

addition, he called an emergency meeting of the Assembly of Experts. Subsequently, his students in Shiraz were harassed, his website was shut down and there were attacks on the Ghoba mosque where Dastgheib has led Friday Prayers for over five decades now. Reassured by the support of most members in the Assembly of Experts, Khamenei dismissed calls for the expulsion of Dastgheib from the assembly deeming it—in truly managerial fashion—not ‘very appropriate’ to do so.²⁸

Khamenei has repeatedly acted as a “prefect” of Ayatollah Khomeini’s legacy, rather than a leader in his own right. Exactly because he was not a marja when he was appointed Supreme Leader in 1989, his discourse of power has relied upon “managerial” themes. A quick perusal of the major speeches on his official webpage shows that apart from occasional references to Islamic imagery and symbols, usually slotted at the beginning and the end of the speeches, there is an overwhelming emphasis on functional issues of the state. Terms and themes such as leadership, management, reconstruction, security and national development clearly dominate. In an address to young army cadets at the Imam Ali military academy in December 2005, for instance, Khamenei reminds them that ‘military training, observing military discipline, boosting faith and determination’ is their major duty.²⁹ In November 2005, on the occasion of the anniversary of Imam Ali, the first Imam of the Shi’i and the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad, Khamenei is equally adamant to stress *raison d’état* when he cautions that the officials should ensure that there ‘is no bribery, administrative corruption, enjoyment of undeserved privileges, waste of working time, disregard for the people, desire to make a fortune ... and no embezzlement of public funds.’³⁰ In a speech to the residents of Eastern Azerbaijan in February 2007, he addresses the ‘youngsters’ who ‘have become aware of their inherent worth and merit and are looking for scientific knowledge and new discoveries.’ In a clear reference to the recurrent theme of national development, Khamenei stresses that ‘they are seeking to tread the path to the high summits of progress.’ Adamant to remind his audience about the development that Iran has already accomplished, he reiterates in typical fashion that Iran ‘benefits from abundant talented human resources that are capable of making considerable progress in various areas of activities, and it is up to government

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ ‘Leader’s Address to Army Cadets at Imam Ali Military Academy’, 21 December 2005. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=3488>> [accessed 12 April 2013].

³⁰ ‘Leader’s Statement at the Tehran Friday Prayers’, 19 August 2005. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=3476>> [accessed 19 March 2013].

officials to make proper use of these valuable resources.’³¹ Elsewhere, Khamenei appears more like a minister of education with very particular pedagogical concerns than the Supreme Leader when he ‘encourages academics and the officials in charge of universities [to] promote self-confidence among university students. We should have confidence in our national resources and cultural heritage’, he adds.

We should determine the country's needs and scientific priorities and base our educational plans on these two factors. Research and thorough investigation may reveal a number of priorities in the humanities, fundamental sciences, and various areas of experimental sciences. The results of these investigations must be taken into account when doing large-scale planning. Due to the limited amount of resources available and the large number of needs we currently have in the country, we should not spend our time on low-priority projects. Neither should we use our human and financial resources in these cases.³²

When theological themes are touched upon they are subordinated to the interest of the system in order to deal with the ‘complicated economic, financial, political and social problems’ facing Muslims today:³³ ‘Pundits who enjoy enormous capabilities in Islamic jurisprudence and who have a modern perspective on the current issues must rely on Islamic jurisprudence and its various aspects and double their attempts to clarify different issues and meet these new requirements.’³⁴ In his emphasis on the interest (*maslahat*) of the system, Khamenei follows the lead of his mentor Ayatollah Khomeini, in particular towards the end of his life when Khomeini enshrined *maslahat* even more firmly as the principle of the state superseding religious ordinances including the first principles of Islam.³⁵ Indeed, Khomeini reprimanded Khamenei himself in 1987 when the latter was President reminding him that the state is the most important of God’s ordinances and that it can suspend even central commandments of

³¹ ‘Leader’s Speech to the Residents of the Eastern Azarbaijan Province’, 17 February 2007. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=3595>> [accessed 12 April 2013]

³² ‘Supreme Leader’s Address to Academics’, 24 September 2008. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=4058>> [accessed 11 April 2013].

³³ ‘Hundreds of Ulama, Scholars, Clergymen, and Theology Students of Yazd Province Call on the Leader’, 2 January 2008. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=3659>> [accessed 8 April 2013].

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ The Expediency Council entrenched the *maslahat* principle even further. It is mandated to arbitrate disputes between the elected parliament and the Guardian Council in favour of the interest (and stability) of the system. These institutional changes demonstrate the importance of regime survival in the doctrines of the Islamic Republic. This is, of course, exactly in tune with the interest of any other state.

Islam such as prayer, fasting or pilgrimage. Khomeini spoke with the full force of his religious and political authority in a way that Khamenei never really did as Supreme Leader. Addressing Khamenei, he said:

From your comments during the Friday prayers it would appear that you do not believe it is correct [to characterise] the state as an absolute trusteeship which God conferred upon the noble Prophet, God bless him and his family and grant them salvation, and that the is the most important of God's ordinances and has precedence over all other derived ordinances of God. Interpreting what I have said to mean that the state [only] has its powers within the framework of the ordinances of God contradicts my statements. If the powers of the state were [only] operational within the framework of the ordinances of God, the extent of God's sovereignty and the absolute trusteeship given to the prophet would be a meaningless phenomenon devoid of content.³⁶

This type of discourse of power was emblematic for the era of Khomeini and never really returned in this form and shape after his death. It was the particular historical juncture in Iran that allowed him to speak with such immense authority and which lent itself to equating the power of the Iranian state with the holiest tenets of Islam. Aged 85 in 1987, and towards the end of the exhausting eight year war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq, challenged by domestic upheaval and international isolation, for Khomeini the politician the stability of the Islamic Republic must have been pivotal. Hence his increasingly managerial discourse of power and recurrent spasms of systematic violence that continue to be a hallmark of the politics of the faqih until today.

Concluding Reflections

When Khomeini was Supreme Leader, he was at the helm of a young state with nascent bureaucratic structures and a diffuse political system without much institutional depth. In contrast, today Khamenei is at the helm of a state that is by far more professionalised, with a rather more differentiated and experienced under-belly and an inflated public sector that is financially tied into the bureaucracy sustaining the state. Khamenei cannot afford to be arbitrary in the way Khomeini could. His movements have to be measured and strategic. His power is channelled through the diverse anchors scattered around the Iranian body politic from the nodal point of the *beit-e imam* in Tehran and from there to a whole cast of powerful

³⁶ Quoted in Shirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, p. 230.

loyalists: “representatives of the Imam” at universities, ministries, and councils, the editors of the two major national newspapers *Keyhan* and *Etelaat* in addition to larger institutions with immense technological power to discipline and punish if necessary. These loci of power zigzag through Iran’s political system and society such as the heads of the economically powerful foundations, the director of the national radio/television network, the Baseej voluntary forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). It is no revelation that in particular the IRGC has become increasingly central to the economic and political power sustaining the Islamic Republic in general and the power of the faqih in particular.

At the same time, the office of the Leader continues to be an institution in the competitive political market in Iran that has to be promoted with its own sophisticated PR machinery like a commodity to be sold to a sceptical constituency who are exposed to the competing ideas of influential dissenters, that don’t believe in the project of the Islamic Republic anymore. As a consequence of this pluralistic space that continuously impinges on his sovereignty and legitimacy, Khamenei seems to have chosen to rule as a “prefect” of an unrealisable revolutionary dream, which has turned into a grim reality for many: challenged he may be, but ruling he does.

Bio: Arshin Adib-Moghaddam is Professor in Global Thought and Comparative Philosophies at SOAS University of London and Fellow of Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge. Adib-Moghaddam is a member of over a dozen editorial boards and he is co-editor-in-chief of the Cambridge book series, *The Global Middle East*.