

Notes on Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival* (Ch. 4,5 and 6)

WADG

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Ch. 4 Khomeini's Moment

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Khomeini's direct pipeline to God

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Iranian monarchy held power w/ Shia consent until weakened by Brits & Russia, late 19th C. Shah ceded exclusive control of the **tobacco** industry to Russia; Ayatollah banned tobacco use. The Shah cancelled the concession, thereby **relinquishing some power to the ayatollah**.

Defending the Shia realm came to mean constitutionalism.

- The **ulama** joined the constitutional movement 1905-06 to vest more authority in the people.
- **Iranian constitution of 1906** was secular, but deferential to Shiism.
- **Iraqi constitution of 2005** is similar. [?]

Khomeini was a noted **philosopher**, specialized in Aristotelian logic, dabbled in mysticism.

Khomeini implied that he was **divine and claimed direct knowledge of the truth**.

Khomeini wore a black **seyyed's turban** and was a **drastically new kind of Shia leader**.

From Pahlavi Monarchy I to Khomeini's vision

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1925 Reza Khan staged a military coup and declared himself Shah.

- acted as a **Turkish-style modernizing republic**, parading in royal trappings
- **marginalized the ulama**
- abdicated to son in 1941

Shah II appointed **Mossadegh as premier in 1950**.

- instituted **reforms**, incl. nationalizing the oil industry, **overthrown in 1952 coup**.
- **Madeleine Albright**: "...the coup was a setback for Iran's political development; it is easy to see why **many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America**."

Taleqani, Shariati and "red Shiism"

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Senior Cleric Mahmoud **Taleqani** (1911–1979) **blended Shia and Marxist** ideals.

Lay intellectual **Ali Shariati** (1933–1977) saw **Shiism as a creed of revolution**

- "Every day is Ashoura, every place is Karbala."
- Shiism had become **creed of scholarship and piety** rather than social justice and revolution
- Advocated for "**red Shiism**"
 - Resembled Catholic movement of "liberation theology"
 - Became the credo of revolutionary youth
- To curb his influence, **Khomeini appropriated Shariati's ideas**.

Khomeini as 12th Imam, and the cult of martyrdom

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K. relied on **Shia messianism** to confirm his leadership of the revolt.

K. assumed the title Imam, equating himself with the saints.

Iranian revolution executed enemies on **charges of fighting against the 12th Imam**.

In Iran-Iraq War, volunteers were given **plastic keys to gates of Paradise**.

The intent of Iran's rulers has been to **enshroud the revolution and Khomeini in myth**.

[Q2Q: Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, p. 38-39: "The classical [Islamic] jurists distinguish clearly between facing certain death at the hands of the enemy and killing oneself by one's own

hand. The one leads to death, the other to hell. ... The suicide bomber is thus taking a considerable risk on a theological nicety.” Why are suicide bombers willing to risk eternal damnation?]

Khomeini's bid to lead Islam

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K. wanted to be accepted as **leader of the Muslim world**.

K. focused activism on **opposition to US and Israel** rather than on **Islamic concerns**.

K. inspired Muslim activism but **failed to achieve Muslim unity**.

K. escalated **anti-Americanism** while inculcating **fear and mistrust toward Islam**.

K's face came to symbolize Islam in western popular culture.

[Question to Consider: What role does the media play in shaping conflicts between the US and Islam?]

[Q2Q: Compare Khomeini to George Wallace.]

Iranian revolution spawns spin-off groups

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Ex: **Amal (Lebanon), Da'wa (Iraq)**, others in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

Iraq:

- **Saddam killed Shia and Da'wa leaders, purged the Ba'ath Party, and attacked Iran.**
- K. thought **Iraqi Shias** would side with Iran, but they **fought for Iraq**.
- 1988, K accepted humiliating ceasefire (a **“poisoned chalice”**).

Lebanon:

- Iranian revolution **spread a lasting influence only in Lebanon (Musa al-Sadr's Amal)**.
- Al-Sadr saw K. as an unorthodox political upstart; K. saw Amal as not radical enough.
- **1982 Iran began building Hezbollah in Lebanon.**
- **Hezbollah adopted cult of martyrdom** and killed 600 Israeli soldiers from '82 to '84.
- Oct '83 **Hezbollah attacked US barracks in Beirut**, killing 241 Marines; same day attacked French barracks, killing 58.
- **Reagan then withdrew US forces.**
- Laid foundation for **regional alliance among Iran, Lebanon and Syria**.
- Hezbollah's **methods became a model for Hamas** in Palestine.

Shia ripples spread across region.

Sunnis saw mostly Shia mischief and threat to Sunni dominance.

[Q2Q: Do people commit religious acts of terror in order to further their cause, or do they commit them in order to justify and satisfy their personal desire to kill and terrorize?]

[Q2Q: How does terror differ from “shock and awe”?]

Khoi's resistance

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Ayatollah **Khoi**, native of Iran, worked in Najaf; influential **teacher of Sistani**

Khoi **rejected Khomeini's theory as bogus** and encouraged others to ignore him.

Khoi presented the **greatest barrier to Khomeini's influence** in the Shia world.

Ch. 5 The Battle of Islamic Fundamentalisms

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The Saudi-Iranian divide

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Khomeini grated on Sunni sensibilities.

With the **Shia awakening in Iran, the days of sectarian tolerance were over.**

Sunni militants learned methods from Iranian revolutionaries but found them obnoxious.

Pakistan Sunni fundamentalists **mixed mercantile interests with religious values.**

- **green Shiism**

Cleavage between **fundamentalism as revivalism** and **fundamentalism as revolution** was deep.

- **Sunni “haves” vs. Shia “outsiders”**

K’s direct challenge to SA galvanized Sunni opposition to Iranian revolution and Shia awakening.

K called SA monarchy **US lackeys; underestimated depth of Sunni support for SA regime.**

1987, clashes between Saudi police and Iranian pilgrims left 402 dead.

K’s call for genuine Islamic control of the two holy places was seen as a Shia plot.

Many Shias delighted in K’s challenge.

King Fahd responded by **claiming title of protector of the two holy places.**

Fahd received a **ringing endorsement from the Sunni world.**

Faisal, assassinated in 1975, was a Muslim hero, primarily because of the ’73 embargo.

Faisal alone had **stood up to Nasserism and Ba’athism,** calling them atheistic

Faisal **supported the Muslim Brotherhood**

1982 Syria killed tens of thousands Muslim Brothers

Khomeini refused to support the Brotherhood

With ‘74 oil bonanza, SA began subsidizing Islamic causes, incl propagation of Wahhabism

- **thru Saudi funded universities, schools, mosques and research institutions**

Symbiotic relationship w/ institutions, teachers, etc.

Enabled SA to withstand K’s challenge and close vast swaths of Islam to his influence.

In Iraq-Iran War, SA backed Iraq.

The sectarian card, á la Joe McCarthy, was played often.

The Wahhabi network built by SA “formed a wall blocking off Iran from Pakistan.”

Saudi-Pakistan strategic relationship underwrote the Taliban’s conquest of Afghanistan.

Taliban declared Afghan Shias to be infidels and massacred 2,000.

Others were told to convert to Sunnism or die.

The brand of radical Islam spreading across Central Asia & the Caucasus in the ‘90s didn’t come from

Iran but was Sunni radicalism **born of the deliberate Saudi policy of containing Iran.**

The Saudi strategy **caught little Western attention** through the 90s.

Because of the **Shias’ apocalyptic bent and cult of martyrdom,** even hotheaded **Sunnis seemed less dangerous by comparison.**

This **inclined the West toward complacency.**

[Q2Q: Among Middle East countries, Saudi Arabia is the top supplier of oil to the US. If we stop buying Saudi oil, will we be safer?]

[Q2Q: Under what conditions should we encourage business investments in Iran?]

“Green” vs. “red” fundamentalism in Pakistan

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Hunza Valley, site of ongoing clash between Sunni jihadists and Shia/Ismaili locals.

In 80s & 90s Central Asia, esp. Pakistan, was the main battleground of the Saudi-Iranian and Sunni-Shia conflict.

Pakistan has 30 million Shia.

1977 Pakistan's military took power and **wreaked revenge on the Shia PM, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.**

1977 Gen Zia took power, set out to **"Islamize" Pakistan**

Shias began refusing to abide by Sunni laws, said **"Islamization" was "Sunnification"**

Zia gave way, but **sectarian divisions became a central political issue**

Battle in Pakistan between **Iranian "red" fundamentalism** and **Zia's "green" fundamentalism**

Zia, his allies and SA defined the competition in sectarian terms to their advantage

Zia warned K **imprudent to tangle with a superpower**; K said that **his superpower was God**

The SA network of madrasas and charities influenced India and Pakistan to side with SA

All 3 regimes saw Iranian influence in Pakistan as a strategic threat

1983 the conflict escalated after Sunnis attacked two mosques

Mainstream Islamic parties refused to adopt a hardline sectarian posture

The traditional Sunni polemic against the **Shias as wayward brothers** thus gave way to a newly virulent root-and-branch **rejection of Shiism as a gross heresy.**

Implied that Sunnis **should revere who rulers had fought Ali** and killed Husayn.

Damned Ashoura as a heathen spectacle

1984 Muhammad **Manzour Numani**, **extremist Deobandi senior leader** wrote a book, *Iranian Revolution: Imam Khomeini and Shiism*, **prefaced by moderate Nadwi (Ali Mian)**

- a friendly endorsement

Became the gospel of Deobandi militant organizations that mushroomed across Pakistan in the 80s to fight the Shia.

The strife was a factor in **destabilizing incipiently democratic governments** in the 90s, **culminating w/ coup by Gen. Musharraf.**

Organizational and ideological **ties bind Sunni sectarians w/ Sunni Arab extremists.**

Intense hatred of Shias and Shiism is an important motive for Taliban and al Qaeda.

Iran was not able to match the scale of Sunni militancy.

Sensing their advantage, **Sunnis demanded that Shias be declared a non-Muslim minority.**

The main Shia parties are backing Hamad Karzai.

Sunnis use **violence, theology and religious ideology** to roll back Shia gains.

What happened in Pakistan will happen wherever the Sunni-Shia balance of power comes into question.

Pakistani **Sunni extremists have counterpart in Iraq** in Abu Musab **al-Zarqawi.**

In Iraq or Bahrain, the Shias may win because of numbers, but their **gains will lead to violence and to more Sunni extremism.**

[Q2Q: How does Islamic fundamentalism differ from Christian or Jewish fundamentalism?]

[Q2Q: What role do business profits play in the relationship between the US and Muslim countries?]

Ch. 6 The Tide Turns

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Sistani keeps Shias' eyes on the prize

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The fall of Saddam's regime **ended Sunni rule** over Iraq.

The most important outcome of the Iraq war is that Iraq became the first Arab state to be ruled by a **democratically powered Shia majority.**

The opening of Iraq also produced a **new, undisputed Shia leader in Ayatollah Sistani**.
Old school scholar.

Heir to Khoi, received **adulation, contributions and taxes from millions**.

Received **endorsement of military**.

Sistani **put forth a simple model of government** on which everyone could agree

- principle of **majority rule**
- **accountable and representative** government
- reflect and protect **Shia identity**

Limited the role of Islam to providing values and guidelines for social order.

Brought to the Middle East a **new approach to politics**.

The most compelling and credible challenge that fundamentalism and other forms of authoritarianism have ever had to face.

Neither antagonistic toward, nor deferential to, the US.

His **moderate and levelheaded style** set the tone for Shia ascendancy.

Convinced various Shia factions to let him deal with the US.

Unaffected by **Muqtada al-Sadr's challenge** to him.

Honest broker and bridge-builder.

Paints broad strokes.

Did not try to produce ideal Islamic state, but merely to give **constitutional and elective power to Shias in accord with their numbers and the principle of majority rule**.

Shifting turf wars were mere distractions, and predictable.

First draft **constitution approved in 2006**.

Provides for principles of **representative government** but stipulates that **“no law should contradict the tenets of Islam’s jurisprudence.”** [Is that really what it says?]

Influenced new interest in Iran in **“quietist” model**.

Sistani has **extensive network** of people who reinforce the practice of **non-violence**.

Sistani reminds us:

- **leadership remains important**
- **realities on the ground matter greatly**
- the **Shia are ready and willing** to play a major role in shaping the Middle East

[Q2Q: Is it realistic to suggest that the Shia can play a major role in spite of the limits on their influence outside of Iran?]

[Q2Q: Compare Sistani to Jesus, John Adams, Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Pope Francis].

Opening of Iraq spurs Shia revival

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At a more fundamental level, the **Shia revival** refers to a consensus among **Shia governments** and movements that **gains made in Iraq should be protected and entrenched**.

Several implications:

- **stronger cultural and religious ties** will continue to form among the various Shia communities in the Middle East, and a **consensus will form** around their need to defend their political power
- the example of Iraq will spur a **“demonstration effect” in Shia communities** beyond Iraq to begin to **demand more say** in how they are governed in their own countries

- these gains in power and assertiveness will reinforce inter-Shia cultural and religious ties, and these ties will in turn **sustain the gains in power**

The Shia rise in relative power is injecting a **robust element of real pluralism** into political Islam, and many **Shias are finding democracy appealing as an end in itself**.

[Q2Q: What “Shia governments” is Nasr referring to? Iran only? Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan have Shia majority populations, but do they have Shia governments?]

[Q2Q: Lewis, pp. 163-64: “Of the 57 member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, only one, the Turkish Republic, has operated democratic institutions over a long period of time and, despite difficult and ongoing problems, has made progress in establishing a liberal economy and a free society and political order. In Iraq and Iran... there are democratic oppositions capable of taking over and forming governments. We... could do much to help them, and have done little. ... If they succeed, we shall have friends in the true, not just the diplomatic, sense of these words. ... If the leaders of Al-Qaeda can persuade the world of Islam to accept their views and their leadership, then a long and bitter struggle lies ahead.” What more, if anything, should the US be doing to help the democratic oppositions?]

The 3 pillars of the Shia revival

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1. The newly empowered **Shia majority in Iraq**
2. The rise of **Iran as regional leader**
3. The **empowerment of Shias in Lebanon, SA, Kuwait, UAE and Pakistan**

The revival will lead to most even Sunni-Shia balance of power in Middle East in 1400 years

[Q2Q: Do Shias really have significant power in SA, Kuwait, UAE and Pakistan?]

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For an interesting look at where Sunnis and Shias live, see:

<http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/>

Miscellaneous Q2Qs:

1. What is the US doing now that increases Muslims’ **animosity** toward us? What is the US doing now that increases Muslims’ **affinity** with us?
2. What can we do to move from an “**us versus them**” attitude to a “**we**” attitude?
3. Should Americans support **women’s movements** in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia?
4. Should the US encourage vigorous **cultural exchange** programs with all Muslim countries?
5. Would the US benefit from having a **Good Neighbor policy** toward Muslim nations?
6. Can we and should we be doing anything **in Boulder** to build bridges to Islam?

7. Before American oil explorers arrived in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s, Saudi Arabia was largely a **hunting-and-gathering society**. What social and religious impact would you expect on such a society that becomes industrialized within a 25-year period?
8. Other than voters and government officials, **who exerts significant influence** on US foreign policy?
9. Lewis (*The Crisis of Islam*, p. 28) **divides Islam into 3 groups**:
 - i. Those who see the West in general, and the US in particular, as the ancient and irreconcilable enemy of Islam, the one serious obstacle to the restoration of God's faith and law at home and their ultimate universal triumph. **For these there is no way but war to the death**, in fulfillment of what they see as the commandments of their faith.
 - ii. Those who, while remaining committed Muslims and well aware of the flaws of western society, nevertheless also see its merits – its inquiring spirit, ... its concern for freedom. These, while retaining their own beliefs and their own culture, **seek to join us in reaching for a free and better world**.
 - iii. Those who, while seeing the West as their ultimate enemy and the source of all evil, are nevertheless aware of its power, and **seek some temporary accommodation in order to better prepare for the final struggle**.

How can we tell which group is which?