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“Republican Islam in the Islamic Republic of Iran”

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Republicanism (*res publica* or public things) is an ancient Roman ideology of freedom which is directed against tyranny and political domination. Isaiah Berlin has famously termed this as positive liberty in contrast to the negative liberty of the non-interference with the individual of political liberalism. It is positive because it is directed against the repression of the tyrant and the state. It is also positive because republicanism sets the singular objective of seizing the state's *public things* and then using the state and its laws to sustain the liberty of its citizens. Liberalism on the other hand, seeks to secure the individual against mere interference so that in the Middle East, for example, the intelligentsia is often left alone while the tyrant abuses the citizenry. Republican Islam (*al jumburiyya al islamiyya*) represents a similar expression of republicanism but an expression that has developed in a parallel fashion to western republicanism. As in the western tradition, it also seeks to control the state but it does so with the guidance of Islamic precepts that begin with the leadership role of the few *ulama* or *ayyan* (or possibly the controversial “one” in Shi’ite Islam as in *velayat-i Faqih* or Supreme Jurisprudent) acting on behalf of the masses (*shaab*) according to the principles of *maslaha*, the *Shari’ah* and *Fiqh*. There are also the additional concepts of *bay’a*, *shura* and *ijma’a* which are commonly attributed to liberal democracy, whereas, in fact, they have greater connotations of the few acting on behalf of the many as does the concept *al jumburiyya* itself. Republican Islam, like its western counterpart is driven by the fear of the “tyranny of the majority” expressed by the republican founders of the American republic like Hamilton and Madison in *The Federalist Papers*. This presentation applies these concepts to Iran where the Ayatollah Khomeini mobilized the masses against the Shah in the name of republican Islam, according to the revolutionary motto: “Neither Eastern Nor Western: Republican Islam (*nah gharbi, nar sharqi, jumburi-yi islam*).” While the republican conservatives continue to pursue these ideas, a progressive republican opposition has developed under the heroic leadership of Akbar Ganji who, unlike the conservatives, is distrustful of the masses. Instead, he is prepared to act on behalf of the masses in order to instruct the latter in the principles of republican democracy. While there perhaps remains a liberal democratic movement of pluralism and individualism in Iran, this movement appears, at least for the moment, eclipsed by the ascendancy of “top down” elitist republicanism. More broadly, it is this republican Islam which suggestively characterizes the politically ascendant Islam elsewhere in the *umma*, whether it be Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or possibly the Justice and Development Parties of Turkey or Morocco.