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A lot of ink has been spent on understanding the Islamic Republic of Iran, yet its political architects, the ayatollahs, remain an inscrutable enigma. Most studies in English offer incomplete glimpses or limited biographies of these leaders. Yvette Hovsepian-Bearce's *The Political Ideology of Ayatollah Khamenei: Out of the Mouth of the Supreme Leader of Iran* represents the first substantive attempt to provide a coherent and thorough account of the ideology of Iran's current theocrat, Ayatollah Khamenei, through his own words. As she writes, the goal of her text is "to provide an interpretive guide with which to assess and analyze the man, his worldview, and the complexity of the interaction between the religious and political spheres within which his decision-making takes place" (xiv). She succeeds in her goal. Though it was Khamenei's predecessor, Ayatollah Khomeini, who truly shaped the formative years of the Islamic republic, Ayatollah Khamenei has continued to shape and transform the revolutionary project of establishing an Islamic republic originally undertaken by his predecessor. Understanding how Khamenei has done so elucidates both the history and modern geopolitics of Iran.

The book is divided into three parts, "The Early Years," "Supreme Leader Khamenei 1989-2014," and "Central Themes in Ayatollah Khamenei's Ideology," all with multiple subsections that structure the text as an easy read and useful reference guide. Drawing from an archival treasure trove of public speeches, translated writings, press interviews, biographical accounts, and other publications, Hovsepian-Bearce provides a close interpretive analysis of what Ayatollah Khamenei has said. The author's historical contextualization of the texts is particularly useful, as they illustrate how Iran's Supreme Leader has evolved and refined his political ideology from that of revolutionary Khomeinism to Khameneism.

The first part of the book is dedicated to the formative years of Khamenei, his biographical background, and his tenure as part of Khomeini's inner circle. Taking various utterances and writings by Khamenei, Hovsepian-Bearce explores not only how he was shaped by other ideologues and how his vision aligned with Khomeini's but also Khamenei's experience during the Iran-Iraq War and his tenure as president; the section culminates with an examination of Khamenei's succession as Supreme Leader. Three particular aspects of his formative years stand out. First, his struggles with the shah's secret police, SAVAK, fanned the revolutionary flames in the heart of the young ideologue (p. 32). Next, despite the first Supreme Leader Khomeini's isolationist policy of "neither East nor West," Hovsepian-Bearce finds that Khamenei's early intellectual interests did incorporate the philosophies of others and were connected to the broader ideological debates in the Muslim world. The author notes, for example, that Khamenei wrote of Egyptian theorist Seyyid Qutb that Qutb "gave voice to an Islam that was inextricably interwoven with every aspect of society and politics" (p. 33). Finally, the section provides surprising insight into Khamenei's motivations during the Iran-Iraq War and his role as defense minister (pp. 63-67). The author's contextualization of Khamenei's writings and experience during the Iran-Iraq War illustrate Khamenei's perspective of the global forces involved in the agitation and support of a war that bred tragedy and horror. It is a perspective that was to shape his years as Supreme Leader.

The second section of the book focuses on Ayatollah Khamenei's rule as Iran's highest theocrat. The author provides invaluable insight by examining not just Khamenei as a ruler but also his personality as an individual as he struggled with the problems of running the then-experimental project of a revolutionary Islamic republic. Hovsepian-Bearce notes that Khamenei assumes the role of Supreme Leader with a challenge to his critics: "There are those who suggest

that Iran has entered into a ‘new era’ with a new direction. I assure you, Iran continues on the path of the Islamic Revolution and has not diverged from its [revolutionary] principles” (p. 121). Khamenei’s rebuke of his critics succinctly encapsulates a complicated man dedicated to continuing the project started by Khomeini while simultaneously grappling with international isolationism, global hostility, internal struggles (with reformist presidents like Khatami, for instance), and leading Iran in its exploration of nuclear power. The author captures the complexity of a man convinced of his beliefs nonetheless struggling with the pragmatic complications of rule. Drawing upon countless writings, the second section of the book traces the transformation of Khomeinism as it is systematized into Khameniesm, and concludes with 2014 and the presidency of Rouhani.

While the first two sections of the book follow a chronological format, placing the thought and sayings of Ayatollah Khamenei in historical context, the third and final section, “Central Themes in Ayatollah Khamenei’s Ideology,” provides a coherent thematic analysis of the leader’s sayings. The author isolates five themes woven throughout Khamenei’s writings and sayings: “America,” “Muslim unity,” “Religious democracy,” “Freedom,” and “Iranian youth.” In each subsection, Hovsepian-Bearce provides relevant quotes from the ayatollah on each theme while providing important context surrounding each. For example, in the “America” section, Hovsepian-Bearce lists seventeen “historical and contemporary factors that have contributed to Khamenei’s ill will toward the US” (p. 283). In her analysis, she not only notes the hostility towards America but also examines how such hostility is in fact wrapped up in Iran’s disdain for Israel (and the U.S.’s support thereof) and an isolationism rooted in the principle of “Neither East nor West.” She also notes that despite this animosity, Khamenei never permanently cuts off relations with America and cites him as asserting, “There is no reason for Iran to cut relations with any country permanently” (p. 282). The subsections of this part of the text are not merely descriptive of the various themes but provide much-needed contextualization for why the themes are central for Ayatollah Khamenei. Hovsepian-Bearce’s contextualizing is a necessary intervention for scholars trying to understand the themes, ideas, and motivations of Iran’s Supreme Leader.

Despite being over three hundred pages, *The Political Ideology of Ayatollah Khamenei* is an easy and substantial read. By tracing Khamenei’s ideology while following his life, the author is able to present a compelling story that is fascinating and fastidiously thorough. Dividing the text into three parts with well-organized subsections allows the book to flow naturally from front to back, while simultaneously being an accessible resource text that scholars can use to flip to relevant sections. Yvette Hovsepian-Bearce has provided a much needed scholarly contribution into the political thought of one of contemporary Iran’s chief architects. Scholars from diverse fields of political science, history, geopolitics, Middle East studies, and similar disciplines will find the book invaluable.

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