

Khomeini's Ghost - The definitive account of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic
revolution and its enduring legacy by Con Coughlin.
Macmillan 2009.

The revolution in Iran that overthrew the Shah continues to rank as one of the most significant events of the closing decades of the 20th century, and the impact of it, and reverberations from it, continue to be felt throughout the world, and to occupy and concern many governments, both within the Middle East and outside it.

Khomeini's Ghost, by the respected foreign correspondent Con Coughlin, author of a superb biography of Saddam Hussein, tells the story of the man who will forever be not only the iconic image of the Iranian revolution, but also its ideologue and inspiration, Ruhollah Khomeini.

Born Ruhollah Musavi, and taking the surname by which he is commonly known from the family home town of Khomein, Khomeini showed scholarly prowess from a relatively early age as he progressed through the Islamic academic system, becoming a respected Shi'ite cleric. As his stature grew he came into contact with the Shah, against whom he conceived an almost immediate dislike - the feeling was mutual - and as his role became more and more political and opposed to the Pahlavi regime he sought refuge in the Shi'ite holy city of Najaf in Iraq. Fatefully exiled from there to Paris he then further developed the contacts that would successfully see the overthrow of the Shah and his triumphant return to Iranian soil on February 1st 1979.

The second half of the book details events after the Shah's overthrow; the bloody settling of scores with remnants of the old regime, the spreading of politicised Islam to various places in the Middle East where there were residual Shi'ite populations, the US Embassy siege, the bloody and unnecessary war with Iraq, which saw brutality and massive loss of life on both sides, the Rushdie fatwa, and Iran's support for terrorist groups such as Hizbollah.

Khomeini emerges from the pages of this book as a fascinating figure; highly intelligent, manipulative and epitomising the cruelty and coldness that many in the West - quite unfairly - now associate with Islam in general.

Khomeini's Ghost is an excellent biography, a reminder of times of upheaval that those who witnessed them, never mind those who participated in them, will never forget, and a description of the life and legacy of a man whose name is now revered and reviled throughout the world in almost equal measure.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh