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Iran's Intellectual Revolution

Since its revolution in 1978–79, Iran has been viewed as the bastion of radical Islam and a sponsor of terrorism. The focus on its volatile internal politics and its foreign relations has, according to Mehran Kamrava, distracted attention from more subtle transformations which have been taking place there in the intervening years. With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, a more relaxed political environment opened up in Iran, which encouraged intellectual and political debate between learned elites and religious reformers about the nature of Iranian society, its traditions, and its principles. What emerged from these interactions were three competing ideologies which Kamrava categorizes as conservative, reformist, and secular, and which he illustrates with reference to particular thinkers. As the book aptly demonstrates, these developments, which amount to an intellectual revolution, will have profound and far-reaching consequences for the future of the Islamic Republic, its people, and very probably for countries beyond its borders. This thought-provoking account of the Iranian intellectual and cultural scene will confound stereotypical views of Iran and its mullahs.

Mehran Kamrava is the Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar. His recent publications include *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War* (2005) and *The New Voices of Islam: Rethinking Politics and Modernity* (ed., 2006).

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
 São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press,
 New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521725187

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First published 2008

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Kamrava, Mehran, 1964–

Iran's intellectual revolution / Mehran Kamrava.

p. cm. – (Cambridge Middle East studies; no. 29)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-89799-0 (hardback)

1. Iran – Intellectual life – 20th century. 2. Iran – Intellectual life – 21st

century. 3. Iran – History – 1979–1997. 4. Iran – History – 1997–

I. Title. II. Series.

DS266.K35 2008

305.5'520955–dc22

2008023228

ISBN 978-0-521-89799-0 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-72518-7 paperback

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To Melisa, Dilara, and Kendra

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Acknowledgments

I could not have possibly written this book had it not been for the generous assistance of a number of organizations and individuals. Grateful acknowledgment goes to the United States Institute of Peace for a generous grant covering 2003 to 2005 (SG-036-02F) that allowed for the purchase of books, the hiring of research assistants, and extensive travels to and within Iran and elsewhere for work on the book. Additional funding support was provided by the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at California State University, Northridge, and by the American Institute for Iranian Studies. The present book would simply not have been possible without such generous financial support.

During the time it took to complete this work, I came across many extraordinarily kind and considerate individuals. On numerous occasions, I personally experienced the warmth and beauty of the hospitality for which Iranians are so famously known. In the process I made many lasting friendships and had the opportunity to renew old ones. I am especially thankful to those friends and family members who graciously put up with my frequent impositions and with what no doubt must have been seen as the eccentricities of an inquisitive social scientist.

I am also grateful to the numerous individuals and scholars who selflessly gave me their time and advice, and, in many cases, helped guide me to important additional sources or to other useful contacts. There are far too many of these generous souls to individually mention. Nevertheless, here is a brief list of some: Saeed Hajjarian, Rohullah Hoseinian, Shahram Pazouki, Mas'oud Pedram, Mohammad Kazem Rahmati, Mohammad Rozati, 'Eesa Saharkhiz, Hosein Seifzadeh, Mahmoud Shafi'i, and Hosein Zare'. Seyyed Mostafa Shahraeni, at the International Center for Dialogue of Civilizations, was particularly instrumental in facilitating contacts and arranging meetings with numerous thinkers and intellectuals. Mehdi Zakerian, at the Center for Scientific Research and Middle East Strategic Studies, was always generous with his time and his vast knowledge of Iranian politics. Mujtaba Zarvani was kind enough to organize a roundtable discussion

x Acknowledgments

on the topic of this book with his colleagues at the Faculty of Theology and Islamic Studies of the University of Tehran in July 2004, which I found most rewarding. I also benefited tremendously from subsequent meetings in January and July 2005. Equally fruitful were two similarly in-depth meetings, in July 2004 and January 2005, organized by Ali Mirmoosavi, head of the Political Science Department at Qom's Mofid University and himself a scholar with truly impressive insight into the topics discussed here. Mostafa Mehraeen, another gifted social scientist, has also been a source of invaluable support and critical input throughout the work on this project.

I also benefited tremendously from the efforts of two capable research assistants. In Iran, Maryam Sarrafpour collected bibliographical data and other relevant background information on many of the thinkers and political activists mentioned in this book. Back in the US, Arjang Sayari proofread and commented on earlier drafts of many of the chapters. I am thankful for their efforts and their great enthusiasm for this project.

Through professional collaboration, many of the scholars named here became personal friends, and I remain thankful for their friendship, their kindness, and their hospitality during my many, often intrusive visits. There were countless other individuals who either directly or indirectly helped my research. My apologies to those whose names I may have inadvertently left out. No one, of course, bears responsibility for the book's omissions and shortcomings but myself.

Work on the book required that I spend long periods away from home. This was difficult for me and for my family both emotionally and practically. During these frequent periods of absence, my wife Melisa went about the challenging task of running our household with her radiant smile and her usual gusto. Although she was often alone in looking after our beautiful daughters, she never wavered in her enthusiastic support for my research, sending me off on my many research trips to Iran with enthusiasm and much needed moral support. At home, her love and support sustained me through many long, sleepless nights and endless solitary hours behind the computer. On countless days and nights she provided the loving, supportive environment that allowed me to research for and to work on this project. I literally could not have written this book had it not been for Melisa, and for that I owe her a tremendous debt of gratitude.

A final, personal note. The Iran that I grew up with saw far too many torments – a repressive dictatorship, a mass-based revolution, a bloody and needlessly prolonged war, indiscriminate repression, political instability and uncertainty, economic woes, and more. For those Iranians who, unlike me, had the courage to stay in the country as

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these tragedies unfolded, the trauma was grave and the toll personally exacting. Today's Iran is not nearly as tormented as it was not too long ago, but, as this book attests, it is still far from at peace with itself. I write in the hope that my young daughters grow up with a happier Iran than the one I did.