

Shi'i Studies and the Islamic Republic of Iran: Claiming Islam Back to its Own History

Raffaele Mauriello*

Abstract

Barack Obama's message to the Iranian people and government on the occasion of Nowruz 1388 (2009) and the appointment of Vali Nasr earlier the same year as Senior Advisor to the US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan arguably marked a turning point in the US foreign policy vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Shi'as at large; indicating an enhanced role for Shi'i Studies in shaping American foreign policy. However, a number of European and American historians of Islam have endeavored for quite some time to inform both the Western governments and the general public that there is the necessity to distinguish between Islam as an "object" of study within the framework of the history of religions and Islam as a political phenomenon – and therefore as an object of study for the political scientist. The present article, drawing on the writer's understanding of some implications of a recent work of synthesis about the history of the academic historiography concerning Shi'i Islam by the Italian Shi'itologist/historian Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti (November 2010), addresses the implications of the post-1979 re-interpretation of Shi'i history in political terms. It argues that in the crisis in the relations between the West and Muslim societies two alternative approaches are conceivable. Either it is assumed that Islam as a religion has little to do with the crisis and that this is the result of geo-politics, political interests, and economic competition among states (Graham 2010), or alternatively, that Islam is in fact the relevant issue at stake, in which case it calls for a serious, scholarly discussion of Islam, primarily as a religion, and hence, a matter of theology and history.

Keywords: Shi'i Islam, Shi'itology, Islamic Republic, Euro-American Academia

* **Raffaele Mauriello**, PhD in Islamic Civilization from the University of Rome, is a researcher specializing in the contemporary history of Shi'i Islam and Iranian and Iraqi geopolitics. He served as expert on Iran for the External Image of the European Union Project (2008-2009). His research papers have been published in edited volumes by Routledge and Edinburgh University Press, and his articles and interviews have appeared in *Limes*, *Rivista di Intelligence*, *Left*, and *Liberal*. He is also a contributor to the Muslim Civilisations Abstract Project of the Aga Khan University. He is the author of *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History: A Case Study, the Shi'i Religious Establishment of Najaf, Iraq* (2011, forthcoming).

Introduction

The unfolding of the popular Islamic movement in Iran (1978-1979), victory of the Islamic Revolution, and subsequently the establishment of the Islamic Republic have come to increasingly influence the role of Shi'i studies (henceforth Shi'itology) in affecting and shaping both public perceptions and policy-making in the U.S. and Europe. Likewise, the relations between the West proper on the one hand and the Islamic Republic – and the wider “Shi'i World” on the other – have been affected to an increasing degree. A century ago Edward Browne (1862-1926), the well-known British Orientalist/Iranologist of the time, had largely no role in affecting the public opinion regarding his direct witnessing of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran (1906-1907) – and the political opportunity of supporting it. A few decades later, however, Henri Corbin (1903-1978), a prominent French authority on Shi'i Islam, came to exert a highly influential role in shaping Europeans' understanding of the special place of religion – Shi'ism to be exact – in the Iranians' identity. However, lesser known, or at least less influential, was Alessandro Bausani's strictly “Islamic/Shi'itologic” response to some of Corbin's theses. In this respect, I find of particular relevance the concise but rich contribution about the history of the academic historiography concerning Shi'i Islam in the 20th century by the Italian Shi'itologist/historian Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti, entitled “Islam sciita,” which appeared very recently in a dictionary of the historical and religious knowledge of the Twentieth century edited by R. Melloni.¹ She shows in a very lucid narrative how part of this



historiography in fact sustains that the French scholar had a role (albeit inadvertent) in offering the Pahlavi dynasty a justification for the promotion of a peculiar nationalistic project. In this reading of Corbin, the Pahlavi project was based on the idea of Iran as the *lieu par excellence* of exotericism in a claimed continuity from the Achaemenid history through the Arab-Islamic conquest up to the proclamation of Shi'i Islam as state religion by the Safavids in 16th century.²

The essay by Scarcia Amoretti traces the development of the Euro-American academic understanding of Shi'i Islam particularly in relation with the different political conditions that formed the background in which these understandings emerged. It also contains a good compendium of relevant ideas and notions in the Shi'itology, providing a framework for trying to place in a proper perspective what could be considered as conceptual distortions caused by both the Orientalistic academic production as well as the improper use of some of its ideas/products by Euro-American colonialist policies.

The main points of interest on the current understanding of Shi'i Islam, as interpreted by the writer, include³:

- The protagonists of the political life of the Islamic Republic of Iran share a consistent use of an ideological and propagandistic language that formally has a religious origin.

- In his discourse the Sorbonne-educated Iranian sociologist Ali Shariati subverted the approach to the history of Shi'i Islam. In his view, Shi'i Islam was an immanent model to be unceasingly re-visited, not an historical phenomenon. He saw current Shi'i Islam as a deviation from this model and sustained that true Shi'i Islam found its expression only in the origins of Islamic history. In this perspective, Shi'ism is a 'permanent revolution'. The theoretical consequences of Shariati's thought can imply that at the source of the conflicts that at least since the 1970s characterize the Middle East lies in a unitary historical subject, Shi'i Islam, and that its adherents are united and shaped by the same faith. This hypothesis is clearly denied by the



events of revolutionary Iran.

- The source of the current questionable interpretation of Shi'as' history in almost exclusive political terms is particularly represented by both Euro-American Shi'itologists specialized in contemporary issues and by acculturated Muslim scholars. The background to this line of thinking could, to some degree, be found in the quite strong appeal of Marxism and socialism among the Middle Eastern youngsters in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in the emergence of a certain brand of militant Shi'i historiography with borrowed (inadvertently though) discourse and analysis of Marxist sociology. This militant Shi'i historiography has claimed the same authenticity usually assigned to classical Muslim historiography. Moreover, it largely dabs as "Orientalistic" other more recent results of the Euro-American academic production, contradicts them, and describes Euro-American scholars as being still moved by an unending colonial will.

- Colonialism favored (and its recent progenitors still favor) the possibility of making political use of the Orientalistic academic production. It is to be cautioned, however, that it is often the politician who chooses the most advantageous product on the market – even though not usually the best.

- In contrast with the academic production for the public at large during the 1960s and 1970s, a very large part of what has been published in more recent decades has been conceived with a commercial purpose and with an eye to the whims and wishes of the public opinion, not in terms of accessible works of synthesis based on primary sources. The end result has been an increasing emphasis on the improper use of the "Orientalistic" academic production.

Based on the above general framework of understanding, the following four basic historical assumptions could be presented:

- Shi'i Islam is primarily a religious phenomenon and, therefore, plural, shaped by history, and experienced in different ways in relation to different contexts and moments⁴;



- Shi'i Islam (and Islam in general), as a religious phenomenon per se, is primarily concerned with theology and history;
- Shi'i Islam is not monolithic; and
- Shi'i Islam is an essential element of the Iranian national identity.

Obama and the Prospects of a New Approach

In the course of a major speech at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo on 4 June 2009,⁵ addressed to the Greater Middle East and, in fact, the entire Muslim world, the U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama used the occasion to send a clear message to Tehran. He admitted that “[I]n the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government” – that of Mohammad Mosaddeq (1953). On that occasion, he also affirmed that “[T]he question is not what Iran is against but what future it wants to build.” In fact, Obama had already made known his ‘new’ vision and approach towards Iran; first through the appointment of a Special Advisor to the US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (further below) and second through the special Nowruz message. On 19 March 2009, the White House released a video in which the U.S. President directly addressed “the people and leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran” on the occasion of Iranian new year (Nowruz). While the message represented a clear departure from a similar gesture by George W. Bush in that it was addressed to both Iranian people and government, it was equally explicit in other respects. President Obama affirmed in the video message that “[T]he United States wants the Islamic Republic of Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations. You have that right, but it comes with real responsibilities, and that place cannot be reached through terror or arms, but rather through peaceful actions that demonstrate the true greatness of the Iranian people and civilization. And the measure of that greatness is not the capacity to destroy, it is your demonstrated ability to build and create.”⁶



A year later, again on the Nowruz occasion (1389/2010)⁷, under a quite changed political atmosphere between the two countries as a result of post-election difficulties in Iran and impasse in the nuclear negotiations, Obama repeated his appeal. He reaffirmed his earlier pronouncement: “I said, last year, that the choice for a better future was in the hands of Iran’s leaders. That remains true today.” Obama’s personal predisposition and willingness “to reach out with an open hand to the Iranian government and the Iranian people”, despite the prevailing unfavorable atmosphere, was underlined once more in late September 2010 in the course of an exclusive interview with the BBC Persian Program.⁸ He went on in the interview to assert: “Because we believe that there's nothing inevitable that should cause Iran and the United States to be enemies” and, underlined his willingness to “change the dynamic that has been in place since 1979” – which, one could lament, and without prejudice to the array of factors involved, has remained unfulfilled for all practical purposes. It might as well be surmised that Obama’s affirmations, sweetened also with saying a few words in Persian and Arabic, could be seen and understood as a very late American [official] response to Mohammad Khatami’s “Dialogue among Civilizations” – albeit under extremely unfavorable conditions.

Vali Nasr: Political Shi'itology Reaches Washington

Just a few days after taking office, President Obama appointed Vali Nasr, *an Iranian-American scholar of contemporary Islam and* professor of international politics, and also son of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, as Senior Advisor to the US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke – who passed away on 13 December 2010. The appointment arguably represented an important step in at least two ways; both as regards to Obama’s vision for relations with Iran – to be precise, the Islamic Republic – as well as from the vantage point of the role of a political scientist specialized in Shi'i Islam hired with the specific mandate and function of helping shape a more nuanced and judicious policy towards the Greater Middle East.



Nasr's most influential work – *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (2006) – is an interesting work in several respects, including in terms of his scholarly references.⁹ For what is of strict concern here, it reveals the seemingly deliberate avoidance of mentioning the complex but relevant debate among historians about major nodal issues of contemporary Shi'ism. Among the most relevant issues for this essay is that Shi'i Islam should be considered, first and foremost, a religion, not an ideology nor a political movement, even if currently it is overwhelmingly seen as a strictly political phenomenon. It is to be noted that while Shi'i Islam manifested itself in the early decades of the Islamic history as a political opposition and only later provided a religious basis to its theological and jurisprudential differences with the predominant Sunni Islam, Shi'ism in its religious essence is primarily based on the idea of providing “a more proper” interpretation of the Qur'an and the Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁰ However, the current focus on Shi'i Islam as a political phenomenon can reasonably be understood within the bigger context of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the establishment of the Islamic Republic as a state with an overarching official role assigned to the Shi'i ulama by its Constitution, and the political-religious [ideological] ever-expanding ripple effects thereafter. Such a focus and related sensitivities have been further inflated as a result of Iranian approach and policies in the bigger region, including with respect to Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Palestinian Hamas, discernible impact in the post-Saddam Iraq, and Shi'i increasing visibility in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Bahrain and the Persian Gulf.

Within this framework, a look at Nasr's basic idea in analyzing the basis of the conflicts characterizing the Middle East at least since the 1970s is illuminating. In his analysis, there has emerged among the different groups living in the region a unitary historical object called Shi'i Islam whose adherents are united and molded by the same faith – and in conflictual contraposition to the predominant Sunni Islam.



Nasr's view largely fits in the fourth (and ongoing) period of Shi'itologic studies, as defined by Scarcia Amoretti¹⁴, in particular the pattern opened by Ali Shariati. In fact, as implied in Scarcia Amoretti's analysis, Nasr's view might prove wrong, as indicated by a close look at the events of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and, I add, at the more recent eight-year Iran-Iraq War, in which Shi'as were engaged on both sides, and the implications involved in terms of collective identity (Mauriello 2006). It is also of interest that Nasr himself tempers his thesis when he writes that "Shias and Sunnis are not monolithic communities, [...]. The followers of each sect are divided by language, ethnicity, geography, and class." And he further goes on to add that "Yet no matter how much we may focus on the diversity of opinions, customs, attitudes, and interests within each community, in the end it is not the diversity that defines the conflict but the conflict that defines social attitudes that are widely shared" (Nasr 2006: 24-25).

As briefly discussed above, Scarcia Amoretti's contribution appears to imply that the current – wrong – interpretation of Shi'i Islam's history in strictly political terms is both based on a series of misreading by Shi'itologists strictly specialized on contemporary issues – particularly those who apparently do not sympathize with their object-study – and on Shi'i acculturated scholars. Her essay also seems to suggest that unnecessary focus on addressing the transient needs and requirements of the market have largely left unanswered several main issues on the table, such as: How can we possibly address the actual influence of sectarian (Shi'i) affiliation on Iraqi, Iranian, Lebanese, or Bahraini national identities when we have diverging views of what Shi'as are, especially when some scholars tend to describe them as a *de facto* unitary phenomenon (Nasr 2006) while others emphasize their diversity (Mervin 2007)? Also, how can we verify the continuity or discontinuity caused by colonialism and foreign rule and domination of different kinds and to different degrees on these communities in order to show how, as suggested by



the more recent data collected by historians and contrary to the previous prevalent perceptions, issues such as peaceful coexistence and pluralism are Middle Eastern home-grown realities and indeed congenital to Islam and, in fact, the region has been exposed more to violence and sectarianism than the promised democracy or civil society?

A World Without Islam or Making Sense of Islam's Political Language

Among Nasr's references we come across an interesting dissonant voice, that of another American political scientist of long-established serious interest in Shi'i studies – Graham Fuller, with special interest in the Arab Shi'as,¹² and, for what is of strict concern here, author of a recent interesting work with a quite tantalizing title: *A World Without Islam* (2010). Graham argues in his latest book that viewing Islam as an explanation of current Middle Eastern political troubles obfuscates a clear vision of the issues. He advances the idea that even if Islam had not existed we would still be facing an East-West confrontation.¹³ Graham substantially debunks Huntington's narrative of the clash of civilizations (Huntington 1993) and goes on to explain that positing a permanent conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims in geopolitical terms is absurd, particularly on the premises advanced by the author of *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1997). It can be argued, though, that as a matter of fact whoever sat in possession of Anatolian, Levantine, and Balkan territories would have inherited a set of built-in geopolitical legacies of tension with the West.

Aside from the impact of such built-in legacies as proposed in Graham's analysis, in my view, from a Shi'itologic perspective, the Western [EU-US] stalemate vis-à-vis the Muslim world also lies in a peculiar aspect of the Islamic Civilization, the specificity of its political language. A main reference, in this respect, is Bernard Lewis's *The Political Language of Islam*, on whose premises Graham arguably



builds part of his *A World Without Islam*. It is worth mentioning that, in fact, many sustain that Lewis is the original “inventor” of the idea of “clash of civilizations” in describing the future of the relations between the West and Islam – an idea that he reportedly fancied back in 1957, three and a half decades before Samuel Huntington put it on the international pedestal (see Miles 2004, Gresh 2005, and Whitaker 2006).

Quite well-known misuse by neo-colonialists of a substantial part of Lewis’ intellectual-academic production – whether because of his Jewish origins or ardent support for the Jewish state – does not necessarily invalidate some interesting results of his academic activity. It should be recognized and borne in mind that an excellent scholar of Middle East Islamic history does not necessarily make a wise political analyst or policy advisor. Some of the main ideas suggested by Lewis in *The Political Language of Islam* bear relevance to our discussion here.

- In order to understand Islamic politics and the movements and changes perceived and expressed in Islamic terms, first of all we need to understand the language of the political discourse among Muslims, the way in which words are used and understood, the system of metaphors and allusions which is part of every communication, and abound in the political language of Islam.

- The political language of Islam is packed with metaphors and allusions.

- The Iranian revolution indicated a way, and in every Muslim country there are men and women who are trying to find an alternative way to get back to the true, original, and authentic Islam of the Prophet and his Companions.

- The political language of Islam has been changing and has over time acquired new content and meaning¹⁴, some of which seem to have been influenced by both the Occidentalization and laicization of the 19 and 20 centuries – a language in which the foreign sources of inspiration have acquired a de facto status equal to those taken from classical and prophetic Islam. The results of this process of



harmonization of diverse traditions are still uncertain and have, in fact, proved uneasy and even troublesome.

Conclusions

The present article has tried to shed some light on the state of Shi'itology in the current Euro-American discourse. Drawing on the ideas of Italian Shi'itologist Scarcia Amoretti, the obvious shortcomings of the dominant discourse have been addressed, albeit in very broad brush. The crux of the argument here is that the West's approach in recent decades to the Shi'as has been predominantly influenced by the Realpolitik of a knee-jerk political response to the Islamic Republic, whose Shi'i [religious/Islamic] identity and aspirations have been found unacceptable and its impact unsettling. A highly "politicized" approach to what is essentially a matter of theology and history – and hence belongs properly to the realm of academic discourse and discussion – has as a matter of fact much complicated an intrinsically complex and multilayered relationship. The article also drew attention to the fact that an important fault line in dealing with Muslim countries has emanated from and revolved around the peculiar political language used in the Muslim world – by leaders both in power and in the opposition – which has been markedly different from the one used in the US or in Europe, itself very much influenced, directly and otherwise, by the political, economic and cultural legacy of the nineteenth and twenty century colonialism and foreign domination.

Portrayal of a real geo-political conflict between the West proper and the Muslims in the Greater Middle East in terms of Huntington's untenable idea of The Clash of Civilizations was in fact utilized by the Bush Administration and, in the extremely confused post-9/11 atmosphere, it became a dominant feature of the US policy vis-à-vis the Muslim world, particularly Shi'i Islamic Republic. The consequences have been tragic in every sense – politically, economically, and worst of all, culturally – for both the West and the



Muslim countries. Given this, the author believes that there exists an urgent imperative of “de-layering” Muslims’ grievances (i.e. reading through the specificities of the Islamic political language) in order to arrive at and appreciate the real economic, political, and more importantly, the socio-cultural issues on the table as seen by the other side. As argued in the article, Barack Obama’s new approach to both Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran represents a much-needed change and a valuable opportunity towards curbing serious tensions with quite ominous consequences and hopefully, arriving at a better, more nuanced understanding of an intrinsically complex phenomenon and dynamic reality.

From a strategic perspective, the discussion in this article implies that in formulating their future policies towards the Islamic Republic of Iran henceforth, Europe and the US [West] basically have two options. The first is to conceive – and act accordingly – as if (Shi’i) Islam did not exist; that is to say that they should deal with the political impasse in their interactions and relations over geo-political differences with the Islamic Republic without viewing Islam [precisely speaking, Shi’ism] as the obstacle. The obvious failure of the policies thus far based on such a conception and understanding, inclusive of sanctions and military threats, hardly need any mentioning. The second option is for them to consider that Islam – and in the particular case, at hand, Shi’i Islam – is in fact the relevant issue in West-Muslim World relations. Conceived and viewed as such, as argued by Shi’itologists, we need to discuss it primarily as a religion, and not as a peculiarly political phenomenon. As already underlined, proper scholarly discussions to this end need to take place at a serious level and within proper academic milieu and Islamic hawzas not at the level of commercial media or even political think-tanks. Perhaps the U.S. [and the West proper] should consider what Vali Nasr and Roy Takeyh would call “The Iran option that is not on the table”¹⁵ – which would as well allow Iranians to sort out, among themselves and free from undue outside interference, a core struggle between state and society.

Notes

1. Dizionario del sapere storico-religioso del Novecento (November 2010).
2. It could be argued that, within the context of the discourse offered by the Islamic Republic, the French scholar largely shares this role with Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Henry Corbin's activity was the result of a series of instances dealing with the role of religion in Iranians' history. The French scholar hypothesized the existence of an unbroken continuity in the overall history of the Iranian plateau. All the different religious expressions witnessed by Iran should, in his view, be interpreted as simple variations of this single model. In this respect, Shi'i Islam, particularly in its esoteric form, should be understood as a perfection of this model. Alessandro Bausani on the one hand shared with Corbin the idea of a marked continuity in the religious history of Iran, but on the other consistently denied the hypothesis of viewing Shi'i Islam as a sort of simple modern adaptation of Zoroastrianism and other forms of religiosity on the Iranian plateau. Indeed, the most recent historiography discussed by Scarcia Amoretti indicates that the idea that Iran is the native country of Shi'i Islam, understood as a phenomenon intrinsically subversive and esoteric, is groundless.
3. Scarcia Amoretti's contribution offers the possibility of extracting several mainstream historiographic understanding of the characteristics of both Islamic and Shi'i history very often unknown or at least misunderstood by the general public, such as: Shi'i Islam does not recognize the contraposition orthodoxy/heterodoxy; Sunnis and Shi'as do motivate their divergences in religious terms; Shi'i Islam has Arabic and not Iranian origin, as wrongly sustained by the Arabic classical historiography, which often wrongly interprets Shi'i revolts as Iranian efforts to restore a vaguely defined "religion of the fathers"; from a historical perspective, Shi'i Islam translates its "diversity" at two levels, political and religious. Again, from a historical perspective, the political level appears to have preceded the religious one. Born as a means to meet pragmatic exigencies, the Caliphate institution had to take Shi'i Islam into account and, in order to exorcise it, Sunnis attributed religious prerogatives to it.
Within the framework of the Shi'i beliefs, during the absence of the Hidden Imam, Twelver Shi'as assume the necessity of conceding to some individuals provided with some specific requisites the right to express themselves on how the "lay-common" believer can and should act. It is to be noted that Shi'itologists largely agree that



historically the Islamic civilization does not distinguish between 'laic' and 'religious'. However, failing all else, I use "lay" and "laymen" to refer to Muslims who have not studied theology in the hawza [religious seminary]; a "lay" believer can freely choose his/her "guide" (mujtahid or marja') and, in return, does recognize the latter's authority. The Constitutional Revolution in Iran (1905-1909) testifies to the active participation of the 'ulama' – on both sides of the revolutionary divide; Constitutionalist (Mashrooteh) and anti-Constitutionalist (Mashroo'eh) camps. Both groups of 'ulama' articulated their participation on the basis of what each considered as the correct application of Shi'i theology, jurisprudence (fiqh), and traditions.

The experts have still not completely and convincingly explained the contraposition between the diverging positions of two prominent streaks in contemporary Shi'i thinking and action; the more traditional line otherwise known as 'quietist' – as best represented by the late Ayatollah Boroujerdi in Qum (Iran) and the late Ayatollah Khui in Najaf (Iraq), and the more recent activist line – best represented by the late Ayatollah Khomeini in Qum and the late Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in Najaf. The basic fault line between the two streaks has been – and continues to be – on the politically committed role of the mujtahid, considered an obligation in the case of Khomeini – hence, the articulation of the concept and system of Velayat-e Faqih [the Guardianship of the Jurisconsult] and the Islamic Republic – and pure heterodoxy by Khui.

4. This notwithstanding that, at least since 1979, the Shi'as' history has been increasingly re-interpreted in almost exclusive political terms – which the writer finds questionable.
5. "President Obama Speaks to the Muslim World from Cairo, Egypt", youtube, 4 June 2009 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaxZPiiKyMw&annotation_id=annotation_54394&feature=iv).
6. "A New Year, A New Beginning", The White House Blog, March 19, 2009 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/Nowruz/>).
7. "President Obama's Nowruz Message", The White House Blog, 20 March 2010 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/03/19/president-obamas-nowruz-message>)
8. Interview with Bakman Kalbassi, BBC Persian, Washington, 24 September 2010.
9. Allamah Seyyed Muhammad Hussein Tabataba'i, Ayatollah Jafar Sobhani, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Juan R.I. Cole, William C. Chittick, Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, Said A. Arjomand, Henry Corbin, Elie Kedourie, Nikki R. Keddie, Yitzhak Nakash, Fouad Ajami, Hamid Enayat, Faleh A. Jabar, Laurence Louër, Graham E. Fuller, and a few others.
10. A central part of this Tradition concerns the special role it assigns to the descendants of the Prophet thorough his daughter Fatima and his cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Shi'i Imam, whose position as the true successor to the Prophet according to the Shi'i belief signified the original dichotomy - the main field of contention - with the Sunni belief based on the historical fact that post-Prophet Caliphs were appointed through the mechanism known as the "Saqifah."
11. According to this periodization, the first phase starts from the beginning of the Academic studies on Islam in the 1840s and runs until the 1920s; the second covers from the



1920s until either the end of the Second World War (partition of India and establishment of the state of Israel) or 1962 (formal independence of Algeria); the third phase ends with the beginning of the Islamic revolutionary movement in Iran (1978-1979).

12. He co-authored *The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims*, with Rend Rahim Francke (1999).
13. Based on this line of analysis, Graham advances the following “interesting” proposals in terms of US policy vis-à-vis the Muslim world:
 - ‘In formulating Middle East policies, Washington should act as if Islam did not exist’;
 - ‘The United States must accept that under democratic processes Islamist parties will be legitimately elected in early elections in most Muslim countries’ [with which the writer tends to disagree]; and
 - ‘Only Muslims (i.e., locals) in the end will be able to find solutions to dealing with Islamic (i.e., local) radicalism’ (Ibid., 300-302).
14. While Islamists (i.e. political Islam activists) nowadays emphasize the indissoluble unity of ‘religion and state’ in Islam (din wa dawla), in fact, Shi’itology clearly indicates that this contention is a modern ideological construct. The history of the Islamic Civilization tells us that state power was always distinct from the ‘ulama’.
15. Nasr, V., Takeyh, R., “The Iran Option That Isn’t on the Table”, *The Washington Post*, 8 February 2007 (http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/07/AR2007020702136.html?nav=rss_opinion/columns)

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