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Introduction

In late December 2017, a series of public protests broke out in the Islamic Republic of Iran, starting in the country's second-largest city of Mashhad and spreading soon to many other towns and cities, including Tehran. The protestors' initial demand was for better economic conditions of living and employment, especially among the youth, but it rapidly came to include slogans against the government, criticizing the country's ruling clerics, including the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and calling for an end to the theocratic rule and costly involvement in regional conflicts, most specifically Syria and Lebanon. US president Donald Trump and several of his senior aides, especially his ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, as well as his strongest regional ally, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, suddenly found their moment to voice strong support for the protestors against the Islamic regime, with a warning that the US and the world were watching it. Haley convened a meeting of the UN Security Council to condemn the regime. However, neither Trump's efforts nor the Security Council's meeting produced any results, as other permanent members of the council, like most of the rest of the world, adhered to the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of a state. In his

response, the Iranian ambassador to the UN, Gholamali Khoshroo, condemned the Washington interference as a “preposterous example” of US bullying tactics and accused it of having “lost every shred of moral, political and legal authority and credibility in the eyes of the whole world.”¹

Washington’s interventionist approach indeed enabled Tehran to label the protests as foreign-led and to castigate the American and Israeli leaders as the enemies of the Iranian people. Rhetoric aside, the conservative opponents of the moderate president, Hassan Rouhani, had a hand in the protests and exploited the protesters’ grievances. The Islamic regime soon quelled the unrest at the cost of dozens killed and hundreds arrested. The whole episode, whose importance was exaggerated by the US and its regional allies, demonstrated Washington’s misjudgment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Islamic regime. This was not the first time that the regime had to deal with domestic disturbances, foreign intervention, and a poor understanding of its nature. The regime has proved to be more resilient and at the same time vulnerable. It has oscillated between its religious legitimacy and pragmatic policies.

The central concern of this book is to explore and analyze this oscillation over the last four decades and the reasons for it. In so doing, it focuses on the evolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran in its domestic and foreign policy settings in changing regional and international contexts. It also offers an analysis of the salient issues and developments that enabled the founder of the Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, to implement his unique vision of a Shia theocratic order. While this order continues to be governed by his legacy, it has sufficiently reinvented itself to endure and survive numerous interlinking internal and external challenges.

The Context over Time

The Islamic Republic of Iran has experienced trials and tribulations ever since its inception, following the momentous Iranian Revolution of 1978–79. The revolution was remarkable in many ways. It was a mass uprising of unprecedented scale and social breadth in

modern history, even as it predated social media. It began with the aim of reforming the rule of pro-West Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in order to transform Iran into a constitutional monarchy. However, it ultimately delivered a new Islamic type of government under the leadership of the Shia cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, who emerged as the most high-profile political opponent of the Shah. At one level, the revolution inaugurated a dramatic departure from the past by replacing a secular monarchy with an Islamic government. At another level, however, it merely perpetuated a political culture of authoritarianism that had underpinned Iranian politics for most of the country's 2,500-year-long history. In short, one form of autocracy—the Shah's secular monarchy—was merely substituted with another—Khomeini's modern revolutionary Islamic theocracy. The transition altered Iran's domestic and foreign policies in dramatic ways. It resulted in the severance of ties with the United States, Iran's major sponsor under the Shah, which Khomeini demonized as a "hegemonic" and "evil" world power. The Iranian Revolution ushered in a new Islamic government that, from its inception, has challenged the prevailing norms of the regional and, indeed, the global order.

The Islamic system of governance that the revolution ultimately established was deeply informed by Khomeini's particular, politicized interpretation of Twelver Shia Islam, the dominant sect in Iran but the minority vis-à-vis the Sunni sect that predominates in most other states in the Muslim world. Khomeini promoted his interpretation of Islam as the most authentic and applicable under contemporary national and international conditions. He regarded it as the most conducive instrument for creating an Islamic government that could give full expression to the supreme will of God, and to the necessarily subordinate will of the people, in the contemporary world. Khomeini also believed that his interpretation of Islam alone could create a polity capable of serving humanity to the highest standard—which for him could only mean an Islamic standard. For him, there were only two possible ideological positions: Islamic and un-Islamic, with nothing in between or beyond. He pronounced that his Shia theological paradigm, which some of his followers subsequently

promoted as *Islam-e naabi-e Mohammad* (the quintessential Islam of Prophet Mohammad), stood above all other interpretations of the faith, but he nonetheless called for pan-Islamic solidarity, including from Sunni coreligionists.

Khomeini desired to create an Islamic polity that would be durable in a changing modern world. To achieve this, he adopted a two-dimensional approach to Islamic government: *jihadi* (“combative”) and *ijtihadi* (“reformist”). The former was to focus on the Islamization of politics and everyday life, and the latter to apply a novel interpretation of Islam based on independent human reasoning, to the degree necessary to forge a strong, modern Islamic Iran. He drew on an ideological interplay between the two dimensions in the context of a broader rhetorical framework that centered on the struggle between *mosta’zafin* (the “have nots,” or the “oppressed and downtrodden”) and *mostakbarin* (the “haves,” or “arrogant oppressors”). Although Khomeini never endorsed Marxist thought, his dichotomization of the social strata rhymed with the Marxist division of social classes in capitalist countries: between the ruling bourgeoisie and oppressed proletariat. To legitimize the construction of his new Islamic Republic, he emphasized the empowerment of the *mosta’zafin* over the *mostakbarin* by an *ijtihadi* interpretation that combined divine and earthly themes from Islamic theology and jurisprudence. As Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic from 1979 until his death on June 3, 1989, Khomeini oversaw the establishment of an Islamic political paradigm that has guided the management of Iran under his successor Ayatollah Khamenei and the successive elected Islamic governments and that continues to shape Iranian politics to this day.²

Khomeini’s transformation of Iran along these lines challenged and even threatened the US geopolitical dominance that had prevailed in the oil-rich and strategically significant Middle East under the so-called Pax Americana. Prior to the revolution, Iran itself had acted as a critical pillar for this US policy under the Shah. The advent of the Islamic Republic not only alarmed the United States, which lost a critical ally in the region, but also caused deep ideological, political, and security concerns for many neighboring Arab

states, which feared the Republic would embolden Shia and other minorities to rise up across the region. While Khomeini initially played down his Shia sectarian allegiance in favor of a pan-Islamist stance, his radical political Islamism was deeply rooted in Twelver thought and revolutionary rhetoric, with a call for the export of the Iranian Revolution in support of the oppressed peoples of the world. The revolution also jolted the Soviet Union to an awareness of political Islam.

Never before had a political leader as theologically driven, defiant, and popular as Khomeini burst onto the world scene to lock horns with a superpower like the United States while loudly denouncing another, the USSR. Khomeini shunned the United States in particular, but he had no time for its “Godless” communist global rival either, condemning the December 1979 Soviet invasion and decade-long occupation of Afghanistan as “socialist imperialism.” Iran was no longer a compliant actor for an international superpower but rather a resistant and independently transformative force. Khomeini’s defiance injected a new catalyst for global political realignment that alarmed regional ruling elites and the United States.³ The rise of the Ayatollah was to shake the post–Second World War Pax Americana at its foundations in the Middle East—with a dramatic and lasting impact on regional geopolitical dynamics.

The US not only was suspicious of the forces that had toppled its Pahlavi ally but also saw Khomeini’s political Islamism and Islamic system of governance as repugnantly fundamentalist; a view that intensified during the “hostage crisis.” On November 4, 1979, a group of Khomeini’s militant student supporters invaded the American embassy in Tehran and took dozens of diplomats and employees hostage. Their demands were the extradition of the Shah from the US, where he had been admitted for medical treatment, to face trial in Iran for crimes against the people. After thirty-seven months, unable to rescue or negotiate the release of the hostages, Washington cut off all relations with Iran, imposed unprecedented sanctions on the country, and condemned the new order in Iran, which was becoming increasingly repressive as Khomeini moved to consolidate his power at the cost of thousands of lives.

Iran's erstwhile ally also decided on a policy of backing whoever opposed the new Islamic regime, including Israel, which was alarmed by Khomeini's call for the destruction of the "Zionist state" and which set out to undermine his Islamic order in whatever way available. Iraq, Egypt, and the Arab monarchies, all of which shared American and Israeli concerns, adopted the same approach to Iran. The Islamic Republic thus found itself immediately isolated. The US sought to shore up Pax Americana not only by strengthening its strategic partnership with Israel but also by increasing arms sales and military assistance to anti-Iranian Arab states, especially in the Gulf. Iran's main regional Sunni rival today, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was selected as Washington's main regional counter to the newly militant Iran.

In its determination to marginalize Iran, the US even proved willing to aid its erstwhile foe, the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. With the Shah no longer an obstacle to his quest for regional supremacy and the country engulfed in postrevolutionary turmoil, the Iraqi leader saw his opportunity to invade. The Gulf Arab states, plus Egypt and Jordan, backed Iraq financially and logistically on a large scale. In Syria, the ruling Arab socialist Ba'ath party under Hafez al-Assad supported Iran as much out of strategic interest as out of their schismatic dislike for their cousin Ba'athists in Iraq. Iraq's attack on Iran in mid-1980 ignited a bloody and costly war that lasted eight years and inflicted terrible devastation on both sides, resulting in massive loss of human life and widespread damage of infrastructure that has had a lasting impact on both countries' people.

During the war, however, the US ceased to look on Saddam Hussein as a repressive dictator hostile to the West and came to regard him as a useful pawn or even potential ally against Khomeini's Iran. The US assisted him in the war against the Islamic Republic primarily because it perceived its own interest in letting Iraq and Iran wear each other down in a cycle of mutual destruction, thus dramatically weakening two of the region's strongest states. Israel played its part in this plan by channeling some arms to Iran, although indirectly, in such a way as to make sure that the two antagonists were locked in indefinite hostilities and that no united

Arab or Islamic front could be formed against the Jewish state—a policy that informs Israeli behavior to date.⁴ Unsurprisingly, the war ended in stalemate. The Islamic Republic had staved off its first existential threat, largely because of Khomeini’s ability to mobilize the Iranian population against Iraqi forces by invoking a combination of Iranians’ fierce sense of Shiism and nationalism in defense of the new Islamic Republic and the old motherland, Iran.

During the war, the resistance to Iraqi and Arab aggression and the stance against the United States and its allies provided Khomeini and his devotees with a powerful platform from which to wage *jihād* concurrently against two sets of enemies: external and internal. While fighting the Iraqi forces and fending off their regional and international supporters, Khomeini used the cover of war to engage in forceful processes of power centralization. The war was instrumental in promoting his leadership and the Islamic Republic as the resolute and fearless defender of true revolutionary Islam from internal and external threats. During the same period in which Khomeini’s supporters and ordinary Iranians stemmed the tide of the Iraqi aggression, they also virtually wiped out or neutralized all those who either actually opposed or were suspected of opposing Khomeini’s Islamic direction for Iran.⁵ Those complicit in the violence and arrests included a number of ranking clerics who had either actively or tacitly supported the revolution and Khomeini’s leadership.

No regional or distant Muslim country embraced Khomeini’s system of Islamic governance as it stood, despite his efforts at “export of revolution,” which became the Islamic Republic’s policy for a time. However, his political Islamism appealed to some minorities in the region, predominantly to marginalized Shia communities. The most successful case in this respect was in Lebanon, where Iranian Hezbollahis (followers of the Party of God) assisted the formation of the Lebanese Hezbollah (Party of God), which over time has grown to be a formidable Iranian protégé force in Lebanese political and military life.

Khomeini used a mixture of religious imagery, rhetorical power, political violence, and moral persuasion to implement a unique new

Islamic order based on a two-tiered system of divine and popular sovereignty. He developed an *ijtihadi* concept of the “sovereignty of God”—*velayat-e faqih* (the guardianship, or governance, of the Islamic jurist). Through this concept, he argued that Islam empowers a *faqih* (strictly a jurist, but in Khomeini’s reading also a deputy to the last hidden Shia imam and related to Prophet Mohammad) to have custodianship over the people,⁶ whose sovereignty was represented by an elected president and Majles (the National Assembly). Khomeini’s political theology legitimated and furnished what could be considered a form of religious polyarchy, as defined by Robert Dahl.⁷ It gave rise to a theocratic but politically pluralistic Islamic government, where the “sovereignty of God,” vested in the *faqih*, would nevertheless prevail over the will of the people on contentious governance issues.

Khomeini—the first *faqih*—was not oblivious to the need for his Islamic system to be robust and resilient. Indeed, he saw internal and external adaptability as necessary to safeguard the continuity of the Islamic government in the context of a changing modern world, and it was here that the *ijtihadi* dimension of his thinking and actions mattered most. Despite his emphasis on and reputation for ideological purity, he proved to be remarkably pragmatic when the survival of his regime was at stake. The system he established allowed the participation of diverse groups of his followers, so long as they operated within the Islamic framework that he had laid down. The Supreme Leader’s umbrella dictate underpinned the emergence, by the end of the 1980s, of three main theo-political factional clusters: *jihadi* (revolutionary conservatives and traditionalists, popularly referred to as “hard-liners,” characterized by a confrontational streak), *ijtihadi* (reformists, progressives, and internationalists), and *amalgaran* (pragmatists).⁸ Hereafter, the terms “traditional,” “conservative,” and “hard-line” will be used interchangeably to refer to the *jihadi* side of the spectrum, while “reformist” and “internationalist” will be used to refer to the *ijtihadi* side.

The same adaptability applied to Khomeini’s stance on the conduct of the Islamic Republic’s foreign relations. For example, to compensate for sanctions and hostilities with the United States, he

was content to allow the cultivation of good relations with the Soviet Union, China, and India and, ultimately, to swallow his pride and accept a ceasefire with his mortal enemy, Saddam Hussein, despite his long-standing vow to fight to the end.⁹

By the time of his death, Khomeini had left behind not only a politically pluralist theocratic order but also a seesawing *jihadi-ijtihadi* approach to its governance. This approach has been very diligently pursued by his successor Ayatollah Khamenei. Having risen, somewhat unexpectedly, to the heights of the Supreme Leadership, Khamenei has successfully used and consolidated his religious and constitutional powers as well as various vetting and power-enforcement bodies, particularly the state's coercive instruments, in order to subordinate the executive and legislative branches of the Islamic government to his authority and to preserve his power to act as the final arbiter of all significant domestic and foreign policy issues. In this, he has performed both conservatively and pragmatically within Khomeini's framework, depending on the nature of the issues and their implications for regime survival.

In many cases, Khamenei has insisted on ideological adherence, but there have also been occasions when he has accommodated pragmatic and reformist policies. He has done so especially when he and his conservative entourage have judged such flexibility as necessary. As such, they have allowed reform and renewal measures in both domestic and foreign policies, as long as those measures do not open the way for radical changes to the Islamic system that could undermine the basis of their power. Whenever confronted with complex or significant policy innovations, Khamenei has made sure to qualify his endorsement of them with precautionary statements to ensure their reversal if required.

Within this paradigm, Khamenei has thus far interacted with four elected presidents, all of whom have ultimately bowed to his authority over policy differences with him. The president who has had the most success in gaining Khamenei's backing has been the moderate, Hassan Rouhani (2013–present). Rouhani was elected in a landslide with the combined support of the reformist and pragmatist factions in 2013 and again in 2017. He has campaigned

on a platform of political moderation, economic reform, and flexibility in foreign policy to resolve the long dispute over Iran's nuclear program with the West and widen Iran's foreign relations. In this instance, the president's quest for reforms has aligned with the position of the Supreme Leader (who has been aided by an array of advisors within the Beit-e Rahbari, or House of the Leader). By 2013, Khamenei appeared to have reached the conclusion that there was probably no other viable option but a diplomatic resolution of Iran's nuclear dispute in order to bring an end to international sanctions. Since Rouhani's election, both the president and the Supreme Leader also apparently agreed in viewing the broadening of Iran's interactions with the West as a necessity for improving an increasingly moribund economy, which had fueled serious political and social unrest, as demonstrated by the 2009 Green Movement and again by the December 2017–January 2018 protests.¹⁰

Khamenei, however, styled his endorsement of Rouhani's approach to the nuclear issue—controversial among conservatives who oppose any negotiations with Iran's archenemy, the United States—as *narmesh-e qahramaneh* (heroic flexibility). He also accompanied his endorsement with a clear warning that the US cannot be trusted and emphasized that any agreement must be in compliance with Iran's sovereignty and Islamic system.¹¹ Nevertheless, the Supreme Leader gave his consent, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, or simply, the “nuclear agreement”) between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany (P5+1) was concluded on July 14, 2015, enforceable from January 2016. Under this agreement, Iran downgraded its nuclear program for demonstrably civilian use only for the next fifteen years in return for the lifting of sanctions. Yet the agreement still faced obstacles; not all the sanctions were lifted and hard-liners in both the United States and Iran remained highly skeptical of the agreement, not to mention the objections it raised among Israel and the Saudi-led Arab states.

While the Democrat US president Barack Obama was able to override his domestic critics to clinch the nuclear deal, his highly divisive, temperamental, populist Republican successor, Trump, who took office on January 20, 2017, strongly sided from the start

with the critics. President Trump painted the nuclear agreement as “the worst deal ever” and promised to “scrap” it. The Trump administration accused Iran of “provocative” and “destabilizing activities” in the region¹² and lambasted the Islamic Republic as the biggest supporter of terrorism, comparing it to North Korea as a “rogue” state, and putting it “on notice.”¹³ The Europeans responded to Trump’s threats by insisting on the nuclear agreement’s multilateral nature. The European Union foreign policy chief Frederica Mogherini stated, in a press conference in July 2017 alongside the Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, that “the nuclear deal doesn’t belong to one country, it belongs to the international community.”¹⁴ Until March 2018, the Trump administration retained the deal and verified Iran’s adherence to it, but with a focus on canceling America’s participation and containing the Islamic Republic in whatever way necessary.

Trump’s secretary of defense, General James Mattis, stood fast in favor of a military confrontation with the Islamic Republic in order to remove what he asserts is a menace to American interests, especially in Iraq and Syria, and a threat to its Arab and Israeli allies in the region. Mattis’s vehement opposition to Iran goes back to his time as commander of the United States Central Command (2010–13) and commander of the United States Joint Forces Command (2007–10), when he played a key role in managing US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. His direct experience of Iranian operations in Iraq and Syria led him to regard the Islamic Republic as the biggest danger to the region and to view the Islamic Republic not as a state but rather as “a revolutionary cause devoted to mayhem.”¹⁵ In light of these views, he grew frustrated by the Obama administration’s unwillingness to adopt his recommendations against negotiating the nuclear deal, which he, like Trump, considered disastrous, although at the end he favored the retention of the nuclear agreement as important to US security interests¹⁶ Trump—backed by Mattis; the president’s former special advisor, Steven Bannon, who sees the Iranian regime as part of what he calls the “cancer” of radical Islam¹⁷; and the current national security advisor, John Bolton, who has advocated a hawkish stance against Iran over a long period of time¹⁸—continues to view Iran as America’s

real enemy and main culprit for regional instability and insecurity. Trump finally withdrew the US from the JCPOA in May 2018, vowing to reimpose sanctions with such severity as to destroy the Iranian economy.

Tehran had already stated that in the event of a US withdrawal from the agreement or any US aggressive action against Iran, it would respond in kind. There is a “snapback” clause in the deal that applies if either side violates the agreement. It had vowed that in the case of America’s violation, Iran will return its nuclear program to its pre-JCPOA state of development and not only restore all its centrifuges but also upgrade them. With Trump in the White House, Mattis in charge of America’s military power, and the Iranian Supreme Leader remaining defiant in the face of increasing American pressure, the risk of a US-Iranian military confrontation is at a critical level.

Whatever progress had been achieved in improving US-Iranian relations under Obama and Rouhani has been reversed under Trump’s presidency, placing the US and Iran once again on a collision course.¹⁹ This situation has pleased the forces of the Right in the United States and Israel and emboldened Saudi Arabia to pressure its partners in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC; Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates) to treat Iran as more of a threat than the Jewish state, although Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar (which has been subjected to a blockade by Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Cairo, and Manama since June 2017 partly because of its good relations with Iran) have not wholeheartedly embraced this view. The powerful Saudi crown prince and defense minister, Mohammad bin Salman, has categorically ruled out any rapprochement with Iran, accusing Tehran of plotting a Shia takeover of the holy sites in Saudi Arabia. He has threatened to take the battle to Iran.²⁰ Regional hostility to Iran has helped to forge an unprecedented degree of cooperation not only between Saudi Arabia, its Arab allies, and the US under Trump but also between Saudi Arabia and Israel, although the latter has taken place largely behind the scenes.²¹

Tehran has not been an innocent party in its international isolation by any means—for two important reasons. The first is its involve-

ment in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen and its growing influence in the region, and the second is the sense of ideological, sectarian, and civilizational superiority with which the Islamic regime has approached the neighboring Arab states. This state of affairs has deeply worried the GCC and some other Arab countries, including Egypt under the authoritarian rule of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, with whom the Trump leadership has forged a close alliance against what it has described as “the crisis of Islamic extremism and the Islamists and Islamic terror of all kinds” in the Middle East.²²

Conversely, Washington’s stance toward Iran has prompted the latter to strengthen ties with Russia and China as counterweights against the United States and its regional allies. Despite its historical trepidation about Russia, Tehran and Moscow have entered into an enhanced strategic cooperation not only in war-torn allied Syria but also in Afghanistan. Here the two countries have common cause in denying the US the opportunity to determine that country’s conflict and shape its status according to its interests. This cooperation does not rest on any firm ideological or even geopolitical foundations, because Russia’s regional interests do not necessarily converge with those of Iran. It nonetheless serves the pragmatic interests of both sides for the time being.²³

Iran, through its actual and perceived actions, has acquired a reputation as a threatening, powerful regional actor, especially among its Arab neighbors and the US. Anoushiravan Ehteshami, for example, writes that Iran’s foreign policy “reinforce[s] the impression and image of a powerful Iran acting in its national interest on the international stage.” He further notes that “Iran’s apparent prowess has invited counterbalancing rather than ‘bandwagoning,’ leading to relative international isolation.”²⁴

Positioning Revolutionary Iran

Despite all of the difficulties and hostility that the Islamic Republic has faced, many pundits contend that it has succeeded in rising to the position of a “middle power,” although what this specifically means is often debated.²⁵ Louis Bélanger and Gordon Mace write

that “middle stateness . . . is not characterized by a clearly determined position in the international hierarchy of power but by vague locational parameters—somewhere between the major powers and the small states—and role conceptions.”²⁶ This vagueness has underpinned the inclination of some policymakers and analysts to label the Islamic Republic as a “rogue” state. It has also underpinned the extraordinary anxiety around its foreign policy intentions.²⁷ Given the popular perception of Iran as a destabilizing regional actor, a thorough and dispassionate analysis of Iran’s actual power capabilities in its historical and current political context is both relevant and necessary.

Of all the approaches defining and measuring the status of a state as a middle power, including the functional and behavioral perspectives,²⁸ the hierarchical view offers the most useful theoretical reference with which to quantify Iran’s national power. This view defines middle powers as states that occupy the middle range in a ranking of states established by a quantitative measure of national power. Many popular conceptions of what constitutes a “middle power” come from Martin Wight’s classic definition:

A middle power is a power with such military strength, resources and strategic position that in peacetime the great powers bid for its support, and in wartime, while it has no hope of winning a war against a great power, it can hope to inflict costs on a great power out of proportion to what the great power can hope to gain by attacking it.²⁹

This definition invokes the unavoidable centrality of materiel factors in defining how we perceive and critically assess notions of greatness, size, and power.³⁰

A hierarchical approach to the conceptualization of national power underpins this book’s analytical and empirical investigation of Iran’s material capabilities. The reason is that such an approach offers the most conceptually coherent and intuitive understanding of a “middle power” while remaining relatively free from the normative and ideological assumptions that would necessarily impede a judicious appraisal of so controversial a case as Iran. From the real-

ist premise that state power constitutes the most important criteria in organizing international relations—a premise that is shared and acted upon by the policy and political elite of all states across the world—it follows that any analysis of the relations between states must take account of the power differences between them.

Within the hierarchical approach, there are many different views on how to measure national power. Gregory Treverton and Seth Jones suggest that state power is typically conceptualized in three ways: (1) resources and capabilities, (2) the conversion of resources into power through domestic processes, and (3) outcomes.³¹ In this approach, the difficulty in measuring outcomes makes it impractical as a way of quantifying power, particularly when it comes to military power. On the other hand, a purely resources-based approach would face similar empirical limitations. Because power is not necessarily fungible, it might not be possible to compare different aspects of national power.³² Indeed, one of the weaknesses of the hierarchical approach is that there is no universal or standard method of measuring or quantifying power, because any effort involves implicit assumptions about the nature of power itself. Another major criticism of the hierarchical approach is that it is imprecise, lacking a unified methodology. As a result, different metrics used for measuring power produce different results.³³

One solution is to combine all three measures of state power—in particular focusing on measurements of resources and processes of conversion, given the inherent difficulty in measuring outcomes—into an assessment of a state’s capabilities. In this way, it is possible to develop a measure of a state’s power through its potential ability to use its resources effectively to achieve its goals. Jonathan Ping notes that capabilities are a more fruitful method of quantifying power, concluding that “statistics [capability measurements] are a useful form of defining middle power if it is accepted that states are not required to use their capacity to influence others unless they see fit to do so.”³⁴

Measuring a state’s capabilities involves looking at three different but interrelated areas. The first is the traditional arena of “hard” (military) power, which Hans Morgenthau defined as a combination

of geography, natural resources, industrial strength, military capacity, population, “national character” and morale, and the quality of government and diplomacy.³⁵ Meanwhile, Kenneth Waltz proposed that hard power should “be defined in terms of the distribution of capabilities,” including “size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence.”³⁶

The second is Joseph Nye’s concept of “soft” (nonmilitary) power, which has gained greater currency in the post–Cold War era. Nye defined soft power as

the ability of a country to structure a situation so that other countries develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with its own through cultural or ideological attraction, institutions, and transnational corporations.³⁷

Soft power is qualitatively different from hard power because it is “co-optive” rather than “coercive.” However, the most common instruments of soft power—such as culture, language, and ideology—are inherently difficult to quantify. Jonathan McClory and Olivia Harvey, looking at the Soft Power 30 index—an aggregation of multiple “subjective” and “objective” quantitative measures of soft power—found that the increasing “diffusion of power” away from hegemony toward multipolarity (and nongovernmental organizations, NGOs), alongside the evolution of digital communications and media, are increasing the importance of soft power.³⁸

The third area of analysis is the normative shift toward a neoliberal paradigm that has changed the role of the economy in society as well as academic understandings of that role and that has triggered an increasing profusion of non-state actors in the international system. While the economy, as traditionally defined, is still important—if only because of its role in fueling and funding material and military capabilities central to a state’s power—scholars’ understanding of economic power has developed to encompass subtler soft-power dimensions. Strong economic growth, for instance, can have a normative effect on a state’s soft power that is positive, whereby the state becomes a model of emulation that os-

tensibly attests to the superiority of particular political systems. At the same time, economic power can also be used to “buy” the goodwill and support of target audiences through foreign investment and philanthropic efforts, notably through the dispensation of foreign aid at the simplest level.³⁹ The proliferation of affordable everyday technology to “consumers”—the basis of the global neoliberal economy—has also contributed to the diffusion of power to non-state actors and interconnected individuals and movements. These phenomena extend the battlefield for states in international relations from the economic influence of state economic agencies down to the consumer of everyday goods.

Organizational Plan

Unpacking the complexities of the evolution of the Islamic Republic raises a number of questions. What is the nature and structure of the Islamic Republic’s theocratic order? Why has its existence aroused so much regional and international opposition, especially from a world power like the United States? What has enabled the Islamic Republic to ride out this fierce opposition, and what has given rise to its unorthodox domestic and foreign policy behavior, which has, at least in part, fed outsiders’ fear of the Republic? How far has it progressed in its resources capabilities, and to what extent has this progress allowed it to maintain domestic order, an adequate popular base of support, and its status as a key player in the region and possibly beyond? In what ways has it pursued its interests against those of its neighbors and world powers, while proffering itself as an amicable and stabilizing force within the international system? Will it be able to deflect the Trump administration’s hostile attitude, as it had done vis-à-vis previous American leaderships?

The book’s approach to addressing these questions is mainly analytical and empirical rather than theoretically elaborative. In other words, it seeks to elucidate and analyze those issues that have prominently underpinned the foundation, development, continuity, and vulnerability of the Islamic Republic of Iran in both its domestic and foreign policy exposition within the changing regional and

international circumstances. It posits that the Islamic Republic has a unique and multidimensional, and at times tragic, theo-political story that needs to be narrated and heard if one is to gain realistic and valid insights into how it has functioned and managed to move forward in the face of all its many adversities.

This approach does not mean that various conceptual and theoretical tools are not deployed to examine the case of the Islamic Republic. Nor does it imply that the various issues covered in this book have not been tackled elsewhere. On the contrary, the Iranian Revolution and its resulting Islamic system have been the subject of many scholarly and popular publications, albeit of varying depth, breadth, and quality. What primarily distinguishes this book from others is the detailed analysis that it offers of the *interplay* between the domestic politics and foreign relations of Iran, and the manner in which this interplay has interacted with the vicissitudes of the regional and international situation to ensure the survival of the Islamic regime. In other words, although the regime's behavior has more often than not taken shape in reaction to outside provocations, it has at the same time played a key role in generating these provocations and responding creatively to them. In providing a holistic picture of change and continuity in the development of the Islamic Republic, this book also provides the most up-to-date study of the Islamic Republic over the span of the last forty years.

The book is divided into eight chapters, including a conclusion. Chapter 2 sets the scene by explaining the concept of revolution and analyzing the internal and external conditions that helped to unleash the Iranian Revolution and paved the way for Khomeini's rise to power. The nature, structure, and processes by which Khomeini established his Islamic order and managed to overcome domestic opposition and outside hostilities are outlined in chapter 3. Chapter 4 critically discusses the evolution of Khomeini's system under his successor, Khamenei, who has managed to accumulate as much power, if not more, than his predecessor in domestic and foreign policy matters. The issue of the Islamic Republic's resources capability in terms of its economic and hard and soft power is examined in detail in chapter 5 as an essential base for evaluating Iran's capac-

ity to act as a key regional player. Chapters 6 and 7 provide a critical analysis of the Islamic Republic's relations with its neighbors and world powers, respectively. The concluding chapter examines some of the preeminent challenges facing the Islamic Republic and poses the question of whether the Iranian Islamic system can survive outside Khomeini's *jihadi-ijtihadi* tradition or whether at some point that tradition will run its course, raising the potential for Iran to take a different direction. As part of this, it gives particular consideration to the effect that the hard-line policy attitude of the Trump presidency may have on US-Iranian relations and the destiny of the Islamic Republic itself.