

# THE ADVANCE OF ISLAMISM IN EUROPE. BRITISH-IRANI RELATIONS UNDER THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY

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**Resumen:** The basic statement of the paper is that in 1989 and the subsequent years political analysts concentrated their attention on the changes of Eastern European régimes and the worldwide impact of these events while they neglected the major turn that took place in the relationship between Western European countries and Muslim immigrants in 1989. Francis Fukuyama's famous prophecy delivered at the time of the Soviet Union's demise, declaring that liberal democracy will become a worldwide blueprint for societies, did not hold. On the contrary, this was the first time when Europe truly had to face the presence of Islam in Western Europe and the effects of political Islam.

**Palabras clave:** Pahlavi dynasty, Ruhollah Khomeini, Iranian Revolution, Islamism, Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses, fatwa, Islam in Europe

In the second half of the 18th century the British Empire consolidated its presence in Asia. Britain looked upon the Ottoman Empire as her major Middle Eastern ally from the 1830s and expanded the network of economic and political ties with the Porte. From the moment the British East India Company commenced the colonisation of India its attention was also focused on the neighbouring Afghanistan and Persia. Soon after the first British mission arrived to Persia from Bombay in 1799, Britain made it a top priority to halt the

advance of the Russians towards the Persian Gulf. From the beginning of the 19th century, the two rival powers, Russia and Great Britain entered into a fight to promote their own political and economic interests in Persia, which had been ruled by the Quajar Dynasty from the end of the 18th century.

Heavy British economic intervention from the last third of the 19th century is clearly shown by the acquisition of railway, mining, tobacco and telegraph concessions in Persia. The anti-British resistance of the Persian monarch was further weakened by the fact that his opposition sympathised with the British. By the beginning of the 20th century the country's independence was eroded to the point where the engineer William Knox d'Arcy was able to gain licence to extract crude oil from the wells of Southern Persia (D'Arcy Oil Concession).<sup>1</sup>

Persia was divided into two spheres of influence by the two colonising powers, Russia and Great Britain, in the 1907 Convention of St. Petersburg. The northern part came under Russian, the southern, under British control; the creation of a neutral belt between the two zones was also settled in the British-Russian treaty. The pact included an agreement authorising the two countries to occupy their own zones with military force upon any third-party threat. The British oil companies subsequently strengthened their influence and control over the exploration and extraction of natural resources in Iran.<sup>2</sup>

British foreign policy in the first decades of the 20th century was largely centred on two issues: the Empire and oil. Possessing no oil fields of its own, Britain developed a network of bases along

the coastline of the Persian Gulf. After the first oil well was opened (1908) the Irani oil industry was controlled by British Petroleum's (BP) precursor, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), putting the British in charge of Irani oil between the two World Wars. 1912 was a decisive year with respect to British presence in the Middle East not only because the Admiralty acquired a leading role in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company but also because this was the year when the British started to search for oil in Kuwait. Although these explorations did not bring fast results, after a quarter of a century black gold started to gush forth from the belly of the Earth in the area. In the first third of the 20th century Great Britain managed to gain a foothold in the oil industry in the Persian Gulf region in the territory of the future Iraq. As the Ottoman Empire was gradually falling to pieces, almost three-quarters of the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) founded in 1902 in Iraq were owned by the British and the Germans. The British share of the Turkish Petroleum Company amounted to nearly 50% while a quarter of the oil firm belonged to the Deutsche Bank.

In the post-World War I years much of the Middle Eastern region stood under London's control or protectorate. As early as 1918 revolutionary Russia had declared a complete break with former expansive Tsarist policy against Persia. British pressure on Persia did nevertheless not ease. London indicated a claim to the whole territory of the country by drafting a protectorate treaty in August 1919. Ahmad Shah, the Persian ruler was unwilling to accept British supervision over his land, so instead of the treaty option the London government trusted the solution with the élite military force of the country: the Persian Cossack Brigade and its commander, Brigadier-General Reza Khan (promoted in 1919).

With British support, General Reza took advantage of continued internal political instability and marched his troops into Tehran on 21st February 1921, forcing the Persian government to resign and making the young pro-British journalist Sayyid Zia od-Din Tabataba'i Prime Minister. Within a few years of the military coup he united Persia under his rule. Although General Reza had for a short time toyed with the idea of founding a republic in the country, in the end he decided to take the throne. On 12th December 1925, shortly after dethroning the Quajar Dynasty, the Tehran national assembly declared Reza, the creator of

the unified Persian state, shah of the country. The monarch was sworn in on 15th December 1925 and crowned on 25th April 1926. The British were glad that the new Persian monarch, with whatever means necessary, had made order in the land. Having advanced to state leader from a simple, uncouth and illiterate soldier, Reza shah founded a rigid, monolithic system and his stable government proved to be advantageous for London. The dynasty founder, a professed supporter of the neutrality of arms, who had collaborated with the British after World War I with the primary aim of gaining power, now proved to be less and less willing to show gratitude to London for its previous support. He wanted to decrease Persia's foreign dependence and withdraw the country from Soviet as well as British influence; to achieve this he initiated a regional non-aggression pact with three neighbouring countries. Signed on 8th July 1937 in the Saadabad Palace in Tehran, the document known as the Saadabad Treaty<sup>3</sup> of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan served to protect the security and territorial integrity of the four countries. During his rule of a decade and a half, Reza shah succeeded in ridding himself of most of British dominance, only failing to terminate the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's concession.

Apart from British businessman D'Arcy's gain of Irani oil concessions in 1901 and the commencement of oil extraction in Persia by the British in 1908, the period that saw the foundation of ties between Iran and British oil enterprises was marked by one other event before World War I. It happened in Britain and at Churchill's behest. The Admiralty of the United Kingdom bought up 51% of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company shares, putting the British government in direct control of the Irani oil reserve. Reza however was not content with altering the profit share due to be paid to the Irani state: he wanted to take over the oil industry of Iran by terminating the original agreement. Britain had to rely on help from the League of Nations to protect its interests in Irani oil. This difficult political issue caused the suspension of cooperation between the two countries for some time.

Reza shah, the founder of the modern nation state launched a German-oriented foreign policy from the mid-30s to level out political and economic dependence from Britain. He formed close ties with the Third Reich. Attempting to hide a German-friendly attitude, the Irani

monarch declared his state an independent one. As Irani-German cooperation continued to flourish in the first years of World War II, the British and the Soviets occupied Iran within a few days in August 1941. Reza shah was forced to abdicate on account of his pro-German attitude on 16th September; he died a very rich man and an exile in South Africa on 26 July 1944. His son, the Swiss-educated crown prince Mohammad Reza, aged 27, was put on the throne of the first Pahlavi. In 1942 Great Britain and the Soviet Union signed a treaty with Iran declaring that the allied troops would continue to occupy the Persian state until the end of the World War.<sup>4</sup> The Allies held one of the most important meetings of World War II in Tehran between 28th November and 1st December 1943. It was at the Tehran conference that Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt met in person for the first time. The Irani capital was appointed as venue by Stalin. At the behest of the American President the members of the anti-Fascist coalition agreed at the conference that Iran would regain its independent status when the war was over.

After the World War Mohammad Reza could rely on both British and US support. The ruler of the Peacock Throne was little involved in the troublesome matters of governance. He seldom interfered with the conflicts of internal power centres on the rise. In 1951 Mohammad Mossadegh, a politician of great popularity, who had founded the National Front a year before, was appointed Prime Minister of Iran. His policy hallmarked with the phrase “negative balance” was aimed at avoiding both British and Soviet influence. The national programme of the government, designed to free the country from foreign dependence was contrary to British interests in Iran. Although Mohammad Mossadegh nationalised British-owned Irani oil production in spring 1951, the action failed to bring the desired effects due to a British blockade and the fact that markets were struggling with overproduction at the time.

Mossadegh, in an attempt to curtail the authority of the shah, found himself involved in a sharp conflict with the monarch. In 1953 he managed to force the ruler to leave Iran. The power of the democratically elected Irani prime Minister was subsequently toppled in a military coup on 19th August 1953. Operation Ajax, the ousting of the Mossadegh government was led by the Tehran US Embassy, and organised and financed by the CIA with help from the British Secret Service.

The United States feared that the example of oil nationalisation would be followed in Saudi Arabia; for this reason it acted to promote its own interests and sided with the British in the conflict. Mossadegh’s overthrow became a milestone in the sense that from this point on it was the United states (instead of Great Britain) that intervened in Iran’s life as an external power strongly advancing its own political and economic interests. After 1953 the lines of Irani foreign policy were woven with a focus on the United States, and mostly, with a consideration of British interests. Later, in autumn 1955 it was on this horizon of foreign policy that Iran joined the Baghdad Pact and in 1961 the Irani monarch gave permission to set up US military bases in his country as a token of close cooperation with Washington.

In the wake of the successful Operation Ajax the shah, who had fled to Rome, could return to Tehran; he regained his power and appointed General Fazlollah Zahedi, a partaker in the coup, Prime Minister. Mohammad Reza, forced into the background in Mossadegh’s time, now took firmer hold of the reins: he introduced a dictatorial government similar to his father’s tyrannical régime. His power was mainly guaranteed by an organisation of internal security and politics: the SAVAK, the infamous secret police established in 1957 on the American model with Turkish and Israeli assistance. It was the secret police that regulated public information and controlled the country’s political life. This instrument of oppression continued to work highly effectively for two decades.

After the shah’s return the new government gave back the right of oil extraction to the Western companies. In 1954 Iran signed a contract with the international oil extraction consortium that was to expire in 1979. The major member of this consortium remained British Petroleum, with a 40% share but its hegemony came to an end and American oil companies also acquired significant stakes. Although the following decades were marked by quiet or less than quiet position fights between British and American interestholders, both countries still considered important to supply large quantities of arms to Iran in order to maintain stability in the Gulf.

The development of military force strengthened the shah’s ambitions of power. Now in possession of a solidly accumulating arsenal, Iran wished to step into the role of the gendarme

of the Persian Gulf – a position vacated by Great Britain in the early 1970s.

As a result of Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution British-Irani diplomatic contacts were frozen for almost two decades, until 1998. The new leaders of Iran looked upon the British and Americans as countries that had misused their superpower status, exploiting Muslim people, robbing them of their resources and endangering their culture.<sup>5</sup>

### **1. SATANIC LOANS: OPPORTUNIST DEALS AND TURNS AT THE END OF THE 80s.**

The heirs of the revolution - those who for their own interests wish to sweep aside the outdated remains of revolutionary days – will as a rule treat the revolution very differently from those who made it. As Khomeini's decade was still ruled by the generation of the revolutionaries, Islamised foreign policy in essence was carried on according to the Ayatollah's expectations. At the same time, the transformation that Iran went through during the Khomeini era is quite suggestive. Although Irani revolutionary consensus had barely eroded for a decade, the exhausting eight-year war between Iraq and Iran, the thirty thousand death sentences signed since the 1979 revolution, and compulsive talk about betrayals and internal enemies had quenched the revolutionary fever. The broad electoral base of the revolution had been preserved but Khomeini had to fight increasing pressure in his last years in power. One of these pressure factors was population boom. The other, the issue of a depleted economy after the protracted war. Opportunist deals<sup>6</sup> were struck concerning Western loans and foreign investments. Although the revolution had focused on economic and political independence and had banned foreign loans and foreign investment, in 1988 Ayatollah Khomeini passed the budget for the year 1989-1990 and a five-year development plan that authorised such activities. The official aims of economic restructuring empowered the government to carry out these initiatives and the Irani Foreign Office started to labour towards renewing contacts with Western European countries, and Great Britain among them. These endeavours were then set back for nearly a decade by the "death decree"<sup>7</sup> issued by Khomeini against Salman Rushdie in February 1989. It was clearly seen in this period that the Islamic republic's foreign policy in the Khomeini era was characterised by a revisionism and ideology that would often triumph over pragmatism.

In 1989 and its aftermath political analysts concentrated their attention on the demise of the two power blocs, the "Communist world" and the "free world", the end of the bipolar age and the crumbling of the Yalta Agreement. The Cold War was won by the West; Eastern European countries could step out of the Soviet Empire in peace, and the Soviet Union also disappeared in the end. On the dissolution of the Soviet Union, at the beginning of the 1990s, Francis Fukuyama prognosticated that liberal democracy would be ushered in worldwide as a universal value and the world would be ruled by free market capitalism, making history come to a point of rest.<sup>8</sup>

The world refused to prove what it promised to Fukuyama in 1989; Fukuyama's resounding sentence did not hold good. There were no significant changes worldwide apart from those in Eastern Europe in the beginning of the nineties. The multitude of formerly non-democratic countries did not seize the opportunity to institute a modern democracy. In the middle of the first decade of the new millennium the Russian bear came forth from its cave after a long winter's sleep and started reclaiming its old positions in an ever louder voice. Stealthy China with its billion people and soaring economy became a factor that could no longer be disregarded – besides, by this time the dominant power of the East Asia region had taken decisive steps toward the "domestication" of Africa. Although Eastern Europe's Socialist systems ended in economic and moral disaster and the organisations backed by the international Communist movement died away, several old ideologies persisted. Thus Plato's question raised two and a half thousand years ago on what type of society would suit man's moral nature best still remains open.

Examining the world outside Europe we may state that the age of liberal democracy did not set in after 1989: no new era was started at this point. Looking at the Europe of 1989, at the same time, we can clearly see that this was the start of another process of historical dimensions in Western Europe, and that the very centre of this movement was hidden from the eyes of social analysts by the cataclysmic events in Eastern Europe. 1989 marks a turning point in the relationships of Western European states and Muslim immigrants, a phenomenon that may be clarified in its context complete with the comprehensive analysis of the 1979 advance of Islamism. Young Muslim people in Western

Europe started to show intensive interest in the ideology of political Islam from the end of the 1980s: this happened when the first generation of the immigrants' children reached maturity, having been raised and undergone acculturation in Europe among social hardships. The chances of this generation on the labour market were further worsened by the fact that many of them had been unable to finish school. They were the first ones who made up a layer of poor young Muslim citydwellers in Europe that would listen to the preachings of radical Islamist militants with far closer attention than their parents had done. These young people were mostly Maghreb, Middle Eastern, Turkish or Indo-Pakistani students; they were older, intellectually more mature and familiar with the language and culture of their country of origin. Immigrants' children very often do not know these but many feel attracted to a culture where they can discover their roots and the sources of their self-esteem. Until 1989 Islamist movements settling in Europe respected the inviolability of European states. They regarded these countries as recruitment areas for activists and sympathisers who would start fighting the godless régime upon returning home. Up to this point in time they did their best to avoid conflict with the local authorities.<sup>9</sup>

In 1989 and 1990 the party states formed under Moscow's command fell one after the other. 1989 also brought a new "government" for the European Community (The Twelve). On 1st January 1989 the 17-member Brussels Commission started its four-year mandate under the reelected head, Frenchman Jacques Delors<sup>10</sup>. For years the Brussels institution, which was composed of commissioners delegated by the twelve member state governments, focused on the tightening of integration, a policy advocated by the former French Finance Minister Delors. According to the renowned French politician's ambitious plan, integration in Western Europe and the strengthening of the participant states was primarily seen as the creation of a unified market for three hundred million citizens, free of internal barriers and to be brought into existence by the end of 1992. The German Federal Republic was busy celebrating three major historical anniversaries in the first half of 1989. First the capital (albeit only temporarily regarded as such), Bonn, a city of Roman origin greeted the two thousandth year of its existence. Following the Bonn bimillennium attention in West Germany was riveted on the great northern harbour, Hamburg, which turned

eight hundred, and the Federal Republic itself, which became forty years old. From the autumn German reunification occupied the first line of interest. At the same time, from 1979 Komeini's and the Irani capital's names would frequently be mentioned in parliamentary debates and public talk in the German Federal Republic, the strongest European economy. Bassam Tibi, an Arab historian and a resident of Germany of four decades remarks that until 1979 only open-minded educated Germans had some information on Islam, while they were sharing their home country with about a million Muslims at the time. Germans started showing interest in the Islam world after the 1979 Irani Islam revolution.<sup>11</sup> Once Khomeini and his supporters had put Islam on the level of a political movement, some in Western Europe started to realise that the process generally mentioned as the boom of Islam could not be seen as a purely religious phenomenon and that the religious component was inextricably linked to social and political factors. It is the Rushdie case that highlights Western European politicians' growing awareness of fundamental and general problems connected to the presence of Islam in Europe.

## 2. THE RUSHDIE CASE: A DUEL OF WORDS AND BOOK BURNINGS.

Salman Rushdie arrived to the British Isles from the Indian subcontinent, home to a major Muslim population. He was born to an affluent Muslim merchant family in 1947 and lived in India until the age of fourteen. Later he settled in Britain and acquired British citizenship. Rushdie's literary career started in 1975 but he would attract attention from the litterati only in 1981, on the publication of *Midnight's Children*. The novel was awarded the Booker Prize, the highest literary prize in the United Kingdom.

The title of the novel published by Viking Penguin on 26th September 1988: *Satanic Verses* is linked to the holy book of Islam.

The Prophet Mohammad deleted certain verses from the Qur'an because in his opinion they were inspired by Satan. News of the book quickly spread in the world media via the channels of mass communication. The war that surrounded the author and the Booker prize nominated work started before the wider public could get access to the novel. Some Muslims labelled the book blasphemous due to disrespectful depictions<sup>12</sup> of the Prophet

Mohammad, others likened it to pornography, declaring it obscene. The publication of a literary work that doubted the infallibility of the Prophet upset even those Muslims who did not belong to any militant stream. For a true Muslim believer Rushdie's text presenting Mohammad as a hoax would be harsh words almost physically hurting on the lips, although we know that no Muslim in his right mind would ever say such things.<sup>13</sup>

The book which fired vehement opposition in the world of Islam was banned in several countries; publication was also prohibited in India, a state with a hundred-million-strong Muslim minority. The case of the ban on *Satanic Verses* is at the same time not an unprecedented one. In the first half of the 20th century alone there are numerous examples to the workings of censorship in European culture. In the United Kingdom *Ulysses* was banned on the account of obscenity from 1918, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, from 1929, and 1931 saw *The Case for India* put on the index for the unsettling ideas it contained. Outside of the British Isles, in the Western and Eastern parts of Europe dozens of works deemed immoral, antireligious, heretical, occult, obscene, socially undermining or politically suspicious were banned.

The publication of Rushdie's novel brought consequences of unprecedented gravity to the Western European Muslim population. After the Attorney General of the United Kingdom declared that there was no legal means to ban *Satanic Verses*, a public burning of the satirical novel took place in Bradford, a British industrial town with a community of fifty thousand Muslim immigrants mainly from Pakistan. Angered by *Satanic Verses*, a Muslim crowd started a burning in Oldham near Manchester. British Muslims and sympathisers took to the streets of London to demand a ban, the destruction of the copies that had already been delivered to the bookstores and a punishment for Rushdie, who had offended religious sensitivities. The leaders of Britain's one-and-half-million Muslim community turned to Ayatollah Khomeini for a stance on the issue of *Satanic Verses*, which in their minds was a scandalous work. Britain then saw the unfolding of a controversial situation in which several Labour MPs and Council members publicly supported the book burners whereas a few Conservative politicians, among others Secretary of State for Education Kenneth

Barker, criticised the principles of the Bradford public auto-da-fé.

On the publication of Rushdie's book in Britain, in the first half of February 1989 Pakistan witnessed the greatest Islam-inspired demonstration after the triumph of the Irani Islam revolution. In a mass demonstration held in front of the Islamabad American Cultural Center tens of thousands of people demanded a ban on the Indian-born author's book. Not only did they burn the Stars and Stripes and a dummy representing the author of *Satanic Verses* but they also wanted to set fire to the building of the cultural centre. Police and protesters clashed in the downtown area. Seven died in the armed combat between the demonstrators and the authorities with more than eighty hurt. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto condemned the violence. A day of national mourning was held in Iran in memory of the victims.

Ageing Khomeini, who in the previous years had increasingly avoided public appearances due to his declining health, but who had played a decisive role in the Irani Islam revolution and had devotedly acted as the spiritual leader and spokesman of Islam, decided to come forward on the issue of Rushdie's volume. Although Islamic civilisation lacks an authentic religious-spiritual centre, Khomeini, the number one Shi'ite religious authority and a renowned scholar of Islamic law made a clear statement on the matter. A month after the Bradford burning the Ayatollah, in the name of international Muslim responsibility, as if representing the whole of Islam in one person, declared the fetva in defence of the world's Muslim community. He issued a death threat on the British author of Indian birth for blasphemy and an offence against Islam contained in the novel *Satanic Verses*. On 14th February 1989 Iran's religious leader addressed his message broadcast in the Tehran radio as his last will not only to the people of Iran but to all Muslim nations and the oppressed all over the world.<sup>14</sup> The fetva, an official declaration passed by competent theologians, ranks equal to laws within the legal system of Islam and as such it was a clearly understood order to all Muslims.

The Tehran parliament expressed its support of Khomeini's decision by announcing that 115 MPs demanded the break of all diplomatic ties with Great Britain. The school of theology in Qom also backed the Ayatollah's call. In order to speed the execution of the "death decree"

Hojatoleslam Hassan Sanei, a member of Khomeini's close circle and the president of the 15 Khordad Foundation, offered a bounty of \$1m to any foreigner who kills Rushdie and two and a half times as much to any Iranian.<sup>15</sup> In the Southern Iranian town of birth of Hashemi Rafsanjani, President of the Iranian parliament and Commander-in-Chief of the army, a prize of \$3m was collected for the man who would execute the Indian-born British writer. On the very day the fatwa was announced the author of *Satanic Verses* requested protection from the British police. The 41-year-old writer and his family were taken to a hideaway and put under police protection. Once again, Iran made world news headlines in mid-February 1989.

The reason behind Salman Rushdie's condemnation was not only his offence against Islam in the novel *Satanic Verses*. According to the teaching of Islam he committed the grave sin of deserting his faith. In an article entitled *The Book Burning* in the American journal *The New York Review of Books* (a shorter version of the article appeared in *The Observer*, a British liberal weekly on 22 January 1989) Rushdie indeed acknowledged a loss of faith, being unable to accept the indisputable absolutes of religion.<sup>16</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini thus passed a sentence on the faithless writer that any Muslim would receive in any part of the Muslim world if he betrayed his faith. In addition to Iran, the Shi'ite leader's "death decree" was met with the biggest sympathy demonstrations in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

### 3. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE "DEATH DECREE".

Rushdie's novel and Khomeini's fatwa fired up emotions both among those who condemned the author and those who condemned the condemnors in the Western European countries, which had about seven million Muslim immigrant residents at the time. In spring 1989 an analyst writing for *Time* magazine summarised the newly risen controversies of Islamic presence on a governmental level. He recalled the book burnings in Britain, the Rushdie portrait burnings in Bonn and the infuriated cries in the streets of Paris demanding the faithless writer's death. The analyst then mentioned the killing of a pro-moderation Muslim religious leader in Brussels two weeks later and remarked that the long labour to break down stereotypes about Islam as a religion of fanaticism and violence had been ruined overnight

in the flames fuelled by the controversy over *Satanic Verses*. He saw Islam as stronger, more active and more influential as ever in Europe but at the same time increasingly fearsome and repugnant to some.<sup>17</sup> The British public thought it unacceptable that the life of a British subject living in Great Britain was under threat based on a sentence passed in Tehran and according to Islamic law. Khomeini was blamed for the emotions that had flared up in the Muslim community of the country. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher found herself under increasing pressure from advocates of the freedom of speech and religion, who wanted her to officially condemn Ayatollah Khomeini's "death decree" and close the UK's diplomatic mission in Tehran, a small office with a staff of three and no ambassador. The decisive, determined and principled politician, the first female leader of the Conservative Party, who started her office on 21st May 1979, almost simultaneously with Khomeini and who had been governing the country for almost a decade, was not slow in protesting against Khomeini's radio speech and the death threat.

The "Iron Lady", considered a political leader of major importance at the end of the 1980s, declared Khomeini's call an intervention into British affairs. After the forceful statement of Europe's first female prime minister the European Community carried out a diplomatic "attack" on Iran in support of the freedom of thought: it reacted to the order issued for Rushdie's murder by recalling its ambassadors from Tehran.<sup>18</sup> Several Western European countries considered introducing economic sanctions against Iran, which was struggling to rebuild its economy. A few days after the "death decree" against Rushdie was announced the British media magnate Robert Maxwell made an offer of 6m (more than \$10m) in his London weekly *The People* to the person who would be able to "civilise" Khomeini.

Khomeini's fatwa was not met with full consent even in the Islam world. Many questioned if the Shi'ite Ayatollah had presented the true and authentic Islamic point of view in his decision. In the days after the fatwa was issued the President of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, which represents more than forty Muslim countries, did not support Iran's initiative to call an extraordinary session on the fatwa that was based objections to the book *Satanic Verses*. Several members of the Islamic Conference thought that Tehran's action against

Rushdie and several aspects of Ayatollah Khomeini's were discrediting Islam. Leading theologians of the Cairo al-Azhar Sunnites showed a certain amount of flexibility in the debate surrounding the British writer by declaring a sentence passed without trial and without a hearing of the defendant unacceptable. The first Nobel-prize-winning Arab writer, the Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz condemned the Shi'ite religious leader's death sentence against Rushdie as a showcase for "intellectual terror".

The leaders of the Muslim communities in France also rejected the notorious parts of Rushdie's book but they did not unanimously support Khomeini's call. European Shi'ite religious head Ayatollah Mehdi Rohani, a resident of France, distanced himself from the Irani religious leader's fetva, saying it contradicted international norms. The Belgium murder has been mentioned before. The 35-year-old imam of the Brussels mosque did reject the blasphemous content of *Satanic Verses* but wanted to cool down aggressivity that had been fired up by Khomeini's "death decree" and asked his followers to respect the laws of Belgium. The peacemaking imam was shot in the mosque in downtown Brussels in the afternoon of 29th March 1989. The assassination in the seat of the European Community set off yet another political storm.

The conveniently tangled political and religious upheaval in Great Britain and the Indian subcontinent that was triggered by the book published in September 1988 came at the best possible time for Khomeini, who had conducted a fundamentally confrontative foreign policy for a decade. As the Ayatollah encouraged the followers of Islam to murder a European citizen and declared war on international law yet again, in a certain sense he had to "handle" a political problem similar to the one at the end of 1979 when he felt Iran drawing closer to the US and sent his students off to occupy the Tehran American Embassy. The end of the 1980s saw both Irani and British politicians make an effort to fully normalise diplomatic relations between the two countries and agreements were made to mutually appoint ambassadors. In November 1988 a written document was drawn up to attest to a firm wish of settling relations. Khomeini's fetva fulfilled all the expectations of the Ayatollah: it prevented Iran's opening towards Great Britain and western countries for a long time. It was in vain that 10 Downing Street asked Russian Foreign Minister Edouard

Shevarnadze's help via Mikhail Gorbachev at the end of February 1989 to try and solve the Rushdie matter on his Tehran visit. Khomeini remained inexorable. At the same time and quite unexpectedly, Russia and Iran started to forge closer ties. The two countries had a common border of almost 2500 kilometres; a contact-building exchange of messages between Khomeini and Gorbachev at the beginning of 1989 was a good basis for the intensive development of bilateral relations. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan on Gorbachev's initiative also helped.

Fighting a losing battle with cancer, three and a half months after issuing the "death decree" on Rushdie, Ayatollah Khomeini died of a heart attack in a Tehran hospital on 3rd June 1989. The learned theologian left behind a political testament of twenty-nine pages.<sup>19</sup> As opposed to this document, some consider the fetva that closed the upswing period of Islamist movements as Khomeini's true political testament, which marks time periods apart from two respects. Firstly, by humiliating Saudi Arabia, which showed great incompetence in handling the matter, Khomeini made Iran the champion of Islam responsibility; secondly, Europe was integrated into the Muslim world.

Tehran had had to close the long Iraqi war that had lasted from 1980 to 1988 without being able to drive out Saddam Hussein. At the same time, Saudi Arabia had been able to retain its hegemony over Islam despite Iran's every effort to destabilise it. In this context the fetva may be interpreted primarily as an attempt to regain the initiative. Khomeini made himself a spokesman of Muslims who were offended by a novel that attacked their honour, religion and culture in a time when Riyadh and its dependent organisations were unable to prevent the publication of the book. The fetva of 14th February 1989 relocated the war front of Islamism from the South-East Asia of the 1980s to a territory outside the historical borders of the faithful community. This new area was Western Europe, where Salman Rushdie lived and which served as his hinterland. This gesture instantly extended *dar al-Islam* to the whole universe, including the masses of people of Muslim origin living in exile, first making them hostages and then active participants in the combat over Islam's field of significance. In the following decade, the West would become a new battlefield in this struggle.<sup>20</sup>

On the death of the charismatic leader of the Islam revolution a period of forty days was announced for national mourning in the Islamic Republic of Iran, ten in Pakistan, seven in Syria and three in Lebanon. Khomeini continued to determine the political parameters of the Islamic republic well after his death: the old river kept on flowing under the new bridge. Contrary to the expectations of many western analysts the struggle for power did not lead to civil war. The religious leaders passed a fast decision on Khomeini's succession with more than a two-third majority. It was quite clear at the same time that no one would ever command the respect and possess quite the power in Iran that Khomeini had claimed.

After the death of the highly respected founder of the Islam republic, Iran with its population of fifty million wished to normalise its relations with Western European countries but it remained unthinkable for years to revoke the *fatwa*. President Hashemi Rafsanjani, often called "a pragmatic fox", could only reach a point where he tried to more precisely define Khomeini's *fatwa*. All further steps would have been seen as the betrayal of the revolution by Shi'ite religious leaders who were following Khomeini's principles. As late as the mid-1990s Iranian leaders would corroborate the death sentence against Salman Rushdie but they stressed that they had never wanted and would never want to have it executed by agents as they fully respected international law.

This in fact means that Tehran made a gesture to Western Europe in 1995 communicating that the 1989 Iranian death sentence on Salman Rushdie's head is irrevocable but it will not be executed abroad. With its lenience the Iranian régime wished to urge believers of Islam to observe the recipient country's laws in all circumstances.

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#### Notes.

<sup>1</sup> Yergin, Daniel, *Der Preis. Die Jagd nach Geld, Öl und Macht*. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991, pp. 176-193

<sup>2</sup> Greaves, Rose, 'Iranian Relations with Great Britain and British India, 1798-1921'. In: Avery, Peter – Grossman, Stanley I. – Hambly, Gavin R. G. – Melville, Charles P. (eds.): *The Cambridge history of Iran*. Vol.7, *From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 374-425

<sup>3</sup> Abdulghani, Jasim Mohammad, *Iraq & Iran: The Years of Crisis*. London: Croom Helm, 1984, 17; Dann, Uriel (ed.): *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988, pp. 333-352

<sup>4</sup> Keddie, Nikki R., *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretative History of Modern Iran*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 113-119

<sup>5</sup> Bakhash, Shaul, 'Iran's Foreign Policy under the Islamic Republic, 1979-2000'. In: Brown, L. Carl (ed.): *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside*

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<sup>6</sup> Abrahamian, Ervand, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 132-143

<sup>7</sup> Bakhash, Shaul, 'Iran's Foreign Policy under the Islamic Republic, 1979-2000'. In: Brown, L. Carl (ed.): *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*. London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001, pp. 250-251

<sup>8</sup> Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1992. A similar feeling of an end was diagnosed by Hobsbawm, Eric John Ernest, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*. London: Michael Joseph, 1994

<sup>9</sup> Kepel, Gilles, *Dzsihád*. Budapest: Európa, 2007, pp. 331-333

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Delors, nicknamed in international political circles as Mr Europe, led the European Union's executive body for two subsequent terms from 1985. Jacques Delors was first time elected President of the European Commission on 7th January 1985.

<sup>11</sup> Tibi, Bassam, *Keresztes háború és dzsihád: az iszlám és a keresztény világ*. Budapest: Corvina, 2003, p. 37

<sup>12</sup> Rushdie, Salman, *The Satanic Verses*. London: Viking Penguin, 1988, pp. 93, 367-368, 381; On the circumstances of publication see: Netton, Ian Richard, *Text and Trauma: An East-West Primer*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996

<sup>13</sup> Zaki, Yakub, 'Rushdie's Real Crime'. In: *Times*, 28 February 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Bakhash, Shaul, 'Iran's Foreign Policy under the Islamic Republic, 1979-2000'. In: Brown, L. Carl (ed), *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*. London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001, p. 248

<sup>15</sup> Bahar, Sarvenaz, *Guardians of Thought: Limits on Freedom of Expression in Iran*. Source:

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<sup>16</sup> Rushdie, Salman, 'Choice between Light and Dark'. In: *The Observer*, January 22, 1989, p. 11; Rushdie, Salman: 'The Book Burning'. In: *The New York Review of Books*, March 2, 1989, p. 26

<sup>17</sup> 'Allah gyermekei Európában'. In: *Heti Világgazdaság*, 20 May 1989, p. 19

<sup>18</sup> The recalled ambassadors would start to return to Tehran within a month.

<sup>19</sup> This 29-page testament complete with appendices is Khomeini's third will. The first was written in 1982, the second one in 1987.

<sup>20</sup> Kepel, Gilles, *Dzsihád*. Budapest: Európa, 2007, pp. 315-316. The meaning of the phrase "dar al-Islam" is "the house of Islam" or "the world of Islam".