# The Hawza and the State

The Shiite Islam, Question of Authority, Women and Geopolitics

Foreword by
Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman

Edited by:
Abdullah M.Al-Taie

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Not for Sale

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Foreword

Dr. Magdalena Kirchner:

Resident Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Amman

At the time of publication, Shi'ite political Islam, as a phenomenon catapulted onto the modern world stage in 1979, is at a crossroads. Practices and institutions of the Islamic Republic in Iran are fundamentally questioned by broad segments of society, symbolized by women burning compulsory hijabs in the streets of Tehran and all over the country. Two decades after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, shifting the local balance in favor of Shi'ite political parties, and the rise of the Popular Mobilization Forces after Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's "righteous Jihad fatwa" in 2014, Muqtada al-Sadr's return to politics might open a new chapter in the relationship between the state and religious communities. Beyond the headlines, the question arises of what Shi'ite political Islam in Iraq and Iran will look like in a post-Sistani and post-Ayatollah Ali Khamenei era. State collapse, fragmentation, and diffusion of power in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen have created a favorable environment for non-state and para-state actors blending politics and religion to mobilize domestic and regional support. At the same time, the politicization of Shi'ite religious identity in the past decades has profoundly shaped the perception of other communities and international stakeholders, leading to a heavy securitization and a conflation of sectarian and geopolitical dissent. Amid the volatility of the current situation and the

high stakes for local societies, the wider Middle East, and the international community, first-hand knowledge and insight cannot be underestimated.

"The Hawza and the State" introduces many of these dynamics yet goes beyond studies of the geopolitical and security realm. Describing a seminary for Shi'ite religious studies and, at the same time, the transmission of knowledge, the book takes inspiration from the Arab and Persian term *hawza* itself. It offers cross-country analyses of some of the most prominent state and non-state examples of Shi'ite political Islam, their rise to and occasional fall from power, and their mobilization, cooperation, and adaptation strategies. Many contributions also shed light on the social and economic development of Shi'ite communities, institutions, discourses, and identities, prominently, but not only, reflected in the ever-evolving role of women in and outside the *hawza*.

Given the scarcity of literature on Political Islam, especially in Arabic and from local experts, FES Amman started a publication series in 2007, under which a broad range of books have appeared since then, focusing on topics such as Islamist movements, radicalization, and jihadism. This could not have been achieved without the rigorous work and efforts of Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman, the team of the Politics and Society Institute, and the authors of this volume. The team of FES Amman wishes to express their heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved for contributing to this important work.

We also want to thank you, our readers, for your interest in the activities and publications of FES Amman, and we hope that the book will present you with many new insights.

Preface

Mohammad Abu Rumman:

Academic Advisor, Politics and Society Institute

The book you hold examines the geographies of Shi'ite political Islam and its social, cultural, and political dimensions. It discusses which factors led to the rise of its manifestation over the last two decades and elaborates on the security and political implications at the regional level. It also explores the interconnected dynamics of historical contexts, deeply-ingrained religious beliefs and convictions and geopolitical realities. We move beyond the traditional analyses in the Arab media that have served specific political agendas and the doctrinal writings and stereotypes existing among Sunnis and Shi'ites in the Arab world. Instead, this book presents objective, knowledge-based analyses of various issues and challenges related to the development of Shi'ism in the region.

In recent years, we have worked with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) to conduct analyses of political Islam, jihadist groups, ISIS, al-Qaeda, women in jihadism, and youth participation in Islamist and Salafist movements and other Sunni groups. Other studies have been carried out on trends in global Sufism. FES held a series of annual conferences to study these issues. I regularly served as the coordinator and advisor for these initiatives until the Politics and Society Institute was founded in Amman in 2020, which enabled a strategic partnership between us. Two publications followed: The first book dealt with the state of Islamism ten years after the Arab Spring, and the second focused on ISIS

and the shifts that took place after the fall of its caliphate. In 2022, we decided to turn to a different topic: the development and characteristics of Shi'ite political Islam, including its seminaries (*hawza*s), political parties, and movements.

Some might ask: Why this shift towards studying Shi'ite political Islam? But the question we should really be asking ourselves as researchers and specialists in Arab politics and political Islam is: Why have we waited so long to conduct a full-fledged study of Shi'ite political Islam? I am not referring here to doctrinal or theological studies of Shi'ite Islam; an enormous number of books on Islamic intellectual heritage have devoted thousands of pages to these topics. What requires further study is the contemporary phenomenon of Shi'ite political Islam in the Arab world, particularly the many interwoven factors that have shaped—and continue to shape—how Shi'ite political Islam is constituted today. We must also examine how this relates to matters of sects, history, religious schools of thought, and internal dynamics among Arab Shi'ite groups, as well as their relations with other countries and the Arab world in general. This will require us to pursue numerous interconnected questions, including relations with Iran, the role of *hawza*s, Shi'ite feminism, and Shi'ite political Islam in the region.

The Iranian revolution of 1979 was a historical turning point in the development of political Shi'ism. It enshrined the principle of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist *(Velayat-e Faqih)* as a foundation for governance, which caused major transformations in the Shi'ite political sphere inside Iran, affecting the political regime there, as well as among Shi'ite Arabs mainly in terms of their political-religious orientation.

The US occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime led to two main shifts: First, Shi'ite political forces took the reins of power in Iraq. Instead of continuing to operate as an undercover or open opposition force, they came to occupy influential positions in the country's decision-making circles. Secondly, Iranian influence expanded within the Arab world, as Iran took advantage of the situation in certain Arab countries and the regional systems that were under conflict. Power dynamics in the Arab world were redrawn into two camps: the so-called axis of moderation (which included most of the Arab ruling regimes) and the axis of resistance (which included Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Sunni political Islamist groups that operated in the orbit of Hamas and embraced a similar interpretation of political Islam).

After the Arab Spring, Iran's presence in Syria and Yemen increased, similar to Iraq and Lebanon before, and Iran became highly influential in regional politics. Its religious influence had grown since the Iranian revolution, and Tehran became a regional center, projecting power in Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Sanaa, with significant sway over Shi'ite religious organizations and local communities.

These earlier shifts were accompanied by changes in US policy, which moved from a dual containment approach vis-à-vis Iran and Iraq (during the mid-1990s) to support a regime change in Iran from within. In the context of the 11 September 2001 attacks and the ensuing neoconservative response from the White House, a new policy towards Arab Shi'ites emerged, including considerations to working with Shi'ites to counter "Sunni extremism." Former US

President Barack Obama pursued rapprochement with Iran and signed an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program, which marked a historic moment of reconciliation between the two countries for the first time since the Iranian revolution. Subsequently, his successor, President Donald Trump, withdrew from the agreement, whereas President Joe Biden resumed talks again in 2021. These ongoing shifts in US foreign policy have enabled Iran to take advantage of the political vacuum and strategic weaknesses in the Arab world in order to expand its spheres of influence.

It is important to note here that the authoritarian approach in the Arab states has also facilitated Iran's efforts to become a regional center for Shi'ite Arabs. Other contributing factors are Sunni fundamentalism, especially Salafism, which has been gaining ground in Islamist circles for a long time, and Shi'ite fundamentalism. Old sectarian conflicts have continued to plague these societies and have exacerbated divides and disputes between Sunnis and Shi'ites in Arab countries. Sectarian, ethnic, and religious factors constitute a significant threat to national security and civil peace in many Arab countries.

In turning from the international and regional level to Arab domestic politics, there are numerous questions we might raise regarding Shi'ite political Islam in this sphere. These include the role of political Islam in domestic political dynamics, especially after Shi'ites came into power in Iraq, and had more power in Yemen and Lebanon. Shi'ite groups also continue to be active in politics in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia in various forms, including in the legal-political and military spheres, as well as through networks

in many countries involving alliances with other sects, as the case with the Alawites in Syria and the Zaydis in Yemen.

Many questions remain to be answered regarding Iran's ties with Shi'ite Arabs, including Shi'ite religious authorities (*Marja*s), *hawza*s, contemporary Shi'ite political theory, and conflicts between Khomeini's school abiding by the principle of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist and other Shi'ite schools of thought that oppose the application of *Velayat-e Faqih* in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and other countries. The case of Iraq, in particular, raises various questions about the role of *hawza*s, the new youth generation, Shi'ism and consensus-based democracy, Shi'ite women's role in *hawza*s, and the pressures that *hawza*s face.

These are the kind of questions that have spurred us at the Politics and Society Institute, along with our colleagues at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, to examine the political dimensions of Shi'ism and related cultural, societal, and religious questions. These include differences between generations, the role of women, and the relationship between the ruling regimes and the people in the Arab world, considering various geopolitical factors at the international, regional, and domestic levels.

The project aims at deconstructing entrenched Arab stereotypes regarding Iran and Shi'ites. In other words, we wanted to reexamine the assumption that the question of Shi'ism is a purely ideological or doctrinal matter by drawing upon more in-depth and substantive studies from the Arab world that can help us understand the shifts and dynamics taking place among Arab Shi'ites, including those regarding their ties with Tehran. Scholarly research can shed light on such

phenomena, whether with regard to the dangers of sectarianism in the Arab world, diverse religious and political identities, security issues at the regional or national level, or matters of public culture, among many other issues that need to be studied more comprehensively in this field.

Introduction

Since the occultation of the twelfth Imam of the Shi'ites, "Al-Mahdi", in 941, the Twelver Shi'ites have chosen to retire from power, as they have maintained from the outset a position of rejection of any caliphate that does not have the infallible Imam at its head. This view was consistent with their belief that the caliphate passed by appointment from the Prophet Muhammad to Ali bin Abi Talib, from him to his sons Hassan and Hussein, and after Hussein to the infallible Imams, the most recent of whom is Imam Al-Mahdi.[1] Therefore, the Shi'ite jurisprudential position was defined by a move away from the existing authority and a refusal to collaborate with the sultan, who usurped the right of the infallible Imam. Nonparticipation was therefore considered a form of protest and a deterrent to establishing a legitimate Shi'ite state. Even though several post-Ilkhanid dynasties adopted Twelver Shiism, its characteristics rarely extended beyond admiration for the Ahl al-Bayt (Prophet Mohammed's descendants), without Twelver Shi'ism being practiced officially in these kingdoms.[2]

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1 Darwish, Ali Ibrahim. Politics and Religion in the foundation of Safavid Iran 1501-1576, Doha Institute, Beirut, Lebanon 2013, p.293. [in Arabic].

2. Mazzawi, Michael. The origin of the Safavids, Shi'ism, Sufism, and extremism, Doha Institute, Beirut, Lebanon 2018. p. 145. [in Arabic].

An important turning point, however, happened during the Safavid era in Iran, from 1501 to 1736, when the Sufi Sunni Shafi'i-rooted Safavid state adopted Twelver Shi'ite Islam as its religious identity. The recently established dynasty took this action to separate itself from other Islamic empires in the region, notably the Sunni Sufi Ottoman Empire, with which it was involved in a geostrategic conflict. It also linked the Shah to the Ahl al-Bayt to bolster his authority, particularly since most of the books of political jurisprudence demand the rule of the Qurayshi lineage. This put the Safavid Shah on equal footing with other caliphs and granted him political power in a state with a different sectarian identity, where the Shah was the deputy of the infallible Imam, i.e., the rightful ruler who must be followed.[3]

Shah Ismail's promotion of Shi'ism in his realm was a clear political maneuver. As he and his advisors, however, were unaware of Shi'ite jurisprudence when they embraced it,[4] the Shah at the time established channels of communication with Shi'ite scholars in Iraq, the Persian Gulf, and Jabal Amel (modern-day southern Lebanon). The Shah did not obtain an adequate response from Iraqi scholars, who argued that establishing a religiously-based government during the age of occultation was forbidden. This caused him to invite Shi'ite scholars from Jabal Amel, with Sheikh Ali al-Karki being one of the most notable scholars to answer.

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3. Darwish, Ali Ibrahim. Politics and Religion in the foundation of Safavid Iran 1501-1576, Doha Institute, Beirut, Lebanon 2013, p.278. [in Arabic].
4. Colin Turner, Shiism, and transformation in the Safavid Era, AlJamal Press, Baghdad, Iraq 2008 p. 133. [in Arabic].

Ali al-Karki spread Twelver theology in Persia, but religious authority remained firmly in the hands of Shah Ismail until the end of his reign. Al-Karki formulated his thesis that makes him a "deputy of the infallible Imam," a non-political but religious position.[5] Since that time, the role of the jurist has undergone numerous modifications. One of the most significant was Shah Tahmasp bin Ismail's acceptance of the total guardianship of the jurist and Al-Karki's official assumption of the position of deputy of the infallible Imam.[6] Although Al-Karki didn't come up with the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* at the time of occultation, he was the first to put it into effect. This was also consistent with the desire of Shah Tahmasp to minimize the military and religious power of his entourage.[7]

Subsequently, the jurist's role encountered numerous obstacles. With the ascension of Shah Ismail II, who had displayed pro-Sunni tendencies, was hostile towards Shi'ite jurists, and reintroduced the Sunnism faith, this religious and political position began to weaken. It was challenged multiple times in the following centuries.[8] During the reign of Nadir Shah (1722-1763), the first Afsharid emperor,

5. Colin Turner, Shiism, and transformation in the Safavid Era, AlJamal Press, Baghdad, Iraq 2008 p. 149. [in Arabic].
6. Darwish, Ali Ibrahim. Politics and Religion in the foundation of Safavid Iran 1501-1576, Doha Institute, Beirut, Lebanon 2013, p.14. [in Arabic].
7. Darwish, Ali Ibrahim. Politics and Religion in the foundation of Safavid Iran 1501-1576, Doha Institute, Beirut, Lebanon 2013, p.364. [in Arabic].
8. Colin Turner, Shiism, and transformation in the Safavid Era, AlJamal Press, Baghdad, Iraq 2008 p. 174. [in Arabic].

Shi'ite scholars were persecuted, resulting in the exodus of thousands to Karbala and Najaf.[9]

In conclusion, the role of the jurist in Iran has undergone modifications and challenges that have at times expanded and at other times constrained his authority. The jurists were also instrumental in changing the scene at times, particularly with their emergence as leaders of the Islamic opposition, as in the constitutional revolution of 1905-1909 under the rule of the Qajars, in which the jurists of the seminaries played a significant role. Following the change and development of these roles, Shi'ite Islamic political movements emerged, such as the ones leading the 1920 revolution in Iraq. What is remarkable about these movements, which the *Hawza*'s scholars supported at the time, is that they adopted discourses of nation or homeland, rather than a sectarian one, in order to challenge foreign influence agendas that sought to undermine Islamic identity.[10]

Much has changed since 1979, when Imam Khomeini led the Islamic Revolution in Iran to depose Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. In the Middle East, the revolution represents a historical turning point. Because it witnessed the Shi'ite Islamism reaching the summit of the power pyramid, and the rise of Islamists in the region's societies in general. Also, the revolution has been a source of inspiration and

9. Saed, Haidar. Arab Shi'a: Identity and Citizenship, Doha Institute, Beirut, Lebanon 2019 p. 244. [in Arabic].
10. For more information read: Naqash, Yitzhak, The Shi'is of Iraq, Princeton University Press, Princeton,NJ. 1995.

optimism, especially after the numerous failures in the region to construct a modern state, and the attendant defeatism after the setback of 1967.

What is crucial to understand from this is that after gaining power, Imam Khomeini attempted to apply "absolute guardianship of the jurist" rather than the prevailing theories about the guardianship of the jurist. Unlike other theories such as "restricted guardianship of the jurist" or "guardianship of the nation over itself," Khomeini lectured his theory when he was in Najaf. There, it had also been lectured before by the scholar Mawla Al-Naraqi (1771-1829) who found in the role of jurists not only a religious position that gives politicians legitimacy, but also the right to assume direct political roles.[11]

Khomeini believed that revolutionary action should replace waiting for the return of the Imam. Waiting was doomed to failure, according to him, and therefore a government of experts or Velayat-e Faqih must establish the just state on behalf of the absent Imam[12] . Khomeini's Velayat-e Faqih (which mimics the Mahdi's government in the time of occultation) is a political function and a right to govern, so

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11. Taher, Ali. The Embers of Governance: Iraqi Shiites and Nation-State Building Challenges in the Post-2003 Era, Darelrafidayn, Beirut 2017, p.101. [in Arabic].
12. Halm, Heinz. Shi'ism, Al-Warrak Publishing, Baghdad 2011, p.147. [in Arabic].

that he has the powers and the rights of the Prophet and the Imams, but without extending to the value or rank in which the Prophet and the infallible Imams are distinguished.[13]

It is worth noting that the success of Khomeini's revolution was applauded by many in Shi'ite seminaries, and some changed their opinion of the jurist's absolute guardianship after it had been condemned initially. Some of them even developed a theory that combines absolute jurisprudence with the guardianship of the nation on itself through Shura, as Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr did in his book "The Caliphate of Man and the Testimony of the Prophets", which discussed in detail a civil rule with a religious restriction.

Another event that transformed the region was the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which Vali Nasr called the most central chapter in the modern history of Shi'ites since the Iranian revolution.[14] However, the need to emphasize identification - particularly at the political level - led to the continuation of a sectarianism-based political custom that persists to this day.

13. Taher, Ali. The Embers of Governance: Iraqi Shiites and Nation-State Building Challenges in the Post-2003 Era, Darelrafidayn, Beirut 2017, p.108. [in Arabic].
14. Nasr, Vali. The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future, W. W. Norton & Company; Reprint edition (April 17, 2007).

This rise of Shiite political Islam was followed by other factors that led to the continuous emergence of Shi'ites' political involvement in politics in the region, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah's military successes in the 2006 war with Israel, which strengthened its presence in Lebanon's internal political equation. And this was followed by Shiite forces being active in the Arabian Peninsula after the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011.

This historical narrative, which witnessed several Shi'ite political movements, leads us to Shi'ite philosophy, which contains various political ideas, interpretations, and in-depth arguments centered on the Shi'ites' political involvement in the occultation era. These disputes, for their part, produce questions and disagreements concerning the ruler's and jurist's responsibilities and powers. The *Hawza* is a Twelver Shi'ite academic institution where students receive jurisprudential, linguistic, logical, and other sciences, and it has a gradual educational system similar to universities, with each stage concluding with a scientific license to qualify for the next stage. *Hawza* scholars instruct these pupils with high status marja; the highest level of Twelver Shi'ite authority, who provide advice and make decisions on religious, social, and political questions. In addition to being an educational institution, the *Hawza* is also a spiritual-doctrinal center where followers of the marja demonstrate obedience and loyalty.[15]

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15. Abdulmawlam, Ali. Arab Shi'a: Identity and Citizenship, Doha Institute, Beirut, Lebanon 2019 p.242. [in Arabic].

The *Hawza* produced religious leaders with significant political roles, at times controlling the scene, at times paying the price for their often-dogmatic beliefs. Shi'ite political thought was always a source of contention and debate within the hawza, such as the concept of Velayat-e Faqih, which originated there but was also opposed or criticized in the hawza.

This brief historical context may explain the motivations for the release of this book and the selection of its title "Hawza and State". These structural transformations (intellectually and politically) and the accompanying Shi'ite geopolitical transformations (in the region following the Iraq War and the Arab Spring) prompted a discussion and analysis of developments in the field of Shi'ite political Islam, with a focus on reading the Shi'ite scene in power and researching the reality of its experience, behavior, and future presence.

In an effort to predict the future, it was crucial to comprehend the mechanisms of transformation that occurred during the Shi'ite political experience in opposition before 1979 and the power struggle, both at the level of discourse and political action.

In the middle of current events in the experience of Shi'ite Islamists in power, internal and external tensions cast doubt on the experience's continuation and necessitate a revisiting and evaluation. It is no secret that many intellectual and po-

litical elite circles are demanding the need to reassess and redefine the political role of the Shi'ite Islamism, which is accompanied by the escalation of protests (from within the Shi'ite house) in Iran, Iraq, and to a lesser extent Lebanon against the Shi'ite elite and in addition to protests from other sects against accumulated Shi'ite power.

Therefore, the book, written by experts in the affairs of Shi'ism and Shi'ite political Islam, is divided into eight chapters. They address many of the above mentioned questions, especially regarding political power, which is the most prominent and important transformation in the post-colonial journey of Shi'ism, the views and roles of the seminaries, authority in Shi'ite political thought, a number of Shi'ite political experiences in the Middle East,[16] and the transformation of Shi'ite geopolitics in light of a changing regional and international environment, especially after the Arab Spring, in addition to studying women in the hawza and Shi'ite political parties, and concluding with the Jordanian vision of these Shi'ite interactions taking place in the region.

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16. The term (Shi'ites) in the contemporary concept refers to Shiite (Twelver), but addressing the experience of the Houthi movement movement (Zaidi) in Yemen comes within the framework of political Shi'ism that Iran is trying to redefine the movement with (i.e. transforming the Houthi movement into Twelver Shi'ism), which is illustrated by the sixth chapter that deals with the experience of the movement, which controls the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, until writing these words.

Chapter One: Governance in Shi'ite Political Thought

Mohsen Kadivar focuses in his paper on three main issues: The Imamate in Shi'ite political thought, justice as an element associated with the existence of the ruler, and Shi'ite political thought after the occultation of the Imams.

Kadivar discusses the issue of the political power of the Imam, who he believes not to be appointed but rather elected. He argues that Prophet Muhammad was an appointed (chosen by God) leader of Islam, yet his political authority in Medina was elected after the Ansar invited him there. He states this reflected on Ali bin Abi Talib as well, but the separation between political rule and spiritual leadership had become absent among Shi'ite clergymen. He also discusses justice as one of the core issues in the Shi'ite Imamate. Its association with political thought was the necessity of a ruler and a just state and grants the right to protest and revolt against an unjust or corrupt ruler. The paper also reviews the stages of development of the Imam's role in the occultation period, which is witnessing to this day intense discussions. He concludes with what Iran has reached at the hands of Imam Ruhollah Khomeini in his adoption of the absolute Velayat-e Faqih, and points out here that this concept was - and remains - only supported by a minority of Shi'ite jurisprudence.

Chapter Two: Political Islam in Iran: The Aftermath of the Revolution and Challenges of Governance

This chapter examines the reality of the Iranian experience and its future prospects in the midst of the debates taking place about the power experience in its intellectual and political dimensions, and sheds light on the issue of the role of the *Hawza* and educational institutions in political orientation and polarization, and discusses the issue of its transition from independence to political dependence.

In his paper, Ali Mamouri presents a brief reading of the main milestones experienced by the Shi'ite political Islam in Iran. Mamouri argues that the system of government in the original Shi'ite political jurisprudence is a postponed issue linked to the presence of the infallible Imam, who without being as the head of power the state is considered illegitimate, and therefore the Shi'ite jurists dealt with the authority as a fait accompli without trying to adopt or confront the rule, but the Safavid-Ottoman conflict overturned much of the equation.

Ali Mamouri points out that the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and the resulting Islamic system were not a coincidence but were preceded by social and political movements amid the vicissitudes of identity between heritage and modernity, under a political system that was described as dictatorial, which prompted the collective dream of restoring the role of religion that was in the era of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali. Since 1979, Iran has been witnessing

important debates that have hit the essence of its political existence and deep controversies, such as those who called for the Islamization of society instead of the Islamization of the political system, and those who saw the Islamization of the system and society as two necessities that should take place simultaneously.

Al-Mamouri concludes that the criterion for survival or decay lies in the ability to adapt and coexist with the modern world's new political and societal environment, especially since the experience underwent many changes and developments were imposed by social and political transformations forcibly.

In the second paper, Sari Hanafi presents a vision on the dialectic of centralization and decentralization of the *Hawza* and religious education in Iran and its exposure to the problem of the transition from independence to subordination to the political institution. Over the course of his paper Hanafi mentions that the seminaries and educational institutions in general after 1979, Iran's generous funding and political control reduced their independence from the political power. As a condition for keeping funds going, Tehran imposes certain approach on the seminaries, as happened with Sayyid Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, a prominent Lebanese Shi'ite figure whom Iran tried to marginalize through cooptation. Hanafi points out that Iran is no longer practicing political Shi'ism, but has also moved to real-Shi'ism, as is happening in Syria, where seminaries and Husseiniyas have begun to be

active in all areas controlled by the Syrian regime, regardless of whether there are Syrian Shi'ites or not. It has also repeatedly tried through its seminaries to influence the Najaf *Hawza*, and after the *Hawza* in Najaf maintained its traditional positions, Iran chose to influence Shi'ite seminaries and scientific institutions in Lebanon.

Chapter Three: Shi'ites in Iraq - the Political Action and the Question of Identity

Aqeel Abbas' chapter focuses on Shi'ites in Iraq; the Political Action and the Question of Identity. Here he argued that the ideological discourse of the Iraqi Shiite political Islam parties is based on employing ethical dualism to form its political and religious legitimacy, and this ethical dualism is connected to the narrative of grievances, which is foundational in the structure of Shiism as a religious and political belief and later turned into a doctrine.

The discourse of the Iraqi Shiite political Islam parties related to the nation has changed. Before 2003, it highlighted grievances towards the West or towards the secular regime ruled by Saddam. Soon things turned around after 2003 and the forces of Shi'ite political Islam rose to power. According to Abbas the discourse here started to focus on their superiority over the Sunnis, the oppression from foreign injustice, which sought to fight Islam and the modernization of Islamic identity, and the Sunni injustice from more than 1400 years ago and until the rise of the Baath Party era in 2003.

Abbas concludes in his paper that the dependence of Shi'ite political Islam forces on identity as the basis for their political legitimacy is a temporary bet, which was proven in the past few years. The real challenge to these parties will be getting out of the deep identity tunnel as a political program to material achievement, economically, serviceably and institutionally, as a criterion for political performance and a way to electoral victory.

Chapter Four: Hezbollah in Lebanon: Between Democracy and Militancy

In his paper "The Hezbollah Model: Eras and Phases of Political Action", Muhannad Hajj Ali discusses that regional transformations and the Lebanese sectarian framework are more influential than ideology in defining Hezbollah's transitions and entering of the political process. For example, the party had to compromise ideologically in terms of accepting the Lebanese regime and organizing alliances that allowed the organization to protect its weapons in exchange for trade-offs taking place in the Lebanese arena. But Hajj Ali argues that religious doctrine remains useful for the party within the framework of controlling and polarizing its popular base, at a time when the party has moved to the stage of political work and alliance with forces without any considerations other than their position on its weapons and its ability to provide political cover for an activity that is no longer limited to the southern borders of Lebanon, but now includes the region and carries with its repercussions on Lebanon's foreign relations. According to Haj Ali, this expansion of the regional role or function in favor of Iran

was only possible with the political cover available due to formations and a combination of factors available within the Lebanese arena that served the party.

Chapter Five: Shi'ite Political Islam in the Arabian Peninsula

The chapter highlights the model of the Houthi movement as an armed group and major player in the political situation in Yemen and the capital Sanaa and the model of Al-Wefaq Society in Bahrain, which once dominated the legislative authority there but ended up being outlawed.

Ahmed Nagi argues in his paper that internal and regional factors played an important role in Houthi movement's rise to power in the Yemeni scene. The weakness of the central government, sharp political divisions among Yemeni political parties, and difficult economic conditions were all important factors that paved the way for the rise of Houthi movement. The external support the movement receives from Iran has enabled it to develop its military capabilities during the war. But Nagi points out an important point: These factors are dynamic in nature and can turn at any moment against the movement. This opens up the question about the movement's political future and how it can survive in a rapidly-changing future.

Regarding the relationship between the Houthi movement movement and Iran, Nagi says that it is more political than ideological; because Houthi movement is a Zaidi movement

and not Shi'ites in the contemporary sense. However, attempts to convert Zaydism into Twelver Shi'ism exist, and since the Houthi movement is not a solid bloc, but rather multiple factions, the factions closer to Iran control the movement's decisions. Revealing this shift is neither in the interest of Iran nor the movement due to national and political considerations.

Abdullah Al-Jabour reviewed in his paper the emergence of Shi'ite political Islam movements in Bahrain and the factors affecting their rise and decline, in addition to their relationship with the authority and the ruling regime. He focuses on the experience of Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, as the most prominent and recent contemporary Shi'ite political Islam movement in Bahrain, whose political experience was accompanied by controversy and collision with the ruling regime.

The paper concludes that the geopolitical location of Bahrain and the external interference in Bahraini affairs - made it adopt a cautious democratic transformation path after the monarchy phase. Although Al-Wefaq presented itself in a political, democratic and civil manner, its practice was characterized by a sectarian religious identity. The splits within Al-Wefaq had a significant impact on its political performance in the parliament and in its international relations, also they have resulted in ending its experience inside Bahrain on charges of political sectarianism. Despite all this, the group still has a political presence and contact with Bahraini society and influences it.

Chapter Six: Shi'ite Geopolitics: Exporting the Revolution and Challenges of a Changing Environment

Imad Abshanas argues that Iran ultimately emerged from insisting on the old idea of Shi'ite clerics that everyone should be Twelver Shi'ites, to the idea of dealing with different intellectual trends in the region, even those who are not Shi'ite and not in harmony with Twelver Shi'ite thought. This trend has become the most powerful element of Iranian foreign policy today, and Iranian influence is now expanding because of it, even though Iran's opponents have enormous potential that cannot be compared with Iran in general. All this depends on the vision of the political pragmatism of the Islamic Revolution and its adaptation to different circumstances and flexibility towards ideological orientations so it is not focused on one orientation only. This makes it more powerful because they believe that the success of Iran comes from its influence on people not through war.

Firas Elias discusses Shi'ite geopolitics in light of regional and international challenges and changes. He argues that Iran tried to link the vitality of Shi'ite geopolitics with the political rise of Shi'ites in the region, in addition to supporting the rise of political Islam in general. On this basis, Iran tried to exploit this rise to support and strengthen its own geopolitics. Shi'ite geopolitics contributed to the process of launching the wave of contemporary politicization, based on religious identity, one of the geopolitical functions performed by Shi'ites at the present time, by linking theory and practice in the contexts of Iran's strategic mind. The Shi'ite geopolitical strategy also sought to increase attempts to influence and expand

the sphere of influence of Shi'ite areas, starting from Iran, as a viable strategy to unify Shi'ite communities and give them the elements of power and control.

Chapter Seven: The Shi'a Political Islam and the Question of Women's Role

Ilham Makki presents an anthropological paper titled "Self-Formation and Gender Role Shifts in the Lives of Shi'ite Islamic Women within the seminaries" and in it she explores in depths the lives of *Hawza* women, which are somewhat ambiguous. Makki concludes her paper that perceptions of gender change according to general contexts, and that the new roles resulted in a new status for women. Also, the political change in Iraq in 2003 imposed a new reality on the roles and status of Shi'ite Islamic women.

Despite the limited activities acceptable for women, they have contributed, according to Makki, to a change in the essence of traditional gender standards, especially since the environment provided by the *Hawza* is almost non-existent in government institutions. She also sheds light on different forms and different levels of patriarchal opposition to the participation of women into the public sphere and joining the *Hawza* and the subsequent change in gender roles.

While Dalal Al-Bizri addresses the reality of Shi'ite women in Lebanon in light of the presence of the two poles of the sect (Hezbollah, the Amal Movement) and sheds light on what she calls "the other Shi'ite women", which are outside

the framework of the Shi'ite dualists, who we do not find occupying official positions because they do not belong to them, she sees Shi'ism as part of her public identity and considers her placement under the category of Shi'ite political Islam a derogation of her existence - as Al-Bizri says. She also focuses on the role of women, their representation and effectiveness within Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, and Al-Bizri believes that there are many paradoxes: Shi'ite women, like other Lebanese women, have acquired the right of leaving the house many decades ago, for purposes such as education, work and participation in public political affairs. On the other hand, on the ground, they are exposed to some ideas and ways of living imposed on them by a fundamentalist party that Al-Bizri described as extremists, with the participation of a less powerful and extremist sectarian party (as in the case of the hijab). Within this paradox, there is a dynamic, the exact size of which is unknown, but it is expected that it will have one day s quasi-conflict which could be Silent, or with more changes if it had more affects.

Chapter Eight: Jordanian Foreign Policy and Shi'ite Political Islam

In his paper on Jordan's view of Iran and its allies in the region, Alaa Aqel identifies a number of key determinants for Jordan's relationship with Iran – after the Islamic Revolution. In part, they are related to the nature of Jordanian politics, or what Aqel called the "Jordanian personality." Such as nationalist thought, historical experience, geopolitical posi-

tion, the Palestinian cause, the relationship with global and regional powers, and other factors related to the nature of the historical experience with Iran since the revolution, the relationship has always been characterized by suspicion and tension as a result of Iranian rhetoric and political behavior, both of which put Jordan in a position of rivalry and hostility.

Aqel argues that Jordan cannot build relations with Iran's regional allies in isolation from Iran. This further complicates Jordanian-Shi'ite relations in the region, as the relationship with Iran was witnessing improvement whenever Iran pursued "rational" policies and not policies of "expansion and hegemony", and that the Jordanian position towards Iran and its allies cannot be separated from the counter-position taken by Jordan's allies towards Iran (such as Saudi Arabia and the US). An improvement of Jordanian-Iranian relations requires Iran to take serious steps towards strengthening relations based on security and strategic understandings before engaging in economic cooperation.

Chapter I

Governance in Shi'ite Political Thought

An Analysis of Shi'ite Political Thought

Mohsen Kadivar

Introduction

I repeatedly heard my mentor Ayatollah *Hussain Ali* Montazeri (1922-2009), during his teachings narrating from his mentor Ayatollah Sayyid Hossein Borujerdi (1875-1961) - the most distinguished Shi'ite authority in the 20th century: "The Shi'i fiqh (doctrine) and hadith[1] is like a footnote (*hāshiya*) on Sunni fiqh and fatwas[2]."[3] The statement was used to emphasize the necessity for Shi'ite fuqaha[4] to have knowledge on Sunni hadiths, fatwas, and context in order to gain a better and correct understanding of Shi'ite Imams' hadiths and early Shi'ite jurists' fatwas.

This is an important point to understand the texts of the minorities that have lived for a thousand years under the rule of the Sunni majority administration. The product of this overview resulted in comparative *fiqh* which could be found in *Al-Mabsut* or *Al-Khilaf* by Shaykh al-Taʾifah al-Tusi (995-1067), also *Tadhkirat ul-Fuqaha* by al-Allama al-Hilli

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1. Hadith: the record of the words, actions, and silent approval of the prophet Muhammad as transmitted through a group of narrators.
2. Fatwa: the rulings by recognized religious authority on a point of Islamic law.
3. Ayatollah Montazeri Najafabadi, Hussain Ali, *Mabani wa sabk-e Ayatollah Bourjerdi* (the principles and style of Ayatollah Bourjerdi) interview, **Hawzeh** bi-monthly, Qom, Vol. 8, no. 43-44, April -May 1991, p. 942.
4. Fuqaha: the plural of Faqih and means the jurists.

(1250-1325), also it was mentioned recently in the works of Borujerdi himself and his students such as Montazeri.

The relationship between Shi'ite political thought and Sunni political thought was explained by Ayatollah Borujerdi above through the *footnote strategy and based on it* the Shi'ite ulama[5] highlighted and expanded their doctrinal points in their comments on Sunni political thought. These doctrinal points are two: Imamate[6] and Justice, which have shaped the Shi'ite denomination's doctrine and its political philosophy.

Imamate, the first doctrinal element of Shi'ite political thought

There are three branches of Shi'ite Islam (Ja'faris, Zaydis, and Isma'ilis), but the focus of the paper is on Ja'faris, which constitutes the strong majority of Shi'ite Muslims. The other names of Ja'faris *are Imāmīyyah* and *Ithna 'Asharis* (*Twelvers*) – those who believe in the Twelve Imams as *usul al-madhab* (principles of Shi'ite theological school). It means that Imamate is one of the vital elements or the first and the most important factor in Shi'ite Islam. We know that the first crisis after the death of the Prophet in 632 and the division of Islam into two branches -Sunni and Shi'ite- was the discussion about who will hold the position of the Prophet Muhammad's successor.

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5. Ulama: the plural of 'ālim' Religious scholars.
6. Imamate: leadership of the Muslim Community.

The issue has at least three dimensions: historical, theological, and political. Abu Bakr b. Abi Quhafa (573-634) the father-in-law of the Prophet and his cave companion[7] (Q. 9:40) came to power as the first caliph (*Khalifat Rasul Allah*) or the successor of God's messenger, and this is the historical dimension of the issue.[8]

From the Sunni theological perspective, there is no difference between Sunni theology and the historical event. From the Shi'ite theological perspective, Ali ibn Abi Talib (600-661) the prophet's cousin, his son-in-law, and his companion in *Laylat al-Mabit* (the night he slept in the Prophet's bed risked his life for Muhammad's safe escape from Mecca) (Q. 2:207) [9] was the first Imam and the real successor of the Prophet. The Shi'ite refers here to a few Qur'anic verses and some Prophetic hadith[10] to appoint Ali

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7. When Muslims migrated from Mecca to Medina, Abu Bakr accompanied the prophet, and they took refuge in a cave.

8. Look at Ayoub, Mahmoud. ***The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam*** (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003); and Madelung, Wilferd. ***The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate***. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

9. Al-Hakim al-Niyshaburi, Muhammad b. ʿAbd Allah. ***Al-Mustadrak ʿala l-Saḥihayn***. (ed. by Muṣṭafa ʿAbd al-Qadir ʿAṭa. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.t.). 3:5.

10. Look at al-Tusi, Nasir al-Din Muhammad b. Muhammad. ***Tajrid al-'I'tiqad***. (ed. Muhmmad Jawad al-Husseini al-Jalali. Qom: Maktab al-A'lam al-Islami, 1987), Section 5: *al-Imama*, pp. 223-241. For Sunni commentary look at Al-Isfahani, Shams al-Din Mahmoud b. Abd al-Rahman. ***Tasdid al-Qawa'id fi sharh Tajrid al-'Aqayid***. (ed. Khalid b. Hammad al-'Adnani. Kuwait: Dar al-Diya', 2012). 1065-1164; For Shi'ite commentary look at: al-'Allamah al-Hilli, al-Hassan b. Yusuf. ***Kashf al-Murad fi sharh Tajrid al-'I'tiqad.*** (ed. Hassan Hassanzadeh Amoli. Qom: Mu'ssisisa al-Nashr al-Islami, 2011). 495-538.

as his successor. The Sunnis accept the occasion of revelation of some of those verses on Ali's right to be the successor, also they accept the *Ghadir Khumm* hadith[11] as *mutawatir*[12] hadith[13] in which the Prophet has said exactly: "Anyone whose *mawla* is me, then 'Ali is his *mawla*". Here everyone including the greatest companions pledged their allegiance to Ali, and Abu Bakr and 'Umar ibn al-Khattab were among the first companions who congratulated him.[14]

What does *Mawla* mean in this *mutawatir* hadith? Sunnis said it means friendship or companionship, and Shi'ites said it means the guardianship or leadership or authority. Both of them are correct literally. The Prophet did not appoint anyone as his successor and did not issue any kind of will in this regard, according to Sunni theology. The Shi'ites

11. *Ghadir Khumm* hadith has been narrated in four of six major authentic hadith compilations **al-Sihah al-Sitta**: **Sahih Muslim** (four hadiths), **Sunan Ibn Majah** (two hadiths), **Sunan Tirmadi** (one hadith), **al-Sunan al-Kubra** by al-Nisa'i (more than five hadiths) as well as **Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal** (at least seventeen hadiths), and **Ansab al-Ashraf by Baladari** (six hadiths).
12. A hadith is said to be *mutawatir* if it was reported by a significant, though unspecified, number of narrators at each level in the chain of narration, thus reaching the succeeding generation through multiple chains of narration leading back to its source. In other words, a *mutawatir* hadith is reported by such a large number of narrators that cannot be perceived to have jointly forged and narrated a tradition about an issue without a compelling force.
13. Al-Dhahabi, Shams al-Din Muhammad b. Ahmad. **Siyar A'lam al-Nubala**, 8:334-335 (chief editor: Sha'ib al-Arnout, Beirut:al-Risalah, 1982); and al-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din. **Al-Azhar al-Mutanathirah fi Ahadith al-Mutawatirah**. No. 100, pp. 37-38 ([Cayro]: Dar al-Ta'lif).
14. Look at Amini, Abd al-Hussein. **Masu'a al-Ghadir fi al-Kitab wa al-Sunna wa al-adab**. (ed. Al-Sayyid Mahmoud al-Shahroudi. Qom: Mu'assisa Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-fiqh al-Islami tibqan li madhab ahl al-Bayt, 2009, in 14 volumes.

criticized their counterpart that announcing "friendship" and taking a pledge of allegiance on it was meaningless. In contrast, they believe God has appointed Ali as the successor of the Prophet, and the Prophet has announced this fact to the people, in addition to appointing Ali as his trustee (*wasiyy*).[15] The theological conflict is beyond the scope of this paper.[16]

Before starting the political discussion, there is a big question here: Do the Sunni caliphate and the Shi'ite Imamate have the same understanding regarding the political successorship to the prophet, or does this understanding take on a different meaning in these two denominations? The answer is affirmative from the Sunni perspective, while it is negative from the Shi'ite perspective. Muhammad ibn Abdullah had at least three dimensions or aspects. First, he was the Prophet and Messenger of God (PBUH). Second, he was the political ruler of Arabia in his time. Third, he possessed a formative mandate (*al-wilayat al-takwini*). According to Sunni theology, the first dimension had ended with the Prophet's death. Therefore, any successorship after the Prophet should be confined to political rulership only and nothing else.

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15. Al-Muddafar, Muhammad Rida. '*Aqayid al-Imamiyya*. (Qom: Ansariyan, 2008). 66-67.
16. For more information look at Sobhani, Ja'far. **Doctrines of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices**. Translated and edited by Reza Shah-Kazemi. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001, pp. 96-120.

From the Islamic mystical perspective (Sufism), although the prophetic revelation was ended by the death of the Prophet, the other types of revelation and inspiration (*ilham*), as well as the third dimension of the Prophet (formative mandate), have been continued through the Sufi masters. They called themselves the successors of the esoteric prophetic knowledge and of his spiritual guardianship. All the mystical Sufi circles (Sufi *tariqa*) including all Sunni Sufis except one[17] are linked to the Prophet through Ali ibn Abi Talib. This means that for almost all Sunni Sufis, Ali is the second Saint of Islam. Sufism transcends the Sunni-Shi'ite conflict.[18]

From the Shi'ite perspective, the Imam is the successor of the Prophet in all of his dimensions except the Prophetic revelation (*al-wahy al-risali*). Therefore, the Imam is the successor of the Prophet in these aspects: First, he is the successor of the Prophet in the authentic interpretation of the Qur'an and Prophetic Tradition. According to this dimension, the Imams are the third source of Islam (after the Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition). Second, the Imams - same as the Prophet - could be the political rulers of their times. Third, the Imams were the Islamic Saints and they have also obtained a formative mandate.

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17. Naqshbandiyya in one of its later chain of permissions.
18. For more information look at Chittick, William C. **Sufism, A Beginner's Guide**, (Oneworld, 2008).

Similar to the scholars and the Sufis, the first and third dimensions of Imamate are positions being awarded on the basis of talent and they are not being bestowed upon elections. Discussing them is beyond the scope of this paper. But for the political rulership of the Imamate, was it appointive or elective? It was the successorship of the Prophet, and the answer here depends on our approach to the prophecy and on the Prophet's leadership. Most of the Messengers of God were not political rulers of their times. The Prophethood of Muhammad b. Abdullah (prophet Muhammad) was appointive, but his rulership in Madinah was elective. He was invited by the *Ansar* (Helpers)[19] and there he was elected by all Muslims. Imams as political rulers should be elected by the people too, because this role of being a political ruler was different from being an authentic source of Islamic knowledge and Islamic Sainthood.

Practically, Ali ibn Abi Talib was not the political ruler in the time of the three of Righteous (Rashidun) Caliphs (632-656), although he was the Shi'ite Imam (third source of Islamic knowledge and Islamic Saint). He was the political ruler (Caliph for all Muslims) for about five years (656-661). Ali was elected directly by the public of Muslims in his time. There are several pieces of evidence that Ali himself believed in the consent of people (*ridā al-nās*) as the necessary condition of legitimate rulership which means 'elective political imamate'.

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19. The local inhabitants of Medina who helped the prophet and his followers when they immigrated from Mecca.

When he was asked to be the Caliph, he responded: "My pledge of allegiance) Bay'ah(should not be hidden and is only made with the consent of the Muslims."[20] So, he took the satisfaction of Muslims into consideration and made the political Imamate emerge from it. In one of his letters in *Nahj al-Balagha* he clearly expressed: "Shura[21] is only for the Emigrants (*Muhajirun*)[22] and the Helpers (*Ansar*), so if they gather around a man and name him an Imam, that is God's pleasure."[23] This means that rulership is an elective position. It is consistent with the other parts of *Nahj al-Balaghah[24]*, and Shi'ite theology that Ali considered himself the religious and political successor of the Prophet, whose right has been usurped.

Before his martyrdom, Ali was asked: "(If we lost you,) shall we pledge allegiance to al-Hassan?" He answered: "I neither command nor forbid, you know better."[25] This is another confirmation of elective political imamate. In his will to his sons, there is nothing but moral advice.[26] Also,

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20. Al-Tabari. *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk.* 4:427 (edited by Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim, Cairo: Dar-al-Ma'ārif).

21. Shura means a consultative council or assembly or the process of decision-making by consultation and deliberation.

22. *Muhajirun* the early Muslim who immigrated from Mecca to Yathrib (later Madinah) in July 622.

23. Al-Sharif al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha*. letter 6, 357 (edited by Subhi Salih, Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 2004)

24. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha*. sermon 97, p. 143; sermon 154, p. 215-216; sermon 173, p. 247-248; sermon 192, p 300-301, and sermon 3, p. 48-50.

25. Al-Tabari. *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk.* 5:146-147.

26. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha*. Letter 31: his will to al-Hassan, 391-406; Letter 47: his will to al-Hassanain. 421-422.

Imam Ali did not mention the appointment of a successor after him in his public will.[27]

Imam al-Hassan ibn Ali (625-670) known as *al-Mujtaba* the second Shi'ite Imam (661-670) was the political ruler for about six months in 661. He was elected by the people too. In his letter to Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan (605-680), Imam al-Hasan clearly expressed that "the Muslims chose him after the death of his father."[28] All of the other Shi'ite Imams were never political rulers. Practically the Shi'ite Imams were political rulers only for five years (656-661), while they held the other dimensions of Imamate (the third source of authentic Islamic knowledge and Islamic Sainthood) for about two centuries and a half (632-874: by the beginning of the minor occultation). This means that political rulership was not the main element of the Shi'ite Imamate, although- from the Shi'ite perspective- the Shi'ite Imams were the most eligible candidates for rulership in their times and its actuality occurred by the people's consent.

The separation of the political rulership as an elective human position of Muhammad from his Prophethood as an appointive divine position was not acknowledged by Muslim scholars until the early 20th century. The book "*Islam and the*

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27. "Al-Hassan Ibn Ali was his father's guardian in family affairs, endowments, and alms". Al-Mufid, Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Nu'man. **al-Irshad fi ma'rifa hujj Allah 'ala al-'ibad**. (Qom: Dar al-Mufid, 2010). 2:7.

28. Abu l-Faraj al-Isfahani Ali b. al-Hussein. **Maqatil al-Talibiyyin**. (ed. al-Sayyid Ahmad Saqar. Beirut: al-A'lami, 2006). 66.

Foundations of Governance"[29] (1925) by Ali Abdel-Raziq (1888-1966) was a turning point in this subject. In Shi'ite Islam, there were the same viewpoints.[30] The mainstream by the late 20th century did not separate political rulership from spiritual leadership (the third source of Islamic knowledge as well as Islamic Sainthood) in Shi'ite Imams. The first Shi'ite perspective of the separation of political rulership as a human matter from the other two aspects of Shi'ite Imams was my discursive paper on 'Shi'ism and democracy' which was published in November 2003.[31]

From the Shi'ite perspective, Political Imamate is crystallized in the rulership of *Amir al-Mu'minin[32]* Ali ibn Abi Talib. His administration methods in detail were reported in historical books. Also, his sermons, letters, and short statements were compiled separately. The most famous compilation of his works is *Nahj al-Balagha[33]* by al-

29. Abd al-Raziq, Ali. ***Al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm***. (Intro: Ammar Ali Hassan. Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Misri, Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 2012). English translation: Abdel Razek, Ali. ***Islam and the Foundations of Political Power***. tr. Loutfi, Maryam. ed. Abdu Filali-Ansary. Scotland: Edinburg University, 2013.

30. Mehdi Bazargan (1907-1995) in his last book "*The Hereafter and God, the Purpose of Prophets' Missions*" (*Ākherat wa Khoda Hadaf-e Fe'that-e Anbiyā*) (1992) reached this conclusion that politics and management of this temporal world were not the purpose of prophetic mission.

31. "Shi'ism and democracy", debate between Hatam Qaderi and Mohsen Kadivar, ***Yass-e Now*** daily, Tehran, Nov 2003, later in Kadivar, Mohsen, ***Shari'at and Siyasat*** (Shari'at and Politics: Religion in Public domain), Webbook, 2009, 397-419.

32. *Amir al-Mu'minin* literally means the leader of believers or the commander of faithful.

33. *Nahj al-Balagha* literally means "Peak of Eloquence".

Sharif al-Radi, Muḥammad bin al-Ḥusayn (970-1016)[34] it is the best-known collection of sermons, letters, and sayings of Imam Ali based on the criterion of the art of eloquence (*al-balagha*). Also, the book *Musnad Amir al-Mu'minin al-Imam Abi al-Hassan Ali ibn Abi Talib* which comprises 27 volumes is a collection of his work.[35] A major part of these two books is what we call Shi'ite political thought or Shi'ite political ethics. The most detailed document is the letter 53 in *Nahj al-Balagha,* Imam Ali's command to Malik b. Hārith al-Ashtar al-Nakha'i (d. 659) at the time of sending him as the governor of Egypt.

By Shi'ite political thought, I mean the principle of justice and fairness, (including judicial justice, and financial justice), the mutual rights of the ruler and the ruled, the right not to pledge allegiance, the policy regarding the unarmed opposition, and the policy regarding the armed opposition (*bughat*).

These are the essentials of the political Imamate in Shi'ite Islam. Ali's teachings are at the heart of Shi'ism, they are inseparable from Shi'ite Islam. Any theory or practice in jurisprudence, theology, ethics, commentary of the Qur'an, hadith compilations and its commentaries, mysticism, philosophy, and politics under the label of Shi'ism, which is

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34. The best editions of ***Nahj al-Balagha*** were published by Sunni scholars: Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Subhi Salih (1926-1986).
35. 'Utarudi, Quchani Aziz Allah. ***Musnad al-A'imah Ahl -al-bayt*** in 70 volumes. ***Musnad Amir al-Mu'minin al-Imam Abi al-Hasan Ali b. Abi Talib***. 27 volumes. (Tehran: 'Utarud, 2007).

inconsistent with the teachings of Imam Ali, is unacceptable. Also, Ali's political teaching is the standard for Shi'ite political thought. Ali's authority in Shi'ite Islam is closely linked to the authority of the Qur'an and prophetic Tradition in Islam for all Muslims, including Shi'ites. This is the real meaning of the third source of Islamic knowledge.

The Political Thought of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib

Here I will give seven examples of Ali's key political thought, and most of them are from *Nahj al-Balagha*.

> **A. Mutual rights of the ruler and ruled**: "A right is very vast in the description but very narrow in equitability of action. It does not accrue to any person unless it accrues against him also, and right does not accrue against a person unless it also accrues in his favor. *If there is any right that is =only in favor of a person with no (corresponding) right accruing against him it is solely for Allah, the Glorified, and not for His creatures…. The greatest of these rights that Allah, the Glorified, has made obligatory is the right of the ruler over the ruled and the right of the ruled over the ruler. This is an obligation which Allah, the Glorified, has placed on each other.*" [36] Ali mentioned the particulars of these mutual rights in his time in another sermon.[37] His political philosophy started with teaching these rights to the people. Shi'ite political thought is right-oriented.

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36. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha*. sermon 216, p. 332-333. I used the English translation from online Al-Islam.org with a minor edition.

37. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha*. sermon 34, p. 79.

B. The fallibility of the ruler and his need for public monitoring and guidance: in one of his sermons, Ali said: "*Do not praise me for the duties I have performed towards Allah and towards you, because I am afraid there could be obligations which I have not fulfilled, or maybe I have issued rulings which could not be avoided, and do not address me in the manner despots are being addressed. Do not evade me* as the people of passion are to be evaded*, do not deal with me with flattery, and do not think that I shall take it in ill if a true thing is said to me* because the person who feels disgusted when the truth is said to him or a just matter is placed before he would find it more difficult to act upon them. Therefore, *do not abstain from saying the truth or pointing out a matter of justice because I do not consider myself above erring. I do not scape* erring in my actions, *except if Allah helps me (in avoiding errors) in matters in which He is more powerful than I am"*[38]. Here Ali explains clearly that temporal rulership and political governance are fallible positions, regardless of whether the ruler is the Prophet, the Imam, or anyone else. This is the standard for political ethics in Shi'ite Islam.

After condemning the seclusion of the political authority from the ruled, Imam Ali justified it as another evidence of the fallibility of the governor: "Do not keep yourself secluded from the people for a long time, because

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38. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha.* sermon 216, p. 335.

the seclusion of those in authority from the subjects is a kind of narrow-sightedness and causes ignorance about their affairs. … After all, a governor is a human being and cannot have knowledge of things that people keep hidden from him. There are no marks on the face of truth to differentiate its various expressions from falsehood."[39]

C. Ruling that is based on mercy and forgiveness for all people without any religious discrimination: "Habituate your heart to mercy for the subjects and to affection and kindness for them. Do not stand over them like greedy beasts who feel it is enough to devour them, since they are of two kinds, either your brother in religion or one like you in creation. They will commit slips and encounter mistakes. They may act wrongly, willfully, or by neglect. So, extend to them your forgiveness and pardon."[40] This is the foundation of egalitarian international human rights not only for Shi'ites or Muslims or people of the Books, or monotheists but for all mankind, human as a human: "one like you in creation".

D. The rights, justice, the public opinion, the satisfaction of the middle class and caring for lower class: Ali once said "*The way most coveted by you should be that which is the most equitable for the right, the most universal by way of justice, and the most comprehensive*

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39. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagh.,* letter 53, p. 441.
40. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha.* letter 53, p. 427-428.

with regard to the agreement among those under you .... It is the common people of the community who are the pillars of the religion, the power of the Muslims, and the defense against the enemies. Your leanings should therefore be towards them, and your inclination should be directed towards them."[41] The four pillars of a Shi'ite political policy are as follows: rights, justice, public opinion, and middle class. The fifth pillar is a special concern and included an extra plan for the lower class.[42] He reported that he heard repeatedly the prophet Mohammed saying: "The people among whom the right of the weak is not secured from the strong without fear will never achieve purity."[43] This is the permanent principle of any politics in the name of Shi'ism or Islam.

E. The sanctity of contracts especially with the enemy: After encouraging peace,[44] Imam Ali outlines another permanent principle of Islamic political thought, that any agreement with the enemy must be fulfilled with honesty and trust because nothing is more important than fulfilling pledges: "If you conclude an agreement between yourself and your enemy or enter into a pledge with him then fulfill your agreement and discharge your pledge faithfully. Place yourself as a shield against whatever you have pledged because among the obligations of Allah there is nothing on which

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41. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha. letter 53, p. 429.
42. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha. letter 53, p. 438-439.
43. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagh. letter 53, p. 440.
44. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha. letter 53, p. 442.

people are more strongly united despite the difference in their ideas and variation of their views than respect for fulfilling pledges."[45] The contract of the state with the people is another particular element of this valuable principle. The social contract is the foundation of the modern nation-state.

F. The sanctity of life and the high protection of innocent people's life: Ali once said, that rulers must avoid shedding blood and using violence and they should not strengthen their authority by that: "You should avoid shedding blood without justification because nothing is more inviting of Divine retribution, greater in (evil) consequence, and more effective in the decline of prosperity and cutting short of life than the shedding of blood without justification. On the Day of Judgement Allah, the Glorified would commence giving His judgment among the people with the cases of bloodshed committed by them. Therefore, do not strengthen your authority by shedding prohibited blood."[46] This is the foundation of security and safety in any society and one of the principles of Shi'ite political thought.

G. Freedom of speech as the cornerstone of Shite political philosophy: Ali always encouraged the freedom of speech even if it was against the ruler. **After hearing Ali's advice to his companions, one of the Kharijites said: "**May Allah kill this *heretic*! How

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45. Al-Radi. ***Nahj al-Balagh.**,* letter 53, p. 442-443.
46. Al-Radi. ***Nahj al-Balagha**.* letter 53, p. 443.

logical he is!" **People then leaped toward Kharijite to kill him, but Ali said:** "Wait a bit. There should either be abuse [for an abuse] or else pardoning from the offense." [47] A *Kharijite* called the ruler a 'heretic', here Ali rejected any punishment for this insult. This was an unarmed offense. The proper reaction of the ruler should be forgiveness or a verbal answer, this is the best defense of freedom of speech.

The historians mentioned that those who did not pledge allegiance to Imam Ali[48] did not face any sort of difficulty under his leadership. Their salaries from the public funds were not cut, exactly like everyone else. All of them died of natural causes. This is another aspect of political freedom. If we compare it with the policy of caliphates before and after him, we can understand the importance of this political principle.

Justice, the second doctrinal element of Shi'ite political thought

The second doctrinal point was the common ground between Shi'ite and Sunni *Mu'tazila,* who were called the people of justice (*al-'Adliyyah*). Although justice is the notion of the divine attribute, simultaneously, it is the cornerstone of ethical objectivism. [49] Its correlation with political thought

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47. Al-Radi. *Nahj al-Balagha.* saying 420, p. 550.

48. al-Mufid, Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Nu'man. *al-Nusra li Sayyid al-'Itra fi Harb al-Basra*. Mawsou'a al-Sheikh al-Mufid. (Qom: Dar al-Mufid, 2010), 1:94–100.

49. Look at Hourani, George E. Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; and Sobhani, Ja'far. *Buhuth fi*

was the necessity of a just ruler and a just state. If God's justice is an *a priori* concept, governments' justice can also be understood through the prism of human reason and common sense.

The major result of this Shi'ite political doctrinal point is the right to protest and rise or armed rebellion against an unjust/corrupt ruler. This right is one of the essentials of political philosophy prior to the conditions of the ruler. The Sunni hadiths[50] and fatwas[51] here could be summarized in this way: There is an obligation of obedience and submission to the ruler, even if he is unjust and immoral, and it is not permissible to rebel against him. The ruler is not to be removed by immorality (*fisq*), injustice, and obstruction of rights, nor is he to be dismissed, and it is not permissible to revolt against him for that.

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al-Millal wa al-Nihal. Vol 3. Part 7: al-Mutazilite. (Qom: Mussisa al-Imam al-Sadiq, 2006), P. 219-646.

50. Look at Muslim b. al-Hajjaj. ***Sahih al-Muslim***, (Riyadh: Dar al-Tayyiba, 2006), vol. 3, *Kitab* al-*Imara*, section 13: #1847, 12:1846, 8:1840, 17:1855, 16:1854, 13:1848, 13:1851; Abu-Yusif, Ya'qoub b. Ibrahim. ***Kitab al-Khiraj***. (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1979), p. 10; Abu Dawud, Sulayman b. al-Ash'ath. ***Sunan Abi-Dawud,*** *kitab al-Jihad*, Bab *al-ghazw ma'a a'ima al-jawr.* (Damascus: Dar al-Risala al-'Alamiyya, 2009).

51. Look at al-Baqilani, ***Tamhid al-awa'il wa jalkhis al-dala'il***, (ed.: Ahmad Haidar, Beirut: Mu'ssisa al-Kutub al-Thiqafiyya, 1987), 478; Abu Ya'la al-Farra' al-Hanbali, ***al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya***, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), 20; al-Qudamah al-Maqdisi, 'Abduallah b. Ahmad, ***al-Mughni***, (ed. 'Abdullah b. 'Abdul Muhsin al-Turki and 'Abdul Fattah Muhammad al-Hulw. Riyadh: Dar 'Alam al-Kutub, 1997). *Kitab al-jihad, mas'la* 1622, 13:14; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, Ahmad b. Muhammad, ***al-'Iqd al-Farid***. (ed. M. M. Qumayha. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983). 2:203. For different view look at: al-Jassas, Ahmad b. Ali. ***Ahkam al-Qur'an***. (ed. Muhammad al-Sadiq Qamhawi. Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1992). 1:87; and al-Mawardi, Ali ibn Muhammad, ***al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya w'al-Wilayat al-Diniyy***. (ed. Ahmad Jad. Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 2006), 42.

The Shi'ite doctrine relies on the Prophetic hadith that was narrated by both Sunni and Shi'ite: "No obedience to any creature in disobedience to the Creator."[52] The Shi'ite policy says that an unjust ruler should be faced with *commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong* (*al-amr bil -ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*) and this should be according to particular steps as much as possible; first, it should be with denouncing with the heart and then with the tongue, and in the third step with the hand (physically), until the shift reaches at the end to go out and rise with a weapon. The unjust ruler is dismissed, his governance is illegitimate, obedience to his commands is prohibited (*haram*) and his support in any way is forbidden (*haram*), except if it is to remove harm from oppressed mankind.[53]

The major exemplar of this teaching is Imam al-Hussein b. Ali (626-680) has two famous sayings which are well-known for each Shi'ite Muslim. These are the vital elements of his teachings, and we can define them as one of the

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52. Al-Radi, al-Sayyid Muhammad ibn al-Hassan al-Musawi al-Sharif, *Nahj al-Balagha*, ed. Subhi Salih (Cairo and Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya and Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 2004), hikmat 165, 500; al-Hurr al-'Amili, Muhammad ibn al-Hassan, *Tafsil Wasa'il al-Shi'a ila Tahsil Masa'il al-Shari'a*. (Qom: Mu'assasa Al al-Bayt li Ihya' al-Turath, 1994), kitab al-amr bil-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar, bab 11, hadith 7, 16:154; and close to it in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *al-maghazi*, 4340; *Sahih al-Muslim*, *al-Imara*, 18:1839 and 18:1840.
53. Montazeri, Hossein-Ali Najaf-Abadi, *Dirasat fi Wilayat al-Faqih wa Fiqh al-Dawlat al-Islamiya* (Qom: Maktab al-I'lam al-Islami, 1988), 1:594-595.

essentials of political philosophy in Shi'ite Islam. but first it is important to mention here that Imam al-Hussein is the grandson of the prophet and the third Shi'ite Imam who is called *Sayyid al-Shuhada* (the master of martyrs). He was martyred in the massacre of Karbala in 'Ashura (10th of Muharram, 61 AH) with 72 members of his family and companions. Mourning ceremonies for Imam al-Hussein and his companions in Muharram each year constitute the most popular Shi'ite public rituals. The martyrdom of Imam al-Hussein has had a deep impact on the Shi'ite community in general and on Shi'ite politics in particular. It has been a source of inspiration for various resistance movements and revolutions throughout Shi'ite history.[54]

The first saying is his reply to his brother Muhammad ibn Hanafiyya[55] (637-701): "*Oh brother, I swear by God that even if I find in this world no refuge or shelter, I will not pledge allegiance to Yazid [ibn Mu'awiya] ... I have not risen up in revolt out of evil intent or greed, neither to perpetuate corruption nor wrongdoing. Rather I did so in a quest to reform the community of my grandfather (the prophet). I want to reform the Ummah[56] in service of my grandfather. I want to command the good and forbid the wrong, and [I want to] follow the example of my grandfather and my*

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54. Look at Ayoub, Mahmoud. ***Redemptive suffering in Islam: a study of the devotional aspects of Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism.*** (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1978).

55. The son of Ali b. Abi Talib and Khawla al- Hanafiyya (the daughter of Ja'far b. Qays). He is also regarded as Muhammad al-Akbar or Muhammad b. Ali.

56. Ummah: the whole Muslim world or the community.

father Ali ibn Abi Talib".[57] Here he confirms the point that there is a right not to pledge allegiance to a state, especially to an unjust ruler, the aim of his reformist movement was commanding the good and forbidding the wrong, and following the Tradition of the Prophet.

Imam al-Hussein clarified his purpose by narrating what he heard directly from his grandfather: "*O people, the Messenger of God said: Whoever sees an aggressive tyrant who legalizes the forbidden of God's sanctity, violating God's covenant, opposing the Traditions of the Messenger of God, acts towards the servants of God with sin and transgression, and did not change the tyrant by doing or saying [did not protest by expressing his objection or practical objection], it is God's right to make him enter the tyrant's entrance [hill]. Indeed, these people [supporters of the tyrant] have committed themselves to obey Satan and have abandoned obedience to God - the Most Merciful -, have expanded corruption publicly, have suspended the penal codes of shari'a, have taken possession of the public property, and made permissible what is forbidden by God and forbidden what is lawful.*"[58]

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57. Ibn A'tham al-Kufi, Abu Muhammad Ahmad, **Kitab al-Futuh**. (ed. Ali Shiri. Beirut: Dar al-Adwa', 1991). 5:21.

58. al-Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir, **Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk, Tarikh al-Tabari**. 7:300; Ibn al-Athir, Ali b. Muhammad. **al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh**. (ed. Abi al-Fida' Abdullah b. al-Qadi. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987). 3:408.

According to Imam al-Hussein, each Muslim should follow the Prophet Muhammad. This golden rule is an essential teaching of Shi'ite Islam. This religious duty is conditional on the possibility and impact probability, as described in Shi'ite *fiqh*.[59] The reaction of the Sunni community and scholars was something else. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058-1111), the most distinguished Sunni theologian and jurist, did not consider it permissible to curse Yazid b. Mu'awiyya (646-683) the second Umayyad Caliph, because of killing al-Hussain, and it is not permissible to attribute a major sin to a Muslim without investigation![60] These are two different political philosophies. Understanding Shi'ite political thought is impossible without considering the doctrine of justice and its consequences such as the right to an uprising against unjust rulers, which is crystallized in al-Hussein b. Ali's maxims and teachings. There is no disagreement between the Shi'ite community and scholars on this vital point. I can say clearly that Shi'ite political thought without the centrality of justice and al-Hussain b. Ali's maxims and teachings are meaningless and foundationless.

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59. Sections of enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong (*Kitab al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*).

60. Al-Gazali, *Ihya al-'Ulum,* the quarter *on muhlakat, kitab afat al-lisan, al-afat al-thaminah: al-la'n*, (edited by Abd al-Rahim b. Hussain al-Hafiz al-'Iraqi, NP: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, N.T.), 9:19. For other Sunni idea on this point look at Ibn al-Jawzi, ***Al-radd 'ala al-mut'assib al'anid al-mani' min dhmm yazid.*** (ed. Haytham Abd al-Salam Muhammad. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2005); and al-Taftazani, Sa'd al-Din. ***Sharh al-Maqasid***. (ed. Abd al-Rahman 'Umayrah. Qom: al-Sharif al-Radi, 1988). 5:311.

Shi'ite Political Thought in the Time of Imams' Absence[61]

This period is called major occultation and started in 941, continued eleven centuries to the present time and has been full of diversity in political theory. The approaches of Shi'ite scholars to politics could be classified into five stages.

First Stage: The *Non-political* theory of the 'guardianship of the jurists'

Before Safavid (941-1501) the main concern for Shi'ites was the protection of their identity and waiting for the release of Imam al-Mahdi from occultation to spread justice throughout the world. As a minority that is different culturally and socioeconomically, they were under significant pressure from zero-tolerance Sunni rulers' administrations. The Shi'ites' first *social theory* in these six centuries for the preservation of their identity was made by Shi'ite *jurists* under the name of *wilayat al-fuqaha* (guardianship of the jurists). The theory was clearly restricted to two domains of Shari'a affairs: adjudication in the Shi'ite community and its relations, in addition to socially necessary *hisbiyya* affairs (the socially necessary affairs).[62] In other words, *wilayat al-fuqaha* in *al-hisbiyya* affairs did not have any political meaning and it was not a theory of the state in this period.

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61. The expanded information of this section could be found in this article: Kadivar, Mohsen. "Islam and the State from a Shi'ite Perspective" in ***Secularism in Comparative Perspective — Religion across Political Contexts***, Jonathan Laurence (ed.), Switzerland: Springer, 2023. pp. 57-80.

62. Look at al-Shaykh al-Ta'fia al-Tusi, Muhammad b. al-Hassan. ***Al-Nahaya fi Mujarrad al-Fiqhwa al-Fatawa*** (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1980). 299-300.

Second Stage: The guardianship of the jurists in religious affairs and the kingship of a powerful Shi'ite in profane affairs

The Safavid era (1501–1736) in Iran marked a turning point in Shi'ite political thought. Many elements have changed here, and the ruling dynasty was Shi'ite. the majority of Iranians converted from Sunni to Shi'i Islam in the 16th century, and Shi'ite Islam became the state religion in Iran since the Safavid kingdom. This dynasty came to power with armed forces and appointed and designated the Shi'ite jurists for different religious jobs.

Because of the Safavid kings' impressive religious services, the Shi'ite jurists were doubtful about categorizing them as *unjust rulers*. A paradigm shift from an *abstract utopian idealism* to a type of *political pragmatism* occurred. The dominant political theory of this period was the guardianship of the jurists in religious affairs (*shar'iyyat*) and the kingship of a powerful (*dhī shawkat*) Shi'ite Muslim in profane affairs (*'urfiyyat*). Although this theory was practiced absolutely and was not rejected by any jurists, it was not mentioned in the books of *fiqh* either. The distinguished scholar of hadith in this era, Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (1627-1699), was the first Shite clergyman who wrote on this theory in his books.[63] This was a dual theory based on the hypothesis of

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63. Majlesi, Mohammad Baqer, *'Ain al-Hayāt*, (ed. Sayyid Mahdi Raja'i. Qom, Anwar al-Huda, 2003), 2:282 and 290-291; and *Bihār al-anwār*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-Islamiyya, 1983) , 52:237-238, & 243.

separation of religion and politics, as well as coexistence and mutual respect. The authority of sultans was much more respected than the authority of the jurists in this era.

Third Stage: The general guardianship of the jurists and the permitted kingship of the Shi'ite sultan

The third period is from the fall of the Safavids in 1736 to the Constitutional movement in Iran in the early 20th century. The major point about this period is the rise of the '*practical'* social authority of the jurists. Consequently, they increased their domain of authority 'theoretically', i.e., from the socially necessary affairs (*hisbiyyah*) or religious affairs (*shar'iayyat*) to the 'public domain'. At this stage, *theoretically*, the guardianship of the people in the public domain is the exclusive duty of jurists. Guardianship means the right to involve and interfere in the affairs of others and is a religious priority in that domain. The theory of general guardianship of the jurist council in the public domain was dominant in the Qajar era in the 18th century, when the number of Shi'ite jurists increased, and their authority grew larger than the authority of the sultans. It was the jurists who legitimized the kingship of the sultan and gave him permission for jihad.[64] In addition to managing religious

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64. For example, Kāshif al-Ghiṭa, Jaʿfar b. Khiḍr (1743-1812) based in Najaf in his trip to Iran gave Fath 'Ali Shah, the Qajar king an official permission for Jihad with unbelievers, mobilization of soldiers, and receiving taxes and zakat from people in order to organize his army. He issued a fatwa for Jihad in the first war between Iran and Russia (1803-1813). Kāshif al-Ghiṭa, Jaʿfar b. Khiḍr. *Kashf al-Ghiṭa 'an mubhamāt al-shari'at al-gharrā'*. (Qom, Bustan-i Kitāb, 2001), 4:333.

affairs, the administration of profane affairs should be done with the *permission* of the jurists and under their *supervision*.

Amad Naraqi (1771-1829) in his book *'Awa'id al-ayyam*[65] and Muhammad Hassan Al-Najafi (1785-1849) in his book *Jawahir al-Kalam fi Sharh Shara'i' al-Islam*[66] strongly defended this theory. Thus, we can say here the dominant political theory considered in this period practically was 'the general guardianship is for the jurists, and the permitted kingship of the Shi'ite sultan'. This permission is decorative and means toleration, nothing more.

However, al-Shaykh al-Aʿzam Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī (1800-1864), the most distinguished student of Naraqi, whose books in Islamic jurisprudence and its principles (*fiqh* and *usul*) are used as textbooks in the Shi'ite seminaries, rejected his teacher's interpretation on general guardianship of the jurists in public affairs. He explicitly wrote that the evidences didn't support the idea that their role extended beyond issuing *fatwas* and jurisdiction i.e., religious affairs (*Shar'iyyat*).[67]

65. Naraqi, Amad b. Mohammad Mahdi. *'Awa'id al-ayyam*. (Beirut, Dār al-Hādi, 2000), 2:93.
66. Al-Najafi, Muhammad Hassan, **Jawahir al-Kalam fi Sharh Shara'i' al-Islam**, (Qom, Mu'assisa al-Nashr al-Islāmi, 2012), 22:677.
67. Al-Anssri, Murtida, **Al-Makasib**, (Qom, Majma' al-Fikr al-Islami, 1999), 3:545-560.

Fourth Stage: The legitimacy of the Constitutional State without the permission of the jurists

The fourth period, Iranian Constitutionalism 1891-1911, divided the 'ulama into its supporters and opponents. The most well-known jurist who rejected Constitutionalism as modern-style and anti-Islamic governance was Sheikh Fadlullah Nouri (1843-1909). He believed in the guardianship of the jurists in Sharia affairs and the kingship of the powerful Shi'ite sultan in profane affairs. The spiritual leaders of the Constitutional movement were Iranian Shi'ite authorities in Najaf, the most notable figures being Muhammad Kazim Khorasani (1839-1911). He was the most influential and the most spiritual leader of the Constitutional movement. His book, *Kifāyat al-usūl*, has been the textbook of Shi'ite seminaries until the present. One of his innovative ideas was the *impossibility* of the 'Islamic state' in the time of occultation. Khorasani distinguished the legitimate state (*mashrū'*) such as the constitutional state from the religious/Islamic state (*mashru'ah*). He explicitly condemned the absolute state of fallible rulers as both illegitimate and non-Islamic. According to him, the necessary condition for the legitimacy of governance is *justice*. Justice is the result of public awareness and monitoring and distributing political power.

The major innovative political thought of Khorasani was the absolute negation of the political guardianship of the jurists. He was one of the most active jurists among the opponents of *wilayat al-faqih* in straggling against injustice.

His struggle was based on the Islamic duty of commanding good and prohibiting evil, not based on the guardianship of the jurists. Khorasani did not believe in any 'extra right' for the jurists in the public domain. He did not accept the duty of jurists to be the temporal rulers of the country. He believed the legitimacy of any political duty included temporal rule by non-jurists and did not require the jurists' permission. There is no legal difference between a jurist and a layperson in the public domain (egalitarian approach). In other words, knowledge about *fiqh* is not required for the management and the ruling of a country, because *Fiqh* is different from political science and management affairs.[68]

In his later and final works, Khorasani promoted and revised his idea about the priority of jurists' role in the socially necessary affairs (*hisbiyyah*) domain. In the famous fatwas that were issued by him and two other Shi'ite authorities in Najaf, they said: "Briefly, we express the actual duty of all Muslims that the secular subjects and *hisbiyyah* affairs are assigned to the wise Muslims and reliable believers in the time of occultation, that is crystallized in the parliament."[69] Khorasani recognized the representatives of citizens in parliament in place of the jurists in the expanded *hisbiyyah* domain.

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68. Kadivar, Mohsen, "The Innovative Political Ideas and Influences of Mulla Muhammad Kazim Khorasani," **Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies (AJAMES),** (Special Issue Changing Knowledge and Authority in Islam), 21/1 (September 2005), pp.59-73.
69. Kadivar, Mohsen, **Siasat-nameh Khorasani** (Khorasani's Political Philosophy: Political Statements in Works of Akhond Mulla Mohammad Kazim Khorasani)*,* Tehran, Kavir Publication, 2008*,* 215.

Muhammad Hussein Na'ini (1860-1936), the other major scholar of this age, was one of Khorasani's most distinguished students and his assistant. He wrote the most important book advocating Constitutionalism from the Shi'ite perspective, named *Tanbih al-umma wa tanzih al-milla*[70]. This is the manifestation of Shi'ism in political philosophy and constitutional law. These are the first Sharia-based arguments for the principles of modern political philosophy, which included ideas such as equality of all human beings before the law, political liberty, the validity of majority votes, human rights, the necessity of public monitoring of the state, rule of law, and the responsibility of the state vis-à-vis the citizens.[71]

Khorasani' theory impressed his students, and they continued his way. The most outstanding one was Abdolkarim Haeri Yazdi (1859-1937), the founder of the theological *Hawza* at Qom city, and the teacher of Khomeini and many Shi'ite authorities who had several innovative ideas. "It is impossible that the Imam (Sadiq or Mahdi) appointed the jurists to the guardianship of the people in the time of occultation, while they themselves were unable

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70. Na'ini, Mirza Mohammad Hossein Gharavi. *Tanbih al-Ummah wa Tanzih al-Milla: Hokoumat az nazar-e Eslam* [The admonition of the community and the refinement of religion: Government from Islamic Perspective} (with an introduction and commentary by Seyyed Mahmoud Taleqani (Tehran: Ferdowsi, 1954).

71. Nai'ini believed in the guardianship of the jurists *in hisbiyya* affairs and constitutional state by permission of the jurists. I explained the difference between Khorasani and Na'ini in my 2005 article.

to implement it in their presence." Haeri Yazdi not only rejected the three types of guardianship of the jurists but also rejected the idea that the jurists were appointed for jurisdiction by the sixth Imam. According to him, the jurists do not have any duty except for issuing fatwas and teaching the Shari'a rulings in premised and prohibited affairs.[72] The other Shite authorities in this category are al-Shayk Muhammad Hussein Gharavi Esfahani (1878-1943), and al-Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim (1889-1970).

The Fifth Stage: The Islamic Republic of Iran and its Aftermath

The fifth period was the birth of political Shi'ism and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 and its aftermath. A dominant thought known as "political Islam", or later, Islamism, was raised in almost all Muslim lands in the post-colonial era. The figures of this movement in Sunni Islam were 'Abul A'la Maududi (1903-1979), the founder of *Jamaat-e Islami* (Islamic Group) in Pakistan, and Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), the founder of *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* (Muslim Brotherhood), and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), the leading theorist of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

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72. Mohammad Ali Araki, ***Risala Wilayat al-Faqih***, the lessons of Abdolkarim Haeri Yazdi, Mohsen Kadivar (ed.), editor's website, February 2017.

After defeating Constitutionalism and the Pahlavi despotism in Iran, the Shi'ite authorities were united to object to Shah's modernization in removing Shari'a rule in November 1962. Three of the most distinguished students of Haeri Yazdi were among them. They were Sayyed Mohammad Kazem Shariat-madari (1906-1986), Sayyed Mohammad-Reza Golpayega-ni (1899-1993), and Sayyed Ruhollah Mousawi Khomeini (1902-1989). Khomeini promoted his public objection to the Pahlavi dictatorship and the US capitulation law. He was arrested and exiled first to Turkey in November 1964 and then to Iraq for fourteen years.

In the early 1970s, Shariatmadari and Golpayegani in Qom city and Khomeini in Najaf started teaching "guardianship of jurists". They did so separately but simultaneously. In contrast to their mentor, all of them supported the general guardianship of the jurists in the public domain. The most influential figures of political Shi'ism in the 1960s and 1970s were Ali Shariati (1933-1977), and Khomeini. Khomeini returned successfully to Iran in early 1979 and established the Islamic Republic of Iran. There were three innovative points to his political theory. **First**, he was the first jurist-ruler or jurist-king (compared to the Platonic philosopher-king) in the history of Shi'ism. The Prophet or Imam Ali were the rulers of their time. Therefore, the jurists should be the rulers in the time of occultation as deputies or successors of the hidden Imam.

Second, Khomeini expanded the general guardianship of the *jurists* from the public domain to absolute guardianship. In other words, the authority of the jurist-ruler was now exactly identical to the authority of not only the Prophet and the Twelve Imams in the public domain, but also to God's authority![73]. He clarified this absoluteness later, saying that it was beyond Shari'a rulings. According to Khomeini, governance required two conditions: knowledge of *fiqh* including awareness of the time and complexity of politics, and disposition of justice.

Third, he was the first Shi'ite authority that merged the expediency of Islam or the political regime in *fiqh*. Recognizing the expediency of the political regime was the first step in the secularization of the Shi'ite *fiqh* by the founder of a theocratic regime.

The final political theory of Khomeini could be called the Islamic Republic with absolute guardianship of the jurist-ruler. Although the jurist-ruler is obligated to observe the public interest (and the agent of discernment of expediency is himself), he is not bound by Islamic law (primary and secondary sharia rulings). The jurist–ruler can issue a governmental command that is also categorized as Islamic law (Sharia ruling). Khomeini's theory could be compared

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73. Kadivar, Mohsen. *Wilayt al al-faqih: naqd nazaryya al-hukm fi alfikr al-siyasi al-shi'I*. tr. Hassan al-Sarraf. Doha: Muntada al-'Alaqat al-'arabiyya wa al-Dawliyya, 2021.

with the *Leviathan* (1651) of Thomas Hobbes. I described elsewhere the Transformation of the 'Islamic Republic' to the 'Islamic State of Iran'.[74]

Ayatollah Khomeini's political theory is in the absolute minority not only in the history of Shi'ite *fiqh* but also in contemporary Shi'ite *fiqh*. I mention only the theories of two of his distinguished students. **First**, my mentor Montazeri[75], in his final political theory, accepted (1) the principle of separation of powers in place of concentration of powers in the hands of the jurist-ruler, (2) the elected ruler in place of an appointive ruler, and (3) the limited power of the state based on the constitution in place of absolute guardianship. (4) Emphasizing the need to supervise the most prominent jurist as part of the parliament's lawmaking means a rejection of the jurist's political guardianship. In his final theory, the Islamic state is acceptable only by the consent of the citizens, and the guardianship of the jurist is a model of governance among other models, not the only model. [76]

Second, Mahdi Haeri Yazdi (1923-1999), the youngest son of the Qom seminary's founder discussed the issue in this

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74. 2021 Annual Lecture of British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) December 7, 2021, London.

75. He was the spokesman of Assembly of Experts of Constitution in 1979 and elected as the second leader of Islamic Republic by the Assembly of Experts in July 1986. Khomeini fired him illegally three months before his death. Montazeri was placed under house arrest after criticizing the second leader in October 1997.

76. Montazeri Najafabadi, HusseinAli. ***Hokoumat-e dini wa Hoqouq-e Enasn*** (Religious state and the rights of mankind). Tehran: Sara'i, 2998.

way: The citizens are the joint owners of the public domain. The governments are the representatives of these joint owners and their authority is limited to a constitution and to the demands of their client (citizens). It is based on the principle of ownership as the foundation of legitimacy, the principle of representative democracy, and the recognition of administration and political management as secular knowledge.[77] You can read the other contemporary Shi'ite political theories in my first book.[78]

Epilogue: Final remarks on Shite political thought

The diversity of political thought of Shi'ite jurists is undeniable. It is a wide spectrum between the absolute guardianship of the jurist ruler - unlimited power of the jurist-ruler above the shari'a rulings (primary and secondary) and above the constitution – and a constitutional state without the jurist's permission (and without the label of an Islamic state that is impossible in the time of occultation). The former is the theory of Ayatollah Khomeini - the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the latter is the theory of Akhund Khurasan - the spiritual leader of constitutionalism. Both of them were well-known Shite authorities. What is the reason for this wide diversity? Is the political theory

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77. Haeri Yazdi, Mahdi. **Hekmat wa Hokumat** (Wisdom and Governance)*.* [London], Shadi, 1995. Its English translation: Hairi Yazdi, Mehdi. *A Philosophical Treatise on Muslim Politics: Wisdom and Governance*. Daryoush Mohammad Poor (tr.). Switzerland: Springer, 2022.

78. See my book **Nazriyehayeh dowlat dar fiqh-e shi'eh** (*The Theories of State in Shi'ite Fiqh),* Tehran: Nashr-e Nay, 1998.

design a part of the derivation (*istinbat*) of shar'ia rulings from the Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition the same as other shari'a rulings?

These are my final remarks on Islamic political thought in general and on Shite political thought in particular[79]:

A. Expecting *political ethics* from Islamic or Shi'ite teachings is a valid and justified expectation.

B. In a comparative study, *Shi'ite Islamic political ethics* is the richest political ethics. However, the actualization of its capacities requires more scientific effort.

C. Due to the inherent temporal and spatial constraints of legal rulings and systems; mechanisms, and political decisions; *religious constitutional law* or *religious political science* are hard to be implemented. The generalization of the policies of early Islam as permanent and fixed rules of Islamic constitutional law or Islamic political sciences is a completely wrong approach and against certain scientific standards.

D. By denying Islamic constitutional law or Islamic political sciences, the following are also eliminated: Political Islam, Islamic politics, the Islamic political

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79. This is the abstract of my Persian lecture on 'The relationship between religion and politics: What we should not expect from Islam in politics', (January 3, 2021).

regime, Islamic State, political jurisprudence, political guardianship of the jurist, supervision of the jurist, and the Islamic Republic. Of course, if one means by Islamic politics 'observing *Islamic political ethics'*, then this is acceptable.

E. Denying political Islam and its correlations is not equivalent to political quietism and passivity. Denying political Islam is freeing Islam from *political instrumentalization* or *political weaponizing*, not welcoming political apathy. Muslims or Shi'ite Muslims, like other people in "civil society", are politically active with their religious identity.

F. Muslims committed to Islamic standards, especially Islamic political ethics, have a stronger tendency to face injustice and conformity to social obligations and contracts.

Chapter II

Political Islam in Iran: The Aftermath of the Revolution and Challenges of Governance

Understanding Shi'ite Political Islam in Iran

Ali Mamouri

As the Islamic Republic of Iran enters its fifth decade, it is worth reflecting on the key historical turning points and transformations of the past forty years using various political and theological frameworks. Iran has endured many challenges that have caused changes in its political scene. Now, Iran finds itself confronting new obstacles and uncertain horizons.

This brief section examines the key turning points in Iran's trajectory and development over the past four decades. However, this will be preceded by a historical overview of political Islam in the Shiite heritage of Iran.

Historical Context

In Shi'ite political theology, governance system is linked to the presence of the infallible Imam. This means that any form of governance outside the purview of this infallible leader is considered invalid under Islamic law, and any other leader is seen as having usurped the right of the infallible Imam. Shi'ite jurists (*fuqaha*) have always dealt with this question of authority in a way that protects the interests of the Muslim world and community (*ummah*) without trying to engage in governance in any form. Shi'ites have avoided taking government positions under various powers in the Islamic world, which led to the emergence of a particular

kind of Shi'ite politics that was not precisely the same as Sunni political Islam. They did not pursue political power but were not entirely disconnected from the political sphere. Instead, their principles were closer to the practical wisdom than the provisions of shari'a. These ideas were developed by Shaykh Mehdi Haeri Yazdi, the grandson of Abdolkarim Haeri Yazdi, who was the founder of the Qom Seminary (*hawza*) in Iran, in his book *Hekmat va Hokumat* [Philosophy and Government].

After the rise of the Safavids in Iran, new elements emerged within the field of Shi'ite political theology, which helped bring Shi'ite political thought into a new era and marked the beginning of Shi'ite political Islam.

The Safavids were descended from a Sunni Sufi order, similar to the origins of the founders of the Ottoman Empire. They turned to Shi'ism shortly prior to establishing their dynasty in Iran. The disagreement between the Safavids and the Ottomans actually started regarding the political conflict over ruling the Muslim lands. The Safavids had Sufi centers with many followers in northwestern Iran, and Shah Ismail ibn Shaykh Haydar ibn Shaykh Junayd was able to use this base to establish his rule in this region. This was later expanded to include all areas of present-day Iran as well as parts of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and —during some periods— parts of Iraq as well.

Shah Ismail dealt with a major challenge from his Ottoman rivals who hoped to take control of the entire Islamic world. The Ottomans eventually claimed that their empire was an Islamic caliphate and cast themselves as the sole legitimate rulers who would challenge any other Islamic ruler in the region.

Later Shah Ismail adopted Shi'ism as the official doctrie for his newly-established kingdom. He aimed to create legitimacy for his regime separate from Sunni theology and the notion of the caliphate that the Ottomans had adopted. The Safavid sultans turned to Shi'ite jurists and tried to get them to come to the Safavid capital Qazvin (and later Isfahan), in order to lend legitimacy to the Safavid regime as a Shi'ite entity. This culminated in a partnership that was established between the sultan and Shi'ite jurists, similar to the relationship that formed between the Ottoman sultan and Hanafi jurists.

After the Safavid rulers were confronted by the approach of Iraqi Shi'ite jurists led by Shaykh Ibrahim al-Qatifi, who shunned political engagement, the Safavids instead sought to link themselves with the jurists of Jabal Amil, who had been subject to religious and political persecution by Ottomans and saw the *Safavids' order* as a way out. These jurists emigrated en masse to Iran and were the first who established an alliance between the sultans and Shi'ite jurists there. There were various disputes over legitimacy

and authority, and conflicts over whether the rulers or jurists should have the upper hand, in which one side would prevail at the other's expense. For example, Shaykh Ali al-Karaki and Shah Tahmasp had a dispute that led to the murder of the former, according to Muhammad Baqer al-Khansari in his biography of Shiite jurists "*Rawdat al-Jannat*". Also, it is similar to what happened between Nasser al-Din Shah and Mirza Shirazi during the Tobacco Protest, while there was another major dispute during the Constitutional Revolution. However, the partnership between the Safavid rulers and Shi'ite jurists was generally smooth.

The relationship between other dynasties, Qajar in particular, and the Shi'ite jurists, although was up and down, the power balance remained relatively even.

When the Pahlavi rule turned towards secularism, the balance of power shifted dramatically. This led to the exclusion of jurists from the public sphere to a very large extent, and paved the way for the development of notion of *Velayat-e Faqih* (the absolute Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, without any involvement of the sultan), turning it into a practical political framework. What paved the way for this was that the political sphere in the region was gripped by two currents: leftist revolutionaries, and proponents of an Islamic revival. This helped develop this ideology of governance and put theory into practice remarkably quickly.

Nostalgia for Islamic Rule

The Islamic Revolution in Iran was not an isolated event that happened by accident. It occurred in the context of political and social movements that sought to pursue a common dream in the midst of a troubled collective identity caught between tradition and modernity. And because of the appearance of totalitarian and autocratic rule, and the failure in applying a modern ruling system; all this played a major role in the dream of reinstituting just religious governance, inspired by the early Islamic rule in the days of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali. This model was seen to provide the most effective solutions for good governance in societies.

As with other countries in the region, Iran was largely engaged in attempts to recover this historical identity and resisting efforts to impose modern forms of governance, which were mostly unsuccessful in the region. Many felt that modern system models were unsuitable for Islamic societies. They maintained the belief that recovering the Islamic golden age was key to saving the Islamic world and humanity.

Meanwhile, the West was experiencing its own challenges with various forms of liberal, communist, and fascist regimes. However, the primary difference was that modern regimes were looking to the future to address questions of governance, while the region was generally looking for ways to revive the past. This nostalgia did not always consider the present challenges and conditions on the ground, or the specificities of earlier historical moments.

As a result, Islamic rule in Iran became part of the fundamentalist movements that tried to identify a pure antecedent that could deliver the Islamic world from an unfortunate present. Different movements chose different antecedents to emulate and adopted divergent methods to recover this lost glory, but tended to agree on the need to revive the past. They also differed with regard to whether it was acceptable to mix these historic models with elements of modernity. Some decided only modern technology was permissible, while others incorporated political principles and elements of governance models as well.

Hence an idea emerged that a modern republican governance model could be integrated with Islamic rule rooted in the historical identity and collective nostalgia of the Iranian society. By this logic, the former would represent the people's will and ensure democratic governance, while the latter would adopt religious principles from the time of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali, and from religious texts on governance in Shi'ite theology and jurisprudence.

This attempt to incorporate Islamic and democratic elements was a central challenge in developing forms of governance in Iran, since maintaining both was often impossible, and produced tensions within the Islamic regime itself. Most internal critiques of Islamic rule in Iran have sought to address the paradox involved in developing democratic and Islamic rule, which we will examine in more depth later on in the article.

The Muslims' Republic or the Islamic Republic?

The first local critique of the Iranian regime came from the *Freedom Movement* of Iran. There were three main leaders of this movement at that time: Ayatollah Sayyid Mahmoud Taleghani, Dr. Yadollah Sahabi, and Mehdi Bazargan who was the first prime minister in Iran after the Islamic Revolution. This movement sought to distinguish between the terms "*the Islamic Republic* " versus a "*The Muslims' Republic*".

The first term "*the Islamic Republic*", means that the new political system with all its institutional and legislative aspects should be built upon the Islamic identity, and the Shari'a law should be implemented. The Islamic nature of the regime would remain constant regardless of the political shifts and transformations that might happen through holding elections. Therefore, the idea of *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) turned to practice, represented by the supreme leader who will ensure the continuity of Islamic rule and the religious character of the new system of governance. Several additional institutions were also formed as part of this guardianship, including *the Guardian Council*, which contained six jurists (*fuqaha*) who approve and have veto power over all legislation. There was also an Assembly of Experts, which consists of 88 *mujtahid*s (jurists with the authority to interpret Islamic law), specialized for appointing the Supreme Leader. Meanwhile, the judicial authority must be headed by a jurist appointed by the Supreme Leader. There are also several other state institutions in the new system of governance to assure the implementation of Islamic rules .

In the second term "*The Muslims' Republic*"— which was backed by the Freedom Movement of Iran, the regime has a common unified democratic character but develops safeguards to ensure that it represents the beliefs and culture of the Iranian people. This theory is grounded in the belief that the democratic process in Muslim-majority societies will naturally provide Islamic identity to the governance system and legislation. However, this does not mean that the regime must formally adopt shari'a or impose Islamic law upon the people. The leaders of this movement were opposed to the idea of an absolute Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist and including her in the new constitution in Iran. From this concept, Sayyid Mahmoud Taleghani also was against forcing women to wear the hijab. However, this movement did not have the opportunity to turn their ideas into reality due to the success of the first movement that demanded the Islamization of the regime, especially after a referendum was held in which an absolute majority supported the Islamic Republic as a governance framework for the new regime. As a result, the Assembly of Experts was required to draw up a constitution according to that model.

The Republic before Islam, or Islam before the Republic?

A second attempt appeared because of the struggle between the reformist movement against the fundamentalist movement after the victory of reformist candidate Sayyid Mohammad Khatami in 1997. At that time, the reformists were trying to compromise with the Islamic regime. They would preserve some Islamist elements but would adapt

them to the republican nature of the regime in order to ensure democracy remains the priority and the underlying principle of governance.

Khatami proposed the idea of civil society as a basis for political reform, noting that it would be necessary to strengthen the civil foundations of the regime according to religious structures as part of the reform project that he tried to implement during his eight years as a president of Iran. However, Khatami encountered significant pushback from groups and institutions aligned with the fundamentalist movement in Iran. His ideas became somewhat ambiguous and vague as a result of these pressures, and perhaps due to a lack of clarity in the ideas themselves. He sometimes focused on the idea of a social contract as developed in political theory, especially that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In Khatami's writings and speeches, he also referred to the famous book of Mohammad Hussein Na'ini, "*Tanbih al-Umma wa-Tanzih al-Milla*" [the awakening of the community and refinement of nation]. This book was a major contribution to Shi'ite scholarly literature regarding the acts of constraining despotic rule and establishing a governance framework that would represent the will of the people through a consensus which fell under the Islamic jurisprudential notion of *wakala.* In other words, the people would authorize the ruler to manage the country's affairs.

This notion of *wakala* was clearly opposed to that of *velaya* (guardianship), particularly in its absolute manifestation as adopted by the Islamic regime in Iran. Khatami sometimes called for pursuing political liberalism through civil

institutions as part of the system of governance as well as argued in favour of relying on the opinion of the people for sovereign decisions. He emphasized the need to allow public opinion to express itself through syndicates and political parties, as well as elements of civil society as defined within a political science context, i.e., in which institutions serve as the link between the people and the state.

He tried to give this concept a religious sense by arguing that civil society was rooted in the "city of the Prophet." This implied that good governance had its origins in the form of rule developed by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. Khatami also drew upon the concepts of *bay'a* (an oath of allegiance) and the *shura* (mutual consultation) and argued that these concepts were compatible with new democratic mechanisms such as elections and popular referenda.

These ideas had more dimensions during Sayyid Khatami's time. Shaykh Mohsen Kadivar, a cleric supportive of reformism, also suggested that it was necessary to set a time limit for the Supreme Leader so that he gets changed by regular cycles, as was the case with the presidency. He argued this would also help the institution avoid having a single individual dominate political opinion or having one person or political movement to control the highest seat in the country. Other theorists who supported Khatami proposed other ideas to curtail the power of the Guardian Council and other institutions that function as an extension of Islamist power in Iran while expanding republican structures, but this did not succeed because of the strength of the opposition against it.

Secular Critiques of Islamic Rule

Khatami's unsuccessful efforts to promote reconciliation led to heightened expectations in reformist circles, which in turn produced greater criticism of the Islamic regime. The reformists called for a more secular system of governance. Political theology took several important steps forward during this period. Reformists who criticized the regime argued that the political system needed to be fully secularized. The most important of these theoretical shifts can be traced to the reformist cleric Shaykh Mohammad Shabestari, who wrote in his book Al-*Iman va Al-Hurryai* [Faith and Freedom] that faith fundamentally contradicts with the Islamization of power, and that faith depends on free will. Faith is only a virtue when an individual is able to have choice, and if one chooses to believe, then that is a religious virtue. However, if one is forced to act according to faith, then this is no longer a virtue. While the state relies on coercive methods to impose its laws and regulations on society and is the only entity authorized to use lawful strength. By this logic, if the state adopted religious precepts and converted them into laws of the state, these too would become coercive, and that would contradicts with the faith-based nature of these principles, which required free will.

Shabestari's views here were similar to those of the Sudanese scholar and researcher Abdullahi al-Na'im. The latter argued in his book *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* that Muslims would only be able to freely practice their faith in a secular state, which

would provide absolute freedom of choice in religious belief. By contrast, a believer living in a religious state would surely encounter challenges to and limits his/her beliefs, and his/her faith would lose its core value, namely, the freedom of choice. In this case, a believer would also face constraints on differing interpretations (*ijtihad*), since the state's interpretation might not necessarily align with that of individual believers.

In conclusion, Shi'ite political Islam has held power in Iran for four decades and was preceded by other theoretical transformations and movements. It has experienced various critical stages that have struck at the core of its political existence, which suggests that these shifts and developments will continue to occur. Only time will tell whether this system of governance will endure or whether it might begin to wither under criticism and opposition. However, it is clear that this system must adapt and evolve according to the new political and societal milieu of the modern world in order to ensure its longevity. This is particularly important given that it has achieved major transformations and shifts over the years as dictated by specific social and political realities.

Religious hawzas and Shi'ite Religious Education:

From a Legacy of Independence to Political Dependency

Sari Hanafi

Religious seminaries (*hawza*s) are among the most important educational institutions in preparing imams to give sermons in Shi'ite mosques and in providing religious education to specialists and a general Shi'ite audience alike.[1] This paper will examine these seminaries and their curricula with a focus on how shari'a topics interact with philosophy and the social sciences. It will also trace how the *hawza*s developed as independent institutions, the current dynamics of their relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and debates around centralization versus decentralization.

The Development of the *hawza*: Centralization vs. Decentralization

Hawzas were deep-rooted institutions historically known for their relative autonomy from the political sphere, much like Quranic schools. The religious seminary of Najaf was the historical religious capital for the Shi'ite world and its social and religious structures for about a thousand years. It was after the year 1038 by the leader of the Shi'ites at the time, Shaykh Mohammad ibn Hassan al-Tusi, who is

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1. According to Firas al-Nasser (2022), the number of Shi'ites is estimated to be around 150-200 million people globally, or about 10-13 percent of all Muslims. https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2022/4/21.

known as Shaykh al-Ta'ifa.[2] Historically, it was the center for Shi'ite seekers of knowledge from around the world. According to Ali al-Momen, the number of affiliates of the seminary in Najaf in 1967 was around 16,000 students and teachers. This fell to only 500 in 1991 due to oppression from the Ba'athist party in Iraq. After the party was removed, the number grew again to around 15,000 students and teachers by 2020.

The second most prominent Shi'ite seminary was the *hawza* in Qom in Iran, which dates to the 9th century, during the time of the Shi'ite leader and *marja* Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babawayh, who was known as al-Shaykh al-Saduq ("the truthful scholar").[3] There were around 140,000 students and 10,000 teachers at the seminary in Qom in 2020. Meanwhile, there were 250 *mujtahids* (individuals with the authority to interpret Islamic law), including 100 *mujtahids* teaching at the most advanced level (*bahth al-kharij*), that means: there were almost 100 classes held at this level in Qom alone. There were 350,000 foreigners living in Qom, of whom 50,000 were affiliated with the seminary.

There were also three other major seminaries in Iran, in Mashhad, Isfahan, and Tehran, with a total of 90,000 students and teachers. There were also 650 medium and

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2. Ali al-Momen, "The Shi'ite hawza: Between Najaf and Qom," 4 August 2021, *Shafaq*, https://bit.ly/3CHLoy9
3. Adnan Farhan Al Qasim, *The History of hawzas Among Imami Shi'ites*, p. 6, Beirut: Dar al-Salam.

small *hawza*s which included 2000 religious schools in 650 Iranian cities with a total of 60,000 affiliates. There were around 30 classes held at the most advanced level in the *hawza*s of Mashhad, Tehran, Isfahan, Ahvaz, Shiraz, and Tabriz. The total number of affiliates among all the Iranian *hawzas,* including Qom, was around 300,000 students and teachers all in all.[4]

In Lebanon, the *hawza* in Jabal Amel became prominent under the *marja* Shaykh Muhammad al-Makki al-Amili (1385), who was known as al-Shahid al-Awal "the first martyr". Since the end of the nineteenth century, Jabal Amel experienced a scholarly renaissance that resulted in developing new modes of teaching and ways of thinking in religious schools. There were fifteen schools established in southern Lebanon alone. After finishing these first stages of study, capable students could go to Iraq to pursue advanced studies at the *hawza*s of Najaf. Leading Lebanese religious scholars (*'ulama*) graduated from Najaf and became widely known in the Arab and the Islamic world. After the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the Islamic revival which was established by Imam Musa al-Sadr in the 1960s continued among Lebanese Shi'ites. Since the mid-1980s, new seminaries were established, including the Iranian-sponsored *al-Rasul al-Akram* hawza in Haret Hreik, the Islamic Shar'ia Institute which operates under the auspices of Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, and other

4. Al-Momen, 2021.

*hawza*s. Graduates could also continue their studies in Qom or enroll in the Al-Mustafa International University in Iran.[5] There are around 30 *hawza*s in Lebanon today, including both large and small seminaries.[6]

Many Friday preachers graduated from *hawza*s, although there are not many statistics available on this. Some graduated from Iraq or from Qom in Iran, while others completed their religious studies (or sometimes legal or basic studies) at universities in Lebanon. The vast majority of those that studied in religious *hawza*s were studying for a bachelor's degree. This was the result of agreements signed between the *hawza*s and universities in Lebanon, such as the Islamic University of Lebanon, enabling *hawza* students to receive a bachelor's degree in Islamic studies. As outlined above, *hawza*s were very important institutions in training Friday preachers.

Historically, the financial affairs of the *hawza*s were separate from those of the state. The *khums* system (a religious income tax on one-fifth from certain sources toward specified causes) provided the *hawza*s with direct income. *hawza*s functioned independently from the state, despite their strong ties with the religious authorities

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5. For more details, see Haitham Mazahim, 2018, "Shi'ite hawzas in Lebanon: Between the Traditional and the Academic," https://cutt.us/uUM1F; Ali Kassem, 2018, "The Modernization of the hawza? Lebanon as a Case Study," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 11 (4): 83–110.
6. Ali Kassem, "The Modernization of the hawza?".

(*marja*s) in Iran (either directly or via Hezbollah) and Iraq. Shi'ite shaykhs also received funding from private classes, writing, and media appearances.

Curricula

According to Mottahedeh,[7] education in Shi'ite religious schools was historically structured as follows: Each student began with introductory studies (*muqadamat*) which included Arabic language, logic, and theology. After this stage, the student moved on to *sutooh* (intermediate-advanced studies), where they studied a practical manual of law published by a prominent Shi'ite *marja* and then several books of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). After this, students began to study *usul al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence), that is, the study of how rulings in Islamic law are derived, and evaluating the transmission (*naql*) of hadith. There was also time set aside for philosophy. Finally, the student entered the advanced stage of *bahth al-kharij* which involved discussing a particular topic and systemically considering arguments and counterarguments. In this *hawza* system of study, the students had to develop competence at several levels in order to reach the final stage of *ijtihad* (interpretation). These three levels (*muqadamat, sutooh,* and *bahth al-kharij*) took eight to nine years to complete. Usually these classes began around 9:00-11:00 am so that students could attend to other necessary matters regarding their studies in various scientific disciplines.

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7. R. Mottahedeh, 2016, "The Najaf Ḥawzah Curriculum," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26: 341–51.

Historically, students sat on the ground in a study circle (*halaqa*) with their teacher, but now most major *hawza*s use the same chairs as classrooms in modern schools and universities.

In one master's thesis of Ali Qassim, which I supervised and co-interviews with him professors in *hawza*s, we found that some major *hawza*s teach non-shari'a materials that are closer to the humanities (history, geography, philosophy, language, ethics) and social sciences. However, these topics were limited and less wide-ranging than in the shari'a faculties of Lebanese universities.[8] This does not necessarily mean that we should promote the humanities and social sciences to develop critical thinking and *fiqh al-waqi'* (understanding contexts) using social science research techniques and theories, as proposed by Abd al-Ghani Emad.[9] If we compare interviews conducted in the Shi'ite *hawza*s and Sunni universities, we can see that the first set of interviewees were more aware of the importance of the social sciences when asked about general curricula and books in the field.

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8. The degree to which these subjects are taught differs: Beirut Islamic University does not teach any social science subjects, while al-Imam al-Ouzai University teaches 12 humanities and social science subjects of a total of 40. In its four-year program, the Islamic Dawa College covers 9 social science subjects of a total 65 subjects. See Sari Hanafi, forthcoming, *Studying Islam in the Arab World: The Rupture Between Religion and the Social Sciences*. London: Routledge

9. Abd al-Ghani Emad, 2019, *Guardians of Religion in a Diverse Society: Religious Education and the Teaching of Shari'a in Lebanon*, Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

This is also the general trend beyond Lebanon in other countries such as Iran. Sara Shariati has demonstrated that the *hawza*s of Qom kept their philosophy curriculum but removed sociology, psychology, and politics after 2013. Later on they timidly allow Islamic social sciences.[10] The Iranian revolution had been compelled to grapple with complex economic, political, and social issues, in which clerics played a leading role. Kamal al-Haydari, a professor of Islamic philosophy in the *hawza* of Qom, alluded to the challenges regarding transformations taking place in Iran. He said: "When we encounter problems with Islamic rule, we have to address them. When we look at Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), I'm not saying it can't address these issues at all, I'm just saying that many of the resources couldn't help us grapple with these questions."[11]

The *Marja* in Religious Seminaries and Ties to Iran

Since the Islamic Revolution, the *hawza*s began to lose their historically independent position vis-à-vis political authority as a result of Iranian funding for the seminaries. The presence of local parties aligned with Iran (such as Hezbollah, the Houthis, the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces, etc.) also had a political influence on the seminaries. In Lebanon, the *marja* Hussein Fadlallah had a significant following in Shi'ite circles and became widely known for his judgments (*ijtihad*). The Islamic Shar'ia Institute (his

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10. Interview with Sara Shariati, January 2013.
11. Ahmed Bouaoud, *Fiqh al-Waqi': Principles and Foundations,* (Darussalam Publishers, 2006).

hawza) also became prominent but was pushed to the side after the Iranian authorities felt that it was competing with the authorities in Qom. Fadlallah had been accused of apostasy by some extremist clerics in Iran when he announced he had become a *marja*. Today the institute in Lebanon has only minor influence compared to the *hawza* of al-Rasul al-Akram, which is funded by Iranian funding and has a Lebanese-Iranian staff and instructors. Here I will consider two forces that played a role in limiting the autonomy of the *hawza*s and limiting the scope of the Shi'ite religious sphere in Arab countries: the Al-Mustafa International University in Iran on the one hand, and the *hawza*s and *husseiniya*s that were part of the broader Iranian imperial project on the other.

Al-Mustafa International University in Iran

Al-Mustafa International University helped in institutionalizing *hawza*s that seek to obtain support from the Iranian authorities. The university presented itself as an international cultural and scholarly institution that sought to foster Islamic and social sciences and the humanities. It stated that it would dedicate modern technologies and digital spaces to providing opportunities for students from all over the world from different regions, sects, nationalities, and ethnicities to pursue their studies of Islam and the humanities. In doing so, the university sought to train competent and pious religious scholars who would spread Islam and Islamic knowledge and be guided by the Holy Quran and the knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (Prophet's relatives).

Al-Mustafa International University used two approaches: either a short- or a long-term course of study. The long-term study option had two systems: a *hawza* system (with levels) and an academic system (with stages). Both options could be pursued either in-person or remotely.

There is also stages academic system (*nizam al-marahel*) in the Al-Mustafa International University as what is in the *hawza* model. In the former, the student could receive a diploma, bachelor's, master's, or doctorate in Islamic studies or in the Islamic humanities. At the end of the course of study, the student received an official diploma that was recognized worldwide.

Although the university specialized in shari'a sciences, it also offered degrees in social sciences such as a masters in cultural studies (see the list of university subjects at the end of this chapter).

The impact of this university and its associated *hawza*s went beyond the students who attended in person. According to a study conducted by Ali al-Momen, there were around 150,000 students from Iran and from countries around the world who studied online, including 45,000 women. Most *hawza*s and religious universities with an active online presence were based in Qom and were affiliated with the *hawza* of Qom and Al-Mustafa International University. That is why the programs received attention: because they followed the curricula of the *hawza* itself.[12]

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12. Al-Momen, 2021. https://bit.ly/3CHLoy9.

Of course, this university was not alone in institutionalizing *hawza*s in Iran and in the Shi'ite world. Al-Momen (2021) indicated that there were four central administrations that ran all of the *hawza* schools, universities, institutions, and their branches in Qom. These included:

1. The Board of Directors of the *hawza* in Qom, which supervises Iranian students.

2. The Al-Mustafa International University in Qom, which particularly targets non-Iranian students.

3. The Central Directorate for Women's *hawza*s, which is only for women.

4. The Board of Directors for *hawza*s in Iran, which supervises small and mid-size *hawza*s throughout Iran.

There are many initiatives from Iranian institutions to connect the *hawza*s with one another, such as a website[13] which presents news on the *hawza*s in five languages: Farsi, Arabic, French, English, and Urdu.

*Hawza*s and *Husseinias* in the Iranian Imperial Project

Since the early 80s, and along other empires, Iran has acted like an imperial power with several features, mainly in maintaining its center (the state of Iran), the Islamic identity concerned with general Islamic issues such as the Palestinian problem, and the Shi'ite identity to protect Shi'ism and to spread it throughout the world. Even if it adopts a procedural

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13. https://ar.hawzahnews.com/

democracy, It had an authoritarian political regime that does not have freedom of expression, the right to run for office, nor the right to form political parties (beyond what would be approved by official religious clerics). This became clear in Iran's behavior towards less powerful countries, especially after the Arab Spring. This chapter will focus on how Iran spread Shi'ism to achieve its political objectives, some of which were supporting noble causes such as the Palestinian liberation movement, but also counterrevolutions against the potential democratic transition.

Before talking about political demography and demographic engineering, I must first say that it is the right of any religious or religious-political group to call upon the people to change their religion or sect as long as this decision is made out of their free will and not as a result of substantial pressure. However, the main issue is how this is used to support the Iranian political agenda, using special circumstances (e.g. supporting needy people in wartime). This does not concern only the Arab world as the periphery of the Iranian empire but extended elsewhere. Iranian Shi'ism also had a presence in Africa, as did Salafi and Wahhabi movements. This political and religious competition produced violent conflicts within many countries (Gabon for instance).

In Syria *husseiniya*s and *hawza*s became active in all areas under the regime's control regardless if there were Syrian Shi'ites there originally or not. At the same time, demographic shifts and intensive naturalization procedures have been underway for Shi'ite Arabs and foreigners. This

was carried out by the Iranian authorities at the same time that the Syrian regime officially recognized the Alawite sect as part of the religious landscape of Syria. This is not inherently problematic, given the need to acknowledge the right to one's own beliefs including freedom of conscience. However, in the Syrian case, this reflected oppressive demographic engineering.

As Antonia Robson argued, the al-Assad regime succeeded in securitizing sectarian identities in the early stage of the uprisings and transformed the conflict into a civil war with major sectarian dimensions. The regime utilized a discourse of protecting minorities, deliberately stirring up fears of alternatives to Alawite rule through playing off deep-rooted anxieties about the lack of security and Syria's sectarian past. This enabled the regime to mobilize its base and justify its oppressive campaigns to explain the uprising through the lens of security. Key regional actors backing al-Assad, such as Iran and Hezbollah, also focused on securitization by escalating an internal conflict in one nation to a regional security problem as part of broader Shi'ite-Sunni tensions.

Although Hafez al-Assad sided with Iran against Iraq (which was led by another segment of the Ba'ath Party), the Syrian leader also wanted to maintain some level of balance in his relations with the Arab regimes, especially Saudi Arabia, and did not want Iran to become involved in internal Syrian affairs. However, this balance began to fade after Bashar al-Assad took power from his father and Iran began to penetrate further into Syrian society. Shi'ite

activities expanded and *husseiniya*s were established, but only to a limited extent. The regime was afraid of the response that this could provoke from Syrian society and from its Arab neighbors. Meanwhile, Iran's influence in Alawite officer circles, the Syrian army, and the security forces was slowly growing.[14]

After the Syrian uprising, Shi'ism continued to spread as part of political demographic change. According to Khalid Sindawi, who drew upon studies of the European Union, cases in which Sunnis converted to Shi'ism cannot be attributed to the usual socio-economic factor. For example, in Damascus, 64.4 percent of converts to Shi'ism were middle-income families.

Other activities are changing the religious landscape. Syria had two important shari'a institutes: Al Fatih Institute for Studies,[15] which was an Islamic charitable, cultural, scholarly, and reform institution founded by Shaykh Muhammad Salih Farfour in 1956, and the Shaykh Ahmed Kuftaro Center (named after a Naqshbandi Sufi shaykh and former mufti of Syria), which was established in 1975.[16] Although Shaykh Farfour and Kuftaro had been close

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14. Antonia Robson, 2021, "Mobilizing Sectarian Identities in the Syrian War," *Harmoon*, 20 September 2001, https://bit.ly/3u6sIHm

15. The institute included faculties of law and shari'a, theology (*usul al-din*) and philosophy, Arabic language, and Islamic and Arabic studies.

16. This center was previously known as the Abu el-Nour Institute, and now includes a faculty of *dawa* and Islamic studies, a faculty of theology (*usul al-din*), and of shari'a and law.

to the Syrian regime, their institutes were not officially recognized until 2011, after the Syrian revolution began, under the umbrella of *the al-Sham Higher Institute for Shari'a Sciences, Arabic Language, Islamic Studies and Research* in Damascus. This was attached to the Ministry of Endowments. Meanwhile, the Sayyida Ruqayya Center, which was previously only a *hawza* that taught Shi'ite jurisprudence, also became an institute.[17] This switch helped establish the legitimacy of the Sayyida Ruqayya Center, but some analysts have also argued that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's later decision to abolish the position of general mufti and to transfer their duties to a cross-sectarian center for jurisprudential studies was part of the broader expansion of Shi'ism in the country, and indicated plans to remake the religious map in Syria.[18]

Iran also made similar attempts in other Arab countries and mixed together political, religious, and cultural elements of Shi'ism. With regard to a cultural framework, Iran established Shi'ite cultural associations in my countries. In Morocco, al-Ghadeer Cultural and Social Association in Meknes, which was led by Hassan Hani, whose brother Idris Hani wrote theoretical texts about Shi'ite thought in Morocco. However, the group's activities stopped for unknown reasons. There was also Anwar al-Mawadda

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17. This included faculties for theology (*usul al-din*), Arabic language and Islamic studies, and shari'a.

18. TRT arabic, Deir ez-Zor after Damascus and Aleppo... Iranian militias continue to impose Shiism in Syria, 2021, https://bit.ly/3QtuWbb

in Tangier and al-Liqa' al-Insani in Oujda, which did not receive permits from the authorities. The Basa'ir and Tawassul associations also focused on cultural programs. Unlike in 2006 and 2007, a major reduction of cultural activities occurred in 2008 for these organizations and some shut down on their own without explaining why. The country's highest authority seemed to double down on combating Shi'ism as part of its plan to restructure its religious sphere to what it had been in 2004 and 2008. This prompted those involved with these Shi'ite organizations to make a strategic shift, and to move from open activity to undercover operations.[19]

Iraq was home to the *hawza* in Najaf, which Iran tried to control both directly and indirectly. According to Ali Mamouri,[20] after the fall of Saddam Hussein, concerns shifted from Qom to Najaf, and Iran began to spend huge amounts of money in Najaf. It sent a number of representatives from the *hawza* in Qom to Najaf to spread its conservative ideological and social views and to foster a new generation of scholars aligned

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19. When Iran and Morocco cut ties in 2009 after allegations that an Iraqi school in Rabat had been teaching children Shi'ite principles, this strengthened the argument that Shi'ite activities should be conducted less overtly. This was especially true after it was announced that Morocco would make strengthening spiritual faith and doctrinal unity and combating Shi'ism as state priorities. Some shia figures began to think about building bridges with the Left to help them considering their case as a human rights issue, especially freedom of belief and the rights of religious minorities in Morocco. (*Arabi 21*, 2019). https://bit.ly/448C8P3.
20. Ali Mamouri, 2013, "Competition Heats Up Between Qom, Najaf," *Al-Monitor*, 17 May 2013, https://bit.ly/463wrT2.

with the political vision of Qom and *Velayat-e Faqih*. Imam Khomeini opened an official office in Najaf and began to disburse large remunerations to the students. He then appointed Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi al-Asifi as the official representative in Najaf, who opened an official office near the house of al-Sistani. After this angered al-Sistani, the location of the office was moved and Khomeini's office and reduced their activities.[21] There were also Iranian efforts to plan for the *marja* after al-Sistani with the support of persons aligned with him. In this regard, Qom and Najaf had diverged at two levels. At the political level, moderate-conservatives in Najaf felt that the graduates of Qom were very focused on worldly affairs and had political aspirations. They also saw their jurisprudence and other religious activities as of a lower quality than that of their counterparts in Najaf. At the national level, there was a competition between the Arab scholars in Najaf and those of Iranian origin, but this was less important than the first issue.

Conclusion

Shi'ite *hawza*s do not differ significantly from Quranic Sunni schools with regard to the diversity of *marja*s and schools of thought. However, that diversity has shrunk significantly under the influence of Iranian funding. In general, contemporary Shi'ite consciousness has been

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21. Ibid.

shaped by conflicting convictions and divergent perspectives which in their depth seek out the truth of Shi'ism itself and thereby reformulate the role of the faqih. According to the Lebanese philosopher Wajie Qansuh, there was a major controversy within the Shi'ite jurisprudential institution when the *hawza* in Qom produced new interpretations upholding the religious state in Iran. Meanwhile, Najaf has kept its traditional position and considered the worldly affairs to be outside the scope and purview of a religious institution.[22] This meant that the *hawza* of Qom has more influence in Lebanese *hawza*s than the *hawza* of Najaf. Iranian influence extended beyond the political sphere and, as we have shown, also shaped the content of some of the study curricula in the *hawza*s, especially material related to the humanities and social sciences.

How this would be developed? Ali Mamouri[23] has predicted that the disputes between Qom and Najaf will soon lead to a greater rift which would establish two independent centers of Shi'ism based on very divergent approaches. Political and social factors have also played a decisive role in this shift. Meanwhile, there is still ambiguity regarding the concept of *Velayat-e Faqih* and which religious *marja* will lead Shi'ism.

22. Wajih Kanso, Shiism between religious faith and political loyalty, 2021, https://bit.ly/3sqU4Y7.
23. Ali Mamouri, 2013, "Competition Heats Up Between Qom, Najaf" *Al-Monitor*, 17 May 2013.

V. Annex

a) General *hawza* Courses (Division of Social and Cultural Studies)

Number in Sequence	Name of Course	Number of Units	Hours			Prequisites	Notes
			Total	Theory	Practice		
1	Islamic Jurisprudence 1	3	48	48			
2	Islamic Jurisprudence 2	2	32	32		Islamic Jurisprudence 1	
3	Islamic Jurisprudence 3	2	32	32		Islamic Jurisprudence 2	
4	Principles of Jurisprudence	3	48	48			
5	Comparative Scholastic Theology 1	2	32	32			
6	Comparative Scholastic Theology 2	2	32	32		Comparative Scholastic Theology 1	
7	Islamic Philosophy 1	2	32	32			
8	Islamic Philosophy 2	2	32	32		Islamic Philosophy 1	
9	Islamic Philosophy 3	2	32	32		Islamic Philosophy 2	
Total		20	320	320			

b) Specialized *hawza* Courses (Division of Social and Cultural Studies)

Number in Sequence	Name of Course	Number of Units	Hours		
			Total	Theory	Practice
1	Exegesis: Materials and Methods	2	32		32
2	Thematic Approaches to Tafsir (interpretation) (Quran and Society)	2	32		32
3	The Quran and The Sciences (Social Sciences)	2	32		32
4	The Quran and Contemporary Culture	2	32		32
5	Understanding Hadith (including Rhetoric and all Social Accounts)	2	32		32
6	Evaluating Hadith: History, Narrators, Verification	2	32		32
Total		12			

c) Specialized Courses in Master's Program (Division of Social and Cultural Studies)

Number in Sequence	Name of Lesson	Number of Units	Hours			Notes
			Total	Theory	Practice	
1	Technology Studies	2	32	32		
2	Sociology of Knowledge	2	32	32		
3	History of Islamic Civilization	2	32	32		In comparison with all civilizations
4	Cultural Studies	2	32	32		Beliefs, values, traditions
5	Literary Arts	2	32	32		
6	Cultural Anthropology	2	32	32		
7	Public Relations	2	32	32		
8	Sociology of Religion	2	32	32		
9	Cultural Theory	2	32	32		
10	Cultural Principles in Quranic Verses and Hadith Narrations	2	32	32		
11	Educational Studies	2	32	32		
12	Comparative Cultural Studies	2	32	32		Compares between Islamic and modern secular culture
13	Religious Rituals and Groups	2	32	32		
14	Cultural Transformations from an Islamic Perspective	2	32	32		
15	Master's Thesis	4	128		128	
Total		32	576	448	128	

Chapter III

Shi'ites in Iraq: Political Action and the Question of Identity

Shifting Identities in Iraqi Shi'ite Political Discourse

Akeel Abbas

Abstract

This paper examines the shifts in the ideological discourse of the Islamist Shi'ite parties in Iraq since their opposition years under Saddam Hussein's regime through their rise to power during the post-Saddam era. Because of its identity-based and essentialist nature, rooted in a narrative of historical injustice, this discourse, the paper argues, continues to rely on the deployment of moral dichotomies (such as the conflict between the representatives of good and evil) to establish religious and political legitimacy. The paper follows the changes in the binary concepts employed by these parties in this evolving conflict from a unifying discourse that adopted an all-encompassing Islamism, generally free from sectarian and denominational implications in the early years, while emphasizing an inherent animosity towards the West and its presumed local representatives as the domineering enemy to Islam, to a sectarian discourse based on a conflict with the Iraqi "other" represented by the Sunnis and Sunnism. The paper discusses the reasons for and consequences of this change in discourse and its consequences, especially in the context of the electoral and political competition and the complex task of managing the state that the Islamist Shia parties found themselves in after 2003.

The Ideological Framework of Iraqi Shi'ite Political Islam

When the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) was established in Iran in November 1982 based on an official and clear Iranian desire, to help organize the Shi'ite opposition in Iraq against Saddam Hussein's regime, SCIRI issued its founding statement in which it described its ideological line of thinking, its view of the roots of Iraq's problems, and how these might be solved:[1]

> O you, Muslims of Iraq, members of the glorious Islamic world (*ummah*), free people of the world: Since World War I and the fall of the Islamic state, our wounded Iraq has been subjected to various forms of cultural, political, and military invasions. The powers of world arrogance, particularly Britain and the US, have imposed their will via a series of agent governments that have oppressed and terrorized the Iraqi people. The people have experienced the worst forms of deprivation, persecution, and division.

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1. "Iraqi Shi'ite political Islam" refers to Islamic political movements formed after 2003 either in Iraq or abroad, such as the Islamic Dawa Party and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. This study does not include Shi'ite movements formed after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime such as the Sadrist movement or the armed factions operating as part of the Iranian-backed Axis of Resistance. These later groups were characterized by different dynamics that produced a discourse that aligned with that of the pre-2003 movements in some regards but differed in others. Although the study makes reference to some figures from post-2003 movements, it remains primarily concerned with examining elements of discourses before 2003 that were common among various Iraqi Shi'ite political movements at the time.

Corruption and backwardness remain rampant in social, cultural, and economic spheres. The loyal sons of the Iraqi people, especially its religious scholars (*'ulama*) have played a great role in resisting the injustice, humiliation and subservience imposed by colonialism on the Iraqi people in all cultural, political, and military spheres. This resistance began with religious scholars, such as Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Sa'id al-Habboubi, Ayatollah Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Shirazi, and their brothers, leading the jihad against the British military invasion [during world war I]. It continued with the organization of political boycotts, and popular uprisings as well as confronting the efforts of crusade proselytism and Marxist and capitalist atheism by using the works and writings of Ayatollah Shaykh Mohammed Jawad al-Balaghi and the martyr Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. These acts, which were hostile to Islam and the Muslim Iraqi people, culminated in a disgraceful coup that brought Aflaq's Ba'ath Party to power in Iraq in 1968.[2]

The statement specifies the main enemy of Islam, and consequently of the Islamist political movements represented in the SCIRI, as the West — the US and UK in particular— by considering the formal Iraqi political experience, since the monarchical founding of the Iraqi state in the 1920s un-

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2. Ali al-Momen, *Years of Embers: The Islamic Movement in Iraq, 1957-1986*, fifth edition, (Beirut: Center for Arab Orient Studies, 2020), p. 584-585.

til the Ba'athist regime, as different local representatives and promoters of "suspicious" Western values and ideas. The statement enumerates the supposed shortcomings of this experience through its latest Ba'athist representation, pointing out to one particular shortcoming related to this regime's continuous effort to "distort the Muslim character of the Iraqi people, eradicating the historical, intellectual and cultural features of this glorious Muslim people, and cutting it off from its heritage, history, civilization and Islamic glories..[3] Before shifting from being a general umbrella group for Islamist Shi'ite movements to a movement in its own right, SCIRI had represented Islamist Shi'ite parties in Iraq, including the Islamic Dawa Party.[4] This is why this founding statement represents an intellectual consensus that appears taken-for-granted among Islamist Shi'ite parties. The importance of the extracts quoted above lie in the fact that the statement is among the few rare texts in the official register of Iraqi political Shi'ite Islam that engage in some detail with the country's modern history. It provides the perspective developed by this branch of political Islam regarding its understanding of modern Iraq, since its founding in 1921 until the date of this statement in the early 1980s, away from the moralistic and religious generalizations about opposing tyranny and enduring hardships to defend the faith, which are often seen in this register.

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3. Ibid., 586.

4. The council, which was formed at the bequest of Iran, also included a Sunni-Kurdish Islamic movement known as the Kurdistan Islamic Union.

The statement announces frank positions about the nation's modern history. It considers Islam, in its general, non-denominational version, to be the basis of political and legal legitimacy of governing, hence, rejecting the claim of foreign or sectarian domination by Ottoman rule over Iraq since the legitimacy and acceptability of this rule was rooted in its religious character, something that justifies the feelings of regret for the end of this rule as the "fall of the Islamic State" led by the Ottomans. The statement, then, considers all governments formed following the fall of this Islamic state as "agent governments," which harmed Iraq and were imposed by the West, the source of distrust, exploitation and bullying, in the context of its assumed cultural and political invasion of Iraq with the aim of falsifying its Islamic identity. Based on this portrayal, the important experience of modernizing a traditional society, initiated with the formation of the Iraqi state in the 1920s with British support, disappears in the interest of a binary description advanced by the statement that sees this experience negatively in terms of suffered deprivation, enfeeblement, division and different forms of corruption and backwardness. According to this understanding, the 1920 uprising becomes a popular-religious grassroots response to the cultural threat of westernization rather than to material and economic injustices, political procrastination, and conflicting interests of various actors who had previously been allies. Finally, in the language of the statement, Iraqi liberalism and Marxism turn to be part of atheistic effort in the context of the wider and continuing westernizing "project" of alienation, something that necessitated a religious response led by clergymen. These clergymen, the statement

assumes, have been represented by the Islamist Shia movements, included in SCIRI, in that these movements serve as an intellectual and moral continuation of the efforts of these clergymen.

Conflict here emerges as an organizing principle in how the forces of Iraqi Shia political Islam understand itself and the world around it. This conflict is understood by the movements of this political Islam in binary terms to involve "evil," powerful, and usually dominant forces versus the forces of good which, although relatively weak, are determined, principled, and resilient. One might argue that this is a modern Islamist application of the pre-modern Islamic concept of *istishab* (continuous certainty),[5] which is based on a classical understanding that considers the essence of Islam as an eternal conflict between belief and disbelief, whether internal or external, carried out in continuously renewed shapes, differing only in form according to the

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5. *Istishab* (continuous certainty) is a jurisprudential concept within *usul al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence) and is used to derive theological rulings. It relies on the notion of prior certainty to address new changes of state in which there is uncertainty. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr defined *istishab* as requiring morally responsible persons or believers to adhere to the previous state of certainty if there is doubt that a new condition intervened changing this certainty . For example, al-Sadr explained: "I am certain that water is pure, and that if it is made unclean by some impurity then we might doubt whether it is pure. We do not know [for sure] whether the water has been made impure, so we presume continuity of the previous state [of purity] . . . . See: Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, *New Frameworks for Usul al-Fiqh,* (Qom: Center for Research and Specialized Studies in Honor of the Martyr al-Sadr, 2001), p.236. A daily and practical example of *istishab* is when the person is sure that he/she did the ceremonial ablution necessary to perform the prayer, but later before actually performing the prayer, he/she starts to suspect that he/she did something that broke the ablution, such as peeing or dozing off which requires him/her to repeat the ablution. Because he/she is not certain of committing that act that breaks the ablution while certain of the previous act of doing the ablution, he/she should ignore the later suspicion and act based on the previous certainty.

vicissitudes of time and place. This understanding was brought to bear on the modern age of nation-states in the sense that the essence of modernity's conflicts is likewise moral and religious, just like how the conflicts of the various pre-modern states of the Islamic caliphate, whether Umayyad or Abbasid, have been understood by these Islamist Shi'ite movements.

This vision of modern history is a key point of convergence between Shi'ite and Sunni political Islam. Sunni and Shi'ite perspectives also align on other issues such as using victimhood as a conceptual framework to explain this conflict in modern times. "Victimhood" itself is a binary concept based on invoking the past as an ongoing conflict between the strong and weak as a way to understand the present in which the conflict continues but in different forms, with its "essence" remaining unchanged. Victimhood usually involves a defining sense of an overwhelming psychological suffering by the group that sees itself as the victim. As Didier Fassin and Richard Fechtman have argued, this occurs through forming a collective memory "articulated as a traumatic relationship with the past in which the group identifies itself as a victim through its recognition of a shared experience of violence. Notwithstanding the different contexts, the moral framework that emerges is the same: suffering establishes grounds for a cause; the event demands a reinterpretation of history."[6]

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6. Didier Fassin and Richard Fechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 15-16.

In SCIRI's founding statement (and in similar conceptual frameworks in Sunni political Islam), the key traumatic event in question is the fall of the Islamic caliphate and the ensuing struggle against European powers that had overthrown the caliphate and imposed their non-Islamic values in the Arab world.

There is also an important difference between Sunni political Islam and its Shi'ite counterpart regarding the position and the function of victimhood in relation to understanding the self and dealing with the other. In Sunni political Islam, victimhood is understood to be a modern problem dating back to the end of World War I. For Sunnis, this is a political issue unrelated to Sunni religious belief, which long predates the emergence of Sunni political Islam as a response to modern victimhood wrought by Europe. By contrast, the feeling of victimhood is foundational in the doctrinal and political structure of Shi'ism, long before it developed into a full-fledged sect in the fifth Hijri century. While Sunnis have a narrow conception of victimhood that is limited in range and is confined to the political sphere, the Shi'ites have a deep-rooted and comprehensive sense of victimhood that is central to individual and collective Shi'ite consciousness.

Mohammed Jawad Mughniyeh links the presumed trans-historical oppression of Shi'ites to what he considers as the formation of Shi'ism as a revolutionary faith at heart where what is religious is already integrated into what is political:

> The Shi'ites, as Imams, theologians and literary persons, rose against oppressive rulers, refusing to cooperate with them in their transgressions. This is so because Shi'ism as a doctrine, based on its own nature, is a revolution against wrongdoing and a readiness to sacrifice one's own life for the sake of what is right. Because it was illogical that the rulers would ignore this doctrine, they persecuted the Shi'ites, inflicting on them every possible pain, and pursuing them everywhere. They made a bargain with some bad [Sunni] clergymen. The two sides agreed to kill those [Shi'ites]believers faithful to Allah, his prophet and ahlu albayat. The clergymen blessed this killing, justifying it based on this supposed religion.[7]

Even without explicitly stating it, the oppressive side in this victimhood duality is the Sunni Muslim, something that appears generally clearly in pre-modern classical Shi'ite writing, but not in the discourse of Islamist Shi'ite movements, particularly the Dawa party, during the opposition era when Saddam was in power.

Whether or not the oppressor in the Shi'ite victimhood duality was a Sunni ruler as in pre-modern eras, a modern occupying foreigner, or a modernity-produced local despot, there is a strong assumption here about the root of this

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7. Mohammed Jawad Mughniyeh, *Shi'ites and Rulers*, (Beirut: Dar al-Hilal and Dar al-Jawad, 2001), p. 28.

duality and its organizing principle. It is rooted in a kind of alienation from the natural and original essence represented by Shi'ite Islam, an alienation that results from despotic action by the oppressive side through the dualistic conflict. In other words, the main task of the Muslim Shi'ite self is to resist this alienation or, more precisely, the alienating process that culminates in alienation as an accomplished fact, imposed and naturalized by the powerful oppressor. It was in this way that Iraqi Shi'ite Islamism understood Saddam Hussain, with his "secular" regime. SCIRI's founding statement is, indeed, one of the clearest manifestations in this regard by its assertion that the problem of oppression in Iraq is represented by the ruling regime's alienating effort to "distort the Muslim character of the Iraqi people, eradicating the historical, intellectual and cultural features of this glorious Muslim people, and cutting it off from its heritage, history, civilization and Islamic glories…"

Shi'ite Political Islam after 2003: From Islamic Generality to Shi'ite Particularity

The US military overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and the consequent organization of Iraq's political life based on political representation using electoral tools was an important and major transformation in the nation's still unfolding story as well as in the intellectual structure and the political behavior of the Islamist Shi'ite movements. The defining moment in this transformation came early on during the founding stage of the new political system. There was then a transitional moment of identification between two types of structures:

those of the political Shi'ite Islamism and the traditional religious Shi'ism. These two types of structures came together when the thesis of alienation from the presumed original/moral self-appeared in the rhetoric of the Shi'ite clerical establishment, known as Hawza, in Najaf as the primary form of Shi'ite objection to the US military presence in Iraq. It is important here to understand the way in which the Hawza, led by grand-ayatollah Ali Sistani, viewed this presence: as a moral and social threat more than a political or national threat in the context of the traditional legal meaning of national sovereignty. What is implicit in this framing by Hawza is the merger between what is moral with what is national in the context of reconstructing Iraqi nationalism as a spontaneous consequence of a combination of general religious ethics and conservative social behaviors greatly influenced by religion in terms of content and supervision. This merger between religion and nationalism began very early in the Hawza rhetoric, within months of the overthrow of the Saddam regime, by expressing the worry over a potential moral decline and value alienation under the American military occupation.

For example, one question posed by *The Washington Post* to Sistani was "What is the relationship between religion and the state?" Sistani answered it in the following way "It is supposed that the government which arises from the will of a majority of the people should respect the religion of the majority, adopt its values, and not violate its rulings in its decisions… Another question was "What is your position about the American presence"? His answer was "We feel very worried about their aims and we feel it is necessary that they allow Iraqis to rule themselves without foreign

intervention. Another question was "What is the biggest danger and threat that Iraq faces?" Sistani's answer came, expressing worry "The distortion of its cultural identity whose one of main pillars is the noble Islamic religion".[8]

In Sistani's responses above, values and morality appear as points of priority and worry around which the conflict with the American "other" is carried out—less so the mere foreign occupation by this other of the national land. In other words, the danger of the occupation lies in the fact of the moral distortion resulting from it. The occupation is only a means to an end and Sistani wants to foil this end by rejecting the means. The essence of the conflict is ethics and culture, not nationalism and sovereignty per se. As a matter of fact, this nationalist/sovereign aspect enters the conflict only as a tool/means for ethical and cultural empowerment. This instrumentalist approach to the concept of national sovereignty appears more clearly in a response by Sistani to a question posed to him by a group of his religious followers in June 2003, two months after the end of the Saddam regime. The question was about writing the constitution: "The occupation authorities in Iraq announced that it had decided to form a council to write the next Iraqi constitution in consultation with social and political bodies in the country. These authorities would then put the [draft] constitution approved by this council, to a general popular referendum. We would like you to state the religious

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8. Hamid al-Khfaf, *Statements by Ali Al-Sistani on Iraqi Issues* (Dar al-Mouarekh al-Arabi, Beirut, sixth edition, 2015), 34-35.

position on this project in terms of what the *mu'minun* [the believers] must do regarding the issue of writing of the Iraqi constitution." Sistani's answer emphasized the instrumentalist nature of the democratic mechanisms in order to consolidate a conservative religious version of national identity:

> These authorities do not enjoy any [legal] powers to appoint members of the constitution-writing council. There is also no guarantee that this council would write a constitution that corresponds to the higher interests of the Iraqi people and expresses its national identity whose one of foundational pillars is the sacred Islamic religion and the noble social values. This aforesaid project is fundamentally unacceptable. General elections must first be held so that every qualified Iraqi voter can choose who will represent him in a constituent assembly to draft this constitution. A general referendum must then be held on the constitution approved by this council. All believers must demand that this important matter be taken care of and contribute to realizing it in the best possible way.[9]

Such automatic link between the role of the state's institutional instruments and sovereign documents as guarantors and protectors of particular social and religious values in the name of   representing the ethical code of the

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9. Ibid.

majority on one hand, and the role of this majority as the guarantor of popular and electoral legitimacy for these values to dominate, on the other hand, seriously redefined the meaning of the state and the political system that manages it. This redefinition gave official primacy to such values by consolidating their normative and prescriptive functions in the life of the nation. Within such a redefinition, the role of the people, through the act of vote-casting, turns into merely granting the institutional and sovereign authorization to the state to adopt and promote a national identity based on these values. This is simply the root of the Shi'ite clerical establishment's understanding of democracy: the assertion and protection of a national identity that represents the values of the majority, not the respect for difference and the recognition of diversity as fundamental rights to be protected by the state from the potential tyranny of the majority.

Defending this dominant identity while considering anything external to it as a form of alienation to be avoided represents the root of the conflict between the Shi'ite clerical establishment and the US military occupation authorities in Iraq. The clerical establishment assumed that these authorities were in the process of consolidating a new and "foreign" identity that would alienate the majority from its original and authentic identity.

Bob Woodward, the famous US journalist, wrote in a 2006 book about the Iraq invasion that US officials in the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the UN-mandated and US-

led governing body in charge of Iraq at that time, were indirectly communicating with the clerical establishment in Najaf. Woodward recounts how a verbal message from Sistani was passed to Meghan O'Sullivan, an advisor to the CPA head, Paul Bremer, after Sistani had issued a statement demanding elections for a constituent assembly to oversee the drafting of a new Iraqi constitution before putting it to a general Iraqi referendum:

> People close to Sistani told O'Sullivan that he had issued the June 28 fatwa insisting that the constitution to be written by properly elected Iraqis because he is worried that Iraq would resemble Japan after World War II. MacArthur's staff had written most of the nation's postwar constitution, and Japan, which had unconditionally surrendered, had adopted it with only minor changes. Sistani wanted full elections, but it would take another six to nine months...[10]

This defense of Iraqi identity against the threat of alienation posed by a foreign power was the main reason for forging the alliance between the Shi'ite clerical establishment and the Shi'ite Islamist movements during and after 2003. The latter took the political lead on defending Iraqi identity, greatly benefiting from the electoral support they received from the former.

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10. Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006) 263-264.

The work of this alliance led to two interrelated outcomes. The first outcome was the drafting and ratification of a hybrid constitution that lacked ideological and legal coherence. It represented an unwieldy combination of liberal values born out of western modernity, considered as a form of alienation by Shi'ite religious forces, and traditional values rooted in Islamic heritage, thus representing "originality" and "authenticity". One prominent example of this problematic combination has been the constitutional stipulation that no law could be legislated if it contradicts the "established provisions" of Islam, counteracted by another stipulation that no law could be legislated if it "contradicts the principles of democracy." The acceptance by the Shi'ite religious forces, both Islamist and clerical, of liberal values in the constitution was reflective of power realities on the ground that these forces could not change. These realities included the existence of other Iraqi social and political forces which were interested in modern values for their own purposes such as the Kurds, Sunni Arabs and a sizable segment of urban populations. Another significant player in the power dynamic then was the US which was ready to accommodate religious Shi'ite demands, but only to a certain extent that would not seriously jeopardize its democratization project in Iraq.

The second outcome was the successive electoral victories by the Islamist Shi'ite forces allowing them to hold and keep the reins of institutional power for the following 15 years. Based on the consociatal arrangements that came to govern power-sharing in Iraq, the retention of power

by these forces made it possible to ensure the primacy of traditional over liberal values in the public sphere and in the exercise of politics in general. Through the combination of their executive and legislative powers within Iraq's parliamentary system, the ruling Shi'ite forces consistently promoted traditional values presenting them as the true expression of the "essence" of the Iraqi people or, at least, the majority of Iraqis

The main party, responsible for this domination, is the Islamist Shi'ite movements which have governed Iraq since 2005. If the clerical establishment's rhetoric that paved the way for these movements to assume the official reins of power was denominational (from *madhabiyya*), in the sense of showing pride in and organizing a defense of the largest group's identity in the context of diversity and cooperation with other groups, the rhetoric of the governing Islamist Shi'ite movements was sectarian (from *ta'ifiyya*).[11] These movements invested in a binary conflict with a specific foe; i.e. Iraqi Sunnis, assuming Shi'ism as morally and ethically superior to Sunnism, turning this assumed superiority into political domination. This domination was finally achieved at the cost of much pain and bloodshed. In this regard, a close examination of the clerical establishment's rhetoric,

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11. In Arabic, *madhabiyya* and *ta'ifiyya* are two different terms around the use of "sect," which connoting different relations with other doctrines and sects. In the first case, the term refers to religious differences in which cooperation among diverse groups is possible, while the latter term implies the superiority of one group over the other and an uneven balance of power. In mainstream, particularly journalistic, English use, this important distinction is lost as the two are referred to as "sectarian."

some discussed here, reveals a striking similarity with the opposition-era rhetoric of the Islamist Shi'ite movements. For instance, the main values in SCIRI's founding statement in 1982 resemble those of the clerical establishment: The defining identity of the Iraqi people as a religious Islamic one, this identity's original and unchanging nature, the necessity of defending it against all values that contradict it —usually perceived as problematically foreign — and viewing the West as the source of threat to this identity. Although the statements by the clerical establishment did not offer an interpretation of the Iraqi history on the basis of enmity to the West and the latter's presumed local manifestations like the Saddam regime, unlike the public understanding by the Islamist Shi'ite movements, the establishment's distrust in the US role in Iraq was grounded in similar reasons invoked by the movements: fears of moral alienation caused by US policies in Iraq.

The signs of the striking shift in the rhetoric and behavior of the Islamist Shi'ite movements from general Islamism, and even the cautious denominationalism in the context of a local religious diversity, to sectarianism as a conflict with a Sunni "other," gradually appeared following the end of the Saddam regime in 2003. This shift picked pace when these movements, gathered then in "the United Iraqi Alliance," assumed formal power in 2006 after they won the parliamentary election in December 2005. The most important signs included two. First, offering a hasty and different reading of modern Iraqi history. The essence of this reading is sectarian by removing the crucial distance between the Baathist

regime of Saddam Hussian and Iraqi Sunnis, problemati-
cally merging the two to make the latter as the carriers of
legacy and extension of the former. In this way, Iraqi Sun-
nis became natural perpetrators and partners in Saddam's
crimes and mistakes. The assertion of this reductive reading
emerged in the context of the rise of discriminatory policies
whose public claim was to the legitimate implementation
of "transitional justice" measures such as de-Baathification
and army demobilization. However, the true aim and effect
of these measures were punishing Sunnis as demographic/
religious group and reducing modern Iraq's complex and
structural problems to moral mistakes reflecting the self-
ish desires of a sectarian, cruel and despotic minority, i.e.,
the "dominant" Sunnis, versus the "weak" and "dominated"
Shi'ite majority!!

To highlight this resurgence of Shi'ite victimhood, it is in-
structive here to cite two public statements by ruling Islamist
Shi'ite politicians. In a 2011 TV interview, Baha'a Araji, a
former deputy prime minister and Sadrist MP, said "There
has been a conspiracy against the majority in Iraq, the sect
that represents the majority in Iraq, from the days of Abu
Bakr [the first caliph following the death of Prophet Moham-
med], until the [Baathist] party of Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr [the
Iraqi president between 1968 and 1979 who was replaced by
Saddam Hussein] (Nā'ib fī al-birlmān. . .).[12] The two basic in-
terdependent premises informing the statement are: First, the

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12. Bahaa al-Arji, "al-Arji Attacks Caliph Abu Bakr," YouTube channel: Abu Osaid,
    15 February 2010, Accessed on 25 April 2021, https://youtu.be/lP8OMVyFcF0.

permanent, trans-historical oppression of the Shi'ites since the Rashidun Caliphate, 1400 years ago, passing through the Ba'athist assumption of power in the late 1960s, until the US overthrow of the Ba'athist regime in 2003. The second is that the source of this oppression is Sunni, unlike the previous narrative presented through SCIRI's founding statement that viewed the source of oppression as western, targeting all Muslims, not the Shi'ites specifically. In this later, post-2003, reductive narrative of history, what is religious was blended with what is political to construct a new understanding, as an integral part of this emerging narrative, that makes the political persecution the Islamist Shi'ite parties were subjected to under the Ba'athist regime one more manifestation of the religious persecution against the Shi'ites through the assumed long-running Sunni control of state power. The most prominent statement in consolidating this narrative in the life of the new Iraqi state was made by former prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, in the final days of 2013, during one of the peak moments in the confrontation between the Iraqi government and the year-long and large-scale Sunni protest movement between 2012 and 2013, a movement that the extremist Jihadist organization, the Islamic State (IS), could penetrate down the road, thus giving the Shi'ite-led government the pretext to lump together in the "other" camp nearly all Sunnis, regardless if they were peaceful protesters who were the obvious majority or Jihadist terrorists who were a small, but a well-organized, minority:

Those who killed [Imam] Hussain have not yet ceased to exist. They exist today. And Hussain, in a different form, still exists. He is the one targeted by these despots. Thus, the partisans of Yazid and the partisans of Hussain, once again and across time, clash in a pitched and intense confrontation. This allows us to see that the crime committed against Hussain did not end. Indeed, we are today witnessing new chapters in it at the hands of the sectarian persons, terrorists and the those who are hateful of Islam and Ahlu Albayat (peace be upon them), including what they do today in terms of criminal acts and targeting the innocent people. In particular, they prepared themselves to target the visitors of Imam Hussain and sabotage the atmosphere of the visit. (Nuri al-Maliki: al-maʿarka. . .) [13]

Maliki's words give the security problems and political conflict, taking place in Iraq at a specific historical moment, an everlasting and deep-rooted character by using the convenient model of a binary confrontation between good and evil. This essentialist characterization of the conflict prevents the possibilities of change, transformation or maturing in the positions of the conflicting parties, let alone allowing paths of reconsideration and reconciliation among these parties. In other words, Maliki's words preclude the internal processes for these parties because they are permanently imprisoned in

13. Nouri al-Maliki, "The Battle in al-Anbar between Hussein and Yazid," You-Tube: Sawt al-Arab channel (Kuwait), 2 January 2014, Accessed on 26 April 2022, http://bit.ly/2hCyY15.

the dualistic confrontation between Yazid and Hussain, the two opposing historical figures who could not be reconciled under any circumstance or subsequent movement. In the mainstream Shi'ite understanding, Yazid represents absolute evil; that is, the ultimate moral and religious degeneration that one could never be saved from.

The second sign of this shift was the emergence of identitarian religious specification of the victims of terrorism. For example, an official statement by the Islamist Shi'ite leader of the governing United Iraq Alliance, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, who was also SCIRI's head described victims of terrorism in a sectarian light:

> Criminal elements of takfiris,[14] Saddamists and their agents have once again committed a major crime against innocent Iraqis who follow Ahlualbayat, peace be on them (the household of the Prophet i.e., the Shi'ites) in Sadr City on Thursday, 23 November 2006. This vicious attack left hundreds of martyrs and wounded. The sectarian *takfiri* terrorists committed another crime in al-Hurriya today and attacked Kadhimiya and Adhamiya with rockets that killed dozens of Iraqis. The rise in terrorist operations during the past few days targeting innocent people in Latifiya and Baquba, attacking state institutions and offices and the heart-wrenching events today, have all a single aim: to

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14. Takfir is an Arabic word used in Islamic doctrine to describe the theological process of excommunication i.e., deciding that another Muslim is actually an apostate, a decision that usually carries death with it. Jihadist gorups have been known to use takifir a lot against many other Muslims, including the Shi'ites.

sabotage the constitutional state that millions of Iraqis have helped to build and for which they have shown the greatest of courage, persistence and sacrifice ... We strongly condemn this vicious aggression on the life and security of Iraqis whatever its source. I call upon the government and its security agencies to intensify their measures to prevent such crimes and to exert serious effort to establish the state of law and institutions. These horrendous crimes which began on that bloody Friday in Najaf [in 2003], claiming the life of the Martyr of the Alter, Sayyid [Muhammad Baqir] al-Hakim, may God rest his soul will only increase our insistence on leading a dignified life and remaining resolute in the face of conspiracies hatched against our people and the followers of Ahlualbayt, peace be upon them, in Iraq.[15]

In this statement which condemns terrorist attacks that took place in majority Sunni and Shi'ite areas, leading to both Sunni and Shi'ite victims, there is a clear distinction between Iraqis as a general group and Iraqis as followers of Ahlualbayat, the traditional religious description of the Shi'ites. The implied message here is that Shi'ites are targeted because of their identity, as followers of Ahlualbyat in that those who target them do so because of this Shi'ite religious orientation. In many other statements at the time, whether issued by individual political Islamist Shi'ite movements or by the ruling Shi'ite coalition to condemn terrorist acts

15. Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, "Sayyid al-Hakim Releases Statement Denouncing the Hideous Crime AgainsteInnocent Civilians in Sadr City," *Buratha News Agency*, 24 November 2006, Accessed on 27 April 2022, http://burathanews.com/arabic/news/11647.

against Iraqi civilians, the assertion of the denominational identity of the victims acquired an important political and religious function for the governing Islamist Shi'ite parties. This function was to consolidate the spirit of sacrifice in the mainstream Shi'ite understanding of the self; i.e., the Shi'ites as sacrificing entities in whose formation of self and identity the concept of sacrifice plays a central role. This was much emphasized in the Hussaini mourning rituals.

In fact, one of the most significant functions of the Hussaini mourning rituals and other religious Shi'ite occasions after 2003 was the consolidation of the themes and values of altruism and sacrifice in the behavior of Imam Hussian, his family and followers in Karbala as well as in the celebrated anniversaries of the births and deaths of other Imams. Although the historical event of the brief Karbala battle in 61 Hijri year, included many examples of sacrifice and altruism and although Iraqi Shi'ism historically formed much of its feelings of victimhood through reproducing the great sufferings experienced by Hussain and his family in Karbala, this understanding of the Kabala historical scene acquired new psychological, political and identitarian dimensions in post-2003 Iraq.

identitarian in addition to the familiar dimensions related to the purifying sorrow, religious piety, and the assertion of Shi'ism as a held belief, there is now the added electoral and political gains by the political Islamist Shi'ite move-

ments by showcasing their ideological identity as a protec-
tor of Shi'ism and its representative as well in the public
sphere. In this context, these movements used Hussaini and
other Shi'ite rituals not only to boost their street legitimacy,
but also, and more tellingly, as a special legal and material
gain achieved by these movements in the "new Iraq" for the
Shi'ite constituency, rather than viewing the unhindered ex-
ercise of these rituals as a natural and automatic part of the
freedom of expression enshrined in the Iraqi constitution.
In other words, these movements emphasized that exercis-
ing these freedom-of-expression rights is the result of an
ongoing and organized action carried out by a conscious
political agent whose presence and effort are necessary as
a guarantee to ensure that these rights are available to Iraqi
Shi'ites! Here one notices a political function whose es-
sence is opportunistic that these Islamist Shi'ite movements
insist on by this consonant "activation" of these rituals to
"remind" society of them as remarkable and attention-grab-
bing events in the public sphere. What this signifies is the
deliberate political refusal to integrate these rituals into the
life of society as spontaneous expressions of faith, thus pre-
venting them from occupying their normal space in this life,
without official noise or political declarations to impress on
all the status of these rituals as special events that break
the normalcy of things. In other words, there seems to be
political resistance to allowing these rituals to be normal-
ized as all religious beliefs and practices within the social
landscape of life, away from exaggeration, politicization,

and partisan and official reminding of their occurrence as events.[16]

Through this continuous "event-making," throughout the year, the Islamist Shia parties appear to offer regular Shias, their "natural" constituency, an identitarian, spiritual and psychological achievement. Based on this supposed achievement which feeds into other-worldly sentiments and desires related to the mainstream Shia sense of sacrifice and victimhood, the worldly importance of material achievements recede, albeit seasonally. Through this mystifying process, these material achievements as the legitimate measures to evaluate the ruling Shia parties as office-holding entities whose primary function is related to serving the public interest of all society, are obscured in the interest of the spiritual and self-imposed tasks of deepening the denominational and sectarian feelings of one religious' group in it. For instance, these parties cannot argue in the public sphere against their proven inability to improve the material aspects of life in Iraq as in the fields of basic services, economic opportunities, and good

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16. The constant sense of exceptionalism conferred upon many Shi'ite rituals and ceremonies by the many official activities around them aime to affirm that these were special occasions separate from rather than a natural part of Iraqi society. Politicians and leading figures routinely issue official statements celebrating these occasions, sometimes personally participating in them. There is also the expanded media coverage, and special security arrangements to protect the celebrations (and later, the announcement that these arrangements had been successful). This was understandable during the first years after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime due to security unrest around these rituals, but it has since become difficult to justify this degree of government interest after almost 20 years since the Saddam regime fell, and many years since terrorist operations targeting these rituals and ceremonies have stopped.

governance, i.e., the normal tasks that belong to political parties in power. Because of their demonstrated structural inability in this regard, these parties focus on imagined abstract achievements revolving around maintaining Shia identity as conceived by these parties and invoking the need to defend it in the face of perceived threats that these parties are capable of inventing and perpetuating.

This dynamic appeared clearly in these parties' response to the Tishreen protest movement that arose out of the social and electoral base of these parties. Instead of this legitimate and significant movement, resulting from the lack of material achievements, leading to a serious reconsideration of the political behavior behind this lack in an attempt to reform it, these parties resorted to an identitarian interpretation of the protest. Through a huge propaganda machine, featuring unambiguous anti-protest positions, this interpretation demonized the protest by portraying it as an organized action carried out by gullible and misled Shia youth controlled and managed by the western forces of alienation to target the institutional and political authority of the Shi'ites and to undermine their denominational identity by placing them again at the mercy of their former "oppressors." From this accusatory context, the term "the sons of the embassies" in addressing protest activists emerged to deny them Shi'ite originality and Iraqi patriotism, labeling them as agents of foreign, mainly western, forces, unlike the the conscious and deliberate "agents" made up of Sunni governments that ruled Iraq since the 1920s until the Saddam regime. And even in the context of the gradual and limited reform produced as a result of the pressure of the protest movement,

leading to an early election — based on a new election — which most Islamist Shi'ite parties lost, the response was not a sincere recognition of a serious structural failure, both political and partisan, requiring them to genuinely review their political performance and identity. The response, instead, was a new entrenchment behind identity. This was clear in the actions and rhetoric of the Shi'ite "Coordinating Framework" (CF) after it lost the October 2021 election. The CF rejected the majority government proposal adopted by the winning Sadrists which excluded it from being in government, forcing it to go into parliamentary opposition. It viewed the exclusion of "the biggest social component" (i.e., the Shi'ites) from government formation as deliberate targeting of the Shi'ite and a menace to social peace.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the popular support for identity politics as the basis for political legitimacy and action is fast eroding in Iraq, something that represents a serious threat to Islamist Shi'ite parties whose only political "program" has been identity and how to defend it. The serious crisis that these parties currently undergo is to figure out how to get out of the deep trap of identity as a political platform and develop a pragmatic alternative around tangible material achievements as the criterion for political success and the path to electoral victories. Until now, these parties seem structurally incapable of making this fundamental shift from identity to achievement.

Chapter IV

Hezbollah in Lebanon: Between Democracy and Armed Action

Hezbollah's Political Trajectory in Lebanon: A Case Study

Mohanad Hage Ali

This paper aims to shed light on the regional shifts and the sectarian context in Lebanon that have shaped Hezbollah's ideological trajectory. At first, Hezbollah focused on covert security operations and a purely Khomeini-style discourse separate from local influences. It later became involved in the Lebanese Parliament at the national level in 1992 and in local governments and coalitions after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005. The political process and social and regional transformations have played a significant role in shaping Hezbollah's stances on various issues and have led the group to make ideological concessions and to prioritize some interests over others.

There is a lack of consensus among scholars regarding when exactly Hezbollah was founded. Some argue it began in the late 1970s during meetings with Islamists, some of whom were young students at Shi'ite *hawza*s, while others were Amal movement followers or members of the Islamic Dawa Party in Iraq. Others argue that Hezbollah began after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the ensuing political shift among Shi'ites in Lebanon and in the region as a whole. However, it is clear that the Israeli invasion was a watershed moment. Religious and political doctrines are not the product of a single political moment but rather the result of the gradual and cumulative impact of events. However, the tremendous aftershocks of the Israeli invasion

created space for new forms of thought, especially since this occurred only three years after the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the birth of a new regime there. Meanwhile, leftist parties and forces were on the decline as Soviet power quickly receded leading up to the fall of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s.

These two events coincided with a politically formative era for Shi'ites in comparison to other sects in Lebanon. Musa al-Sadr, an Iranian-born Lebanese cleric, played a key part in shaping Lebanese political Shi'ism. He founded the Movement of the Dispossessed (Harakat al-Mahrumin, the predecessor of the Amal Movement) and the Supreme Islamic Shi'ite Council. These emerging institutions did not create political and religious elite forces that could prevent the emergence of a new religious current, especially after the Israeli invasion of Beirut and southern Lebanon in 1982.

When the Israeli invasion began, a group of forces joined together. These included Islamic student groups, Amal Movement members, and religious scholars with ties to the Islamic Dawa Party. They were responding to Khomeini's call to cooperate with the Syrian regime to form a united organization capable of resisting the Israeli occupation. According to Naim Qassem, the deputy secretary-general of Hezbollah, discussions around forming the group centered around three objectives. The first objective was to adopt Islam as a comprehensive platform, a goal shared with other Islamic organizations. The second objective was to resist the Israeli occupation and the third was to adopt

Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) as a system of governance. These three principles were to be carried out by three entities: a circle of clerics in the Beqaa, Islamic committees that represented various groups, and members who had split off from the Amal Movement after Nabih Berri, the head of Amal who joined the National Salvation Committee, which also included Bachir Gemayel, commander of the Lebanese Forces, within two weeks of the Israeli invasion.[1]

This was the official narrative about Hezbollah's beginnings. It involved both political conflict with Amal and a focus on doctrinal matters and the role of religious clerics in Hezbollah's leadership.

Hezbollah was initially composed of younger clerics and youth from working-class backgrounds who came from the southern suburbs of Beirut. These young people had previously been involved with Palestinian and leftist organizations. Hezbollah also included those who had been displaced from the countryside to impoverished urban areas in the 1960s and 1970s. This second generation of leadership included youth such as Imad Mughniyeh and Hassan Nasrallah, then a high-ranking security official in Hezbollah and now its secretary-general. Nasrallah was the son of a vegetable merchant from Nabaah, an impoverished area in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Mughniyeh's family were

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1. Naim Qassem, *Hezbollah: Its Platform, History, and Future*, Egypt: Dar al-Hadi, 2002, p. 37-38.

farmers who were displaced to Beirut's suburbs when he was young. Mughniyeh and Nasrallah shared this same social background, as did most of the early members of Hezbollah.

Regional Shifts: The Syrian Regime Taking Charge

In Lebanon, Hezbollah shifted from covert operations and a discourse styled after Khomeini (that is why it is not really designed for the specificities of the Lebanese context) to participation in the sectarian government. Hezbollah accepted the need to adapt its discourse with the local alliances that were not always amenable to its ideologies and demands. At the same time, shifts were taking place in the social and economic approaches that had been formulated by the leaders of Hezbollah in the 1980s. Hezbollah developed a new social and economic vision, thus the movement included other social categories, while some leaders moved up the socioeconomic ladder, and here businessmen started to appear in the movement.

The Open Letter

Hezbollah's *open letter* was the first public statement produced by the group, after it had previously carried out covert militant operations. This document was crucial in laying out Hezbollah's political roadmap and attested to its full commitment to implementing Islamic rule linked to the Islamic Republic in Iran according to *Velayat-e Faqih.* In the principle of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (who was then Ruhollah Khomeini but since 1989 has been Ali Khamenei) occupies the position at the top of the hierarchy. The *open letter* explicitly called

upon everyone to embrace Islam and stated that Islamic rule would be implemented in Lebanon after holding a popular referendum: "*We believe in Islam as both a doctrine and a form of governance, and we ask the people to familiarize themselves with Islam and to turn to its laws for guidance. We also call on the people to adopt Islam and to adhere to its tenets at the individual, the political, and the social level. If we should let the people freely choose the model of governance in Lebanon, there would be not no alternative to Islam. We call for an Islamic system of governance grounded in the free and direct choice of the people, and not through force and coercion as some have claimed!"*

The letter also contained a clear ideological message regarding the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist and Hezbollah's ties with Iran. In the letter, Hezbollah described itself as an Islamic community (*ummah*) rather than a political party:

"*We are members of the ummah of Hezbollah which Nasrallah launched in Iran, which have planted the seed of a new central Islamic state in the world. We adhere to the orders of a single just and wise guardian embodied in the Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah Imam Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini who possesses all the necessary qualifications (al-jami' li-l-shara'it) and who led the Muslims' revolution and their glorious revival. We in Lebanon are not a closed political party nor a narrow political framework. We are an ummah linked to Muslims around the world.*"

The open letter also reflected Hezbollah's focus on a militant ideology. It also outlined the group's military and security ideology, which did not recognize the Lebanese government nor the sectarian diversity within the country. This approach drew directly on Khomeini's discourse and approach towards politics in Iran, which was projected onto Lebanon's more complex societal composition. How could a state in which Shi'ites were a minority adopt a Shi'ite doctrinal framework, especially given that Hezbollah was in turn a minority among Lebanese Shi'ites at that time?

Regional Impacts

Hezbollah's ideological stance later shifted after Syria became involved in Lebanese politics, and after Hezbollah became involved in the Lebanese political process after the *Taif* Agreement and its decision to participate in the 1992 elections. At the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1991, local militias handed over most of their weapons to the Lebanese state under Syrian tutelage. However, Hezbollah held onto their weapons and military capabilities under the pretext of resisting the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon. This was a product of a Syrian-Iranian agreement which culminated in reconciliation between Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, which are both Shi'ite entities.[2]

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2. Mohanad Hage Ali, "Power Points Defining the Syria-Hezbollah Relationship," *Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center,* 7 May 2019, https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/05/07/ar-pub-79076.

This was a complicated process at the end of a bloody war with Amal that included a massacre committed by the Syrian forces against Hezbollah. Prior to the withdrawal of Syrian forces in 2005, the Syrian regime had conducted "corrective" efforts regarding Hezbollah's external relations and internal structure in order to ensure its militant work was only directed against Israel in specific contexts.[3] Hezbollah's political role was limited to participating in parliamentary elections without being involved in any of the governments formed in the wake of the Taif Agreement.

Involvement in Government

In 2005 Hezbollah decided to become involved in leading the pro-Syrian coalition known as the March 8 Alliance; the opposition called itself the March 14 Alliance. Hezbollah claimed it had decided to participate in elections to protect the resistance, but this was also the product of the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon and the shifting balance of power after the killing of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. A political coalition had emerged, who were working against the Syrian regime's allies, especially Hezbollah.[4]

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3. Violence was one of the tools used during this "corrective" process. This included the Fathallah massacre in the 1980s and the attack on an anti-Oslo demonstration in 1993. Mohanad Hage Ali, "Power Points Defining the Syria-Hezbollah Relationship," *Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center,* 7 May 2019, https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/05/07/ar-pub-79076.
4. Naim Qassem, *Hezbollah: Its Platform, History, and Future*, Egypt: Dar al-Hadi, 2002, p. 246.

Hezbollah's involvement in the Lebanese political sphere required the organization to make ideological concessions with regard to recognizing the Lebanese government and forming coalitions. This enabled Hezbollah to hold onto its weapons in exchange for certain trade-offs. Hezbollah successfully formed an alliance with the Amal Movement, and this so-called "Shi'ite duo" became an inseparable force in Lebanese politics. Hezbollah also signed the *Mar Mikhael* Agreement with Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement.[5] These two coalitions were the product of a political exchange in which Hezbollah supported the Amal Movement and *the Free Patriotic Movement*'s (FPM) role in the state and the expansion of their influence. In return, the Lebanese state protected Hezbollah's weapons and allowed them to function as a legitimate organization. According to Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's deputy secretary-general, the agreement was intended to create a coalition to counter UN Security Council Resolution No. 1559, which had been issued a year and a half before.[6] The resolution sought to disarm Hezbollah, while the agreement affirmed that Christian militias would protect Hezbollah's right to bear arms. This commitment became clear only months later during the 2006 Lebanon War (the July War).

These negotiations between Hezbollah and its coalition partners were key to establishing the organization as part

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5. Joseph P. Helou, *Activism, Change and Sectarianism in the Free Patriotic Movement in Lebanon*, Germany: Springer International Publishing, 2019.
6. Naim Qassem, *Hezbollah: Its Platform, History, and Future*, Egypt: Dar al-Hadi, 2002, p. 249-250.

of the political class, regardless of how often it accused *the* FPM or the Amal Movement of corruption in the media and through other means of public discourse. On other occasions, Hezbollah would critique FPM- or Amal-run ministries as having failed in their duties, even though Hezbollah was also backing these ministries, such as the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Finance.[7]

Hezbollah therefore shifted from a Tehran-oriented force to a political party engaged in local political issues in Lebanon, including appointing ministers and political officials. It also formed coalitions to contain opposing blocs, such as the March 14 Alliance, the 2019 popular uprising, or an independent bloc that made inroads into the May 2022 elections. This series of transformations began with Hezbollah's first entrance into parliamentary politics in 1992, when it adopted the Lebanese flag, and launched dialogues with the Maronite Patriarchate. It culminated in Hezbollah's 2009 political program, which explicitly recognized the Lebanese government and called for embracing consensus-based democratic governance between different sects in order to end political sectarianism.[8] The goal of this more open political approach was to remove barriers that

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7. Denise Fakhry, "Lebanon in the Dark as Political Discontent Flares Up," *Independent Arabia,* 12 March 2021, Accessed on 29 May 2022, https://tinyurl.com/d7canwsa.

8. Dr. Joseph Alagha referred to this period as a time of opening (*infitah*) located at the opposite end of the spectrum as the open letter of 1985. Joseph Elie Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program,* Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2006, p. 41-42.

had prevented Hezbollah from engaging in the Lebanese political sphere and to facilitate coalition-building. This was necessary since the *open letter* and the party discourse during the 1980s made forming any political alliance with Hezbollah a potential liability for the Christian forces active in Lebanese political institutions.

Internal Institutional Work

Hezbollah's involvement in domestic Lebanese politics was a tactical decision made in order to contain political threats so that the group could pursue activities that had become hard to justify to the Lebanese public after the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000. Hezbollah was looking for ways to justify the maintaining of its weapons and military capabilities and pointed to the issue of disputed areas such as the village of *Ghajar* and the *Shebaa* Farms as well as the issue of the Lebanese prisoners held in an Israeli prison (until 2006). However, after the Arab Spring uprisings erupted in 2010-2011, Hezbollah began to play a growing regional role, sometimes providing a base for Iranian-aligned forces in the region, as was the case with the Bahraini opposition forces, Iraqi factions and political figures, and the Houthis in Yemen.[9] This culminated in direct military intervention in Syria on behalf of the Syrian regime. Hezbollah remained involved in the war in Syria for many years, which caused it to suffer grave

9. "Protests in Yemen after Broadcasting of Almasirah and al-Sahat from Lebanon," *Alquds Alarabi,* 22 February 2022, Accessed on 29 May 2022, https://tinyurl.com/tt9r6f5c.

losses and also resulted in *jihadist* operations targeting Lebanese territory in response to Hezbollah's intervention.

The expansion of Hezbollah's regional role on behalf of Iran would not have been possible without the political cover made possible by shifts in Lebanese politics. The "Lebanonization" of Hezbollah and its involvement in the Lebanese political process did not ultimately mitigate Hezbollah's doctrinal and political ties with Iran. Indeed, the opposite happened, and Hezbollah became more involved at the regional level, which had implications for Arab relations with Lebanon. During the October 2021 Lebanon crisis, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar withdrew their ambassadors from Lebanon following statements made by former Lebanese Minister of media, George Kordahi.[10]

Institutions and the Lebanese Shi'ite Identity

Despite Hezbollah's involvement in Lebanese politics, including in coalitions and governments that bridged sectarian divides, Hezbollah was unable to translate this political openness into a new social policy given the Shi'ite context. Hezbollah runs various educational and social institutions including the *Islamic Institution for Education and Teaching* and it runs 17 schools and has thousands of students. It also runs the Martyr's Foundation, the Aljarha

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10. "Gulf Countries Recall Ambassadors to Lebanon in Response to Kordahi's Earlier Comments," *BBC Arabic*, 27 October 2022, Accessed on 29 May 2022, https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleast-590483832021.

institution, the al-Imdad Charitable Foundation, the Islamic Knowledge Society, the al-Qard al-Hassan Association (for Islamic banking), and the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts. Additionally, it owns various media outlets, journals (each of the above institutions has its own publication that targets a particular audience, such as different age groups and women, and publishing houses.[11] In the cultural sphere, Hezbollah is a leading publisher nationwide: its magazine *Baqiatollah* is the most widely distributed with a print run of 30,000 copies. It also supports the publication of a wide variety of books every year.[12] Since the 1980s, these institutions have played a key role in promoting Hezbollah's new identity and refining a political and national Shi'ite discourse rooted in the principle of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist and in the ideology of resistance as historical constants that transcend temporal or geographical boundaries.[13] These institutions have not shifted their educational focus and continue to expand their work, as proven by an increasing number of educational institutions and Hezbollah's continued support from Shi'ite circles. The elections in 2018 and 2022 also showed continued support

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11. Mohanad Hage Ali, *Nationalism, Transnationalism, and Political Islam: Hizbullah's Institutional Identity,* Germany: Springer International Publishing, 2017, p. 44.

12. Ibid., 42.

13. Leninist-Marxist literature uses slightly different terminology, e.g. the proletariat (vs. the *mustada'fun*, or oppressed) and imperialism (vs. *istikbar*).

for Hezbollah despite political, economic, and financial crises.[14]

Hezbollah's work has remained constant at the organizational level and with regard to Shi'ite activities, ties with Iran, and its adherence to the concept of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist. However, there has been a socioeconomic shift within Hezbollah and its political representatives. At first, Hezbollah's leaders came from outside the traditional Shi'ite political elites, especially the second generation of leaders that had been displaced from the countryside to impoverished suburbs of Beirut. Hezbollah's leadership later became financially prosperous, and in some cases upper-class or university-educated middle-class individuals joined the organization. Hezbollah's first representatives in Parliament in 1992, 1996, and 2000 now shifted towards a more financially affluent crowd, including businessman Amin Sherri (a representative for Beirut in 2005), lawyer Nawar al-Sahili, and graduates of European universities such as Hussein Hajj Hassan (who received his PhD from a French university) and Ibrahim Mousawi (who received his PhD from Birmingham University). Since the late 1990s, businessmen began to join Hezbollah; their names sometimes came out as a result of successive US sanctions against them. This social shift was part of the group's cross-

14. Hezbollah's lists won all of the Shi'ite seats, which were split between Hezbollah and their Amal Movement allies, as well as some independents aligned with Hezbollah. Hezbollah was able to use the electoral leverage of its allies such as the Free Patriotic Movement to gain a sizable bloc in Parliament. See: Mohanad Hage Ali, "The 2022 Lebanese Elections: Political Shifts and Election Turmoil," *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies*, 19 May 2022, accessed on 29 May 2022, https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/5374.

cutting approach to Lebanese politics. It removed certain leftist slogans from the group's publications and political discourse in favor of focusing on recognizing the right of the resistance in Lebanon.

Conclusion

Since Hezbollah's *open letter* in 1985, the organization has gone through many different stages that have been shaped by shifting regional contexts since the end of the Lebanese Civil War and the Syrian regime's involvement in Lebanese affairs until its withdrawal in 2006. Hezbollah was forced to enter the political arena to confront threats to its existence and to defend its right to bear arms, despite initial ideological reservations about such involvement. The regional shifts and the Lebanese sectarian context have been critical in shaping these transformations. Hezbollah's socioeconomic base has become increasingly diverse as educated middle-class and businessmen have joined the ranks of its leadership. Hezbollah has abandoned some of the leftist discourse that appeared in the first statement issued by the group (which referred to the oppressed and the deserving, calling for solidarity, and emphasizing the need to recover national wealth). Shi'ite religious doctrine remains central to how Hezbollah attracts its popular base, even as it moves into a new stage of political work and alliances with diverse forces that support Hezbollah's access to arms and which can provide political cover for the group's activities beyond Lebanon's southern border. Through these efforts, Hezbollah has become an active force in the region, which has consequences for Lebanon's international relations in general.

Chapter V

Shi'ite Political Islam in the Arabian Peninsula

Ansar Allah Movement: Restoring the Lost Zaydi Imamate in Yemen

Ahmed Nagi

September 21, 2014, marked a turning point in Yemen's history. That was the day Sanaa fell to Ansar Allah movement, better known as the Houthis.[1] This movement had been involved in a six-year conflict with the Yemeni government under the rule of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Thousands were killed in the clashes between the two sides. Several years later, the Houthi movement assumed de facto control of Yemen. Their rise to power in Sanaa was a surprise to many observers in the region and the world. At the beginning of the previous decade, the movement had been nothing more than a small group operating in some districts of the Sa'da governorate in northernmost Yemen. As a result of the immense military and political turmoil caused by the Houthi movement rule, questions have been raised about the movement and how it emerged, its religious roots, and its sectarian and political ties to other regional entities, particularly the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is seen as a primary backer for the movement.

This section argues that the Houthi movement was an attempt to revive the Jarudi Zaydi imamate. Its political doctrine emerged from the notion that the Muslim world and

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1. This study primarily refers to this movement as the Houthis, particularly in refer-ence to the period before they adopted the new name, and due to the widespread us-age of the name linked to the movement's founder, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi.

community (*ummah*) should be ruled by the descendants of Imam Ali and Fatima al-Zahra. This political-religious doctrine was not new but rather arose from the prevailing political and historical context in Yemen in different eras. The political forces following this doctrine came to power at different historical stages and were able to take control of wide areas of Yemeni territory. Their presence was centered in northern Yemen, where many followers of the movement lived. During its rule in Yemen, the Zaydi state varied between expansion and contraction depending on local and regional factors. What was new about the Zaydi revival which was led by Hussein al-Houthi that it added a radical dimension[2] to the movement's ideological underpinnings. He critiqued historical Zaydism and Zaydi theology and drew upon the Quran as the foundational text for his political vision.

Historical Roots of the Zaydi Imamate

The Houthi movement began in Sa'da, a city located in northern Yemen on the border with Saudi Arabia. Sa'da has religious significance among many Zaydis because the founder of the first Zaydi state in Yemen, Imam Yahya ibn al-Hussein al-Qasim al-Rassi, settled there in 896. This state collapsed during the lifetime of Yahya ibn al-Hussein, also known as Imam al-Hadi, who died in Sa'da in 911.[3]

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2. Interview with Maysaa Shuja al-Deen conducted by the author, Stockholm, 18 June 2022.
3. Maysaa Shuja al-Deen, "The Houthis: A Journey Lost Between Isolation and Expansion," 16 April 2015, *Aljazeera Centre for Studies,* https://studies.aljazeera.net/node/3860.

Whenever the central authority in Yemen weakened, the Zaydi imamate would re-emerge onto the political scene again. Power swung between the administrative center in Sanaa and the geographic periphery in Sa'da where the Zaydi imamate was based. This became a key factor shaping the historical trajectory of Yemen. Whenever the center weakened, the periphery took hold—and likewise, when Sa'da receded, Sanaa grew.

Although more than eleven centuries have passed since the Zaydi movement first emerged, some scholars argue that the Zaydi imamate was unable to extend its control and solidify its political standing in Yemen until the Ottomans first arrived. The Yemenis, including the Zaydi tribes, expelled the Ottomans for the first time in 1635 and from that point onwards, the Zaydis' geographical reach and school of thought became an influential force in Yemeni political life.[4] This was also tied to external actors that allowed the Zaydi imamate to expand in areas beyond its usual geographical scope. The presence of a foreign power usually brought Yemeni tribes closer to the Zaydi imamate. It is worth noting that the Hashid and Bakil tribes were branches of the Zaydi imamate and that their area of influence extended from Sa'da in the north to Yarim, which is located 193 kilometers south of Sanaa.[5]

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4. Sayyid Mustafa Salim, "The First Ottoman Conquest of Yemen, 1538-1635," *Institute for Arab Research and Studies,* Cairo, 1969, seventh chapter, p. 338.
5. Ibid.

A discussion of Zaydism also requires further elaboration of its history. The school was founded by Imam Zayd ibn Ali Zayn al-Abidin (695-740). It drew upon the Hanafi school as well as Mutazilism movement.[6] Zaydism derived its reputation as a moderate school from its stance towards the Prophet's companions. It recognized the legitimacy of the caliphs before Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib based on the principle of the "imamate of the inferior" (*imamat al-mafdul*) which means that while Ali was better suited to succeed Muhammad, the reigns of Abu Bakr and Umar must be acknowledged as well, and any other caliph who is welling for it. The Zaydi school of thought was known for opposing unjust leaders, which was unusual in other schools of thought, which believed in obedience to the ruler in order to avoid discord (*fitna*) or as part of a precautionary dissimulation (*Taqiya: the permission to conceal the religion or commit a sinful act when under threat of persecution or compulsion*) until the Mahdi returned. Although Zaydis have been described as similar to Sunnis in doctrine, and they were described as the Shi'ite of the Sunnis, or perhaps the Sunnis of Shi'ites.

The Zaydis are not in fact a single school of thought, but rather comprise various branches. These include the Jarudiyah, who adopt more radical stances towards the Prophet's companions, and the Hadawis, who follow Imam al-Hadi, who added a clause restricting the right to lead

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6. Robert D. Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Yemen*, London: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1995, p. 428.

the imamate to Imam Ali and his wife Fatima. Beyond the debate over who has the right to rule the imamate, there are many similarities between the Shafi'i sect that most Yemenis belong to, and the Hadawi Zaydi school.

Before withdrawing from Yemen in the early twentieth century, the Ottomans handed over the political reins to the Zaydi Imam Yahya Hamid ed-Din, an influential religious leader, on the condition that he does not join the British in their fight against the Ottoman state. Imam Yahya had previously been involved in various wars against the Ottomans between 1872 and 1911, when he became established as an independent Zaydi imam in the north of Yemen.[7] After the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I and their withdrawal from Yemen, Imam Yahya became the de facto ruler of northern Yemen and revived the Zaydi state through establishing the *Mutawakkilite* Kingdom of Yemen. He became known as Imam al-Mutawakkil 'ala Allah and remained in power until 1948, when he was killed during the 1948 uprising. His son, Ahmad bin Yahya Hamid ed-Din, came to power after he put down the uprising that overthrew his father, and he remained in power until 1962, when the 26 September Revolution against the Mutawakkilite Kingdom resulted in the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic.

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7. Sayyid Mustafa Salem, *Building Modern Yemen: Yemen and Imam Yahya, 1904-1948,* Said Raafat Library, Cairo, second edition, 1971 AD/1391 AH, p. 87.

Zaydi Grievances as a Fuel for the Emergence of the Houthi Movement

A serious study of the emergence of the Houthis requires examining the historical, political, and religious context of the movement. The movement was deeply embedded in these contexts which collectively contributed to its development into the movement we know today. When the 26 September Revolution erupted and republican rule was established, the new republican forces were unable to fully remove the imamate rule. During the years following the revolution, there were numerous conflicts between republican forces and supporters of the imamate. The latter was led by Muhammad al-Badr, son of Imam Ahmed Hamid ed-Din. These conflicts were not resolved until ending the siege of Sanaa on 1968, in which Imam al-Badr and his forces unsuccessfully tried to take the city. In 1970, Saudi Arabia oversaw the reconciliation between the royalists and the republicans, which resulted in the end of the Mutawakkilite Imamate. Yemen then entered a new political era under republican rule. Many republican leaders were in fact Zaydis who opposed the imamate led by the Hamid ed-Din family. The republican-royalist conflict of this period was therefore not a sectarian dispute between different schools of Islam but rather a primarily political conflict.

Not all Zaydi religious leaders welcomed this outcome, since they felt snatching power in this way from the Zaydi Imams was inconsistent with Zaydi political ideology. This perspective was primarily in circulation among more

extremist leaders,[8] who argued that only descendants of Imam Ali and his daughter Fatima had the right to rule. This belief became more rooted after religious schools that were not entirely in line with Zaydi doctrine were established in northernmost Yemen. For example, Yemeni educational institutions began to adopt Imam al-Shawkani's interpretations of jurisprudence (*ijtihad*), which introduced more extremist thought regarding authority and governance into Zaydi communities. Imam al-Shawkani was a prominent Zaydi thinker but his writings on the nature of authority were not well-received by most Zaydis, who felt that these ideas went beyond the parameters of the Zaydi school.[9] Meanwhile, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood[10] in traditionally Zaydi areas angered many Zaydi jurists. They felt that the institutes run by the Brotherhood were directly targeting Zaydi authority. However, the Brotherhood's policy at the time was trying to contain Zaydi communities seeking to expand the scope of the brotherhood's political influence but to maintain a non-confrontational discourse with regard to the Zaydis. It is important to mention here that Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi was a student at one of these institutes.

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8. The Jarudis form a branch of Zaydism that is affiliated with Abu al-Jarud Ziyad ibn al-Mundhir al-Kufi al-Hamadani. Jarudis believed that the Prophet Muhammad specified Imam Ali as his successor by describing Ali without naming him directly. The people failed to understand whom the prophet was describing, and so they chose Abu Bakr. Ehsan Elahi Zaheer, *The Book of Shi'ism: Branches and History.*

9. B. Heykel, 2003, *Revival and Reform in Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University in Islam, p.1.

10. In 1990, they became known as the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (al-Islah).

The establishment of the Salafist school Dar al-Hadith in Dammaj - a conservative district in the Sa'da governorate- is considered a threat to Zaydi figures in the Sa'da governorate. The school was established and run by Shaykh Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi'i and became the leading Salafi school in Yemen. Salafi discourse was openly confrontational with the Zaydis and tried to affect the followers of the latter sect through its activities. As Dar al-Hadith expanded and began to attract hundreds of students from across the country and from abroad, traditional Zaydi schools felt threatened by this religious transformation of its areas of influence. This shift was of particular concern to Zaydis since the Salafists were receiving generous support from both Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government. The two countries had different motives for backing the Salafists: Saudi Arabia was interested in promoting shifts in religious identity in neighboring countries, especially after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the events in Mecca (in which extremists took over the Great Mosque) in 1979. For its part, the Yemeni government wanted to establish greater religious and doctrinal balance in a governorate that had always been known for its strong Zaydi presence, especially after pro-Iranian protests erupted in Sa'da, which resulted in a wave of arrests by the Yemeni government. The government was also trying to foster a rival religious identity that could compete with the Brotherhood's educational institutions.

Sa'da became the center of religious conflict between Zaydi, Salafist, and Muslim Brotherhood movements.[11] This religious competition prompted some Zaydi figures to establish organized entities to unite activists working on behalf of the Zaydis. The first of these was the *Youth Union*, which was established by Zaydi scholar Salah Ahmed Fleetah.[12] This entity tried to spread Zaydi doctrine to a new generation of Zaydis through educational programs and awareness-raising activities. The Youth Union gained significant momentum after the return of some Zaydi *marja*s from Saudi Arabia to Sa'da after they had left during the revolution of 26 September 1963. Two of the leading *marja*s in this group were Majd al-Din al-Muayyadi and Badreddin al-Houthi, the father of Hussein al-Houthi, founder of the eponymous movement.

Yemeni unification brought together northern and southern Yemen and established political pluralism. At this time, Zaydi leaders founded *the Party of Truth* and also became involved in other political parties. Extremist Zaydi groups benefitted from this political representation, which helped bring their vision and ambitions to Sanaa. According to Muhammad Badreddin al-Houthi, Zaydis had not been considering neither covert nor overt political activity at the

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11. For more on the activities of religious institutions, see Maysaa Shuja al-Deen, "Yemen's War-torn Rivalries for Religious Education," 5 January 2022, *Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center*, https://carnegie-mec.org/2022/01/05/ar-pub-86119.

12. Salah Ahmed Fleetah is the father of Mohammed Abdul Salam, the current official spokesperson for the Houthis.

time; but the main issue here was focusing on protecting the Zaydi thought. After unification took place in the early 1990s and political pluralism was permitted, various religious scholars and educated youth formed *the Party of Truth* under the leadership of Majd al-Din al-Muayyadi and his deputy Badreddin al-Houthi along with general secretary Ahmed al-Sham.[13]

Many Zaydi figures were involved in the *Party of Truth*'s political activities. In the 1993 parliamentary elections, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, the founder of the Houthi movement, ran in one of the electoral districts in Sa'da governorate and won. In 1995, a dispute emerged between the party's founders, Majd al-Din al-Muayyadi and Badreddin al-Houthi, over their divergent jurisprudential approaches and political views, which resulted in the latter leaving the party. President Saleh played a role in this internal split, since he was interested in undermining his opponents regardless of their ideological and political stances. An alliance was formed between Saleh's party, the General People's Congress, and the movement aligned with Badreddin al-Houthi. In the 1997 elections, Yahia Badreddin al-Houthi, the older brother of Hussein al-Houthi, won in the same electoral district that his brother had previously captured.[14]

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13. Press interview with Mohammed Badreddin al-Houthi, *Majalis Al Muhammad*, 3 September 2007, https://al-majalis.org/forums/viewtopic.php?t=7205.

14. Ahmed Amin al-Shuja, *After the Popular Uprising in Yemen: Iran and the Houthis - New Avenues, Old Struggles*, November 2012, p. 15.

After leaving parliament after only a year, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi became involved in intellectual work and went to Sudan to continue his graduate studies before returning to Yemen to join *the Faithful Youth Union*, which is a cultural and intellectual forum established in 1990. After joining the forum, he also tried to expand its cultural and intellectual activities in other governorates. However, more important than this geographic expansion was the ideological shift driven by Hussein al-Houthi, who had clearly been influenced by the Iranian revolution. In the beginning he was not supported by all Zaydi leaders in his efforts to restore Zaydi rule. Hussein also had difficulty reaching consensus with the founders of the *Faithful Youth Union* because of his revolutionary and political approaches, which caused ideological conflict between them.[15] However, he was ultimately able to convince many to join forces with him and adopt his vision. He introduced fundamental changes to the Union, and it quickly transformed from a political platform to the center of a military rebellion using idiological solidarity and grievances to rally support.

Later the *Faithful Youth Union* became known as the Houthi movement. It grew into an opposition force against then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh and tried to achieve self-rule. Because many Zaydi leaders are still remembering the wars of the 1960s, thus initially they did not support the Houthi movement. This changed when war broke out in

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15. Interview with Mohammed Azzan, a Zaydi thinker in Khartoum, Sudan, April 2016. He was the co-founder of the Faithful Youth Union along with Mohammed Badreddin al-Houthi, the younger brother of Hussein al-Houthi.

2004 because of the conflict between Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthis over the latter's activities, which Saleh saw as a threat to his authority. The government tried to arrest Hussein al-Houthi before he was killed in fighting later that year. Al-Houthi's death increased the Zaydi support for the movement, which then grew more quickly. Hussein's brother, Abdul Malik Badreddin al-Houthi, took his place as the leader of the movement.

The Houthi rebellion continued to grow in the years that followed. One of the drivers for this growth was the Houthis' capacity to attract support of local Hashemite communities. Most of the Hashemites were families who had played an important political and administrative role during previous Zaydi rule, and claimed to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. By incorporating Hashemites into the movement, the Houthis were able to expand their networks and move beyond their traditional areas of influence. Some of the Hashemite families refused to get involved in the Houthi movement for various reasons including pre-existing ties to other religious and political movements. For example, some Hashemite figures had links to the Yemeni Congregation for Reform.

It is important to mention that Hezbollah was also a significant backer for the Houthis. Also, the Houthi movement evoked a political vision aligned with the ideas of Hussein al-Houthi that would have popular appeal, and which drew upon elements such as Islamic unity, fighting corruption, and other issues.

The Houthi movement established networks in various areas to achieve its political and religious objectives, which enabled it to recruit more fighters. The group relied on a system of *mushrif*s (supervisors),[16] which was a hierarchical system under the movement's commander to expand their areas of control. This system was divided into three main branches: cultural-religious , security, and social supervision.

From the Mountains of Sa'da to the Palaces of Sanaa

After the sixth round of war in 2010, the Houthis took control over most districts in the Sa'da governorate. Their influence had also begun to spread to the neighboring governorates of Amran, Hajjah, al-Jawf, and Sanaa. Given the weakness of state institutions, the Houthis had become the de facto ruler of some areas and controlled local administrative structures. However, in the midst of these protracted wars, the Houthis remained politically and socially isolated for a time until the protests of 2011 began, when many factors changed in their favor.

On 11 February 2011, widespread popular protests erupted against former President Ali Saleh and called for him to leave office. The protests gained momentum from the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, and many Yemeni activists saw the

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16. E. Ardemagni, A. Nagi, M. Transfeld, Shuyyukh, "Policemen and Supervisors: Yemen's Competing Security Provider*s*," 26 March 2020, *ISPI (Italian Institute for International Political Studies)*, https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/shuyyukh-policemen-and-supervisors-yemens-competing-security-providers-25518#n1.

uprising as an opportunity to address many of the problems with the Yemeni state under Saleh's rule. The Houthis became involved in the popular uprising and participated in these events under the title of *Shabab al-Sumud* (which means literally resilience youth). They utilized the sit-ins held in many cities to spread their political vision, and took a pragmatic approach to incorporating the people's demands without bringing up controversial issues. This enabled the Houthis to build networks with other political and youth groups and also gave them the opportunity to attract many young people who were eager for change.

The Houthis wanted to expand geographically into districts around Sa'da. Their military action took advantage of the security vacuum that had emerged under Saleh's government, which was absorbed in the major political turmoil caused by the popular uprising. The Houthis also wanted to retaliate against the tribes that had been aligned with the state during six different wars. The movement was able to expand into many districts in the Hajjah and al-Jawf governorates and declared open war on the tribes aligned with the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (*Al-Islah*). During this period, rumors circulated in political circles that President Saleh had decided to deliver the coup-de-grâce to the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, which had been at the forefront of the popular uprising, through strengthening the Houthis and convincing some military leaders to give their camps to the movement.

The popular uprising ended in a political compromise brokered by the GCC,[17] which required Saleh to transfer power to his vice-president, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. In return, Saleh would be granted immunity from any legal prosecution for any acts committed under his rule, and his party, the General People's Congress, would be granted half of the seats in the government cabinet. The Houthis did not accept the deal and continued to oppose it, but still joined the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, which was one element of the deal. The Houthi delegates were given 35 seats out of 565 seats in the dialogue conference and the group was involved in most discussions during the conference's sessions.

The Houthis adopted two contradictory paths that nevertheless both served the movement's ambitions. In the political sphere, participating in the national dialogue provided the Houthis with a key opportunity to create alliances and open channels of communication with most other participants. It also allowed them to present themselves in an acceptable light in the Yemeni political sphere using a pragmatic approach to exploit disputes that had emerged between different political factions during the previous period. Although the general perception of the Houthis was that they had suffered injustices during the Saleh era, they were also able to form political partnerships with Saleh

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17. For the full text of the GCC initiative and its mechanisms for implementation, visit the National Information Center: https://yemen-nic.info/sectors/politics/trans/initiative.php.

against common adversaries. Meanwhile, in the military sphere, the Houthis continued to expand and eliminate their rivals. After the Houthis gained control of many parts of Hajjah and al-Jawf, they became involved in brutal struggle against the students from the Dar al-Hadith Salafi school in Dammaj. After achieving victory in this battle, the Houthis embarked on a more expansive journey towards military control.

The Saleh alliance with the Houthis began in Hashid, a stronghold for the Al-Ahmar clan, which had opposed President Saleh in the 2011 uprising. Some of the tribes in this area had supported the Salafists of Dammaj in their fight against the Houthis. The defeat of the al-Ahmar clan, the arrival of the Houthis to Hashid, and an explosion at the home of tribal leader Shaykh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar dealt a huge blow to anti-Houthi forces. This strengthened the Houthis' power and rendered them a major actor in a fractured military sphere. As a result, the Houthis began to progress towards the Amran governorate, which was only 40 miles from Sanaa. After laying siege to this area for several days, it fell to Houthis, following the death of Hameed al-Qushaibi, a military leader from the Yemeni Army who had opposed Saleh in the 2011 uprising. As soon as Amran fell, reaching Sanaa was only a matter of time. Houthi militias arrived in Sanaa on 21 September 2014 without any major resistance from government forces, who were victims of the acute political polarization that played an important role in the rise of the Houthis.

The fall of Sanaa to the Houthis was a turning point in the history of modern Yemen. The national dialogue, which was seen as an example by many countries that experienced transitional periods after the Arab Spring uprisings, broke down entirely in light of these conditions on the ground. A new agreement known as the Peace and National Partnership Agreement gave the Houthis major openings for political participation. However, the extent of Houthi control over the state undermined this political agreement and prompted President Hadi to resign. The Houthis placed him under house arrest, but he was able to flee to Aden in secret and announced from Aden that he had withdrawn his resignation.

During this time, the Houthis, who openly remained partners with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, expanded into the rest of the Yemeni governorates. They easily took control of most northern and western governorates, only encountering modest local resistance, while their own forces continued to expand. This was particularly true after the Houthis seized the arms depots belonging to the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. However, the Houthis encountered fierce resistance from well-organized forces in certain areas, such as Taiz, Marib, and Aden. Meanwhile, the Houthis and Saleh's forces continued to advance towards Aden to take control of the city and arrest President Hadi. While their forces were at the gates of Aden in late March 2015, a Saudi-led Arab coalition launched military operations to support the government in Aden.

From that time onwards, Yemen has been witnessing an open war on multiple fronts, and many local and regional actors have become involved in the conflict. Domestic coalitions that had formed at the beginning of the war had now fundamentally shifted. President Saleh, who had stood alongside the Houthis in order to retaliate against opposition forces from the 2011 uprisings, now found himself in armed clashes with the Houthis in Sanaa that ended in Saleh's death in December 2017. Meanwhile, the Houthis seized control of the political council that they had jointly formed with the General People's Congress as the country's official administrative structure, and which the two forces had taken turns in leading. The Sanaa branch of the General People's Congress receded to a very marginal role.

The Yemeni government became highly fragmented as a result of the divisions that emerged between Arab coalition countries and, by extension, among local forces. This was particularly true after the rise of the Southern Transitional Council, which advocated for the south's independence from the north in government-aligned areas. The Saudi-led coalition wanted to pursue political solutions and avoid military action, and the institution of the presidency was re-established based on the outcomes of the war. President Hadi was removed and power was handed over to the Presidential Leadership Council, which was composed of eight members led by Rashad al-Alimi.

Although international and regional forces have tried to mediate among opposing parties as fighting continues, it seems that the convoluted nature of the military and political situation in Yemen will make political compromise difficult to achieve. The Houthis believe that they alone have the right to political power in Yemen and that they should be the negotiating party in any dialogue between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. They view the Yemeni government and other local actors as part of a coalition, but not as partners in governing Yemen, for both political and religious reasons. In light of this situation, the potential for a political solution remains complicated and it appears that Yemen will remain locked in military conflict in the short and long term.

The Houthi movement's Political Project: A Hybrid Zaydi Imamate

What do the Houthi movement want exactly? This question has often been asked, but the movement's leadership has not provided a clear answer. Their own narrative regarding the nature of their political project features primarily general terms allowing for multiple interpretations such as a just state, sovereignty, law, or honor. The meanings of these vast terms tend to vary according to the political circumstances or depending upon which political figure happens to be speaking about the political project of the movement. This does not mean that the movement did not have clearly-defined objectives. On the contrary, the movement had a set an agenda that it has been trying to implement since the earliest days of its founder Badreddin al-Houthi.

As it has been described above, the Houthi movement had embraced the approach of political pragmatism which had driven them to adopted various identities over the course of their military and political ascent.[18] They skillfully transformed from a group that defended the Zaydi minority during the six wars in the period from 2004 to 2010, to adopting a discourse advocating for Sa'da's rights during the popular protests of 2011. The Houthis then shifted to defending the Hashemite families, and then representing the northern tribes during the national dialogue period (2013-2014). When the Saudi-led Arab coalition intervened in 2015, the Houthis presented themselves as the sole representatives of the Yemeni people.

This shifting identity helped the Houthi movement achieve political gains and attract new fighters to their ranks from groups they claimed to represent, and also helped the movement avoid the question of its end goal and what it was trying to achieve. However, by examining the political and military actions of the movement since its founding until today, as well as the religious materials that some of its main leaders have produced, we can begin to answer that question. Before the ceremonial presidential elections of February 2012 in which Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi was chosen as the consensus candidate by the Gulf initiative, an ideological statement was released by the Zaydis[19]

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18. Ahmed Nagi, "Yemeni's Houthis Used Multiple Identities to Advance," 2 April 2019, *Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center*, https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/04/02/ar-pub-78744.

19. Ibid.

summarizing the principles that determined the Zaydis' political and ideological course of action. This document was one of the clearest sources in terms of describing the general direction in which the Houthi movement was headed. In the document's preamble, it was stated that a committee had met to formulate an agreement among Zaydis, including the *mujahideen*. This included Abdul Malik Badreddin al-Houthi and some Zaydi religious scholars and their followers, including Abdel Rahman Hussein Shayem, and Hussein bin Yahia al-Houthi. This document set forth cultural and ideological principles on six main topics: *usul al-din* (principles of religion), the Prophet's *Sunna*, *Istifa'* (divine selection), *Usul al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), *Ijtihad* (interpretation), and *kalam* (scholastic theology).

The document discussed the concept of governance (*wilaya*) in detail. With regard to theology, the document indicated that the imam after the Prophet Muhammad was Imam Ali, then Hasan, then Hussein, and then other imams who were their children, such as Imam Zayd, Imam al-Qasim al-Rassi, and Imam Hadi, the founder of the Zaydi school in Yemen. It stated that guidance (*hidaya*), salvation, and protection (*aman*) could be achieved through adhering to the Quran and the descendants of the prophet (that is, the line of succession from the Prophet to the children of Imam Ali and his wife Fatima al-Zahraa). With regard to *istifa'* (divine selection), the document emphasized the precedence of the household of the Prophet which God had chosen as the inheritors of the book of God. The document aligned with what Badreddin al-Houthi had said when he was asked about the Zaydi position on democracy – that the Zaydis support justice rather than democracy. Although he deemed

acceptable that those not descended from the Imam Ali or Fatima al-Zahraa can also rule, this option was only allowed in exceptional situations, which in Zaydism was referred to as *hisba* (upholding morals). Badreddin al-Houthi said that in the absence of am imam (that is, a member of the household of the Prophet), this scenario could come into effect. If an imam was present, then they would take precedence, because they were the most capable of protecting Islam and of reforming the *ummah*.[20]

For the Houthis, having an established rule by the descendants of the household of the Prophet was a central theological (*usul al-din*) concern rather than a secondary issue on their political agenda. However, the shift initiated by the movement's founder Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi was more extreme. He criticized Zaydi *usul al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence), *tafsir* (interpretation of the Quran), and *kalam* (scholastic theology), which he found to be misguided. In his view, this was the source of the humiliation and of other grievances that the Zaydis had faced. Hussein al-Houthi's thought also had radical and revolutionary dimensions: He believed that armed jihad was the best way to bring the household of the Prophet to power.

During the last two decades, attempts were made to translate this religious vision into a political and military

20. Ahmed al-Daghshi, "The Houthis: A Comprehensive and Systematic Study of Why and How they Came to Power, Foreign Policy Challenges, and Future Prospects," 2010, *Library of Khalid Ibn al-Walid*, Sanaa, p. 102.

reality. Abdul Malik Badreddin al-Houthi was seen as the revolution's imam because he was a descendant of the household of the Prophet and the movement did not permit anyone to challenge him. Most high-level state positions were given to persons from Hashemite families because they were seen as preferable to others. The political partnerships that occurred between the movement and other entities have always been temporary, and it usually ended with the Houthi movement being in control. This was what happened with partnerships that the movement established with tribes, parties, and religious entities alike, because the Houthi movement's expansionist mentality did not leave space to compete with the imam or the master of the revolution.

In order to prepare society for this form of governance, Houthi movement works intensively to incorporate this vision into the curriculums, study subjects and sermons in all areas including schools and mosques in all areas under their control.[21] They adopted a series of programs and activities under the theme of strengthening religious identity and did not hesitate to promote this political-religious vision even in Shafi'i areas. Given the poor quality of public education in the hundreds of schools that the movement controlled, there was growing interest in religious education, which provided a ready framework for this kind of political

21. Manal Ghanem, "Curriculum Changes to Mold the Jihadis of Tomorrow," 13 January 2021, *Yemen Peace Forum - Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies*, https://sanaacenter.org/ypf/ar/curriculum-changes-to-mold-the-jihadis-of-tomorrow.

religious work. The movement sought to establish religious summer programs to create the right conditions to attract new followers or potential fighters to the movements' fronts.

However, the notion of restoring the imamate that had existed in 1962 did not seem realistic. A higher authority needed to be identified that would exist alongside the executive authority. This mode of governance preserved the presence of a republican structure even though the actual power was located with a ruler outside the official structures. Such an arrangement was similar to that of the political system in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in which the higher authority was the Supreme Leader while executive authority was handed to the president. In Yemen, this took the form of the Supreme Political Council, which is currently led by Mahdi al-Mashat, but the real force behind the military and political scene is Abdul Malik Badreddin al-Houthi, who was known as the commander of the revolution. Houthi movement have adopted this hybrid approach to the imamate in forming a republic with a supreme guide from within the household of the Prophet.

The Houthi movement and Iran: Revolutionary and Political Shi'ism

The relationship between the Houthi movement and Iran is one of the most controversial elements of this topic. Many studies view the Houthi movement as nothing more than Iranian agents in Yemen, and the Houthi movement political and religious project as a Twelver Shi'ite endeavor. Despite the significant ties between the two sides, characterizing

the Houthi movement as an Iranian proxy obscures the local context from which the movement emerged, and which contributed to its rise. There is no doubt that Iran played a major role in supporting Houthi movement and developing their military capabilities during their wars against the Yemeni government and later on – against the Saudi-led Arab coalition. However, the basis of the Houthi movement's religious and political project differs from the principle of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (*Velayat-e Faqih*) in Iran. There are many ideological commonalities between the two sides in terms of the worship of the house of the Prophet, but Houthi movement political revolutionary Shi'ism differs from Shi'ism in the purely religious context. Moving Zaydi communities towards Shi'ism was not a short-term project, and some Zaydi *marja*s viewed themselves as their own centers of authority.

In his political and religious lectures and activities, Hussein al-Houthi criticized some Twelver Shi'ite beliefs such as the notion of the Hidden Imam, while also indicating his admiration for the Iranian Revolution as well as for Imam Khomeini and his revolutionary approach. Al-Houthi traveled to Iran in 1995 and spent time there, during which he developed good political relations with the Iranian regime. The political goals of the Iranian revolution were also reflected in the Houthi discourse, Houthi movement also encouraged his followers to adopt the Iranian revolutionary approach, although he did not try to incorporate *Velayat-e Faqih* in Zaydi thought. The Zaydi imams' involvement in the state in Yemen was at odds with Twelver Shi'ite

doctrine, and the Zaydis often accused Twelver Shi'ites and Ismailis of being apostates in their writings. Houthi leader Ali al-Emad said that the relationship between the Houthis and Iran involved only a revolutionary consensus but not a doctrinal convergence, and that ties with Iran were only maintained within the parameters of an ideological political vision for revolutionary action.[22]

Yemen itself occupied a high standing in Shi'ite thought. The Yemeni revolution paved the way for the return of the Mahdi. The figure of Al-Yamani, who is supposed to lead this revolution, helped many Shi'ite groups overlook doctrinal disputes with Zaydis during this period and focus instead on a common political and ideological frameworks. The movement was widely discussed in mainstream and religious media in Shi'ite communities in the Arab world, including in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Bahrain.[23]

The increasingly close ties between Iran and the Houthis caused certain shifts within the Houthi movement. The Houthis' military wing was loyal to Iran and began to cooperate more closely with Iran during its ongoing war in Yemen, which gave Iran significant influence in decision-making circles. This contributed to the development of a religious discourse that was more closely aligned with the Iranian vision. Twelver Shi'ism also continued to spread in certain circles of activists within the Houthi movement.

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22. Manal Ghanem, "Curriculum Changes to Mold the Jihadis of Tomorrow."
23. Ali al-Kourani, *Epoch of Appearance.*

Given Iran's major military support for the Houthis, the former gained significant power in the group, and the Houthis became a key element of the Axis of Resistance in the region.

Conclusion

Internal and regional factors both played an important role in the Houthis' rise to the forefront of the Yemeni political scene. The weakness of the central government, acute political divisions between Yemenite political parties, and difficult economic conditions all helped pave the way for the rise of the Houthi movement. External support for the Houthis from Iran enabled the movement to develop its military capabilities during the wars. These factors allowed the movement to grow and expand until it controlled most northern regions of Yemen, which constituted 30 percent of Yemeni territory, in areas in which two-thirds of the country's population live. However, these are all variables that could change and turn the tide against the Houthis at any moment. This raises an important question about the political future of the Houthis and how to maintain resilient movements in potentially volatile climates.

Although an overwhelming force has enabled the Houthis to strengthen their capacity to hold onto power, they lack constitutional legitimacy or the support of a majority of the Yemeni society on the political and on the religious level. The movement has been unable to resolve most economic hardships affecting the areas under its controls, and so the Houthis have to reveal themselves as a force that collects

taxes and resources to fund its military operations but does not pay financial benefits to public sector employees nor it provides public services. The Houthis' narrative is grounded in the idea of a tormented state that is constantly engaged in war. This has enabled the movement to evade its responsibilities, but in the long term the movement will suffer from the chronic instability, which will ultimately undermine its capabilities to mobilize popular support.

Despite successive military victories, the Houthis are facing major challenges today at the internal, local, and regional levels. There are rivalries among internal leaders and an increasing number of branches within the movement, which could cause divisions in the future. Such rifts have plagued most attempts to restore Zaydism in Yemen. At the same time, reliance on Zaydi identity and Hashemite families in governance has created widespread discontent among the majority of society who does not support this vision, which could unleash a violent pushback against the movement. Some Yemeni nationalist currents have recently emerged to challenge the primacy of the house of the Prophet in governance. However, the main question will be how the Houthis will manage the shift from waging war to state-building and incorporating other elements of Yemeni society in this process. The Houthis are now at a stage in which they must transform their theoretical ideals into reality—a future which, at this point, remains opaque.

Shi'ite Political Islam in Bahrain:

Al-Wefaq Society as a Case Study

Abdullah Al Jbour

Over the past decade, research in the field of political Islam has focused primarily on studying movements in Sunni political Islam such as the Muslim Brotherhood. There has been a comparative lack of scholarship on Shi'ite political Islam and its relationship with the state. Western scholars are also more concerned with this topic than scholars from the region, and interest in this field became more pronounced after the Iranian Revolution, which marked a turning point in the Middle East in various spheres. French philosopher Michel Foucault and Jurgen Habermas of the Frankfurt School, among others, were keen on going to Iran to study the revolution as a new social movement and to understand its aftermath. They wrote about religion in the public sphere in Iran, about removing religion from the political sphere, and about political revolution backed by religious authority. Given the attention that has been paid to religious scholars and traditional sources, it is important that the social sciences and centers of political and social thought in the Islamic and Arab are given more attention in studies in this field.

Introduction

Bahrain did not escape the numerous movements for change that sought to transform the character of the Arab state after the end of Ottoman rule. Generations of Bahrainis have been affected by various ideological influences since that period. Beginning in the early 1920s, nationalist spirit spurred wide swathes of Bahraini society to rise up against the British, and against the House of Khalifa. The national struggle in Bahrain lasted more than a century, starting with the *Baharna uprising* of 1922 against the *corvee* labor system imposed by the British. This ideological struggle continued for the next half century and involved nationalist, communist, and Ba'athist currents, and served as a precedent for the uprisings and movements of the 1940s-1960s.

Bahrain was a small and impoverished emirate that depended primarily on pearl trading in the Gulf until the discovery of oil in 1934. Although oil production was relatively limited, the country experienced significant development and used some of its oil revenues to build an advanced educational and health system. An educated elite with political consciousness emerged in opposition to British policy in Bahrain. These elites played a role in the political developments that Bahrain experienced during the 1930-1950s. As a result of the education system in Bahrain, an educated class emerged, as discussed above, some of whose members studied outside Bahrain due to the political conditions under the British rule. Development in Bahrain began more seriously after independence in 1973,

despite Bahrain's relatively modest national income rate as compared to some of its neighbors in the Gulf. The liberal current in Bahrain, as in Kuwait, was part of an educated business elite that led the modernization process, including defining new modern values that encountered friction with other forms of modernity in the Arab world, India, and Europe. Studying abroad played a major role in this process, especially for the middle class. The challenges that Bahrain faced at home and abroad also played a role in developing the country's cultural and political consciousness.[1]

The educated class and trading elites developed a political consciousness beginning in the 1920s and were united by their concern for the welfare of the people. Demands for reform centered around political participation, including the following issues:

1. Establishing a legislative council.

2. Arabizing state agencies.

3. Providing for social justice and equality for diving workers.

4. Maintaining a free and open cultural environment.

5. Achieving some measure of democracy through popular participation.

6. Ending Britain's interference in Bahrain's internal affairs.

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1. Abdul Malik al-Tamimi, *Modernity and Modernization in the Arab Gulf since the Mid-Twentieth Century,* Alam al-Marefa publications, Kuwait, 2018.

When the ruler of Bahrain, Shaykh Isa ibn Ali Al Khalifa (1848-1932), responded to these demands, Britain intervened. It removed Shaykh Isa from power and appointed British advisor Charles Belgrave (1894-1969) as the de facto ruler of the country. The reform movement in Bahrain helped open schools and establish clubs, associations, and newspapers. However, such reform movements were unable to escape the repercussions of what was happening in the Arab world, particularly in Palestine. This reform movement had a unified character at the national level and was not affected by sectarian divisions. The movement organized strikes that prompted the British authorities to detain a number of Bahraini youth and to send them into exile abroad, where they faced various political and social problems especially in the 1950s.[2]

This was followed by the Islamic Revolution in Iran amidst calls to export the revolution elsewhere. At the same time, nationalist fervor had begun to ebb while the socialist camp collapsed, which had repercussions for nationalist and leftist groups in Bahrain. At this juncture, sectarian groups began to form in Bahrain, which were backed by the Islamic regime in Tehran. These religious organizations succeeded in attracting wide swathes of working-class Bahraini Shi'ites who felt that they needed someone to defend their rights and interests. Although Shi'ites were a majority in Bahrain, they suffered from political oppression as well as from difficult economic and social circumstances.

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2. Ibid., 146.

Despite the fears that had been stirred up in the Arab world following the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the transformations in Iran were not the subject of sustained academic and intellectual study to better understand why and how this revolution had occurred. It is increasingly important to understand Iran's political trajectory given the expansion of Tehran's political influence in the Arab region, especially in the Gulf. Tehran was able to become one of the most important regional forces, often through indirect means such as soft power and building ideological bridges.

Despite popular support for the demands made by political forces backed by Shi'ite organizations in Bahrain, the authorities made no concessions to the opposition. This led to increasing political violence in Bahraini society, which did not end until after the death of the emir of Bahrain, Shaykh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, in March 1999. The political scene in Bahrain experienced an unexpected development when the new emir, Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa, who would later become king, took several steps to change Bahrain's openness to political opposition and set the country on a careful course towards democratic transition.

Shi'ite Political Islam in Bahrain

Shi'ites in Bahrain can be divided into three main groups. The first are the *Baharna*, who are the indigenous inhabitants of Bahrain and are Shi'ites of Arab origin who settled in Bahrain during various periods in history as they fled religious and political persecution during the Umayyad and

the Abbasid eras. The second group are *Akhbari* Shi'ites who hail from Qatif and al-Ahsa and came to Bahrain during the rise of Wahhabism in the nineteenth century. The third group are *Usuli* Shi'ites who came from Iran to Bahrain and settled there during the seventeenth century during the Persian invasion. Arab Shi'ites make up 95 percent of the Shi'ite population in Bahrain and they are primarily Twelver Shi'ites (Imamites).[3]

Although the majority of Bahrain's population is Shi'ite, they have generally been under the rule of Sunni Arab tribes that came from the center of the Arabian Peninsula. Shi'ites suffered from difficult economic, social, and political conditions, which led them to advocate for their rights through submitting petitions to the British authorities. There were also public uprisings, most importantly the February 1922 uprising, which developed into a general strike in the Manama market and protests against the oppressive regime. Based on census data gathered during the British presence in Bahrain, occasional official statistics, and polls carried out during the transition to the monarchy and later - during the Arab Spring, we can ascertain that Shi'ites generally comprised 75 to 85 percent of Bahrain's population. This number fell to 65 to 75 percent after the naturalization policy that the Bahraini government pursued, especially during the Arab Spring.

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3. Falah al-Mudaires, *Political Movements and Organizations in Bahrain, 1938-2002,* Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya, Lebanon (Beirut), p. 86.

Since the 1950s, the Bahraini government has encouraged the establishment of various Shi'ite and Sunni religious platforms, including associations, newspapers, and magazines such as *al-Mawaqif*, which focused on religious and political activism. Government-aligned Shi'ite clerics became involved with these platforms. The Bahraini government tried to back this religious movement as an alternative to nationalist and leftist political opposition. In doing so, it tried to undermine the popular momentum around demands made by these latter forces through developing an alternative that could appeal to this popular base. This mirrors what happened in Kuwait when the government utilized religious groups to combat and isolate nationalist and leftist forces. Since the early 1970s, Shi'ite ideological and political activity has expanded, and centers of Shi'ite Islam emerged in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and eastern Saudi Arabia, as Shi'ites established fundamentalist religious parties and groups. The Amal Movement in Lebanon was established in April 1974, followed by the Organization for the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula in 1975, and the Islamic Action Organization in Iraq in 1979.

At this juncture, Hadi al-Modarresi came to Bahrain and began to engage in organized political and ideological religious activism through religious sermons, the *al-Mawaqif* magazine, and other religious publications and materials. New currents began to emerge within the Shi'ite religious movement in Bahrain, especially after the revolution in Iran and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. These events

made it difficult for the government to keep the religious movement in check and marked a paradigm shift for the Shi'ites towards a liberation theology.[4] The current had once devoted themselves to Islamic thought in isolation, but now, after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, emerged to form the following political parties and organizations:

1. The Islamic Dawa Party: The Islamic Dawa Party - Bahrain branch was founded in 1968 by a group of university students who had studied in Iraqi universities, joined by students from the religious seminary (*hawza*) in Najaf. The party's base was composed of secondary school students and some university students who belonged to the Islamic Awareness Society. The party participated in the parliamentary elections that took place in Bahrain to elect the Constituent Assembly and the National Assembly. Various members of the party were also involved in social and cultural activities organized by the Islamic Awareness Society in the 1970s. In 1983, the Bahraini security forces arrested a number of activists from the society as well as party members. They were accused of belonging to the Islamic Dawa Party, since the Islamic Awareness Society had formed the basis for the party's work in Bahrain, which was ultimately unsuccessful as a result of these arrests.

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4. Falah al-Mudaires, *Political Movements and Organizations in Bahrain, 1938-2002*, p. 92-93.

2. The Islamic Awareness Society: The Islamic awareness Society was the religious front for the Islamic Dawa Party-Bahrain branch, which was founded in 1968 during devotional circles (*halaqat al-dhikr*) held in the village of Diraz. These gradually expanded until their founder decided they needed official headquarters and asked for an official permit from the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1972. Shi'ite youth, intellectuals, and religious scholars ('*ulama*) were all involved in founding the society, which was led by Shaykh Isa Qassim, a member of the religious bloc in the National Assembly. Many Shi'ites joined the society, including judges, merchants, leading social figures, university graduates, engineers, and doctors. The society's early activities took place in the Tayy mosque in eastern Diraz. The society took advantage of the political opening at the time and built a member base in most villages and cities in Bahrain. The society played an important role in politicizing the Shi'ite public since it was an important center for electoral campaigning during Constituent Assembly and National Assembly elections.

3. The Islamic Guidance Society: This society was established in 1969 in Manama and was founded on the anniversary of the death of Imam Ali ibn Ali Talib in the *ma'tam* (a Shi'ite congregation hall) of al-Arrayed. This heralded a new era in Islamic political activity in Bahrain. It was initially known as the Islamic Youth Guidance Society and its activities were driven by Shi'ite youth who formed the core of organized Shi'ite religious movements in

Bahrain. The society's main activities included convening religious councils and holding religious festivals. It tried to obtain an official permit from the Bahraini government but was unsuccessful.[5]

4. The Husseini Social Fund: Shi'ite religious scholars ('*ulama*), university-trained intellectuals, and students of religious sciences founded the Husseini Fund in Manama in 1972. The founders tried unsuccessfully to obtain an official permit from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and were obliged to carry out their activities via another licensed institution, namely the Islamic Cultural Bookshop. The Husseini Fund served as an extension of the Islamic Guidance Society and members of the fund eventually took over the Islamic Cultural Bookshop and began to distribute and publish the books of Hadi al-Modarresi. This resulted in a rift between the bookshop and the fund. In 1976, the Husseini Fund split from the bookshop and became known as the Husseini Social Fund with new headquarters in the Husseiniya of al-Qassab in Manama. It announced that the goals of the new fund were to build an Islamic society, promote and deepen Islamic thought and the spirit of scientific progress in society, develop a sense of responsibility, and share the objectives and principles of the revolution of Imam Hussein with the world as part of the struggle for a dignified life. The fund adopted the slogan "God, justice, humanity,"

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5. "Analyzing Political Movements and Groups in Bahrain," a study published on the website of the Gulf Centre for Development, https://gulfpolicies.org.

in reference to its social, political, and doctrinal orientation. This slogan resembles that of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain ("God, justice, and good deeds"). The fund formed the base from which the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain later emerged. Since the early 1970s, the fund tried to focus on various revolutionary social and humanitarian issues in Islam as well as building its ranks in order to form groups to carry out clandestine work. These groups later became the main pillar of the fund, and the fund relied upon these groups to promote its political discourse and in the organization of Shi'ite individuals.

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Husseini Social Fund began to claim that Hadi al-Modarresi was Imam Khomeini's representative in Bahrain. As the Shi'ite opposition in Bahrain ramped up, the government decided to arrest Hadi al-Modarresi in late 1979 and exiled him to the UAE. Al-Modarresi travelled from there to Iran, where he became involved in organizing against the Bahraini government to overthrow the political regime with help from the Iranian media. Iranian broadcasting ran many segments and speeches that dealt with the political situation in Bahrain. In 1980, the Bahraini security agency shut down the Husseini Social Fund. Its doors were sealed with red wax, its possessions were confiscated, and dozens of members were arrested on charges of being affiliated with the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain.[6]

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6. Falah al-Mudaires, *Political Movements and Organizations in Bahrain: 1938-2002,* Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya, Lebanon (Beirut), p. 97.

5. The Religious Bloc: In 1972, the government in Bahrain declared its intent to hold elections for a Constituent Assembly in order to elect the country's first parliamentary assembly—the National Assembly—in 1973. The religious bloc did not a become a clearly-defined political organization in Bahrain until these assemblies were established. All the founders of the religious bloc were conservative Shi'ite clerics who had been involved in the Islamic Awareness Society. The bloc was seen as a strictly rural phenomenon since its six members hailed from Shi'ite villages. Most of them had studied at the Shi'ite religious seminary in Najaf in Iraq. The religious bloc's electoral program was grounded in several points including support for labor unions, since the bloc's electoral base in the villages was primarily working class. It also forbade the sale of alcohol, banned mixed classes in higher education, and excluded women from public life by banning mixed societies, clubs, or workplaces. Religious bloc candidates did well in the elections and won nine seats. After this electoral victory, three members who had won seats in the National Assembly left the religious bloc and joined the independent centrist bloc. The religious bloc's stances in the National Assembly fluctuated based on pressures from the government and the labor movement.

6. Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain: After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Bahraini Shi'ites split into two camps: a conservative camp that only wanted a few reforms to improve its situation, and a revolutionary camp

that included the vast majority of Shi'ites in Bahrain. This latter group wanted to overthrow the regime and replace it with an Islamic republic similar to that in Iran, especially after some leaders of the Iranian revolution made comments about re-annexing Bahrain. Ayatollah Sadiq Rouhani had made statements about incorporating Bahrain as part of Iran again as its fourteenth province. He stated that Bahrain was part of the Islamic Republic of Iran and called on the Bahraini government to establish a system of Islamic rule similar to that which exists in Iran.

Hadi al-Modarresi held a press conference in which he announced the establishment of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. However, Faisal Marhoon, one of the leaders of the front, affirmed that it had been established long before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, though for security and organizational reasons no specific date has been revealed. Most of the front's members were Ajam Shi'ites of Iranian origin. In contrast, Shi'ites of Arab origin tended to be linked to the Islamic Dawa Party in Iraq, and would later form the Bahrain Freedom Movement.

The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain outlined its demands in its first statement, which was published on 5 October 1979. These included the right to self-determination without pressure from the US or other global powers, the release of political prisoners, permitting the free and independent exercise of religious activities, including those tied to the Risali Movement, removing US bases from Bahrain, allowing the people to act with

free will in making decisions for the Muslim world and community (*ummah*), and expelling foreign advisors. These demands later expanded to include the overthrowing of the regime and the establishing of an Islamic Republic in Bahrain. The front received material support and media backing from the Islamic Republic in Iran and has been actively involved in media activities through its office in Tehran, where it published a number of journals including *al-Sha'b al-Tha'ir* [The People's Uprising], *al-Bayinna* [The Evidence], *Bahrain*, and *al-Thawra al-Risaliyya* [The *Risali* Revolution], which served as the mouthpiece of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain.

The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain utilized Shi'ite religious occasions to promote its slogans such as "Neither east nor west, but an Islamic republic" or "Our struggle is for Hussein, our leader is Khomeini," and other Islamic Revolutionary slogans from Iran. Traditional Shi'ite institutions such as the Islamic Awareness Society and the Husseini Social Fund, as well as schools and *husseiniya*s, served as springboards for the front. The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain also had close ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran and received political and media support from it. The front, in turn, considered Iran's war with Iraq to be its own battle and sent volunteers to fight on that front for Iran. It also set up joint organizations with Iran such as the Muslim Students' Union and the International Organization for the Islamic Revolution. The front has strong ties with fundamentalist Shi'ite groups in the Arab world such as

the Islamic Action Organization and the Islamic Jihad Organization in Iraq, the Amal Movement and Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Organization for the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula and Hezbollah al-Hejaz in Saudi Arabia, and Hezbollah in Kuwait.[7]

7. The Bahrain Freedom Movement: This movement was founded in 1982 after the government cracked down on other centers such as the Islamic Awareness Society, which was the religious front of the Islamic Dawa Party. Many members of that party were arrested, which led to internal dialogues during which it was agreed that a new political initiative was required and that the new organization should be founded abroad with a focus on Bahraini issues and Islamic identity. A group of Shi'ite students who had studied in the UK helped establish the movement. Some of its most prominent leaders included Dr. Saeed al-Shehabi, Dr. Majeed Al Alawi, and Dr. Mansoor al-Jamri. The movement expressed its political stances vis-à-vis the political regime in Bahrain through its monthly publication *Sawt al-Bahrain*, which was first published in London in January 1983, and which is the main outlet for the group.

The Bahrain Freedom Movement is a reformist Shi'ite political organization. It does not want to overthrow the ruling regime, but rather calls for a return to democracy, for

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7. Falah al-Mudaires, *Political Movements and Groups in Bahrain 1938-2002,* Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya, Lebanon (Beirut), p. 101-109.

the release of political prisoners, and for the guaranteeing of public freedoms. It has a broad follower base among Shi'ites in Bahrain, especially since it publishes its materials from London and Beirut (unlike the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, which releases its statements from Tehran). The Bahrain Freedom Movement is very popular among Bahraini Shi'ites and was also the main group leading the popular protests in Bahrain in 1995. The movement succeeded in building ties with leaders from the Sunni Islamic current via the Islamic Society during the constitutional uprisings of 1992 and 1994. It uses London as its base for mobilizing against the regime in Bahrain and has been able to establish ties with European parliaments and international human rights committees. The movement has avoided attacking GCC countries directly and does not criticize the presence of US forces in Bahrain or in the GCC, in contrast to the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain.[8]

8. Hezbollah - Bahrain: In June 1996, the Bahraini government discovered that there was a Bahraini branch of Hezbollah. It arrested many Shi'ite Bahrainis and accused them of belonging to this organization and of inciting the violent militant actions that Bahrain had experienced during the constitutional uprising. Hezbollah-Bahrain is one of Hezbollah's branches in Arab countries with Shi'ite minorities, including Hezbollah in Lebanon,

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8. Ibid., 118.

Hezbollah al-Hejaz, and Hezbollah in Kuwait. *Al-Naser,* a magazine published by Hezbollah in Kuwait, indicated that Hezbollah in Bahrain was founded later than some of the other branches. The magazine has sharply criticized Bahraini religious organizations, which are aligned with *the Islamic Action Organization* and the Islamic *Dawa* Party, for their reformist approach and for not being in line with the Hezbollah and Iranian party line. *Al-Naser* claimed that the Islamic Dawa Party was backing the reformist current and that it had dissuaded the latter from pursuing jihad, either by defending the Islamic community, or by fighting injustice. The magazine went on to say that the Islamic Dawa Party was deterring the movement in Bahrain from political confrontation. According to al-Naser, they demanded democracy in the form of a Bahraini constitution that would delineate the colonizer's power. It concluded that Islam had been left behind and that Bahrain no longer followed the Imam's line.[9]

9. The Constitutional Movement: After the end of the Second Gulf War, a political movement emerged in Bahrain that involved all opposition forces. This began with submitting petitions to the government and holding political meetings both in the halls of the state and in the mosques, as it happened in Kuwait during the constitutional process following the dissolution of the National Assembly in 1986. The goal of this movement was to demand the

9. Falah al-Mudaires, *Political Movements and Groups in Bahrain 1938-2002,* Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya, Lebanon (Beirut), p. 108.

implementation of the constitution and to reconvene the parliamentary body known as the National Assembly, which had been unconstitutionally dissolved in 1975. In 1992, the opposition began to take action when 300 people from different political and religious backgrounds submitted a petition to the Emir of Bahrain demanding that general elections be held for the National Assembly. However, the emir refused to comply with these demands. After the Consultative Council was appointed and the democratic process was rejected, the political situation between the government and the opposition became tense. The political forces formed the constitutional movement, which included almost thirty people, including members of nationalist, democratic, and religious forces.

Following the constitutional movement's opposition activities, the emir stated that the National Assembly would remain the country's legislative authority but that it was intended to serve only in an advisory capacity. Meanwhile, the emir would exercise the powers vested in him by the constitution, and the constitution would take precedence over the National Charter. Despite these promises, things did not go as the constitutional movement had hoped. A year later, the emir held a referendum to change the basic articles of the 1973 constitution, which was met with opposition from leftist and Shi'ite groups.

10. Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society: This was the most prominent Bahraini opposition group and has often been described as the successor to the Bahrain Freedom Move-

ment, which was the main driver for protests demanding the return of parliamentary life between 1994 and 1998. Al-Wefaq was the main Shi'ite organization in Bahrain at the time and was officially established in 2001 after the King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa issued a general pardon and the group's leaders returned from exile in London. Al-Wefaq became the largest political association in Bahrain.

Al-Wefaq is led by Shaykh Ali Salman, but a document published by WikiLeaks dating from 2008 indicated that the Bahraini Shi'ite *marja* Isa Qassim was a key backer for the group.[10] We will discuss the history of al-Wefaq in more detail in the next section.

Iran and Shi'ite Political Islam in Bahrain

Shi'ite political leaders were openly sympathetic to the Islamic Revolution in Iran. They spoke in favor of the revolution and some leaders visited Imam Khomeini in his exile outside Paris in the village of Neauphle-le-Château. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, a delegation of notables and religious scholars (*'ulama)* went to Tehran to congratulate Khomeini on the victory of his revolution. These included among others Shaykh Isa Ahmed Qassim, a leader of a Shi'ite political Islam group, and Shaykh Abdul Amir al-Jamri.

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10. "Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society" on https://www.aljazeera.net, Accessed on 20 May 2022.

Until this point in time there had been no confrontation between the government and the Shi'ite current. There were two main incidents that marked the beginning of this confrontation: The first was the arrest of Shaykh Mohammed Ali al-Ekri in September 1979 upon his return from Iran via Kuwait, and the second was the execution of Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr in Iraq.

The first incident marked the first time that the state security law was used against Islamic activists, after it had previously been used against leftists for years. This law was rejected by nationalists and Islamists alike in October 1974 in the National Assembly and was one of the main reasons for the assembly's dissolution. After al-Sadr's execution, the Islamic Dawa Organization encouraged people to go out to protest in April 1980. This resulted in the arrest of hundreds and the death of two Shi'ite political prisoners, Jameel al-Ali (in May 1980) and Karim al-Habashi under torture a month later. Relations remain tense between the two sides until this day.[11]

What does this all mean? To answer that question, we might turn to the work of the anthropologist Fuad Khuri, who described the rural Shi'ite character of Bahrain's religious bloc. This mirrors the findings of French scholar Laurence Louer, who compared the Islamic Dawa Party with the

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11. Saeed al-Shehabi, *The Shi'ites of Bahrain and Iran*, published on the *Arabi21* website, Accessed on 8 May 2002, bit.ly/3aFyS7E.

Shirazis in Bahrain. She draws attention to the paradox that the Islamic Dawa Party was supposed to be an urban party in Iraq, where it was a regional urban movement that opposed leftist, nationalist, and Ottoman urban political movements. However, the Islamic Dawa Party in Bahrain began as a rural phenomenon that did not expand to the cities until later. For its part, the Shirazi current spread from cities to villages. It started in Manama and then expanded to villages such as Bani Jamra, which was a stronghold for this current.[12]

The first building blocks of the first modern Islamic movement appeared in 1968 through a proposal to establish a modern religious society. However, the official permit for the group was not issued until after independence. In May 1972, the Islamic Awareness Society was officially established and became the starting point for far-reaching Islamic work during the 1970s. The society was established by the largest Shi'ite current, which became more fully developed through parliamentary work.[13] During this time, the society had eight Islamic representatives who were known as the religious bloc (as opposed to the leftist or the government blocs). The society functioned as an extension of the Islamic Dawa Party in Iraq, and focused on education,

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12. Ibid., p. 140.
13. Saeed al-Shehabi, *The Shi'ites of Bahrain: Emergence, Growth, and Prospects*, published on the *Arabi21* website, Accessed on 8 May 2022, bit. ly/3H7eYyd.

outreach, social work, and promoting its religious work. It was active from 1972 to February 1984, when it was closed down and its doors were sealed with red wax.

Shi'ite political Islam has been on the rise since the early 1970s. It was aligned with the Shi'ite *marja* in Iraq and followed the jurisprudence of the leading religious authority as determined by the jurists in Najaf. When the Islamic Dawa Party was established in Bahrain in the late 1960s, it was aligned with the *marja* Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim. After his death, the role was passed on to Abu al-Qasim Khoei, whom most Shi'ites around the world considered their spiritual leader. Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr also became a prominent *marja* and was seen as the main representative of Shi'ite political Islam, especially since he had been one of the founders of the Islamic Dawa Party in 1956. Few emerged to challenge these leaders, but in the first half of the 1970s the political arena experienced divisions after a religious scholar declared himself to be a rival *marja* to Khoei. During this time, the Risali Movement, which is also known as the Shirazis (after their *marja*, Muhammad al-Shirazi), emerged. This current gradually began to carry out social and religious activity in Bahrain and became influential among youth groups in various areas.[14]

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14. Saeed al-Shehabi, *The Shi'ites of Bahrain: Emergence, Growth, and Prospects*, published on the *Arabi21* website, Accessed on 8 May 2022, bit.ly/3H7eYyd.

While the Islamic Dawa Party was emerging in rural Shi'ite areas, the Shirazi current was gaining a foothold in primarily urban Shi'ite circles. The initial impetus for this current came from the prominent al-Alawi family in Manama, particularly Mohammed al-Alawi (and later Jaafar al-Alawi), who visited Karbala in the late 1960s and met the Shirazi *marja*, Muhammad al-Hussein al-Shirazi.[15]

Laurence Louer has observed that Mohammed al-Alawi, upon his return to Bahrain, founded the first Islamic society for the Shirazi current, the Islamic Guidance Society, which had 200 members. He also organized Hadi al-Modarresi's visit to Bahrain in 1970. Al-Modarresi was given a place to stay near the heart of Manama, the *husseiniya*s of al-Ajam, and the Hoora graveyard mosque. He gave lectures on Bahraini television and was involved in stirring up revolutionary discourse which ultimately sparked the beginnings of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. This front was founded in 1979, a time during which Manama attracted many Shirazi leaders. In April 1973, Hassan al-Shirazi, the brother of *marja* Muhammad al-Hussein al-Shirazi, came to Bahrain and gave many lectures in the *husseiniya*s of Ahsaiyyin, al-Qassab, and al-Ajam al-Kabir.[16]

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15. Nader Kadhim, *Historical Social Transformations in the City of Manama: Demographic Considerations, Islamization, and Commercialization,* published in issue 28 (spring 2019) of *Umran* magazine (p. 7-33). This quarterly peer-reviewed social science journal is published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.
16. Laurence Louer, *Transnational* Shi'ite *Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (London: Hurst, 2008), p. 129.

Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society

During the last five decades, Bahrain experienced various transformations in its domestic politics, most significantly the passage of the 1973 constitution. This was followed about two years later by the suspension of parliamentary life in 1975. In 1994, the "uprising of dignity" broke out during the same year in which the Bahrain Freedom Movement called for the implementation of the 1973 constitution and the return of parliamentary life (which had been suspended since 1975). It also called for establishing a constitution grounded in increased popular participation in governance. In 1999, the Bahrain Freedom Movement was dissolved and Shaykh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa came to power with clear plans to restore democratic life. He proposed an initiative known as the National Action Charter which was put to a vote in 2001.

At first, the National Action Charter was not accepted by the banned Bahrain Freedom Movement. After it had been approved from the opposition, the National Action Charter was put to a popular referendum, and nearly all qualified voters participated in the democratic process. The charter was approved by a popular vote, and many considered this a new beginning in establishing democracy in Bahrain. In early 2001, during the voting on the National Action Charter, detainees were released and exiled persons were allowed to return to Bahrain. The al-Wefaq and Dawa currents became popular among Shi'ites and swept through key mosques and *husseiniya*s across the country, with very few exceptions.

In any case, the charter received very broad approval. Over 200 religious clerics who had been in Qom returned from a long exile, and their return had a noticeable impact on the discourse in mosques and *husseiniya*s. Likewise, terms the usage of which had receded in the 1990s quickly reappeared after the return of the clerics from Qom. This resulted in various changes. For example, the *husseiniya*s were filled with images of Iranian religious leaders, which caused political embarrassment on the Bahraini side; Bahraini Shi'ite leaders were unable to explain how this had happened in a *husseiniya* that was supposed to be under their leadership. At the same time, they could not easily remove these images because they were afraid of causing internal discord (*fitna*). However, many felt this would not cause political problems because it was a purely religious issue.

Establishment of the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society

Supporters of the Bahrain Freedom Movement began to think about the need to establish an organization to represent them that could be recognized under Bahraini law and founded the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society. In their view, this society embodied the aspirations of many Bahrainis. Many of the founders of the Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society felt that the fundamentals of the group had been set years ago, prior to its formal establishment. The events of the 1990s provided a solid foundation for the establishment of interconnected core groups, which were jointly conducting political work. These pre-existing core-

groups found themselves discussing the idea of al-Wefaq before the party itself was officially established in 2001.[17]

One of the most important figures who returned from Qom after voting on the National Action Charter of 2001 was Shaykh Isa Ahmed Qassim, who led al-Wefaq from 1978 to 1991, when he decided to join the seminary (*hawza*) in Qom. Qassim returned at the same time that Abdul Amir al-Jamri fell ill—who had a stroke in May 2002—and so Qassim returned to assume leadership of the group. Qassim initially tried to establish a group for religious scholars ('*ulama*) led by seven major scholars who had issued a statement during the municipal elections of May 2002. The number of scholars involved in the initiative felt to two (Qassim and al-Ghuraifi) after al-Jamri's illness and the withdrawal of the others. This small core formed the beginning of the *Ulama Islamic Council (the Scholars' Islamic Council)*.

Meanwhile, several elite activists were holding meetings among themselves and the internal trends within the Dawa and al-Wefaq became more diverse. Some called for the rule of religious scholars ('*ulama*) only, as per the principle of the Islamic jourist (*Velayat-e Faqih)*, while others welcomed all qualified individuals, regardless of whether those happened to be religious scholars or otherwise qualified. In general, the activists, many of whom were "technocrats," realized

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17. Interview by Abdullah Al-Jbour with several founders of al-Wefaq National Islamic Society.

the need for a collective agreement on this matter, and that is how the name *al-Wefaq* (which means consensus in the Arabic) came to be.

Why al-Wefaq?

One of the most important and controversial issues facing the group that became the Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society was choosing the organization's official name. According to al-Wefaq representative and founder Mohammed Jamil al-Jamri, the name "al-Wefaq" was one of several suggestions during a meeting held at the Saar Club. The proposed names were discussed individually and a majority of members agreed upon al-Wefaq as the name of the organization. Al-Sitri said that the decision stemmed from the awareness that the Bahraini people wanted consensus despite all of their differences. Jalal Fairooz said that al-Wefaq had been formed during a very difficult period but that there was cooperation between groups with divergent visions, and that was why they felt that al-Wefaq was a good name to encompass these different approaches.

A series of meetings were held in late February 2001 to discuss how to take the political struggle to the next stage. During these meetings, different points of view began to emerge regarding the importance of having the same leaders continue their work or forming a political association. The King of Bahrain supported these efforts at the time, and the meetings continued to be held in various homes. Approximately 16 persons attended these meetings,

including Abdulwahab Hussein, Hussein al-Daihi, Shaykh Hassan Sultan, Ali al-Araibi, Sayyid Majid Sayyid Ali, Mohammed Jamil al-Jamri, and others.

The negotiations around forming an association became more serious after the summer of 2001. The participants invited leading figures to a general meeting to discuss the issue. The first meeting was held in Saar Club in July 2001 with 83 people in attendance. During this meeting, the name of the society was agreed upon, and various political actors with similar approaches joined the organization. During this time, Shaykh Ali Salman (who later became secretary-general of al-Wefaq) returned to Bahrain to participate in meetings that were being held to fully conceptualize the society's work. A committee which included Salman, Sayyid Majid Sayyid Ali, and Jalal Fairooz was established to determine the relevant criteria and to choose the names of members who would help elect the two working committees.[18]

1. Al-Wefaq's Islamic Vision for Conducting Political and Social Work: Al-Wefaq held its first conference in September 2001 in the Shahrazad Hall on al-Badia street. There were around 106 attendees from among the 111 who had been invited to found the al-Wefaq Society. Five individuals who had been invited did not attend this meeting because they were not in Bahrain at the time. A second meeting was held

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18. See the documentary on the *Ma'lat al-Nass* [Connotations of the Text] program on al-Araby TV*, written by Abdullah Al-Jbour, YouTube, 2019/6/10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IQlKSoHWnI.

in November 2001 that resulted in officially establishing al-Wefaq. The preparatory committee then held several meetings to determine the basic structure of al-Wefaq, which was also a specialized committee helped oversee.

Al-Wefaq carries out its political, social and economic work in accordance with its founding documents, through individual and societal responsibility to participate in decision-making, manage the country's affairs, and participate in legislative, executive, and judicial governance. It takes an interest in political, economic, and social affairs, defending public funds, and fighting corruption in accordance with directing what is right and forbidding what is wrong.

In adhering to the constitution and the National Action Charter, respecting the rule of law, justice, and equality, and rejecting discrimination and violence in all its forms, al-Wefaq affirmed its focus on justice and equality among citizens in accessing all their rights and duties, as well as on equitable distribution of resources and electoral districts in order to ensure equal opportunities and that every citizen has an equal voice.

It also declared the absence of organizational or financial ties with any entity outside Bahrain, and that the group did not conduct any of its activities under orders from any foreign country or entity. It also committed itself to maintaining the independence and security of the Kingdom and acknowledged the importance of safeguarding national unity. Al-Wefaq emphasized the principle of national unity

and the need to act cohesively and in cooperation with governmental institutions and civil society organizations by the guidance of God and to refrain from disagreement or division. It also vowed to offer criticism and advice to the officials in such a way that would serve the best interests of the country and of its citizens, preserve the independence and security of the kingdom, and protect national unity.[19]

2. Ideological Orientation and Political Trajectory: Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society is a Shi'ite organization that follows the direction of the Ulama Islamic Council *(the Scholars' Islamic Council)*. The General Congress is considered the society's highest authority and can edit its basic laws and elect its general secretary and deputy. It also selects the members of the Consultative Council and the arbitration tribunal in resolving disputes within the organization.

Al-Wefaq represents many different Shi'ite currents and represents a mixture of the Islamic Dawa, Islamic jurists (*Velayat e-Faqih)*, and a number of the technocratic Shiites. It boycotted the 2002 elections as part of a four-way opposition alliance to protest the mechanism for drawing up the 2003 constitution and because it rejected the government's appointment of a parallel council that existed alongside the elected parliament and had the same powers.

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19. See the documentary on the *Ma'lat al-Nass* [Connotations of the Text] program on al-Araby TV, written by Abdullah Al-Jbour, YouTube, 2019/6/10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IQlKSoHWnI.

3. Parliament and Internal Divisions in al-Wefaq:
The fourteenth round of elections in Bahrain was held in February 2002 and included voting on a new constitution that changed the form of governance in Bahrain to a monarchy. As a result, Shaykh Hamad bin Isa became king of Bahrain. The al-Wefaq Society boycotted the elections in 2002 but participated in the elections of 2006.

Al-Wefaq experienced internal divisions in 2005 and 2006 after Hasan Mushaima formed the Haqq Movement following disputes over whether to participate in the legislative elections of 2006. The society ultimately chose to participate and won 17 seats, forming the largest parliamentary bloc. It also participated in the parliamentary elections of 2010 and won 18 seats. Days after protests began in Bahrain on 14 February 2011 demanding political and constitutional reform, the society decided to suspend its participation in parliament to protest the killing of some of the protestors. It demanded that the army and security forces withdraw from *the Pearl Roundabout (Lulu Roundabout)* where protestors had staged a sit-in. As the protests continued, the representatives resigned from parliament after claiming that the government had responded to just political demands with "massacres and terrorism."

During the last fifteen years of its political work, the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society (2001-2016) has experienced two internal schisms. The first was led by Hasan Mushaima and was caused by his accusations that al-Wefaq was being too soft on certain political issues and that it had not responded

to the public's concerns. The second rift was led by Nazar al-Baharna, who accused the group of extremism and a lack of political flexibility. Mushaima went on to found the Haqq Movement, which attracted many disaffected youth. The al-Wafa' current also emerged from within the society, led by activist Abdulwahab Hussein, while al-Baharna's Justice and Development Movement never came to fruition.

Al-Wefaq candidates won seventeen of forty seats in the November 2006 elections and became the largest parliamentary bloc, led by its secretary general Ali Salman. However, many felt that al-Wefaq's political participation did not result in any serious gains. The Haqq Movement, an opposition group that had previously split off from al-Wefaq, was a particularly vocal critic of al-Wefaq's parliamentary performance.

Al-Wefaq had limited legislative powers within the parliamentary system in Bahrain. The power of the forty elected representatives was largely eclipsed by that of the Consultative Council's representatives, who were appointed by the king. However, al-Wefaq's participation still had positive ramifications for government policy in various spheres. For example, government investment in providing housing increased, which had been a priority for al-Wefaq candidates, since it was rare in Bahrain to receive housing support or mortgages.[20]

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20. "Assessing al-Wefaq's Parliamentary Experiment in Bahrain," Jane Kinninmont, an economic expert and editor specialized in Middle Eastern affairs, published on the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace website, 2008, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/21244.

When al-Wefaq was founded in 2001, a constitution was approved by associations recognized by the government of Bahrain. This meant that al-Wefaq recognized the constitution on which the state was founded. After boycotting the 2002 elections on amending the constitution, the al-Wefaq Society decided to participate in the 2006 parliamentary elections, which meant accepting the amended constitution of 2002.

Al-Wefaq Society members said that one of the most important reasons for rejecting the constitution of 2002 was their demand for a peaceful transfer of power. They felt that the government had committed errors when they presented these demands, and that al-Wefaq Society would endeavor to change the ruling family. Many scholars and researchers think that the al-Wefaq candidates drew upon the principle of *taqiya* (precautionary dissimulation) when they participated in the 2006 elections under the constitution that they had rejected in 2002.

4. Barring and Disbanding the al-Wefaq Society: Since the protests began, al-Wefaq has specified their demands with regard to establishing a constitutional monarchy in which the people elect ministers, and that the government should be held accountable to the representatives and not the king. They also called for a new constitution to take the place of the 2002 document and insisted on the dismissal of the government as a condition for participating in a dialogue

in which the king had invited them to participate. That same year, the society became involved in two main alliances with various opposition forces known as the four-way and six-way coalitions. This was an effort to exert pressure on the Bahraini government through boycotting the elections. However, these alliances were ultimately broken up.

Surprisingly, various protestors sympathetic to the al-Wefaq Society were chanting Shi'ite-specific slogans and criticizing al-Wefaq. They accused the society of receiving support or even orders from the Lebanese Hezbollah, particularly during the uprising against the Bahraini government. Whether al-Wefaq was accused of being linked to Hezbollah or Shi'ite religious authorities (*marja*), in both cases, according to specialists, it had ties to Iran.

There were clashes between Bahraini protestors who supported al-Wefaq, and security forces, which led to bloodshed and violence. On more than one occasion, al-Wefaq was accused of plotting terrorist acts or even carrying them out. After the Arab Spring and al-Wefaq's involvement in the Bahraini revolution and boycott of the legislative and municipal elections of 22 November 2014, Ali Salman, the general secretary of al-Wefaq, said that the ballot box could not reflect the true will of the people until districts were fairly distributed.[21]

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21. Jane Kinninmont, "Assessing al-Wefaq's Parliamentary Experiment in Bahrain."

Given the deteriorating relations between al-Wefaq and the Bahraini government, the first administrative court of Bahrain issued a ruling on 28 October 2014 to halt al-Wefaq's activities for three months. They called on this Shi'ite opposition group to rectify their status and to cease committing violations. The court's decision was the result of a case filed by the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs and Waqf, Shaykh Ali Al Khalifa, that called for suspending the activities of both al-Wefaq and the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad). Both groups boycotted the elections held in November 2014.

On 14 June 2016, the Bahraini government issued a decision to dissolve the al-Wefaq Society and announced that it was operating outside the law. This led a number of its leaders to flee abroad, where they formed an opposition front in exile that remained influential in Bahraini society. These leaders monitor human rights violations within Bahrain and exert influence over stakeholders in the international community including human rights organizations. They now carry out political outreach remotely.

Relations Between al-Wefaq and the Regime after the Dissolution Order

On 1 November 2017, the Bahraini public prosecution filed a new accusation against Shaykh Ali Salman related to allegedly communicating with Qatar to carry out hostile acts in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which had experienced an upheaval for more than six years. The prosecution stated that it would summon Salman, after which it interrogated him

and "showed him the evidence" regarding the investigations taking place. This pertained to calls that had allegedly taken place between Salman and Qatari officials prior to the protests calling for change in Bahrain during 2011. The prosecution accused Salman of seeking to collaborate with a foreign country and its agents in undertaking hostile acts against Bahrain to harm its political, economic, and military status and national interests. It also accused him of divulging defense secrets to a foreign country and spreading false reports and news abroad about internal affairs of the state in order to undermine its prestige.

The Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the Bahraini allegations and denounced being brought into internal political disputes in Bahrain.[22] It clarified in a statement issued on 18 June 2017 that the calls in question had taken place with the knowledge and approval of the authorities in Manama as part of Doha's mediation efforts after the protests in Bahrain in 2011.[23]

Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the most important points about the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society is that it has defined itself from the beginning as an extension of the Iraqi Shi'ite Islamic Dawa Party. Many of the group's critics, including the political regime in Bahrain, have been concerned about the new relationship forged between the society and religion.

22. Statement from Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, https://goo.gl/MzdVAu.
23. Aljazeera.net, https://goo.gl/vVYNbJ.

Its critics worry that that al-Wefaq will not tolerate "the other" who is different, work with those who do not share their views, or embrace religious, political, and cultural pluralism. In the beginning, membership in al-Wefaq was limited to Shi'ites only, which it attributed to its identity as a religious rather than a nationalist association.

The dissolution of al-Wefaq, the arrest of some of its leading figures, and the persecution of others has contributed to the emergence of a powerful opposition front in exile that has good relations with influential human rights organizations in Europe and the UN. Al-Wefaq now has a capacity for political outreach unlike other political movements in Bahrain or elsewhere and retains political influence over Bahraini society. Al-Wefaq has played a major role in mobilizing the Bahraini public, including during some of the protests, through forming small groups and reaching out to human rights organizations. We cannot ignore that al-Wefaq has aimed to develop its political program in recent years and has demonstrably shifted towards a civil ideology and identity.

Despite popular support for the demands made by political forces and Shi'ite organizations in Bahrain, the government has not shown any signs of compromising with the opposition. On the contrary, we can see that there are sharp political divides in Bahraini society which have exacerbated the ongoing political instability in this small Gulf country.

Although the new generation appears less engaged in religion, political Islam and religious identity continue to have profound resonance in Shi'ite societies, including Bahrain. The implications of what Foucault called "political spirituality" remain relevant, especially with regard to the turbulent relations between the society and the state, and the failure to deal with issues of political identity, which has resulted in exclusion, marginalization, and even violence.

Chapter VI

Shi'ite Geopolitics: Exporting the Revolution and Challenges of a Changing Environment

Iranian Foreign Policy and the Question of Exporting the Revolution

Emad Abshenass

Introduction

Perhaps we should first explore, if only briefly, the reasons for the Iranian orientation towards Shi'ism and the roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Let us see why some voices were raised at the beginning of the revolution in Iran calling to export the revolution, what these voices meant by exporting the revolution, and what Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei had in mind for the concept of exporting the revolution.

The beginning of political Shi'ism in Iran

After Islam arrived in Iran and the Umayyad caliphs took control of the Islamic government, the Shi'ite movement in Iran began to emerge in tandem with political opposition to the regime ruling Iran and to the regimes ruling the Islamic World in general. One of the reasons for the emergence of Shi'ism in Iran could be that many of those with ideas opposed to the regimes established over Islamic territories were able to escape to Iran to keep their distance from the authority of the central government.

It can be said that the signs of the influence of the revolutionary Shi'ite thought on Iranians appeared with the emergence of Abu Muslim al-Khurasani from the Khorasan

region of Iran. He came out of Merv[1] (now the capital of the Mary Region in Tajikistan) in order to topple the Umayyad government and bring the Abbasids to power.

At the time, Abd al-Rahman Al-Khurasani (Abu Muslim) faced opposition from some senior Shi'ite imams and religious figures who refused to participate in political action. They opposed the thought of Ibrahim al-Imam, who was working in Kufa to promote Shi'ism and political action with a vision to overthrow the Umayyad government.[2] Most Shi'ite religious authorities believed that they should wait for the Mahdi to come and form the Government of Divine Justice. In their view, any premature action to form an Islamic government could lead to a delay in the Mahdi's appearance, and that everyone would retreat from that goal due to the absence of a divine justice government ruled by the Mahdi. This view still exists among many Shi'ite scholars. Before the Iranian Revolution, a movement called the Hojjatie Society opposed the formation of an Islamic government before the appearance of the Mahdi,[3] and Khomeini was forced to threaten their leader with declaring them infidels and executing them all unless the Society was dissolved. Although the leader of the Hojjatie Society, Sheikh Mahmoud Halabi,[4] announced the dissolution

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1. Abd al-Aziz Duri, *Stories of the Abbasid Caliphate*; Dar Altaleaa for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, 1971, p. 272.

2. Ibid., p. 270.

3. Emadeddin Baghi, *In Recognition of the Qa'idin Party*; Dar al-hawza al-'Ilmiyya (Qom), 1982, p. 127.

4. Ezzatollah Nowzari, تاريخ أحزاب سياسي در ايران; Dar Navid (Shiraz), 1987, p. 140.

of the Society, to date there are several Iranian political figures accused of belonging to the Society, including many supporters of former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, for example.[5]

In any case, Abu Muslim al-Khurasani gained his power and influence from Ibrahim al-Imam after he was made a missionary in Khorasan in 745 CE and toppled the Umayyad government in 750 CE.

Political Shi'ism is not a recent topic but has existed since the beginning of Islam. We see that in practical terms, it was in the year 128 AH (745 CE) that the world witnessed the first Shi'ite political movement to lead to the fall of a ruling regime. The movement spread out of Kufa, and then Iraq, to reach far northeastern Iran (now Tajikistan), then toppled the Levantine government and set down roots in Baghdad.

In practical terms, the Iranians supported Abu Muslim al-Khurasani's missionary call at the time because they wanted to be no longer under Arab rule, and not for religious or sectarian reasons.[6]

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5. Center for the Study of Islamic Science and Culture. http://www.dte.ir/portal/home/?news/

6. This view has been advocated by Jawad al-Ali in his book *The History of Arabs in Islam*, Ahmad Amin in his book *The Dawn of Islam*, Orientalist Carl Brockelmann in his book *History of the Islamic Peoples*, Ali Hussein al-Kharboutli in his book *Ten Revolutions in Islam*, and Ahmad Abbas Saleh in his book *The Left and the Right in Islam*. See Wadi' Bashur, *Syria: The Making of a State and the Birth of a Nation*; Dar al-Yazaji (Damascus), 1994, p. 160.

Political Shi'ism with the Ismaili movement in Iran

We see that the Iranians were later influenced by Ismaili'ism,[7] a Shi'ite political movement that came from Fatimid Egypt and spread across Yemen. Led by Hasan-i Sabbah, it was known as *the Hashasheen (or the Assassins)* movement and conducted Shi'ite (but non-Twelver) revolutionary actions against the ruling regime, which was loyal to the caliph in Baghdad at the time.[8]

Despite the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate and the Mongol destruction of the Ismailis' headquarters in the city of Alamut, near Qazvin in western Iran, Shi'ite movements remained in Iran as a fiery sectarian and revolutionary movement. The revolutionaries were generally affiliated with Shi'ism.

The Safavids and the Shi'ization of the Iranians

We see that because of the presence of a Shi'ite revolutionary movement spreading across the whole country, the Safavid Shah Ismail took advantage of the Shi'ite affiliation of many opposition members and revolutionaries. When he established his state, he imposed Shi'ism on all Iranians to win the Shi'ite revolutionaries to his side and to unite the various Iranian ethnic groups, which had been fighting one another, under the banner of embracing Shi'ism and thereby setting aside ethnicity. Shah Ismail imposed

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7. Morteza Ravandi, *A Social History of Iran*, San Khoza Publishing House (Stockholm), 1991, Vol. 9, p. 82.
8. Paul Amir, *The Lord of Alamut (Hasan-i Sabbah)*.

Twelver Shi'ism on the Iranians to counteract the divisions that existed even among the revolutionary Shi'ites, most of whom were Ismaili or Zaydi.[9]

Nonetheless, Shah Ismail was not principally a sectarian man but rather a statesman who needed to unite the Iranians to counter Arab and Ottoman influence in Iran. That influence had divided different tribes and ethnic groups and pitted them against one another so that Iran could not be united and stand firm. Many Iranians were influenced by their religious affiliation, which linked them to clerics in Baghdad or Mecca, or Ottoman fatwas on their ethnicities.[10]

We see that Shah Ismail and other Iranian kings were forced to call on Shi'ite scholars from other countries in the region, such as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq (especially Kufa), Turkey, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Yemen, and even Pakistan and India, to come and settle in Iran and to promote Shi'ism among the Iranian people.[11] [12]

Here, we can say that the issue of Shi'ite influence in the region has generally prevailed over the issue of ethnicity. We believe that historically political Shi'ism in general has known no boundaries.

9. A collection of articles on the Shi'ization of the Iranians by the Safavids: https://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/keyword/
10. "Shah Ismail was not sectarian, and his government was not religious". https://www.ilna.news/
11. "How were the Iranians Shi'ized?". https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/
12. Hussein Noor Ahmedi and Ali Babaei Siab, "The Iranians and the Effect of Kufa in their Shi'ization," A Quarterly for Shi'a Studies, Issue 39, 2011, Dar Muasesah Shi'ah Shinasi.

Political Shi'ism under Qajar rule

Later, during the Qajar era, Iran became more closed up under this policy. The confinement of the Iranians within their borders and their creed, in which they differed from the rest of the region's peoples has made them isolated. That is, until Mirza Muhammad Taghi Khan-e Farhani (known as Amir Kabir), the chief minister to Shah Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, sent groups of Iranian youth to other countries to study modern sciences. In practical terms, the Iranian youth became acquainted with different types of governments,[13] and their philosophical ideas intermingled with the ideas of European peoples and delegates of Eastern governments such as India, Arab countries such as Egypt, and Islamic countries such as Turkey. These young people, who were meant to bring modern engineering and medical technology back to the country, brought back political ideas and philosophies that had not existed in Iran. Accordingly, they started to demand change in the Iranian political system, on the premise that the country would not evolve without change in the system of government and the abandonment of absolute monarchy. They also wanted to change the social and cultural systems of the country, which were sometimes met with opposition on behalf of religious scholars.

In response to this political wave, the Qajar shahs were forced to rely on Shi'ite clerics and to grant them a greater

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13. Dennis Wright, *The Persians Amongst the English: Episodes in Anglo-Persian History*; I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. (London), 1985, pp. 70–82.

political role, whereas previously they had restricted Shi'ite clerics' activities to religious and doctrinal matters only. This had even led Mirza Abu'l-Qasem, the imam of the Tehran Mosque, to issue a *fatwa*[14] to kill Amir Kabir.[15] Here, we see that political Shi'ism started once again to demonstrate its influence.

The Constitutional Revolution

In spite of all the Shah's efforts to stop the movements calling for fundamental political change in the country, the stream that championed the formation of a constitutional monarchy ultimately succeeded in carrying out constitutional revolution. This group would not have succeeded, if it had not managed behind the scenes, to convince Shi'ite clerics to cooperate with it[16] by giving them a role in governing the country. Accordingly, we see that the governance of the country was distributed among four pillars – the monarchy, the army, the bazaar merchants, and the clerics – all of which trying to reduce the monarchy's power and to open an avenue for an elite of intellectuals to be another one of the pillars of governance in the country. For the first time in Iran, a parliament was formed, elected by the people and with powers enabling it to stand up to the shah. The

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14. Fatwa: A formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar.
15. Fereydun Adamiyat, *Amir Kabir and Iran*, Khwarzmi Publishing House (Tehran), 2018, p. 334.
16. Imam Khomeini, *Nūr* newspaper, Vol. 7, page 205.
    http://lib.eshia.ir/

idea had been imported from the system of government in Britain. To guarantee an effective role for Shi'ite clerics, a consultative body was formed to revise laws enacted by Parliament so that they conform with Islamic Shari'a law. After the Revolution, this body became the Guardian Council.

The clerics, however, soon arranged with the monarchists to divide power between themselves. We see that when Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was then the commander of the army, tried to change the system of government in the country and to transform it into a republic like France or Turkey, the first to stand against him was Ayatollah Modarres, who insisted on preserving the monarchy in Iran.[17]

We see that after the Reza Shah-led army came to power in the country, he as the new shah weakened the clerics' role in governance and politics. Ayatollah Modarres, who led the Shi'ite political movement in the country, was assassinated, and religious scholars were once again confined to religious schools and mosques. The shah supported clerics who advocated for avoiding politics until the promised appearance of the Mahdi. The founder of the seminary in Qom –Ayatollah Abdolkarim Haeri Yazdi – who was considered one of the top Shi'ite religious authorities; the group that later headed the Qom seminary

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17. Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions, Princeton University* Press198, ISBN 0691101345.

(Mohammad Kuh Kamari, Mohammad Taqi Khansari, and Sadr al-Din al-Sadr, the father of Moussa as-Sadr); and later - Ayatollah Borujerdi, are all known[18] to have opposed clerical involvement in political matters. Former Iranian president Hassan Rouhani even said that Ayatollah Borujerdi prohibited his students from listening to the radio or reading the news out of fear that they would start to demonstrate political opinions.[19]

After Ayatollah Borujerdi's death, the Qom seminary could not be managed by one person due to disagreements among senior clerics. Accordingly, the administration of the seminary, considered an authority for Shi'ites in Iran, was entrusted to Imam Khomeini, Mohammad-Reza Golpaygani, Kazem Shariatmadari, and Shahab al-Din Mar'ashi Najafi. In their era, meaning after 1961, the seminary again began to move toward political Shi'ism generally, propelled by Imam Khomeini.

As we mentioned earlier, political Shi'ism had been represented in the presence of Ayatollah Hassan Modarres and Ayatollah Abol-Ghasem Kashani – two of the senior Shi'ite marjas (religious references, sources of emulation) – in the Parliament established after the Constitutional Revolution. They generally inspired young revolutionaries such as

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18. Hamid Basirat Manesh, *The Ulama and Reza Shah's Regime*, Aruj Printing and Publishing Foundation, (Tehran), 1997, p. 241.
19. Hassan Rouhani, *Memoirs of Dr. Hassan Rouhani*, Center for Support of the Islamic Revolution, 1998, p. 121.

Imam Khomeini, Navvab Safavi, and others to move toward political Shi'ism.

It is known that Mohammad Mossadegh managed to carry out a bloodless coup against Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and to privatize oil, fishing, minerals, etc., with the support of Abol-Ghasem Kashani and other clerics. Then, he fell as soon as they withdrew their support from him.

In any case, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi preferred to deal with and support Shi'ite clerics against the background of the influence of communists and leftists, whom he considered as the greater threat to himself.

It must be noted though that the 1979 Revolution in Iran involved a multitude of political groups; it was not a revolution by a group with a single orientation. We even see that the communists and the secularists were on the same side as the Islamists. In practical terms, the leftists were instrumental in the Revolution, but the Islamists were dominant in the end. The disagreements among the different groups started at the beginning of the Revolution, and armed fighting in the streets began among the groups. Here we can say that Imam Khomeini's charisma and popularity, Saddam Hussein's initiation of the war against Iran, and the Iranian youth joining the front lines to defend the country, and the rising of nationalist and sectarian feelings in society all this resulted in preventing the Revolution from being compromised by internal fighting that could have destroyed it. For this reason, perhaps, Imam Khomeini considered the

war a blessing and an opportunity for the Revolution.[20]

The leftists were convinced that the clerics would not be able to govern and run the country, so they preferred to steer the country from behind the scenes by controlling the system of the state. This is why we see that at the beginning of the Revolution, the left controlled the state in practical terms, while clerics held non-executive positions. The leftists believed that they would be able to remove the clerics from power gradually by controlling the pillars of governance in the country and by isolating them in religious schools and mosques. In the end, however, the opposite happened.

We see that after the Revolution in Iran, Imam Khomeini formed a revolutionary committee[21] to run the country temporarily until the government had stabilized. The committee had members from three currents: the religious

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20. Abdelrazak Ahvazi, *War as a Blessing*, Imam Khomeini Editing and Publishing Institute (Tehran), 2015, p. 322.
21. The members of the revolutionary committee were:
    Morteza Motahhari (right), Mahmoud Taleghani (Islamic left), Mohammad Beheshti (right), Abolhassan Banisadr (Islamic left), Mohammad-Javad Bahonar (right), Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (right), Abdul-Karim Mousavi Ardebili (right), Sayed Ali Khamenei (right), Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani (right), Mehdi Bazargan (religious nationalist), Yadollah Sahabi (religious nationalist) Ezzatollah Sahabi (religious nationalist), Abbas Sheybani(right), Major General Valiollah Qarani (right), Sadegh Ghotbzadeh (Islamic left), Major General Ali-Asghar Masoudi (Islamic left), Mostafa Katiraei (religious nationalist), Ebrahim Yazdi (Islamic left), Habibollah Payman (religious nationalist), Ahmad Jalali (religious nationalist), Mir-Hossein Mousavi (Islamic left), Hassan Habibi (Islamic left), Reza Sadr (religious nationalist), and Ali Akbar Moinfar (religious nationalist).

right, nationalists, and leftists. Imam Khomeini always wanted to strike a balance between the rule / the governance of the right, the left, and the nationalists in the country, while he himself were to remain above all of them. The governance of the country would thus not be entrusted in the hands of only one group or current, not even if the group were the religious revolutionaries.

But the nationalists were quickly removed from power, and the right managed to take control of the revolutionary committee. They kept it going informally despite its dissolution after the first elections and the rise to power of Abolhassan Banisadr, who belonged to the religious left.

The remaining members of the committee continued to compete with the government that was formed later. They untied into a group that called itself "the fundamentalists," and they later controlled the country after Khamenei and Rafsanjani came to power.

We therefore see that at the beginning of the Revolution in Iran, power was not entirely in the hands of an Islamist Shi'ite regime, as some imagine. At the time, the matter of exporting the revolution was raised by the leftists (not the clerics who were involved in controlling the country). The foundation of this idea, according to Imam Khomeini's vision, was to provide a model of governance that all other Muslim peoples are missing. In his view, they all lacked a system that benefited Muslim peoples, as all the ruling regimes in Islamic countries (all along, according to his

view) were inherited from Eastern or Western systems.[22] The leftists, meanwhile, were demanding support for all leftist groups in Muslim countries to carry out leftist Islamic revolutions in line with their vision.

Although Imam Khomeini's vision[23] was somewhat contrary to that of the leftists, Imam Khomeini did not oppose them. In fact, he was even courting them to a certain extent in contrast to the next supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei.[24]

Later, the new ruling regime was forced to adjust more and more to the leftist and the revolutionary currents dominating political trends in the country because they surpassed the clerics in organizational work and had the upper hand in influencing the revolutionary masses.

For example, we see that the leftists attacked the U.S. Embassy in Tehran (on the premise that the United States was preparing a coup against the Revolution like the one against Mossadegh in 1953), although the government at the time was made up of religious nationalists, and neither they nor even the leader of the Revolution, Imam Khomeini, knew about this decision. We see that Imam Khomeini

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22. Imam Khomeini, *Imam* newspaper, Imam Khomeini Publishing House, Vol. 16, 1998, p. 311.
23. Imam Khomeini, *Imam* newspaper, 1998, Imam Khomeini Publishing House, p. 434.
24. Speech by Khamenei on 9/7/1989.

decided to work with the leftists and not stand against them. The nationalists, meanwhile, decided to counter them, and Iran's first prime minister after the Revolution resigned due to this behavior by the leftists.

The leftists who dominated the government later retaliated against the nationalists, while the right wing remained on the sidelines and watched their rivals fight one another so that they could later swoop in, remove their opponents, and seize power.

Accordingly, the Islamic Revolution in Iran is not exclusively Shi'ite revolution. It is known that the actual leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, was greatly influenced by the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, and he translated books by Muslim Brotherhood intellectuals into Persian. Imam Khomeini himself drew on the theories of many Sunni religious philosophers when codifying his theory of the absolute Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist. He encountered major opposition from a large number of senior Shi'ite clerics, both in Najaf and in Qom, because of this theory and his vision for forming an Islamic government. He insisted on calling the Iranian regime the "Islamic Republic" because he refused to label his revolution as a Shi'ite revolution; he considered it the crystallization of the ideas of Muslim scholars throughout history.

Here, maybe, we can begin by answering many questions about this topic.

1. How has the strategy of "exporting the revolution" evolved throughout the changes that the region has witnessed since the outbreak of the revolution?

As mentioned in the introduction, from the beginning of the Revolution in Iran, Imam Khomeini did not consider his revolution to be a Shi'ite revolution. His aim was to establish an Islamic regime that would be a model for all other Muslim peoples to follow. At the time, the leftists, who were influenced by the ideas of Islamic Marxism, were working to develop an Islamic socialist-Marxist model. They were also influenced by Marxist and socialist ideas and by the movements of leftists around the world, such as Che Guevara, Castro, Mao, Lenin, Stalin, etc., who considered that their revolution should be spread to the rest of the world. The Islamic right, meanwhile, adopted the idea that it was necessary to form a strong Islamic government as a model for all other Muslim peoples. Today, it is the Islamic right that controls the regime and the Revolution in Iran.[25]

According to the theory of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, however, the borders that were drawn by colonization are deceptive, and all Muslims should unite – under the leadership of the Islamic Jurist, of course.

According to the theory of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, which was codified by Imam Khomeini, it is not necessary for the Islamic Jurist to be an Iranian. This later

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25. Speech by Khamenei on 9/7/1989.

led to a disagreement between Iran and Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, the former spiritual leader of Hezbollah.[26]

In any case, the theory of exporting the revolution still exists. The official title of Iran's supreme leader is not "Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran" but "Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution." This means that the objectives of the Islamic Revolution are still present, namely to transmit the experience of forming Iran's Islamic government to the rest of the Islamic world.

2. Is this strategy a primary or a secondary pillar and a driving factor of the Iranian foreign policy today?

The strategy of exporting the Islamic Revolution in Iran has not been considered a primary strategic pillar of Iranian foreign policy since Ayatollah Khamenei and Hashemi Rafsanjani came to power in Iran. There is a disconnect between revolutionary strategy and the Iranian government's national and nationalist strategy, and there is to an extent a disconnect between the objectives of the Revolution and the Iranian nationalist objectives. Sometimes, the revolutionary objectives prevail, and at other times, the nationalist objectives prevail. In general, though, the Iranian government is obliged by the constitution to support all vulnerable peoples who want to confront the Arrogant, on the condition that doing so does not interfere in the affairs of other

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26. http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5760162,00.html

countries.[27] Naturally, when this obligation converges with the national strategic objectives to safeguard Iran's survival, the revolutionary tone overshadows the nationalist tone.

Here, a vivid example can be provided, which is that Iran engages with actors in the region of various political orientations, some of which have nothing whatsoever to do with the objectives of the Islamic Revolution or exporting the revolution if we are to consider Iran's policies through this lens.

For example, when we talk about the situation in Syria, we see that Iran supports the Ba'athist, nationalist, Arab government in Syria versus the religious current represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, although from a fundamentalist or doctrinal perspective, it should be supporting Islamism against secularism. This is a source of a major controversy inside Iran between revolutionaries and the government.

In Lebanon, Iran is allied with Christians and Druze; in Palestine, it supports Sunni Islamist groups, such as Hamas, that not only oppose the idea of Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist in practical terms, but also are ideologically at odds with this vision. We even see that in the Syrian war, Hamas is linked up with the Muslim Brotherhood in the war against

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27. Article 154 of the Iranian Constitution.
    https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/133635

the Syrian regime, its Iranian allies, Hezbollah, and the Popular Mobilization forces. Nonetheless, Iran would later turn a blind eye to the issue because its ultimate interest requires supporting Hamas against Israel.

In Yemen, also, the Iranians support the Zaydi Houthis, who are historically the ideological rivals of the Twelver Shi'ites. In Iraq, they support the Yazidis, the Kurds, and the Sunnis, who are also doctrinally against the theory of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist. We even saw them (the Kurds) turning later against Iran and allying themselves with the USA and Israel to counter ISIS.

Sometimes Iran is silent – for example, regarding the situation of Muslims in China or India because of its political relationships with these countries. If the matter were limited to revolutionary ideas, Iran might have taken more stringent positions vis-à-vis these countries, and this would have been particularly the case at the beginning of the Revolution.

Also we see, for example, that at the beginning of the Revolution, Iran was hostile to the Taliban and considered them its enemies. Iran as a state, however, considers that its interests require dealing with this anti-Shi'ite Sunni group at times and tries to create bridges of friendship with them.

3. Did Iran really abide by "exporting the revolution" after the outbreak of the Arab Spring?

Rather than calling it "Arab Spring," the supreme leader preferred to refer to the uprisings as an "Islamic Awakening."[28] In doing so, he hoped to link the Arab Spring movements to the Islamic awakening that the Muslim Brotherhood had been calling for. He transported the idea to Iran, linked it to the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and provided a model for revolutions in Islamic countries so they could emulate it and form new governments on this basis.

Of course, as everyone knows, the Arab Spring uprisings generally have not been successful in any country, and in practical terms, Iran has had no role in them except that it tried to serve as a model for other Muslim peoples.

Naturally, if there were a revolution in an Islamic country, Iran would take the lead to frame its governance system as a model to which the revolutionaries could adhere. But the idea that Iran would intervene directly in the course of revolutions in Islamic countries is highly unlikely, if not – impossible.

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28. The supreme leader's view of the Arab Spring.
   https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=1648

4. Where did this strategy spread out and where did it regress?

In general, it can be said that this strategy spread out to places where people faced some sort of intellectual longing for a political system, to which they aspire, and it regressed in places where the ruling regimes were able to satisfy or silence their people as best as possible. The general perception is that the idea of the Islamic Revolution has a greater sway in Islamic countries where the people face repression and have no logical political alternative, or any vision or idea of how to unite to confront the ruling regime.

5. What are the most important obstacles to this project?

In practice, it cannot be said that there are obstacles facing this project apart from the fact that the people themselves must be persuaded to take up this project of forming an Islamic government. In our current world, persuading people generally requires a strong media presence and direct and indirect propaganda, in addition to an impressive success by an Islamic government in competing with other systems. This is what the Islamic Revolution is so badly lacking.

6. How does exporting the revolution clash with political pragmatism in building trust with forces allied with Iran?

In practical terms, as we have already said, the revolutionary wave that existed at the beginning of the Revolution, especially within the extreme left, is no longer present in Iran. The leftists transformed into the so-called reformists, and

the old generation of reformists changed its revolutionary ideas dramatically so that they became the ideas of the new generation of reformists. Although the new generation uses the same name, their ideas contrast sharply with those of the revolutionary left at the beginning of the Revolution.

Generally speaking, this trend started with Rafsanjani's presidency and his vision that Iran's economic and, of course, political interaction with the countries of the world would be an ideal model for building a model of Islamic governance that can be emulated by all other Muslim people. This was the practical start of the transformation from a revolutionary regime to a state.[29]

With all the external pressures and threats that Iran faced, however, we see that another current in Iranian politics raised its voice and demanded an expansion of the scope of Iranian political influence in order to draw on the world map an Iranian sphere that extends well beyond the country's political boundaries. This current considers that expanding this sphere of influence will strengthen Iran's position vis-à-vis its enemies and weaken threats against it, as the enemy would be forced to confront Iran far beyond its political borders.[30]

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29. Alireza Sahraei and Amin Mahmoudinia, *The Model of Good Governance: A Framework for the Analysis of the Political Economy of Hashemi Rafsanjani's Government (1376-1368),* Strategic Studies of Public Policy (Strategic Studies of Globalization), Center for Studies of the Presidency of Iran, 2018, pp. 207–228.

30. Ibid.

According to this way of thinking, Iran is the heart of the notion of Islamic governance, and therefore it is essential to preserve Iran as a home base or the so-called (*Umm al-Qura*) which literally means *the Mother of Islamic Villages;* the core of nation of the Islamic world.

Here, we are speaking not only of Iranians but of revolutionaries around the world working to form the greater Islamic government.

Thus, we can say that whenever threats and pressures on Iran increase, the revolutionary trend becomes stronger and Iran turns from a pragmatic state to a revolutionary state, and vice versa.

On this basis, we can see that different governments in Iran at times adopt revolutionary theories, and at other times – pragmatic state theories.

For example, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power with revolutionary slogans and support, and ultimately moved toward supporting a stronger state as opposed to the revolution. By contrast, we see that Hassan Rouhani came to power with slogans supporting the state rather than the revolution, but in the end, after the United States withdrew from the nuclear agreement and Iran came under pressure, Rouhani turned to revolutionary policies and slogans. Before them, this was also the case with Rafsanjani. He began by working to form a pragmatic state but ended up with right-wing revolutionary slogans, and he even set the course for the fundamentalists,

who were against the reformists who consolidated their status after Khatami came to power in Iran. He later left the fundamentalists to form a coalition with the reformists.

7. Is Iranian foreign policy still the product of a Twelver-Shi'ism based revolutionary ideology?

Here we have to separate the Iranian state from the Iranian Revolution. The Iranian state is guided by the supreme interests of the country, while the Iranian Revolution is guided by the supreme interests of the system and the Revolution.

At present, the state is taking the lead in Iranian foreign policy. Iran is handling foreign policy on the basis of the supreme interests of the state, not the supreme interests of the Revolution. Consequently, and as we mentioned earlier, Iran is not basing its foreign policy on the ideology of Twelver Shi'ism or even Shi'ism in general. Rather, Iran can form alliances with actors from different political backgrounds and beliefs where the interests of the country require doing so. It can be said that for decades, the Iranian regime has been able to move beyond this issue.

Conclusion

The Islamic Revolution in Iran was the result of the historical crystallization of numerous ideas in Iranian society and the merger of these ideas with the philosophies of Islamic thinkers around the world.

For example, we see that Imam Khomeini started discussing the formation of Islamic government after settling in Najaf for five years, whereas while he was in Iran he only worked to oppose the shah's policies.

After the revolution in Iran in 1979, there were even disagreements over what to call the Revolution and even regarding the character of the new state to be formed. Some demanded the formation of a "Republic of Iran," some wanted the "Democratic Republic of Iran," and some even went further and demanded to call it the "Shi'ite Republic of Iran." There was always disagreement between Islamic nationalists and Islamic sectarians over the meaning of the terms "Iranian Islamic" vs. "Islamic Iranian," in terms of whether Islam or Iran should come first. The issue of regarding Iran as the core of nation of the Islamic world (*Umm al-Qura*), was based on the idea presented in the paper that Iran must become a model for all other Muslim people to emulate, and the issue was not confined to exporting the revolution but included discussing how the revolution should be exported.

The Iran-Iraq War strengthened the role of Islamic revolutionary forces at the expense of nationalism, but Iranians' nationalist feelings gradually began to prevail over the revolutionary and Islamic feelings existing in society. Thus, we see that Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, who is considered the intellectual godfather of Ahmadinejad's

supporters, came out in 2010 with a statement stressing the necessity of spreading "Islamic Iranian" culture because this expression has the effect of earning popularity among the public, especially when it comes to the nationalists in Iran. The issue is not about ending the idea of exporting the revolution so much as it is about confronting the Erdoganist thought that calls for spreading "Islamic Turkish (Ottoman)" influence in Islamic societies.

On the contrary, we see that Ahmadinejad himself wants to start a new cycle from the phase of exporting the revolution, especially as the Arab Spring took place during his presidency. He believed that the Arab Spring was a result of Islamic societies being influenced by the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and he worked to earn popularity in other Islamic societies outside Iran by taking advantage of the slogans of the Islamic Revolution without focusing on the Iranian nature of it. In practical terms, he started an undeclared competition with Erdogan in claiming ownership of the wave of the Arab Spring and having the last word on who of them gets to define the nature of the "Islamic awakening" (according to the view of the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran's supreme leader).

Because of the stances of Ahmadinejad and his team, the fundamentalists who insist on the term "Iranian Islamic" and on favoring Islam over nationalism took an opposing stance in Iran. The late Hashemi Rafsanjani even called Ahmadinejad's group the Diverging Line (meaning diverging from the origins

of the Revolution). They were even accused of following those aligned with the Hojjatie Society (which believes that an Islamic government should not be formed until the Mahdi returns and that the formation of an Islamic government will delay the Mahdi's return).

The next two presidents – Hassan Rouhani and Ebrahim Raisi – were supporters of the initial leitmotif of the Revolution, which is that Islam comes before nationalism. This is especially true of the intellectual orientation of current Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, one of the strict fundamentalists who has worked to entrench the principles of the Islamic Revolution as envisaged by Imam Khomeini. Raisi hopes to lead the Islamic Revolution as the next supreme leader, not just as the head of the government.

The theory of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, on which Imam Khomeini made the foundation of Islamic governance in Iran, is not confined to the ideas of Shi'ite religious scholars, but rather draws on ideas from Muslim religious scholars from various political currents. The Iranian Revolution was not a Shi'ite revolution or an Islamic revolution per se, but a nationalist revolution, in which a range of political and intellectual currents participated, and through which the Islamists ultimately came to control the country.

In the early part of the Revolution, some groups were influenced by revolutionary thought. They believed that the Revolution should spread to other Islamic countries, like the leftist revolutions sweeping the world at the

time and producing concepts like the notion of exporting the revolution. In the end, however, rationality is what overshadowed the general intellectual stance and current, even the revolutionary actors themselves. Today, the prevailing intellectual approach is that Iran must build a strong prototypical Islamic state, and that the success of this state will be presented to other Muslim people as an option provided they want to adopt such a system as a model.

In the end, it can be said that Iran has left behind the preoccupation with the Shi'ite clerics' old way of thinking, which boils down to the idea that everyone should be Twelver Shi'ites. Iran's new thinking favors engagement with different intellectual currents in the region, even those that are not Shi'ite and not compliant with Twelver Shi'ite thought. This is now the strongest element in Iranian foreign policy, and Iran's influence is currently expanding because of this policy, even though Iran's opponents have enormous capabilities that in general cannot be compared to those of Iran itself.

All this depends on the vision of political pragmatism on behalf of the Islamic Revolution and whether it adapts to different circumstances rather than being constrained to a single intellectual approach.

Actually, the foundation of the political orientation established by Ayatollah Khamenei is that Iran is the core of nation of the Islamic world (*Umm al-Qura*), and therefore

its success will grant it influence vis-à-vis the Muslim masses all over the Islamic world. This is the dominant political orientation with respect to Iranian foreign policy. From this point of view, exporting the revolution does not mean occupying countries or imposing sanctions on them in order to enforce what it regards as democracy; but rather, spreading and exporting the revolution entails persuading the people.

Shi'ite Geopolitics and the Challenge of Regional and International Variables

Firas Elias

Summary

Following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Shi'ite societies in various countries have emerged from their political and social isolation and have embarked on the road of empowerment and revival. These developments have gradually resulted in the formation of Shi'ite geopolitical ideas in the Middle East. Since the Islamic Republic of Iran was established on the basis of Shi'ite doctrine in a Shi'ite-majority society, Shi'ite societies in other countries have been influenced by its objectives and aspirations, especially in countries bordering Iran. This influence led first to self-awareness and to political awareness, then to a desire for shared rights and powers. The second effect was the creation of a Shi'ite geopolitical belt after the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, and the third was the formation of Shi'ite geopolitics aimed at influencing relationships between regional and international powers. This chapter seeks to understand the strategic points of departure on how Shi'ite geopolitics is formed, Iranian strategy within the framework of that geopolitics, the nature of the interaction between regional and international variables and the evolution of this geopolitics, and the strategic challenges it is currently experiencing.

Introduction

The first contours of Shi'ite geopolitics took shape with the triumph of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. This victory was based on a theocratic system led by the supreme leader of the Iranian Revolution, Khomeini. It can be said in this context that the Iranian Revolution and the emergence of Hezbollah in Lebanon acted together to position Shi'ite political geography at the forefront of the regional and international political landscape. Khomeini's religious and revolutionary rhetoric, and the Revolutionary Guard leadership's political slogans, have also given Shi'ite societies in the Islamic world significant impetus to be aware of their political existence. The objective of this is to form a trans-national Shi'ite movement linked to the central state of the Shi'ite doctrine – Iran.

Shi'ite geopolitics is a geopolitical reflection of Shi'ite societies. It is an expression of the Shi'ite geography that influences the relationships of regional and international powers by pushing Shi'ite societies to connect with Iran, the center of this emerging international force. As stated by Mohammad Javad Larijani, Iran is an international pole seeking to restructure the international order into a multipolar system. In other words, Shi'ite geopolitics is essentially an Iranian geostrategic project that reflects the nature of the geopolitical assumptions advocated by strategic thinker Halford John Mackinder in his Heartland Theory. The Iranian Revolution borrowed this concept to create a centralized Shi'ite order within the Islamic world, focused on Iran as the "the core of nation of the Islamic

world (Umm al-Qura)" and its political system based on the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist.

The formation of a trans-national Shi'ite movement and the expansion of the geostrategic arenas of Shi'ite geopolitics after the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003 forced Iran to explore its national capabilities to draw a Shi'ite map distinct from the Sunni map in the Islamic world. The Iranian strategy has achieved major successes across a geographic area stretching from Afghanistan to North Africa, due to its strategic action in the military, the economic, and the ideological field. Nevertheless, its strategy has encountered major challenges that have disrupted Shi'ite geopolitics, notably Iran's role in escalating sectarian and ideological conflicts and Iran's geopolitical competition in the Islamic world. This is in addition to the impact of U.S. policies, the internal transformations that Shi'ite societies have undergone, and – most importantly – the major repercussions of the assassination of Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani. His assassination has affected Iran's entire strategic project in the Middle East because he was the project's engineer and the founder of several armed Shi'ite movements within the so-called "Axis of Resistance." Although Iran's political project looks strategic from the outside, at its core it is a geo-doctrinal project aimed at containing the countries and societies of the Islamic world in order to construct a living space for Iran.

The importance of this study is evident in that it is an attempt to read Iran's strategic assumptions related to Shi'ite geopolitics through an examination of the nature and

reality of Iran's roles, and the ultimate consequences for the outcome of Iranian strategic action. There is a need to reach a clear perspective on the nature of Iran's wide-ranging roles, especially as Iran is one of the most influential forces in the Middle East, and its impact has implications for the international geostrategic map.

In light of this, the research focus is based on several key questions:

- What are the contours of Shi'ite geopolitics today, and how did it form a necessity to construct an Iranian geopolitical space?

- Is Shi'ite geopolitics a strategic and religious necessity for Iran, or is. It just a pragmatic way of engaging Shi'ite societies in the service of Iran's objectives and policies?

- What is the nature of the interaction between Shi'ite geopolitics and recent regional and international transformations?

In the interest of answering these central questions, the study's approach is to provide a comprehensive overview of Iran's strategy in an effort to explore all the explicit and implicit aspects that shape Iran's strategy within the context of Shi'ite geopolitics.

In order to reach a clear understanding of the general approaches that form the conventions of Shi'ite geopolitics, the methodology of this study relies on various academic research methods, including a historical approach, a sys-

tematic analysis approach, and a descriptive approach, given the various fields and dimensions covered by the study.

The study is structured around a number of key themes that form the overall framework for the study. It begins with a brief overview of the founding framework of Shi'ite geopolitics and then elaborates on the various special characteristics that cover all its aspects starting with the dimensions of Shi'ite geopolitics and their role in shaping strategic approaches to creating Shi'ite geopolitics. Finally, it examines the regional and international challenges faced by this type of geopolitics and its objectives.

A general foundational entry point to understanding Shi'ite geopolitics

The concept of Shi'ite geopolitics is one of the most prominent theoretical manifestations of the Iranian strategic mindset in the 21st century. We can simply point to the fact that Iranian strategic thinking has formulated several theories of expansion and domination based on the elements of Iran's geopolitical strength across the various stages of its history, and these theories reflect the potential for ambitious strategic action to construct Iran's living space.

With regard to the concept of Shi'ite geopolitics, we note that the French researcher François Thual became the first to use this concept when his book *Géopolitique du chiisme* (Geopolitics of Shi'ism) was published in 1995. It was later translated into Persian and published three times in Iran: by Ali Reza Qasem Aga in 2000, Hassan Sadu in

2001, and Katayun Yaser in 2003. Thual says Shi'ism is a geopolitical concept because Shi'ite geographic spheres affect power relationships around the world. For example, Shi'ites have geopolitical importance in the Persian Gulf because of their position on the geographical map of global energy, and this issue is of vital importance for the survival and the economic growth of the whole world. It is therefore necessary to take into consideration the geographical distribution and locations of Shi'ite populations, as well as the nature of their beliefs. Thual concludes that the phenomenon of Shi'ization has in fact become the focal point of many regional and international conflicts. Most Shi'ites live in sensitive geopolitical areas of the world, giving them the ability to play influential roles through the use of the historical background of Shi'ism, their own geographic distribution, and their centers of power from a geopolitical[1] perspective.

The Iranian researcher Mayel Afshar also presents another definition of Shi'ite geopolitics in a June 2004 article titled "Shi'ite Political Geography." She says that in the post-Cold War era, new critical theories have emerged which present a critical study of geopolitics. With Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory, we saw a politicization of cultural, ethnic, religious, and geopolitical identities. As Iran is the foundation of Shi'ite identity, it can be considered a central focus of the Shi'ite world.

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1. Francois Thual, Géopolitique du chiisme, translated by Katayun Baser; Vistar Publications, Tehran (in Persian); 2003; p. 17.

The Iranian researcher Mohammed Reza Hafeznia says Shi'ite geopolitics is a specific concept of a human structure and religious society with a Shi'ite religious identity. This means there is a global Shi'ite struggle, in order to rebuild identity and religious cohesion on a global scale, and to build a Shi'ite centralized order in the world inspired by the Iranian leadership. This has also resulted in the sensitivity of competing regional structures and their drastic reactions to the Shi'ite structure. It seems that the Shi'ites' political struggle to achieve their natural place in the Middle East and Southwest Asia is ongoing. The concept of Shi'ite geopolitics seems to be a hybrid concept, like other concepts such as Sunni geopolitics, Catholic geopolitics, Jewish geopolitics, Hindu geopolitics, Francophone geopolitics, and so on. All of these concepts are based on human structures of religion, race, ethnicity, politics, class, position, etc.[2]

In general, the concept of Shi'ite geopolitics indicates that Iran is the main pillar of the Shi'ite world within the framework of Islamic geopolitics. The idea of a centralized Shi'ite order here is formulated as proposed by Mackinder when he formulated the Heartland Theory. It features a central point, Eurasia, surrounded by other living spaces linked to it. This can be addressed within the context of Shi'ite geopolitics through several geopolitical theories that have been proposed. Foremost among them is core of nation of the Islamic world (*Umm al-Qura*) theory, proposed by

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2. Farahnaz Mayel Afshar, "Shi'ite Geopolitics," *Siast-e Rouz*, 25 May 2004.

Mohammad Javad Larijani, in which he deems Iran to be the main pillar of the Shi'ite world. He thus creates a framework for the same idea that Mackinder posited when he spoke of the focal region of the world.[3]

Diagram 1: The Construction of Shi'ite Geopolitics

Geographic space → Overall capacities → Islamic Revolution → Shi'a geopolitics

Geography → Capabilities → Policies → Geopolitics
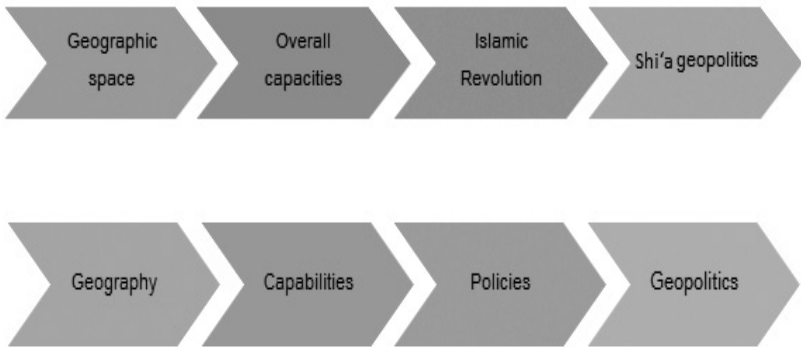
The concept of Shi'ite geopolitics is linked to several vital geostrategic spheres around it, which constitute geographic extensions of Iran's living space/ biosphere. They can be categorized into four geostrategic spheres: states of the Shi'ite framework, states of the Shi'ite living space, states subject to the impact of Shi'ite politics, and the Shi'ite diaspora. Each of these geostrategic spheres has specific geographic dimensions that sometimes overlap.

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3. Ibid.

Diagram 2: The Geostrategic Spheres of Shi'ite Geopolitics
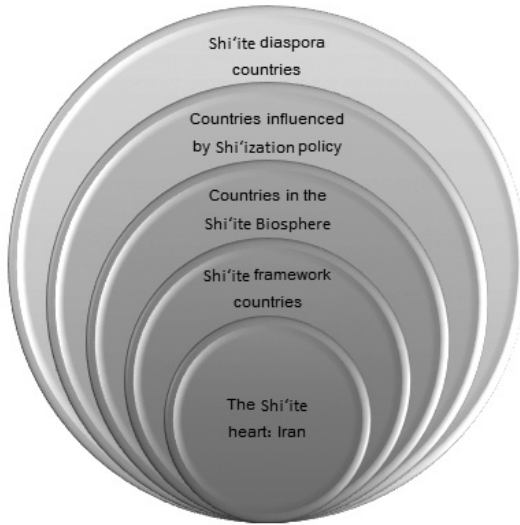
Although it is a recent creation, Shi'ite geopolitics is a strategic objective that the Islamic Republic in Iran has long worked to achieve. All the intellectual proposals advocated by Khomeini come within the framework of achieving this Iranian strategic endeavor, which ultimately constitutes the cornerstone for the creation of a global Shi'ite empire under the guardianship of the Islamic Jurist in Iran. Even the idea of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist is part of a strategic context aimed at creating a link between the idea of a global Shi'ite order centered on Iran, with centralized decision-making in the form of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, representing the focus of political legitimacy in the

Shi'ite world. This order would be based on the historical and political circumstances through which the ideology of Shi'ite political Islam has passed in Iran.[4]

In accordance with the strategic transformations that Iran has experienced,[5] Shi'ite geopolitics has passed through three main phases:

Phase 1: The weakness of Shi'ite geopolitics "from the 19th century to the Iranian Revolution in 1979."

Phase 2: The revival of Shi'ite geopolitics "from the Iranian Revolution in 1979 to the occupation of Iraq in 2003."

Phase 3: The rise of Shi'ite geopolitics from 2003 to the present. This is the date when Shi'ite political identity emerged in Iraq and state pressure was lifted from Shi'ites, who make up two-thirds of the population. It created a chance for Shi'ites to gain power, which has worked to the benefit of Shi'ites in the entire region. That, in turn, spurred Iran to exploit this ascent to serve its regional influence and support Shi'ites' demands in countries in the region influenced by the Iraqi situation.

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4. Nabil Ali Alotoum, *Iran and the Promised Sh'ia Empire*; Al-Asr Center for Strategic and Future Studies, London; First Edition, 2013; pp. 35-40.
5. Mohammed al-Selmi and Abdul Raouf al-Ghunaimi, "Sh'ia Geopolitics ... The Current Reality and the Future"; Journal for Iranian Studies, Vol. 1, Issue 1; Arabian Gulf Center for Iranian Studies, Riyadh, 2016; pp. 39-40.

The concept of Shi'ite geopolitics has been a general framework for understanding the major evolution that Iran's strategic thinking has undergone since the triumph of the Iranian Revolution. The strategic plan in Iran turned to studying the geographic boundaries around Iran and their various dimensions. A geo-doctrinal reading enables it to achieve the objectives of Iranian national security by constructing a Shi'ite-Iranian centralized order within the framework of the Islamic world. The Islamic world today is experiencing a geopolitical competition among several regional forces representing Islamic doctrines and ideas that variously align with or diverge from Shi'ite geopolitics in terms of objectives and means.

In line with the above, Iran has found itself obliged to play a central role in reshaping the doctrinal geography of the Islamic world based on the foundations underlying Shi'ite geopolitics, with a view to constructing a Shi'ite living space. Iran will be at the heart, and other Shi'ite societies would be the limbs. This is consistent with the geopolitical contexts advanced by modern thinkers in geopolitics, notably Friedrich Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellen, Halford John Mackinder, and Nicholas J. Spykman.

On Shi'ite Geopolitical Theory

Research on Shi'ite geopolitical theory highlights several Iranian geostrategic theories and projects with significance beyond Iran's geographic scope. Iran's geopolitical location has provided a major geographic advantage by making it

a pivotal bridge between Shi'ite societies in the East and the West. According to this perspective, Iran is concerned with representing the focal point for the heart of the sect that feeds the limbs. In addition, it has enormous resources that have supported the regional and international doctrinal position it holds in the Shi'ite world. This has enabled it to exercise influence on Shi'ite societies existing within the context of Shi'ite geopolitics.

1. The Theory of Islamist Nationalism

The theory of Islamist nationalism is key among the theories proposed within the framework of theorizing Shi'ite geopolitics. It was developed by Mehdi Bazargan, the first prime minister of Iran after the success of the Iranian Revolution led by Khomeini. The main objective of proposing this theory was to create new strategic outlets for Iran within the Islamic world. Because of the nature of the Islamist slogans taken up by the Iranian Revolution, this means that Iran's expansionist ambitions would remain confined to Shi'ite vital areas and would not extend to states with a nationalist coloring. Here we mean the countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Southeast Asia, which share many national commonalities with Iran. Although Bazargan's theory was unable to hold up to the conservative current in Iran that wanted to overthrow him because he adopted liberal ideas that would affect their positions and influence, he succeeded in proposing his theory amidst the revolutionary tide that Iran experienced after the revolution.

2. The theory of exporting the Iranian Revolution

As defined by Khomeini, the concept of exporting the revolution is closely linked to the global authority of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist. According to his belief and interpretation, this guardianship imposes its authority on all states. The Islamic nation is to abide by this authority/ Guardianship, which exerts its influence on everyone, and is not bounded to any international law. There is no sovereignty that can prevent this reality from being imposed or any independence that can block this guardianship from spreading to other states. The phrase "exporting the revolution" has other connotations. It is a synonym of the Islamic term for conquest, *al-fatḥ*; in other words, it is a process of re-conquering Islamic countries and forcibly subordinating them to the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist. Based on the divine task placed on the shoulders of this Islamic Guardian, the establishment of a global state for Islam is a lawful necessity and a realistic objective requiring progress to be achieved. The Islamic Republic in Iran must stretch its arms towards Muslims wherever they are in the world and export its revolution to all lands.[6]

3. The theory of Umm al-Qura (the Mother of Villages).

As formulated by Larijani in his book Commentary on Iranian National Strategy, (Umm al- Qura) the Mother of Villages theory suggests that Iran will be the center of the Islamic world. Thus, it is the leading state that will produce

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6. Abdul Sattar al-Rawi, "The ABCs of Exporting the Iranian Revolution"; *Nesan*, 7 August 2015; accessed on 1 August 2019. https://bit.ly/2mu6Typ

a leader possessing authority and guardianship over the entire Islamic nation because the religion requires the formation of a single Islamic nation and the selection of a government to represent this nation. It is, therefore, not in the interest of the Islamic nation to remain divided because the goal is Islamic unity.[7] The triumph of the Mother of Villages/Iran is, therefore, a triumph for the Islamic nation, and its defeat is a defeat for the Islamic nation. Preserving the Mother of Villages/Iran means preserving its Islamic system of governance, which encompasses all the territory of the single Islamic State. The Mother of Villages is formed because of that state, and it will lead this nation.[8]

4. The theory of the Mahdi's global state

While Mahdism (the belief in the appearance of the Mahdi) is an old idea, the former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made it a driving political theory. He viewed his government as a temporary government that would lay the groundwork for the establishment of the Mahdi's global government. In his address to the Mahdism Conference in Tehran in 2005, he said: "The Islamic Republic and the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist have no other task but to prepare for the establishment of a global government ... and Imam Mahdi will run the universe through this

7. Mohammad Javad Larijani, *Postulates in National Strategy: Explaining the Mother of Sh'ia Villages Theory*, Arabic translation by Nabil Ali Alotoum; Al-Asr Center for Strategic and Future Studies, London; 2013; pp. 108–109.
8. Nabil Ali Alotoum, *Iran and the Mother of Sh'ia Villages Theory*; Dar Ammar Publishers & Distributors in collaboration with Umayya Center for Research & Strategic Studies; First Edition, 2017; pp. 101–102.

government."[9] His vision of Islamic government was that it is the foundation of the Mahdi's global state. It must acquire all the components of power to advance the state and ensure its success, and the failure to achieve these objectives means they remain major obstacles to the establishment of the Mahdi's global government.

5. The Islamic Middle East project

The Iranian-Islamic Middle East project that has been proposed as an alternative to the U.S.'s Middle East project during Mohammad Khatami's term as president of Iran is the latest geopolitical project aimed at linking Shi'ite societies and other Islamic movements to the heart of the sect, Iran. The Iranian-Islamic Middle East project can be defined as an "Iranian project in the name of Shi'ism as a whole. The objective is Iran's seizure of the historical initiative or the functions of Islamic leadership in the Islamic world, and the construction of a resistance framework in their name at the level of the broader region in which Muslim people live. In this case, the objective of using the term Middle East is to cover up a process of constructing a Shi'ite living space based on the political dominance or leadership of the Iranian state.[10]

9. Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader*; University of California Press, Berkeley; 2008; p. 106.
10. Mohammed Sayed Said, "The Islamic Middle East ... Borders and Semantics!"; *Al-Ittihad*, United Arab Emirates; 8 November 2006; accessed on 2 August 2019. https://bit.ly/2LXGHYG.

Shi'ite Geopolitics and Iranian Strategic Expansion

The triumph of the revolution in Iran in 1979 was the practical start of the major transformation that Iranian strategic thinking has undergone. The possibilities underlying Shi'ite political Islam flourished, and Khomeini's geopolitical thesis acquired political power in Iran because of Iran's unique geopolitical location and enormous energy reserves in the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. In addition, Iran hosts nearly 40% of the world's Shi'ite population, rendering it a key center for the Shi'ite world. The success of the Iranian revolution has therefore had far-reaching implications for the Islamic world.

One of the main causes for Iran to shift from Iranian geopolitics to Shi'ite geopolitics is the political developments in the Islamic world, especially in countries with Shi'ite communities that have become conscious of their political existence. They are aligned with the revolutionary atmosphere generated by the revolution in Iran, which has given a morale boost to Shi'ite societies in other countries, as in the case of Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. It has also created a political climate in these countries to break free from the rejection of political action and seek a chance to correct the historical mistake they made. Since this measure of political transformation swept Shi'ite geopolitics, Shi'ites in most Arab states have gradually succeeded in playing a more influential role and participating actively in the political structures of these countries.

The critical possibilities of Shi'ite Islam and the existence of political catalysts within Shi'ism have made it possible to present a new, revolutionary interpretation of Islam. Meanwhile, beliefs such as defending the vulnerable, social justice, the authority of the righteous man, and the divine promise of the appearance of the Mahdi have all contributed to a new concept of Shi'ite Islam, and Khomeini has presented it as the strategy to be followed to establish a global Islamic government. On that basis, Shi'ite societies have begun to organize themselves militarily and politically in the Middle East, which would not have been possible before the revolution in Iran.

In his book *The Shi'ite Resistance, and Revolution*, Martin Kramer says that today's Shi'ite societies have produced some of the most powerful concepts of revolutionary insurgency. There is now a Shi'ite belt covering parts of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iran, Pakistan, and India. This belt is divided into Shi'ite -majority and -minority countries but is in itself a major evolution in the strategy towards the Shi'ite-Iranian living space.

Given the geopolitical characteristics of the countries within the Shi'ite geopolitical framework, their natural, demographic, religious, and political structure has been described as an active and effective unity within the global system. Topics such as resources, population, and strategic location have involved the region's countries in important global issues, such as energy, military and strategic operations, religious conflicts and trends, international

security, and global trade. For example, Shi'ites are located in the Persian Gulf, a highly sensitive area from a geographic and political standpoint. The Persian Gulf, as the world's largest oil reserve, plays a crucial role in determining the fate of the global economy. Nonetheless, the importance of the Persian Gulf is not limited to its vast petroleum and mineral resources; the region's political role is also clear in terms of its ideological, geopolitical, and strategic importance.

In the context of the above, Graham Fuller says in his book *The Arab Shi'ite: The Forgotten Muslims* that from a theoretical standpoint, Arab Shi'ites along with Iran can control most of the oil resources in the Persian Gulf. If Shi'ites are able to reach positions of power in the Persian Gulf region, then one can analyze and understand the sensitivity to an dominant Shi'ite identity and its role in the success of Shi'ite geopolitics.

An overview of the economic, political, and demographic circumstances of Shi'ite societies in the Islamic world reveals that Shi'ites do not have absolute power in any country except Iran, and most of them live amidst social and political turmoil. This situation has led to political protests by Shi'ite communities, and these protests have in turn escalated with the rise of Shi'ite social consciousness. In this regard, regional and international developments have had a major impact on the persistence of these protests. In particular, the triumph of the revolution in Iran has opened up new prospects for Shi'ites in the Islamic world, prompting them to become more engaged in conflict to change the current situation.

Trans-National Shi'ite Identity and Shi'ite Geopolitics

The structural focus on identity, especially transnational identities such as Shi'ite identity – along with the interaction between it and the center of Shi'ite geopolitics in Iran, and an examination of the structure and the normative and cultural aspects of this identity within the international order – is very useful from a theoretical standpoint when it comes to describing and explaining the political developments in Shi'ite geopolitics. In the Middle East, transnational identities are at risk, thus constraining state behavior. The structural analysis of the rise of Shi'ites in the Islamic world points to a gradual ascent from the bottom to the top, i.e. from a pre-revolutionary stage to the success of the revolution. Shi'ite identity has become capable of changing the regional order by spreading new doctrinal identities in the Islamic world through Shi'ization policies.

Here it can be said that three factors have contributed to the revival of Shi'ites in the Middle East: the strengthening of Shi'ites in Lebanon and Iraq; the strengthening of other Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates; and finally, Iran's political and doctrinal rise. These three factors have reinforced Shi'ite power in the Middle East and played a role in regional and international dynamics. There is now a mutually beneficial relationship between the upswing in Iran's political standing and the roles of its allies in the Middle East, which has reinforced the standing of Shi'ite identity in the regional and international political arena.

We emphasize here that there are political disagreements among Shi'ites in the region about how to gain power. Khomeini believed that the only way to gain power was through revolution. On the other hand, several Shi'ite religious leaders in Iraq have appealed to their followers to adhere to the rules of democracy in the context of the fight for power taking place since 2003, with the main reason being the existence of a Shi'ite majority in Iraq. Shi'ites in Bahrain have done the same, while we see that Hezbollah and the Houthis have found armed action a necessity to establish Shi'ite identity in Lebanon and Yemen.

In this context, it is important to distinguish between the supranational Shi'ite trend as a political current and supranational Shi'ization as a religious identity, especially when confronted with Sunni identity, or when doctrinal commonalities contribute to the reproduction of this identity as an imagined supranational group, or in the case of religious institutions that play a role similar to that discussed by Anthony Smith, who addresses their task of safeguarding the group identity by producing policies on how to deal with it.[11]

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11. Hareth Hassan, "Supranational Sh'ia Relations, the State, and Nationalism in Iraq" in the book *Arab Shi'ites ... Identity and Citizenship*; Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Beirut; 2019; p. 287.

Within the framework of transnational Shi'ite identities falls the projection of the "Axis of Resistance," which initially consisted of Iran, Iraq, and Syria. In the post-Arab Spring era, the axis has shifted to include non-state armed groups and movements alongside the abovementioned states. This shift in Iranian security thinking is perhaps the result of a shift in the distribution of power in the Middle East. The exercise of power is no longer limited to states, especially after the emergence of several armed groups such as ISIS, Jabhat Fath al-Sham, and others, that exercised authority over and administered areas once under their influence and control.

Iranian support for armed groups in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria is, therefore, part of Iran's general stance that the strategic imperatives of the 21st century require a different approach to regional strategic action and the mobilization of even more of those entities and organizations to fill the strategic gaps left due to state collapse, especially in Iraq and Syria. Examples include the widespread presence of armed factions in Iraq and the recruitment of foreign groups such as the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade and the Pakistani Zainebiyoun Brigade to operate in Syria. All of these groups have broad popular support because they are often the military wing of social movements that emerged in countries where Iran has obvious influence over various religious currents.[12]

12. Payam Mohseni and Hussein Kalout, "Iran's Axis of Resistance Rises: How Did Chaos Make It Stronger?", *Foreign Affairs*; 27 January 2017; accessed on 1 September 2019. https://bit.ly/2LnnTiB

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard efforts to form a transnational Shi'ite movement consisting of hardline groups active in the Middle East and Southeast Asia has benefited from the hardening of the sectarian identities since the Arab Spring, and then the events in Syria and Bahrain. This was accompanied by the rise of ISIS in Iraq and the Saudi-led military intervention against the Houthis in Yemen, contributing to the large-scale crystallization of Shi'ite identity across the Middle East. Toby Matthiesen observed this phenomenon emanating from what he described as the Shi'ite public space, as the symbols used to frame the conflicts in Syria and Iraq as holy wars spread "widely via social media and Shi'ite satellite channels, which reinforced transnational sectarian identities."[13]

Shi'ism is undoubtedly a pivotal focus in Iranian domestic politics, but its mark on Iranian foreign strategy is less clear. Religious identity and beliefs affect but do not dictate the Iranian approach to foreign policy. Religion is one of many factors that contribute to Iran's behavior on the international stage but is not often perceived as being a primary nor even secondary concern, given that Iran is a Shi'ite state. It is true that Iran's Shi'ism may render Iran's leaders more willing to support Shi'ites outside Iran. On the other hand, we find that Shi'ite groups loyal to Iran already consider themselves a global link under the spiritual and

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13. Sardar Falaki, "One of the Commanders of the Syrian Front, in an Interview with Mashregh News Site," *Bultan News*; July 2016; accessed on 1 September 2019. https://bit.ly/2NEYm7w

political authority of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. These views have been shaped by a common purpose in conflicts in the region. The longer such conflicts last, the more they become based on sectarian identity politics, which then reinforces and cultivates more links between Iran and its allies in the Islamic world.[14]

Regional and International Challenges Facing Shi'ite Geopolitics

The challenges facing Shi'ite geopolitics are no less important than those Iran faces today in terms of both the political system and foreign policy. The Iranian situation cannot be addressed separately, given the strategic integration of Iran's approach to foreign policy. At the level of Shi'ite geopolitics, the Iranian strategy has worked to make use of its many strengths to consolidate this geopolitics in theory and practice by relying on some of the pillars of Iran's geopolitical strength, such as its geographic location, political system, economic and military capacity, and large population. All these strengths, however, have not enabled Iran to overcome other challenges that Iran has no capacity of handling, most notably:

1. Conflict within the geographic scope of Shi'ite geopolitics: The nature of conflict within the territory of the Islamic

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14. Afshon Ostovar, "Sectarian Dilemmas in Iranian Foreign Policy: When Strategy and Identity Policies Collide"; Carnegie Middle East Center, 30 November 2016, p. 3; access on 1 September 2019. https://bit.ly/2m85Zrr

world since 2003 (when the practical application of Shi'ite geopolitical views also began) has generated several strategic obstacles for Iran. One of the most important of those is the emergence of international axes and alliances that have found themselves in a direct clash with what is considered to be the threat posed by the "Shi'ite Crescent." This has forced Iran to put aside many of its geostrategic ambitions towards linking the geographic lines with their borders and seas to the state at the heart of the sect – Iran. Despite Iran's official announcement that today it controls several Arab states and has a presence in the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, and even the Atlantic Ocean, this is ultimately an attempt to overcome the geographic hurdles currently standing in the face of Shi'ite geopolitics. Specifically, it faces a U.S. presence across Muslim territory; Russian, Chinese, and European involvement in the affairs of the Islamic world; the political role of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt; and the normalization of relations between Israel and the Persian Gulf states.

2. **Geopolitical competition:** Iran occupies a central position in Middle Eastern geopolitics, not for ideological reasons but for geopolitical reasons. That is because of the geographic spot on which Iran finds itself, which has been and still is at the heart of the region and represents the center of the Shi'ite sphere. This reality has prompted geopolitical competition against Iran, especially from other competing poles in the Islamic world. We are talking here about Turkey and Saudi Arabia, two countries that have rushed to

adopt policies to counter Iranian geostrategic projects. In addition, Turkey seeks to revive its influence over former Ottoman territory, while Saudi Arabia seeks to revive the project of Arab solidarity and confrontation.

The nature of this geopolitical competition has put Shi'ite geopolitics into a state of a strategic coma for some time, especially since this competition has taken on an international dimension that has negatively affected Iran's strategic role in the Middle East. The U.S. role in Iraq and Syria has delayed the Iranian strategic project in the short term. The Saudi role in Yemen has hindered Shi'ite ambitions in the medium term. And Hezbollah's Israel problem, plus Israeli normalization with Persian Gulf states, has resulted in a fragmentation of Iran's role in Shi'ite geopolitics in the long term. Iranian-Afghan relations have also indirectly impacted the nature and situation of the Shi'ite minority in Afghanistan, especially after the rise of the Taliban.

3. Leadership in the Shi'ite world: Since its establishment, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been unable to form a good, stable relationship with the center of Shi'ite scholarship in Najaf. Iranian anxiety surfaces from time to time because of the reluctance on behalf of Najaf scholars to change their traditional view on the subject of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, a new view in field of Shi'ite jurisprudence put forward by Khomeini to lay the foundation for his absolute rule over the country. As a result, the Iranian regime

is constantly anxious about Najaf. This is in addition to other disagreements between the religious authorities and the political system regarding the methods of governance[15].

The dispute between Iran and the Najaf scholars is not confined just to political disagreements but extends to other areas in terms of Iran's role in Iraq and Lebanon, for example. Today, this dispute has shifted moving into the social context in these countries, and evolves around the Najaf scholars' attitude towards Iran as a representative the Shi'ite world. Several anti-Iran demonstrations have taken place, blaming Iran for the political and economic failure that Shi'ite societies are currently experiencing. This, in turn, has created a serious challenge that has begun to arise far from the media in dialogues on religious, doctrinal, and political issues between supporters of the top Shi'ite authority, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, and supporters of Khamenei. This dispute could escalate in the future with the escalation of anti-Iran protest movements in these countries.

4. Post-Soleimani Shi'ite geopolitics: The U.S. assassination of Soleimani in 2020 triggered several of the challenges Iran has faced within the framework of Shi'ite geopolitics, especially paired with the U.S. sanctions due to the nuclear program and continued military targeting

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15. Ali Mamouri, "Iran on Quest to Legitimize Velayat-e Faqih in Iraqi Seminaries"; *Al-Monitor*, August 2013; accessed on 1 September 2019. https://bit.ly/2pG3bTZ.

of Axis of Resistance groups in Iraq and Syria. More importantly, several Shi'ite political movements managed to liberate themselves from the subordination role imposed onto them by Soleimani's presence. Soleimani's absence has undoubtedly created a very difficult regional situation for Iran. His successor as commander of the Quds Force, Esmail Qaani, has been unable to overcome the new reality or even minimize its effects.

5. The international variable: The political challenges facing Shi'ite groups in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon (specifically those loyal to Iran), the new situation in Afghanistan and Yemen, the transformation of Arab-Turkish-Israeli relations, and the escalation of the international conflict between Russia and China on one hand and the United States, the European Union, and the United Kingdom on the other: these factors have confronted Iran with international transformations, which it cannot control. Khamenei has attempted to maintain Iran's options in terms of the nuclear negotiations and the role of Iran, especially with regard to removing the Revolutionary Guard from the list of foreign terrorist organizations. It can still be said, however, that the international variable, especially the nuclear program and the associated sanctions, leaves Shi'ite geopolitics vulnerable to major shocks that Iran has been unable to contain, specifically when it comes to the resources and support required to maintain and strengthen this type of geopolitics.

Conclusion

The main concern of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the symbol of Shi'ite politicization, was to build a political structure that could extend past Iran's political borders and therefore transmit the Shi'ite religiopolitical movement in Iran to others through a process of political modelling and indoctrination. The first political model in Iraq and Lebanon was converted into political movements based on Shi'ism to gain sovereignty and power not only in the Islamic world but anywhere. In other words, Iran has sought to influence popular religiopolitical movements in various parts of the world in recent decades. Some of these movements in the Sunni Islamic world have set their stance against the Shi'ite structure, while others identify with them based on a common purpose and a shared project.

In this context, it is possible to make some general observations about Shi'ite geopolitics, including:

- The general concept of Shi'ite geopolitics involves a set of material, moral, and intellectual components through which Iran has defined the nature of its roles and policies. The components of standing, history, and geography enter into the political, the military and the economic field as channels that affect Iran's strategic mindset amidst several options and fields through which it has been able to act in several areas of Shi'ite geopolitics.

- Shi'ite geopolitics has helped launch the wave of modern politicization based on religious identity. This is one of the geopolitical functions that present-day Shi'ites have performed, by linking theory and practice in the context of Iran's strategic mindset.

- Shi'ite geopolitical strategy has sought to increase opportunities for impact and expand Shi'ite spheres of influence, emanating from Iran, as a viable strategy for unifying Shi'ite societies and giving them access to power and control.

- The ultimate objective of Shi'ite geopolitics is to form a global Islamic government organically linked to the government of the Islamic Jurist in Iran. To that end, Iran has supported political and armed movements to achieve this objective.

- Iran has tried to link the vitality of Shi'ite geopolitics and the political ascendance of Shi'ites in the region, and it has also supported the rise of political Islam in general. Thus, Iran has tried to explore this ascent in order to support and strengthen these geopolitics.

- Shi'ite geopolitics has faced several regional and international challenges, most notably the U.S. policies, Soleimani's absence, geopolitical competition in the Islamic world, and leadership conflict within the Shi'ite world. As a result, Iran faces an extremely complex foreign environment.

- Shi'ite geopolitics is an Iranian strategic objective that evolves around its regional and international role. It is therefore always trying to link regional and international challenges and the pathways of this geopolitics. Therefore, it addresses these challenges carefully and seeks to contain them so as not to affect the future of Shi'ite geopolitics.

Chapter VII

The Shi'a and the Question of Women's Role

Self-Formation and Shifting Gender Roles in the Lives of Shi'ite Muslim Women in *Hawza*s

Ilham Makki

Introduction

After the change of the political system in Iraq in 2003, political actors exhibited clear contradictions in their views on state-building and the nature of the political system. This complication is linked to Iraqi society's historical legacy and its interaction with the political regimes that have ruled since the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921. The political changes introduced by the international allied forces under the leadership of the United States gave Islamic parties, particularly Shi'ite parties, the opportunity to realize political gains.

The access of Shi'ite Islamic parties to power is new in the history of Shi'ites in Iraq, who suffered from marginalization and exclusion under the oppressive dictatorship of the Baath regime. After the establishment of the parliamentary political system, and within a clear orientation toward attaining a monopoly on power, Shi'ite Islamic parties encouraged the participation of women in political life, as constituents and candidates, not from the perspective of a belief in women's rights to political participation and decision-making positions, but in order to win the greatest number of parliamentary seats.

In addition, the Shi'ite religious authority, represented by the *marja* Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani, placed great importance on involving women in his new political and religious directives, and the Shi'ite religious authority supported women's enrollment in seminary studies in all governorates and cities with a Shi'ite majority.

The term "scholarly seminary" (*hawza*) is used to refer to a center where Shi'ite Imams study and is a space that was exclusively for men since its establishment in 460 AH (1067 AD).[1] Inside these seminaries the principles of jurisprudence, philosophy and theology are taught, in addition to the subjects of grammar, faith, logic, Quranic recitation and calligraphy. These schools aim to prepare female proselytizers, preachers and teachers, with the task of proselytizing (*tabligh*), raising awareness and guidance, in order to spread Shi'ite identity and Shi'ism in Iraqi society (political Shi'ism).

Other women were excluded from the seminary. However, after the Iranian revolution, the overthrow of the Shah and the announcement of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the

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1. The *hawza* (scholarly seminary) is a recent term that means: "A scholarly institution established for the purpose of religious scholarly studies, which enables students to learn the principles of the Sharia in the various fields of their scholarly life." It is like an entity that expresses the view of the Imami Shi'ite sect (*Imamiyyah*) on all its different religious, social, political and intellectual affairs. For further information, see: Al-Qasem, Adnan Farhan 2016. *The history of scholarly seminaries and religious schools among the* Shi'ite *Imamiyah. Part* 1. Beirut: Lebanon, Dar al-Salam.

education of women became one of the most important pillars of religious education in the Islamic Republic. In 1984, on the occasion of the establishment of the scholarly seminary Alzahra University, Al-Khomeini stated the nature of the reasons that led the Shi'ite authorities in Iran to allow women to study in the seminary, the most important of which were to support and provide services to Islam and to educate and train society: "...During the revolution, the esteemed women of Iran established that they, side by side with men, are able to provide valuable services to Islam and Muslims in terms of social and political activities and that they can become leaders in educating and training society."[2] The reasons for involving women in religious/ seminary education are no different in Iraq than in Iran, as the seminary as an educational/religious institution became a tool to support the Shi'ite Islamic parties, representative of the new political system.

Women's circumstances and choices in Iraq were affected by the special political, economic, and social contexts, both before and after 2003. Shi'ite Muslim women were forced to face complicated intertwined political discourses under the Baath rule prior to 2003, which tried to involve women in development programs and to adopt international human rights discourses by ratifying a number of international

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2. Künkler, Mirjam. 2016. "Training Women as Religious Professionals: Iran's Shiite Seminaries." https://www.mei.edu/publications/training-women-religious-professionals-irans-shiite-seminaries

agreements and treaties that involve the inclusion of equal rights for women and men in the constitution and laws. At the same time, the Baath regime did not address the conservative tribal/religious cultural system opposed to women's rights. Gender policies in Baath regime plans did not achieve actual equality for women; discrimination and the deprivation of basic human rights continued. The matter was more complicated for Shi'ite Muslim women than other women, as Shi'ite sectarian identity requires that they act in accordance with the jurist)taqlid), who is necessarily opposed to the ruling political system because it does not possess the qualities of a legitimate rule according to Shi'ite sectarian beliefs. Unlike men, Shi'ite Muslim women bore the burden of the problems of the secular and Islamic structural contexts. Large numbers of them were deprived of their right to education and public participation in order to establish their opposition to the Baath regime and their adherence to Shi'ite political/Islamic identity.

This paper focuses on the experience of Shi'ite Muslim women studying in scholarly seminary schools in Baghdad and Najaf between 2015–2016, understanding the extent of its impact on their identities, how it contributed to reshaping gender relations which framed women's roles within the limits of the private sphere and the public sphere and how it helped create new paths and possibilities in women's lives. The article tries to understand how shifts

in gender relations and roles impacted women's lives and contributed to reshaping their identities to align with their new roles, even when gender standards inside their families and society or the views of the religious authorities did not change. The field study was part of Ilham Makki's (the author of this chapter) doctoral thesis; in it she relied on the anthropological method by using participant observation and conducting in depth interviews with women inside seminary schools in Baghdad and Najaf.

The study within this chapter relies on the feminist approach in identifying the concept of *gender* as a cultural construct, and an intersecting and interactive relationship between the concept of religion and gender, which is not limited to the past and our reconstructed historical legacies, but represents a continuous process of influence and impact on all political and social shifts in the lives of individuals and societies in the present. The aim of this study is not to uncover the broad Sharia and jurisprudential principles regarding the organization of gender relations and roles, as found in the Quran, Sunna, and hadiths of the Shi'ite Imamate. Rather, it is to discover the practices and beliefs of Muslim women on gender standards, relations and roles as they live them in daily life, which are linked to the deep structures of cultural and religious/Islamic life, and to uncover the underlying and hidden shifts in their process of reinventing themselves within the new political, social and economic contexts.

Contextual shifts in the gender roles of Muslim women within the family and society

"I don't want to just be a housewife."

This is an expression that many women repeated during the interviews in Iraq, and precisely the same words were repeated by women in Najaf. It is an expression that brings up problematic gender assumptions, standards and expectations and the division of roles between men and women as if they are part of human nature when in fact they were culturally created and historically supported by religious values, practices and sermons. These assumptions and expectations lead to specific contextual stereotypes, imposing certain practices and roles according to gender, which are constantly being assessed, even if they are not an actual practice. Nevertheless, the stereotypical roles socially established for women are deemed less valuable than those roles assigned to men. Women are limited to fields and roles lacking in equality, which marginalizes their presence and their impact on everyday life, despite their wide participation.

The statement above gives us the opportunity to explore what the past studies "on women" have overlooked, especially Muslim women, who are represented sometimes as victims, passive, and submissive beings. This can be done through exploring in depths women's practices and learning their strategies in adapting to the social structure

and gender roles in a way that meets their aspirations as individuals and crossing the barriers of exclusion and marginalization to reach self-realization. This knowledge is available only through women's stories and voices, by showing the many structural changes in their reality and the effectiveness, activity, and influence women possess on the personal level and the influence they have on their families and societies.

Political changes imposed a new reality on Iraq in 2003 for Shi'ite Muslim women's roles and for their status. Women's stories contain understandings that reflect the process of transformation and change in their lives since the religious authorities in Najaf allowed women to participate in public life. Despite the limited scope of the activities acceptable for Muslim women, the type of activities that became acceptable for Muslim women changed materially from those in traditional gender norms. The Shi'ite religious authorities encouraged women to participate in politics as electors and candidates for membership in the Parliament, in addition to assuming leadership positions in the government. Also it was allowed for women to enter the field of religious sacred learning, to study at seminary schools, and to perform roles that were exclusive for men, such as education and religious proselytizing in the public sphere.

One of the respondents from Najaf nearly summarized the gender shifts experienced by Muslim women who enrolled in seminary schools. She described the shift in her life

because of the seminary: she was in one situation and then she was in another situation; she moved to a new world, became another person. She was a housewife performing her traditional roles as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law, responsible for housework such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of children. However, her roles changed. She is currently an employee at the shrine after completing two years of studies at the seminary. After she finishes her work at the shrine, she also works as a volunteer at a center for girls and women memorizing the Quran.

"I was reborn because of the seminary, as if I was in one world and then I was in another. I was non-existent, I didn't feel I existed. After I left the house and studied at the seminary, I felt like I'm a real person, I am a being and I exist. I don't know how I was living with myself before. The seminary taught us how to speak, how to demand our rights. We were like a bridge people walked all over. We were servants in the house, we lived to serve others. Now many things have changed in our lives. Our relatives have started to treat us differently, they've started calling before they come to visit. This didn't happen before, because we were at home all day, seven days a week, only rarely going out. Our way of speaking and talking to people changed. Our families have started to feel that strength, they say to us: That's how the seminary taught you to speak! I used to be embarrassed to speak the truth or defend my rights, I was shy. Now I have changed, I've become more self-confident."[3]

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3. She spoke in the plural, meaning her and her mother-in-law (the dual). People from Najaf often use the plural when speaking generally.

Her story is very similar to the story of another respondent from Baghdad whose seminary studies changed her life completely, as she described it. She was a typical woman in the traditional culture, also a housewife, spending her days doing housework, not participating in any activities outside the house. She indicated the shift in gender relations through the changes that occurred in her relations with her husband and her strong feelings of self-worth as a result of the religious learning she obtained from seminary schools. Education gave her various skills and abilities in debate and discourse. In addition to studying at the seminary, she organizes a women's discussion group on social media related to various general religious subjects. In the group, the women discuss the problems that exist and refute the erroneous interpretations attached to them:

"Before the seminary I did not participate in long discussions or go into controversial subjects with my husband. First, because I didn't have information on the subject or issue being discussed, and because by nature I didn't like to argue. I'd give a simple opinion or share information I'd heard somewhere and stop talking, and my husband would continue the discussion and in the end his opinion would be the end of the discussion. Now, I've changed a lot, I've become different. I've become more capable of having a discussion because I have proof and evidence for my argument, especially on religious matters. And I have used this ability in my own way in discussing other subjects, because I have confidence in my ability and

knowledge. The thing I loved most about the seminary is research. I submitted a study on Fatima Zahra, it helped me collect a lot of information and read many books. Currently I do research and we discuss it on WhatsApp. I've started looking at things from another angle. For example, there is a big difference between the person who believes and the person who learns. God Almighty favored the learner over the believer by 70 levels [in heaven]. The believer receives the grace of their worship, but the learner wants others to benefit from the knowledge they possess. My husband was and still is just a believer. Me, I am a learner."

Another respondent from Najaf shared her own understanding of her role and place as a woman who enjoys some of the human rights, even if those around her did not treat her this way. The strength of gender norms lies in the fact that we simply learn ways of existing, ways of doing things, without looking at the reasons behind them, and without acknowledging or distinguishing the larger structure on which they rest. The respondent described how her husband still held the same old conceptions about the position and place of women and their role at home. But she believes that women's work outside home or her participation in public activities and having relations outside the family will help her affirm her existence.

"I don't want to be just a housewife. I want to exist outside the house. Men forget that women have minds, they only acknowledge that women have roles related to home matters,

such as children education and childcare. But for me this is not enough. There is always something missing, I don't feel that I exist. So, I am currently studying at the seminary. I want to prove myself. As I said, men and husbands forget that women have minds. After I finish my seminary studies and get my certificate, I think I will work as a teacher."[4]

Shi'ite Muslim women have proven that gender concepts change according to the general contexts, and that the new roles result in a new status and position. This was confirmed by a respondent from Baghdad, who described herself as being an "ordinary" woman before she decided to go to the mosque and participate in Quranic recitation lessons. This was followed by her enrollment in studies at seminary schools. Then she became a teacher at a government institute for the Islamic sciences. The moment she decided to participate was pivotal in her life. Her traditional role as housewife changed to a reciter and teacher of the Quran[5]. She is now one of ten female arbitrators in Iraq. Her new roles, which were traditionally roles for men, caused a significant transformation in her professional and personal life, and her self-image and position in her family and in society changed.

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4. Interview, student in the second stage, married, four children, in her forties, Najaf, 13 April 2016.
5. That is, as a result of acquiring the skill of Quranic recitation, she became certified and her judgment credible; she could certify other women as capable of reciting the Quran and qualified to teach other women.

A group of respondents shared the above respondent's opinion that the seminary impacted several aspects of their lives and caused clear shifts in their personal characteristics:

"The seminary changed many qualities. We learned patience and respect. The seminary was a refuge, it goes beyond just studying. People think that all we do in the seminary is "crying and slapping ourselves," they don't know the topics and disciplines they teach us."[6]

During the interviews, women mentioned how the seminary had a significant role in changing some personal traits. "My personality changed after I entered the seminary, I became calmer." This sentence was also among those repeated by the women in Baghdad and Najaf. The women pointed to the subjects studied at the seminary as the causes of the change. These focus on family connections, goodwill, not causing harm, and compassion among people. Some of them attributed the change to the lack of time, that they were forced to assess daily matters by priority, and there wasn't time for bickering or small problems:

"My relationship with my husband, my children, and my husband's family changed noticeably after I enrolled in the seminary. It became calmer. Before the seminary there was

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6. Unorganized focus group consisting of a group of second stage students. In the interview, most of the women used the plural when speaking, and the other women were agreeing with them on all the opinions mentioned. Thus, I have maintained the sentences as spoken during the interview. Baghdad, 10 May 2016.

always bickering and tension in the house between me and my husband and children as well as my husband's family. In the seminary I learned how to control anger and deal with my husband patiently and calmly and listen to him before giving him my opinion. This is part of his right as a husband/spouse."[7]

Shifts in traditional gender roles and the factor of time, "Time started to be a blessing"

Gender norms are to some degree hidden structural elements, directed and organized through their authority over our spiritual, social and symbolic world, as well as over how we communicate. Gender as a cultural construct is linked with some standard rules, which relate to real men and real women and lead to the realm of expectations and symbols. Gender norms don't just impact specifically gender-based experiences and activities, but also the formation of skills and interests, and they influence our deep mental architecture, the unconscious. During the interviews, most of the respondents agreed that their traditional roles as housewives changed after they enrolled in seminary schools and engaged in new roles outside the home. However, housework remained the main part of their daily lives; their responsibilities as mothers and wives did not change. Thus, their understanding and treatment of time changed greatly, because it required that the hours of the

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7. Interview, student in her fifties, married, Baghdad, 19 October 2015.

day be organized and divided to accommodate the new skills and roles. Interestingly, most of their opinions were given without direct questions on this subject. The sentence "time became a blessing" was repeated by some of the respondents in Baghdad as well as some of the respondents in Najaf. This indicates that time was one of the major challenges faced by the women, as a result of their leaving the private sphere/home to study in seminaries, participate in volunteer work at certain religious organizations or obtain paid work opportunities.

"I was a housewife before I enrolled in the seminary. All my time was devoted to housework, raising and caring for my children and caring for my husband and mother-in-law. The seminary changed the order of my life, I have organized my time based on my daily schedule at the seminary. I don't sleep before I've cleaned the house and cooked for the next day. After I finish all of my duties, I sleep at nine o'clock. I wake up with the dawn prayer in order to finish cooking, cleaning and organizing the house. Even our relatives have started to know our bedtime and don't visit us late in the evening."[8]

Unmarried women are no different from married women in bearing responsibilities for housework, as certain issues impact women's control over their ability to divide their tasks up among the hours of the day and even the night. It also takes more time for women to do housework if they are

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8. Planned focus group, five students in the fifth stage, married, Najaf, 17 April 2016.

from a poorer class, or if the house does not have modern appliances that help them do housework faster and without spending as much energy. In addition to caring for children and routine work such as cleaning the house and washing dishes and clothes, there are traditional tasks that women must still perform. For example, most Iraqi families still prefer making bread at home instead of buying it; however, it requires a considerable amount of time to make every day, especially if there are a large number of people in the family. One of the respondents from Najaf, who was unmarried, did the housework, and she was no different from any married woman directly responsible for taking care of her husband and children; there were certain tasks she must do because they were part of her household duties, and she must also take care of her father and her male siblings. Therefore, she does all the tasks assigned to her before going to the seminary:

"When I have classes at the seminary, I sleep at about nine o'clock at night and wake up at two o'clock in the morning in order to finish all my housework before going to the seminary. I don't want to leave for my classes with someone at home saying that I left and didn't finish the housework. Honestly, you won't always find someone who accepts women leaving the house. That's why I'm careful to not give anyone in the house an excuse to prevent me from going to the seminary because of housework."[9]

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9. Teacher, unmarried, in her forties, Najaf seminary, 5 March 2016.

Another respondent from Najaf did not differ in terms of the type and quantity of tasks and housework she is responsible for even though she is married and has five children. However, from the beginning she remained determined to enroll in the seminary and not to be just a housewife again. After she finished her studies at the seminary, she got a job in the shrine. During the interview she described how the factor of time was turned on its head. After not leaving the house except in cases of necessity and for visits, she started going out at seven o'clock and not returning until five o'clock in the evening. This forced her to divide the hours of the day according to her new activities.

Despite the differing general contexts in Baghdad and Najaf, the details of the story of the respondent in Baghdad was no different from the other respondents in Najaf. She asserts that gender norms, expectations and roles remain fixed even with the increased signs of modernity in the capital city of Baghdad, which had a greater fortune in the modernization process than other governorates, especially those in the south.

Not all women continued with housework at the same pace as the respondents above. Some women changed their way of dealing with traditional roles, which they'd followed in the past precisely to conform with gender norms and to be the good wife and mother that devotes all her time, effort and energy to the house, children and husband. Now these

Muslim women use their time according to the new priorities in their lives, as happened with a respondent from Baghdad:

"You can say that I am a good housewife. I am used to doing all the housework by myself, raising and taking care of the children and taking care of my husband. However, things changed after I enrolled in the seminary and then the university. My children sensed the changes first. You can say that they suffered as a result of me leaving the house to study. They were deprived of care, guidance and the foods that used to take all my time. They tried to make me quit studying and going to the seminary, but I refused and told them that this is my dream. I was deprived of it before, how could you now deprive me of it again? Now they've pretty much adjusted to the new situation."[10]

The views of seminary schools towards the reproductive role of women and their role as mothers

The assumption that women are the only ones capable of providing care to children (unpaid work) placed the full responsibility for all the consequences that might result from reducing or delaying childcare on them. There is a strong relationship between empowering women to attain their human rights and the task and responsibility to take care of children. The existence of childcare establishments helps women obtain opportunities for empowerment and for

10. Teacher, married, in her seventies with seven children, Baghdad, 7 December 2015.

pursuing their rights. This is what most of the seminaries I visited during the field study sought to achieve. In general, nearly all the seminaries I visited had children present.[11] They moved around with the mothers, who are actually students. There was a clear acceptance of the presence of children inside the seminaries and a high understanding of women's role as mothers and of their situation and responsibility with regard to taking care of children. Most of the seminaries allocated a special room as a nursery for children and took care of them while the mothers were in classes. The nursery inside the seminary has the same general atmosphere as the seminary,[12] and is under the supervision and observation of the management.

Most of the seminary administrations during the field study agreed that the most important reason women leave their studies is, first, the husband forbidding the woman to go out, and second, the responsibility to take care of children and women's inability to control their time and manage their household tasks. A director at a seminary in Najaf stated:

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11. Male children are not allowed to enter women's seminaries if they have reached puberty, i.e., around Twelve years of age.
12. During my visit to the nursery at the Imam Ali Shrine, which is a nursery for women working at the shrine, I noticed an educational curriculum for children of nursery school age. There were lessons on memorizing the Quran given to children over the age of four and lessons for learning to pray, in order to prepare them to participate in the special celebrations the children participate in as well as competitions on memorizing the Quran.

"Many women stopped attending classes in the seminary as a result of their commitments of taking care of children. Unfortunately, they couldn't balance their responsibilities at home and their studies in the seminary."[13]

Most of the women who are able to find work opportunities and complete their education inside the seminaries or their governmental and public academic education have children that are no longer very young and have started primary school, which helps the women utilize the time the children are at school to devote to their studies. There are some women who leave their children with a female relative, with their family or their husband's family. In addition, even when there is no room allocated for the children (a nursery) at the seminaries, women help each other if one of them is not able to leave her child at home for one reason or another. During the field study in Baghdad, one of the students arrived one day carrying a baby. She calmly placed him in one of the corners of the large hall and asked another woman there to take care of him while she finished her first class. Of course, the women took turns taking care of the child during class time, without the school administration making any objection or giving any indication that this action was unacceptable.

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13. School director in her seventies, Najaf, 5 January 2016.

A similar situation happened in Najaf when one of the teachers, whose child was with her in the classroom, started nursing her child in the middle of the lesson. It was an was Arabic language class, and the teacher had a large book on the rules of Arabic in front of her on the table and the child was sitting at the same table. When the child started to cry, her mother (the teacher) picked her up and put her in her lap while she continued the explanation and commented on the sentences and their syntax, all while not stopping the explanation for a moment! Children accompanying the mothers/students is a natural thing inside the seminaries.

I saw no sign of surprise from any of the other students, all was normal. The seminary's point of view is based on Islam's view of motherhood and its connection to women. Motherhood is a topic and issue that is viewed in the lessons as a higher value whose responsibility falls on women. One of the seminaries devoted one lesson a week, called the psychology lesson, to focus on ways of raising children and how to treat them at various ages. The view of the seminaries on accepting women/students as mothers who are directly responsible for taking care of children is in line with a reality that has not changed much even in advanced societies, where the percentage of working women is almost equal to the number of working men in advanced industrialized societies, however, the responsibility of taking care of children is still a basic task of women, and a husband's participation is just a temporary contribution to those responsibilities.

The seminary gave mothers/students a better opportunity than those provided by other governmental institutions which strictly ban the presence of children inside the institutions. The above stories about the women/students and how they dealt with children inside the seminaries rarely occurs in official schools and universities. At the same time, the government's efforts to provide and establish childcare establishments were suspended years ago. Even those nurseries located in some government institutions are not at a level that ensures a child's rights and don't meet the needs of working women, whether in the public sector or the private sector. This forces women to either pay a not-insignificant amount of money to nurseries and preschools or to stop working, which is what happens with a large number of women.

Gender shifts among Muslim women and confronting the patriarchal system

Women going to the seminary creates a threat to the patriarchal system and its institutions, also it is a challenge to the hegemony and authority of men. Fear of gender shifts were not limited to the network of family relations. There were various forms of opposition from society, even within the religious institution itself. Barriers were established preventing women from reaching the higher levels of seminary education. The stories of Muslim women from all different classes and academic levels, in Baghdad and

Najaf, contained different types of problems and varying levels of male opposition, hidden and declared, to women going out into the public sphere, enrolling in the seminary, and the ensuing gender shifts.

One of the respondents mentioned that one of the representatives of a high religious authority (*marja'*) refused to use the word "seminary" for women's schools, and that he does not view them as a seminary in the traditional historical meaning of the word. Instead, he called them educational religious schools to raise awareness among women of the principles of Sharia and Jaafari jurisprudence. This description was repeated by a religious figure in Najaf, who stated that the so-called "women's seminaries" are outreach schools for women whose objective is to raise awareness among women and prepare them for the task of religious proselytizing.

However, the attitude in Najaf toward women's seminary schools was relatively better than in Baghdad. Because Najaf is a center and destination of Shi'ite students from around the world, academic seminaries are widespread, and its status as a religious city has helped women access educational opportunities inside the seminaries. Therefore, the opportunities of Shi'ite Muslim women who wanted to continue seminary education in Najaf were better. Due to the range of seminaries, and the presence of religious leaders/teachers who received their knowledge from

the sect's scholars, figures and authorities, women were encouraged to enroll in seminaries and continue studying at the advanced stages. As mentioned previously, women in Najaf reached the intermediary-advanced level: "The books that we study now are taught in men's seminaries at the advanced independent research stage," one of the students at the intermediary-advanced level at the women's seminary at Dar al-Hikma told the author. Women were able to break through the historical sacred barrier and the exclusive space of religious knowledge possessed by men.

In Baghdad, however, according to the information obtained, women did not reach the intermediary-advanced level despite women's appeals and demands to open schools to accommodate women who wished to obtain knowledge in line with their intellectual abilities.

A respondent from Baghdad described the contradictory position of the representatives of the religious authorities, which she found unconvincing: "One of the representatives told me, why do you want to continue the seminary studies, what do you want to be, is it possible for a woman to be a *mujtahid* (individuals with the authority to interpret Islamic law)? This is hard for women."[14] Those are the attitudes of some religious leaders stemming from the historical legacy,

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14. Interview, teacher in the seminary, unmarried, in her forties, Baghdad, 3 November 2015.

that the seminary is for men only. However, they have no choice other than to be supportive of the directives of the religious authorities that called for the participation of women in the new phase, which the Shi'ites are experiencing as a political group, and their important role in proselytizing, spreading Shi'ism and strengthening Shi'ite identity. But this support does not mean that they are relinquishing their role as the guards in consolidating and preserving the hierarchical system and gender norms. Women leaving the private sphere/home and their enrollment in seminaries and their participation in men's activities and roles is a new shift, that still arouses concern among some religious leaders/representatives. The transformations in the lives of Muslim women require pivotal systemic changes in order for women to be accepted as effective actors within the seminary institutions and the other traditional institutions.

According to the observations during the interviews and from participating in women's classes and activities at the seminaries, it was found that Muslim women do not discuss their issues and struggles using feminist approaches and concepts, nor try to use official frameworks (the constitution, the law) in demanding the right to equality and justice like other Muslim women, who have adopted the approach of activists and human rights defenders, organized under the umbrella of the feminist movement, particularly in the capital, Baghdad, and the other governorates. There are also no jurisprudential, scholarly attempts to reinterpret the

sacred texts (Quran, the Sunna) to bring them into alignment with the principles of gender equality and justice.

Pragmatism is what frames women's discussion on demanding rights as well as the focus on the academic results of Muslim women going out and studying in the seminary because this strengthens their roles as good mothers and wives, and the importance of their roles as mothers will help advance society, which is a practical and feasible solution for many of the problems. Women are focusing on results instead of the origin of the legislative text governing gender relations and the related practices, roles and tasks. The participation of Muslim Shi'ite women in the discussion on equality between men and women, or the demand for the application of those Sharia texts that support the principle of women's equality and rights, takes on another dimension and is considered political because it involves discussing and criticizing the Shi'ite faith. The Shi'ite religious discourse was and remains focused on strengthening political identity and addressing the historical exclusion and marginalization of Shi'ites. Thus, any attempt to participate in reinterpreting the sacred texts and purifying them of patriarchal interpretations is an attempt to strike at the foundation of the Shi'ite faith, because the majority of the interpretations of rulings are by infallible Imams.

Conclusion

In the interviews, Shi'ite Muslim women established that the concepts of gender are changing according to the general contexts, and that new roles and positions have resulted from them. The political changes in Iraq in 2003 imposed a new reality on the roles and place of Shi'ite Muslim women. Studying the new reality within an analytical framework and gender approach sheds light on the dynamics of power impacting the interactions of Muslim women and their relations with men in the general gender system, whether within the family or society. The analysis of gender concepts and interactions of Muslim women unequivocally showed the extent of the resolve, determination and perseverance of Muslim women and their effectiveness in reshaping gender norms and roles to ensure the recalibration of the concept of subjective equality, stored in women's own perceptions of themselves as beings who are in their view no different than men, despite the continuous pressures and challenges that women faced and continue to face.

The interviews with Muslim women showed how seminary studies introduced great changes in their lives. The women described the process of the shift in stereotypical gender roles, defined as housework and childcare, to new roles and tasks after their enrollment in studies at the seminary. The levels of gender transformation varied among the women. Some of them exerted great effort and energy in order to reconcile the new situation/role with their traditional roles,

without support from their family. Some of the women stated that the changes in gender relations happened at the level of the family and relatives. There are women who gave their own indications of the transformation process, most importantly the high feeling of self-esteem and self-confidence, and learning various skills in terms of debate and discussion as a result of studying at the seminary.

Nevertheless, housework remained the main part of women's daily lives and their responsibility as mothers and wives did not change. Therefore, their concept and treatment of time changed greatly, because it required that the hours of the day be organized and divided to accommodate their new tasks and roles. Not all women maintained the same pace of housework; some women changed their way of dealing with traditional roles, which they had followed completely in order to conform with gender norms and be the good wife and mother that devotes all her time, effort and energy to the house, children and husband. The women's stories showed that there was a clear acceptance of the presence of children inside the seminaries and a high understanding of the role of women as mothers and their situation and responsibilities in taking care of children. The seminary's view is based on Islam's view of motherhood and its connection to women. Motherhood is one of the topics and issues that the lessons focus on as a higher value whose responsibility falls on women. The seminary gave mothers/students better opportunities than those provided by other governmental

institutions, which strictly prohibit the presence of children inside the institutions. The stories of Muslim women from all different classes and academic levels, in Baghdad and Najaf, contained different types of problems and varying levels of patriarchal opposition, both hidden and evident, to women going out into the public sphere, enrolling in the seminary and the ensuing gender shifts.

Shi'ite Women in Lebanon

Dalal Al-Bizri

Other Shi'ite Women

As part of this conference on Shi'ite political Islam, I will be discussing one of the subtopics of the conference: "Shi'ite Women in Lebanon." But to approach the topic of Shi'ite women under the rubric of Shi'ite political Islam suggests that Lebanese Shi'ite women are wholly incorporated into one of the two Shi'ite organizations, the Amal Movement or Hezbollah.

Before going further, we must first distinguish between the two organizations. Hezbollah is a Shi'ite fundamentalist organization. It dominates the Shi'ite and Lebanese spheres. The Amal Movement is not fundamentalist; it resembles the other Lebanese sectarian parties but is allied with Hezbollah in what is known as the "Shi'ite duo."

While most Shi'ites, both men and women, support these two organizations, there are varying numbers of women outside of these organizations: non-religious women, unveiled women, secularists, women with a general or specific leftist leaning, women who enjoy a high level of freedom to live and act as they wish.

These women will not be found in official state positions, at either the high- or mid-level, as obtaining an official position requires complete loyalty to one side of the "Shi'ite duo"—these organizations accept no competitors. Within the existing confessional system in Lebanon, these two organizations hold all the Shi'ite positions in the state.

You may find such women in other roles: journalists, writers, professionals and artists. They include prominent figures who take positions contrary to those of the "duo." They have views, platforms, posts or literary and political works. Some are subject to intimidation campaigns and pressures.

This "type" of Shi'ite woman does not fall within any definition, whether academic or investigative; it exists but is fragmented. They do not meet and, with few exceptions, they may not even know one another, and thus do not represent one voice.

In this paper I discuss two events that brought Shi'ite women together outside the umbrella of the "duo": the campaign for children's custody and the Shi'ite uprising in October 2019.

Beyond these two exceptions, you will find the other Shi'ite women, those who do not define themselves as Shi'ite except within the limits of their inherited culture. Their

Shi'ite "identity" is part of their experience, their culture, their folklore, their joy and pain, their cuisine, their games and hobbies—like other women from Lebanon's eighteen other sects. For them, being Shi'ite is part of their broader national, Lebanese, Arab, Eastern, Western identity. Placing such women within the category of "Shi'ite women" under the topic of "Shi'ite Islam" is to diminish them—it denies the complexities of their existence.

Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah and the Beginnings

A field study[1] conducted 32 years ago at the end of the Civil War on ten women with specific responsibilities in Hezbollah concluded that the conduct and ideas of these women bore a dialectical cast, in which a "discussion" between opposites was being negotiated, and a kind of special formula was reached. The book summarized this formula as follows: these women move within convictions, views and ways of life that lie between two circles that govern their lives. The first is called "Modernized Islam" or modernist Islam, and the other is "Islamified Modernity." The first circle, "Modernized Islam" is found in most of the well-known contemporary issues: leaving the house freely, pursuing professional work, and participating in politics, and all such matters are welcomed among these women on the basis that Islam itself authorizes them. "Islamified

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1. Dalal Al-Bizri. *Sisters of Shadow and Certainty*. Beirut. Dar Al-Nahar, 1996.

Modernity," the other circle, involves entering into all of these spheres (work, education, etc.), but with conditions, first of all wearing the veil, or hijab. Here the conversation becomes absolute: women do not wear the hijab due to the pressure of tradition, environment or family, but by divine religious decree, unchanged by time or place.

A combination of sociological reality and religious authority placed the women of Hezbollah on this dialectical path, and though one side of this dialectic is held as sacred, there is still an openness to debate.

At the sociological level, this influx of modernity comes from two experiences. The first is Christian women, who were the first to have a relationship with the West and its modern culture and spread the ideas and ways of life of this culture in Lebanese society. The second experience is modern leftism, in which some of the women interviewed participated or had immediate family members who participated in it. Of all the other sects, Shi'ites were the most involved in this experience.

The second factor responsible for this dialectical path is the Lebanese Grand Ayatollah (*marja'*, religious authority), Sayyed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, who was at the time considered the "spiritual mentor" of Hezbollah. Fadlallah held high moral authority and produced extensive works. He had a special interest in women, and in non-traditional interpretations and jurisprudence.

One point is an exception in the thought of Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah on women, which is that of sex, polygamy, temporary marriage (*zawaj al-mut'ah*) and sexual "marital duties" as having the absolute priority. Other than that, he said that women have the right to work, even if the husband rejects the idea, and that women have the right to travel without the permission of their husband if the purpose of travel is to acquire knowledge. He said that there is nothing wrong with men doing housework, or for a breastfeeding woman to receive compensation, and that *bayt al-ta'a* (lit. "house of obedience," the practice of returning women to the marital home against their will) is tantamount to "life imprisonment." He said that the hadith "Never will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler" is weak (*da'if*), that the experience of the Queen of Sheba was successful, and that women can become judges in Shari'a courts. Some of his fatwas caused an outcry: these include his call upon the Jaafari courts to raise the age of custody from two to seven and allowing women who are the victims of marital violence to defend themselves with violence.[2]

However, Fadlallah's authority and his role as Hezbollah's spiritual mentor did not last. The parting of ways began in the mid-1990s, but this was preceded by some dark clouds in one of the last rounds of the Civil War when Fadlallah

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2. Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah. *Women's Corner*. Beirut. Dar Al-Malak. First Edition 1996. Pages: 66, 80, 83, 95, 96, 123, 124, 128.

refused to take sides in the clashes between Hezbollah and Amal known as the "War of Brothers."[3]

In the aftermath of this event, Fadlallah remained Hezbollah's "spiritual mentor" while at the same time refusing to assume any party position within it. This continued until 1992, when Imam Abu al-Qasim al-Musawi al-Khoei, Fadlallah's *marja'*, died and Imam Ali Khamenei was declared a *marja'* after his death. Fadlallah rejected Khamenei as *marja'*, while Hezbollah welcomed it. Here the differences became public.[4]

While Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah was a mentor to Hezbollah, he never adopted Hezbollah's mission of establishing an Islamic state. He also did not accept the theory of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (*Wilayat al-Faqih*)

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3. Hadi Karki. "Dahieh's Abu Bakr confronts Hezbollah on its home turf." 16-3-2009. Leb Reports: "Dahiyeh's Abu Bakr" confronts Hezbollah on its home turf.

4. Qasem Qasir. "What are Sayyed Fadlallah's points of agreement and disagreement with Iran?" 5-5-2020. The problem with this interpretation is that the date of Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei's death is different from the official one. Although, according to all sources, this writer is knowledgeable about his subject, Imam Al-Khoei did not die in 1996 but in 1992, which is the year after the field inquiry for the study "Sisters of Shadow and Certainty" was conducted, which is to say that it was conducted under the shadow of the dominance of Sayyid Fadlallah's thought. Most likely what happened is that the differences between Fadlallah and Hezbollah slowly matured until they became apparent a few years prior to his departure. The cause of this factual error in the date may also be that Hezbollah's young new leadership needed time to mature in order to be able to control the leadership of the sect before the dispute between them emerged, so that they could remove Fadlallah from influence without significant damage, seeing as Fadlallah was loved by both Shi'ites and Sunnis. Articles and Studies (bayynat.org).

followed by the party, and he issued a series of independent judgments (*ijtihadat*) intended to unify Sunnis and Shi'ites, the most famous of which are those that refute the narrative of "the tragedy of Fatima al-Zahra" at the hands of some of the Companions, Abu Bakr Al-Sadiq or Omar ibn Al-Khattab. He was a pioneer in adopting science in the service of religion. This includes his reliance on astronomy to determine the beginnings of the lunar months. His Ramadan calendar is still followed by many Shi'ites and Sunnis.[5]

This separation was followed by campaigns rejecting Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah. For example, he was subjected to attacks or interruptions by Hezbollah members during prayer and asked to reverse his fatwas that prohibit insulting the Companions. There were also threats to the students of his seminary (*hawza*) and pressure to force them to transfer to seminaries affiliated with Hezbollah.[6]

Gradually Sayyed Fadlallah lost his title of spiritual mentor of Hezbollah, and he started to disavow this title, as did Hezbollah. After that, we move on to other men, more adherent to Iranian religious authority. Some voices began to question whether the ideas of the Shi'ite sect "had become regressive and Salafist."[7]

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5. Ibid.
6. Hadi Karki. "The Abu Bakr of Dahieh faces Hezbollah at his home." 16/3/2009.
7. Salwa Fadel. "Why did the social concepts of Shi'ites become more regressive?" 28-3-2017. Why did the social concepts of Shias become more regressive? - Janoubia (janoubia.com)

Hezbollah and Women

Hezbollah officially announced its establishment in 1985 in a small booklet titled "The Hezbollah Mission, a letter to the Oppressed in Lebanon and the World." In this letter, women are mentioned only in their capacity, along with children, as victims of the Israelis and their militias in the Sabra and Shatila Massacre: "thousands of us were killed, women and children, in Sabra and Shatila."[8]

Hezbollah's political "document" issued in 2009, which is considered the reference text for the changes that gave Hezbollah a more prominent role after the 2006 war, mentions women twice. Women are mentioned once to condemn the American attack on the region "by launching destructive and devastating wars that do not distinguish between innocent and guilty or between children, the elderly, women and youth." The second time is when Hezbollah mentions that the state that it deems acceptable is "the state that works to strengthen the role of women and improve their participation in all spheres, within the framework of benefiting from their special characteristics and their influence and respecting their status."[9]

Thus, Hezbollah has no special concern for the issue of women but appends it to general political matters.

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8. "The Hezbollah Mission, a letter to the Oppressed in Lebanon and the World." February 1985. No publisher named. No country named. P. 2

9. Full text of Hezbollah's political document. Al-Manar Channel. 30-11-2009. Full text of Hezbollah's political document - 2009 (khiyam.com)

After the departure of Sayyed Fadlallah, the subject of women was not entrusted to Hezbollah's Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, but to his deputy, Sheikh Naim Qassem. The former, Hassan Nasrallah, has said but a few words here and there, such as on Muslim Women's Day, where in one of his speeches he encouraged early marriage.[10] Another example is in an interview with Al-Manar during past parliamentary elections (2018) about Hezbollah's position on not nominating women, where he presented the broad outlines of his theory: Women are not lacking "roles" in Hezbollah, "[there are] engineers, doctors, university professors and intellectuals," but he rejects the nomination of women to the Parliament, as he believes that the concept of "the representative's work is currently distorted in Lebanon." Women candidates would only be considered under certain conditions: "When the day comes where the representative is a member of the parliament, member of councils, member of legislation, member of law, member of political debate, part of a true political establishment and not held to account just because they did not employ so-and-so's son, or did not build such-and-such a road…"[11]

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10. "Nasrallah: opponents to early marriage are in the service of the Devil... Debate and Divide!" "Nasrallah: opponents to early marriage are in the service of the Devil...Debate and Divide!"Annahar (annahar.com)

11. "Women of Hezbollah: The bee that doesn't share the honey." Saada Al-law. "Women of Hezbollah: The bee that doesn't share the honey | Legal Agenda (legal-agenda.com

Sheikh Naim Qassem, on the other hand, has books, television statements, publications and interviews on his theory on women that are too extensive to be discussed in detail here, but the main points do not differ from any fundamentalist theory and are repeated in the texts of Sheikh Qassem.

Two points are worth mentioning on his writings:

First, his division of the "view" on women between two contraries. One, what he describes as "the Western view," which he calls "women's rights and freedoms." He believes that this view is "purely material, focused on women's bodies, and refuses to acknowledge the differences between them and men." He states that it "does not acknowledge that women's role in some spheres differs from men's role and aspires for complete equality between them in everything." This "disrupts complementarity" in his view. This point of "complementarity" is the crux of the battle between feminists and political Islamists; as the latter respond to the former by posing "complementarity" instead of "equality," which is the banner of feminists. So the Islamic view based on "complementarity," as described by Sheikh Qassem, is based on "full equality in participation and outcomes and on a differentiated consideration of ability, role and complementarity, as equality is in participation and outcomes and not in everything."[12]

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12. "How we protect women." Sheikh Naim Qassem. 24-12-2014. *Guest of Annahar – How do we protect women's rights? Annahar (annahar.com).*

Second, on his website, Sheikh Qassem overflows with intimate explanations. He goes into details on marital relations, on the basis that they are the foundation of the Muslim family. He differs with Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah on the common subjects of guardianship, marital violence, polygamy, etc. About women's right to leave the house he says, for example, that the husband has the right to prohibit his wife from going out: "The man has the right to permit his wife or not permit her to go out, and among some authorities not giving permission is restricted to the right of enjoyment." If this prohibition turns into arbitrariness and domination, he believes that the solution is "to place conditions in the marriage contract addressing all of these problems." That is, he suggests a solution only tenacious brides could impose, with or without a written agreement.[13]

After verses from the Quran, Sheikh Naim Qassem cites two names that appear in every sentence: Imam Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini and Imam Ali Khamenei—the leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution and its current Supreme Leader, respectively. This is known and recognized by Hezbollah: the Islamic Republic of Iran is the model, and its clerics are the religious authority, in their capacity as preparing for the coming of the Hidden Imam, the guardian jurist.

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13. "Rights of the Husband and Wife." Sheikh Naim Qassem. *Website of His Eminence Sheikh Naim Qassem, Deputy Secretary General of Hezbollah – Lebanon | Rights of the Husband and Wife (naimkassem.net)*

But this identification with the Iranian "model" poses a real problem because it does not conform with the concept presented by Hezbollah's leadership on the law governing its women.

To return to the beginning: After the era of the non-democratic but modernizing Shah, which left civil status laws in the hands of religious authorities, the Islamic Revolution came and stripped away these few modern rights and imposed new legal restrictions on women. However, Iranian women resisted this reversal in various ways, and Iran witnessed periods in which its subsequent leadership was forced to introduce some reforms into this area.

First was the era of Mohammed Khatami, for whom women voted in great numbers. This was known as an era of political and social openness, the growth of civil society and the flourishing of a women's press. Then was the era of Ahmadinejad, which represented a resurgence toward ultraconservative views. However, after his second presidential win he appointed two women to his cabinet, which at the time was interpreted as an effort to pacify the protest movement that broke out after this victory. Hassan Rouhani, on the other hand, has a richer record when it comes to women. He released many political prisoners, including imprisoned women's rights defenders. He appointed four women to his government and as his representatives or spokespersons. One of them, Shahindokht Molaverdi,

held the position of Vice President for Women and Family Affairs.[14]

How can we interpret this disparity between the root, Islamic Iran with its society and eras, and the dynamics of the resistance of its women, in its various forms, and the results thereof—between the Iranian root and its branch, Hezbollah? How can we understand this relative contradiction between the model and its imitator? The likely answer is that this party's relations with Iran do not pass through Iranian society, or through the different wings of the Iranian state. The party's channel with Iran is the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, which is known as a den of Iranian ultraconservatives who hold the most hardline views on women's rights.

The Amal Movement and Hezbollah, from Beginning to Separation

Sayyed Moussa Al-Sadr is a Lebanese Shi'ite religious figure who lived in Iran and came to Lebanon in the mid-1950s. His activities were focused on correcting injustice against the Shi'ite sect, in terms of its acknowledgment as an independent sect that, like the other Lebanese sects, has

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14. "Women's Rights and Feminism in Iran." Nayareh Tohidi. *International Journal on Human Rights*, December 2016, *Women's Rights and Feminist Movements in Iran - Sur - International Journal on Human Rights (conectas. org),* and Maryam Rajavi: **égalité et libertés des femmes en iran.** *droits des femmes en iran - liberté et égalité - opinions... (maryam-rajavi.com).*

its own courts. He founded the Supreme Shi'ite Council in 1967. The significance of this council is that it oversaw the Jaafari religious courts that played a role in the lives of Shi'ite women. He founded the Amal Movement (an acronym, meaning "hope," for "Regiments of the Lebanese Resistance") in 1975, which had a stake in the civil war as one of the Islamic militias fighting the Christian militias. He was a leader of this movement until 1978, when he disappeared in Libya, where he had been invited by official invitation from Colonel Muammar Al-Gaddafi. While Al-Sadr wrote numerous works on Islam, sectarianism and Palestine, none of these works discuss the issue of women. There is one lecture, probably the only one, in which he talks about the issue, after describing the status of women and girls in Lebanon when he first arrived there as "tragic." At that time the issue of "hijab or no hijab" was not part of the debate. Rather, he states that the danger laid entirely in "the indecency of women, whose corruption in Lebanon exceeds all the other countries in the East." He reveals that this scourge is due to "wayward thinking, illiteracy and disregard for religious teachings" and he thus set himself to "improve religious and moral awareness." However, he faced two obstacles. The first was "the weak participation of women in public life" and the second "their concern with clothing, fashion and makeup." Since it was not possible to "begin by calling upon them to wear the hijab," he proceeded to "adopt less direct methods." These included him announcing that the Charity and Philanthropy

Association that he founded was ready to accept women as active members. He goes on to say that within a short period two hundred women had joined the association, eight of which were elected to form a women's administrative panel. In 1960, one of the members won the "best active member" award in the association. Some of the most important activities of these members were visiting poor families and distributing monthly assistance.[15]

After the disappearance of Moussa Al-Sadr, Hussein Al-Husseini assumed leadership of the Amal Movement, followed by Nabih Berri in 1980, who is still head of the party. In the Amal Charter, which details the political description, movement membership and the national battles fought by Amal, women do not exist—not their livelihood, their issues or their demands.[16]

Two years after Berri took over leadership of Amal, an organized group broke away from his movement and called itself "Islamic Amal." This group, led by Hussein Al-Musawi, later turned into Hezbollah. Al-Musawi was followed first by Sheikh Subhi al-Tufayli and then Sheikh Abbas al-Musawi. In 1992, Hussein Nasrallah was chosen

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15. *Imam Moussa Al-Sadr Center for Research: The Imam's Texts (imamsadr.net).*
16. "The Formation of Islamic Shia Military Movements in Lebanon." Arab Center for Research. 17-7-2015. (acrseg.org), *Amal Movement Charter (7olm.org) Projects page - Imam Sadr Foundation - Lebanon, and Rabab al-Sadr - Association mondiale des femmes musulmanes - GAMWomen.org.*

as the Secretary-General of Hezbollah, and he continues to hold that position to this day.

Now, after the parties have reached their zenith, with an unprecedented start, they may be compared. How does Hezbollah differ from Amal?

The founder of the Amal Movement, Moussa Al-Sadr, was a religious leader, unlike his successors. His first successor, Hussein Al-Husseini, holds a diploma in Business Administration from Cairo University and was speaker of the Parliament from 1984-1992. The next and last is Nabih Berri, who holds a bachelor's in law from the Lebanese University and has been Speaker of the Parliament since 1992.

That is, after the disappearance of its founder, the Amal Movement has not been led by sheikhs. It is an organized group, with no known party framework, that shares its offices in various fields with other parties. Loyalty to it is entirely connected to loyalty to its leader, Nabih Berri. The adjective "deprived," which Moussa Al-Sadr carried on his shoulders throughout his political life, could be the deeper description, which makes loyalists to the Amal Movement identify so strongly with its leader. In the background of this description is a reminder of the change its leader introduced to the position of the Shi'ite sect in its political journey, from "deprived" to the forefront.

For Hezbollah the old "injuries" are not far off and are easily reopened. But while Amal has only the reminder of past deprivation, the "intellectual apparatus" of Hezbollah is broader and deeper. Amal does not have a detailed discourse on women, or religious leaders occupying important roles. Nor does it thus have a discourse on the hijab, adding or repeating or issuing calls for it to be worn, as Hezbollah does.

With its stronger organizational framework, Hezbollah displays a strict hierarchy, with the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Assembly) at the top, leading lower councils. It is highly centralized and led by a sheikh, Hassan Nasrallah, who is its secretary-general, followed by his deputy, another sheikh, Naim Qassem, in addition to sheikhs in its leadership. There is also a layer of secrecy in the management of its affairs. It is not known for public party conferences, and the proceedings of its internal elections, the standards for choosing its deputies or ministers, or how its decisions are made to direct or disrupt the affairs of the state or wage wars in Lebanon and abroad are not known to us. All of this is hidden by Hezbollah, which does not deny that it follows the instructions of the Iranian Supreme Leader and receives support from him.

A comparison between Nabih Berri and Hassan Nasrallah in terms of political personality yields more. Both are from southern Lebanon. The former, Nabih Berri (84 years old),

is from the town of Tebnine, and was born in Sierra Leone, where his father was a diamond merchant. He studied law at the Sorbonne (France). He wears "modern" dress, like other men of the era. He has few writings and is known for one long annual speech at the end of August, at the annual commemoration of the disappearance of Imam Moussa Al-Sadr. He issues few statements, while the party issues many.

Meanwhile, Hassan Nasrallah is more than twenty years younger than Berri (62 years old). He was born in an agricultural town and grew up and lived in the populous neighborhood of Karantina. All his studies were at religious seminaries. He wears the turban of the Shi'ite leaders and the abaya of their sheikhs. He appears before his public periodically and seasonally, behind an enormous screen, sitting on a chair. He has innumerable speeches in which he discusses religious or worldly matters, or local, regional and global political positions.

Thus, we have a Shi'ite "duo" consisting of two sides: Hezbollah, which is organized, coherent, fundamentalist, doctrinal, armed, with a leader that has a strong presence and circles of supporters, and the Amal Movement, whose leader also has a strong presence, but which has a vague, undefined organizational framework and speaks a semi-secular language.

Women in the Amal Movement and Hezbollah

A. The Hijab

The hijab is a central point. We have two organizations, one, the fundamentalist Hezbollah, and the other the sectarian Amal Movement, that wants to be traditional and contemporary at the same time. In this regard, Amal does not possess copious writings, books, statements, articles and conferences about the hijab like Hezbollah does.

The hijab contains both overt and implicit meanings, based on its shape, color, how it is tied, the parts of the face, neck and shoulders that it covers and the clothes or attire that accompany it. With this in mind, we can see that the style of hijab used by prominent women in Hezbollah and Amal speaks volumes.

Women with Positions in the Amal Movement:

The hijab of Mrs. Rabab Al-Sadr: Her hijab combines the traits of the "traditional" rural veil and the new "shari'a-compliant" veil. Her head covering is a piece of traditional fabric, square and short, that does not cover the shoulders, like the religious one. Like the traditional head covering, her hijab covers the neck, but, like the religious one, it covers the full forehead. She wears a long, dark-colored overcoat, not too loose, with little tailoring.

The hijab of Mrs. Randa Berri: Years ago Mrs. Berri replaced her "traditional" veil, which covers the shoulders and neck, with a veil designed by Elie Saab, the famous

Lebanese fashion designer. In this new hijab, the front part of the hair and part of the ears show, as well as the neck. Mrs. Berri wears colorful, on trend, and modest clothing.

The hijab of Mrs. Inaya Ezzeddine: This hijab resembles the new hijab of Shi'ite women in general. Its wide fabric covers the forehead, and sometimes covers the shoulders and sometimes does not. Its colors are not flashy. She wears current and modest clothing.

The anchorwoman on the Amal Movement's channel NBN is like the anchorwomen on other channels, unveiled and wearing makeup. Her clothes are normal, modest.

Women with Positions in Hezbollah:

All the women in Hezbollah, from those with responsibilities, like Rima Fakhri and Afaf Al-Hakim, to the ordinary members, wear the loose black Iranian abaya, called the chador, where only the face and hands show. Anchorwomen on Hezbollah's channel Al-Manar sometimes wear the chador and other times, especially in news broadcasts, wear the "religious" hijab.

B. Media Presence

Amal Movement: Amal's leader, Nabih Berri, has no known position on, opinion about, or special involvement in Amal's women's activities. His wife, Mrs. Randa Berri, plays this role. She is the most senior woman in the "official" sphere.

That is, first ladies change with the times, and third ladies, wives of ministers, also change, and rapidly, while Nabih Berri, Randa's husband, has been speaker of the Parliament since the end of the civil war, i.e., for 32 years. This longevity has given Mrs. Berri successive and cumulative roles, which no other politician's wife has enjoyed, Shi'ite or non-Shi'ite. As we will see, she is present in the sphere of development and charitable work, which she leads entirely, and she has access to state institutions through her sponsorship of presidents of Lebanese universities and other educational and cultural institutions. All her activities receive heavy media coverage.

Hezbollah: Comparison between the wife of Speaker Berri and the wife of Hezbollah's Secretary-General yields a vast difference: The first has a strong presence, the second is entirely absent. We know only her name, Fatima Yassin, and that she is the mother of five children. She does not appear in the "family" photos published by her husband.

C. Roles

Amal Movement: Mrs. Rabab Al-Sadr: She is the sister of Moussa Al-Sadr. She came to Lebanon when she was fifteen years old and had a strong relationship with her brother. In 1960, he invited her to join the Moussa Al-Sadr Organization dedicated to social work and humanitarian assistance. She has a doctorate in philosophy and pursued higher studies in art. The Al-Sadr Organization, which she

now leads, contains schools and an orphanage, and special divisions for girls. Mrs. Al-Sadr believes education plays a role in women's lives, as "the central tool for social change and personal development." She is active in regional and international spheres with her lectures calling for gender equality and for men and women to work together to achieve a "harmonious" society. But when asked about the reasons for her avoidance of political work, she expresses her "aversion" to it and to participating in it, stating that it imposes "restrictions on family and social life."

Mrs. Randa Berri: Above we referred to the "longevity" enjoyed by Mrs. Randa Berri relative to the wives of other Lebanese politicians. She speaks about this at length, going back quite some time, to mention that she has accompanied her husband since the beginning. This companionship has imposed "formidable tasks," which she took on as her own, as "the responsibilities, tasks, and roles I undertake are complimentary to the principles that Speaker Nabih Berri is working towards." She rounds out her view of her special role in the marital institution, saying, "I believe that the standard for the success of a man or woman is for them to be side by side on one path, achieving the goals and aspirations of people first."[17]

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17. Special article for the Lebanese Army website: Mrs. Randa Berri: One path unites me with the Speaker | Official Website of the Lebanese Army (lebarmy.gov.lb).

With this objective, Mrs. Randa Berri presides over all the community associations affiliated with the Amal Movement: the Lebanese Welfare Association for the Handicapped (LWAH), Amwaj Association for the Environment and the Protection of the Antiquities and Heritage of South Lebanon, the Tyre Festivals Committee, the Committee for the Commemoration of Martyrs of Israeli Massacres, the Phoenix Forum, and the Lebanese Sports Federation for the Handicapped. She is active in women's conferences and symposiums and the Arab League's Arab Women's Committee. She is also present in activities concerning women. She attends charity dinners, Ramadan iftars, and presents prizes. She figures prominently in women's morning gatherings, attends parties honoring her, represents her husband at funerals and weddings, makes speeches, statements and comments, conducts television and press interviews and considers herself to be a part of "civil society" organizations.

Mrs. Randa Berri holds longstanding positions on the women's quota in parliamentary elections and the Council of Ministers. Her authority for these positions is not Islam, but the United Nations. She says that although the UN raises the slogan "I am Generation Equality," Arab women still suffer from "marginalization." She makes an exception for the Tunisian experience, as Tunisia approved a women's quota in its assembly of representatives and expresses her hope that Lebanese women enjoy similar luck, that

"women achieve true participation in all decision-making positions."[18]

Based on reports from the reputable press, Mrs. Randa Berri is also fighting an internal struggle over the succession to the Berri family's political dynasty. At the center of it is establishing her son Bassel as heir to his father Nabih Berri, instead of Abdullah, his first son from his first marriage. This dispute became public the night of the 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections, after Mrs. Berri's attempt to nominate her son Bassel to the parliament failed.[19]

Representative and Minister Inaya Ezzeddine: She is a member of the Amal Movement's political office and holds advanced degrees in laboratory science. She ran on Amal's list in the parliamentary elections of 2018 and 2022 and was the first Shi'ite woman to successfully do so. She is also the first Shi'ite woman to be appointed as a minister in the previous government, as Minister of State for Administrative Development Affairs. Although she says that Sayyed Moussa Al-Sadr is "her source of inspiration," in practice she works to realize Mrs. Randa Berri's demand for a women's quota. In this capacity, Dr. Ezzeddine tried

18. Ibid.
19. "Randa Berri presents her son Bassel, Abdullah knocks at Damascus' door, and the "Family Elder" looks on." Janoubia Magazine. 7-12-2021. Janoubia Exclusive:"Randa Berri presents her son Bassel, Abdullah knocks at Damascus' door, and the "Family Elder" looks on!" - Janoubia (janoubia.com)

to achieve the quota in parliament, and submitted an amendment to the elections law now in force. The proposed amendment reserved 26 out of 128 seats and 40% of the spots on the candidates list for women. The proposal was not even discussed and was shelved two minutes after it was made. Ezzeddine left the session angry. She did not for a moment refer to the responsibility of her patron, Nabih Berri, in this failure, at least in his capacity as Speaker of the Parliament, where he is eminently capable of passing legislation that meets his favor. She did not discuss her colleagues in the Parliament who were nominated with her on the same list. Instead, she placed the blame on women, saying: "I'd like to say to all the women in political parties that the issue of women's support and participation is mere lip service for them... Women must make the decision, I don't know what that is."[20]

However, with regard to the Jaafari courts, whose stories and protests shook the Shi'ite community and Lebanon as a whole, the representative has contradictory positions. In her capacity as head of the Women and Children Parliamentary Council, she has made statements calling for "integrated reform of the religious courts" and the like. But after this "reformist" call she steps back and states that

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20. "Ezzeddine after leaving the session of the joint committees: The parliamentary block itself did not bother to discuss the quota." 7-10-2021. Ezzeddine after leaving the session of the joint committees: The parliamentary block itself did not bother to discuss the quota – Al-Bayrak (al-bayrak.com)

"development and update of the personal status laws must take place under the umbrella of religious doctrines" out of her belief that the religious doctrines are "the best and most suitable way to protect family life. This is in harmony with the beliefs and faith of the vast majority of the Lebanese people and conforms in spirit and word with the Lebanese constitution." She supports her argument stating that the status of the religious courts "is no worse than that of the civil courts and both need to be reformed."[21]

Women in Hezbollah

- The Women's Organizations: Hezbollah has a centralized structure, as mentioned above. It is headed by the Secretary-General, who has broad powers. Below him is the Shura Council, which oversees the remaining lower bodies, from the Executive Council down to the Political Committee and the Jihad Committee. We mention these subordinate entities, because the two women who hold positions inside Hezbollah are members of them. Afaf Hakim is a member of Hezbollah's Executive Council. The second is Rima Fakhri, member of the Political Office. It can be said that the first rank, and the one holding it, Afaf Hakim, is higher

21. "Ezzeddine denies the statements circulating about her in the news." 2-9-2019. https://www.bing.com/search?q=ورد+ما+تنفي+الدين+عز&qs=n&form=QBRE& sp=-1&pq=ورد+ما+تنفي+الدين+عز&sc=8-20&sk=&cvid=54A48B1530B5413F9 C7C479A55E381A0

than the second, Rima Fakhri, but the two are equal before the Shura Council.[22]

This centralization is supported by a group of women's organizations established by Hezbollah, which define the details and describe the activities necessary to achieve their goals. The supreme text dedicated to these organizations are the classic words of Imam Khomeini on women: **"Women have a great role in society, women embody the realization of mankind's hopes... Women are the only existing thing that can gift society with individuals who push society – nay, societies – forward toward righteousness and higher human values."**[23]

The text divides women's activities in Hezbollah into three areas: cultural, social and media.

The first, cultural, focuses on "spreading the authentic culture of Islam as represented by the approach of Imam Khomeini" through cultural courses, including religious

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22. "Full profile on the structure of Hezbollah (1): How does it operate and who makes the decisions?" Janoubia Magazine. 22-4-2015. "Full profile on the structure of Hezbollah (1):How does it operate and who makes the decisions?" - Janoubia (janoubia.com). Beyond the women-centered entities named above, this leadership directs a group of other organizations, like the sports, cultural, and media institutions, such as the Research Center, the Imam Khomeini Center, *Al-Ahd* newspaper, Al-Nour broadcasting and Al-Manar television channel, in addition to the Jihad al-Bana Institute, the Islamic Health Organization, Al-Qard Al-Hassan Association, Al-Shahid Institute, the Islamic Institute for Education, the Organization to Support the Islamic Resistance, etc.

23. "Women's Organizations in Hezbollah: Roles and Goals." Prepared by the Women's Organizations, Beirut. 24-2-2016. Women's Organizations in Hezbollah: Roles and Goals (baqiatollah.net)

subjects such as Islamic jurisprudence, shari'a, faith and ethics, the Quranic sciences and modern philosophy. **These are presented "in a simplified manner."** In the same area, these organizations reach out "to girls between the ages of ten and 18 years old by organizing summer courses." The focal point here is "al-Hawraa Zainab Committee," which is concerned with "commemorating the memory of Ahl al-Bayt" (the family of the Prophet Muhammad), deaths and births, and preparing courses qualifying readers as Husseini mourning reciters and reciters for moulids and weddings, as well as issuing pamphlets for mourning ceremonies both for individuals and for Ashura, and the moulids of Ahl al-Bayt. It distributes Ashura mourning reciters to more than 2,200 households.

The social aspect includes the provision of financial and in-kind social assistance, caring for families of martyrs, prisoners and the wounded, released female prisoners and disabled and elderly women, as well as health, environmental and educational instruction. The organization has another special committee that organizes the annual "Muslim Nurses Day" which was announced by Imam Khomeini and the birthday of Sayyida Zaynab. It relies on "skills development" and "professional qualification" courses and lectures on social subjects, where the hijab is always at the top of the list.

Finally, in terms of the media, these organizations aim to cover various women's activities, communicate with the various media and coordinate with foreign media delegations. It launched the "Walaa" artistic team, which holds "targeted" artistic activities, especially on the Ashura holidays, in addition to plays directed at children and adolescents. The team itself organizes "*nasheed* concerts to commemorate the births of the infallible Imams, peace be upon them, in a refined way fit for the subjects of these great occasions."[24]

Writer Saada Allaw reports the words of "a woman who worked for ten years in Hezbollah's women's organizations on how the women of Hezbollah that get involved in the activities of its various organizations from childhood grow, and how they impact their environment." We list most of them here, given their importance.

Allaw starts by saying that "joining Hezbollah's activities is not compulsory of course." She describes how Hezbollah's women's organizations recruit women: "They start from the age of four or five with the Mahdi Scouts, in the girls' cohort of course." Here girls are usually prepared for their religious obligations, i.e., wearing the veil and performing the duties of fasting and prayer. These obligations are assigned during a celebration in which gifts are presented to the girls, which

24. Ibid.

are a Quran, a prayer robe, a head covering (scarf) and the like." For those who missed out on the Scouts, the women's organizations remain open to them: "The neighborhood official announces her intention to organize educational courses on religious dress and the rules of prayer. These courses are light, we don't put pressure on them and there is some entertainment. At the end we ask them: Who wants to start wearing the veil?" The values and "supreme" example on which these girls are raised are those of Ruqayya, Zaynab, and Fatima al-Zahra: Ruqayya the ideal daughter, Zaynab the sister, and Fatima al-Zahra the wife and mother. These are the women of Ahl al-Bayt, and in them we have an ideal, and we raise our daughters in their image."

She gives examples of how they operate: The areas are divided into neighborhoods, "each woman is responsible for a neighborhood. It's best if the number of households in the neighborhood are not more than 20-30 maximum." The neighborhood official must know the leanings and circumstances of those who live in her area. "There are Hezbollah members, friendly supporters, those who are neutral and those who are opposed." The women of Hezbollah do not exclude any of these categories. Meanwhile, "we inform the neighborhood official of a mourning ceremony or wedding in her area. The women's organizations form a delegation that visits to offer condolences or congratulations. They become acquainted with the women of the household and the relationship begins. We offer cultural activities and courses to women of all age groups and needs." Invitations

are then sent to all the women in the neighborhood whose names were provided to the neighborhood official by the women's organizations.

After the religious duty of the hijab, "the lessons start on teenage girls, their relationship with themselves and their surroundings as a woman and their relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt: the obedient girl whose model is Ruqayya, Hussein's daughter; Sayyida Zaynab, the sister who supported her brother and her leader Hussein; and Sayyida Fatima al-Zahra, to whom the lessons of "the successful marriage" are devoted in memory of her marriage to Imam Ali, in which are found the characteristics of the righteous wife and her rights and duties according to Islam and its teachings." The courses on successful marriage are held at the same time as the commemoration of the marriage of Imam Ali and Sayyida Fatima al-Zahra. Allaw says the content covers "how a woman must act in society, how she deals with her husband, raises children and helps solve problems around her. There are certain booklets in series, for example: How to raise a resistance fighter? How to be a resistance fighter? How to be the mother of a martyr and the wife of a martyr? How to play the role of both mother and father in the father's absence if he is martyred?"

Allaw describes the women in Hezbollah: "We are soldiers on the ground." She continues: "Yes, we are at the lowest in rank, but the work starts with us. From us begins the information about everything, meaning when you go into a

house you generally know who supports and who opposes Hezbollah. There are those who do not support Hezbollah, but we maintain relations with them."[25]

Women's leadership: The leading women in Hezbollah, who assume high party positions, are limited to two:

First, Hajja Afaf Hakim, member of the Executive Council, as mentioned above.

Hajja Afaf Hakim holds religious degrees issued from various scholarly seminaries. In presenting her religious knowledge she always makes reference to the fact that she received most of her education from her grandfather, Sayyed Noureddine Noureddine, and her uncle on her mother's side, Sayyed Abdel Karim Noureddine. Her professional experience is a list of two and a half decades of religious instruction at official secondary schools for girls and at Amlieh College for Girls. She says that she was the first woman to teach religion in these schools.

Hajja Hakim heads a group of Islamic women's associations—the health, cultural, and educational associations affiliated with Hezbollah. She is a leading member of other regional and Islamic organizations, such as the International Islamic

25. "Women's Organizations in Hezbollah: Roles and Goals." Prepared by the Women's Organizations, Beirut. 24-2-2016. Women's Organizations in Hezbollah: Roles and Goals (baqiatollah.net)

Women's Union (Sudan), the Union of Non-Governmental Islamic Women's Associations, the General Organization for the Ahl Al-Bayt World Assembly, the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, and the Global Association of Muslim Women.

She has a long list of articles and lectures delivered in Lebanon and other countries. These are on the hijab, Muslim women, Khomeini, Christianity, normalization with Israel, Fatima al-Zahra, Ahl al-Bayt, globalization, the Western media and so forth. The only lecture that we will not find online is called "The role of women in the duty of enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong." The writer says that the conference scheduled to be held under this title "was not held due to the July aggression against Lebanon." However, the date of the conference listed below the lecture is 12 December 2005, i.e., eight months before the 2006 July War.[26]

Among the writings of Afaf al-Hakim, one in particular is worth considering, called "Women's Civil Organizations in the Arab and Islamic Worlds: Opportunities and

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26. "Writings of Hajja Afaf al-Hakim." Al-Zakiya Website:Writings of Hajja Afaf al-Hakim (alzakiya.com). On the groups for enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, no precise or detailed references can be found. There is just a word here, an allusion there. Knowing the details and mechanisms of this activity would require field research, and, in all cases, it would be difficult given the near secrecy in which it is shrouded.

Challenges." **Most notably this, which comes after verses from the Quran:** "We need an alternative to the postulates of the insidious Western system, which today has started to attract most of the women's civil society institutions and organizations in the world." We also need to stand against "the tendency to impose the Western secular view on other societies," as happened in the Beijing World Conference on Women (1995), in which Hajja Afaf al-Hakim participated. The conference resulted in "a project for the absolute liberation of women from everything related to their beliefs, traditions and the culture of their society." In this way, "the impending threats to the situation of Muslim women" became clear, and the "flagrant intervention in our societies" was revealed. Thus, it is necessary to "demand that those concerned with the issues of the Islamic Ummah provide an active positive alternative to these conferences." Here the writer returns to "the establishment of the triumphant Islamic Republic on Iranian soil under the command and leadership of the great Imam Khomeini, which was automatically followed by an Islamic awakening throughout the world that was the most important movement to revive religion in our age, and which through practical experience proved beyond a doubt the capacity and ability of the pure religion of Islam to cause tremendous transformations on all different levels, including women's issues." She later poses "volunteer work" as the alternative to Western feminism,

observing that "the strength of today's societies is in their volunteer work." This work "enjoys a high place of importance in Islamic culture, as we find many hadiths that urge sponsoring orphans, assisting those in need, extending help to the disabled and handicapped, contributing to the spread of knowledge, protecting the environment and participating in the material and moral building of mosques and Husseinyas, in addition to meeting people's needs, assisting the oppressed, providing relief for the anxious and alleviating distress."[27]

The second leader is Rima Fakhri. She has been a member of Hezbollah's Political Council, the third body overseen by the Shura Council, since 2004. She presents herself with unusual academic qualifications: Dr. Rima Fakhri, holds a diploma in agricultural engineering from the American University in Beirut, a master's degree in international affairs from the Lebanese American University, and is currently working on a doctorate on "Turkey's foreign policy from an international relations perspective." She has good knowledge of Arabic, English and French and is currently learning Turkish.[28] That is, she has a modern

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27. ***Women's Civil Organizations in the Arab and Islamic Worlds: Opportunities and Challenges.*** **Afaf al-Hakim. (No date.)** Women's Organizations in the Arab and Islamic Worlds (hajij.com)
28. **On YouTube: Exclusive interview with Mrs. Rima Fakhri, member of Hezbollah's Political Committee, 14/1/2018 | Al-Kawthar**

education, different from the seminary education received by Hajja Afaf Hakim. She is also from a younger generation.

In an exclusive interview with the writer Saada Allaw, Rima Fakhri praises the wives of martyrs, and describes the women in Hezbollah as "persevering, vigilant in the narrow lanes and neighborhoods, the holders of the keys of commitment and advocacy, and of course the elections. They are the ones who know the secrets of their surroundings in detail, the same details on which much of society and politics is built, summed up in security." Allaw raises the point with her that women now form 50%—half—of Hezbollah and yet Hezbollah has not nominated a woman to the parliament or as a minister "like the Amal Movement has." Rima Fakhri agrees with this percentage and increases it: "At least 50%!" Allaw reminds her that Hassan Nasrallah, in a television interview, announced his refusal to nominate women to the parliament. She asks her: How do all these women not let out one buzz of protest over their exclusion from the distribution of the beehive's honey, most of which they make themselves? Why? Rima Fakhri answers that the women in Hezbollah will not object. "We do not consider the parliament a position to cry over."

Allaw asks: "Then why doesn't Hezbollah follow Iran's example?" Fakhri answers: "In Iran the entire society is conservative and not like ours here in Lebanon, and the job

of the representative is also different." However, she adds: "Hezbollah cannot ignore the weapon of women, seeing as it emerged out of Khomeini's approach, and women in Hezbollah contribute to creating those men."

Allaw asks another question: "Can the women inside Hezbollah be described as the black army without relying on stereotypes or being discriminatory?" Fakhri answers: "Most of us do in fact wear black clothing, and yes, we are also like an army." She says that she personally is "convinced by Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's view." What about the other women? "They accept what he says and abide by it." She adds: "Perhaps we are still lacking in courage." When asked whether the women in Hezbollah really lack courage, Fakhri explains: "Not on the level of making leadership decisions... But Sayyid Hassan can act only as a man of religion, and we are a religious party governed by religious rules."[29]

Like her colleague Hajja Afaf al-Hakim, Dr. Fakhri has not written much, but she does have political positions, the most significant of which are those she announced in a press conference in Tehran following the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, leader of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. She expressed her honor at having met the martyred Soleimani.

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29. **"Women of Hezbollah: The bee that doesn't share...."**

All the themes of his battles were "the vulnerable against the arrogant... in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan." This "is an indication of the breadth of spirit of this fighter for the Ummah, his great connection with God Almighty...who has some of the ethics of the prophets and the saints.... The dear martyr was a confirmation of the sacred hadith: "God has men who, if they will it, God wills it." Then more praise: "He was the virtuoso leader in the field," "He was where God wanted him and where the divine leadership wanted him to be."

On Soleimani's victories she says: "With the Martyr Hajj Qasem Soleimani, the fighters—Iranians, Lebanese, Syrians, Iraqis, Afghanis and others—succeeded. We succeeded in defeating the *takfiri* enemy, in whose service the arrogant world placed hundreds of billions of dollars and tremendous military powers with the aim of striking the resistance and the resistance's abilities.... With the Martyr Hajj Qasem Soleimani, the Axis of Resistance also succeeded in defeating the United States' project at various stages."[30]

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30. **Dr. Rima Fakhri: The battles fought by the martyr Soleimani are an indication of his ability to deal with others.** Dr. Fakhri: The battles fought by the martyr Soleimani are an indication of his ability to deal with others (alkawthartv.ir).

Civil Status Courts

Why this point precisely, instead of others?

Because Lebanese civil status is in the hands of the sects, i.e., their religious authorities. All transactions concerning marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody and death are managed by each sect individually, which in turn are managed by their religious leaders. The relation between the secular-sectarian political authority that presides over "civil" law and the religious authority that presides over the non-civil "shari'a" is a fused, parasitic relation in which each party feeds off the other. But it is also in the interest of the secular politician. There is a kind of trade-off managed by this politician with the religious leader. He places his top men inside the official religious establishment in exchange for the loyalty of those men to him. Overall, it is a type of relationship based on religious symbolic capital sold by the politician from the pocket of the spiritual world, represented by the religious leader. Thus, each official religious body is affiliated to the strongest members of their sects. That is, the leader of the political sect controls the religious body pertaining to his sect.

But in the case of Shi'ite women there is a large exception. The Shi'ites are the only Lebanese sect in which the religious leaders are at the head of its political "branch." That is, for the members of this sect, there is no difference between the political contingent and the religious contingent. Hassan Nasrallah and his deputy Naim Qassem are sheikhs, as

are the majority of the Shura Council. The opposite is true for the Amal Movement, whose "civil" part is the sect's leadership; it has some sheikhs that perform their role, but they are under the control of the sect's leader, Nabih Berri, the lawyer who studied positive law. Meanwhile, the leaders of all the other sects are "civilians."

In general, the Jaafari courts that are managed by the Supreme Shi'ite Council are under the control of the "duo," with Hezbollah being the stronger party, at the expense of the other, the Amal Movement.

On the other hand, the image that emerges from all the civil status religious courts across all the various sects is one of chaotic dealings, the use of delaying tactics in cases, men conspiring with the courts, wives waiving their rights in exchange for divorce, sisters prosecuting brothers who squandered the entire inheritance, judges who have been bribed and mothers fighting decisions that strip them of custody of their children.

Children's custody is the hottest issue in these courts. The removal of a child from its mother's arms at a young age after the parents' divorce has occupied all the Islamic courts for the past ten years. Why the provisions on custody in the civil status law exactly, and not divorce, or polygamy? Because women have started demanding divorces from their husbands, and this is always accompanied by the problem of the husband's right to custody of the children while they

are still very young. And mothers have changed from those in the past and have started to refuse—loudly—having their children taken away from them.[31]

Women in both the Druze and Sunni sects have managed to pressure their religious and political leaders for one provision of the shari'a custody law, which is a provision that raises the age at which the children may be taken by the father after divorce from their mother.

In 2012, the Sunni women's associations, led by the lawyer Iqbal Doughan, managed to obtain the right to custody of the children until the age of twelve, for both boys and girls. This was through pressure and lobbying on the part of these women, starting from the political leadership, and mingled with pressure and negotiations with Dar al-Fatwa and Sunni religious leaders, which achieved the demand.[32]

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31. *In the Eyes of Women: The Affairs and Issues of Lebanese Women*. Azza Bidoun. Dar al-Jadid. 2021. The writer makes a reference to Sheikh Mar'i, the director of the Sayyed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah Office, who "speaks (about this transformation) with his religious language, when he says that women are no longer satisfied with the struggle (*jihad*) of "wifely obedience" but have started seeking to be a part of "the struggle (*jihad*) of society as a whole." P. 47.

32. "How are personal status laws in Lebanon changing? Some observations from the Sunni experience." Samer Ghamroun. 3-4-2020. *Legal Agenda Magazine*. Two Christian sects preceded this amendment, the Orthodox sect in 2003 and the Evangelical sect in 2005. How are personal status laws in Lebanon changing? Some observations from the Sunni experience | Legal Agenda (legal-agenda.com)

The matter in the Druze sect was deeper. In its supreme religious organization, the Druze Council, women have a share represented by the membership of a non-religious figure, the lawyer Ghada Jumblatt, a specialist in positive law. In 2017, this woman, with the support of the political leadership and the assistance of dozens of Druze women's associations, managed to convince the Druze Council to raise the age of custody to 12 for boys and 14 for girls.[33]

Meanwhile, divorced Shi'ite women remained deprived of their small children, unlike their counterparts in the other sects. Writer and journalist Badia Fahs describes this phenomenon in a series of articles, as she lived the experience of being deprived of her son by her ex-husband. These articles are about the issue of custody among mothers in the Shi'ite sect. They tell the stories of their tragedies; she empathizes with them in her deprivation from her son. She describes the treatment of men and women in the courts and the overt bias towards men, toward their sexual pleasure, their carelessness, their lack of concern for the fate of the children that they are taking away from their mother.[34]

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33. "The woman in a decision-making position in the Druze sect: How did she change the path of the movement to amend personal status laws and what were the outcomes?" Elham Barjas. *Legal Agenda Magazine*. 18-12-2017. The woman in a decision-making position in the Druze sect: How did she change the path of the movement to amend personal status laws and what were the outcomes? | Legal Agenda (legal-agenda.com)
34. "O Shi'ite Women..." Badia Fahs. Daraj website. 27-2-2020. The other articles that discuss this issue on the same website are "Listen, Reda." 11-3-2022. "We meet during Eid." 3-3-2016. "The fault of the court." 16-7-2019. "My last letter." 9-3-2019.

Two years before the revolution, Badia Fahs joined a movement with other Shi'ite women focused on this issue. Custody cases had multiplied among Shi'ite mothers, and the stories of women who had suffered tragedy achieved a painful resonance in the public sphere. From Lina Jaber, who was deprived of her daughter and barred from going near her grave after she passed away while far away from her mother, to Fatima Hamza, the first Lebanese woman who agreed to go to prison to prevent implementation of the custody law on her three-year-old son, whose father had decided that he would live with his second wife, to Nadine Jouni, Zahra Yasin, Khadija Bitar, Abir Khashab, Nawal Chaito and other women who refused to remain silent and went out into the streets. Veiled and unveiled women were among those who demonstrated and sat in at the gates of the Supreme Shi'ite Council and the Jaafari Court, who participated in solidarity marches with civil women's organizations and the formation of the "National Campaign to Raise the Age of Custody in the Shi'ite Sect."

The peak of this movement was the uprising that broke out in October 2019. With it came the slogan "The Revolution is Female" due to the high numbers of women participating in them—not just "as masses," in quantity, as the parties in authority were accustomed to expect, but in all the sites and forms of this uprising: from leading to formulating slogans to creating chants to organizing, mobilizing and media. In this revolution, the demands of Shi'ite mothers to custody rights equal to the divorced father became prominent. And

Badia Fahs became prominent in her capacity as a mother who was deprived of her son for eleven years, only meeting him in the protests.

Special Cases

In a lengthy article that can be read as a monograph on the Shi'ite clans of the Bekaa, writer Saada Allaw narrates the details of life inside the clans, its laws and traditions and living with change, including the events of marriage and divorce and the issue of custody after divorce. She states that the law that is applied by the Jaafari courts to women with regard to custody applies only to the mother if her clan is stronger than her husband's. In this case, the father or brothers can prevent the ex-husband from depriving his ex-wife of her children.[35]

In keeping with this unwritten law of the "strong," Parliamentary member Nawwaf Moussawi, as the representative of the strongest party in Lebanon, Hezbollah, could have rescued his daughter from enduring the Jaafari courts in the manner of the recalcitrant Bedouins. Moussawi is known as the sole Muslim representative that, with ten other representatives, signed a draft law to protect women from domestic violence submitted by a women's

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35. "Daughter of the clan in the private sphere or "responsible freedom". Saada Allaw. Legal Agenda Magazine. 23-8-2021. Daughter of the clan in the private sphere or "responsible freedom" | Legal Agenda (legal-agenda.com)

association. He is also known for his famous crisis, that he acts as "as a father" and not "as a politician," and for his public rejection of the marriage of under-age girls, contrary to the approval given it by Hezbollah's Secretary-General. He is also known for the story of his daughter whose own story struck a chord with the women protesting the separation of children from their mothers. After her divorce from her husband, the representative's daughter was subject to the same law. In fact, her husband went beyond limiting the times when she could see her children to completely depriving her of seeing them. The ex-husband violated the agreement, already unfair, which he made. The dispute intensified and the former spouses were brought to the police station. The representative's intervention on behalf of his daughter, breaking into the police station by force and his violent fight with his son-in-law, was the end of his political life as a representative, as he was forced out in the guise of a "resignation." Hezbollah soon replaced him with another representative, who won uncontested a month after the incident.

What made this representative weak before Hezbollah, as his attempt to utilize his party's parliamentary standing was an utter failure and ended his rich ten-year parliamentary career?

It is most likely due to two primary factors. First, his authority, position or standing as a "secular" representative

is lower than that of a religious leader who upholds custody decisions. Hezbollah's leadership structure and cadres are dominated by religious figures, graduates of religious seminaries, and not "secular" men. Also, the father of his daughter's ex-husband, who supported him, is the director of Imam Ali Khamenei's office in Lebanon, Mohammed Tawfiq Miqdad, a prominent leader of Hezbollah. Opposing him is like opposing the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. Hezbollah was patient with the representative's quasi-feminist views, as long as they remained substantially conservative. But this substance was threatening to crack when the representative's activities touched on the custody law, which for Shi'ite religious leaders is sacred. It is not they who drafted it, but God.

Conclusion

From our perspective, there is a paradox in all these developments. Over the past decades, Shi'ite women, like other Lebanese women, have acquired the ability to leave the house, to study, to work and to participate in political affairs. In contrast, on the ground, they are subject to ideas, laws and ways of life imposed on them by an extremist, fundamentalist party, with the participation of a sectarian party that is less strong and extremist. Within this paradox, a dynamic of unknown magnitude is unfolding. The only question is: will this dynamic continue as a kind of silent semi-struggle, or will it explode?

Chapter VIII

Jordanian Foreign Policy and Shi'ite Political Islam

Jordanian- Shi'ite Relations:

How Does Jordan View Iran and Its Allies in the Middle East?

Alaa Omar Aqel

Introduction

Over many decades, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has formulated its relations with the political currents and regional blocs around it based on several determinants that have always been the drivers for the state and its organs in interactions with its regional and international political environment.

Through the Islamic Revolution in Iran, political Islam in general and Shi'ism in particular has been able to build one of the most important political currents of substance in the region. The revolution adopted principles of international-ism, exporting the revolution, ideological expansion, abol-ishing monarchy, and building Islamic alliances and wings with a Shi'ite sectarian predisposition.

Therefore, a study of the Jordanian relations with Iran and the Shi'ite political movements that emerged from them rests mainly on studying the relationship between the Shi'ite political project in the region and the determinants of Jordanian foreign policy. The country's foreign policy is based on principles, precautions, and red lines that have evolved in the last 100 years due to various circumstances that the state has experienced. These circumstances culti-

vated its behavior in terms of prioritizing domestic security and stability, and moving away from changing its historical alliances, while maintaining neutrality to preserve its ability to maneuver and be the mediator when necessary.

Jordan's political personality:

The study of the Jordanian foreign policy towards any state or political current is based on Jordan's experiences across the last 100 years. The events Jordan has witnessed in the past have shaped how the political systems behave towards the changing environment. One factor that helped shape this political behavior is the location of Jordan in a region with a various form of political challenges: economic crises, displacement, civil wars, armed conflicts, foreign intervention, settlement projects, and so on.

We can therefore say that the main objective of the Jordanian foreign policy is maintaining the stability and order of Jordan domestically and maintaining its political and economic cohesion against the circumstances around it.[1] This cannot be achieved except by taking firm security and military positions against any conduct that could be considered a threat in the view of the political system and its components.

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1. Ghazi Bani Melhem, *Jordan's Political Stance on the Second Arabian Gulf Crisis, 1990–1991*. Dar al-Bahja, Amman, 1997.

A discussion of the evolution of this defensive behavior could require a separate paper or even a book to recount the events that have contributed to the formation of Jordan's political personality. We will talk, however, about the most important historical events and material factors that have contributed to the development of Jordan's political personality.

The region began to undergo rapid transformations in the early 1950s, as the *Free Officers* took power in Egypt in 1952 and overthrew King Farouk. This transformation that led to a change in the Egyptian political system was in fact the start of a series of revolutionary movements and organizations in the region that were sometimes affected by it and other times directly supported by it under the same name, with a vision to form a "progressive" Arab nationalist alliance led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. Jordan and Iraq were affected by the *Free Officers* as well, which ended in Iraq in a bloody coup that terminated the monarchy there. Jordan, meanwhile, emerged from this conflict alone after losing its most important allies in the region. also, it went through several attempts to overthrow the regime that ended with the imposition of martial law and the curtailment of democracy in the country.[2]

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2. Nowzad Sati, *Zayed ben Shāker from Arms to Openness*. Arab Institute for Research, Amman, 2019.

The fall of the monarchy in Iraq was an turning point in the evolution of Jordan's political personality. Overnight, Jordan found itself alone after losing its primary backer and partner in politics. At that moment, the country's only aim became to survive and continue, no matter what the cost is.[3] This later motivated the reinforcement of Jordan's international position in the Cold War, thus helping to shape this politically conservative behavior by the state. Jordan's international and regional characteristics – some of which it chose willingly and some of which were forced on it – were a factor in developing highly disciplined and competent security and intelligence agencies directly subordinate to the king, with the aim of preserving the country's security against the background of the Nasserist nationalists affiliated with the Eastern camp. This played a role in what followed in the development of Jordanian-American relations and the strategic alliance between the United States and Jordan. The formation of strong security agencies in Jordan amidst the critical regional circumstances also led to the establishment of a kind of conservative dogma within the state and its institutions in favor of maintaining security and stability and avoiding any kind of unusual change in alliances or policies.

The third situation that influenced Jordan's political personality was the armed conflict the country went through in September 1970, known later as the Black September. This was the last and most intense attempt by the Nasserist

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3. Philip Robins, *A History of Jordan*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

camp to overthrow the Jordanian regime through Palestinian factions that tried, amidst the charged, post-1967 Arab atmosphere, to seize power in Jordan. The armed conflict[4] nearly toppled King Hussein. It may actually have done so if not for internal and external factors that ultimately led to the departure of the Palestinian factions from Jordan and the regeneration of a more conservative dogma within sovereign institutions, both civilian and military.

The role of the Palestinian cause, in all its security, military, demographic, national, and historical dimensions, cannot be neglected. The Palestinian cause was and continues to be the cornerstone of Jordanian foreign policy because it dominates security and military issues related to the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel. To Jordanian decision makers, the Palestinian cause is a domestic issue, not a foreign one. It has demographic implications within Jordan, entails moral and historical obligations for the royal family, and involves the historical significance of Jerusalem and the Hashemite custodianship of its holy sites as a source of political legitimacy at home and abroad.[5]

In addition to the above, Jordan's geographic location renders it lacking in raw natural resources and water. That gives its rivals and enemies perpetual leverage in their attempts to exploit Jordan's economic situation and its permanent need

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4. Nowzad Sati, op. cit.
5. Saad Abu Diya, "The Decision-Making Process in Jordanian Foreign Policy," Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 1990.

for local and international economic partnerships. Other actors can achieve political objectives by interfering with Jordanian positions and policies, something the state and all its components have long tried to counter.

In the past two decades, the United States invaded Iraq, causing instability along Jordan's eastern border. Then came the Arab Spring and the accompanying series of uproars that have knocked down one Arab regime after another. Later, the US President Donald Trump arrived in the White House with a new vision for US policy in the Middle East. All of these events again strengthened the conservative security current within Jordan and unified the domestic ranks behind conservative security policies as the only option to protect Jordan from the fate experienced by the neighboring countries.

Despite the frequent focus on it as a key element of decision-making, the personal dimension of the king's personality, does not play a major role in defining general strategies or the broad outlines of foreign policy so much as it plays a role in determining the tools and tactics used to achieve these objectives and Jordan's higher interests. Looking at the foreign policy of the four kings who have ruled Jordan in succession, we conclude that the Jordanian throne has a fixed character based on the Hashemite legacy and the geo-strategic and demographic imperatives that require the king to adopt the same political behavior as his predecessors with the various tools permitted by the circumstances and the specifics of the king's personality.

Based on this overview of Jordan's political personality and general foreign conduct, the history of Jordanian-Shi'ite relations can be divided into three main phases: from the Islamic Revolution to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, from 2003 to the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011, and from 2011 to the present.

The Jordanian-Iranian relations between 1979 and 1997

In its early days, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan enjoyed good relations with the Imperial State of Iran under the rule of the shah. The political structure and the form of governance in the two countries were similar, which created good relations between them. There were some Jordanian reservations about the Pahlavi regime's conduct and its view of Arab regimes as new and unable to stand alongside the civilized nature of the Persian state. All these reservations, however, melted away in the orbit of the United States, which saw the two countries as part of its regional strategy to combat the communist expansion of the Soviet Union and to confront the Arab nationalists linked to the East. There was also a personal relationship between the king and the shah. The king released a statement of support for the shah in November 1978 before going to Paris the following month to try to discourage Khomeini from overthrowing the shah. He did so based on Jordan's constant concern about the fall of monarchies and a belief that the survival and continuation of monarchies in the region would require common action and cooperation among all the monarchies for their protection.[6]

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6. Monthly International Politics News, *Al Siyassa Al Dawliya*, Cairo, Issue 54, p. 233.

With the start of the Islamic Revolution, the new regime in Iran found itself forced to act with hostility, or at least suspicion and doubt, towards all the international and regional alliances linked to the old regime, and in which the Jordanian regime had a part. Jordan therefore found itself, from day one, under the burden of proving its good intentions vis-à-vis the new regime. According to an informed source, the Iranian regime provoked the king personally on several occasions, which coincided with early signals of Iran's nationalist and expansionist policies, in the form of its intervention in Lebanon and repression of non-religious currents that took part in the revolution.

All these signals encouraged Jordan to stand with Iraq in the war against Iran from 1980 to 1988. Jordan supported Iraq in any way possible; by making diplomatic moves, providing technical and military support, sending Jordanian military experts and advisers, importing weapons in its own name and sending them to Iraq, and working to promote and reinforce the Iraqi narrative in the Arab and Western worlds. Jordan did not take this stance out of belief in and support for the Ba'athist regime in Iraq but driven by Jordan's realization of the expansionist nationalism in Iran's foreign policy and the danger to the stability of the region. The first indication to arise was Iran's intervention in Lebanon.

Jordan's support for Iraq in the war can be attributed first to personal considerations, as there had been tension between King Hussein and Khomeini since the early stages

of the revolution. The second factor was the Jordanian fear stemming from Iran's stance on the Palestinian cause. The Islamic Republic had chosen to support resistance factions and non-state actors, ignoring Jordan's role in the Palestinian cause. Third, Jordan feared that the collapse of Iraq would lead to the spread of Iranian policy and connect Iran to Syria and Lebanon – as did actually happen later – putting Jordan in a hard situation from a security and strategic standpoint.[7]

Jordanian-Iranian relations entered a relatively stable period in the years after the war, especially with the change in Iranian leadership and the arrival of President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and then Mohammad Khatami. Jordan was able to find common ground to build bilateral relations between the two countries in the context of Iran's reformist politics and Jordan's primary focus on bridging religious viewpoints between Sunnis and Shi'ites. For example, Jordan closed the offices in its territory of the *People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran*, which opposes the Iranian regime.

Nonetheless, tensions arose in the Jordanian-Iranian relations after weapons' shipments from Iran was found in Jordan, which Jordan viewed as an attempt to change the regime. This prompted Hassan Rouhani,[8] then the secretary

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7. Muhannad Mubayyidin, "Jordanian-Iranian Relations: Past and Present," International Institute for Iranian Studies, Riyadh, 2016, p. 3.
8. Walid Abdul Nasser, *An Examination of the Revolution and the State*. Dar El-Shorouk, Beirut, 1997, pp. 86-87.

of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and later the president of Iran, to make an urgent visit to Jordan to clarify the situation. Hamas came out and said that the weapons were in Jordan in order to be sent later to the resistance in Palestine. The signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan also had a very negative impact on Jordanian relations with Iran. Even so, the reformist leadership in Iran continued a policy of overcoming differences, which encouraged Jordan to send ambassadors from religious scholarship backgrounds, such as Sheikh Nuh al-Qudah and Dr. Bassam al-Amoush. They prioritized religious dialogue and improving relations between the two countries by bridging religious viewpoints. This was a major success during al-Qudah's tenure as ambassador between 1996 and 2001. During this period, Queen Rania al-Abdullah, the king's wife, visited Iran, and the king invited Mohammad Khatami to visit Jordan any time he liked. It was a moment that could be considered the high point of the Jordanian-Iranian relationship.[9]

Jordanian- Shi'ite relations after 2003

This phase of improvement in Jordanian-Iranian relations didn't continue. Both countries, and the region as a whole, experienced many changes between 2003 and 2006, and several factors played a role in writing a new chapter in Jordanian relations with Iran and Shi'ites generally.

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9. Kuwait News Agency, "Jordanian monarch's wife arrives in Iran on the first visit by a queen since the Islamic Revolution," 3/7/2000.

The fall of Baghdad in 2003 gave rise to a different strategic equation for decision-makers in Jordan. Iran, which had previously been far away, was now at Jordan's doorstep. The new president at the time, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was able to exploit the new circumstances to complete what King Abdullah II called the Shi'ite crescent from Iraq through Syria to Lebanon.

In Iraq, Shi'ite parties that had suffered the persecution of the Ba'ath regime were able to gain power. Just as the Iranian regime was hostile toward regimes that had been close to the shah, opposition parties, especially the Islamic Dawa Party, treated Jordan the same way. Jordan tried hard to maintain good relations with the new power structure because of Iraq's strategic importance to Jordan, but the regional circumstances and the positions adopted on both sides were unhelpful in making room for fruitful dialogue between the two countries.

In Syria, meanwhile, it was clear to the Jordanian regime that the Syrian regime had come to believe it was a stranger in the region and that its real relationships were not with its Arab neighbors but with the Assad family's sectarian connection to Tehran. But the most serious transformation was in Lebanon marked by the end of the Syrian occupation and Hezbollah's forceful entry into Lebanese politics, which led to an escalation on the Lebanese front with Israel and ultimately to the July 2006 war. At that pivotal moment, Jordanian decision makers realized that Iran had become a trouble-maker in the region because its behavior distorted

the structures of the countries in which it intervened. It would form wings parallel to the state that then contested and sometimes defeated the state in a competition for control over territory. This made it impossible to deal with these countries through traditional diplomatic means and generated a sense of subjugation among other groups and sects in these countries, threatening the stability of Jordan's neighbors.

Around the same time, Jordanian decision makers also became aware of the danger that raising the Palestinian cause and resistance posed to the cohesion of the fundamentally fractious Arab and Islamic front. The use of the resistance to serve an expansionist agenda led to a split in the Arab and Islamic worlds, from the political leadership and intellectual elite down to the general public. Iran became part of the daily Arab discussion, and the resistance that Iran represented became a source of inspiration for some, while it transformed into a source of fear for others. In a survey conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, 54% of Jordanian citizens saw Iran as a threat to Jordan, while the figure stood at 69% among elites and intellectuals.

As before, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan saw this type of conflict and security disturbance in the region as an unacceptable threat at its borders, especially when the conflicts overlapped with various issues related to Jordanian

national security. It therefore sought to deal with the threat by initiating attempts to rebuild relations with Iraqi forces separately from Iran to at least maintain good relations with those forces.

This Iranian penetration into the region also pushed Jordan to develop its security cooperation with Iran's rivals in the region, mainly the Gulf axis. Jordan started to become convinced that it was no longer possible to ignore Iran's infiltration. It was now essential to cooperate with international and regional partners, primarily the United States, if Jordan wanted to maintain the stability of its eastern and northern borders.

The Arab Spring: Iran's rise and incursion in the Arab world

The Arab Spring was the central moment in Iran's rise in the region. At the beginning of it, Iran indicated its intentions to intervene to protect its interests, no matter the cost. The Jordanian political system and grassroots reacted to that negatively. A poll conducted by the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies showed how Arabs' general impression of Iran deteriorated following the Arab Spring: 89% of the participants had a negative view of Iran from a political standpoint, and 87% had a negative view from a security standpoint. With regard to Iran's future in the region, 48% expected a worse situation in political terms, while 21% of the participants thought that the general outlook would remain bad. As for priorities, 28% of the respondents said

that the first priority must be to resolve sectarian conflicts and the Arab-Iranian conflict, ahead of other conflicts and problems in the region.[10]

At the beginning of the Arab Spring, Iran made statements in support of the popular movements in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, and Yemen, inviting the Islamic nation to repeat the historical moment of the Islamic Revolution's triumph over tyranny in Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran quickly reversed this stance as soon as a revolution emerged against an allied regime. This eventually reversed the positive popular view of Iran from before the Arab Spring, which was based on its role in the Palestinian cause.

This popular anxiety helped the Jordanian State take bolder steps in its handling of the Iranian issue in the region. Jordan intervened in Bahrain to suppress the protests in Manama, and it joined the Arab coalition in Yemen. According to an informed security source, it based its actions related to Syria on the conviction that there were no "good sides" in the conflict in Syria. The Jordanian priority was to create a safe space near its northern border, free of extremist groups and sectarian militias, according to an official account. Jordan was keen to reach understandings with Russia to secure its northern border by keeping the strip along the border under Russian supervision and control.

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10. Mohammad Abu Rumman, "How do you lose your 'loyal friends' in 5 years?" *Al Ghad* (Amman), 2016.

In the mid-2010s, new indicators emerged that suggested an easing of tensions in Iran's relations with the Arab region and other international relations. The nuclear agreement inspired hope that Iran would become a rational actor in the region. Jordan welcomed this and stressed the need to cooperate and work with Iran on major regional issues to achieve a stable future for the region. The rise of extremist movements in Syria and Iraq, especially the Islamic State (ISIS), once again encouraged the cooperation and coordination between Jordan and Iran-aligned forces against the extremist movements.

In the Persian Gulf, rounds of meetings were held between Saudi Arabia and Iran as a new reformist government and president arrived in Iran. The objective was to reach strategic understandings on points of contention between the two countries, in an attempt to reduce the growing tension between them.

The new Iranian administration, however, was nearly monopolized by conservatives. It believed that it would be in its interest to preserve the traditional policy of expansion and nuclear program development, and to direct Iran's agencies toward breaching every possible regional gap. This eventually led to a halt of these meetings and the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement under President Donald Trump. The Gulf states reached an unprecedented degree of alliance and partnership with the United States, especially after the 2019 attack on Aramco facilities in Saudi Arabia. This partnership between the Gulf states

and the Trump administration eventually pushed the Gulf Cooperation Council states towards rapprochement with Israel with the aim of providing regional strategic sponsorships to confront Iran.

Besides these changes, pro-Iran Iraqi parties' were against any form of Jordanian-Iraqi cooperation, whether in the context of bilateral cooperation between the two neighbors or in the framework of the New Levant Initiative, which also includes Egypt. They have reinforced the conviction that Iran's behavior will not change in the foreseeable future, and that reaching any form of understanding with Iran in the region is out of the question in the short term.

The arrival of US President Joe Biden brought grounds for hope for the return to the nuclear agreement, with the resumption of attempts at reaching an understanding between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Jordan has made all sorts of diplomatic efforts to ease the Caesar sanctions on Syria and reintegrate it into the regional economy before everything gets bogged down and tension once again prevails between Iran and either the Gulf states or Israel.[11]

Amidst this regression in opportunities for understanding between Iran and the West at the beginning of this year, there has been a surge in militia drug trafficking from inside Syria. The militias, including Iranian militias and oth-

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11. Hazem Salem al-Dhumur, "Iranian Attempts to Reform Relations with Jordan: Messages and Variables," Center for Strategic Studies, Amman, 2021.

ers linked to Hezbollah and the Syrian Army, operate along Jordan's northern border using drones. These operations have been an unprecedented escalation at the northern border amidst the withdrawal of Russian forces from southern Syria because of their involvement in the war in Ukraine. Russia has chosen passivity, opting not to pressure Syria and Iran to stop the flow of narcotics. Since the beginning of this year, at least 35 smugglers have been killed, and more than 20,000 bricks of marijuana and 18 million pills have been seized. The numbers have grown weekly across 600 nights, at a rate of three attempts every two nights.

Amidst this escalation, Jordan took a firm stance towards dealing with any form of smuggling. King Abdullah made this clear during his recent visit to the northern border after the death of a Border Guard officer. He sent a message through his orders to deal firmly with smuggling attempts. In an interview during one of his visits to the United States, he said Jordan would immediately take action and make major diplomatic efforts to contain these operations and de-escalate the situation.

In light of recent developments, it seems that Jordan will be pushed out of the gray area concerning Iran. It will have to take a clearer position in its relations with Iran if Iran's behavior does not change. The Gulf states have so far supported Jordan in its efforts to restore calm in its northern border, especially as the bulk of the drugs are smuggled have the Gulf as their final destination. The recent escalation could lead to the coordination between Jordan with Israel,

which is now facing an escalation on its northern front through repeated breaches of its airspace by Iranian drones. If these operations continue, and Jordan has the needed international support, Jordan could take be the last resort to impose a buffer zone inside Syria, just as Turkey did before in order to preserve its national security.

Iraq in Jordanian foreign policy: The gateway to rapprochement and understanding

Since Mustafa al-Kadhimi became the prime minister, Jordan's stance has begun to change. Jordan sensed some kind of potential to reach an understanding and common ground with al-Kadhimi and his government, which would facilitate further understandings with Shi'ite forces in Iraq and maybe with Iran.

This idea did not emerge from a vacuum or any personal desire; it has been circulating among politicians in both countries since the early 1990s. Assumptions emerged that Iranian dominance over Iraq was merely a natural consequence of the absence of an Arab backer when Iraq most needed an Arab presence. When Iraq began its recovery, it had to re-diversify its export outlets, especially given the closure of its border with Syria and a lack of cooperation from the Gulf at the time. The most notable achievement during that period was the signing of the agreement to build the Basra-Aqaba pipeline.

Jordan has continued its security approach in its relations with Iraq, because Jordan believed that this would automatically lead to Iranian incursion into Jordan. Things changed, however, when al-Kadhimi came to power. Al-Kadhimi's international relations helped encourage Jordan to open a new door, especially with the growing Arab conviction that restoring Iraqi-Arab cooperation would lessen Iran's influence in Iraq. This conviction prompted Jordan to take serious steps in cooperation with Egypt to start some form of an economic alliance and rapprochement in the region. The objective was the Iraqi integration at a level unseen since 2003. To this end, the Jordanian House of Representatives Speaker Abdul Monem al-Odat met in 2021 with Ammar al-Hakim, Qais al-Khazali, and other representatives of Tehran-linked Shi'ite groups.

The main problem in the attempt to form a new Levantine alliance is Jordan's and Egypt's reliance on Mustafa al-Kadhimi, whose disappearance from the scene could squander all the progress made in recent years. Thus, the key to the initiative's success today is to use other consensus figures like al-Kadhimi as a key to rapprochement and to open channels of communication with Shi'ite forces with whom dialogue was not previously possible, in order formulate a new vision for relations between Jordan and Shi'ite political forces in Iraq.

Conclusions

Based on the historical evolution of Jordanian-Iranian relations since the 1979 Revolution, the reader can conclude that the future of the Jordanian-Iranian relations depends directly on Tehran›s conduct towards not only Jordan but also the region. From looking at various stages of history, we found that relations improved whenever Iran pursued rational policies in the region but deteriorated whenever it tried to return to policies of expansion and hegemony.

We can also conclude from this paper that Jordan never had a problem with the form or nature of Iran's political system, or any dispute with regard to doctrine or sect. It sought to clarify this on several occasions and also sought to support dialogue among religious scholars as an instrument of rapprochement. Jordan sees Iran and its people as an integral and indisputable part of the region and its history and culture. The disagreement was never about anything but Iran's policies that put expansionist and nationalist ambitions above humanitarian and moral considerations.

The Jordanian-Iranian relations also depend on the attitudes of Jordan's allies toward Iranian policies, especially the attitudes of its allies in Washington and Riyadh. Jordan cannot separate its stability from the stability of the Gulf. There can be no attempt to foster relations so long as Iran and its allies continue to use sectarian tools and non-state entities to undermine the stability of the region.

Jordan cannot seek to establish a network of relationships with Iran's allies in the region in isolation from Iran, nor can it develop partnership-based relationships with axis states without first achieving rapprochement and understanding with Iran. This will not happen without greater international and regional understanding.

In addition to the above, the development of Jordanian-Iranian relations requires Iran to take serious steps to strengthen this relationship based on security and strategic understandings before talking about economic cooperation. Every time Jordan has tried to send a message of its good intentions towards the Islamic Republic, it has been met with indifference from the Iranian side. Iran has done more than enough attempts at reaching commercial and economic arrangements, while not hiding its suspicion of Jordan and its political system.

One of the most important past and present worries of Jordanian decision makers is the marginalization in the Palestinian cause, or even that the Palestinian cause will be used against the Jordanian state. The Jordanian regime has seen Iran's advocacy for the resistance since the beginning of the Revolution, and its inclination towards supporting non-state movements, as undermining Jordan's role and efforts to reach a solution for Palestine, as well as presenting a security threat.

The central role in fostering Jordanian and Arab relations with Shi'ite political forces belonged so far to the former Iraqi government, which was seen as more capable than its predecessors of reaching understandings with neighbors. Nonetheless, betting solely on the Kadhemi's government presented a temporary solution and did not guarantee that strategic understandings can be reached in the long term, especially with the security approach still at the forefront.

Contributing Researchers

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Former Jordanian Minister of Culture and Youth and academic advisor to the Politics and Society Institute. He is also a researcher specialized in political thought and Islamic movements at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan. He received his doctorate in political science and philosophy from Cairo University and has written for *The New Arab (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed)* newspaper. He has many books and publications including *"Political Reform in Contemporary Islamic Thought", "Salafists and the Arab Spring", "Between the Dominion of God and the Rule of the Ummah: The Political Thought of Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida",* and *"Mysteries of the Sufi Path".*

He has also co-authored (with Hassan Abu Haniyeh) *The book "the Islamic Solution in Jordan", "The Islamic State Organization: The Sunni Crisis and the Struggle of Global Jihadism", "Infatuated with Martyrdom",* and *"Huras Al-Din: The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda in the Levant".* He also recently co-wrote (with Dr. Zaid Eyadat) the book *"the Jordanian Jihadists and the Collapse of the Islamic State",* and other books and publications.

▶ **Mohsen Kadivar:**

Born in 1959 in Iran, he is a professor and scholar of Islamic studies at Duke University. He writes about Shi'ite political theology, doctrine (*fiqh*), and political thought. He has published thirty books in Persian, two of which have been translated into English and published in 2021 by the University of Edinburgh.

Kadivar's publications available in Arabic include "The Theories of State in Shi'ite Fiqh" (2000), "*The Forgotten Interpretation: Rethinking the Theory of Virtuous Scholars in Twelver Shi'ism and Four Others Articles"* (2011), "*The Government of the Guardian Jurist"* (2015), "*The Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist: Critiques of Theories of Governance in Shi'ite Political Thought"* (2021), "*Towards Removing Apostasy and the Freedom of Doctrine*" (2022, forthcoming)*,* and "*Compassionate Islam: Religious Knowledge in the Modern Age"* (2022, forthcoming).

▶ **Ali Mamouri:**

An academic and journalist specialized in religious studies. He received his doctorate in comparative Abrahamic theology and a second doctorate in political philosophy.

Mamouri has previously lectured at the University of Tehran and University of Sydney. He is also a former instructor in the *hawza*s of Qom and Najaf. Mamouri has published two books and co-written eight others in English, Arabic, and Persian, including "*The Political Philosophy of Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr*". He has also written several articles published in English, Persian, and Arabic academic spheres and is associate editor and columnist on Iraq for *al-Monitor*.

▶ **Sari Hanafi:**

A professor of sociology at the American University of Beirut and the director of the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies. He is also chair of the Islamic Studies program and editor-in-chief of *Idafat: The Arab Journal of Sociology*. He has been the president of the International Sociological Association since 2018 and before that was vice president of the board of the Arab Council for Social Sciences (2012-2016). He is the founder and director of *Athar: Portal for Social Impact of Scientific Research in/on the Arab World*.

Sari Hanafi's publications include "*Knowledge Production in the Arab World: The Impossible Promise* (with Rigas Arvanitis) and *"Addressing the Rupture between the Religious and Social Sciences: Is the Morning Coming Soon?"*. He was elected as permanent fellow of the British Academy for his contributions to the humanities and social sciences.

▶ **Akeel Abbas:**

Akeel Abbas is a researcher specialized in cultural studies. He focuses on Middle Eastern modernity and its transformations, including the relationship between national and religious identity and processes of democratic change. He has worked continuously on issues related to Iraq with regard to its difficult political context and emerging democratic challenges. He has published dozens of articles and studies on these topics in both Arabic and English.

Abbas has previously been a professor at the University of Houston in Texas, Old Dominion University in Virginia, and the American University of Iraq - Sulaimani, and has taught literature, scholarly writing, and journalism. He worked for years in journalism in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq. Abbas received a PhD in cultural studies from Purdue University.

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Haider Saeed is an Iraqi writer and researcher and the chair of the research department of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. He is also the editor-in-chief of the journal *Siyasat Arabia* and has worked for various think tanks in the region. Saeed received his PhD in linguistics from Al Mustansiriya University in Baghdad in 2001 with a dissertation entitled "The Phenomenological Foundations of Arab Linguistics Theory: An Enquiry into the Origins." He also contributed to the National Report on Human Development in Iraq in 2009 and 2014. Saeed has also written "*The Status of Social Sciences in Iraqi Universities*" (2008) and "*Symbolic Politics and the End of the Nation-State in Iraq*" (2009).

He recently published a study entitled "The Mahdi Army and Sadrist Movement in Iraq: The Struggle for Transformation" (2021) with the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

▶ **Ali Taher Alhammood:**

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▶ **Abdullah Al-Jbour:**

Abdullah Al-Jbour is a researcher in political society who has studied international relations and strategic studies. His research has focused on youth issues and social movements, citizenship and identity, and the state and democratic transitions.

He has published various studies including *The Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq: Regional Dynamics and Local Variables* with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung - Iraq in 2021. This report sheds light on the Popular Mobilization Forces from within, as well as associated militias and groups and their identities and affiliations.

Al-Jbour has prepared research materials for an Aljazeera documentary film entitled *The Second Message of Islam* and for another documentary entitled *Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society in Bahrain* (for Al Araby TV). He also co-wrote the book *Jordanian Youth and the Centennial of the State: Historical Narratives, Current Challenges, and Future Prospect*s.

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The book you hold examines the geographies of Shi'ite political Islam and its social, cultural, and political dimensions. It discusses which factors led to the rise of its manifestation over the last two decades and elaborates on the security and political implications at the regional level. It also explores the interconnected dynamics of historical contexts, deeply-ingrained religious beliefs and convictions and geopolitical realities. We move beyond the traditional analyses in the Arab media that have served specific political agendas and the doctrinal writings and stereotypes existing among Sunnis and Shi'ites in the Arab world. Instead, this book presents objective, knowledge-based analyses of various issues and challenges related to the development of Shi'ism in the region.

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