



The Completion of Prophethood and the Supremacy of Islam over All Religions (An Analysis of the Qur'anic Verse "*Li-yuḏhirahu 'alā al-dīn kullihī*" in the Thought of Ayatollah Khamenei)

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Abstract

The Qur'anic verse "*li-yuḏhirahu 'alā al-dīn kullihī*" ("that He may cause it to prevail over every religion") (Qur'an 9:33; 61:9) has long been regarded as one of the key Qur'anic verses articulating the future trajectory of history in Islamic thought. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach and drawing upon Ayatollah Khamenei's statements and interpretations concerning this verse, the present study systematically examines and elucidates the conceptual framework underlying his thought regarding the ultimate triumph of Islam. The central question of the study concerns the nature of Islam's ultimate supremacy, as well as the foundations and mechanisms through which this ultimate triumph is realized within his intellectual framework.

The findings indicate that, in Ayatollah Khamenei's thought, the triumph of Islam constitutes an inevitable historical process grounded in a comprehensive cultural-civilizational theory rather than merely a military event. The central premise of this theory is the inseparable relationship between the completion of prophethood and the inherent superiority of Islam. In this view, with the mission of the Prophet Muhammad and the presentation of the most complete form of divine guidance, Islam has, by its very nature, attained superiority over all other human schools of thought. This inherent superiority is actualized through *soft-power* mechanisms, particularly the strength of rational argumentation and the production of knowledge. The study demonstrates that this cultural superiority, in order to be realized and protected, requires *hard-power* instruments, including institution-building, political organization, and the establishment of government—processes that emerge through sustained *jihād* and continuous endeavor. Its ultimate horizon is the establishment of the global rule of Imam al-Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance).

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The principal contribution of this study is to conceptualize this intellectual framework as a strategic model capable of resolving the prevalent dichotomy concerning the nature of Islam's ultimate triumph—namely, the opposition between “intellectual/ logical supremacy” and “supremacy through power.” By integrating theological, cultural, scientific, and political dimensions, this model systematically articulates and completes the mechanisms through which Islam's ultimate supremacy is to be realized within a comprehensive theoretical framework.

Keywords: *Li-yuzhirahu 'alā al-dīn kullihī*; Ayatollah Khamenei; completion of prophethood; cultural supremacy; the true religion; Islamic system.

1. Introduction

The Qur'anic verse, "He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may make it prevail over every religion, even though the polytheists may dislike it" (Qur'an 9:33; 61:9), is one of the most significant and inspiring verses of the Qur'an in delineating the future of history and the ultimate purpose of divine revelation. The verse conveys God's definitive and irrevocable promise concerning the eventual triumph and ascendancy of the religion of truth over all human systems of thought and practice. In this regard, Ayatollah Khamenei, interpreting the verse, states that Islam has come to govern human society and to prevail over all schools of thought, religions, and creeds (Khamenei, 2023, p. 59). This teleological vision has consistently served as a source of hope and a driving force behind the struggles of Muslim societies against oppression and global hegemonic powers. Nevertheless, the nature, dimensions, and mechanisms through which this ultimate triumph is to be realized have remained among the most challenging, extensive, and even consequential questions in Islamic thought. Is this triumph, as some have assumed, a military and physical victory to be realized in the eschatological age (*ākhir al-zamān*) (Tafsir Nemuneh, Vol. 7, p. 371), or does it encompass deeper dimensions, such as intellectual, cultural, and civilizational ascendancy that can be pursued in every historical period? This question assumes particular significance in the contemporary era, when materialist ideologies and systems of global domination have confronted Islam through sophisticated media, economic, and military instruments.

Within this spectrum of interpretations, Ayatollah Khamenei's perspective offers a coherent, dynamic, and practically relevant framework by systematically connecting theological foundations, historical developments, and the strategic requirements of the contemporary world. Rejecting an understanding of Islamic ascendancy based merely on coercion and the sword (Khamenei, statement dated 21 March 1997), he presents a perspective in which the ultimate triumph of Islam is not a singular event but a historical process rooted in solid theoretical foundations, most notably the *completion of prophethood* (*ikmāl al-nubuwwah*). From his perspective, the ascendancy of the final religion is the logical consequence of the completion and perfection of the prophetic cultural mission, which renders Islam inherently superior to all human systems of thought (Khamenei, 2020, pp. 204–207). This approach transforms the issue from a purely eschatological hope into a strategic doctrine that generates responsibility and demands action from the contemporary Muslim community. Accordingly, the principal objective of this study is to analyze and explicate these theoretical foundations and to identify their practical dimensions and implications within his broader intellectual framework.

With regard to the existing literature, mention may be made of the study entitled “The Heirs of the Earth and the Government of the Oppressed: An Examination of the Supreme Leader’s Theories Based on Three Qur’anic Verses Concerning Mahdism” by Seyyed Abbas Hosseini-Pour. Drawing upon Ayatollah Khamenei’s interpretations of Qur’an 28:5, 24:55, and 21:105, this study examines the divine promise concerning the succession and governance of the righteous and believers, as well as the concept of awaiting the advent of the Mahdi. Another study, entitled “An Examination of the Relationship between Mahdism and the New Islamic Civilization in the Intellectual Framework of the Supreme Leader,” by Mostafa Rezaei, argues that, within Ayatollah Khamenei’s intellectual framework, the construction of a new Islamic civilization and Mahdism are deeply intertwined. A further study, entitled “Mahdism in the Thought of the Supreme Leader,” by Hamidreza Karami, examines his speeches and emphasizes individual and social advancement as the ultimate outcome of the Mahdist discourse. It identifies such measures as the establishment of Islamic government and the preparation of the necessary conditions as formative factors contributing to the realization of the advent.

Despite the substantial body of scholarship addressing the necessity of civilizational development in relation to the advent of the Mahdi, a fundamental theoretical gap remains in the existing literature. Previous studies explain why civilization-building is necessary for the realization of the advent; however, they do not adequately answer the fundamental question of how, according to Ayatollah Khamenei’s intellectual foundations concerning the advent, Islam is to prevail over other religions, and how this ascendancy is related to the concept of the completion of prophethood. Moreover, dichotomies such as hard-power versus soft-power ascendancy have not yet been adequately synthesized into a comprehensive theoretical framework within existing scholarship.

The present study seeks to address this gap by focusing on Ayatollah Khamenei’s thought and statements concerning Qur’an 9:33 and 61:9. It therefore seeks to answer the following fundamental questions:

- 1) What do the concepts of *iḥḥār* (manifestation/ascendancy) and triumph mean within Ayatollah Khamenei’s perspective, and how do they differ from interpretations based exclusively on military domination or purely intellectual superiority?
- 2) How is the relationship between the completion of prophethood, as the culmination of the historical trajectory of divine missions, and the inherent and cultural superiority of Islam over other schools of thought theoretically formulated within his intellectual framework?
- 3) What are the principal mechanisms and instruments for realizing this ascendancy in the contemporary era, particularly with regard to such elements

as rational argumentation, justice, scientific production, and institutional and political system-building, from his perspective?

The present study first examines Ayatollah Khamenei's statements and interpretations concerning the aforementioned Qur'anic verses. It then analyzes these materials in order to systematically reconstruct his intellectual framework concerning the nature of Islam's ultimate ascendancy and the foundations and mechanisms underlying its realization.

The significance of this research lies in its presentation of a coherent interpretation capable of transforming the doctrine of *intizār* (awaiting the advent of the Mahdi) from a passive state of expectation into a constructive and dynamic form of anticipation and action. This understanding is consistent with the emphasis placed by thinkers such as Shahid Motahhari on the concept of constructive expectation (*intizār-e sāzandeh*) (Motahhari, 1993, Vol. 24, p. 437). From this perspective, the doctrine of expectation provides a strategic horizon for the movement of Muslim society toward the realization of the divine promise. Ultimate victory is consequently understood not as an instantaneous occurrence, but as a gradual process grounded in intellectual and practical struggle, individual and social self-cultivation, and the establishment of an effective society founded upon justice and equity.

2. Conceptualization

For a profound and strategic understanding of the divine promise expressed in the verse "so that He may make it prevail over every religion" (*li-yuḡṡirahu 'alā al-dīni kullihi*), a precise examination of the two foundational concepts of *dīn* (religion) and *izhār* (ascendancy) is essential. The way these two concepts are understood constitutes the principal framework for interpreting the nature, dimensions, and mechanisms of Islam's ultimate triumph, demonstrating that this triumph should be understood not merely as an event, but as a civilizational process.

Within the Qur'anic worldview, the term *dīn* extends beyond its common and reductionist understanding as a collection of beliefs and individual rituals found in certain schools of thought. Rather, it refers to a comprehensive and all-encompassing framework for human life. Ayatollah Khamenei explicitly challenges this restricted conception, emphasizing that Islam was not revealed merely to guide a particular group of people in one corner of the world; rather, it came to govern the entire human community (Khamenei, 2023, p. 59). He defines religion as equivalent to a way and method of life, whose objective is to administer and guide all humanity (*ibid.*, pp. 59–60). This definition places competing ideologies within the broader category of *dīn* as well. From this perspective, every school of thought or system that offers a program for human

life may be regarded as a *dīn*, whether divine, human-made, or *tāghūtī* (tyrannical/anti-divine). He maintains that “every new proposition brought by Islam means that whatever form and structure human beings have adopted in their lives must be transformed, and the framework of religion must be accepted instead” (Khamenei, 2022, pp. 147–149). This conception stands in fundamental tension with secular thought insofar as secularism confines religion to the private and individual sphere; instead, it emphasizes the comprehensive presence of religion across all dimensions of human existence.

This comprehensive understanding is also reflected in the works of other prominent Qur’anic commentators. Sayyid Qutb, the influential Sunni thinker, understands *dīn* in terms of obedience and submission and considers it to encompass any *manhaj* (method), *madhhab* (school), or system to which people submit and adhere (Qutb, 2004, Vol. 3, p. 1644). Such a definition extends religion beyond the private sphere into the domains of political and social authority. Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah likewise describes the religion of truth as an inclusive and complete system extending throughout human life and directing human beings toward perfection in all dimensions of existence (Fadlallah, 1998, Vol. 11, p. 92). Accordingly, within this conceptual framework, religion constitutes a comprehensive civilizational project that provides guidance for all dimensions of individual and collective life, ranging from economics and politics to culture and ethics. This comprehensive definition directly affects the way its triumph should be understood. If religion constitutes a comprehensive framework for governing human life, its triumph cannot be reduced merely to an internal change of belief or to a temporary military victory. Rather, it must signify objective superiority and greater efficacy than competing systems across the various domains of human life.

The concept of *izhār* in the verse constitutes a point of intersection among diverse interpretive perspectives. The term, which conveys meanings such as ascendancy, superiority, and manifestation, raises the fundamental question of the nature of this ascendancy: What kind of superiority is intended? Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi captures the central interpretive tension by posing the question: logical superiority or superiority through power? (Makarem Shirazi, 1992, Vol. 7, p. 371). Through a linguistic analysis and by referring to verses such as “Indeed, if they gain ascendancy over you, they will stone you” (Qur’an 18:20), in which the notion of *ẓuhūr* denotes physical domination, he observes that the term is frequently used in the Qur’an in the sense of physical ascendancy and manifest power (*ibid.*, p. 372). This interpretation is further supported by historical evidence. Muhammad Jawad Mughniyah, for example, points to the Muslim conquests of the Persian and Roman Empires and the triumph over polytheists and the People of the Book as concrete historical

manifestations of this ascendancy (Mughniyah, 2003, Vol. 4, p. 34).

In contrast to approaches that emphasize hard and physical power, other interpretations focus on soft power and the inherent superiority of Islam. Ayatollah Khamenei makes a decisive distinction in this regard, presenting the principal strategy of Islam not as military domination, but as winning the hearts and minds of human beings. As he states, “God’s religion gains mastery over hearts, and hearts cannot be conquered through the sword and coercion. The heart must understand and accept, and willingly and voluntarily submit to the way, belief, and faith” (Khamenei, statement dated 21 March 1997). Alongside *jihād*, he identifies two fundamental instruments for realizing this global triumph: (1) powerful logic and sound argumentation, and (2) justice in its true sense (ibid.). This perspective shifts the analytical center of gravity from the battlefield to the domains of cultural, intellectual, scientific, and civilizational competition.

This comprehensive and synthetic approach can also be traced in the interpretations of other Qur’anic commentators. Allameh Tabataba’i interprets *izhār* as God’s assistance and granting victory to the religion of truth (Tabataba’i, 2011 AH, Vol. 9, p. 247), a form of divine support that may be realized through various dimensions, including both intellectual and practical dimensions. Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah likewise emphasizes that the divine will concerning the realization of this ascendancy operates through persuasion by means of wisdom and gracious exhortation alongside *jihād* (Fadlallah, 1998, Vol. 11, p. 92). Sayyid Qutb, adopting a multidimensional approach, argues that this ascendancy is manifested both in the very essence and truth of religion—as the most complete divine message—and in historical reality through the early victories of Islam. According to him, this religion is inherently dominant because of its conformity with human *fiṭrah* (primordial disposition), even when its followers experience periods of weakness (Qutb, 2004, Vol. 6, p. 3559).

On the basis of these perspectives, it may therefore be concluded that *izhār* and ascendancy in this verse constitute multidimensional concepts. While they do not negate the necessity of power and *jihād* for removing obstacles to the realization of divine truth, they assign primacy to the intellectual, cultural, and civilizational superiority of the religion of truth. This conceptual framework provides the necessary foundation for examining the central issue of the present study: the theoretical foundations of this cultural ascendancy within Ayatollah Khamenei’s intellectual framework.

3. The Interrelationship between the Completion of Prophethood and Cultural Superiority

At the core of Ayatollah Khamenei’s interpretation of the Qur’anic verse “so

that He may make it prevail over every religion” lies a profound and coherent theoretical premise: the ultimate triumph of Islam is understood not as an accidental occurrence or merely a military event, but as the logical consequence of the completion of prophethood. Within this perspective, Islam’s cultural ascendancy derives from its unique status as the final religion and the culmination of the entire sequence of divine missions. This analysis elevates the discussion from the prediction of a future event to an account of a historical-theological process in which Islam’s inherent superiority constitutes the foundation, while cultural, scientific, and other mechanisms constitute the means through which this superiority is progressively actualized.

3.1. The Ascendancy of Islam as the Fulfillment of the Divine Promise and the Completion of Prophethood

In an original analysis of the opening sermon of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Ayatollah Khamenei establishes an inseparable relationship between the completion of prophethood, the ascendancy of Islam over other religions, and the fulfillment of the divine promise. He explicitly states:

“The Prophet of Islam, by filling the measure of the culture of prophethood and presenting everything that existed within divine knowledge and thought for humanity ... and by presenting the final truths contained in the culture of the prophets, prevailed over and triumphed against all the ideas and paths that could have emerged from the human mind ... This is the meaning of the Prophet’s manifestation and ascendancy over all religions.” (Khamenei, 2020, p. 205)

According to this statement, the final and absolute triumph of one divine religion over all other religions and schools of thought becomes possible when that religion encompasses the entirety of the culture of prophethood. He explains:

“From this perspective, the Mosaic tradition was not a system that had prevailed over all the paths that the human mind could offer and propose for life ... because the line of prophethood had not yet reached its conclusion, and because the measure of prophetic culture had not yet been filled.” (ibid., p. 205)

The incomplete articulation of this prophetic culture during earlier historical periods, however, was attributable to the limited preparedness, capacity, and intellectual receptivity of humanity at those stages of its historical development.

With the mission of the Final Prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him), this measure reached its fullness, the final truths contained within the culture of prophethood were presented to humanity, and the historical sequence of prophethood reached its culmination. From this perspective, by offering the

most complete and comprehensive form of divine guidance—one capable of providing a framework for all historical periods and different levels of human development—Islam inherently prevailed over all ideas and ideologies that could emerge from the human intellect (ibid., p. 206).

Accordingly, the profound and authentic meaning of “so that He may make it prevail over every religion” lies precisely in this inherent, epistemic, and cultural superiority, which was actualized through the completion of prophethood, while history constitutes the arena in which this superiority is progressively manifested. This ascendancy is therefore, at its foundation, an epistemological triumph, from which its other forms of triumph derive.

3.2. The Inherent Superiority of Islam: Conformity with the Order of Creation and Human Nature

This epistemic superiority, resulting from the completion of prophethood, translates in practice into an unparalleled capacity for efficacy and a comprehensive correspondence with the realities of existence. Ayatollah Khamenei explicitly states: “The religion of truth is in conformity with the nature of the universe and the human being” (Khamenei, 2022, p. 149). This correspondence constitutes the key to Islam’s stability, durability, and capacity to govern human life in the best possible manner.

By contrast, human-made and *ṭāghūṭī* creeds and systems, insofar as they arise from imagination and desire and lack correspondence with the laws of creation and human *fiṭrah* (primordial nature), are inherently deprived of enduring stability and permanence. This constitutes the precise meaning of *ḥaqq* (truth) in opposition to *bāṭil* (falsehood). As Ayatollah Khamenei explains:

“Truth refers to those arrangements and structures that correspond to the creational order of this world; that is truth, and everything other than it is falsehood.” (Khamenei, 2023, p. 59)

This conformity with human *fiṭrah* and the laws governing the order of creation endows Islam with an intrinsic power and a natural appeal that distinguish it from other intellectual and ideological systems. It also provides the foundation for its historical endurance and expansion and creates the conditions for the acceptance of Islamic rationality and its conception of justice.

3.3. Mechanisms for Realizing Cultural Ascendancy

On the basis of these theoretical premises—the completion of prophethood and Islam’s inherent superiority—Ayatollah Khamenei locates the mechanisms for realizing this ascendancy not primarily in military power, but in cultural and civilizational instruments associated with soft power. These instruments constitute the practical expression of Islam’s theoretical superiority.

3.3.1. Sound Logic and Robust Argumentation

The first and most fundamental instrument is the intrinsic power of Islamic logic and argumentation, which derives directly from the completion of prophethood and the presentation of the most complete form of truth. This logic is not merely a collection of formal rules of reasoning; rather, it constitutes a comprehensive epistemic system concerned with a deeper understanding of existence and humanity's position within it.

Through a powerful analogy, Ayatollah Khamenei compares this firmly grounded logic to the sun, stating:

“When the sun rises, even if you place a thousand candles in the midst of the sunlight, they have no light at all. The prophetic mission is an emergence and ascendancy of this kind.” (Khamenei, statement dated 10 January 1994)

This analogy illustrates the comprehensiveness and perfection of Islamic rationality: in the light of Islamic truth, other perspectives and intellectual systems appear limited and comparatively incapable of providing a comprehensive account of human existence. It also underscores the proposition that the manifestation of Islam signifies the emergence of a complete and comprehensive epistemic system capable of addressing the fundamental questions confronting humanity.

The persuasive power of Islam consequently provides it with the capacity to attract hearts and shape minds without reliance on coercion. It constitutes one of the principal driving forces behind the expansion of Islam, deriving from the internal coherence of Islamic reasoning and its provision of rational and practical solutions to the problems of human life.

3.3.2. Absolute and Genuine Justice

The second key instrument is the practical realization of justice, which constitutes the tangible manifestation of religion's conformity with the creational order and humanity's innate disposition toward justice.

Such realization is not merely an ethical value but a foundational principle within the Islamic system, in which justice is treated as a constitutive element of governance and social organization. Since human beings, regardless of their geographical or cultural context, possess an innate aspiration for justice, the establishment of a genuinely just system can itself constitute one of the most powerful sources of attraction for peoples throughout the world.

As Ayatollah Khamenei maintains:

“When justice exists within the Islamic Republic, people from all over the world will raise their heads and look toward it; they will turn their eyes toward this brilliant reality, admire it, and be attracted to it.” (Khamenei,

statement dated 21 March 1997)

This statement demonstrates that justice is not merely an internal concern of an Islamic political system; rather, it constitutes a universal message. By directly influencing the perceptions, conduct, and aspirations of people across the world, justice enhances Islam's capacity for expansion, attraction, and acceptance.

3.3.3. Scientific Production and the Acquisition of Scientific Power

From Ayatollah Khamenei's strategic perspective, cultural superiority cannot be achieved without scientific power; the two are mutually constitutive within a comprehensive system. This perspective demonstrates that Islamic culture is not concerned solely with values and ethical principles but also assigns a central and serious role to scientific advancement and the development of knowledge.

In his thought, a direct and substantive relationship exists between cultural ascendancy and scientific independence. He explicitly states:

“Achieving this great objective—the cultural ascendancy over the entire world and assuming responsibility for guiding all the people of the world—is impossible without acquiring knowledge.” (Khamenei, 2017, p. 74)

This perspective emphasizes that Islamic culture must not only demonstrate superiority in the domains of ethics and values but must also attain intellectual, scientific, and technological leadership if it is to exert meaningful influence in the modern world. Scientific dependence upon foreign powers and external producers of knowledge is fundamentally incompatible with the ideal of Islamic cultural ascendancy and constitutes an obstacle to the full realization of the divine promise.

Scientific power, moreover, serves a dual function: it strengthens the intellectual and rational foundations of the Islamic system while simultaneously providing practical instruments for the realization of justice. Scientific development and the advancement of knowledge facilitate access to modern technologies and can consequently contribute to the expansion of justice and the improvement of human well-being across social, economic, and political domains.

4. Fulfilling the Divine Promise: From Theory to Practice

The theoretical foundations of the cultural ascendancy of Islam, grounded in the completion of prophethood and the intrinsic superiority of Islam, raise a fundamental question: How can this latent potential be actualized amid the complex social and political realities of the contemporary world? Within Ayatollah Khamenei's intellectual framework, theory without a practical strategy remains incomplete and ineffective. The fulfillment of the divine

promise is neither an automatic nor a self-generating process; rather, it requires the creation of appropriate conditions, sustained struggle, and concrete measures derived from the very theoretical foundations outlined above. This section examines these practical requirements.

4.1. The Necessity of System-Building: An Instrument for Realizing Justice and a Foundation for Cultural Ascendancy

The first and most vital step in translating Islam's intrinsic superiority into tangible ascendancy is the establishment of an effective political and social structure. Ayatollah Khamenei explicitly argues that Islam without political power and a governing system cannot fully realize the Qur'anic ideal expressed in "*that He may cause it to prevail over every religion*" (*li-yuzhirahu 'ala al-dīn kullihī*). Referring to the long history of Islam's marginalization under regimes that merely bore the name of Islam, he concludes that the form of Islam capable of challenging disbelief and hegemonic power is one that "possesses a system, a state, military forces, media, politics, and an economy" (Khamenei, 2016, June 3). By contrast, Islamic movements that lack such instruments and do not move toward the establishment of government pose no serious threat to hegemonic powers and remain vulnerable to the pressures exerted by the broader front of disbelief and domination (*ibid.*).

From this perspective, the Islamic Revolution of Iran should be understood not merely as a political event, but as a historical turning point in the realization of the Qur'anic promise, because it represents, in Khamenei's view, a continuation of the very path followed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) (Khamenei, 2018, p. 88). System-building provides the necessary institutional foundation for the practical implementation of justice, the dissemination of Islamic reasoning and values through modern instruments, and investment in the acquisition of scientific power and capabilities.

This position is fully consistent with the thought of Imam Khomeini, who regarded the ultimate objective not merely as the overthrow of a *tāghūt*—that is, an oppressive or illegitimate political order—but as the realization of Islam and the establishment of a divinely just government. From his perspective, other political objectives were ultimately preliminary steps toward this fundamental goal (Khomeini, 2010, Vol. 8, pp. 42–43).

4.2. Rejecting Passive and Destructive Expectations

The establishment of an Islamic system is not the endpoint of the struggle; rather, it constitutes the beginning of a continuous and comprehensive endeavor. This struggle encompasses a broad range of activities, extending from military and defensive *jihād* to scientific, cultural, and economic forms of *jihād*. Acknowledging the considerable distance that remains before the complete

realization of Islam's promised ascendancy, Ayatollah Khamenei emphasizes that the path ahead is "the path of *jihād*, the path of effort, and the path of knowledge and action" (Khamenei, 1991, December 22).

This perspective categorically rejects any passive or anesthetizing conception of eschatological expectation. Expectation, in this framework, is not a state of political or social inactivity, nor does it entail postponing responsibility until the advent of the promised savior.

This understanding is rooted in the broader intellectual tradition of Shi'i Islam and was systematically theorized by thinkers such as Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari. Distinguishing between constructive expectation and destructive expectation, Motahhari strongly rejects interpretations that promote passivity or regard the spread of corruption as a means of preparing the conditions for the advent of the Mahdi. From his perspective, the advent of Imam al-Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance) constitutes the final link in the historical chain of the struggle between truth and falsehood, and participation in this ultimate victory depends upon positioning oneself within the camp of truth (Motahhari, 1993, Vol. 24, pp. 437–440).

Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi likewise conceptualizes dynamic and constructive expectation as movement along three interconnected axes: individual self-purification, the strengthening of collective social agency and mutual assistance, and resistance to being absorbed into the corruption of the surrounding environment (Makarem Shirazi, 1992, Vol. 7, pp. 383–386).

4.3. Global Governance in the Era of the Advent as the Ultimate Horizon of Historical Movement

This continuous and systematic struggle is ultimately oriented toward a clear and definitive horizon: the complete and universal realization of the promise expressed in "*that He may cause it to prevail over every religion*" in the era of the global rule of Imam al-Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance). In response to the question of why this comprehensive ascendancy has not yet been fully realized, Ayatollah Khamenei locates its final realization in the eschatological future, specifically in the period of the governance of Imam al-Mahdi (Khamenei, 2022, p. 148). Yet this orientation toward the future does not in any way imply the postponement of present responsibility or provide a justification for inaction in the contemporary period.

Within this framework, the advent of the Mahdi and the establishment of his global government are not conceived as sudden events occurring without historical preparation. Rather, they represent the culmination of a gradual process of historical and civilizational development. Humanity's movement toward higher values unfolds progressively, and this expansion will gradually

intensify until it encompasses the entire world, at which point humanity will embark upon its genuine movement along the path of divine guidance and the straight path (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) (Khamenei, 2012, p. 225).

The Islamic Revolution and the political system that emerged from it are, in this perspective, the platform from which the Iranian Muslim nation is expected to advance toward that ultimate objective (Khamenei, 1991, October 16). Thus, the Islamic Republic is not regarded as the terminus of the historical process, but as an intermediate institutional stage within a broader trajectory leading toward the establishment of a universal order grounded in divine guidance and justice.

Motahhari similarly interprets the Mahdist government as the establishment of a comprehensive realization of human values and the fulfillment of the ideal toward which all prophets and divine guides have historically aspired. It therefore constitutes the culmination of the historical struggles waged by the front of truth against falsehood (Motahhari, 1993, Vol. 24, pp. 427–440).

Accordingly, the Mahdist horizon should not be understood as a factor that encourages passivity or postpones social responsibility. On the contrary, it constitutes the ultimate goal that provides contemporary struggles on the part of the front of truth with meaning, direction, and confidence in the eventual fulfillment of an irrevocable divine promise.

5. Comparative Analysis

To gain a deeper understanding of the dimensions, innovations, and distinctive position of Ayatollah Khamenei's interpretation of the Qur'anic verse "*that He may cause it to prevail over every religion*" (*li-yuḏhirahu 'ala al-dīn kullihī*), it is necessary to examine his perspective within a comparative framework structured around two closely interconnected axes. The first concerns the continuity and further development of his thought in relation to the political thought of Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, whose leadership provided the practical context for the realization of this vision. The second concerns its position within the broader landscape of contemporary Shi'i and Sunni interpretations of this divine promise, each of which approaches the question from a particular theological and exegetical perspective. Such a comparative analysis makes the distinctive features and theoretical significance of Khamenei's approach more apparent, particularly when understood as a strategic doctrine for the historical realization of Islam's universal mission.

5.1. Continuity and Development in Relation to the Political Thought of Imam Khomeini

Ayatollah Khamenei's interpretation of this verse is rooted deeply in the theoretical and practical foundations established by Imam Khomeini, while

simultaneously constituting a continued and further developed articulation of those foundations under contemporary conditions. This relationship can be analyzed at three levels:

First Layer: The Necessity of Establishing Government for the Realization of Islam's Objectives

The most fundamental point of convergence between the two thinkers and religious leaders is their firm conviction that the realization of Islam's universal objectives is impossible without the instrument of political government. Imam Khomeini, through a transformative intervention in Shi'i political thought, strongly challenged the separation of religion from politics, which he regarded as a colonial strategy designed to keep Muslims politically and socially backward. Drawing upon the Prophet Muhammad's practical experience in establishing and administering an Islamic polity, he regarded political governance as an inseparable component of the mission of the prophets and rejected the notion that their role was limited to communicating religious teachings or withdrawing into devotional spheres (Khomeini, 2010, Vol. 20, pp. 411–413).

This constitutes precisely the religious-political foundation that Ayatollah Khamenei transforms into a strategic necessity for realizing the promise of Islam's ultimate ascendancy. He emphasizes that an Islam lacking an institutional and political system is effectively disarmed and incapable of confronting the broader front of disbelief and hegemonic power (Khamenei, 2016, June 3).

Second Layer: The Universal Mission of Islam and the Struggle against Hegemony

Both perspectives understand the horizon of this Qur'anic verse as universal and identify its contemporary manifestation of *mushrikūn* and forces of disbelief with the modern system of global domination and hegemonic power. Imam Khomeini explicitly declared that Islam would bring the great powers to humiliation and conquer the strategic strongholds of the world. He did not regard the objectives of the Islamic Revolution as confined to Iran's national borders; rather, he considered the Revolution a preliminary step toward the awakening and liberation of the oppressed throughout the world (Khomeini, 2010, Vol. 20, p. 325).

This universalist and anti-hegemonic orientation lies at the heart of Ayatollah Khamenei's intellectual framework concerning the verse. He similarly defines the objective of Islam not as the administration of a particular geographical region, but as the governance of humanity as a whole and the ascendancy of Islam over all competing intellectual and ideological systems (Khamenei, 2023, p. 59).

Third Layer: The Point of Development—from the Doctrine of Struggle to a

Theory of Cultural and Scientific Ascendancy

The principal point of distinction and development may be identified in the different historical contexts within which the two thinkers articulated their views. In response to the revolutionary circumstances of his time, Imam Khomeini placed particular emphasis on the political and practical necessity of establishing government and on the obligation to struggle against oppression. Through mobilizing the masses, he sought to remove the principal obstacle—the *tāghūt* regime—from the path of Islam, thereby creating the conditions necessary for its eventual realization and ascendancy (Khomeini, 2010, Vol. 8, pp. 42–43).

Ayatollah Khamenei, however, as the theorist and leader of the political system that emerged from the Revolution, addresses a further set of fundamental questions: Why should this ascendancy occur, and through what mechanisms can it be realized?

His answer to the question of why introduces the philosophy of prophethood and establishes a direct conceptual relationship between the Qur’anic verse and the completion of prophethood. In this framework, the ascendancy of Islam possesses an intrinsic legitimacy and epistemic foundation because Islam represents the most complete and final form of prophetic guidance (Khamenei, 2020, pp. 204–207).

His answer to the question of how consists in a systematic identification of the mechanisms through which this ascendancy can be realized: sound reasoning and cogent argumentation, genuine and comprehensive justice, and the production and acquisition of scientific power (Khamenei, 1997, January 21; Khamenei, 2017, p. 74). Together, these elements constitute a precise cultural-civilizational roadmap that complements and provides a theoretical interpretation of the political and practical strategies emphasized by Imam Khomeini. In other words, Ayatollah Khamenei develops Imam Khomeini’s doctrine of struggle into a more comprehensive theory of ascendancy, while placing particular emphasis on its intellectual, cultural, scientific, and civilizational dimensions.

5.2. Position within Contemporary Exegetical Thought: Toward a Composite and Strategic Model

Compared with other interpretations, Ayatollah Khamenei’s perspective presents a comprehensive and strategic approach that moves beyond several of the conventional dichotomies surrounding the interpretation of this verse.

Beyond the Dichotomy of Logical Ascendancy versus Ascendancy through Power

Many exegetical approaches emphasize this dichotomy and, in some cases,

remain largely confined to one of its two poles. Some commentators, while acknowledging the possibility of both dimensions, rely on linguistic analysis of the root *ẓ-h-r* and its Qur'anic derivatives to emphasize *ẓuhūr* primarily in the sense of military, political, and territorial power (Makarem Shirazi, 1992, Vol. 7, pp. 371–372).

Others may place primary emphasis on purely logical or intellectual superiority. Ayatollah Khamenei's approach transforms this apparent opposition into a hierarchical and complementary relationship. In his view, the foundation and essence of Islam's ascendancy lie in its logical, cultural, and justice-based superiority (Khamenei, 1997, January 21). Yet this cultural ascendancy, in order to be realized and protected against hostile forces, requires the institutional and political support of power (Khamenei, 2016, June 3). Thus, power is conceived as serving culture rather than constituting the ultimate objective in itself.

Giving Concrete Expression to Sayyid Qutb's Emphasis on Islam's Intrinsic Superiority

Sayyid Qutb, one of the prominent thinkers of modern Sunni Islam, emphasizes the intrinsic superiority of Islam on the grounds of its conformity with human nature (*fiṭrah*) and its internal strength. In his view, Islam remains superior in its essential reality even during periods in which its followers experience political weakness or decline (Qutb, 2004, Vol. 6, p. 3331).

This position bears a significant resemblance to Ayatollah Khamenei's emphasis on the conformity of Islam with the created order (*niẓām al-takwīn*). The crucial distinction, however, lies in the fact that Qutb primarily emphasizes the intrinsic superiority of Islam, whereas Khamenei supplements this principle with the elements of system-building, *jihād*, and scientific production, thereby connecting intrinsic superiority to a practical program for acquiring power and giving that superiority concrete expression across all spheres of social life.

In other words, Khamenei moves from a description of Islam's superiority to a prescription for realizing it.

Completing Martyr Motahhari's Philosophy of History through the Theory of Government

Martyr Morteza Motahhari interprets the establishment of the Mahdist government at the end of history within the broader framework of the philosophy of history and the continuous struggle between truth and falsehood. He regards the advent of Imam al-Mahdi as the culmination of this historical process and as the realization of the ideal human society (Motahhari, 1993, Vol. 24, pp. 427, 440).

Ayatollah Khamenei accepts this broader historical interpretation while adding two strategic elements to it. First, by focusing on the completion of prophethood, he introduces a theological foundation into this philosophy

of history. Second, and more importantly, by emphasizing the necessity of establishing an Islamic government during the occultation of Imam al-Mahdi, he connects this broad historical interpretation to a practical and operational theory of governance applicable to the present.

In this framework, the historical struggle between truth and falsehood is understood as manifesting itself today in the confrontation between the Islamic political system and the system of global hegemony. This contemporary struggle is consequently interpreted as both aligned with and preparatory to the culmination of the historical process: the establishment of the universal Mahdist government.

Operationalizing the Comprehensive Perspective of Allamah Tabataba'i and Fadlallah

Allamah Tabataba'i adopts a comprehensive and multidimensional approach, interpreting *izhār* and ascendancy as a general form of divine assistance and support for the triumph of the religion of truth, capable of taking various forms (Tabataba'i, 1991 AH, Vol. 9, p. 247). Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, likewise adopting a pragmatic approach, emphasizes that the realization of this promise occurs through human actions and instruments, including persuasion through wisdom and sound counsel in the context of religious invitation, as well as *jihād* and decisive confrontation when necessary (Fadlallah, 1998, Vol. 11, p. 92).

Ayatollah Khamenei's position, in effect, transforms these broad and substantively valid insights into an operational, coherent, and systematic model. He demonstrates how divine assistance and human agency and practical instruments are interconnected within a political-cultural system, while assigning each of the mechanisms—reasoned argumentation, justice, scientific production, and *jihād*—a specific place within this larger framework.

Ultimately, Ayatollah Khamenei's perspective can be characterized as a composite strategic model that integrates the cultural dimension (reasoning and cogent argumentation), the scientific dimension (knowledge production), the political dimension (system-building), the social dimension (genuine and comprehensive justice), and the practical dimension (*jihād*) into a coherent whole. In this sense, it offers a systematic and action-oriented framework for understanding how an Islamic society may move, in the contemporary era, toward the realization of the Qur'anic promise of the ultimate ascendancy of the religion of truth.

Conclusion

The present study sought to systematically examine and analyze the theoretical foundations of the ultimate ascendancy and victory of Islam within the intellectual framework of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with particular reference

to the Qur'anic verse, "*that He may cause it to prevail over every religion*" (*li-yuzhrihu 'alā al-dīn kullihī*; Qur'an 9:33; 61:9). The findings demonstrate that his perspective should not be regarded merely as one interpretation among several competing views; rather, it constitutes a comprehensive and strategic doctrine that conceptualizes the ultimate triumph of the religion of truth not as a sudden event or a purely military victory, but as an inevitable historical process grounded in the intrinsic, cultural, and civilizational superiority of Islam.

The analysis presented throughout this article indicates that this doctrine rests upon a coherent set of foundations. Its point of departure is a reconceptualization of religion as a comprehensive system of life and a framework for the governance of human society. This reconceptualization immediately transforms the meaning of *ghalabah* (ascendancy) from that of mere military domination into a comprehensive form of cultural, rational, and civilizational predominance. The central theoretical foundation of this ascendancy lies in the profound relationship between the completion of prophethood (*ikmāl al-nubuwwah*) and cultural superiority. With the advent of the Seal of the Prophets (peace be upon him) and the fulfillment of the cumulative trajectory of prophetic revelation, humanity was presented with the most complete and effective form of divine guidance, one that corresponds to the primordial nature of the human being (*fiṭrah*). This, in turn, constitutes the basis for Islam's intrinsic superiority over all competing intellectual and ideological systems.

On the basis of this theoretical premise, the mechanisms through which such ascendancy is to be realized likewise assume a fundamentally cultural and civilizational character. These mechanisms include sound reasoning and cogent argumentation, as instruments for winning hearts and minds; absolute and substantive justice, as the practical manifestation of the truth and legitimacy of religion within society; and the production of knowledge and the attainment of scientific power, as a strategic imperative in the contemporary era. The study further demonstrated that these theoretical capacities require concrete institutional and practical instruments in order to be actualized. These include state-building and institutional formation (*niẓām-sāzī*), namely, the establishment of an Islamic government as the institutional foundation for realizing justice and political power; continuous jihad and sustained effort, as a rejection of any passive conception of waiting for the fulfillment of divine promises; and the orientation of these struggles toward the ultimate and inspirational horizon of the global government of Imam al-Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance).

The principal contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that the fundamental innovation of Ayatollah Khamenei's perspective is the formulation

of a strategic model that successfully integrates the various dimensions emphasized by different approaches into a coherent and functional whole. This model resolves the conventional dichotomy between rational-cultural ascendancy and power-based domination. Through positing a complementary and hierarchical relationship between the two, this perspective maintains that cultural and civilizational superiority constitutes the foundation and primary objective, while recognizing that such superiority requires the support of political power and defensive capacity in order to be realized and protected against its adversaries. In this way, the approach avoids both the pitfalls of abstract idealism—which emphasizes reason and culture while neglecting power—and militarized realism—which prioritizes power while disregarding reason and legitimacy.

Accordingly, Ayatollah Khamenei's interpretation transforms the verse "*that He may cause it to prevail over every religion*" from a merely doctrinal or eschatological proposition into a strategic Qur'anic principle that articulates an integrated roadmap for the civilizational movement of the Muslim community—from its theoretical foundations and intellectual premises to its practical requirements and future horizon. The verse, within this framework, becomes not merely a statement concerning the eventual triumph of Islam, but also a framework for understanding the historical responsibilities and strategic imperatives of the Islamic community in pursuing that promised future.

The present study may also serve as a starting point for further research in this field. Among the most significant avenues for future investigation are the following:

1) Examining the Obstacles and Challenges to the Realization of Cultural Ascendancy in the Muslim World:

A field-based and strategic study aimed at identifying the internal obstacles—such as fragmentation, sectarian division, and intellectual rigidity—and external challenges—such as media pressure and ideological influence—that impede the realization of this aspiration, based on Ayatollah Khamenei's statements and directives.

2) The Role of Knowledge and Technology Production in the Realization of the Divine Promise:

A focused study examining in greater detail the relationship between scientific and technological advancement, on the one hand, and the enhancement of soft power and the expansion of the cultural influence of the Islamic political order in the contemporary world, on the other.

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