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From Latin American Liberation Theology to Islamic Coalition Theology: The Case of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran

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Abstract

This article will offer a comparative analysis between Latin American Liberation Theology (LALT) and Islamic Coalition Theology in the broader literature on liberation theology. The purpose of this comparison is to highlight a fundamental structural divergence in their political and theological orientations. The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran is elaborated in this conceptual context to situate the debate in a recent practical example of the Islamic Coalition Theology that led to a political revolution. Whereas LALT developed as an autonomous Christian critique of structural injustice and Western capitalist domination, Islamic Coalition Theology, as also reverberated in the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran evolved through a coalitional paradigm—what was contemporaneously described as the ‘red and the black reaction’ (ertejā‘-e sorkh o siyāh in Persian)—in which Islamic, non-religious, and even irreligious ideologies temporarily converged to confront a shared adversary: Western imperialism and its domestic expansionism worldwide. Under the broader intellectual influence of twentieth-century global leftist movements, Iran’s revolutionary Islamism absorbed and adapted elements of Marxist and anti-capitalist discourse, and indeed merged with them without relinquishing its theological core. This study argues that such ideological hybridity reveals a distinctive pragmatism within Islamic political philosophy, wherein the pursuit of liberation is not confined to doctrinal purity but is instrumentally open to external alliances and ‘coalitions’ that lead to a common political goal. Through a comparative theological and political hermeneutic, the article will situate Islamic Coalition Theology within the global genealogy of liberationist thought, demonstrating how its strategic inclusiveness contrasts with LALT’s predominantly intra-Christian reformism. The article will build on the argument that Islam primarily encompasses a comprehensive normative and political and jurisprudential order grounded in the Quran; therefore, its coalition theology is charged with its political openness to be chaperoned with any political agenda that too pursues the common political goal.



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1. Introduction

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of liberation theology as a powerful intellectual and theological response to global structures of domination, inequality, and political repression (Cabral 2025). Initially articulated within the context of Latin America, Latin American Liberation Theology (LALT) sought to reinterpret Christian doctrine through the lived realities of poverty, dependency, and systemic injustice, ad-

vancing a vision of faith intrinsically bound to the pursuit of social and economic liberation. Over time, liberation theology came to be understood not merely as a regional theological movement, but as a broader paradigm of critical religious engagement, capable of being rearticulated across diverse religious and geopolitical contexts (Cabral 2025). Within this expanded horizon, the inquiry of this article arises as to whether analogous forms of liberationist thought can be identified within Islamic intellectual and political traditions and theories, and if so, whether they exhibit similar structural and doctrinal features.

This article addresses this question by advancing a comparative analysis between LALT and what is here conceptualized as ‘Islamic Coalition Theology’, as also manifested during the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran as a practical example of it. It will be argued in this article that the theological approaches of these two religions diverge conceptually in their theological constitution, political orientation, and modes of engagement with external ideological forces (Abbasi 2023). The central argument of this study is that, whereas LALT developed as a relatively autonomous and intra-Christian theological critique of Western capitalist domination, Islamic Coalition Theology, as reverberated in the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, evolved through a paradigm characterized by the strategic convergence of Islamic, Marxist, and other anti-imperialist discourses in pursuit of a shared political objective; a political agenda based upon which reaching the target justifies the means; meaning strategic considerations may very well take precedence over strict doctrinal boundaries in the pursuit of revivalist political objectives. This theological agenda is strategic and pragmatic to a degree to which the alliance of Islam with secondary or ideologically divergent religions, with the purpose of defeating the “enemy” and therefore remaining as a viable ideology, becomes a central pillar of Islam’s political and theological agenda. The explicit wording of the Quran is quite clear in defining the ultimate end of the religion of Islam, which is entirely political. The political mission of Islam is to ultimately prevail over other ideologies and religions. This mission is reiterated twice in Quran with the exact same wording; In the verse 33 of Sūrat al-Tawbah and verse 9 of Sūrat al-Saff of Quran, it maintains: ‘It is He [God] has sent His Apostle (Prophet Mohammad) with the guidance and religion of truth that he would make it prevail over all religions, though the polytheists [disciples of other religions] should be averse’ (Qarai 2004).

The above-mentioned verses have been interpreted, within revivalist and political readings, as indicating a universalist aspiration regarding the historical and existential mission of Islam. These verses are among the muḥkamāt (clear and definitive verses) of the Quran, namely those verses whose meaning is regarded as self-evident and does not require extensive interpretive elaboration in order to understand their primary message. In contrast to the mutashābihāt (ambiguous or allegorical verses), which may admit multiple layers of interpretation and require further exegetical analysis, the muḥkamāt constitute the foundational and more explicit statements of the Quranic text. Accordingly, the wording of these verses has been understood as expressing a clear theological assertion concerning the mission entrusted to the Prophet Muhammad and the intended status of Islam in relation to other religious traditions. According to the jurisprudence of Islam, ‘changeable and timeless’ verses are defined through the Quranic dichotomy of Mohkammat (conspicuously understandable absolutes) and Motashabihat (the ones requiring interpretation due to their literal vagueness) (Rahman 2017). Mohkammat verses in the Quran are characterized by their clear and unambiguous nature, easily understood by the average person without the need for expert interpretation. On the other hand, Motashabihat verses are those with less clarity, requiring expertise to decipher their meaning for the ordinary reader (Kinberg 1988). It is well-established among Muslim elites that a dominant majority of Quranic verses, especially those including a certain degree of normativity, are Mohakamt, and therefore, do not require further interpretation (Azamat 2020).

This divergence is neither incidental nor merely historical; rather, it reflects a deeper distinction in the relationship between religion and politics within the respective traditions. LALT emerged within a Christian theological framework in which the institutional Church, despite its historical entanglements with power, could be critically reoriented through a renewed emphasis on the Gospel's 'preferential option for the poor' (Groody and Gutiérrez 2016). Its liberationist impulse, therefore, remained anchored within Christological and soteriological horizons, even as it incorporated socio-economic analysis—often drawing on Marxist categories—to diagnose structures of oppression. Crucially, however, these external analytical tools were not allowed to fundamentally reshape the theological core of LALT, which retained its doctrinal coherence and confessional boundaries (Ratzinger 1984).

The Islamic Coalition Theology in the jurisprudential structure of Islam presented a markedly different political and theological configuration, crystallized in practice in the case of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. The mobilization against Iran's Pahlavi monarchy was not a purely theological "liberation" project; rather, it was the product of a broad-based coalition encompassing Islamist actors, Marxist groups, and heavily anti-imperialist movements. This convergence was contemporaneously captured in the expression "ertejā-e sorkh o siyāh" (the red and the black reaction), a term used to describe the perceived alliance between religious and Marxist and leftist forces united against the Pahlavi monarchy (Sekulow 2016). The term points to a historically verifiable phenomenon: the temporary suspension of ideological antagonisms in favor of a shared emancipatory goal (Sekulow 2016).

The article contends that this phenomenon is not adequately explained by reference to contingent political circumstances alone. Rather, it reflects a structural feature of Islamic political philosophy, namely its instruction to accommodate forms of instrumental pragmatism in the pursuit of political objectives en route to its ultimate end, which is to prevail over other religions. Unlike LALT, which operates within a theological framework that distinguishes between the sacred and the secular—even as it seeks to bridge that divide—Islamic political thought has historically exhibited a more integrated conception of religion, power, and political governance, wherein normative, legal, and political dimensions are deeply intertwined. This integration allows for a mode of engagement in which alliances with non-Islamic ideologies are not necessarily perceived as a dilution of theological integrity, but rather as a strategic extension of a broader political mandate to ultimately prevail over other ideologies and religions.

Methodologically, this study adopts a comparative theological and political hermeneutic, combining textual analysis with historical contextualization. Thus, this analysis is composed of conceptual and historical scrutiny. As for the conceptual part, the comparison is undertaken between Latin American Liberation Theology (LALT) as a solely historically identifiable current of Christian theology, and the politico-theological foundations of what this article conceptualizes as Islamic Coalition Theology and its historical manifestation in the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. This textual analysis focuses on selected Quranic passages, as well as Islamic jurisprudential principles that are directly relevant to the concept developed in this article as Islamic Coalition Theology. In particular, verse 33 of Sūrat al-Tawbah and verse 9 of Sūrat al-Şaff are examined because they articulate what this article interprets as the political pillar of the politico-theological orientation of Islam by connecting the religion's theological mission with its political realization. This textual analysis is complemented by an examination of the jurisprudential principles—fiqhi principles—of taqīyya, ḍarūra, and maṣlaḥa, together with the preservation of the ummah, which provide the transcendently and religiously legitimate reasoning through which temporary coalition with non-Islamic actors may be rendered compatible with the preservation and

viability of the Islamic polity under conditions of political necessity. The historical component of the methodology investigates the extent to which these politico-theological and jurisprudential principles were reflected in the ideological discourse and political practice of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, whose leadership consistently justified its political agenda through reference to the Quran, the Sunna, and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). In other words, the Islamic Coalition Theology is advanced, in this article, as an analytical concept to explain a historically situated pattern of politico-theological coalition-building illustrated by the Iranian revolutionary experience.

The article approaches LALT and Islamic coalition theology not as static bodies of doctrine, but as dynamic responses to specific socio-political conditions, shaped by both internal theological resources and external intellectual influences. In doing so, it engages with the broader field of political theology, understood as the study of how theological concepts inform, legitimize, or challenge political authority and practice. At the same time, it emphasizes the transnational circulation of ideas—particularly those associated with twentieth-century anti-imperialism and leftist critique. The significance of this comparison lies in its potential to reconfigure prevailing assumptions about liberation theology as a predominantly Christian phenomenon. By putting forth the example of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the article demonstrates that Islamic coalition-oriented paradigms can emerge in forms that are not only theologically distinct from LALT, but also structurally divergent in their relationship to ideology and political praxis. In particular, it challenges the notion that theological authenticity necessarily entails doctrinal autonomy in Islamic political philosophy, suggesting instead that, in Islamic contexts, theological efficacy may be enhanced through strategic alliance even with “polytheists and disbelievers” (kafirun in Quranic texts)—to put it in Islamic rhetoric, based on the revivalist purposes to secure the viability of the Islamic political agenda (Bukay 2017).

It is primordial to bear in mind that the notion of ‘Islamic Coalition Theology’ is conceptualized as reflective of a more generalizable structural and conceptual pillar within the normative and political architecture of the religion of Islam. The analytical backbone of it lies in the Quranic articulation of Islam’s universal mission, as expressed in verse 33 of Sūrat al-Tawbah and verse 9 of Sūrat al-Šaff, which emphasize the ultimate prevailing and prevalence of the religion of truth—Islam—over all other religions and forms of belief. Within this interpretive framework, the pursuit of conditions that facilitate such prevalence—including strategic political action and alliance-building—acquires a theologically intelligible dimension. Accordingly, ‘Islamic Coalition Theology’ is theorized here as a concept that captures a recurring mode of engagement inherent in strands of Islamic political thought, rather than as a phenomenon exhausted by a single historical episode. The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran serves, in this respect, as a paradigmatic instantiation through which this broader structural tendency—coalition theology—becomes empirically visible and analytically tractable.

The structure of the proposed article will be as follows: Part I will offer an introduction to the article that will delineate the theoretical ambit of the study. It will situate the comparison conceptually within the broader discourse of political theology and global liberationist thought. Part II will examine the intellectual and theological foundations of Latin American Liberation Theology, explicating its core hermeneutics and soteriology as distinctively and exclusively Christian, rooted in the Gospel’s preferential option for the poor and its autonomous critique of Western capitalist domination. Part III will turn to Islamic Coalition Theology, outlining its foundational principles as articulated in the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Part IV will contextualize Islamic Coalition Theology within the 1979 Islamic Iranian Revolution in Iran, analyzing its strategic intertwinement with Marxist and anti-imperialist discourses and troops. Part V will conclude by synthesizing

the comparative findings, reflecting on how the theological autonomy of LALT contrasts with the Islamic Coalition Theology.

2. Latin American Liberation Theology (LALT)

Latin American Liberation Theology (LALT) emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century as a distinctive theological response to the structural conditions of poverty, inequality, and political repression that characterized much of Latin America (Boff 1987). While rooted in the broader tradition of Christian theology—particularly within Roman Catholicism—LALT constituted a methodological and epistemological rupture with earlier forms of theological reflection by foregrounding the lived experience of the poor as the primary locus of theological inquiry. Rather than treating theology as a purely speculative or doctrinal discipline, liberation theologians re-conceptualized it as a critical praxis-oriented enterprise, in which reflection on faith is inseparable from active engagement in the struggle for justice. In this sense, LALT represents not merely a thematic shift within Christian theology, but a reorientation of its very method and purpose, aligning theological discourse with the historical realities of oppression and emancipation.

The historical genesis of LALT is closely linked to the transformations inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and the subsequent Medellín Conference of Latin American Bishops in 1968, which sought to apply conciliar reforms to the specific socio-economic conditions of the region (Gutiérrez 2023). These developments coincided with a period marked by authoritarian regimes, economic dependency, and profound social stratification, often exacerbated by the dynamics of global capitalism and Cold War geopolitics. Against this backdrop, theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez (Gutiérrez 2023), Leonardo Boff (Boff 2012), and Jon Sobrino (Sobrino 2004) articulated a theological vision that interpreted these conditions not merely as social or political problems, but as manifestations of ‘structural sin’—systemic forms of injustice embedded in economic, political, and cultural institutions (Groody and Gutiérrez 2016). This diagnosis enabled LALT to transcend a purely moralistic understanding of sin as individual wrongdoing, instead situating it within the collective and institutional dimensions of human life.

At the heart of LALT lies the concept of the ‘preferential option for the poor’; a principle that has become both its defining hallmark and its most enduring contribution to global theological discourse (Groody and Gutiérrez 2016). This concept does not imply an exclusionary focus on the poor to the detriment of other social groups; rather, it reflects a hermeneutical priority, whereby the perspective of the marginalized is treated as the privileged site for interpreting both Scripture and social reality. Theologically, this orientation is grounded in the biblical narrative, particularly in the Exodus, the prophetic tradition, and the ministry of Jesus, all of which are read as affirmations of God’s solidarity with the oppressed (Groody and Gutiérrez 2016). Consequently, LALT advances a vision of salvation that is not confined to the afterlife or to individual spiritual redemption, but encompasses the historical transformation of unjust structures, thereby linking soteriology with concrete processes of social liberation.

This reconfiguration of soteriology is closely connected to LALT’s emphasis on praxis as the starting point of theological reflection. Drawing on insights from critical social analysis, liberation theologians argue that knowledge of God is mediated through participation in the struggle for justice, such that theology becomes a ‘second-order’ reflection on prior commitments to transformative action (Boff 1987). In this framework, the traditional sequence of theology—doctrine preceding practice—is effectively inverted: orthopraxis precedes orthodoxy, and the validity of theological claims is tested against their capacity to contribute to the liberation of the oppressed (Boff 1987).

The relationship between LALT and Marxism (Marx 2000) is quite relevant for the progress of this article, and has indeed been the subject of considerable debate, both within ecclesiastical circles and in the broader academic literature. Critics have often accused liberation theology of ideological contamination, suggesting that its adoption of class analysis and its critique of capitalism reflect an undue reliance on secular political theory (Lowy 1996). In response, liberation theologians have consistently maintained a distinction between methodological appropriation and doctrinal assimilation, emphasizing that their engagement with Marxism is limited to its analytical insights and does not extend to its materialist ontology or atheistic premises. This distinction is crucial for understanding the relative autonomy of LALT as a theological project, which, despite its openness to external intellectual resources, remains firmly anchored within the doctrinal and sacramental framework of Christianity.

From a theological perspective, the Christological dimension of LALT is of particular importance. Jesus is interpreted not only as the savior of individual souls but as a historical agent of liberation, whose life and ministry challenge structures of domination and affirm the dignity of the marginalized. This interpretation is closely linked to the notion of the Kingdom of God as a historical reality, partially realizable within human history through the establishment of just social relations (Sobrinho 2004). While eschatological fulfillment remains a transcendent horizon, LALT insists that the pursuit of justice in the present world is an integral component of Christian faith. In this sense, liberation theology rejects any sharp dichotomy between the spiritual and the temporal, instead proposing a holistic understanding of salvation that encompasses both dimensions (Gutiérrez 2023; Boff 1987, 2012). At the same time, it is important to underscore that, despite its radical critique of existing structures, LALT does not abandon the normative framework of Christian doctrine. Its engagement with social and political issues is consistently mediated through theological categories such as grace, sin, redemption, and community, which provide the conceptual vocabulary for articulating its vision of liberation. This theological grounding distinguishes LALT from purely secular forms of revolutionary thought, even as it shares with them a commitment to social transformation. The result is a form of liberationist discourse that is both contextually responsive and doctrinally coherent, capable of engaging with contemporary challenges without relinquishing its confessional identity.

This doctrinal coherence also shapes LALT's approach to political engagement. While liberation theologians have often supported movements for social change and, in some cases, have aligned themselves with revolutionary struggles, they have generally sought to maintain a critical distance from partisan politics, emphasizing the need for ethical discernment and the primacy of human dignity (Sigmund 1992). This stance reflects an awareness of the potential risks associated with political instrumentalization, including the possibility that theological commitments may be subordinated to ideological agendas. As such, LALT can be characterized as a form of engaged but non-coalitional political theology, in which collaboration with secular movements is possible but does not entail a fundamental restructuring of the theological framework. In light of these considerations, LALT is an autonomous liberation theology, one that integrates social analysis and political commitment within a distinctly Christian theological horizon. Its engagement with external intellectual traditions, including Marxism, is marked by a selective and critical appropriation, rather than by a process of ideological fusion. This feature will prove to be of central importance in the comparative analysis developed in the subsequent sections of this article, where it will be contrasted with the more coalitional and hybridized form of Islamic theology.

3. Islamic Coalition Theology

It is necessary at the outset of this section to emphasize that Islamic political and juridical traditions are characterized by considerable internal diversity and interpretive plurality, albeit with theological integrity of Islam in regard to its ‘revivalist’ coalition with non-Islamic externals. Therefore, the Islamic coalition theology has throughout history allowed Islamic polities to shape their inter-polity and inter-ideology relations with a central reference to the needs of viability, revivalism, and at times, expansionism. Given this, conceptions of the relationship between religion and politics, and the degree to which the theology of coalition has crystallized in political practice in the Islamic world, have varied across historical periods based upon the political requirements of the time.

The articulation of the term ‘Islamic Coalition Theology’ requires a careful engagement with both the normative sources of Islam and their historical-political manifestations, particularly in contexts where religion operates not merely as a system of belief, but as a comprehensive framework for social and political organization. Unlike Latin American Liberation Theology (LALT), which emerged within an already institutionalized religious structure and sought to reorient its ethical commitments toward the marginalized (Groody and Gutiérrez 2016), Islamic political theology—especially in its revolutionary expressions—has often been embedded within a broader conception of Islam as a totalizing normative order, encompassing law, governance, and collective identity. It is within this structural orientation that the possibility of coalition, as both a theological and political strategy, becomes intelligible (Funk 1993; Malcolm 2019; Lambton 2013; Abbasi 2023).

A key point of departure for this analysis lies in the interpretation of certain Quranic verses that have historically been understood—particularly within political and revivalist readings—as expressing a universalist and expansive vision of Islam’s role in the world. Among these, as mentioned earlier, are verse 33 of Sūrat al-Tawbah, and verse 9 of Sūrat al-saff, both of which state that God has sent His messenger “with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all religion” (Qarai 2004). It is within the latter interpretive trajectory that Islamic Coalition Theology finds one of its conceptual anchors. If Islam is the “ultimate” normative project oriented toward historical realization, then the pursuit of conditions under which it can flourish—expand, institutionalize, and exert influence—becomes a transcendently legitimate, obligatory, and unquestionable dimension of religious praxis. In this sense, Islam is conceptualized, within certain strands of political thought, as a political institution, or more precisely, as a religio-political order in which distinctions between theology, law, and governance are structurally intertwined. This highlights a persistent and influential strand within Islamic jurisprudence in which the political is internal to the religious, rather than auxiliary or external to it.

Given the above, in Islamic political theory, this integrated conception of religion and politics has significant implications for the ways in which Islamic movements engage with external ideological forces. Whereas LALT maintains a relatively clear boundary between its theological core and the secular analytical tools it appropriates, Islamic Coalition Theology demonstrates a greater openness to strategic convergence with non-Islamic ideologies, including Marxism and anti-imperialism (Shariati 1980; Kanaaneh 2021). This openness is not necessarily indicative of doctrinal fluidity; rather, it reflects a pragmatic orientation toward viability (Malcolm 2019; Abbasi 2023).

In this context, the concept of coalition must be understood not merely as a contingent political arrangement, but as a structurally intelligible mode of action within a framework where the preservation and advancement of the community (ummah) and its normative order are central concerns (Piscatori and Saikal 2019). The idea of ummah in Islam is so central and conceptually primordial that the practical reflection of the religion of Islam is feasible only through formation, maintenance, and aggrandizement of the ummah. Given

this, the preservation of ummah is tantamount to the preservation of the religion of Islam. Ummah in Arabic refers to the notion of ‘nation’. The term nation literally denotes the people living in a defined geography sharing a common national identity, and hence forming a country within specific geographic borders. However, in Islam, the Quranic term ummah is defined based on the ideological identity of Muslim believers—aqeedah—with no geographically determined specification (Abbasi 2023; Feldman 2012). Therefore, ummah refers to the people who share the group identity of being a Muslim irrespective of the country they live in. Their mission is to be bound by Islamic commands wherever they are, and also to spread Islam in the world through ‘invitation’ (daawah) (Murad 1986).

From a conceptual perspective, ummah and what it takes to have a greater and stronger ummah come before and in advance of any legitimacy assessment of the ruling entity (Abbasi 2023). In other words, people and the state are tools contributing to the ideological expansionism of Islam. Professor Gibb explains:

‘[T]he Head of the Umma [the Community of Muslims] is Allah, and Allah alone. His rule is immediate, and His commands, as revealed to Muhammad, embody the Law and Constitution of the umma. Since God is Himself the sole Legislator, there can be no room in Islamic political theory for legislation or legislative powers, whether enjoyed by a temporal ruler or by any kind of assembly. There can be no ‘sovereign state’, in the sense that the state has the right of enacting its own law, though it may have some freedom in determining its constitutional structure. The Law precedes the State, both logically and in terms of time; and the State exists for the sole purpose of maintaining and enforcing the Law’. (Gibb 2010, p. 3)

At this juncture, it is also crucial to address the concept often referred to as taqiyya (dissimulation) and, more broadly, the idea of strategic concealment or flexibility in the face of political necessity in Islamic political philosophy (Kara 2023). Historically, taqiyya has been associated with the practice of Shi‘i Islam, where it developed as a protective mechanism in contexts of persecution, allowing believers to conceal their faith to preserve life and community. In classical jurisprudence, taqiyya is typically justified under conditions of existential threat. However, in modern political discourse—particularly in critical analyses—it has sometimes been reinterpreted more expansively as indicative of a broader strategic pragmatism within Islamic political theory. For the purposes of this article, it is crucial to approach this concept with analytical precision. Muslim scholars have interpreted taqiyya, which is a generalized principle of strategic dissimulation in conditions of necessity, as a broader ethical doctrine that addresses necessity (ḍarūra), public interest (maṣlaḥa), and the preservation of the community (umma) (Kohlberg 1995). Within this framework, the possibility of adapting strategies, forming alliances, or temporarily suspending certain norms in order to achieve higher objectives of self-preservation is inherent to Islamic political and theological theory. This integration becomes particularly salient when considering the ways in which Islamic movements have historically navigated the tension between normative ideals and political realities.

Taqiyya further illuminates the permissive conditions under which coalition with external ideologies may be rendered theologically intelligible and in line with Islamic political theory. While its classical formulation is anchored in the permissibility of dissimulation under duress, later interpretive extensions—particularly when read in conjunction with the ‘doctrines of necessity’ (ḍarūra) and ‘public interest’ (maṣlaḥa)—have allowed for a broader understanding of strategic flexibility in the conduct of political affairs. Within Islamic jurisprudence, the doctrine of ḍarūra (necessity) operates as a well-established principle permitting the temporary suspension or modification of otherwise binding legal or moral norms in situations of compelling need, particularly where the preservation of life,

religion, intellect, lineage, or property—the classical *maqāsid al-sharīʿa* (purposes or ends of Islam)—is at stake (Hallaq 2009). Thus, under conditions deemed necessary—*ḍarūra*—actions that would ordinarily be prohibited may become permissible to the extent required to avert harm, provided that such measures remain proportionate and limited in scope. Complementing this, the concept of *maṣlaḥa* (public interest or common good) functions as a broader juristic or policy-oriented tool through which legal and political reasoning can account for changing social needs and circumstances (Kamali 2008). This pragmatic tool enables adaptive responses and strategies to exigent needs and circumstances, such as those essential for the viability of a given Islamic polity. In light of this, the conjunction of *ḍarūra* and *maṣlaḥa* with *taqiyya*—strategic dissimulation in contexts of vulnerability—renders a legitimate reasoning within Islamic political theory based upon which any temporary accommodation, including forms of coalition with external non-Islamic actors, is justified as serving higher objectives related to the preservation and viability of the *ummah* and Islamic political integrity.

Within this interpretive horizon, engagement with non-Islamic actors, including those grounded in secular or even anti-religious ideologies, or conceptual intertwinement with circumstantial and customary norms of the jurisdiction within which Islamic laws function, can be justified not as a deviation from Islamic norms, but as a context-dependent adaptation aimed at safeguarding and advancing the interests of the *ummah*. In this sense, coalition is not framed as an instrumentally rational strategy operating within a teleological framework oriented toward the preservation and viability of the Islamic normative order and political integrity. Such an approach does not necessarily imply the suspension of theological commitments; rather, it reflects a mode of political reasoning in which temporary alignment with external forces is rendered compatible with longer-term religious objectives, particularly in contexts marked by asymmetry of power or existential contestation. This is what is coined, in this article, as ‘Islamic Coalition Theology’.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran provides a particularly illustrative case of this religio-political structure. The revolutionary movement brought together a diverse array of actors—clerical leaders, Islamist intellectuals, Marxist organizations, and anti-imperialist groups—whose ideological commitments were often deeply divergent. Yet, these differences were, at least temporarily, subordinated to a shared objective: the overthrow of the Pahlavi Monarchy, all with the same anti-imperialist leftist ethos (Abbasi 2026). This convergence can be analytically framed as a form of strategic coalition en route to self-preservation, in which ideological boundaries are strategically negotiated in light of broader political goals. Importantly, such coalitions do not necessarily entail a permanent synthesis of doctrines; rather, they operate as temporary alignments, sustained by a convergence of interests rather than by a deep integration of worldviews. From the perspective of Islamic coalition theology, this mode of engagement can be seen as compatible with a political theology that allows for instrumental alliances, provided that they serve the overarching objective of preserving Islamic politics and orient it against imperialism.

4. The Case of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran’s constitutional and political integrity is set through divine legitimation (Khomeini 1979; Mavani 2011; Mir-Hosseini 2007; Abbasi 2025). Its constitution enshrines the principle of *velayat-e faqih* (the guardianship of the jurist), thereby sacralizing political authority and transforming obedience to the Supreme Leader and the clerical establishment into an act of religious virtue (Khomeini 1979). Within this framework, the apparatus of repression and forceful control acquires an inviolable moral veneer, for it is executed under the intrinsic infallibility of divine command (Khodadadi 2024). In the context of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, for example, Islamist actors were able to

engage with Marxists not because they shared a common metaphysical worldview, but because they operated within a political logic that permitted temporary convergence without doctrinal assimilation (Abbasi 2026). Once the revolutionary objective was achieved, these coalitions often dissolved, revealing the underlying divergences that had been strategically bracketed during the struggle. This perspective also sheds light on the post-revolutionary trajectory of such coalitions. The dissolution of alliances between Islamist and Marxist forces in Iran, and the subsequent consolidation of clerical authority, can be understood as a reassertion of the normative primacy of the Islamic framework once the conditions of revolutionary struggle had passed. In this sense, coalition functions as a transitional mechanism, facilitating the movement from a context of opposition to one of governance, but not necessarily defining the long-term structure of the political order. This model stands in marked contrast to the more autonomous and doctrinally bounded approach of LALT, which differs fundamentally from the Islamic coalition theology given its jurisprudential intertwinement with power, ideology, and self-preservation and aggrandizement.

Understanding this coalition requires situating it within the broader political and intellectual climate of mid-twentieth-century Iran. The decades preceding the revolution were marked by rapid modernization, state centralization, and cultural Westernization under the Pahlavi monarchy. At the same time, the global context of the Cold War and the influence of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements contributed to the diffusion of Marxist and Third Worldist ideologies, which found fertile ground among Islamic intellectuals and activists in Iran. In this matter, Islamic thinkers and theorists in Iran had to ideologically engineer ideological axioms of Islam within the lifestyle and thought process of Iranians with Quranic ethos, mostly through building upon prerogatives associated with the idea of ‘Muslimness’, placing Muslims at the apex of the intrinsic hierarchy of faiths; a perception of normative or moral primacy.

Islamic political philosophy contains an unequivocal normative architecture for the hierarchical classification of communities and individuals, grounded in Quranic revelation and later systematized through jurisprudence (fiqh) and political theology. Central to this architecture is the Quranic construction of collective moral hierarchy based on religious faith. Verse 110 of Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān articulates this logic with striking clarity: “You [Muslims] are the best nation brought forth for humankind: you enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in God” (Qarai 2004). This verse has long been interpreted within Islamic exegetical traditions as establishing the intrinsic moral and epistemic superiority of the Muslim community (ummah) over adherents of other faiths (Rāzī 1999, pp. 366–70). Or, verse 143 of the Sūrat Āl Baqara maintains that:

“Thus We have made you [Muslims] a middle nation that you may be witnesses to the people, and that the Apostle may be a witness to you. We did not appoint the *qiblah* you were following, but that We may ascertain those who follow the Apostle from those who turn back on their heels. It was indeed a hard thing except for those whom Allah has guided. And Allah would not let your prayers go to waste. Indeed Allah is most kind and merciful to mankind”. (Qarai 2004)

The phrase “best or exemplary nation—*ummataṉ vaseta*—” functions not merely as a theological affirmation but as a political claim that positions Muslim identity as a normative benchmark against which other religious and ideological communities are measured (Makarem Shirazi 1995, p. 131). It is worth mentioning that the revelation reason or (as-babe nozul) of this verse followed a struggle among Jews and a Muslim (Ma’az ibn-Jabal) in which the Jews claimed their religion was the standard one, and Ma’az ibn-Jabal argued the opposite, advocating Islam as the standard or exemplary religion. Following this incident, verse 143 of the Sūrat Āl Baqara was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad, which explicitly selects the Islamic community (Ummah) as the standard nation, and their

holy pilgrimage, Ka'bah, as the center and paramount pilgrimage (Qiblah) (Makarem Shirazi 1995). Within this framework, belonging to Islam is not simply a matter of personal belief but a status-conferring condition that legitimizes asymmetrical and hierarchical relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Islamic states (Crone 2004; Abbasi 2023). Even where the verse acknowledges that some among the “People of the Book” may be righteous, the dominant classificatory logic remains intact: Muslimness itself operates as an intrinsic marker of superiority (Crone 2004).

The above-mentioned Quranic maxims convinced Muslims that their ultimate transcendental mission is to fight imperialism, and in doing so, any coalition with those who also fight imperialism would serve their ultimate divine end. Within this milieu, Marxist-Leninist organizations such as the People's Mujahedin of Iran, the Fedaiyan-e Khalq, and the Tudeh Party of Iran emerged as significant forces. These groups articulated a critique of the Pahlavi Monarchy grounded in concepts of class struggle, imperialism, and economic “dependency” on Western imperialism, often drawing explicitly on Marxist and Leninist frameworks. Their activities ranged from intellectual production and student mobilization to armed struggle, particularly in the case of guerrilla organizations like the Fedaiyan-e Khalq. Despite internal and ideological fragmentation, these groups shared a common goal: the overthrow of the Pahlavi Monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic force (Keddie 1983).

Parallel to these developments, a distinct current of Islamic intellectual thought was taking shape, one that sought to reinterpret Shi'i Islam in revolutionary and emancipatory terms. Among the most influential figures in this regard was Ali Shariati, whose writings played an important role in bridging the gap between Islamic and Marxist discourses (Kanaaneh 2021). Educated in France and deeply influenced by existentialism, anti-colonial theory, and elements of Marxist analysis, Shariati advanced a reading of Islam as a religion of protest and social justice, centered on the struggle against oppression (zulm) and the defense of the oppressed (mustad'afin). He reinterpreted key figures in Shi'i history, particularly Imam Husayn of Shia Muslims, as symbols of revolutionary resistance, thereby transforming religious narratives into instruments of political mobilization (Shariati 2003). Shariati's project has often been described as a form of ‘Islamic Marxism’. Shariati can be seen as a key intellectual architect of the coalitional space in which Islamist and Marxist ideas could coexist, at least temporarily, within a shared framework of opposition.

The convergence between Islamic and Marxist actors was not limited to theoretical discourse; it also manifested in concrete practices of political resistance. A striking example of this is the figure of Khosrow Golsorkhi, an Islamist Marxist who, during his trial in 1974, famously invoked Shi'i symbols and the legacy of Imam Husayn of Shia Muslims to articulate his revolutionary zeal. In a dramatic courtroom speech, Golsorkhi framed his Marxist commitments in terms that were deeply resonant with Islamic notions of martyrdom and justice, thereby illustrating the discursive permeability between ostensibly opposed ideological traditions (Dabashi 2017). His execution by the Pahlavi regime further elevated him to the status of a martyr figure, revered across ideological lines and contributing to the symbolic convergence of red (Marxist) and black (Shi'i) revolutionary imaginaries—the ‘black and red’ alliance (Dabashi 2017).

This symbolic and strategic convergence reached its apex in the late 1970s. Mosques particularly provided organizational infrastructure and mobilizational capacity, while leftist groups contributed ideological frameworks and activist networks. The leadership of Ruhollah Khomeini, operating from exile, played a crucial role in reiterating the coalitional discourse that could encompass these diverse troops. It is within this context that the notion of an Islamic–Marxist coalition becomes analytically meaningful. This coalition

was based on a reconciliation on a shared revolutionary horizon, defined by opposition to monarchy and imperialism. The compatibility between these actors was therefore strategic rather than doctrinal, sustained by a convergence of interests and facilitated by a discursive field in which concepts such as oppression and martyrdom could be articulated across ideological boundaries.

However, this convergence was neither uncontested nor universally accepted. The Pahlavi Monarchy itself recognized and sought to decipher the nature of this coalition, and raise awareness to the public about this alliance through the account of ‘alliance of red and black’ (*ertejā’-e sorkh o siyāh*)—to put in late Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s terms—a phrase to describe what he portrayed as a regressive coalition between Marxist (red) and religious (black) forces (Sekulow 2016; Abbasi 2026). This alliance represented a dangerous synthesis of extremisms, threatening both the stability of the state and the prosperous modernization project it had factually started to embody. The ‘red and black’ alliance captures an important empirical reality: the existence of a cross-ideological coalition that played a role in the fall of the Pahlavi Monarchy. From the standpoint of this article, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a concrete manifestation of Islamic Coalition Theology, in which the strategic engagement with non-Islamic troops is integrated into a broader strategy of political aggrandizement.

Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the alliance between Islamist and Marxist forces rapidly deteriorated. Marxist organizations that had participated in the revolutionary struggle were increasingly marginalized, repressed, or eliminated, as the new regime consolidated its authority under a distinctly Islamic framework. This shift underscores the instrumental character of the earlier coalition, suggesting that it functioned as a transitional mechanism rather than as a durable political arrangement. Once the shared goal of overthrowing the monarchy had been achieved, the underlying ideological divergences reasserted themselves, leading to conflict and fragmentation. From a theoretical perspective, this trajectory reinforces the argument advanced in the previous section: that Islamic Coalition Theology operates through strategic pragmatism for the sake of political and ideological preservation and possibly aggrandizement. The willingness to form alliances with Marxist and secular actors does not necessarily entail a long-term accommodation of their ideological positions; rather, it reflects a context-dependent strategy toward a particular political order.

5. Conclusive Remarks

What has been coined in this article as ‘Islamic Coalition Theology’ is not merely a contingent political phenomenon, but is grounded in core elements of Islamic normative thought and political theory. The Quranic verses discussed above, especially verse 33 of *Sūrat al-Tawbah* and verse 9 of *Sūrat al-Šaff*, have been read within political and revivalist frameworks as articulating a universalist horizon in which Islam is oriented toward eternity, historical prevalence, and ideological viability. When considered alongside the centrality of the idea of *ummah*—understood not as a territorially bounded nation but as a transnational community defined by shared belief (*aqīdah*)—this orientation acquires a collective and institutional dimension, in which the preservation and advancement of the community become of paramount existential significance in the viability of the religion of Islam. The conceptual architecture afforded by doctrines such as *taqiyya*, particularly when interpreted in conjunction with *darūra* (necessity) and *mašlahā* (public interest), further enables a mode of political reasoning that can accommodate strategic adaptation to shifting conditions. Taken together, this internally coherent framework—Quranic verses together with the importance of the *ummah* relying on the institution of *taqiyya*—legitimizes coalitions with external ideologies as a theologically backed and instrumentally rational means of se-

curing viability, facilitating revival, and, where possible, advancing the broader normative project associated with Islam.

This article sought to integrate two complementary dimensions of its comparative analysis. The first is conceptual; examining the politico-theological foundations of what this article advances as Islamic Coalition Theology through selected Quranic passages and Islamic jurisprudential (fiqh) principles, particularly taqiyya, ḍarūra, maṣlaḥa, and the preservation of the ummah. The second is historical, investigating the extent to which these normative and jurisprudential foundations were reflected in the ideological discourse and political practice of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. By combining these conceptual and historical dimensions within a comparative framework alongside Latin American Liberation Theology, the article argues that the temporary coalition between revolutionary Islamists and ideologically external agendas is an offspring of a politico-theological framework conceptualized in this study as Islamic Coalition Theology.

To conclude, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran provides a paradigmatic case study of Islamic Coalition Theology in action. The alliance between Islamist and Marxist forces—the red and black reaction—demonstrates that Islamic Coalition Theology promotes engagement in strategic, cross-ideological intertwinement aimed at achieving political and ideological viability. At the same time, the dissolution of this alliance in the post-revolutionary period highlights the interim and contingent nature of such coalitions, as well as the enduring significance of underlying theological and ideological commitments—under the account of taqiyya in Islam as mentioned earlier in the article. This case thus reinforces the central comparative insight of this article: that, unlike LALT, which maintains a relatively stable boundary between theology and external ideologies, Islamic theological praxis has exhibited a propensity for coalitional capacity, even at the cost of temporary ideological hybridity. The ‘red and black’ alliance or reaction, interpreted as a revolutionary necessity and a notoriously strategic convergence, remains an illustration of this distinctive configuration of religion, politics, power, aggrandizement, and anti-imperialistic leftist ethos.

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