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# The Rushdie Affair: Blasphemy as a New Form of International Conflict and Crisis

Mehdi Mozaffari

Your blasphemy, Salman, can't be forgiven.

Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

I cannot convince myself that there is anyone so wise, so universally comprehensive in his judgment, that he can be trusted with the power to tell others: You shall not express yourself thus, you shall not describe your own experiences; or depict the fantasies which your mind has created; or laugh at what others have set up as respectable; or question old beliefs; or contradict the dogmas of the church, or our society, our economic system, and our political orthodoxy.

Jake Zeitlin, *Library Journal*, 1 June 1965.

## Introduction

On 26 September 1988, Viking Penguin published *The Satanic Verses* in London. Its author, Salman Rushdie, was already a well-known and esteemed writer. On 5 October the Indian government, acceding to the requests of its Moslem parliament deputies Seyyed Shahbuddin and Khuershid Ahmad, forbade the sale and distribution of the *Verses* in India. This decision was followed by similar actions in a number of countries such as Pakistan and South Africa. At this point there had not yet been a reaction from Iran. On 8 November the *Verses* won the Whitbread Prize. Despite other protests and demonstrations in England, the situation only became dramatic on 14 January 1989, when Moslem residents at Bradford burned copies of the book. Tension grew and events took a dramatic turn on 12 February when six persons were killed and a hundred others injured during demonstrations in Pakistan. It was only then, after the last events, that Ayatollah Khomeini passed his 14 February death sentence (*fatwa*) against Rushdie as well as the 'editors who knew the content of the *Verses*'. At this point the matter became truly international, entering history as 'the Rushdie Affair'.

From the standpoint of international relations the Rushdie affair is interesting for several reasons. Religion, once again, becomes the object of international conflict creating a point of discord and conflict for many parties. Beyond Iran and the members of the European Economic Community (EEC) who are directly involved, other states as well

as a range of institutions, organizations, and communities, have been impelled to take a position even though they have remained outside the immediate field of conflict. The United States, the Soviet Union, the Vatican and many others are cases in point. Moreover, the Rushdie affair has become an *inter-Islamic* affair for states, groups, and individuals. Different Moslem countries are now in conflict with one another, forcing the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to take appropriate measures to harmonize Moslem policy. Various transnational movements with different nationalities have been formed connecting groups and individuals. In addition to Moslem sects (Sunnis and Shi'as), Catholics, Protestants, Jews and laymen have also taken part. This transnational character has been accentuated by the massive media coverage, which continues to follow its ups and downs, especially in England and the Moslem countries.

The Rushdie affair, especially Khomeini's decree condemning the author of *The Satanic Verses* – a British citizen residing in London – to death, has raised important issues of international law. The decree has provoked serious theological discussions on the question of blasphemy. The European powers and Iran have had to take into account the economic consequences of their actions – especially in light of the new economic upswing after the Iran–Iraq 1988 cease-fire accord.

Finally, this affair has a psychological aspect. Two men are in the forefront: on the one hand, Salman Rushdie, a Moslem by origin, a naturalized Indo–Pakistani British citizen, a talented writer with a pre-existing international reputation, a leftist very critical of Margaret Thatcher's politics. On the other, there was the Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini: a multifaceted, obstinate and extremely politically cold Moslem patriarch whose audience and authority go far beyond the Iranian borders.

The Rushdie affair, then, is complex and multidimensional. What interests us here first and foremost is its international dimension and, in particular, the conflict and the consequent crisis for which the ordinary conceptual tools for analysis seem barely adequate.

### The Cause of the Conflict: The *Fatwa* of Khomeini

The following is a translation of the entire text of this *fatwa*:

In the name of God Almighty; there is only one God, to whom we shall all return; I would like to inform all the intrepid Muslims in the world that the author of the book entitled *The Satanic Verses* which has been compiled, printed and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet and the Koran, as well as those publishers who were aware of its contents, have been sentenced to death. I call on all zealous Moslems to execute

them quickly, wherever they find them, so that no one will dare to insult the Islamic sanctions. Whoever is killed on this path will be regarded as a martyr, God willing. In addition, anyone who has access to the author of the book, but does not possess the power to execute him, should refer him to the people so that he may be punished for his actions. May God's blessing be on you all.

Rouhollah Musavi Khomeini (14 February 1989)

Khomeini's *fatwa* invites a number of reflections. First, the Ayatollah considers himself the supreme authority and the most qualified defender of Islam on such matters. The *fatwa* is addressed exclusively to Moslems, as is indeed the rule. Non-Moslems are not bound to apply the death sentence. Thirdly, Khomeini addresses Moslems throughout the entire world independent of their nationality or place of residence, including Salman Rushdie himself, born a Moslem, now a British citizen and resident in London. Such a *fatwa*, of course, challenges the norms and rules of international law.

#### *Khomeini's Motivations*

Why did Khomeini deliver his sentence? Did he act for political or religious reasons? If he had a political purpose, a political solution might be more plausible than if his motive was religious.

Let us begin by assessing the *political* hypothesis. After eight years of an extremely bloody and costly war with Iraq, the Khomeini regime had finally just accepted a cease-fire (July 1988). At a moment when the Iranian armed forces had suffered some unprecedented setbacks and when the morale of the Iranian population was at its lowest, the acceptance was undeniably considered a semi if not an outright, defeat. Khomeini himself said publicly that taking such a decision was more painful than 'drinking a glass of poison'. The failure of the regime's military policy, followed by the great disillusionment of the *Pasdaran* (the Revolutionary Guards) after so many promises of a quick and final victory, had unquestionably caused a decline in prestige and credibility, not only among the Iranian population but also in Moslem and international opinion. To this must be added the great economic and financial difficulties, galloping inflation, shortages, and unemployment. The cease-fire had further deepened dissent within the clerical factions in power. Some influential and respected persons (such as Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's heir-apparent dismissed in April 1989) were at that time expressing their desire for a political opening and liberation. Therefore, all these factors possibly influenced Khomeini. Interpreting these criticisms as a sign of his weakening authority, he reacted in the strongest manner possible under the influence of anxiety and panic by stepping up pressure on his enemies (for example, executing without

judgement several dozen prisoners who had already served out their punishment).

In this context, the Rushdie affair would have been an unprecedented occasion for the Iranian patriarch himself to regain center stage and show his authority in the hope of improving his tarnished image, while diverting the attention of Iranians from thorny internal problems and difficulties. Certainly, Khomeini's *fatwa* was immediately exploited politically by different political-clerical factions within Iran as well as by the Ayatollah's immediate entourage and the diverse rival groups. Each hoped to exploit this affair in its own interests. And so they did. All this seems quite reasonable and politically rational. But there remains the problem of Khomeini's personality as well as the existence of similar precedents which suggest that the Ayatollah's action was motivated first and foremost by religious considerations.

Let us therefore examine the religious hypothesis. There is evidence indicating that Khomeini had a religious purpose. First, he had no political interest in thrusting himself once again into a sensitive international affair, especially so soon after having extricated himself from an extremely costly war. Iran had already begun reconstruction projects which required international loans and credits. To obtain them the Islamic regime had taken pains to improve diplomatic relations with the Western powers. Diplomatic relations with France, after a dramatic break following the Gorji affair, had just been normalized, and ambassadors had once again been exchanged. Similarly, after numerous negotiations, diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom had just been re-established, and the diplomatic representative from London had opened his doors in Teheran. Iran had every *political* interest in creating a certain credibility in world opinion, in particular among the Western powers. Thus, as regards foreign policy, level-headedness was dictated in Teheran. Furthermore, Iran needed to acquire as much international support as possible, and in particular the support of the two superpowers – or, failing this, at least their neutrality – in its difficult negotiations with Iraq. Consequently, it seems difficult to understand, from the standpoint of political rationality and a costs and benefits calculation, that Khomeini would have had any interest in shuffling his cards and voluntarily placing his assets at risk.

Further, there is a major historical precedent. In 1945–55, the terrorist groups of the *Fadaiyan-e Eslam* (The Faithful of Islam) undertook a series of assassinations which threw Iran into turmoil. Study of this period goes beyond the scope of the present article:<sup>1</sup> however, the first of these assassinations is significant for us. The victim was a celebrated Iranian writer (like Salman Rushdie, anti-clerical). Ahmad Kasravi was the author of a series of books of great literary and scholarly quality, some of which have become classical reference works. He had edited a pamphlet

on the subject of Shi'ism (Shi'a gari) in which he argued that Shi'ism as it exists in our times was an invention of the clergy in the fifteenth century under the dynasty of the Safavides. This pamphlet was judged to be blasphemous and anti-religious; and the author was condemned in a *fatwa* delivered by Ayatollah al-Amini, resident in Iraq. Kasravi's assassination had only one motive, that of eliminating an anti-clerical writer, and hence, there is a striking similarity between the Kasravi and the Rushdie cases. The unfortunate Kasravi was condemned and executed without casting doubt on the principle of the divine unity or the veracity of the Koranic verses as Rushdie did. Neither had he spoken offensively about the wives of the Prophet nor derisively of the Prophet.

Before Kasravi was condemned and executed, Khomeini, a young religious leader, had written an extremely violent book mostly dedicated to refuting Kasravi's pamphlet. In his book, entitled *Kashf ul-Asrâr* (Discovering the Secrets) and published in 1943,<sup>2</sup> Khomeini launches an abusive attack against the people who distorted the truths of the holy religion and injured sacred things of Islam and Shi'ism. He also launches a vibrant appeal to his correligionists to 'uproot the seeds of the impious from the entire world through a national leap, a surge, a religious resurrection ... a will of iron and a fist of steel'.<sup>3</sup> Anyone reading this first work of Khomeini would recognize his extreme sensitivity regarding everything that touches disrespectfully on the principles, personages, and symbols of Islam. For lack of respect in such cases is not the result of ignorance in Khomeini's eyes: behind disrespect there are always ulterior designs and motives to destroy Islam. Moreover, the whole of Khomeini's tormented life, his actions and his reactions, his positions, have clearly shown his extremely skeptical, hateful, and vindictive nature against his adversaries, especially against the 'enemies of Islam'.

Khomeini's personal need to defend Islam, a need which sometimes seems like paranoia and stimulates a lust for destructiveness, indicates that a more detailed picture of his psychology (his 'operational code' or 'cognitive map' as Nathan Leites, Alexander George and John Wolger have used the concept) would be helpful. I have elsewhere developed this picture.<sup>4</sup> Let me point out here that leaders as unusual as Hitler, Stalin and Khomeini, who have caused so much death and destruction, cannot be understood by the categories of ordinary psychology. Khomeini, furthermore, believed that Islam always contained the answer to every question.

All the needs of men are expressed in the Koran and [Moslem] tradition ... the Koran explains everything ... all the answers have been given to the totality of human needs from personal, family and interpersonal problems to regulations concerning war and peace,

and relations among nations, from penal to commercial, industrial, and agrarian law.<sup>5</sup>

He clearly had a Manichean vision of the world, a belief that it was divided into two elements; good and evil, light and darkness, the party of God and that of Satan. No compromise between the two was possible, so he felt called upon to fight on regardless of cost. Khomeini's actions, thus, were a function of his religious consciousness and the idea that he always entertained of his mission, actions sometimes exploited by others for purely political ends.

### The Object of the Conflict: Blasphemy

The death sentence against Rushdie was 'justified' by reason of blasphemy. The term *blasphemy*, from the Greek *blasphemia*, signifies a 'malicious statement' which in the Hebrew-Christian vocabulary is translated as an offence against divinity. Blasphemy is also a term 'that has been used with different and often not very precise meanings at different times. Theologians regard blasphemy as a sin; St. Thomas Aquinas described it as a 'sin against faith'. Originally blasphemy was the term used to translate the Hebrew words *heref*, *giddef* and *niesz* (that is, Isa. 37: 6, where the servants of the King of Assyria denied God's power to save Israel).

### The Judeo-Christian Position and Penalties

In Judaism only the name of God, the *tetragrammaton* YHWH, can be blasphemed. Among other legal restrictions it is necessary for two witnesses to say that they had warned the blasphemer of the transgression before it was committed. If any punishment was applied at all, excommunication was the most common, although, according to talmudic law, the penalty of the blasphemer was death by stoning.

Christianity defines blasphemy in a much broader context, considering both offences against God and those against the divine character of Jesus' miracles as blasphemous. These offenses must be accompanied by a mocking and derisive spirit. Otherwise, the offense is simply a heresy. Blasphemy against God, *Injuriousa in Deum locutio*, may be *immediate* when God is directly affected, or *mediated*, when the offence first touches a sacred thing or person specially united with God, that is, an offence against the Holy Virgin or the saints in Heaven redounds ultimately on God himself. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and, hence against Jesus' divine nature was unpardonable. In the words of Jesus himself, 'All sin and blasphemy will be remitted to men, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not' (Matthew 12:31).

According to older ecclesiastical legislation, severe penalties are imposed on blasphemers, including fines, beatings, exiles or public penances at the church doors. For centuries, blasphemy was included as a crime in civil legislation of various countries, the stated basis always being that Christianity was an integral part of the constitution, as argued in the 1676 case of John Taylor specifically. The last executions for criminal blasphemy, however, go back to an English judgment against two anti-trinitarians in 1612. Although the waning of the Reformation saw the general end of blasphemy cases, in England the subject continued to be considered the state's affair. Consequently, the last blasphemy judgment and conviction by a British court dates from 1977. British law protects Christianity only against blasphemy.

Within the US, Massachusetts state courts have dealt with blasphemy cases in 1938 and 1977, although in both instances the court rejected the charge of criminal blasphemy on the principle of freedom of conscience and the fact that Christianity was not part of American law. In Denmark the penal code's paragraph 140 punishes 'anyone who should publically do violence to legally recognized beliefs or publically mock the worship of God ... by imprisonment or by a fine'. In 1938 the Danish court handed down a conviction for anti-Semitic propaganda, and in 1971 the court acquitted a song writer of the blasphemy charge. As late as 1989 Danish courts criticized an earlier government funding of Jens Jorgen Thorsen's film on the life of Jesus which the Vatican itself denounced.

The blasphemy issue, therefore, while hardly central in the West, is not dead. Consistently, blasphemy cases are subject to strict judicial procedures, whether those procedures are formulated through canon or civil courts.

### *The Moslem Position and Penalties*

Whereas in Christianity blasphemy consists, strictly, in an act of derision and *lèse majesté* against God, in Islam there is no exact term to translate blasphemy. The Koranic term 'statement of infidelity' (*kalimat al-kufr*) is the closest thing to blasphemy that exists (Sura IX, verse 75/74); moreover, the Koran's attitude toward blasphemy appears relatively moderate. For example, the Koran challenges its detractors to compose more beautiful verses if they are capable, as in Sura LII, for example: 'Or do they say, "He is a poet for whom we await Fate's uncertainty?" Say [to them]: "Await! I shall be awaiting with you ... let them bring a discourse like [the Koran] if they speak truly ... [for]"' as continued in Sura LXIX: We know that some will cry lies.<sup>6</sup>

True blasphemy within the Koran consists in apostasy (*ridda*) and infidelity (*kufr*), but the Koran decrees no concrete punishment. The silence on sanctions is of capital importance. Islam normally provides two

categories of punishments: *hudud* and *ta'zirat*. The first are fixed and decreed explicitly in the Koran for acts like theft and adultery. The second are discretionary, the magnitude and form of which are left to the decision of the Imam. In principle, apostasy belongs in this second category.

This discretionary character within Moslem law has opened several avenues of action among the different Moslem groups. Specifically, with the formation of the four major Sunnite legal schools (*Hanafite*, *Mâlakite*, *Shâfi'ite* and *Hanbalite*), and then the *Ja'farite* school (*Shi'ite*), blasphemy was diversely interpreted.

For Abu Hanifa (eighth century), founder of the Hanafite school, blasphemous acts toward God and the prophets are acts of infidelity (*kufur*), and for Mâlik (eighth century) they are squarely equated with apostasy (*ridda*). The position of the Shâfi'ite school – especially under the eminent Iranian theologian Al-Ghazali (twelfth century) – argues that it is impossible to accuse someone of infidelity if he prays toward Mecca and utters the confession of Moslem faith (*shahâda*). In contrast, the *Hanbalite* school, as interpreted by Ibn Taymiyya (fourteenth century), condemned to death anyone who committed any of the following: association with gods other than Allah, doubting one of the attributes of Allah, an act of hostility toward the Prophet, or questioning the sincerity of the companions (*shahâda*) of the Prophet or the companions' associates (*tâbi' in or atbâ*).<sup>7</sup>

Repentance (*tawba*) is not always accepted among the Sunni. The majority are against grace because it is believed that the executed repentant will benefit from repentance in the next world!<sup>8</sup> Not only is a clear position on blasphemy impossible to define, but also there exists no centralized authority within Sunni Islam to administer any decisions or actions based upon such a position.

Conversely, the Shi'ite leadership has traditionally condemned the apostate to death, entrusting judgement only to the Imam and his delegates. May others be authorized to kill the apostate on their own initiative?<sup>9</sup> Shi'ite legal experts diverge on this question. Some, like Shahid the First, for example, are in favor of execution of the apostate by any person who is able to do so. This opinion is not shared by the large majority of Shi'ite legal experts. They believe that only the competent authorities are authorized to execute the apostate. And, if some other person should execute him without prior authority from the Imam, this individual shall be punished in turn by the Imam. The punishment of such a person, however, is largely symbolic.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of Salman Rushdie, Khomeini, a qualified expert on Shi'ite law, explicitly authorizes every Moslem to execute him, theoretically investing any Moslem with the powers of the Imam in this particular case. In his *Precis (Risâla)* entitled *Explication of Questions*,<sup>11</sup> Ayatollah

Khomeini declares that any Moslem who denies the existence of God, doubts the prophecy of his emissary, or does not recognize the obligatory nature of religious duties such as prayer, pilgrimage to Mecca, paying alms, etc., is an apostate.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the specifically Shi'ite character comes into the picture here; he judges anyone who insults one of the dozen Imams or commits acts of hostility toward them to be impure and an infidel.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond the considerable divergence in opinion between Sunnism and Shi'ism, one must remember their different historical experiences. Sunnism was able to erect a state organization in the form of the Califat, and ruled under this title for centuries. Shi'ism, that is, Imamism, never had an equivalent organization. The reign of the great Safavid dynasty (1517-47) was the only period in which serious attempts were undertaken to assimilate the Shi'ite canonic system into a state legal system. These attempts were never successful because the Shi'ite canonical apparatus continued to function independent of and parallel to that of the state. Shi'ism was never in power. This is the point of view of the Shi'ite ecclesiastical authorities (like Khomeini), and also that of the Shi'ite intellectuals such as Ali Shari'ati (deceased 1977).

Consequently, the Shi'ite lack of experience in the area of the practical aspects of jurisdiction must be regarded as important. The establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran is in fact the first Imamite experience of political power and state organization. Nonetheless, it is astonishing that Shi'ite clerics continued to practise in the same way, that is, without any form of trial, even if at present, according to their own statements, they have established the first 'authentic' Islamic power and the first Shi'ite state in the entire history of Islam.

To sum up, civil courts in several Western countries such as the United States and England are empowered to deal with litigation concerning blasphemy, although this power remains largely unexercised. By contrast, the Vatican vacillates between a more moderate attitude, as with its inaction against Scorsese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and a more forceful attitude, as in its excommunication of Mgr. Lefevre.

Islam has never had an institution or a centralized authority equivalent to that of the Catholic Church and questions relating to blasphemy, heresy and apostacy have therefore been questions of interpretation by diverse and numerous bodies. A case in point is the spectacular gesture of President Bourguiba in the early 1960s who in the midst of the month of Ramadan drank a glass of fruit juice on Tunisian television, declaring essentially that 'When one is applying all his efforts to economic reconstruction, it is the same as being at war, and hence one can dispense with fasting.' Such an interpretation on the part of a state authority with regard to a religious duty, and moreover one decreed by the Koran, when

it was followed by Bourguiba's act (public breaking of the fast) provoked a wave of protest throughout the Moslem world. An act of this sort, according to Moslem theological schools of diverse allegiances, is subject to the punishment provided for apostasy. Nonetheless, precisely because no supreme Moslem authority existed, no trial was instituted against the Tunisian president, and no one even dreamed that he might be excommunicated. This confusion reigns in the Moslem world every time it is confronted with a grave problem touching in some way or other on the very foundations of Islam. In the absence of a supreme religious authority in Islam, Khomeini's action assumed great scope and significance. Indeed, while alive he was the only Moslem religious leader who simultaneously was a political head of state. Profiting from this quite unique situation, he was always taking positions on all the problems for the entire Moslem community. The death sentence against Rushdie is the last and perhaps the most celebrated act of judgment rendered by Khomeini. One is tempted to say that if Khomeini as a recognized supreme leader (at least for the Shi'ites) had not claimed authority in this matter, no one else could have.

Now that we have looked at the respective positions of the three great monotheistic religions on the subject of blasphemy, as well as the views of the Sunnite and Shi'ite schools, let us now examine how and to what extent *The Satanic Verses* has touched on the foundations, the symbols, and the personages which Moslems consider sacred.

### *The Universe of Islam*

The universe of Islam is made up of a certain number of concepts, persons, and symbols which all together form a circle around the One, that is, Allah, whose unity (*tawhid*) cannot be doubted. The absolute and inalterable character of this dogma is so evident that it requires no discussion. The second principle is the prophecy of Mohammad (*nabuwwa*), seen as the last of the true prophets. These two principles go indissolubly hand in hand, and their explicit acceptance (*shahâda*) is indispensable. Beyond these concepts, angels, presided over by the Archangel Gabriel, occupy a place apart. The ex-Archangel, Satan (*Shaytân/Iblis*), who was banished from the kingdom of angels after refusing to prostrate himself before Adam, plays the role of provocateur and trouble-maker among the sons of Adam. Next comes the sphere of the prophets like the patriarch Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus, and all these prophets are venerated as an integral part of Moslem faith. The companions, the wives and generally the family of Mohammad occupy a respectable place and must also be venerated.

All these elements, and obviously the Koran, constitute the sacred part of the Islamic universe, which also includes a profane sphere where men

are arranged in a determinate hierarchic order, including the following categories:

- The Sincere Believers (*mu'minîn*),
- The Formal Believers (*Muslimîn*),
- The People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitâb*), that is, the Jews, the Christians, and the Zoroastrians,
- The Hypocrites (*Munâfiqîn*),
- Nonbelievers (*Kuffâr*),
- The Polytheists (*Mushrikîn*), and finally
- The Apostates (*Murtaddîn*).

These, then, are the constituents of the universe of Islam. Now let us see what part of this edifice was supposedly affected by Salman Rushdie's blasphemy.

### *Rushdie and the Universe of Islam*

We must put ourselves in the place of a believing and practising Moslem, whose everyday life is paced and ordered by the dogmas which in his eyes are invariable and eternal. With regard to the Rushdie affair, the violence began with the man in the street. The intervention of religious authorities and of Khomeini – despite the weight they carried and the noise they produced – came only after the wrath accompanying the revolt of the ordinary Moslem. This is by no means a mere detail. It is a significant and considerable event.

First, the novel, the central theme of which may be the distress and woes of exile felt by most émigrés in their adopted countries, nonetheless bears a title which by all appearances has nothing to do with this supposedly central theme. By choosing such a provocative title as *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie, whether deliberately or not, added considerable fuel to the suspicion that, while speaking of *The Satanic Verses* he in reality means the Koranic Verses. It is also quite possible that in his choice of title Rushdie was unconsciously guided by a fascination with the shock value of the title. This kind of literary device is certainly common and widespread among writers and, in Rushdie's particular usage, is a sin among Muslims. If Rushdie's real intention was to shock his public, and in particular Moslems, he certainly brilliantly achieved his objective!

And also, it is ultimately irrelevant whether the universe of Islam is true or false; what is above all important is the Moslem *perception* of this universe, and of the idea of this edifice which every Moslem fashions for himself. In fact, at this level (that is, at the level of the ordinary Moslem) *The Satanic Verses* contains a certain number of elements which have been perceived by millions of Moslems as deliberately injurious and humiliating.

The shock of the title apart, Rushdie does not hold back on 'playing' with all of Islam's most sacrosanct principles. Within the book's reinterpretation, the concept of divine unity (*tawhid*) is greatly compromised. Mohammad, an enterprising gigolo, haggles with the polytheistic leaders of Jahilliya, associating Allah with the three goddesses of that city in exchange for a seat in its council,<sup>14</sup> and thereby degrading the *tawhid* to a negotiable commodity. Moreover, Mohammad's Companions along with the most respected prophets are portrayed as a loose gang of bastards, phony businessmen, and panderers, a significant reduction of their holy status. Even Mohammad's wives are degraded as prostitutes in the brothel of the 'Curtain', where his favorite among them, Ayesha, is not only the favorite of numerous clients but the most expensive prostitute in the place. Satan is presented as respectable as Gabriel, the angel who transmitted Allah's revelation to Mohammad. Finally, the sacred and venerated Koran becomes an arbitrary and falsified text. And Rushdie packages such a radical reinterpretation within the guise of defending the rights of Moslem immigrants in Great Britain.

### The Process of the Conflict and Crisis

In order to retrace the process of our case and identify its unusual nature, we must first examine our notion of international crises? Specialists in international relations have often defined an international crisis as 'a sequence of interactions between the governments of two or more sovereign states in severe conflict short of actual war but involving the perception of a dangerously high probability of war'.<sup>15</sup>

Ned Lebow identifies three components:

- Policy-makers perceive that the action or threatened action of another international actor seriously impairs concrete national interests, the country's bargaining reputation, or their own ability to remain in power;
- Policy-makers perceive that any actions on their part designed to counter this threat (capitulation aside) will raise a significant prospect of war; [and]
- Policy-makers perceive themselves to be acting under time constraints.<sup>16</sup>

Thus we see that the *risk of war* is the necessary condition for an international crisis.

The question now is what is meant by war. These authors are evidently thinking of a conflict involving conventional or nuclear weapons as was the case in the Moroccan crisis of 1905-6 and the 1960 missile crisis in Cuba. In posing the *risk of war* as the necessary condition for an inter-

national crisis, the notion of international crisis is inevitably reduced to a very few cases. In effect, by specifying the risk of war as an inherent and indispensable element, one ignores the evolution of international relations. Hence, it would not be wrong to say that the given definitions of crisis are obsolete especially because acts of violence with spectacular effects have in a sense replaced wars. The matter of American hostages at Teheran partially paralyzed the normal functioning of the American administration under Carter for more than a year. The crisis advisers (the name itself is instructive) were in permanent session. President Carter had moreover voluntarily made himself a prisoner of the Iranians when he declared that he would not leave the White House as long as the 55 American hostages held in Teheran were not freed. The Americans suffered a real loss of prestige, and American officials lived in a situation of extreme uncertainty and nervousness. World public opinion, and in particular American opinion, was deeply affected. American citizens exerted pressure on their officials to take serious measures to put an end to the nightmare.

The drama of the hostages assumed center stage in the international media especially in the United States. All these elements of extreme gravity were effectively present in a situation which everybody understood as an *international crisis*. Nor is this example unique. The 1987 increase in terrorist activity in France during the Chirac government produced a situation of similar proportions as dramatic and critical as the affair of the American hostages, provoking a crisis in relations between France and Iran. Consequently, in the present stage, given the multitude of means of inter-state violence and further given the extreme sensitivity, even vulnerability, of certain states to acts of international terror, the risk of a regular war between states cannot continue to be the sole criterion of an international crisis. Margaret Thatcher, commenting on Khomeini's death sentence and other associated threats, said that 'One must expect anything, that is our cast of mind'. She was expressing precisely the spirit of the new times, that is, times in which crisis is not necessarily associated with war, but with 'anything'.

Hermann's definition of crisis, we think, is appropriate for the Iran-Europe case. An international crisis 'is a situation that (1) threatens high priority goals of the decision-making unit, (2) restricts the amount of time available for response before the decision is transformed, and (3) surprises the members of the decision-making units by its occurrence'.<sup>17</sup> The advantage of this definition is that it considers the threat directed against 'high-priority goals' of an international actor as the essential element of a crisis. This grave threat, demanding a rapid decision, may be the threat of regular war as well as other acts of violence of considerable gravity.<sup>18</sup>

Even so the definition itself is hardly sufficient for analyzing and following the evolution of an international crisis. To do this we will need an operational model. The best is provided by Snyder and Diesing. According to their model every international crisis entails a *challenge*, a *precipitant*, *resistance*, and ends in *confrontation*.

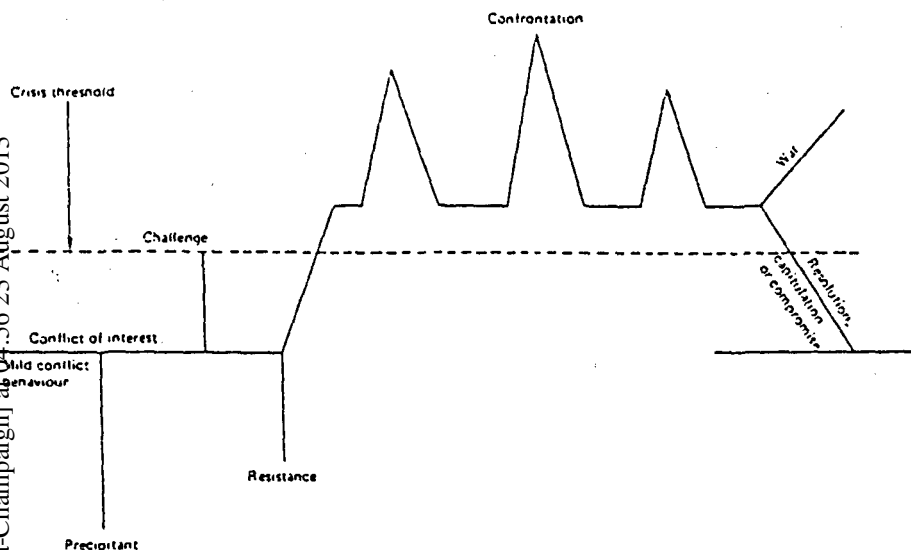
*Challenge* is 'the first act of coercing another by an explicit or implicit threat of force'. A challenge

is stimulated by a *precipitant* ... external or internal. In the external type a state perceives an intolerable situation developing in its environment as a result of action of another state or states (international actors: states and/or non-states). It may be intolerable for a variety of reasons: it is threatening to the state's external or internal security, it threatens the state's economic viability or affronts its national dignity and prestige. We call this the *general* precipitant, which provokes the challenge. There is usually also a *specific* precipitant, a particular and especially provocative act by the opponent that is seen as the 'last straw', or perhaps as the pretext for the challenge.<sup>19</sup>

Once a challenge is given, it must be resisted by the challenged party in order for a crisis to occur. If the victim were to cave in immediately, there would be no crisis. There are three possible outcomes of the confrontation phase – war, capitulation by one side, or negotiated or tacit compromises (Figure 1).

In 'the Rushdie Affair', the *challenge* was uncontestedly the death sentence decreed by Khomeini upon a British subject. This challenge was preceded by the *general precipitant* in the form of the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. There was also a *specific* precipitant in the diverse demonstrations of Moslems in the European countries, in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and elsewhere, during which many demonstrators and police were killed or wounded. The Ayatollah's challenge confronted the European countries and especially Great Britain with three alternatives: to react in no way at all; to adopt a conciliatory tone toward Iran by prohibiting the publication and distribution of *The Satanic Verses* on their territories; and third, adopting a critical attitude toward Iran and expressing their irritation with Khomeini's *fatwa*. Actually the two first alternatives were not true alternatives in the sense that it was absolutely unthinkable that European countries should not respond to such a direct challenge. Nor would European public opinion have permitted a nonchalant and evasive attitude. If the European governments had succumbed to passivity, it would have been immediately interpreted as a blatant sign of weakness that would have brought about major, irrecoverable loss of prestige. The Europeans could not prohibit publishing *The*

FIGURE 1



Source: R.C. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p.15.

*Satanic Verses* to please Khomeini; such a measure would have been technically impossible, and the pressure of public opinion would have been irresistible. Ayatollah Khomeini had also hardly showed himself to be a reliable political leader on whom one could count and with whom one could negotiate. Finally, what Khomeini was demanding was much more than simple prohibition of the incriminated book and far more dramatic. Consequently, by process of elimination, there was only the third alternative left for the Europeans, namely, to condemn openly and clearly Khomeini's *fatwa*, and set about dealing with the future of relations between Europe and Iran.

The declaration of the twelve Ministers of Foreign Affairs who met on 20 February 1989, at Brussels was thus what Snyder and Diesing call the *resistance*. The most concrete manifestation of this resistance was certainly the recall of ambassadors and heads of delegations of the EEC countries at Tehran. Thus we have on the one hand the challenge and on the other the resistance which inevitably ends in *confrontation*. The confrontation was grave. Not only did the Iranians reply very swiftly to the declaration of the twelve by recalling all their ambassadors from the EEC

countries, they also with their Lebanese and Palestinian allies made some serious threats to the lives of Western hostages in Lebanon, while serving notice that they were contemplating the resumption of their terrorist activities in the Western countries – and all this without even mentioning the danger of Rushdie's execution.

The confrontation is in our view the most interesting phase of the crisis. According to Snyder and Diesing, every confrontation should end in either war or resolution (capitulation or compromise). How did this Iran–European confrontation end? There was no war, and in a sense, there was neither capitulation nor compromise. Simultaneously, there were uncertainties concerning whether the confrontation would continue. Alternatively, it may be perceived as still going on since the threat of death against Rushdie has not been eliminated. Quite the contrary, it has been confirmed by the heirs of Khomeini. Furthermore, diplomatic relations between Iran and Great Britain are still suspended.\* Even so, it is undeniable that the confrontation between Iran and the EEC has declined considerably in intensity to the point that one may ask if one can still even speak of a confrontation. The diplomatic tension between the two parties in question only lasted one month. On 20 March 1989, the same Ministers of the twelve, meeting again in Brussels, decided unilaterally to return their ambassadors to Teheran.

This decision, which was motivated essentially by economic reasons (see Figure 2), might in a sense be interpreted as the end of the confrontation, especially because the Iranian authorities also went back on their previous decision and sent all of their ambassadors back to the capitals of the Common Market countries as well. One could interpret the European initiative to reassign their ambassadors to Teheran as a kind of capitulation, a camouflaged or diplomatic capitulation. This was in any case the interpretation Teheran chose to give it. The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Akbar Velayati, said on 21 March that the decision taken the previous day in Brussels underscored the 'strength of Islam'. While insisting on the 'very important' character of the *fatwa*, the Minister added that the 'strong support' given by Moslems to Khomeini's *fatwa* had forced the EEC to 'return to realism'. Some Western papers, such as *Le Monde*, were astonished, if not indignant, over the European about-face, considering the decision of 20 March 'seems at least premature'. In a bitter and ironic tone, the *Le Monde* editorial noted that 'the virtuous indignation of political leaders stops where reasons of state begin'.<sup>20</sup>

To understand this indignation, it must be recalled that in their first declaration on 20 February the twelve had condemned Khomeini's

\* In September 1990 diplomatic relations were resumed but the 'Affair' is unresolved – (Editors).

FIGURE 2  
1987 IRAN'S MAIN TRADING PARTNERS

Iranian Imports	(%)	Iranian Exports	(%)
W Germany	19.4	USA	14.6
Japan	12.9	Japan	13.0
Italy	6.2	Italy	8.8
UK	6.2	Netherlands	8.1
Turkey	5.4	India	6.0
Netherlands	3.5	Turkey	5.8
Brazil	2.0	Spain	5.8
Spain	1.3	W Germany	4.2
India	1.0	Singapore	3.8
Singapore	1.0	Brazil	3.1
USA	0.7	UK	2.6
Total	\$9.0bn	Total	\$10.9bn

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit.

sentence by invoking two fundamental principles. The first was *freedom of expression* and the second a set of principles deriving from *international law*. In addition, the twelve made the normalization of relations with Iran contingent on Iran's renunciation of 'the use and the threat of using violence'. But Iran had not given any signal that it intended to renounce violence as an instrument of its foreign policy, much less renounce the assassination of Salman Rushdie. Quite the contrary, Iranian authorities were quick to reaffirm, immediately after the decision of the twelve to return their ambassadors, the 'validity' of the *fatwa* of their leader. The only point on which the governments of the Common Market countries remained firm was the principle of freedom of thought and expression. On the other hand, the Iranians, while retaining and confirming their threat of death against Rushdie, have not acted in any way to carry out this threat, especially as they too decided to send back their ambassadors to the Common Market countries, except for Great Britain.

If one considers the problem of confrontation and its resolution within a broader context, one must conclude that the Iran-Europe crisis was a different type of crisis in respect of its nature, its objects, and its evolution. Secondly, as regards the confrontation itself, the solution would be doubtless to divide it into two phases: initially the confrontation was real, over a period of a little more than a month beginning with the publication of the death sentence on 14 February and 20 March. After 20

March the second phase begins, marked by an explicit (European) and implicit (Iranian) will to reduce the gravity of the problem and reestablish normal relations. Khomeini's *fatwa*, still declared valid even after the Ayatollah's death, remains suspended like the sword of Damocles. The use of this sword by Khomeini's successor has, when all is said and done, only a symbolic value for internal and Moslem usage.

### International Reactions

The reactions which we shall be examining systematically are principally those provoked after Khomeini's *fatwa*. Second, we will be referring to certain reactions previous to the *fatwa*. The international reactions were manifold and diverse, and they may be classified as follows: those issuing from worldwide or regional intergovernmental organizations (IGO), those originating with states individually and finally, those issuing from world public opinion.

The most lively and most important reactions at the IGO level were clearly those of the Common Market countries which we have just discussed. At the same level, the position of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) is particularly interesting. The OIC embraces 46 Moslem countries and it is important to see how this unique Islamic organization reacted. The 18th session of the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs took place at Riyadh on 13 March 1989, that is, in the midst of the crisis of the Rushdie affair. Iran was represented not by its Foreign Affairs Minister but by a Clergyman named Ali Taskhiri, Vice-Director of Islamic Affairs in the Ministry of Orientation (Information). The Conference did not approve Khomeini's death sentence, despite the insistence of the Iranian delegate, who was supported by the Libyan delegate. Still, the OIC gave satisfaction to Khomeini as regards the substance of the affair. *The Satanic Verses* was judged blasphemous. 'This publication', said the final declaration, 'transgresses all norms of civility and decency and is a deliberate attempt to malign Islam and the venerated Islamic personality', and the declaration referred to the author as an *apostate*. However, the OIC contemplated absolutely no action; it simply deplored the publication of this book.

The reactions of the UN were more subtle and even more cautious. The Nepalese President of the Security Council thought (2 March) that it was not opportune for the Rushdie affair to be taken up by the Council. The next day, Javier Perez de Cuellar, Secretary General of the UN, who at this moment was visiting India, declared that 'We must respect all religions. At the same time we must respect freedom of expression. We must have these two precepts in mind when we take up this question. It is also necessary to understand the concerns of the Islamic countries and the

entire world'. Aside from general considerations, the true reason which dictated caution to the UN had to do with the peace negotiations between Iran and Iraq under the auspices of the Secretary General. The UN simply felt that it must not isolate Iran.

At the level of *states*, there were many diverse reactions to Khomeini's *fatwa* and the events that it provoked. The superpowers adopted different attitudes. The United States condemned without reservation Khomeini's declaration, judging it to be 'deeply offensive to the norms of civilized behavior ... and Teheran would be held accountable'.<sup>21</sup> The Soviet Union refrained from any unequivocal statement. Precisely at this time that relations between the USSR and Iran were entering into a new and quite positive stage. On 26 February, Shevardnadze had visited Teheran and, in an exceptional if not unique gesture, Ayatollah Khomeini gave him an audience. The two countries declared themselves prepared to establish 'strong relations'. This explains the 'pro-Iranian' attitude of the Soviet authorities on the Rushdie matter. The Kremlin curiously tried to render the Iranian government innocent by drawing an artificial and quite bizarre distinction between the Iranian government and its leader in the person of Khomeini. The Soviet press agency TASS wrote,

perhaps the Imam Khomeini, the supreme religious authority in Iran, had no other choice if he was to follow the teachings of the Koran than to denounce a person who had insulted Islam. This denunciation was nothing more in the end than the position of a religious leader. The government had not condemned Rushdie to death ... (1 March).

The Soviets, encouraged by the new era which had begun in their relations with Teheran, announced (3 March) themselves prepared to offer their good offices 'to attempt to defuse the tension between Iran and the Western countries'. For, according to Shevardnadze, the Rushdie affair 'has become a conflagration that must be extinguished'.

The reactions of other states (non-Moslem) were quite diverse, but in most cases they condemned Khomeini's act. Brazil and Australia condemned the call to murder, but David Lange, Prime Minister of New Zealand, announced that his country could not join the movement of protest against Iran, because of the importance of New Zealand beef exports to that country. The case of Japan is significant. Initially, the Japanese government promised the British government its support to the declaration of the twelve. But a few days later, after a meeting between Sosuke Uno, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs; with the adviser of the President of the Islamic Republic; Japan reneged on its promise, saying that 'the proper consideration should have been given to the Islamic people [by Rushdie]' and he should not have written what he had.

As for the Vatican, the Holy See, through its official daily the *Observatore Romano*,<sup>22</sup> criticized the ingredient of 'irreverence and blasphemy' in Rushdie's book. The Vatican expressed its 'solidarity with those who had felt injured in their dignity as believers' adding nonetheless that Moslems should 'abandon attitudes of hate which offend God and the principles of morality', and finally underscoring that the 'sacred character of the religious conscience cannot prevail over the sacred character of the life of others'.

Generally speaking, Western *public opinion*, largely mobilized by the media, took a position en bloc which can be qualified as clearly pro-Rushdie and anti-Khomeini. The pro-Rushdie reaction came from Western writers and their diverse associations. Several hundred writers from different countries signed petitions to demonstrate their 'total solidarity with Salman Rushdie and his editors'. In New York, the Authors' Guild, the PEN American Center, and the Writers' Guild of America (East) fired off letters of protest to the bookstore chains, 'for caving in to censorship by terrorism'. Similarly, in London, demonstrations were organized by writers, and in France, 114 writers demonstrated for Rushdie. An International Committee for the Defence of Salman Rushdie and his Publishers was established in London, and more than 700 writers appealed to 'international opinion to support the right of everyone to express his ideas and beliefs on the basis of mutual tolerance, without censure, intolerance, or violence'. To sum up in one word the attitude of international writers, it must be said that the vast majority acted in a spirit of *corporatism* motivated above all by the defence of one of them whose life had been seriously threatened. Indeed, very few chose a more balanced and objective attitude, namely that of finding a way to accommodate the conflict between freedom of expression and respect of religious sentiments. Curiously, this question was not even posed. Only a rare writer such as John Le Carré or orientalist such as Jacques Berque, who had profound knowledge of Islam, attempted to see both sides of the river. For Le Carré 'absolute free speech is not a God-given right in any country. It is curtailed by prejudice, by perceptions of morality and by perceptions of decency. Nobody has a God-given right to insult a great religion and be published with impunity.'<sup>23</sup>

As for Western political leaders and officials, generally speaking, those on the left squarely assumed the unconditional defence of Rushdie, whereas the others opted for a more subdued attitude, condemning both Khomeini and Rushdie. For example, Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labour Party, declared that his party fully supported the firmest international action in favour of Rushdie, while the British Prime Minister strongly criticized the author of *The Satanic Verses* and Geoffrey Howe, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, clearly expressed the disapproval of his

government with the book. 'We don't agree', he said, 'with his views. We can understand why it can be criticized, and it goes without saying that we are not in sympathy with the book or in support of it'.<sup>24</sup> The same split between left and right existed in France. The communists and socialists supported Rushdie whereas Jacques Chirac, head of the RPR (Gaullists), while severely condemning Khomeini's call, declared that it had 'no respect for him nor for people who use blasphemy to make money, as did that opportunist called Scorsesi, the author of a movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*. When the irrational is set into motion, one must not be surprised how things go'.<sup>25</sup>

Moslems, however, did not wait for Khomeini's call to react. Several months before, the Moslem minority resident in England (one and a half million distributed among 382 mosques) the majority of whom are Indo-Pakistani, demonstrated their protest only a few days after the publication of the book (26 September). The protest movements spread and became almost everyday affairs. On 14 January Moslems from Bradford in Yorkshire burned copies of *The Satanic Verses*. Following these events Moslems in other countries organized impressive demonstrations. Under the pressure of Moslem minorities, India and then South Africa quickly decided to prohibit Rushdie's book. The month of February was bloody. On 12 February, Pakistani police fired on demonstrators in Islamabad. Six persons were killed. The next day one demonstrator was killed in Kashmir. According to some sources, it seems that Ayatollah Khomeini decided to make public his celebrated *fatwa* on 14 February after having seen the scenes of these demonstrations on television.

Moslem protest movements took a new quite dramatic turn after Khomeini's call. As the supreme religious authority, he established the assassination of Rushdie and his 'conscious' publishers as a religious duty. Numerous Iranians and Lebanese (including Iran's Ambassador to the Vatican) volunteered to kill Rushdie. Others, such as Ahmed Jibril, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Palestine General Command, said that 'We in the PFLP-GC will confront this new conspiracy [against Islam] and work to execute the legal action against Rushdie'.<sup>26</sup> The Lebanese Shi'ite Asad Berro, the author of the suicide attempt in a bomb-carrying truck against an Israeli military convoy, who was killed in the operation, wrote in his will that he 'would have loved to have carried out the death sentence against the hypocritical agent Salman Rushdie, and thereby obey the order of the Imam Khomeini ...'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, a few days before the suicide operation, London police discovered the body of a Moroccan who allegedly had come to England to kill Rushdie.<sup>28</sup> And, according to a survey carried out by the Harris Institute in October 1989, one in four Moslems (residing in England) wished the death of Rushdie. Just mentioning all the protest movements

and all the Moslem reactions to the Rushdie affair would make quite a long list.

The reactions of Moslem intellectuals may with some simplification be divided into two categories: those who allied themselves with Western intellectuals and those who took a more cautious attitude, even criticizing sometimes the general Western position. These two tendencies nonetheless had one thing in common: *all* Moslem intellectuals who spoke out beyond the Iranian borders condemned the call to murder. This also applies to Moslem religious authorities with the exception of the Lebanese Shi'ites who followed Khomeini on all points. The two categories of intellectuals diverged on one essential point, namely, the attitude to be adopted on Rushdie's book. Whereas the 'Westernized' intellectuals approved of *The Satanic Verses* by putting their signature under various petitions in the name of freedom of expression, the other and larger group, among whose ranks were included personages otherwise known for their lay views, criticized Rushdie's book, while condemning Khomeini's call. Here are a few examples: Dr Shabbir Akhtar, member of Bradford's Council for Mosques, thought that '*The Satanic Verses* is blasphemous ... [and] anyone who fails to be offended by Rushdie's book *ipso facto* ceases to be a Moslem ... defending it at all costs is as unjustified as threats to its author's life'.<sup>29</sup> Abolhassan Bani Sadr, former president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, said that he was shocked 'that a writer could bring up after fourteen centuries the sexual relations of a man respected by a billion people'. At the same time, 'Ayatollah Khomeini's declaration has nothing religious about it'.<sup>30</sup> The Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz, Nobel Prizewinner in Literature, accused Ayatollah Khomeini of 'intellectual terrorism'. He felt that *The Satanic Verses* 'do not merit a reaction' because it is not an 'intellectual work'; and Mr Rushdie, he continued, 'is not an intellectual. A person who writes a book like this does not think, he is merely seeking consciously to insult and to injure. Thus he does not merit a response because one responds to thought with thought, and what we have before us here is not thought'.<sup>31</sup>

This second group of Moslem intellectuals included those who criticized the general attitude the West adopted on the Rushdie affair. These criticisms took place on two levels: the intellectual and the political. Mohammed Arkoun, Professor at the Sorbonne, represents the *intellectual* tendency, while Ali Mazrui, Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan, represents the *political* one. For Arkoun, it would be wrong to:

react merely by invoking Voltaire, Rousseau, the rights of man, freedom of the artist and writer; that is merely referring to well-known themes and conquests of the spirit that are precious to all

men, but you cannot demand that all cultures follow the trajectory traced out for two centuries by France and Europe. To take up this discourse would be to require other cultures to encapsulate themselves in the exclusively Western model of historical development and intellectual and artistic realization. It would be to repeat the colonial discourse which legitimated the domination over other peoples and cultures by exporting the civilization developed in Europe!<sup>32</sup>

One interesting political criticism of the West, and of Great Britain in particular, was found in Mazrui's talk given on 1 March at Cornell University.<sup>33</sup> He first took up the question of freedom of expression in Western societies:

In Britain elaborate efforts have been made by the government to discourage journalists interviewing so-called Northern Ireland terrorists. The British have a category of censorship concerning Northern Ireland ... . The Thatcher administration [stopped] the publication of the book by Peter Wright called *Spycatcher* ... . And who is demanding that this book be not published? Not Ayatollah Khomeini but Maggie in London.

Mazrui then took up the question of *treason* and said that:

The Western world understands the concept of treason to the state. The Western world even understands capital punishment for treason against the state. ... Sometimes, with people fighting for their country but within the Western empire, may have been executed ... . Now in Islam there is a concept which can be translated as treason not to the state but to the Ummah, to the religious community and to the faith ... Salman Rushdie has been viewed by some as being a traitor in that sense ... In English law ... treason still includes violating the King's consorts sexually ... . The US law on treason defines treason more narrowly in terms of war and military defense. But in the Rosenbergs' case in the 1950s ... it does include this defense of the political system against the rival system of communism. So, instead of religion in the old sense you have a secular style of ideological preference for which the United States is armed to defend even at the expense of the human species.

And last, Mazrui attacks the great Western powers for also carrying out summary executions. Only that when they do it,

it becomes a part of a covert operation, not an announcement in radio. The CIA or MI5 may take the initiative; the Israelis may fly all

the way to Tunis and kill somebody in his bedroom; and then they deny it. Just deny it ... Is the Ayatollah just opening a whole new tactic? It is not more immoral the day it was done, it is just bad taste. He announces it on the radio instead of sending his spy to do it for him.

Even so Mazrui rejects Khomeini's call:

the Ayatollah is still wrong in the death sentence. When all is said and done Islam began with the act of reading; read, from the very beginning. And it tells the Prophet [...] that reading is how God teaches.

### Conclusion: The Consequences

- (1) The Rushdie affair has clearly demonstrated that there exists an irreducible animosity between Islam (as a totality) and the Christian West (as a totality). It seems that the Crusades have not yet been forgotten nor forgiven by either side.
- (2) The process of secularization and modernization within Moslem societies has been reversed, because of the immense influence of fundamentalist forces. It is hard to evaluate how much of this is directly related to the Rushdie affair. But, the Rushdie affair has contributed to the increasing wave of Islamic fundamentalism, and consequently, certain governments have enormous difficulties in implementing even the most timid secularizing policies.
- (3) This affair has also accentuated the animosity of large segments of the population in Western societies against Moslem immigrants. At the same time, Western opinion is becoming more aware of the presence of Moslem communities; communities that can no longer be ignored. The Westerners now realize that Moslems are living side by side with them and share their destiny. This awareness and especially the new process of integrating Moslem communities, which has recently been initiated by a number of European governments, are a direct consequence of the Rushdie affair.
- (4) The Rushdie affair did not incite a systemic crisis: it does not create – as John Groom has formulated – the question of 'life' and 'death' [for a system].<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, it was a question of 'life' and 'death' of particular persons. But was it only that? Judging by the evolution of this affair, it exceeded this. This is why we called it a 'mini-crisis' but not a 'false crisis'. A false crisis might be for example a crisis provoked in *justification of hostility*. It was a mini-crisis in the sense that the threat, despite its gravity (assassination of Rushdie, danger of a recrudescence of terrorist actions, fear for the life of Western hostages

in Lebanon, etc.) has in the end a totally different nature from the risk of an outbreak of war. The Rushdie affair did not end in war or acts of violence on the grand scale, but equally it has not been resolved. There have been, as far as we can tell, no negotiations nor compromises on the subject. The conflict has quite simply ceased to be current. It became latent. It might flare up again. But this will not take place, we think, in a spontaneous manner. Other factors will be necessary. For example, the appearance of another book of the same kind or the assassination of Rushdie, the appearance of a new charismatic Moslem leader of the Khomeini type, etc.

- (5) The most interesting point in this affair is that its latency has been due first and foremost to the fact that the lively antagonism between the religious and secular values lasted a short time without real consequences for the effective behavior of the states concerned. The successors of Khomeini, although they have repeatedly reaffirmed the validity of the *fatwa* of the defunct leader, nonetheless have carefully refrained from committing acts that would sharpen the conflict. And, as Mazrui has said, it is not certain that the assassination of Rushdie was the real or final objective of Khomeini. In fact, some of the passages in the *fatwa* (see above) leave us perplexed with regard to his true intentions. It is not impossible that the Ayatollah had attached more importance to the dissuasive effect of his act than to Rushdie's assassination. His successors, desirous of consolidating their power and establishing normal relations with the industrialized countries on which they are deeply economically dependent, have effectively relegated religious considerations to the background and concerned themselves with *realpolitik*.

The same thing has taken place in Europe. Commitment to freedom of expression which the European powers initially put forth so insistently, has also given way to economic considerations and secondarily to political ones. The fear that the Japanese would gain a foothold in the Iranian market brought the EEC countries swiftly to renew their relations with Iran.

To sum up, it seems that certain conflicts and crises may have no rational/political solution whatsoever. The Rushdie affair is an obvious example of such an incident. Evidently these remarks are only relevant when this specific type of conflict, in which the initial states lose control of the course of events, arise. In other words, even if Iran's religious-political authorities announce the annulment of Khomeini's death decree, perhaps it will reduce tensions but it cannot necessarily save Rushdie's life nor put an end to this affair. Thus the Rushdie affair is no longer an *international* conflict; nor, *a fortiori*, an international crisis. As a

matter of fact, it has turned into a *transnational* crisis, in which the actors are almost unknown and uncontrollable individuals and groups.

## NOTES

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6. *The Koran*, translated by Arthur J. Arberry (London: Oxford University Press, 1983).
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11. R. Khomeini, *Tawzih ul-Masâ'il* (no place, no date).
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14. Rushdie, *op. cit.*, Chapter: Mahound.
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16. R. Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins Press, 1981), pp.10-12.
17. C.F. Hermann (ed.), *International Crisis: Insight from Behavioural Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), p.13.
18. Hermann's definition is similar to that proposed by Jonathan Roberts who says 'A crisis is a critical point, a decisive moment which denotes the favourable or unfavourable outcome of the evolution: life or death, violence or non-violence, resolution or protracted conflict'. *Decision-Making during International Crises* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.10.
19. Snyder and Diesing, *op. cit.*
20. *Le Monde*, 22 March 1989.
21. Declaration of President Bush, *Time*, 6 March 1989.
22. *Observatore Romano*, 4 March 1989.
23. *The Guardian*, 15 Jan. 1990.
24. *The Guardian*, 3 March 1989.
25. *Le Monde*, 2 March 1989.
26. *The Guardian*, 6 March 1989.
27. *Le Monde*, 13-14 Aug. 1989.
28. BBC, 5 May 1989.
29. *The Guardian*, 27 Feb. 1989.
30. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 23 Feb.-1 March 1989.
31. *Le Monde*, 9 March 1989.

\* *anno Hegirae*.

32. *Le Monde*, 15 March 1989.
33. A resumé of his speech is reproduced in: Appignanesi/Maitland, *The Rushdie File* (London: Fourth Estate, 1989), pp.220-28.
34. A.J.P. Groom, 'Crisis Management in Long-range Perspective', in Daniel Frei (ed.), *International Crises and Crisis Management*, an East-West Symposium (Farnborough, England: Saxon House, 1978), p.104.