THE BATTLE FOR THE SOUL OF SHI'ISM

November 14, 2012 gloria-center.org

By Phillip Smyth

This piece will examine the strategies utilized by radicals within the Shi'i clerical realm, namely those who push wilayat al-faqih, the politicized Iranian conception of Shi'ism, on more traditionalist forms of Shi'i Islam. In addition, a look at efforts by those traditionalists to counter Iran's and their allies' tactics will be presented with an assessment on how these factors will affect the future of Shi'ism.

"If two opposite theories are propagated one will be wrong." - *Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib*[1]

KHOMEINISTS AND QUIETISTS

It has been noted that, "By and large, the intellectual landscape of present-day Twelver Shi'ism is much more polymorphic than at any time in the past."[2] The level of political involvement exerted by Shi'i clerics has been a hotly debated topic since the establishment of the sect. Yet after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, the generally demure and apolitical nature of Shi'i Islam, especially at its higher levels, was forever altered, resulting in a new and more politicized facet of Shi'i Islam.[3] For the Shi'i establishment, Khomeini's new ideology was and is an extremely radical split.

Contemporarily, a broad generalization could be made saying, on one side, there are those following "Quietist" traditionalism, a principle of abstention from involvement in politics. On the other end of the divide are clerics who feel they should take a more active role in politics. However, the situation inside Shi'i clerical circles is far more complicated than a black vs. white, politicized vs. unpoliticized conflict. As Denis McEoin correctly assessed, "Religious movements commonly embrace mutually contradictory attitudes, and attempts to classify them along the lines of simple dichotomies (such as 'activist' or 'quietist') are seldom very successful."[4]

Not all Shi'i radicals look to Iran for guidance, just as not all Quietists abstain from commenting on every political decision. In fact, the nature of Shi'i Quietism is changing and entering a new phase of quasi-political engagement. Nevertheless, this does not mean it does not still oppose the radically politicized circles, especially the radical ideology put forth by Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini and his successors who currently rule Iran.

Of course, *wilayat al-faqih* is a far cry from the customary role for the Shi'i clerical apparatus and faces criticism from mainstream circles. Still, some feel they are witnessing a Shi'i clerical system hurdling headlong into a realm of unstoppable politicization, if not acceptance (even if begrudgingly) of Khomeini's ideology.[5] Khomeini's ideology, the absolute wilayat al-faqih (guardianship of the jurisprudents, often known by its Persian term, *velayat e-faqih*), calls for clerics, namely a *marja taqlid* (source of reference), to lead the state.[6] Not only did Khomeini and his successors embrace political leadership, but due to the ideology's revolutionary precepts, they have made sure to push their system wherever a Shi'i community could be penetrated.[7]

Nevertheless, in light of growing politicization, the current end result for the traditionalist school has been

the adoption of Semi-Quietism. Semi-Quietists are represented by "perhaps the grandest of the Grand Ayatollahs," Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani, himself a marja taqlid, and the other leading *mujtahidin* (Islamic legal scholars) based in Najaf, Iraq. According to Haider Hammoudi, "Unlike the Islamists on the one hand, or the full Quietists on the other, the Semi-Quietists neither seek as their ideal model of statehood an Islamic state based on juristic rule, nor do they absent themselves from any sort of interjection into politics…their entry into politics is limited, sporadic, [and] often indirect."[8]

Examples of this often "sporadic" and "indirect" political action include Sistani's backing and encouragements for an Iraqi constitution, which "works for the Islamic identity of the Iraqi people and builds a society that doesn't oppose Islam."[9] In 2004, Sistani voiced religious disapproval of American power-transfers by organizing weeks of protests.[10] However, in no way has Sistani voiced approval for the wilayat al-faqih.[11] Furthermore, in Najaf, the center of Quietist and Semi-Quietist power, Augustus Richard Norton notes, "No doubt, there is widespread rejection of clerical rule, particularly Iran's model of the rule of the jurisconsult."[12]

In their attempts to mitigate and gain greater power over the more popular and influential Semi-Quietists and Quietists, the Khomeinists and their allies have developed a number of strategies. Since the wilayat al-faqih concept forms the basis for the Iranian governance, the state's coffer–often funded by petrodollars and other state interests–provides a centralized network that creates immense ideological leverage across the Shi'i world. Violence and coercion are other measures utilized by those pushing radicalized Shi'ism.

Traditionalist Shi'a also faced other threats. The anti-Shi'i actions of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein primarily put those not in the Khomeinist camp into decades of paralysis. However, the Quietist center of knowledge in Najaf is experiencing a significant, albeit slowly moving revival. Complicating Iran's ideological ascension, Najaf is still viewed as the key city where a Shi'a should look to for guidance. Nevertheless, with a struggle over which cleric will succeed Sistani as the most prominent Shi'i marja taqlid, Iran's grand strategy using money, violence and other forms of coercion, it would appear that clerics practicing Quietism and Semi-Quietism face an uphill battle when countering the Iranian influences.

DO QUIETISTS AND SEMI-QUIETISTS POSE A THREAT TO IRANIAN IDEOLOGY?

On an ideological level, the Quiestists and Semi-Quietists are seen as the antithesis of what "true" Shi'i Islam embodies for the Iranian radicals. As Devin Stewart recounts, Khomeini felt "politically quietist jurists were hypocrites, for they did not act upon precepts that they studied."[13] Khomeini's view of those not following his line was that they were at worst living in a state of false consciousness and at best, confused by propaganda. For Khomeini, Shi'i Islam of the Quietist school was fundamentally flawed due to outside influences and conspiracies. "After all," notes Ervand Abrahamian, "false ideas spread over the centuries by a conspiracy of Jews, imperialists, and royalists had taken a heavy toll…Government officials had systematically spread the notion that clerics should be seen within seminary confines and not heard in the arena of controversial politics."[14]

The question of religious legitimacy also plays a role in how the Iranian regime views Ayatollah Sistani and those in his camp. Current Iranian Supreme Leader Sayyed Ali Hosseini Khamene'i's status as a

grand ayatollah holds little weight when compared to Sistani or his cohorts. The Iranian constitution stipulates that to become the country's supreme leader, one must have the status of grand ayatollah. This was a level Khamene'i never achieved until it was politically expedient.[15] Only following Khamene'i's selection as Iran's supreme leader was he cleared by obscure clerical leaders in Iran's political elite to be recognized as a grand ayatollah.[16] Khamene'i also has little scholarship to his name, a necessary element in establishing legitimacy with fellow clergy members and laypeople.[17]

On a popular level, Khamene'i's lacking religious credentials are well-recognized. On the well-known *ShiaChat.com*, a website dedicated to discussion among Shi'a regarding religious and social issues, one convert to Shi'ism acknowledged how Khamene'i's lacking qualifications affected his selection of a marja taqlid:

> When I first re-verted [sic] to Islam (12 years ago), I just followed who everyone else was following in my community. As I became more knowledgeable, I discovered that knowledge is the ONLY criteria (not politics, agreement, comfort, convience [sic], etc) so I followed Ayatollah Sayed Sistani (ha). In my heart, I would like to follow Ayatollah Sayed Khamani (ha), however, I have yet to be told by a qualified scholar that he is more knowledgeable then [sic] Ayatollah Sistani (ha).[18]

In addition to the threat from his scholarly superiority, Sistani's presence has given the Iranian regime's opposition a firm clerical support network. After a meeting with Iranian oppositionists during Iran's 2009 Green Revolution protests, the Iranian regime's *Ansar News*, an organ connected to the hardline Ansar-e Hezbollah, bashed Sistani's Semi-Quietism, "Have some shame!… If they have become this political why don't they solve their own country's [specifically Iraq's] problems?"[19]

Other incidents also highlight Iran's fear of Sistani. In late 2010 and early 2011, Sistani was made to appear to be an "American-agent". The Iranian press manufactured rumors claiming that the ayatollah had received a massive bribe from American Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Michael Rubin analyzed the rumors as the result of "[t]he Iranians know[ing] that it is the independent Shiites in Iraq which pose the greatest threat to the Iranian regime, since independent Shiite scholarship undercuts the theological legitimacy which the Iranian leadership seeks to claim."[20]

Just as Trotskyism was an intra-ideological threat to the Soviet Union's domination of doctrinaire Marxism, the different forms of Quietism are viewed as threats to the Iranian order and their radical conception of Shi'ism.

SCHOOLING THE OUTSPOKEN & THE SILENT: THE QOM SUCCESS STORY

For the Shi'i clergy, the *hawza* (plural: *hawzat*), a Shi'i seminary led by prominent grand ayatollahs and devoted to higher learning, is the primary institution needed to achieve education and advancement for future clerics of all ranks. Hawzat mainly teach subjects including traditional logic, language, law,

mysticism, traditions, jurisprudence, philosophy, literature, and a litany of other topics. These subjects are then divided into three main stages. Some students spend as little as three years in the hawza, while others have spent decades.[21]

Hawzat have also been separated by their level of political involvement. *Al-hawza al-natiqa* ("the outspoken hawza") was embodied by seminaries in Qom, Iran, while *al-hawza al-samita* ("the silent hawza") found its base in Najaf. As Shi'ism further develops, in some ways Iran holds a distinct advantage over its Quietist and non-wilayat al-faqih subscribing rivals.

Historically, the most important and influential of the hawzat was traditionally in Najaf, where the courses offered and knowledge of the teachers was held in high regard. Nonetheless, Najaf has suffered a precipitous decline since the last quarter of the twentieth century.[22] Repressive government policies, the physical safety of more radical seminaries, and the highly selective nature of the Najaf hawza have all been factors that have had negative effects on the influence of Najaf's seminaries.

Iran has main hawzat in Isfahan, Mashhad, and Qom, with Qom maintaining the most important and prominent position. Since the Iranian Revolution, the Qom hawza underwent a transformation morphing the seminary from a legitimate Shi'i Islamic educational institution into an ideological outlet with the goal of producing uncritical supporters of wilayat al-faqih.[23]

Acknowledging Qom's dominance in Shi'ism, Sayed Ibrahim Larjvardi of the Sistani-created Aalulbayt Global Information Center told the *International Herald Tribune*, "Najaf was a very important and pivotal center for Shia studies, but it was ruined by Saddam… Qom is the same now [as Najaf once was]. The motherland of Shiism is here in Qom."[24] Mehdi Khalaji concludes, "The future of the clerical establishment and of Shiism as a whole for the next several decades will likely be shaped more by developments in Qom than by those in Najaf."[25]

From the 1980s to the 1990s, Shi'i Quietists and Semi-Quietists in Najaf were beset on two sides. Ironically, if it were not for Saddam Hussein's anti-Shi'i policies, Iran's historical and contemporary ambitions to establish the dominance of wilayat al-faqih in Shi'i circles would have faced more prominent hurdles. Ensnared in a war with Iran (1980-1988), Hussein viewed Iraq's Shi'a population as a potentially dangerous fifth-column.[26] These sentiments only increased after Iraqi Shi'a revolted against Baghdad after the 1991 Gulf War.[27] For Saddam Hussein, internal divisions among the Shi'a mattered little; all Shi'i Islamic clerics were suspect. As Semi-Quietist Grand Ayatollah Hakim's son and spokesman told the *New York Times*, "When the Baath Party came to power in 1968, their suffering became a tragedy. We Shiites faced torture, killing and exclusion from the real life of Iraq. Even religion was repressed."[28]

Following the end of the 1991 Gulf War and the initiation of a broader Shi'i revolt against Hussein's reign, Sistani's predecessor, Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Abul Qasim Musawi al-Khoei, Khoei's family, and other senior clerics were arrested by the Hussein regime.[29] Human Rights Watch also recounted, "In both Najaf and Karbala, there were reports that Shi'a clerics who walked on the streets were shot on sight."[30] In March of the same year, Grand Ayatollah Khoei was allowed to return to Najaf, but was placed under house arrest until his death in 1992.[31] The United Nations Human Rights Council reported that Grand Ayatollah Sistani was effectively silenced from leading prayers after his entourage was attacked in 1996, which resulted in the death of one worker.[32] On June 18, 1996, Ayatollah al-Gharawi and his son-in-law

were gunned down while commuting from Karbala to Najaf.[33] There were other attacks and assassinations of Shi'i clerics organized by pro-Saddam elements even after the collapse of the Hussein regime.[34]

Due to Saddam's actions, "clerics and students migrated to… Qom."[35] The migration of these clerics allowed for Iran to consolidate their efforts in a controllable environment. By 2001, it was established that students attempting to study in Najaf from "outlying regions such as Lebanon and India has become increasingly difficult."[36] Even if Iran couldn't change some of these clerics' Quietist beliefs, the threat of force often kept them from openly criticizing wilayat al-faqih or establishing more influential networks among the Shi'i community.

With the loss of almost an entire generation of senior clerics due to assassinations by the Hussein regime, Najaf's quality of teachers and possibly influence would appear to be in a precipitous decline. However, the hawza, even lacking a replacement generation, remains as a thorn in Tehran and Qom's side. One *Wikileaks* cable revealed, "Iran realizes that the only sure way of establishing long-term dominance in Iraq's Shi'a provinces is to seize the spiritual and temporal power the [Najaf] hawza represents."[37] Pro-Iranian cleric Sayyid Muqtada al-Sadr even attempted to take over the Najaf hawza "by claiming to speak in its name, denouncing its apolitical members as unworthy representatives of the Shi'is."[38]

In an effort to counter the advances by Iranian-backed radicals, Sistani does not allow Iranian students to enroll in the Najaf hawza.[39] In fact, "only the few Iranian students who were present [in the Najaf hawza] before the U.S. invasion [were allowed] to continue their studies in Najaf."[40] In terms of numbers, the amount of students Iran churns out will be hard to meet by Najaf. For the Najafi hawza, mid-level education is provided by number of institutions that serve as feeder-schools in Iraq. In Iraq's Karbala Province there are four such schools. By 2008, the largest of these mid-level schools had but 500 students.[41]

In Iran there were around 180,000 students and clerics prior to Khomeini's ascension to power, compared to 3,000 students attending classes in Najaf. In 1979, when Iran's Islamic Revolution deposed the Shah, Qom's hawzat had 6,000 students, multiplying to 25,000 in 1993.[42] By 2008, some 20,000 foreign students had been graduated through Qom's hawzat.[43] According to a 2010 report by Iran's Press TV, 12,000 foreign students studied in Qom.[44]

IRAN'S MISSIONARY APPROACH

Qom has become more than just a city of religious schools; it is now a manufacturer of missionaries. French novelist Emile Zola once said, "If I cannot overwhelm with my quality, I will overwhelm with my quantity."[45] Channeling this sort of logic, Iranian ambitions to spread their politicized theology have affected the way they churn out students from their seminaries. According to Mehdi Khalaji, a former student of the Qom seminary, "Government intervention in all aspects of clerical life, including seminary curriculum, has changed the clergy's traditional way of thinking and living… The clerical establishment is now producing mostly missionaries and preachers, rather than true scholars of Islamic law and theology."[46]

Dovetailing with the effort to spread the Iranian Revolution's concepts, Khamene'i's own clerical background was one of a preacher. This fact has also influenced Iran's push for more missionary activity.[47] While missionary activity normally targets non-Muslims, it is clear that a primary goal of this effort is to reintroduce Iranian revolutionary ideology to Muslim populations.[48]

These "missionaries and preachers" (*mughalib*) complement Iran's revolutionary goal not only to become the "Vatican" for Shi'i Muslims but also to alter Shi'i theology.[49] Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i went so far as to encourage the studying of foreign languages and to push for the "simplification" of the texts students were reading (as opposed to the traditional scholarship methods). Paraphrasing Khamene'i, Muhammad Qasim Zaman explains, "These texts have no divine authority, as he [Khamene'i] dramatically puts it, and the obscure style in which many of them are written wastes the time of students today."[50]

Iran's Qom-trained missionaries have been particularly important in the peripheral states with Shi'i populations, especially those coming out of the atheistic order once provided by communist ideology.[51] AhlulBayt News Agency reported Ayatollah Nouri Hamedani's 2011 announcement stating, "Qom is ready to educate Russian Muslims."[52] In Azerbaijan, which is no Iranian ally, the local Shi'i religious establishment was deeply influenced by Iran's efforts. Shaykh Allahshukur Pashazadeh, the current grand mufti of the Caucasus and a prominent Shi'i religious leader inside Azerbaijan went so far as to call on his followers to accept wilayat al-faqih and the religious authority of Khamene'i.[53]

Even if the ideologues of Iran cannot penetrate Najaf or fundamentally alter theology in Shi'ism's heartlands, distant Shi'i populations can be penetrated. However, the hoped-for result in transforming Shi'ism to one accepting wilayat al-faqih will still be a difficult undertaking. For Shi'i traditionalists, the lack of such a mobilized effort to spread their way of thinking is also a disadvantage.

CASH FOR CLERICS

During his tenure as the most emulated marja, Grand Ayatollah Khoei was also considered the "richest of the marja," maintaining a worldwide network of social services (schools, hospitals, libraries, and cultural programs). This type of presence served as an effective foil to Iran's radicalism.[54] The power of the Imam al-Khoei Foundation will continue to influence clerical circles for some time to come.[55] In addition, a number of other Semi-Quietist and Quietist clerics maintain their own foundations. Ayatollah Sistani's own foundation has millions of dollars and is controlled by Ayatollah Sharistani. It has been recorded that Sharistani is "deeply concerned by the depth of Iranian infiltration in Iraq."[56]

However, in terms of money and organization, Iran's radical clerical apparatus has the upper hand and has used its flush pockets to influence religious circles and popular beliefs when dealing with Shi'i ideology. This has led one analyst to write, "The Islamic Republic has made its clergy the richest in Shi'ite history."[57] In the words of Bryan Maynard, the alms received by leading clerics have "[b]ecome a central fixture of the Shiite religious hierarchy. The amount of alms an 'alim receives is often, along with the acceptance of his peers, a key factor in determining his status as a marja' and his relative position in the hierarchy."[58] Iran's mullahs have taken the more normative donation-based foundations commonly

found among leading members of the Shi'i clergy. Due to their integration with the state, enriching with confiscated monies, and being given control over businesses in Iran and abroad, these foundations have increased their influence in the Shi'i world.

The first area of Iranian dominance comes in how they handle donations and projects built with that money. Due to the fact that the Iranian state is intertwined with clerical foundations (*bonyad*), a centralized strategy can be developed. The bonyads, which manage everything from banks to factories were "[c]reated from confiscated assets of leading members of the prerevolution elite… the bonyads, [are] estimated to control up to 20 percent of Iran's GDP."[59] Thus, bonyad monetary power totals in the tens of billions of dollars.[60]

In Lebanon, the symbol for the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation can be found prominently displayed in front of many building projects, including apartments, civic centers, hospitals, and mosques.[61] According to Iranian reformist sources, the Khomeini Foundation funded 16,045 people in Lebanon, and in Syria around $1 million was spent.[62] In Azerbaijan, another Shi'i-majority country, 27,875 received stipends, and $2,211,694 was spent. In Tajikistan, around 30,000 received payments from a budget of around $1,300,000 spent by the foundation.[63] The spread of Iranian money has also affected Tajikistan's primarily Sunni population, with many becoming Shi'a. In 2010, it was recorded that one-third of the population was Shi'a and that Shi'i mosques were referred to as "Iranian mosques."[64]

In Iraq, especially in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, Iran has been using its financial power to exert its influence. In one leaked cable section, "'Moderates' Unable to Compete with Iranian Money," two politically prominent Najaf residents told the U.S. embassy that Iran directly financed Iranian students in the seminary through Khamene'i's office in Najaf.[65] Financially backing students in the hawzat is another effective way to win the loyalty of students who will be the future of the Shi'i clerical establishment. Often, these students are reliant on donations from individuals and groups in order to continue studying.[66] In meetings with Shaykh Ali al-Rubai, Radwan Killdar, and Imad Kalantar (all well-connected to Najaf's clerical apparatus), American officials were told how having the ability to hand out money to clerical students "helps build influence." The embassy also observed, "By contrast, al-Najafi and Fayad [the other two Najaf-based marja taqlid] have few resources for such gifts."[67]

The U.S. embassy in Baghdad also reported that Sayyid Imad Kalantar, a Najaf cleric related to both pro-Iranian Sayyid Muqtada al-Sadr and Ayatollah Sistani was "suspicious of Iranian intentions and asserted that the imams of the holy Abbas and Husayn shrines in Karbala, Shaykhs Karbal'aie and Safi, were 'in the pocket of the Iranians,' despite their proclaimed loyalties to Sistani."[68] In 2012, Iranian-trained cleric Ayatollah Shahroudi opened an office in Najaf and, according to Paul McGeough, was "luring Sistani and his followers into a costly bidding war for clerical loyalty."[69]

This same sort of "bidding war" was executed in Lebanon by Hizballah. When anti-Hizballah Shi'a tried to draw clerics away from the Hizballah system, they were rebuffed. In one *Wikileaks* cable, Ahmad al-Assad, an anti-Hizballah Shi'a, told the embassy, "They are afraid in part because their salary is controlled by Hizballah."[70]

Money plays a key role in decisionmaking and undoubtedly plays a huge role in maintaining Shi'i clericalism. Influence gained from social projects and from what amount to patronage networks, while immeasurable, is highly important in demonstrating goodwill toward the faithful and building a loyal base for any ideological movement. In this realm, it will be a hard battle. Quietists and Semi-Quietists are

hard-pressed to maintain their relative influence given such a disparity of resources between themselves and Tehran.

SILENCING THE QUIETISTS

When financial and more traditional forms of written argumentation have not been effective, radicals embracing wilayat al-faqih have often turned to more violent tactics. Grand Ayatollah Khoei and the then junior Sistani disavowed Khomeinist ideology in the 1960s and 1970s. This resulted in the Iranian revolutionary government seizing Khoei's properties and in the harassment of Sistani's relatives living in Iran.[71] Grand Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, himself a Semi-Quietist marja taqlid, was "demoted" in clerical title by Khomeini and then arrested in 1982. Shariatmadari died under house arrest in 1986.[72] In an ironic twist, it was Shariatmadari's 1963 intervention via recognizing Khomeini's status as a grand ayatollah that saved the latter from the shah's chopping block.[73]

In Lebanon, Hizballah regularly used force, coercive methods, and even altered the histories of those who did not go along with the group's ideology. In 2009, Hizballah leader Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah went so far as to argue that "the subject of the Wilayat al-Faqih and the Imamate is at the heart of our religious doctrine, and any offense to it is an offense to our religion."[74] In essence, Nasrallah was attempting to drown out any internal Shi'i criticism of wilayat al-faqih and then fold the entire Lebanese Shi'a community into being adherents to the concept.[75]

Nasrallah and Hizballah did not stop with rhetorical messages to the Shi'i populace and often reinforced their ideological inclinations and goals via force. During the fighting of May 2008, Hizballah decided to depose the Mufti of South Lebanon, Sayyid Ali al-Amin.[76] Al-Amin was a fierce critic of wilayat al-faqih and embraced a similar line of belief to that of Sistani's semi-Quietist school of thought.[77]

Al-Amin was not the only Lebanese Shi'i cleric to suffer from his disavowal of Hizballah's ideology. Shaykh Hassan Mchaymech, originally a member of Hizballah and "responsible for the organization's clerics," later became a semi-Quietist cleric and prominent Lebanese Shi'i critic of Hizballah and wilayat al-faqih.[78] In 2010, Mchaymech was detained and accused of being an "Israeli agent." He was then brought back to Lebanon to stand trial. For Mchaymech, "the main reason behind this prosecution is my political and ideological disagreement with Hezbollah."[79]

The late Grand Ayatollah Fadlallah, a marja taqlid once based in Lebanon, could hardly be considered a Quietist or Semi-Quietist. He had formerly associated with Hizballah and expressed extreme anti-American and anti-Israel positions. Yet his disavowal of wilayat al-faqih, which progressed over the course of almost a decade, was not taken kindly by Hizballah or Iran.[80] In some instances his followers were removed from positions within Hizballah, and mosques that associated with Fadlallah were vandalized with pro-Khamene'i posters.[81] Lebanese Shi'i opposition to Hizballah has even claimed that Fadlallah's house was attacked by elements belonging to Hizballah's security chief Mustafa Badreddin.[82] Following Fadlallah's death, Hizballah neglected to mention he was a marja taqlid and on Hizballah's al-Manar television station, only his past associations with Hizballah were highlighted.[83]

When compared to the relative stability for the Shi'a found in Lebanon, the more chaotic conditions in Iraq have allowed for far more instances of the violent targeting of clerics adhering to a more Quietist

approach. With a multitude of Iranian-funded organizations and clerical figures, attacks on Quietists and Semi-Quietists have continued. More often than not, groups such as Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous), Kata'ib Hizballah (The Party of God's Brigades), and Sayyid Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (now called Liwa al-Youm al-Maw'ud or the Promised Day Brigades) have attacked the clerics of Najaf.[84]

Sayyid Abd al-Majid al-Khoei, son of Grand Ayatollah al-Khoei, was a rising cleric, Najaf native, a leader of the Imam al-Khoei Benevolent Foundation, and one who championed the Semi-Quietist approach.[85] When he visited Iran in 2002, there were chants of "Go back to America."[86] In 2003, al-Khoei returned to Iraq to continue his efforts of reconciliation and democratic transition. When Sayyid al-Khoei entered Najaf's Imam Ali shrine, he was brutally stabbed by a mob chanting "Long [live] [Muqtada] al-Sadr."[87] Soon after the assassination of al-Khoei, Sadr's followers proceeded to surround Ayatollah Sistani's house.[88]

Sistani and his supporters have been at the forefront of a number of attacks led by pro-Iranian groups. From June-September 2007, three Sistani aides were assassinated, including an imam in Basra.[89] According to *USA Today*, "Some had stopped wearing clerical robes or turbans when traveling outside Najaf."[90] The killings were often attributed to the forces of Muqtada al-Sadr.[91] August 2007 also saw Sadr's militia kidnapping Shaykh Abd al-Mahdi al-Karbalaei and Ahmad al-Safi. Both were Karbala-based secretaries for Ayatollah Sistani.[92]

In 2007, American officials were warned about Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, a group "run by Iran's Quds Force" and their plot to "target Sistani's inner circle." According to a diplomatic cable, the group was "serving as a tool in Iran's efforts to take control of the hawza… in Najaf."[93] In 2011 alone, there were at least 18 attacks, which "mostly targeted chieftains and men of religion followers of Sayyid Sistani," including the preacher at Diwaniyya's Zahra'a Mosque.[94] Often, the perpetrators of these attacks went unnamed, but the most common method of attack was the variety used by Muqtada al-Sadr's followers: drive-by shootings.[95] In July of that year, Shaykh Muhammad Falak, "One of the leading representatives of… al-Sistani" survived an attempted drive-by assassination in Iraq's Basra Province.[96] Attacks by "unknown" culprits continued, and in February 2012, there was a grenade attack on Sistani's religious followers in Diwaniyya.[97]

The millenarian cult Jund al-Sama'a (JAS or Soldiers of Heaven), led by Dia Abd al-Zahra Kadim, attacked religious celebrations and the Iraqi Police in the hope of welcoming the return of the Mahdi. In 2007, JAS attacked Najaf. According to the BBC, one of the primary goals of the group was to "assassinate Ayatollah Sistani and other senior clerics."[98] Robert Baer added, the group "came uncomfortably close to taking Najaf… and murdering Grand Ayatollah Sistani."[99] The attack was eventually crushed, but some specialists speculated about Iranian involvement. Analyst Bill Roggio has said, "There is no evidence the Iranians have played a role in the uprising in Najaf."[100] Yet in a leaked cable, Basra's police chief, Jalil Khalaf Shuei, asserted the cult had "received weapons and training from Iran."[101] If there were some level of Iranian involvement in the cult's actions, it would point to another violent, albeit temporary front that was allowed to open against Tehran's clerical opposition.

As with many radical ideologies, violence for those embracing Khomeinism and similar ideologies is seen as a means to an ends. These attacks can have a devastating effect on the body-politic of Shi'ism, and through the application of force, oppositional beliefs can be crushed. Nevertheless, since Shi'ism is so broadly spread out geographically, ideologically, and spiritually, violent action has a far more limited effect. The attacks by Saddam Hussein, while vicious and calculated, did not fully crush Iraqi Shi'ism. In Iran,

Semi-Quietism and Quietism still exist, and Iraqi radicals, while politically powerful, still cannot exert enough pressure on the traditionalist element to change Shi'ism for their own benefit. Nevertheless, violent tactics will continue to be utilized.

THE RETURN OF THE QUIETISTS: NAJAF'S RESURGENCE

Despite the numerous advances made by the followers of Khomeinist ideology, the revival of Najaf has proved to be a continuing threat to the Iranian clerical establishment. Najaf has escaped the chains it was once placed in by Saddam Hussein, and acts of terrorism have generally decreased. Even though the threat to the traditional clerical order is still present, the city is set to reclaim its position as the go-to location for Shi'i pilgrims and for religious knowledge.

Notwithstanding, many of these inroads, in Iraq (especially Najaf), Iran still faces a number of contradictory ideologies from its radical allies. Ethnic differences originating from the fact that Iran's version of wilayat al-faqih establishes loyalty to what amounts to the Iranian state has been disfavored by some. Muqtada al-Sadr utilized Iranian hawzat under the tutelage of leading Iranian revolutionary jurist Grand Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi.[102] He also professes a loyalty to wilayat al-faqih. On paper, this would cement Tehran's ideological hold of a prominent Iraqi force. Yet demonstrating a further split from doctrinaire Khomeinism, even Sadr does not feel that authority for the wilayat al-faqih system rests with Iran, actually preferring Iraq-based clerics to run that form of government.[103]

In 2007, the author was doing research on the topic of wilayat al-faqih in Lebanon. Answers from Shi'a of non-Persian ethnic backgrounds established, at least anecdotally, that it was common to ignore Iran's religious authority and ideology. One Pakistani Shi'a working in Beirut said, "If Iran wants to give us [Pakistani Shi'a] money, I have no problem. I am just not [obliged] to be with Khomeini [it is possible he meant Khamene'i]." Another respondent, a Shi'a from southern Lebanon and supporter of Hizballah said, "Our family looks [to] Sistani… Hizballah we support for resistance against Israel… We are Arab first." A young female Shi'i university student, also from southern Lebanon, followed Grand Ayatollah Fadlallah because, "He is Lebanese and understands the Lebanese-Arab mind." [104] In essence, regional Shi'a have their own ethnic identities, generally favor traditionalism, but have no problem going to Iran for money, especially if it is being offered.

Even Qom has detractors from the wilayat al-faqih system. According to the RAND Institute, "Despite three decades of Khomeinist rule in Iran, Qom today continues to be a source of quietism." However, "The quietists in Qom have tended to express their views in private, if at all."[105] Regardless of this fact, their very presence in Qom's very controlled atmosphere demonstrates Iran's failure to win over clerics and offers some variety of leadership for religious Iranians.

Regardless of Qom's newfound prominence in the world of the clerics, historical memory of Najaf's importance and the strength of its religious leadership are still strong. It has also been asserted that "Grand Ayatollah Sistani is the most popular marja…in Iran."[106] In turn, this establishes a far more diverse environment in wilayat al-faqih's home territory.

Demonstrating the pragmatic outlook of the Semi-Quietists of Najaf, they have been busy building their own Najafi-style clerical apparatus into Qom. Ayatollah Sistani purchased the office of influential Quietist cleric Grand Ayatollah Abd al-Karim Ha'iri Yazdi (d. 1937) in order to "make it a cultural center which would contribute, like other religious and cultural centers, in providing services to the religious and scientific circles."[107] This would point to a deeper connection between clerics not of the wilayat al-faqih school of thought, in this case the granting of office space to an ideological ally. In fact, as Elie Elhadj notes Sistani's, "seven social services centers are all in Iran; four in [Qom]… Of his eight religious institutions, six are in [Qom]."[108] In another light, such centers can be seen as vehicles used to exert soft-influence in Tehran's ruling clerics' own backyard.

Najaf's resurgence shines in another way, with thousands of pilgrims who would have otherwise visited Qom now making their way back to Najaf. *The Washington Post* reported that the Shrine to Imam Ali, one of Shi'ism's holiest sites and controlled by Sistani, "is believed to be the third-most-popular destination for Islamic pilgrimages after the Saudi Arabian cities of Mecca and Medina."[109] Not only does this add to the Najafi ayatollah's coffers, but reaffirms their importance to new waves of pilgrims. This is especially important when assessing Iranian pilgrims who have spent their lives under the control of the wilayat al-faqih system and exposes them to a vastly different relationship *vis-à-vis* clericalism.

Najaf and Karbala have seen a massive expansion in infrastructure to cater to pilgrims. According to Najaf's spokesman, over three million pilgrims came to Najaf on the anniversary of the death of Muhammad in 2008.[110] In turn, the increasing ease in visiting the cities also helps increase the prominence of their Quietist leaders among the faithful. Najaf's airport, originally a military airfield, has undergone a massive expansion. When flights began in 2009, charter planes originating in Iran, Kuwait, and Qatar carrying the faithful were primary sources of revenue for the airport.[111] In addition, a $600 million monorail is to be built and operated by a Canadian firm inside Najaf.[112]

The underlying message of these developments is that if Najaf cannot overtake Qom and its radicalism, Najaf's clerics will cross-pollinate into Iran, just as Iran has tried to work its way into Najaf. Even with Iranian investment in Najaf, the clerical apparatus there has enough history and influence inside the city and its centers of Islamic learning to ward off radical influences.

DOES SHI'ISM FACE A RADICAL FUTURE?

With money and the means to kill and repress opposition, it would appear that the radicals will win in their battle against Shi'ism's more apolitical players. Still, the traditionalists' deeply rooted scholarship, history, and popularity among the faithful are effective countervailing qualities. One of the most pressing issues is over which cleric will succeed Ayatollah Sistani. In August 2012, the Ayatollah will turn 82 years of age. Some have speculated that Iran's pushing of Ayatollah Shahroudi may result in the ascension of a radical ayatollah on Najaf's religious establishment.[113] However, a number of mitigating factors would not allow for such a move.

Hayder al-Khoei, son of Sayyid Abd al-Majid al-Khoei and noted writer on Shi'ism established one of the major reasons, "Shahroudi is a well-regarded scholar but his political position in Iran hinders, rather than

helps, his prospects in Iraq… any political position a cleric holds actually has direct–and negative–implications on his religious credentials in Najaf. In Iran, religion and politics may be symbiotic. But in Iraq they do not go hand in hand."[114] In this case, a combined number of issues, including regional identities mixed with ideological aversions, and the established tradition of Najaf, would impede such a move.

Hayder al-Khoei also noted, "In religion it's not all about money. Faith has a different effect on people." [115] Certainly, Iranian radicalism has the power to win over some, especially using the vehicle of faith, but ethnic differences, the power of traditional beliefs, and the constantly changing nature of Shi'i Islam all play different roles in the development of Shi'ism.

Graham Fuller and Rend Rahim Francke note, "The Iranian revolution did not spawn a Shi'i revival but provided a focal point for a Shi'i political identity that was already in formation."[116] This identity is still developing. Just as the completely apolitical Quietism changed with the times and morphed into a more Semi-Quietist body, it is possible for traditional Shi'ism to find some sort of ideological equilibrium with radical elements. Through violence or via spending money, this equilibrium will be tested by those radical components. Eventually, one side will take center stage, but the process will be long and arduous, with neither side being able to claim absolute victory.

**Phillip Smyth is a journalist and researcher specializing in Lebanon and the broader Middle East. He travels regularly to the region. He has been published by the American Spectator, the Counterterrorism Blog, the Daily Caller, Haaretz, The National Review Online, NOW Lebanon, and PJ Media.*

NOTES

---

[1] #182, Sayings of Imam Ali (A.S.), Aalulbayt Global Information Center, http://www.balaghah.net/nahj-htm/eng/id/saying/index.htm.

[2] "Preface" in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende (eds.), *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political Culture* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), p. xiii.

[3] The "Shi'ism" referred to in this piece is that of the Twelver Shi'a (*Ithna Ashriyya*). Twelver Shi'a are generally thought to comprise over 80 percent of the world's Shi'i population.

[4] Denis McEoin, "Aspects of Militancy and Quietism in Imami Shi'ism," *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1984), p. 18.

[5] See: Mehdi Khalaji, *The Last Marja: Sistani and the End of Traditional: Religious Authority in Shiism*, (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006), p. 21, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus59final.pdf, p. v.

[6] The marja taqlid is a Shi'i cleric of the highest rank. Every Shi'i Muslim is required to pick and then follow a particular marja taqlid. Twelver Shi'ism allows for many marja taqlid, and their position is self-announced after an appropriate amount of religious and legal scholarship. Some Shi'a view their marja taqlid as being infallible and a source of absolute guidance, while others more generally interpret the *fatwas* (Islamic legal rulings) and statements made by their marja.

[7] Mark Katz, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Waves* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 28-29.

[8] Haider Ala Hamoudi, "Between Realism and Resistance: Shi'i Islam and the Contemporary State," *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May 2009), p. 112.

[9] Dan Murphy, "Iraq's Critical Sistani Factor," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 20, 2005, http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0120/p01s04-woiq.html.

[10] "Sistani Suspends Protests Against US Plans," *al-Jazeera*, January 24, 2004, http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2004/01/20084101512392069 71.html.

[11] Isaac Hasson, "The Leadership Paradigm of Ayatollah Sistani," Working Paper, *The Eleventh Annual Herzliya Conference*, February 6-9, 2011, http://www.herzliyaconference.org/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/IsaacHasson.pdf, p. 2.

[12] Augustus Richard Norton, "Al-Najaf: Its Resurgence as a Religious and University Center," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (Spring 2011), http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/al-najaf-its-resurgence.

[13] Devin J. Stewart, "The Portrayal of an Academic Rivalry: Najaf and Qum in the Writings and Speeches of Khomeini, 1964-78" in Linda S. Walbridge (ed.), *The Most Learned of the Shia: The Institution of the Marja Taqlid* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 223.

[14] Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 25.

[15] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 34-37.

[16] Alireza Nader, David Thaler, and S.R. Bohandy, *The Next Supreme Leader: Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1052.pdf, p. 40.

[17] Alireza Nader, "Part II: Khamenei: The Nuclear Decision-maker," *United States Institute of Peace: The Iran Primer*, February 22, 2012, http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2012/feb/22/part-ii-khamenei-nuclear-decision-maker.

[18] Post by "Ali Zaki," "Question to Reverts," *ShiaChat.com*, July 20, 2005, http://www.shiachat.com/forum/index.php?/topic/25060-question-to-reverts/page__st__25.

[19] See: "Ansar Hezbollah Publication in Iran, Referring to Ayatollah Sistani: Have Some Shame!" *Kodoom*, September 18, 2009, http://features.kodoom.com/en/iran-politics/ansar-hezbollah-publication-in-iran-referring-to-ayatollah-sistani-.

[20] Michael Rubin, "Debunking the Crudest Iranian Propaganda," *National Review Online*, January 5, 2011, http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/256412/debunking-crudest-iranian-propaganda-michael-rubin.

[21] Christoph Marcinkowski, *Shi'ite Identities: Community and Culture In Changing Social Contexts* (Berlin: LIT Verlang, 2010), p. 115.

[22] Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: Norton and Company, 2006), p. 218.

[23] Muhammed Qasim Zaman, "Epilogue: Competing Conceptions of Religious Education," in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammed Qasim Zaman (eds.), *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 250-52.

[24] Michael Slackman, "Iraqi Cleric Deepens Religious Ties with Iran," *International Herald Tribune*, June 8, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/08/world/africa/08iht-sistani.1929600.html.

[25] Mehdi Khalaji, "The Iranian Clergy's Silence," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 10, July 12, 2010, http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-iranian-clergys-silence.

[26] Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Iran-Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992), pp. 26-31.

[27] "Flashback: The 1991 Iraqi Revolt," *BBC*, August 21, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2888989.stm.

[28] David Rieff, "The Shiite Surge," *New York Times Magazine*, February 1, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/01/magazine/the-shiite-surge.html?src=pm.

[29] Human Rights Watch (ed.), "Iraq and Occupied Kuwait," *Human Rights Watch World Report 1992: Events of 1991* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), p. 665.

[30] Ibid, p. 666.

[31] "Founder & Patron: Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Abulqasim Musawi Al-Khoei," *Imam al-Khoei Foundation*, 2011, http://www.al-khoei.org/About/FounderPatron.aspx.

[32] "Special Rapporteur for Iraq Expresses Concern over Killings of Shi'a Religious Leaders," *United Nations Press Release*, July 2, 1998, http://www.unhchr.ch/huricane/huricane.nsf/0/89E379091F09B10C80256639003AB350?opendocument.

[33] ABDR Eagle, "Obituary: Grand Ayatollah Sheikh Mirza Ali al-Gharawi," *The Independent*, June 24, 1998, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-grand-ayatollah-sheikh-mirza-ali-algharawi-11670
.

[34] From 1998 to 1999, Shi'i clerics, including those of the highest rank, were frequently targeted. Even before the Iran-Iraq War countless clerics and students were executed by the regime. See: Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Iran-Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992), p. 26.

[35] Farnaz Fassihi, *Waiting for an Ordinary Day: The Unraveling of Life in Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), p. 82.

[36] Stewart, “The Portrayal of an Academic Rivalry,” p. 221.

[37] “Iranian-Supported Group Said Targeting Sistani Aides, Would Confront U.S. If Maliki Removed,” *Wikileaks*, June 7, 2007, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/06/07HILLAH86.html.

[38] Reidar Visser, “Shi’i Perspectives on a Federal Iraq,” in Daniel Heradstveit and Helge Hveem (eds.), *Oil in the Gulf: Obstacles to Democracy and Development* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), p. 158.

[39] “Iran/Iraq: The View from Najaf”, *Wikileaks*, December 14, 2009, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/12/09BAGHDAD3195.html.

[40] “Najaf Clerical Leaders Fear Iranian Ideological Dominance,” *Wikileaks*, January 5, 2009, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/01/09BAGHDAD11.html.

[41] “Karbala Religious Education: Preparatory Level,” *Wikileaks*, November 24, 2008, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/11/08BAGHDAD3701.html.

[42] Heinz Halm, *The Shiites: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), p. 133.

[43] “Iran: Rising Number of Foreigners in Religious Schools in Qom,” *ADN Kronos*, http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Religion/?id=1.0.2291474833.

[44] “Iran Seminary Students in Qom,” *Press TV*, January 10, 2010. See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwTi2yKq1WY.

[45] Ashton Applewhite, William R. Evans III, Andrew Frothingham, *And I Quote, Revised Edition: The Definitive Collection of Quotes, Sayings, and Jokes for the Contemporary Speechmaker* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2003), p. 31.

[46] Mehdi Khalaji, “Politics and the Clergy” in Robin Wright (ed.), *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2010), http://iranprimer.usip.org/.

[47] Manouchehr Ganji, *Defying the Iranian Revolution: From a Minister to the Shah: From a Minister to the Shah to a Leader of Resistance* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002) p. 81.

[48] Muhammed Qasim Zaman, “Epilogue: Competing Conceptions of Religious Education,” in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammed Qasim Zaman (eds.), *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 251.

[49] “The Verdict of Qom,” *The Economist*, July 19, 2007, http://www.economist.com/node/9466854.

[50] Ibid, p. 250.

[51] Dina Lisnyansky, “Tashayu (Conversion to Shiism) in Central Asia and Russia, Current Trends in Islamist Ideology,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 8, http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/tashayu-conversion-to-shiism-in-central-asia-and-russia.

[52] "Holy City of Qom is Ready to Educate Russian Muslim Students," AhlulBayt News Agency, November 27, 2011, http://abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&Id=280640.

[53] Altay Goyushov, "Islamic Revival in Azerbaijan," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 7, November 11, 2008, http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/islamic-revival-in-azerbaijan.

[54] Mehdi Khalaji, *The Last Marja*, p. 21, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus59final.pdf.

[55] Caitlin Fitzgerald, "The Sistani Succession Question," *Gunpowder and Lead*, May 24, 2012, http://gunpowderandlead.org/2012/05/the-sistani-succession-question/.

[56] "French-Iraqi Researcher Describes Recent Ramadan Visit to Qom, Contacts with Sistani Representatives," *Wikileaks*, November 14, 2005, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/11/05PARIS7745.html.

[57] Mehdi Khalaji, "The Future of the Marjayia: How Will the Leadership of the Shi'ite Community Evolve in the 21st Century?" *The Majalla*, April 3, 2012, http://www.majalla.com/eng/2012/04/article55230371.

[58] Bryan Maynard, "The Role of the Ulama in Shiite Social Movements: Bahrain, Lebanon, and Iraq," M.A. Thesis Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, June, 2005, http://calhoun.nps.edu/public/bitstream/handle/10945/1902/05Jun_Maynard.pdf?sequence=1, p. 4.

[59] Afshin Molavi, *The Soul of Iran: A Nation's Journey to Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), pp. 176-77.

[60] See: David E. Thaler, Alireza Nader, Shahram Chubin, Jerrold D. Green, Charlotte Lynch, and Frederic Wehrey, "Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian

Leadership Dynamics," *RAND Institute*, 2010, http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG878.pdf, pp. 16-19.

[61] Personal observation made from 2007 to 2011 when travelling through Dahiyya (Hizballah-controlled, Shi'a-dominated southern Beirut suburbs), the Beq'a Valley (primarily Ba'albek), and Jabal Amil.

[62] Amir Haadi Anvari, "Lebanon: 15 Million, Syria: 1 Million, Azerbaijan: 22 Million, Tajikistan: 1 Million, and 90 Dollars Monthly Aid to Hundreds of Thousands of Palestinian Workers," *Etemad Melli*, July 24, 2009, http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=111424517605http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=11 . Also see: "Iran, Tajikistan to Expand Relations in All Fields," Islamic Republic News Agency, May 28, 2012, http://www.irna.ir/ENNewsShow.aspx?NID=80157377.

[63] Ibid.

[64] "Tajikistan Now One-Third Shia," AhlulBayt News Agency, December 24, 2010, http://abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&Id=218237.

[65] "Najaf Clerical Leaders Fear Iranian Ideological Dominance," *Wikileaks*, January 5, 2009, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/01/09BAGHDAD11.html.

[66] Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2002), p. 29.

[67] "Najaf Clerical Leaders Fear Iranian Ideological Dominance," *Wikileaks*, January 5, 2009, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/01/09BAGHDAD11.html.

[68] "Iran/Iraq: The View from Najaf," *Wikileaks*, December 14, 2009, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/12/09BAGHDAD3195.html.

[69] Paul McGeough, "The Struggle to Succeed Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani," *Foreign Affairs*, May 23, 2012, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/features/letters-from/the-struggle-to-succeed-grand-ayatollah-ali-sistani.

[70] "Lebanon: Anti-Hizballah Shia Figure Talks Up Former Hizballah Secretary General Tufayli," *Wikileaks*, April 24, 2008, http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=08BEIRUT571.

[71] Babak Rahimi, "Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and the Democratization of Post-Saddam Iraq," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (December, 2004), http://www.gloria-center.org/2004/12/rahimi-2004-12-02/, endnote 7.

[72] William R. Polk, *Understanding Iran: Everything You Need to Know, From Persia to the Islamic Republic, From Cyrus to Ahmadinejad* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 146.

[73] Amir Taheri, *The Persian Night: Iran Under the Khomeinist Revolution* (New York: Encounter Books, 2008), p. 34.

[74] Mitchell Prothero, "Hizbollah Blames West for Unrest", *The National*, June 26, 2009, http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/hizbollah-blames-west-for-unrest.

[75] Note: Tony Badran offers very concise commentary on this in: Tony Badran, "Hezbollah Is Being Elusive on Wilayat al-Faqih," *NOW Lebanon*, June 24, 2009, http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?page=3&ID=100216&MID=0&PID=0&FParentID=0&FFPa .

[76] "Lebanon: Independent Shia Say Doha Has a Downside," *Wikileaks*, May 22, 2008, http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=08BEIRUT750.

[77] "Shiite Cleric Rejects 'Wilayat al –Faqih' Rule for Lebanon," *Ya Libnan*, June 2, 2008, http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2008/06/another_shiite.php.

[78] Lee Smith, "A Hezbollah Crack-Up?" *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 17, No. 17, January 16, 2012, http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/hezbollah-crack_616154.html.

[79] Inga Schei and Lokman Slim, "Developments in the Case of Sheikh H. Mchaymech: A Sixth Postponement," *ShiaWatch* by Hayya Bina, June 15, 2012, http://shiawatch.com/.

[80] Mohamad Bazzi, "Fadlallah's Death Leaves a Vacuum in the Islamic World," *The National* (Abu Dhabi), June 6, 2010,

http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/fadlallahs-death-leaves-a-vacuum-in-the-islami
.

[81] Tony Badran, "The Death of a Marja," *NOW Lebanon*, July 6, 2010, http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=183528.

[82] Schei and Slim, "Developments in the Case of Sheikh H. Mchaymech."

[83] Ibid. Also, author's personal observations while watching al-Manar broadcasts dealing with Fadlallah.

[84] For more information on these groups and how they factor into Iran's religious struggles, see: Reidar Visser, "Religious Allegiances among Pro-Iranian Special Groups in Iraq,"

September 26, 2011, *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel*, http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/religious-allegiances-among-pro-iranian-special-groups-in-iraq.

[85] Michael Wood, "Obituary: Abdul Majid al-Khoei," *The Guardian*, April 12, 2003, http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2003/apr/12/guardianobituaries.iraq.

[86] "Abdul Majid al-Khoei," *The Economist*, April 17, 2003, http://www.economist.com/node/1714838. Also see: "Enter the Ayatollahs," *The Economist*, April 17, 2003, http://www.economist.com/node/1715041
.

[87] Mahan Abedin, "Interview: Ghanem Jawad: Head of the Culture and Human Rights Office of the al-Khoei Foundation," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 6 No. 5 (May 2004), http://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0405_iraqi.htm.

[88] Ed Finn and Avi Zenilman, "A Guide to Iraq's Shiite Clerics," *Slate Magazine*, May 15, 2003, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/the_gist/2003/05/a_guide_to_iraqs_shiite_clerics.html.

[89] Tina Susman, "Another Aide to Shiite Leader Sistani Is Killed," *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 2007, http://articles.latimes.com/2007/sep/02/world/fg-iraq2.

[90] Hamza Hendawi, "Two More al-Sistani Aides Killed," *USA Today*, September 21, 2007, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2007-09-21-4110462503_x.htm.

[91] "Assassinations Halt in Najaf," *Wikileaks*, October 12, 2007, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/10/07HILLAH137.html.

[92] "Maliki Sacks Karbala Police Chief, Runs Operations Room by Himself," Kuwaiti News Agency (KUNA), http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1837662&language=en.

[93] "Iranian-Supported Group Said Targeting Sistani Aides."

[94] "Ayatollah Sistani's Follower and the Preacher of al-Zahraa Mosque Martyred in Diwaniya," AhlulBayt News Agency, April 4, 2012, http://www.abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&Id=306351.

[95] "Assassinations Halt in Najaf," *Wikileaks*, October 12, 2007, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/10/07HILLAH137.html.

[96] "Representative of Shiite Clergyman Sistani, Escapes Assassination Attempt," *Aswat al-Iraq*, July 24, 2011, http://en.aswataliraq.info/(S(h4tr4uacrgfu4m55wso4up45))/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=143912&l=
.

[97] "Residence of Followers of Sistani Attacked," *Aswat al-Iraq*, February 18, 2012, http://en.aswataliraq.info/(S(h4tr4uacrgfu4m55wso4up45))/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=146979&l=
.

[98] Roger Hardy, "Confusion Surrounds Najaf Battle," *BBC*, January 31, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6313433.stm.

[99] Robert Baer, "Are the Iranians Out for Revenge?" *Time Magazine*, January 30, 2007, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1583523,00.html.

[100] Bill Roggio, "Iraqi Army Battles Shia Cult, Sunni Insurgents in Najaf," *The Long War Journal-Foundation for the Defense of Democracies*, January 29, 2007, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/01/iraqi_army_battles_s.php#ixzz1zh20CbxL.

[101] "Basrah's Iraq Security Forces Quell 'Soldiers of Heaven' Uprising," *Wikileaks*, January 22, 2008, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/01/08BASRAH3.html.

[102] Amit Paley, "Sadr Pursues Image to Match His Power," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2008, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/26/AR2008052602353.html. Note: Al-Sadr follows Iran-based Grand Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri.

[103] Reidar Visser, "The Surge, the Shiites and Nation Building in Iraq," *Jamestown Foundation: Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 5, No. 17, September 13, 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4396.

[104] Impromptu interviews and personal conversations were conducted from June-August 2007 in Beirut. Generally, the author would ask the person's opinion on wilayat al-faqih and the requirement of wilayat al-faqih to follow Khamene'i's edicts. It is interesting to note that out of the 12 Shi'a spoken to about those issues, 10 thought Grand Ayatollah Sistani was an "Arab." Sistani is actually from Mashhad, Iran, and ethnically Persian. Babak Rahimi notes the same impression among Shi'i Iraqis, "Sistani's Iranian origin should not be seen as a disadvantage for the Mashhad-born ayatollah, because many Shi'i Iraqis still see him as an Arab notable who is a direct descendent of Muhammad." See: Babak Rahimi, "Ayatollah Sistani and the Democratization of Post-Ba'athist Iraq," *U.S. Institute of Peace: Special Report 187*, June, 2007, p. 4, http://www.usip.org/files/resources/sr187.pdf.

[105] Alireza Nader, David Thaler, S.R. Bohandy, *The Next Supreme Leader: Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1052.pdf, p. 27.

[106] Frederick W. Kagan, "Shi'ism," *American Enterprise Institute: IranTracker*, http://www.irantracker.org/basics/shiism-0.

[107] “Cultural Center [Office of Grand Ayatollah Haeri],” *Sistani.org*, http://www.sistani.org/index.php?p=570187&id=101.

[108] Elie Elhadj, *The Islamic Shield: Arab Resistance to Democratic and Religious Reforms* (Boca Raton, FL: BrownWalker Press, 2006), p. 192.

[109] Jonathan Finer, “With Promise of Airport, Investment in Najaf Takes Off,” *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/06/AR2006010601733.html.

[110] “3 millions de pèlerins chiites à Najaf,” AFP, July 3, 2008, http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2008/03/07/01011-20080307FILWWW00467–millions-de-pelerins-chiites-a-.

[111] “Najaf International Airport Expanding Rapidly,” *Wikileaks*, February 26, 2009, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/02/09BAGHDAD502.html.

[112] “Urban Rail Progress in Najaf and Baghdad,” *Railway Gazette International*, July 2, 2010, http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/single-view/view/urban-rail-progress-in-najaf-and-baghdad.html.

[113] Tim Arango, “Iran Presses for Official to Be Next Leader of Shiites,” *The New York Times*, May 11, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/12/world/middleeast/iran-promotes-its-candidate-for-next-shiite-leader.htm.

[114] Hayder al-Khoei, “Why Iran-Sponsored Cleric Can’t Become Iraq’s Next Religious Leader,” *Niqash*, June 28, 2012, http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=3081.

[115] Personal conversation with Hayder al-Khoei, June 26, 2012.

[116] Graham Fuller and Rend Rahim Francke, “Is Shi’ism Radical?” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (March 2000), http://www.meforum.org/35/is-shiism-radical.

Filed Under: Iran, MERIA, MERIA Journal, MERIA Journal Volume 16, Number 03 (Fall 2012)