

Key Terms

Faqih - Leading Islamic jurist

Velayat-e faqih - "Guardianship of the Islamic jurist." Theocratic system devised by Khomeini.

Theocracy - rule by priests

Mullah - Muslim cleric

Ayatollah - "Sign of God" top Shia religious leader.

Majles - Arabic for assembly; Iran's unicameral parliament

People of the Book - Monotheistic people who subjected their lives to holy books similar to the Qur'an; Jews, the Torah; Christians, the Bible; Zoroastrians, the Avesta.

Revolutionary Guards - an elite military force whose commanders are appointed by the supreme leader.

Sharia - Islamic law; the foundations of Iran's political system rest in the belief that sharia supersedes all other types of law.

Shiism - the brand of Islam that distinguishes Iran from its neighbors today

Supreme Leader - position at the top of Iran's government; seen as the imam of the whole community and he represents the pinnacle of theocratic principles of the state.

Qanun - Unlike Sharia, has no sacred basis, but is a body of statutes made by legislative bodies.

Islamic fundamentalism - Emphasizes literal interpretation of Islamic texts, social conservatism, and political traditionalism.

Statist - belief that the government should take an active role in controlling the economy.

Factionalism - splintering of the political elites based not just on points of view, but also on personalities.

Imam - belief that the true heirs of Islam were the descendants of Ali. These heirs are called imam.

Hidden Imam - heirs of Ali continued until the 9th century, when the 12th descendant disappeared as a child, only to become known as the 'hidden imam.'

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