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Workshop Report
on the Sunni-Shi'a Divide:
Implications for the Long War

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This workshop report contains the results of a discussion among Middle East scholars and policy experts at a workshop convened in Washington in December 2006. The paper that was distributed in advance and launched the discussion analyzes the famous letter of Abu Musab Zarqawi that was intercepted in February 2004. Zarqawi was a Salafi Jihadist, and his letter reflects the radically anti-Shi'a views of these extremist Sunnis. The letter is filled with references to the Shi'a that will be obscure to those unfamiliar with Islamic history and theology, so the paper illuminates those references and uses them as an occasion to explore the roots and contemporary strategic relevance of the Sunni-Shi'a divide.

In his letter, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi describes the situation in Iraq, especially with respect to the different political and religious communities that compose it. His most lengthy section is reserved for the Shi'ites. By tracking the religious grounds of Sunni-Shi'a antipathy, one can see why attempts at reconciliation – premised on common ritual observance practices and driven by the political ambitions of certain twentieth-century Islamists – have failed.

At the same time, the record of written debates exposes how particular military tactics have spread from Shi'ite to Sunni extremists. Monitoring the trajectory of theological debates also promises to shed light on the future tactical and strategic decisions of terrorists. Islamists live with the idea that their actions must be justified under Islamic law if they are to be spared eternal damnation. This means that their leading thinkers produce hundreds of volumes of books, letters, *fatwa*s and speeches in which they try to clarify their positions theologically, offering U.S. policy makers an under-exploited window onto hostile non-state actors' deliberations and planning.

Given the persistence of sub- and supra-national sources of allegiance throughout the region, following the thread of past, current, and future religious doctrinal statements emanating from the Middle East also illuminates the calculus of key nation-states. For instance, studying the teachings of Wahhabism reveals the most complex challenge that the rise of Iran presents to Saudi Arabia – a challenge that relates directly to the Sunni-Shi'a split. Wahhabism is virulently anti-Shi'a, and the Saudi regime has promised the Wahhabi clerical establishment, which nourishes the House of Saud's legitimacy, to live by, uphold, and defend the principles of the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. Visible past failures to do so have already presented the regime with direct challenges, from the Grand Mosque seizure of 1979 to the emergence of al-Qaeda. The emergence of a Shi'i state in Iraq deeply worries the Wahhabis, and the specter of Baghdad, the seat of the Sunni Abbasid Caliphs and long a Sunni Arab city, falling into Persian-supported Shi'i hands is, to say the least, highly distasteful for Wahhabis. Such a scenario could prove fatal to the Saudi regime.

How the Saudi regime will attempt to counter the rise of Iran and the resurgence of Shi'ism in Iraq is not yet known, but a range of options is already being debated in publicly available sources to which Western eyes should attend.

DISCUSSION

The participants agreed that there exists, at a very basic level, a real and unbridgeable gap between Sunni and Shi'a Islam. This gap is the product of fundamentally different theological concepts and religion-historical experiences. Although it is impossible to know whether the theological differences preceded or followed the political dispute over Muhammad's rightful successor as leader of the Muslim faithful, the split had manifested itself in formal theological doctrine within the first three centuries of Islam. The theological differences are reflected in the differing aesthetics of the two religions and in the cognitive styles that the schools of law cultivate.

The tragic martyrdom of Husayn is the motivating myth of the Shi'a. This imparts to Shi'a Islam an aesthetic that is vivid, emotional and colorful. Sunni Islam, by contrast, generally promotes a more austere and reserved aesthetic. In fact, many Sunni scholars define the "high" Sunni Islam precisely against the sort of themes celebrated by the Shi'a, such as the emphasis upon the passionate martyrdom of Husayn and the personality of Ali. And while Sufi and more popular practices of Sunni Muslims often do depart from the aesthetic of "high" Sunni Islam, the differing aesthetics are reflected in popular ritual and this serves visually to underscore the gap between the two.

Workshop participants raised the possibility of whether or not Shi'ism's more passionate ethos may account for some of its current appeal to traditionally Sunni populations. Inside Iran, for example, millenarianism is said to be on the rise and the Iranian President Ahmadinejad has used this to his political advantage through references to the "Hidden Imam." Many scholars have explained the success of Sunni fundamentalist Islam as a function of its compatibility with certain hallmarks of modernity; its internal logical coherence, austerity, portability, and egalitarian and rationalized nature make it appealing to young educated Muslims moving into new locations and moden institutions. It is therefore plausible that Shi'ism may attract some who are disenchanted with the aridness of Sunni radical thought. Others testified that with Syria such conversions are motivated primarily by the desire to obtain jobs with Iranian contractors and companies inside Syria. Egypt has a miniscule Shi'i population yet nonetheless has recently arrested and charged Shi'is with proselytizing. Aside from rumors and anecdotal news reports, however, there is no solid information on conversions of Sunnis to Shi'ism and it is likely that this is not a significant phenomenon.

In the field of law, the theological differences manifest themselves in the Shi'a willingness to employ *ijtihad*, or human reason, much more freely than the Sunnis. Sunni legal thinking permits *ijtihad* to function more narrowly within the confines established by the Sunni legal tradition. Shi'a law schools, thus, prize argument and critical deliberation whereas Sunni schools more commonly emphasize rote learning of precedents. Some scholars suggest that this is enabling the Shi'a to accommodate modernity in a way that Sunnis cannot, although research on intellectual developments in Shi'ism is thin and is more suggestive than demonstrative.

A testament to the depth of the divide between Sunni and Shi'a Islam is the failure of the *taqrib* movement. This was an effort undertaken in the twentieth century to reconcile Sunni and Shi'a

for the sake of greater Muslim unity in the face of the challenge of the West. Yet despite broad agreement that unity should be a priority for the Muslim world, the movement made little headway.

The real and fundamental nature of the fissures separating Sunni and Shi'a Islam notwithstanding, some workshop participants noted that the practical impact of these fissures should not be overstated. Although the rift cannot be repaired, it can be bridged, and has been bridged in the past. Examples of cooperative engagement do exist. The fourteenth century Sunni scholar Ibn Taymiyah, a thinker especially popular among contemporary Sunni jihadists due to his uncompromising attitude toward the enemies of Islam and the need to combat them with all possible means, acknowledged the possibilities of legitimate cooperation with the dominant sect of the Shia', the Twelvers. Whereas the more extreme sects of the Shi'a were beyond the pale, Twelver Shi'a could be accepted as tactical allies. Shi'a scholars, due to their minority status, generally have been more hesitant to label Sunnis as deviant believers.

Participants noted that more than theology and religious history informs the Sunni-Shi'a divide today. One very important factor is class. Sunnis have politically dominated the Arab lands for most of the history of Islam. The effect of four centuries of Ottoman rule was to marginalize the Shi'a economically as well as politically, and this has helped ensure the continued ascendance of Sunnis in even nominally non-sectarian Arab states. Class dynamics, for example, explain much of the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Via Hezbollah, disenfranchised Shi'a have obtained formerly inaccessible entrance to universities. Hezbollah functions in part as a vehicle for Shi'a social mobility, and because of this it derives tremendous popular support from the Shi'a community inside Lebanon. A similar dynamic has been playing out in Iraq and Bahrain where the Shi'a are insistent that they receive their fair share of wealth. At the same time that it fuels the Shi'a sense of injustice, the class divide further reinforces popular Sunni prejudice against the Shi'a as shabby, uncultured, and inferior.

Whereas the theological and class dimensions of the Sunni-Shi'a split have been constant factors, a new factor has recently emerged to inflame and widen the split and make it of direct political relevance. That factor is the rise of Iran. Iran poses a triple challenge to the current order in the Middle East. At the most basic level, the emergence of a powerful Iran unsettles its neighbor Saudi Arabia. Iran is nearby and bigger than Saudi Arabia. On another level, Iran represents a populist message both at home and through its sponsorship of Hezbollah. Most unlike the (relatively) venerable Saudi and Jordanian monarchies and the Egypt of Hosni Mubarak, the Iranian regime is a revolutionary republic that does not merely talk the talk but walks the walk in its direct defiance of Israel and the United States. Iran's backing of Hezbollah and its theater embarrasses the Saudi, Jordanian, and Egyptian regimes at home and diminishes their importance abroad, particularly in Washington's eyes.

The most complex challenge that Iran presents to Saudi Arabia, however, relates directly to the Sunni-Shi'a split. The domestic legitimacy of the Saudi regime rests on its promise to the Wahhabi clerical establishment to live by, uphold, and defend the principles of the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. The royal family's failure to do so has already presented the regime with a series of direct challenges, from the Grand Mosque seizure of 1979 to the emergence of al-Qaeda. Religious critics of the regime interpreted Riyadh's decision in 1990 to permit the

deployment of non-Muslim forces as a desecration of Arabia and direct violation of a divine commandment to keep Arabia purely Muslim. This sinful act was the last straw for Usama bin Laden among others. Saudi vulnerability on religious grounds is demonstrated.

The rise of the Shi'a in Iraq and elsewhere poses an excruciatingly acute challenge to Saudi legitimacy. Wahhabism is virulently anti-Shi'a. This hostility is deeply embedded in Wahhabi theology, which on several key points is the mirror image of Shi'i theology. Wahhabis regard the Shi'a as the vilest of humanity, and the Wahabbis' record of behavior toward the Shi'a attests to their convictions. The emergence of a Shi'i state in Iraq deeply worries the Wahhabis. It will be seen not just as a victory for the Persians, the old enemies of the Arabs, but as one for the Shi'a, the most treacherous enemies of Islam. The scenario of Baghdad, the seat of the Sunni Abbasid Caliphs and long a Sunni Arab city, falling into Persian-supported Shi'i hands is highly distasteful for Wahhabis. And it could prove deadly to the Saudi regime.

Wahhabism defines Saudi Arabi and gives the Saudi state purpose. Saudi Arabia, in other words, is an intensely ideological state at its core. As such, its interests cannot be understood in isolation from its ideology. Whereas the Saudi ruling class might ultimately decide that in principle it could live with a Shi'i Iraq and Shi'i Baghdad, its constituents will not make such a decision. Critics of the Saudi regime will point to Riyadh's failure to prevent what for Wahhabis can only be regarded as a calamitous outcome. They will seize on the Saudis inability to defend the interests of the Sunnis and their religion to argue that Riyadh is a lackey of the Americans and a tool of the Shi'a and the Jews.

The emergence of the Shi'a of Iraq has energized and emboldened the Shi'a minority inside Saudi Arabia, where they live concentrated in the oil-rich eastern provinces, as well as the Shi'a majority of Bahrain, who live under a Wahhabi dynasty closely linked to that of Saudi Arabia. Although the Saudi and Bahraini elites have made some small concessions to their Shi'a populations, they cannot go much farther without risking a violent backlash from their religious critics. If the Saudis cannot, despite all their money and the favor they curry in the United States and elsewhere, prevent the rise of the Shi'a on the outskirts of Arabia or even inside of Arabia, what right can they claim to rule?

It is clear that the Saudis have an intense interest in thwarting the emergence of a Shi'a Iraq because not only might it mean an increase in Iranian power but it would simultaneously strike a sharp blow against Saudi Arabia's most vulnerable spot, its legitimacy. Absent its ability to defend the interests of Wahhabi Islam the royal family has little claim to anyone's loyalty. The most obvious way for Saudi Arabia to respond would be to ramp up its support to extremist Sunni groups in a manner similar to the way it did in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. That strategy succeeded in undercutting the appeal of the Iranians, particularly in Pakistan, and not least it placated many of the regime's religious critics. The drawbacks to a replay of such a strategy are obvious: it runs the risk of alienating the United States and of creating blow-back. Given the severity of the Shi'a and Iranian challenges, however, it is more than plausible that the Saudis will pursue such a strategy. In fact, they already are.

Another geopolitical issue discussed was the impact of the Sunni-Shi'a split on the Muslim Brotherhood and other Sunni opposition groups in Syria. Iran has been emphasizing Pan-Islamic solidarity against Israel and the United States in order to deflect attention from the Sunni-Shi'a divide. Hezbollah has been a critical element in this part of Iranian strategy.

Yet whereas the success of Hezbollah against the Israelis has won the admiration of many Palestinian and Egyptian Islamists, it may have less appeal to Syrian Sunnis. Bashar Assad and the ruling clique are Alawites, a sect related to the Shi'a but who are beyond the pale even for Sunni moderates. Bashar's father mercilessly crushed the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s after it attempted to overthrow his regime through an extended campaign of terror. This bitter recent history fuels animosity between the two. Since the Iranian-Syrian-Hezbollah axis strengthens the Alawite regime's grip on power, it is quite possible that Sunni Syrians will come to regard it not as a Pan-Islamic front against Israel but instead as a Shi'a conspiracy against Islam. At the least, the presence of Hezbollah and its success has created confusion among Sunni extremists in the Levant, who do not know if Hezbollah is an ally or an enemy. But given the lack of information on the Syrian religious opposition groups, no one knows exactly what they are thinking. One participant noted that a prominent Sunni opposition figure has publicly stated that overthrowing Bashar has to take precedence over the struggle with Israel.

The possibility that the Saudis may wish to back the Sunni opposition in Syria in order to break up Iranian influence in the Levant should be considered as well. This would enable the Saudis both to placate their internal Sunni critics as well as diminish Iranian influence and power.

I. WORKSHOP PAPER DISTRIBUTED IN ADVANCE: THE SUNNI-SHI'A DIVIDE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LONG WAR

INTRODUCTION

"There are those who consider [the Shi'a] as Muslims like us," begins one query to Ali al-Khudayr, a leading contemporary Saudi Islamist, "and the differences are only at the fringes. There are those who pronounce only the extremists among [the Shi'a] as apostates. And there are also those who consider all of them apostates in general. Is it possible for you to advise us in this matter which has been a point of contention since the period of the Rightly Guided caliphs until now?"[1]

After thirteen centuries, what began as a political divide has evolved into a theological divide, one so sharp that that those on either side are willing to pronounce each other non-Muslim apostates. Distrust and ignorance of each other means that ordinary Sunni and Shi'a still ask their leaders whether it is okay to know, befriend and marry one another. The above question illustrates the core issues: Are Sunnis and Shi'ites all Muslims? Is there a cut-off at which point one is no longer part of the community? or is everyone from the rival sect so wildly mistaken that they are beyond redemption?

This is hardly just an academic question for religious scholars to debate. It has very practical implications. For example, there has been an alliance between the Shi'ite Hizbullah in Lebanon and Sunni Hamas in Palestine. How can this be? Clearly both parties have answered the above question by considering each other morally worthy partners and good Muslims. From a religious point of view, a group cannot simply choose any ally. It must be able to justify its alliances under its respective version of Islamic law, for otherwise it risks God's wrath.

The Hizbullah-Hamas alliance should not have been a surprise. Predecessors of both Hizbullah and Hamas have been involved in rapprochement since early in the previous century. The purpose of this study, then, is to point out some of the important theological differences between Sunnis and Shi'ites. It is also to show why some Sunni groups, such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its offspring, find Shi'ites acceptable, while others, like al-Qaeda and the intellectual descendants of original Wahhabis vehemently reject them.

After so many centuries, there are a myriad of theological issues that divide the two camps. In order to keep this study brief, contemporary and relevant, we have chosen to focus on the issues raised in the so-called Zarqawi letter, found in February 2004 by U.S. forces in Iraq.[2] In his

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[1] Ali al-Khudayr, "Fatwa fi al-Shi'a," Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, www.tawhed.ws.

[2] Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, "Zarqawi Letter," (US Department of State, Coalition Provisional Authority, 2004). Each section of this paper will begin with a quote from the letter. There is some disagreement as to the authenticity of the

letter, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi describes the situation in Iraq, especially with respect to the different political and religious communities that compose it. His most lengthy section is reserved for the Shi'ites. Some of the references he makes are obscure to Western observers, calling the Shi'ites by various derogatory names that refer to defamed medieval Islamic movements. Other references point to political concerns that are clear only to an observer of modern Islamic theological debates. We will begin with a look at some ideological differences between the two sects. Following that we will examine how in the 20th century a rapprochement movement between Sunnis and Shi'ites grew. Next, we will examine some differences in practices and finally look at their different perspectives on history. We will also try to relate some of these issues to the 21st century.

IMAMIS, ISMA'ILIS AND THE QUR'AN
Theirs is the legacy of the Batini bands that traversed the history of Islam and left scars on its face that time cannot erase.

One of the ways writers discredit each other in Islamic debate is to refer to medieval history. A writer will associate his contemporary adversary with a well-known and disgraced movement of the past. The author does not even have to explain how the two are linked. The implications of such an accusation are known without having to be mentioned. Even if the link is tenuous at best, it is a powerful metaphor for his readers. In this section, we will explore this method of intellectual attack on the Shi'ites by looking at a debate on the Quran and the development of the Wahhabi-Shi'ite fued.

Al-Zarqawi makes his first textual attack on the on the Shi'a by stating that "theirs is the legacy of the Batini bands that traversed the history of Islam and left scars on its face…" His audience understands who the Batinis were and what their poor name in Islamic history implies. Better known as the Isma'ilis, they are a Shi'a sect, a branch of which founded the Fatimid caliphate from 909 to 1171. The Fatimids were based in Cairo and founded the great al-Azhar mosque and center of learning.[3]

Isma'ilis also have a darker history, to which al-Zarqawi is referring. One branch of Ismai'ilis became the Assassins of lore. The Sunni Seljuq Turks, who had captured Baghdad in 1055, persecuted the Isma'ilis. From their stronghold in the Caspian region of Iran (believed to have been founded in 1070), as well as in Syria and Palestine, they were alleged to have been responsible for the deaths of many officials in the Abbasid state, and later several other powerful

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letter. Regardless of authorship, the majority of the ideas within it express generally accepted *jihadi-takfiri* viewpoints.

[3] Al-Azhar, ironically, has become a major symbol for the Sunni establishment and a center for its thought after Saladin conquered Cairo in the 12th Century.

kingdoms. They were even rumored to be allied with some crusaders, including Richard the Lionheart.[4]

The Shi'a currently living in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf are not Isma'ilis. They are known as Imamis or Twelvers, based on their belief in the infallible leadership of twelve Imams after the death of the prophet Muhammad. Isma'ilis are a small relatively sect today, scattered in various countries around the world. The main difference between the two is the Isma'ili belief that there were only seven infallible Imams. Imamis, like Sunnis, consider Isma'ilis to be extremists, and disassociate themselves from them. Al-Zarqawi and his readers are not interested in inter-Shi'ite debates and divisions, only to link the two together and smear them all with the same brush.

The word *batini* literally means inner, and in this case it refers to an inner, secret meaning of the Qur'an only known to a select few, namely the Shi'ite Imams. In addition, Shi'ites have often been accused of *tahrif*, or claiming that the Qur'an has been altered. Only the Imams know what is truly God's word. While this was never an official Imami Shi'ite view, some of their early authors claimed that there had been omissions in the text with regards to the place of Ali and his family. Traditionally, it is held that the Qur'an as we know it was compiled during the caliphate of 'Uthman, Ali's rival and a member of the Umayyad clan which later assumed hereditary leadership of the community. According to some early Imamis, Ali, having been the most privileged member of Muhammad's circle, was the only one who knew the Qur'an in its entirety. This "complete" version may be as much as three times as long as the canonical one we know today. The inner knowledge of the text was only passed on to his eleven legitimate heirs and will be restored on the day of resurrection.[5]

Anti-Shi'ite commentators to this day will still cite *tahrif* as an attack, despite its unpopularity among modern Shi'ites.[6] For example, as recently as 2001, Nasir b. Fahd, a leading Saudi Islamist, published an article entitled, "A Refutation of the Shi'ites on their Importance of Falsifying the Holy Quran by the Companions [of the Prophet], peace be upon them, and the Sunnis".[7] In this work he argued that the Shi'ites have had political motives behind their claims that the Quran had been tampered with. With the one word, *batini*, al-Zarqawi has implied all of these heretical ideas about the Shi'a to his readers. These are not controversial accusations in the Wahhabi worldview and they have often been made before.

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[4] Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 2003) 117-118, 132-133.

[5] Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism : The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 82-3.

[6] Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century : The Azhar and Shi'ism between Rapprochement and Restraint* in *Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia*, V. 91 (Leiden; Brill, 2004) 332.

[7] Nasir al-Fahd, "Al-Radd 'Ala Al-Rafida Fi Itihamihim Al-Sahaba (Radwan Allah 'Alayhim) Wa Ahl Al-Sunna Bi-Tahrif Al-Qur'an Al-Karim," Minbar al-Tawhed wa al-Jihad, www.tawhed.ws.

His next point about the Shi'a accused them of "polytheism, [for] worshipping at graves, and circumambulating shrines". Visiting gravesites is a common practice, not just among Shi'ites. Sufi mystics often pray at the shrine of one of their masters. In many folk practices across the Islamic world worshippers go to the graves of their local holy men or women and pray for their intercession in matters of health, healing, good fortune, children, marriage, etc.

Wahhibism is based on a strict interpretation of the monotheist dictum, "There is no god but Allah", known as *tawhid*. They emphasize that all humans, even Muhammad himself, are mere mortals that lack any spiritual power. Thus, to ask a human, living or dead, for blessings or divine intervention constitutes polytheism. Wahhabis are so adamant about this that they have not hesitated to destroy many historical tombs and graves around Mecca and Medina, where the events of early Islam took place. They have done the same with many of the graves of the companions of the Muhammad.[8] The Wahhabi's goal was to prevent people from praying at these sites, an act which the Wahhabis regard as idolatry.

This obsession with rooting out idolatry goes back to the very founder of Wahhabism, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a scholar from the arid Najd region in the central Arabian Peninsula in the 18th century. At the time, there were many bedouin around the Najd who practiced so-called 'pagan' rites, such as the veneration of saints.[9] Islamic society, contrary to popular visions of the desert, has been dominated by city life, where laws and social norms can be enforced. Thus, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab sought to 'civilize' and settle the Bedouin.

This strict interpretation of *tawhid* also explains Wahhabi distaste for democracy. God is conceived of as the law-giver. All that is needed to govern correctly is contained in the Qur'an and the *hadith*, accounts of Muhammad and his companions' lives. In a democracy, theoretically, the power to create laws is in the hands of the people, through elected legislators. Since this is a power that is supposed to be reserved for God alone, democracy is also considered polytheism. Participating in the democratic process is one of the many contentious points between Wahhabi thinkers and those associated with the modern Muslim Brotherhood.

The third Saudi state, the current one which was established in the 1920's, was conquered by the Saudi family in conjunction with Wahhabi clerics and fighters. These fighters were converted bedouin. Known as the Ikhwan, or brotherhood (not to be confused with the Muslim Brotherhood), they had been convinced by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's followers to give up the nomadic and 'pagan' folk ways of the desert for the settled life of pious Muslims. These Ikhwan became Ibn Saud's most zealous fighters. As the Saudi state expanded from the Najd to include both the Red Sea and Persian Gulf coasts, the Ikhwan came into contact with Muslims whose Islam they considered just as polytheistic as the bedouin: the Shi'a in the Eastern provinces.

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[8] Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power : The Politics of Islam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982).

[9] A. M. Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 1997) 70-71.

Yet this was not the first time the Wahhabis had come across Shi'ites. The Wahhabis are disciples of the Hanbali legal school, regarded as the strictest of the orthodox Sunni schools. Hanbali's have had a rivalry with Shi'ites since the 9th century when they were both numerous in Baghdad and competing for the Caliphs' favors. In this same vein, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself wrote a treatise against them.[10] In 1802, Wahhabi fighters left the Najd and headed north to Iraq. Southern Iraq is populated by Imami Shi'ites and dominated by the shrine cities Najaf and Karbala. The Wahhabis went into Karbala and destroyed the mosque/mausoleum of the Imam Husayn, second son of Ali and the grandson of Muhammad, third Imam of the Shi'ites. The mosque had been a major pilgrimage center as the site of Husayn's martyrdom.

Leading Islamists still publish tracts aimed at discrediting their rival sect, continuously dissecting old debates in order to convince their readers that Shi'ites are still untrustworthy. Outside of a few skirmishes with the Ottomans, the remoteness of the Najd allowed it to develop free of colonial influences. This meant that internal issues, such as Sunni-Shi'ite disputes were paramount. As we shall see later, in other areas of the Islamic world where colonialism was the dominant political force, Islamic unity usually trumped these differences.

RECONCILIATION

The dreamers who think that a Shi'i can forget [his] historical legacy and [his] old black hatred of the Nawasib [those who hate the Prophet's lineage], as they fancifully call them, are like someone who calls on the Christians to renounce the idea of the crucufuxion of the Messiah.

One of the most contentious issues al-Zarqawi touches on between Sunnis and Shi'ites is the Shi'a practice of the cursing of some of the Prophet's companions. To the Shi'a, the first caliphs were usurpers of Ali and his descendant's rightful place as the head of the community. Abu Basir al-Tartusi, a leading Syrian Wahhabi Islamist thinker, wrote, "Cursing the companions [of the Prophet] is a great apostasy."[11] There have been some on both sides of the divide who have tried to moderate these old hatreds. These groups, the Muslim Brothers among them, called for Islamic unity in the face of a European colonial threat. Others were not so inclined. Many Wahhabi thinkers rejected this point of view, fearing the spread of what they considered un-Islamic practices.

As al-Zarqawi correctly points out, Shi'ites call these and others *nawasib*, or those who hate the lineage of the Prophet. Although many Shi'ites themselves have realized that this ritual cursing is counterproductive, and post-revolutionary Iran has even tried to limit it publicly, it remains popular.[12] Banning the practice is made difficult by the clerical structure of Imami Shi'ism,

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[10] Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam : From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 84.

[11] Abu Basir al-Tartusi, "Al-Radd 'Ala Man Dafi' 'an Al-Rafida," www.tawhed.ws.

[12] Wilfried Buchta, *Die Iranische Schia Und Die Islamische Einheit 1979-1996*, Schriften Des Deutschen Orient-Instituts (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1997).

where clerics independently compete for the charitable donations of believers, and are thus necessarily connected to their 'constituents'. If the practice of cursing the *nawasib* is popular, a cleric may risk losing followers, money and influence if he bans it.

The place of Muhammad's companions is not a simple matter of cursing or honoring, it has implications for Islamic law. The two basic, universally agreed-upon sources for Islamic law, the *shari'a*, are the Qur'an and *hadith*, reports of the Prophet and his companions' lives and actions. Not all *hadith*, however, are considered valid. Loosely speaking, the standard for deciding whether a particular *hadith* is canonical is based on the trustworthiness of the person (or persons) who related it. There were hundreds who were considered companions of the Prophet. Medieval and modern Muslim scholars have been preoccupied with debating the merits and faults of individual early Muslims in order to determine if their *hadith* transmissions are legitimate.

While Sunnis and Shi'ites agree on the inclusion of some *hadith*, they disagree on many others. As Abu Basir al-Tartusi complains, "How do the Shi'a seek unity with the Sunnis when they believe that the *sunna* is false, as is everything proven about the Prophet, peace be upon him, with the correct support as it is in the [canonical books of Sunni *hadith*]."[13] Shi'ites also include hadiths about the lives of their Imams as canonical, as a result adding a whole set of traditions that are absent from Sunni law books.

In practice, where ritual observance is concerned, though, Sunnis and Shi'ites have relatively few differences. Shi'ites visit the shrines of their Imams, but so do some Sunnis. To be sure, the Shi'a have some holidays, such as Ashura, which celebrates the martyrdom of Husayn, that no Sunni celebrates. But their prayers are only slightly different in wording. Otherwise, the daily lives of observant adherents of both strands of Islam are not so different, determined more by culture than by religion. For example, Sunni Arabs and Shi'ite Arabs in Iraq have more in common culturally than the Sunni Arabs do with the Sunni Kurds.

In light of these common points, there have been various works of comparative law seeking to show how similar Imami law is to the four orthodox Sunni schools.[14] There have also been attempts toward rapprochement between Sunnis and Shi'ites. Rapprochement, called *taqrib*, generally calls for Islamic unity by establishing the legitimacy of five law schools, the four Sunni schools (Hanbali, Hanafi, Shafi'i and Maliki) along with the Imami school, known as the Ja'faris after the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq.

The first political leader to call for *taqrib* was Nadir Shah, who ruled Iran from 1736-1747 after the fall of the Safavid dynasty. His motives, though, were not for spiritual gains, but political ones. The Safavids had converted the population of Iran to Imami Shi'ism in the 16th century.

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[13] Abu Basir al-Tartusi, "Al-Wihda Bayn Al-Sunna Wa Al-Shi'a," www.tawhed.ws.

[14] Laleh Bakhtiar and Kevin Reinhart, *Encyclopedia of Islamic Law : A Compendium of the Views of the Major Schools* (Chicago, Ill.: ABC International Group, Distributed by Kazi Publications, 1996).

Nadir Shah, feared a return of pro-Safavid sentiment, and so sought to limit the power of the Shi'ite clerics by confiscating their lands (from which they earned money from rent and taxes). He outlawed the cursing of the first two caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar. Another way he tried to limit their power was to state that Shi'ism was simply the fifth *madhhab* (legal school). This reduced Jaf'ar al-Sadiq to the founder of a legal school rather than an infallible Imam.[15] Nadir Shah may also have been attempting to placate the Sunni Ottomans, so that he would be able to continue conquests on his Eastern border. He even convened a reconciliation summit in 1743, but these efforts fell apart after his assassination.

The *taqrib* movement got restarted in the late 19th century by the Islamic reformer Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and his pupil Muhammad Abduh. Al-Afghani was born an Iranian Shi'ite, but passed himself to the greater Muslim world as a Sunni Afghan. He could do this because Dari, one of the languages of Afghanistan, and Farsi, the language of Iran are closely related dialects of Persian. His assumed Sunni identity helped him gain access to the Ottoman court in Istanbul as well as the Khedieval court in Cairo. He and Abduh conceived of Islamic unity in order to oppose European colonialism when exiled by the British to Paris in the mid-1880's. This meant that Sunnis and Shi'ites should reconcile for the sake of the community.[16]

As the 20th century progressed, conferences were held, letters exchanged and books published all dealing with the issue of *taqrib*. The movement came to be centered at the al-Azhar mosque/university in Cairo, where attempts were made to add Ja'fari law to the curriculum. The movement, though it avoided some of the more controversial and divisive issues, did come to a consensus on a number of points. For example, its proponents noted that Islam is tolerant towards other religions and even some of the most divergent sects in history had found a modicum of respect. Rapprochement was not to be seen as Sunnis and Shi'ites giving up their own identity, just proclaiming their unity together. Neither was trying to proselytize the other. They looked at the differences between the two and claimed that the distance from Sunni to Shi'i was no farther than from one Sunni *madhhab* to another. All Muslims, after all, believed in the five ritual pillars of Islam (pilgrimage, fasting Ramadan, prayer five times per day, giving charity and the proclamation of faith) as well as the three bases of religion, *usul al-din* (belief in the unity of God, in prophecy and in the end of days). Any differences could be seen as legitimate dissent and disagreement among scholars, except for the Isma'ilis, who were considered too extreme.[17]

The *taqrib* movement attributed the division between Sunnis and Shi'ites attributed to the ignorance of Muslims and the machinations of outside forces. Neither knew enough about the other to make informed opinions without relying on stereotypes, rumor and prejudice. Politics,

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[15] Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century : The Azhar and Shi'ism between Rapprochement and Restraint* 29.

[16] Ibid.34.

[17] Ibid. 229-238.

not religion, kept the Muslims at odds with each other. Colonialism and the great powers conspired to keep Islam weak and divided.[18]

Among those supporting the *taqrib* movement was Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brothers were founded, at least in part, as an anti-colonial movement. Al-Banna, like Abduh, saw Islamic unity across the Middle East as a counter-weight against colonialism. As we shall see later, this has had implications to this day, as Islamists associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine and Iraq have consistently argued for collaboration with the Shi'a against outside enemies.

Ayatollah Borujerdi of Iran, the highest ranking Shi'ite cleric until his death in 1961, also lent his considerable reputation to the movement. Though it was never directly colonized, Iran was a pawn in the great rivalry between Russia and Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. The discovery of oil increased Western interest in Iran. The British took a direct hand in deposing Reza Shah in 1941, as did the Americans in 1953 toppling the oil-nationalizing, elected government of Mohammad Mossadeq. Iranian clerics as well saw Islamic unity as a means of self-defense against the West.

In the end, though, only one fatwa was ever written that saw Shi'ites as co-equals to their Sunni counterparts, in 1959 by Mahmud Shaltut, head of al-Azhar.[19] He stated, "The Ja'fari school… is a school of thought that is religiously correct to follow in worship, as are other Sunni schools of thought".[20] The paucity of statements like this shows the difficulty of state-run institutions, like al-Azhar, to come out in favor of international Islamic cooperation. Political leaders in every Middle Eastern nation were becoming increasingly sensitive to their citizen's foreign alliances, regardless of whether they were Islamic or nationalist, as a threat to their own power. The organizations that do work for unity increasingly became the dissidents of society. This was especially true in the parts of the Middle East that experienced colonial power.

A few prominent Wahhabis have also come out in favor of a tolerant view of Shi'ites, although they never joined the *taqrib* movement. In 1956, Saudi King Saud met Ayatollah Borujerdi in Iran.[21] A few contemporary Saudi dissidents, including former allies of Usama bin Laden such as Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awda made conciliatory gestures towards the Shi'ites in their country since 2003.[22] In the Saudi context, though, this may be as much about politics as it is

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[18] Ibid. 238-248.

[19] Ibid. 203.

[20] Mohamad Jawad Chirri, *Inquiries About Islam*, Rev. ed. (Detroit, Mich.: Islamic Center of America, 1986).

[21] Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century : The Azhar and Shi'ism between Rapprochement and Restraint* 279.

[22] Toby Craig Jones, "The Clerics, the Sahwa and He Saudi State," *Strategic Insights* IV, no. 3 (2005).

religion. The vast majority of Saudi Shi'ites live in the oil rich regions of the country. The government must balance upholding traditional Wahhabi values with keeping the Shi'ites passive.

In 1990, the late Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz, the most senior cleric in Saudi Arabia, legitimized the presence of U.S. troops on Saudi soil. Until this time, even Usama bin Laden had held respect for bin Baz. The esteem of the Saudi state clerics has dramatically waned in the wake of this unpopular decision, and clerical verdicts are now viewed with suspicion. Al-Hawali and al-Awda, formerly opposed to the regime, embraced the Saudi family after their release from prison in 1999. As former dissidents, their voice is particularly important in legitimizing government policy to the public. The support of former religious dissidents helps the Saudi family legitimize policies that are controversial, such as recognition of Shi'ite rights.

This controversy also shows the range of Wahhabi opinion. The world's most prominent Wahhabi (or Wahhabi inspired) global jihadist ideologues, such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (al-Zarqawi's mentor in Jordan), Abu Basir al-Tartusi, and Abu Qatada al-Filistini are all anti-Shi'ite. Abu Basir even wrote, "The one who says that the Shi'a are our brothers, that we all pray in the same direction, he is the most astray of donkeys, and more ignorant than a goat whose nose is in the dirt."[23] Bin Baz, who died in 1999, was also vehemently anti-Shi'ite,[24] but he was the epitome of the establishment cleric whom those ideologues came to oppose. Al-Hawali and al-Awda, former allies of Usama bin Laden, have reversed course and become conciliatory toward both the royal family and the Shi'ites.

In 1924, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk of Turkey abolished the office of the Caliphate. This reopened the debate about the legitimate rule of the Islamic community, and there were several contenders this post in the Sunni world. The Sharif Husayn of Mecca (whose descendant still rules Jordan) quickly proclaimed himself caliph.[25] He only held power, though, in the Hijaz, the region of Arabia which includes the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The Hijaz was not historically a Wahhabi stronghold, and all sunni law schools were tolerated there.[26] Later in 1924, Sharif Husayn was defeated by Ibn Saud. This put the holiest cities of Islam is the hands of an emphatically anti-Shi'ite sect. Their opposition to Shi'ites had already taken violent form in 1802 in Karbala.

Al-Azhar in Cairo held a conference in 1926 in order to solve the caliphal dilemma. They even invited Shi'ite scholars, though none came in any official capacity. Although the issue was not

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[23] al-Tartusi, "Al-Radd 'Ala Man Dafi' 'an Al-Rafida."

[24] Amir Taheri, "Saudi Shi'ites," *National Review Online*, 23 May 2003.

[25] Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century : The Azhar and Shi'ism between Rapprochement and Restraint.* 85.

[26] Mai Yamani, *Cradle of Islam : The Hijaz and the Quest for an Arabian Identity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

resolved, it did lead to further contacts. In 1931, Amin al-Husayni held another conference in Jerusalem in order to promote Islamic unity. He invited scholars from both Sunni and Shi'i countries in the hopes that he could raise awareness for the cause of the Palestinians. By this time things had changed, though. With the Wahhabis firmly entrenched, some prominent scholars reversed their conciliatory tone. Rashid Rida, the most visible disciple of Muhammad Abdu, had once argued that Shi'ites were full Muslims, but by 1931 he had reversed his views and sided with the Wahhabis. Even some Palestinian scholars, such as Muhammad Is'af al-Nashashibi, opposed the goals of the conference.[27] His motivation, though, may have had as much to do with the Husayni-Nashashibi family rivalry as it did religion.

Whenever the caliphate and Shi'ism is discussed, the role of the Imams must also be addressed. Shi'ites consider their Imams to be infallible and to have knowledge of the hidden Qur'an. Anti-Shi'ite writers, such as the Egyptian Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, charged that with this belief the Shi'a put the Imams above the prophets. He denounced the Shi'a belief in the Imams to be as pagan as belief in the Greek gods.[28]

The general, but by no means sole, tradition in Shi'ite Islam has been for quietism. Shi'ites understand their history as one marked by suffering and martyrdom. The only legitimate government was that of the twelve Imams, the last of whom is hidden in occultation and will someday return to Earth to establish just rule. Any earthly government is thus corrupt and so establishing a human, temporal authority, even an Islamic one, was immoral. Revolt against a government was also immoral. Many Sunnis also held the view that revolt against an unjust government. That government was a punishment from God, and an uprising could cause something worse, a fitna, or civil war between different followers of Muhammad.

Ayatollah Khomeini began publicly challenged this view after Ayatollah Borujerdi's death. Khomeini, emerging from Borujerdi's shadow, preached that an Islamic government was legitimate. In the absence of the Imams, the clerics were the next best thing, imbued with the ability to interpret Islamic law for the masses. He famously postulated a *velayat-i faqih*, or government of the jurists.[29] He was not alone as Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Shariatmodari also argued for an Islamic government before 1979.[30] After the revolution, Khomeini, popular in many sectors of Iranian society for his steadfast opposition to the Shah, was able to implement his views, despite opposition from some other clerics.

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[27] Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century : The Azhar and Shi'ism between Rapprochement and Restraint* 82-98.

[28] Ibid. 332.

[29] Ruhollah Khomeini and Hamid Algar, *Islam and Revolution : Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley, Calif.: Mizan Press, 1981).

[30] Nikki R. Keddie and Yann Richard, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

The war between Israel and Hizbullah, in the summer of 2006, has put these different trends among various Islamist thinkers in sharp relief. Hamas, which is the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizbullah have been supportive of each others' efforts against Israel, as has the Muslim Brotherhood branches in Egypt and Jordan. Yet, al-Qaeda has distanced itself from Hizbullah, despite the fact that they are fighting Israel [31] The Saudi government, with its Wahhabi roots and deep fear of Shi'ite power, has condemned Hizbullah declaring, "A distinction must be made between legitimate resistance and uncalculated adventures undertaken by elements inside [Lebanon] and those behind them without recourse to the legal authorities"[32] Lining up with the Saudi government is one of the former dissident Shaykhs, Safar al-Hawali, who criticized Hizbullah's actions, saying, "Don't pray for Hizbullah."[33] Another Sahwa Shaykh, Salman al-Awda, despite his Wahhabi background, has echoed earlier calls for unity colonialism, writing, "This is not the time to express our differences with the Shi'ites because we are confronted by our greater enemy, the criminal Jews and Zionists."[34] His stance, though, may possibly be interpreted as an attempt by the Saudi government to appease their own Shi'ite population and rising sympathy for Hizbullah among the populace.

DISSIMULATION AND TEMPORARY MARRIAGE

[The Shi'ites] know that, if a sectarian war were to take place, many in the [Islamic] nation would rise to defend the Sunnis in Iraq. Since their religion is one of dissimulation, they maliciously and cunningly proceeded another way.

This section will look at *taqiyya* and *mut'a*, two Shi'ite practices, and Wahhabi response to them. If anti-Shi'ite thinkers have a trump card, it is dissimulation, called *taqiyya* in Arabic. *Taqiyya* is the idea that if one is being persecuted, they have the right to lie about their beliefs. Also, in this section, we will look at temporary marriage, a specifically Shi'ite practice. Wahhabis claim that this hurts women by taking away the rights which Islam provides for them. Wahhabis claim that this hurts women by taking away the rights which Islam provides for them. The debasement of their women and their practice of *taqiyya* are issues used to make the Shi'a appear untrustworthy.

In the example cited above, al-Zarqawi is asserting that Shi'ites do not want the appearance of a civil war to occur in Iraq, and thus instead they are fighting Sunnis in a different way (by joining the government and the police) and lying about it. *Taqiyya*, while not exclusive to Shi'ites, is certainly a prominent feature in attacks on them. How could anyone trust a person whose

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[31] Bernard Haykel, "The Enemy of My Enemy Is Still My Enemy," *New York Times*, 27 July 2006.

[32] "Saudi Arabia on Crisis in Lebanon," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 16, 2006 2006.

[33] AP, "Saudi Religious Leader Blasts Hizbullah," *Jerusalem Post*, August 5, 2006 2006.

[34] Haykel, "The Enemy of My Enemy Is Still My Enemy."

religion teaches him to lie about their most sacred beliefs in certain circumstances? Their real aim, anti-Shi'ites claim, is to take over the Islamic world.

In fact, the Qur'an does make reference to situations where *taqiyya* is permissible, "Anyone who, after accepting Faith in God utters Unbelief except under compulsion, his heart remaining firm in Faith. . . on them is the wrath of God and theirs will be a dreadful penalty".[35] One of the great Sunni thinkers, al-Tabari (d. 923), explains that this verse refers to a specific person, 'Ammar b. Yasir, who, under torture, renounced his faith verbally, but not in his heart. He was consoled by the Prophet personally. Al-Tabari argues that *taqiyya* is not permissible, though, if the torment is endurable and the example of 'Ammar should not be taken as a general rule. Other verses in the Qur'an portray heroic saints and prophets, and it is their example which should be followed in the face of danger.[36]

'Ammar b. Yasir was a very prominent early partisan of Ali against the Umayyads, who fought alongside Ali. He was given the honor of holding prisoner A'isha, the favorite wife of the late Prophet (according to Sunnis) but member of the rival Umayyad clan, during the civil strife between supporters of Ali and Muawwiya. He fought and died alongside Ali at the battle of Siffin. Thus, his example in *taqiyya* is not taken by the Shi'a as an exception.[37] Of course, the Prophet could not have practiced *taqiyya*, for then revelation itself would be in doubt. Ali, in Shi'ite thought, did practice it during the reigns of the Caliphs Abu Bakr and Umar. Many heroes in Shi'ite biographies are portrayed as having practiced dissimulation.

Taqiyya is remains a controversial issue today. Even among Shi'ites there is disagreement. Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya, a Shi'ite of Lebanon wrote:

> May God curse them who forced us to do [*taqiyya*] in the past! But go today [1964] to any Shi'ite country and you will find absolutely nothing of *taqiyya*. If it were a fundamental religious or legal aspect of our faith, that is valid in every situation, it would have been preserved just as the religion and the principles of the shari'a have been preserved.[38]

His reasoning for the lack of need for dissimulation today was that Shi'ites were no longer oppressed in the world. Other Shi'ites such as Muhammad Mahdi al-Khalisi disagreed with

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[35] Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, New ed. (Brentwood, Md., U.S.A.: Amana Corp., 1991) 16:106

[36] R Strothmann, "Takiyya," *The encyclopaedia of Islam. Volumes 1-11* (2003).

[37] H. Reckendorf, "'Ammar B. Yasir," *The encyclopaedia of Islam. Volumes 1-11* (2003).

[38] Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century : The Azhar and Shi'ism between Rapprochement and Restraint* 219.

Mughniyya and thought that *taqiyya* was one of God's timeless commandments.[39] A contemporary Sunni polemicist would simply argue that Mughniyya could be practicing *taqiyya* about his position on *taqiyya*.

Controversies about Qura'nic verses often have more practical legal implications. Such is the case of *mut'a*, or temporary marriage. *Mut'a* is a practice which stretches back to pre-Islamic traditions. Both Sunnis and Shi'ites agree that it was practiced by Muslims during the Prophet's lifetime. For example, one type of temporary marriage was called *mut'a al-hajj*, or the marriage of the pilgrimage. Since a pilgrimage to Mecca took so long, it was initially held that a man could take a temporary wife to aid him at different points along his journey. In general, both sects agree that this practice was formally abolished by the second caliph, Umar.

As in the case of *taqiyya*, the controversy begins over a verse in the Qur'an. As stated earlier, Anti-Shi'ite Sunnis accuse Shi'ites of *tahrif*, the claim that the Qur'an as we know it today has been tampered with. After describing which types of women are not permitted in marriage (mothers, daughters, sisters, etc.), the Qur'an then continues, "And further, you are permitted to seek out wives with your wealth, in modest conduct but not in fornication; but give them their reward for what you have enjoyed of them in keeping with your promise"[40]. Some of the great early orthodox companion of Muhammad, such as Ibn 'Abbas, read this verse with the addition of the words, "for a definite period" inserted after "for what you have enjoyed of them". This version survives in Shi'ite works, but not is Sunni ones.[41]

This debate is not only one about the nature of the Qur'an and its interpretation. It also becomes one about the role of women. Temporary marriage has no material benefits for women after the dowery. Marriage in Islam begins with a contract, and so does *mut'a*. However, *mut'a* does not require witnesses or a judge present during the contract's signing, thus leaving a woman easily vulnerable to a breach of contract. A woman in a *mut'a* marriage may not inherit from her husband. She would also be denied the monetary compensation stipulated by the Qur'an (2:238) due to her for a certain amount of time after the dissolution of a marraige.[42] Thus, according to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, she is not really a wife because she is being denied her spousal rights under Islamic law, and this is immoral.

Mut'a persists until modern times. As recently as 2002, Iran considered using the concept in order to legalize prostitution. Since *mut'a* marriage can last anywhere from a few minutes to many years, the government considered that it might be better to arrange temporary marriages in

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[39] Ibid. 219.

[40] W. Heffening, "Mut'a," *The encyclopaedia of Islam. Volumes 1-11* (2003). Also see Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* 4:24.

[41] Heffening, "Mut'a."

[42] DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* 90.

government controlled chastity-houses in order to control the health risks associated with prostitution. Former Iranian president Hashemi Rafsanjani also encouraged temporary marriage as a way to alleviate the sexual frustration of the youth.[43]

The final point about *mut'a* returns to the idea of *taqiyya*. When the caliph 'Umar proclaimed that *mut'a* was illegal, it does not seem that there was an outcry among the other companions of Muhammad. Sunnis suggest that this was because by 'Umar's time *mut'a* had already been abolished de facto. Ali could have objected, but did not. This, Shi'ites contend, was only because he could not risk the wrath of 'Umar. 'Umar was universally regarded as ill-tempered and threatened stoning for anyone who disobeyed this precept. Was Ali protecting himself with *taqiyya*? Shi'ites, as we have seen already argue that he was practicing *taqiyya* all during Abu Bakr and Umar's reign, and therefore neither Ali nor anyone else complained.

Wahhabi believe that their interpretation of Islam gives women certain guarantees that their safety and well-being will be looked after. *Mut'a* and *taqiyya* seem to the Wahhabi as a denial of one's personal responsibility. This being the case, they do not believe that Shi'ites can be trusted. The issue of *taqiyya* has made reconciliation quite difficult, for it fosters distrust among Sunnis of Shi'ite positions. It is also one of the main intellectual bludgeons used against them. "Cooperate with [the Shi'a]" Abu Basir wrote, "as you would cooperate with one who makes *taqiyya* and lies legal to you, for he is dishonest to you in all things and does not trust you at all."[44]

VISIONS OF HISTORY

They are infiltrating like snakes… to take complete control over the economy like their tutors the Jews. As the days pass, their hopes are growing that they will establish a Shi`i state stretching from Iran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon and ending in the Cardboard Kingdom of the Gulf.

Islamic theology and law cannot be disconnected from Islamic history. For a-Zarqawi and to the *takfiri* anti-Shi'ites among the Wahhabis (those extremists who wish to declare Shi'ites and secularists apostates), the Shi'ites ideological subversion of true Islam goes back to the period just after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. This vision of history is not just a way to read textbooks, it informs al-Zarqawi of his identity and his goals and determines his enemies. To say that a group or a figure in the past was an enemy of Islam is to attack a contemporary group or sect associated with them. Here we shall see how al-Zarqawi and others discredit Shi'ites and accuse them of wanting to destroy Islam.

One of the most famous anti-Shi'ite polemics is that it was founded by a Jew bent on destroying Islam. His name was Abdullah Ibn Saba. Al-Tabari, a 10th century Sunni historian, argued that this Ibn Abdullah Saba was the first to end the perfect harmony among the Prophet's

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[43] Nazila Fathi, "To Regulate Prostitution, Iran Ponders Brothels," *New York Times*, 28 Aug. 2002.

[44] Abu Basir al-Tartusi, "Kayfa Yata'amil Al-Muslim Ma' Al-Rafida," www.tawhed.ws.

companions. Others Sunni historians claimed that Abdullah Ibn Saba saw Ali as the divinely appointed successor to Muhammad, just as Joshua was to Moses. Accordingly, he is accused of denying Ali's death, asserting that he would return someday. Although even Shi'ites consider Abdullah Ibn Saba an extremist because of the belief that Ali would return, that does not quash the accusations against them by their opponents.[45] Of course, there were ample Jewish converts within the early Islamic community, and Shi'ites note that Ka'b al-Ahbar, a convert, was welcome by the early caliphal authorities in their courts.[46]

In his letter, al-Zarqawi is insinuating that Shi'ites are trying to take over the Islamic world, just as Jews are stereotyped as wanting. He is not alone in his fears. King Abdallah of Jordan has stated his distrust of a "Shi'a arc".[47]The president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak said that, "Most of the Shi'as are loyal to Iran, and not to the countries they are living in."[48] Mubarak and al-Zarqawi have very little in common other than the fact that they are both in some broad sense Sunnis. Their mutual distrust of the Shi'a certainly points to wider cultural distrust between the two groups. Shi'ites as well have a skepticism about Sunnis, referring to them as the *'amma*, the ignorant masses.

The question is still an important one, what loyalty do most Imami Shi'ites have to Iran? After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Iran produced a great deal of rhetoric about Islamic unity and the export of the revolution. But because of the specifically religiously Shi'ite nature of the revolt, the draining Iran-Iraq war and the general Sunni distrust of Shi'ites, this did not go very far. In addition, as pointed out earlier, not all Shi'ites share a belief in the *velayat-i faqih*. The Iranian clerics therefore had no choice but to make a Stalinesque retreat from internationalism to Islamic revolution in one country.[49]

As time has passed and the consequences of the revolution have been laid bare for all to see, other Shi'ites have not ascribed to the Iranian model of government. This does not mean that Shi'ite groups around the globe have not been allied with Iran, Lebanon's Hizbullah, in particular, has received monetary and military aid. It also does not mean, though, that there is a pan-Shi'ite movement led by Iran whose goal is to extend the Iranian revolution. During the Iran-Iraq war, Iraqi Shi'ites remained loyal to Iraq, despite Saddam Hussein's suspicion that they would act as a fifth column. In Iraq today, Shi'ite leaders take pains to show their distance from Iran. Ayatollah Sistani's Persian name, and Ayatollah al-Hakim (who heads the Supreme

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[45] M.G.S. Hodgson, "'Abdallah B. Saba'," *The encyclopaedia of Islam. Volumes 1-11* (2003).

[46] Abu Talib Tabrizi and Ahmed Haneef, *Spurious Arguments About the Shi'a*, 1st ed. (Qum: Ansariyan, 2001) 119.

[47]"Sunnis and Shi'as: Does It Have to Be War?," *The Economist*, 3/2/06.

[48] "Mubarak's Shi'a Remarks Stir Anger," *al-Jazeera*, 4/10/06.

[49] Rudi Mathee, "Die Iranische Schia Und Die Islamische Einheit 1979-1996," *International journal of Middle East studies* 32, no. 1 (2000), 179. This is a review of Buchta's work.

Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq) long tenure in Iran during the 80's and 90's hurts their reputation. Muqtada al-Sadr's popularity partially rests on his family's long history in Iraq and their persecution by the Saddam Hussein.

Al-Zarqawi notes that fear of an Iranian dominated Middle East has its roots in the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry of the 17th century. The Safavids brought Shi'ite Islam to Iran in 1501. The Ottomans attempted to take Vienna twice, once in 1529 and again in 1683. During the intervening years they were concerned with defending their other border, battling over Iraq with the Safavids. The wars were portrayed as religious (Sunni vs. Shi'a) as well as ethnic (Turkish vs. Persian).[50] Al-Zarqawi quotes an unnamed Western historian who stated that were it not for the Safavids, the Ottomans certainly would have taken over Western Europe. Thus, some Sunnis charge, the Shi'ites true goal is to destroy Islam.

Khomeini's victory in 1979 certainly caused a shock across the Islamic world. Most Sunnis, and particularly Wahhabis, feared its consequences. But some Sunni groups took advantage of Iran's new enthusiasm for Islamic unity. Hassan al-Banna, as we have already seen, was open to rapprochement between Sunnis and Shi'ites. Offshoots of his Muslim Brotherhood organization have also been open to cooperation. Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, has taken criticism from Wahhabi thinkers such as Abu Basir al-Tartusi for working with Iran.[51] Hamas has received funding from Hizbullah in Lebanon as well.

The dispute on the Shi'ite question may be explained in terms of particular Islamist groups' respective origins: Muslim Brothers were concerned with the expulsion of colonial powers (and later secular authorities) from Egypt; Wahhabis were more concerned with the correct practice of Islam since they were surrounded by the folk practices of the Bedouin. Less than 1% of Egypt's population is Shi'ite (some of whom were arrested in 2003 by Mubarak)[52], and thus they were not an important concern of Hassan al-Banna. In the Wahhabi heartland, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, though, Shi'ites are numerous, and are thus vigorously countered.

Hassan al-Banna's dispute with Wahhabi thinkers over the possibility of working with Shi'ites continues to this day. Al-Zarqawi accuses the Muslim Brothers of having no firm principles, and thus they follow a middle path for the purposes of gaining money. When the United States invaded Iraq, there was a discussion among Islamists as to whether an anti-U.S. alliance with the Shi'ites was advisable. As may be predicted, the Muslim Brother leaders in Jordan (where many of the fighters in Iraq have come from), exemplified by Hudhayfa Azzam, son of the famous Palestinian teacher and martyr Abdallah Azzam, argued that since the fight was against a colonial power, it was best to fight together. By contrast, Al-Zarqawi, the Wahhabi-inspired

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[50] David Morgan, *Medieval Persia, 1040-1797, A History of the Near East* (London: Longman, 1988) 128.

[51] Abu Basir al-Tartusi, "Hamas...Wa Al-Nifaq Al-Muzalim," www.altartosi.com.

[52] "International Religious Freedom Report 2004," (US Department of State, 2004).

activist, advocated fighting the Shi'ites as well as the US, and he eventually won the debate and the leadership of the *mujahidin*.[53]

CONCLUSIONS

Islamists live with the idea that their actions must be justified under Islamic law if they are to be spared the eternal damnation of the hell-fire. This means that thinkers produce hundreds of volumes of books, letters, *fatwa*s and speeches in which they try to clarify their positions, ideas and tactics theologically. This gives policy makers the advantage of being able to read and understand a great deal about Islamists.

American policy makers must take note of certain trends in Islamic theology if they are to craft an effective policy towards the Middle East. Had they been following theological debates astutely, they may have foreseen how suicide bombing spread as a tactic across the Islamic world. This tactic's use in the Islamic world began in Lebanon in the 1980's by the Shi'ite group Hizbullah. In the 1990's it was used in Palestine, a country without a Shi'ite population. Leading Islamic scholars were forced to deal with this issue:[54] Is suicide legal in Islam? If so, in what circumstances is it legal? Legal treatises were written discussing its permissibility.

The uninitiated might note with surprise that the tactic of suicide attacks moved so quickly from the Shi'ite to the Sunni world. But our analysis suggests that the migration from Shi'ite Hizbullah to the Muslim Brotherhood's Hamas was observable and predictable based on the trajectory of theological debates. Watching these debates closely can possibly help us detect new alliances, tactics and targets of Islamist groups, such as the alliance between Hamas and Iran. They may have been helped the United States be better able to predict the political positioning of certain leading Iraqi Ayatollahs after the initial invasion, many of whom were wary of Iran and its form of active Shi'ite government long before the U.S. invasion.

The debate between Sunnis and Shi'ites is very old and is unlikely to be resolved in the near future. The relative strength of today's anti-Shi'ite Wahhabism, backed by Saudi oil wealth, combined with a fear that Iran would stoke revolutionary zeal in Shi'ites across the Islamic world has created too much distrust. The fact that Shi'ites live in the important oil-producing regions of various countries only complicates the matter. Al-Zarqawi may have been an extremist, advocating for a civil war with the Shi'ites of Iraq, but his view on Shi'ites is not terribly atypical. Throughout all the attempts at rapprochement in the 20th century, all that could be mustered was one *fatwa* calling for equality of the five law schools.

Academics until very recently have seen the Middle East since the 19th century as trending towards secularism. This process picked up pace with the rise of nationalism, Nasserism and

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[53] Nir Rosen, "Iraq's Jordanian Jihadis," *New York Times Magazine*, 19 Feb. 2006.

[54] Shmuel Bar, *Warrant for Terror : Fatwas of Radical Islam and the Duty of Jihad*, Hoover Studies in Politics, Economics, and Society (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) 61.

Ba'thism. In recent years, historians have been forced to re-examine this view. The Middle East is still a place where religious concerns and influences are strong, and thus are still important to the masses. Accordingly, it is imperative to follow religious debates no less closely than quotidian political debates. The two are too intertwined to be separated.

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