for everlasting salvation. For they shall live under [God's law]."

By this, Imam Khomeini saw that the world has been subject to a great deal of detrimental influences, not only to Muslims but also to the whole of humanity. He recognized the achievements of the other powers of the world in many fields, but made it clear that he did not condone their ills. He has also said:

"We accept the advancements of the Western world but not the Western corruption of which they themselves complain." Given all these, Imam Khomeini envisioned change for a better world. This, of course, will be in line with Islamic tenets and based on justice and fairness. Although his detractors, past and present, would object to his idea of a new World Order and change in the future based on Islam, he has nevertheless said: "...our aim is none other than the great aim of Islam — to prevent oppression, arbitrary rule, and the violation of the law, to preserve the rights of Islam and the nation, and to establish social justice."

This great man was able to affect a great and sweeping change in his beloved country for which he was so genuinely concerned, way back in 1979 under tremendously hard circumstances. Decades later, his countrymen are to remember him for setting them back into the path of Islam and for having them believe in themselves and not be blind followers of the tyranny that is often inflicted by capitalism, Westernization, and imperialism. Therefore, if Islam was able to pave the way for real change in a country like Iran and propel it to become a frightening force that other countries healthily respect, then why not the entire Muslim Ummah and the entire world?

The great Imam Khomeini envisioned a greater role for Islam in the future. Not just as a religious force to be reckoned with, but as a moralizing force in the sea of

a confused humanity. His was a prophetic word for a perplexed world. Islam and its tenets can do so much to prepare a troubled world for a brighter future and change it for the better. It is Islam's role to direct humanity to what is good and right and to make it resistant to evil and immorality. It calls upon people to deal with each other fairly, and to respect others. However, unless people make his cause theirs, this vision will not come true nor will Islam realize its full potential to unite all peoples of the world. This is indeed a great challenge for all, not just Muslims but also for others who have been oppressed and victimized by the powers that be. Imam Khomeini has this to say of those who recognize the challenge:

"I kiss the hands and arms of all the dear people who, all over the world, are shouldering the weight of the challenge and are determined to crusade in the path of God and enhance the honor of Islam, and I present my sincere greetings to all the blossoms of liberty and excellence." Imam Khomeini therefore implies that a great task is upon the Muslims of today. Ideas do not blossom and bloom unless there are people who believe in them and make these their cause and actively pursue the fulfillment of them. It is therefore high time for Muslims to act now and help fulfill Islam's potentials in this world and in the future. Islam must have a greater niche in the world's affairs. It is imperative that Muslims believe that the current vicious cycle of greed, immorality, deceit, oppression, and corruption must be stopped, or else all that the great Imam Khomeini built will be in vain. They owe it to him that they continue the struggle so that Islam will flourish and be an agent for continuous, beneficial, and just change in the world. In the future, change will always be inevitable, but as creatures of God, humanity must make sure that the change will be beneficial and not detrimental. Only through Islam and Imam Khomeini's ideas will there be any positive change. For those who recognize this and have taken part in the struggle, may Almighty Allah reward them with Paradise in the Hereafter.

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Demonstrators hold up a poster of exiled Muslim leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini during an anti-Shah demonstration in Tehran, Iran, on December 10, 1978.

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