

one sitting. As such, it will help the general reader make better sense of the rise and fall of patrimonial rule in the Arab world and the dynamics of the Arab revolt.

### Endnotes

1. Talal Asad, "Religion, Nation-State, Secularism," in Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (eds.), *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 197.
2. Hicham Bou Nassif, "Wedded to Mubarak: The Second

Careers and Financial Rewards of Egypt's Military Elite 1981-2011," *Middle East Journal* 67 (4), (Autumn 2013), p. 509; Eliezer Be'eri, "The Waning Of Military Coups In The Arab World," *Middle Eastern Studies* 18(1) (January 1982), p. 74; Mehran Kamrava, "Military Professionalization And Civil-Military Relations In The Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly* 115(1) (2000), p. 67

3. Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 36(2) (January 2004), p. 143.
4. James T. Quinnlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security*, 24 (2) (Fall 1999), p. 133.

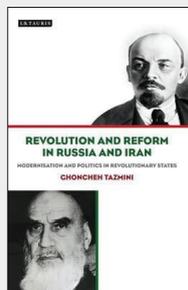
## Revolution and Reform in Russia and Iran: Modernisation and Politics in Revolutionary States

By Ghoncheh Tazmini

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Reviewed by David Ramin Jalilvand

IN HER comparative study, Ghoncheh Tazmini investigates the Russian revolution of 1917 and the 1979 Iranian revolution to identify patterns of continuity and change, including attempts at reform. At first, both revolutions might appear entirely different. In Russia, the Tsarist monarchy was replaced by socialism, whereas in Iran political Islam prevailed. However, Tazmini convincingly shows that both revolutions had related roots: the people's opposition to Western-inspired, autocratically enforced modernization that was endorsed by the Russian Tsars and Iranian Shahs. Moreover, in Vladimir Putin and Mohammad Khatami, she argues, both countries saw reformers with a similar outlook. By adopting beneficial Western practices without 'Westernizing' their countries, Putin and Khatami overcame the "antinomies of the past."



After the introduction, chapters two, three, and four discuss the experiences of modernization in Russia and Iran under the Romanov tsars and Pahlavi shahs. Both Peter the Great (in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) and Reza Shah (in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) sought to catch-up with developed European countries. To this end,

they embarked on ambitious modernization programs, which were continued by their successors. In this context, Tazmini shows that the Russian and Iranian modernization programs only partially followed the European example. While embracing outward signs of modernity such as modern industries, state-society relations remained traditionally autocratic. Tazmini rightly grasps this as "modernization without modernity" in an attempt of "modernization from above." Modernization from above is described as a "double helix" of economic modernization on

the one hand and authoritarian political stagnation on the other hand. She notes, "Whilst both countries aspired to converge with the West by meeting its material and technological achievements, they ended up diverging by retaining the autocratic foundations of the ancient régimes."

Chapter five examines the people's opposition to the modernization from above, which resulted in the 1917 and 1979 revolutions. Tazmini argues that the contradiction inherent to modernization from above – economic development versus political stagnation – made people lose confidence in their respective state institutions. This provided the ground on which "ideological channels and fateful 'sparks' culminated in revolution" that replaced the Romanov and Pahlavi monarchies with communism in Russia and an Islamic Republic in Iran.

Chapter six scrutinizes the systems established by the revolution, i.e., socialism in Russia and theocracy in Iran. Tazmini stresses that Lenin and Stalin in Russia as well as Khomeini in Iran embarked on development paths that were meant to be designed decisively against Western principles, which the revolutionaries rejected.

Before the conclusion, chapter seven deals with reform in Russia and Iran. Tazmini argues that "globalization, economic integration and the information age" forced both countries to reconsider their "alternative modernities." In contrast to previous episodes, however, Vladimir Putin and Mohammad Khatami overcame "the stark antinomies of the past." Instead of continuing or fully rejecting past experiences, both presidents adopted "a more integrative approach to modernity – one that accommodated historical, national, revolutionary and local experience

whilst benefiting from the accomplishments of western civilization." Tazmini conceives this as "modernization from below," which she describes as "the antithesis of 'modernization from above' by concentrating on the indigenous rather than the imported, by finding the impetus for reform from below (civil society and market forces) rather than from above, and by pushing for change through the simultaneous engagement of the future as well as the past." She argues that "having passed through the labyrinth of social contradictions, both countries reached a point where they transcended the logic of development of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries."

Tazmini's study develops a strong argument when explaining the shortcomings of what she labels as "modernization from above." She shows how the modernization attempts of the Romanov tsars and Pahlavi shahs were undercut by the absence of political institutions capable of responding to the transformation of society, which was brought about by economic development. Her findings are in line with political economy research, which claims that long-term development does not only depend on short-term economic output but also on institutions that are inclusive towards change and the needs of people.

At the same time, Russia's and Iran's experiences with "modernization from above" differ substantially in some regards. When the revolution of 1917 toppled the Romanov monarchy, Russia had already been an active player in the "concert of European powers" for more than hundred years. In this regard, Russia was a European/Western power, albeit definitely a special one. Moreover, the socialist ideology that prevailed in the 1917 revolution did not originate in Russia but in Germany. Thus it

is questionable to which extent the revolution was actually a ‘Russian’ response to Western influences.

In stark contrast to the Russian experience, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Iran had to cope with – at times – quasi-colonial rule of the Britain and Russia, and later influence by the United States. Iran’s modernization from above was markedly complicated by meddling from outside powers. Therefore, Iran’s revolution was not only against modernization from above but also, possibly even more so, against interference from third countries.

Moreover, the institutions established by the Russian and Iranian revolutionary response to modernization from above differ markedly. In Russia, a single-person rule was established that, under Joseph Stalin, culminated in outright totalitarianism. Iran’s Islamic Republic, despite all its authoritarian elements, was always characterized by some degree of pluralism. Even during Khomeini’s charismatic rule, elections were held and critics within the system, such as Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, were able to publicly voice opposition. The complex political system of Iran’s Islamic Republic, a system truly *sui generis*, limits the power of the executive branch through

the parliament, the judiciary, and theocratic institutions led by the supreme leader, who holds ultimate power. As a consequence, the roles of the “reform presidents” (Putin and Khatami) differ in their respective political systems. Moreover, while Putin’s powers are limited compared to those of Stalin, they are decisively larger than that of the Iranian president. Regardless of whether or not modernization from below – in the sense of reconciling Western achievements with local tradition – was actually initiated, it is much more likely that Putin was in a position to actually succeed in doing so than Khatami. The powers of the Iranian president are simply too limited to bring about change by virtue of the presidential office alone.

In sum, Tazmini’s comparative study of revolution and reform in Russia and Iran makes an important contribution to the research on revolution, development and, of course, the two countries at hand. Her reflections on modernization from above offer valuable insights to the analysis of both the Russian and Iranian experiences by placing them in a broader context of historical events. The notion of modernization from below stimulates a debate and invites further research on this matter. Overall, this is definitely an interesting read.