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The Historical Roles of *Jihād* in Sunnī-Shīʿī Relations

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a taxonomy of the ways in which *jihād* and *jihād* propaganda have been used in medieval Islamic history and in modern times within the framework of Sunnī-Shīʿī relations. It identifies five main relevant patterns of usage: I) Sunnī *jihād* against a Shīʿī foreign power; II) Shīʿī *jihād* against a Sunnī foreign power; III) Shīʿī use of *jihād* propaganda against a foreign power – usually a Christian power – as a means to gain legitimacy among Sunnis; IV) Sunnī-Shīʿī cooperation and solidarity through *jihād* against a foreign power; and V) Sunnī *jihād* against an internal, Shīʿī enemy. It then discusses the implications of the continuity of these patterns over many centuries for the understanding of Sunnī-Shīʿī relations generally and critiques some aspects of recent scholarship on “sectarianization.”

KEYWORDS

Fatimids; *jihād*; polemics; Safavids; Shīʿī Islam; Sunnī Islam

Introduction

In a context of widespread conflict between Sunnis and Shīʿīs throughout the Islamic world, modern exercises of *jihād*, *jihād* propaganda, and invocations of war and violence against unbelievers vary but often follow patterns that are familiar from earlier historical periods and, furthermore, show remarkable stability over time. A broad historical perspective may help observers make sense of puzzling and seemingly contradictory contemporary phenomena. This study attempts to present a taxonomy of the ways in which *jihād* and *jihād* propaganda have been implicated in Sunnī-Shīʿī relations throughout Islamic history, in hopes of shedding light on historical and contemporary examples of these phenomena. The key factors that appear to determine which mode is adopted in a particular instance are the assessments – based on perception, whether accurate or faulty – of the actors’ own power, of the actors’ majority or minority status, and of the seriousness of outside threats. When the actors in question understand that their group constitutes a minority and that their power is therefore limited, this has historically tended to dictate an ecumenical approach. In contrast, when the actors understand that they constitute a majority and that their power is predominant in the context in which they are operating, this allows them to strive for a more

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confrontational stance and to attempt to force the compliance of their opponents to their own religious dogma.

The contemporary Islamic world is witnessing an intensified conflict between Sunnī and Shī'ī groups, engendered in large part by the Shī'īs' acquisition of political power. Only a few periods of Islamic history have witnessed the establishment of influential Shī'ī dynasties. The first of these periods occurred in the tenth and eleventh centuries, when the Buwayhids controlled much of Iraq and Iran; the Fatimids ruled in Egypt, Syria, the Hejaz, and, for a time in what is now Tunisia, Eastern Algeria, and Sicily; the Hamdānids ruled northern Syria and Iraq from their capitals in Aleppo and Mosul; an Ismā'īlī dynasty ruled Sind in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries; and the Qarmatis held sway in eastern Arabia. For this reason, the period c. 950–1050 has come to be called “the Shī'ī century.” The second of these periods occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when several officially Shī'ī states were established, including the Safavid Empire (1501–1722) in Iran, and several other Shī'ī dynasties in the Deccan in southern India, including the Qutbshāhī dynasty (1519–1687) with its capital at Golconda, the 'Ādilshāhī dynasty (1490–1686) with its capital at Bijapur, and the Nizāmshāhī dynasty (1490–1636) with its capital at Ahmadnagar.

One may argue that the contemporary Islamic world is witnessing a third such period, a new Shī'ī century. The signs of the current surge in Shī'ī political power and societal presence are many. The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1981 was followed by attempts to spread the revolution outside the nation's borders. In Iraq, the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the establishment of a representative government ensured the political dominance of the Shī'ī majority for the first time in nearly four centuries. Through resistance to the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon, Hezbollah won a substantial political role on Lebanon's national stage. The Houthi movement represents yet another Shī'ī attempt to achieve political ascendancy in Yemen, and Shī'īs in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have engaged in civil rights movements, demanding greater representation and an end to discrimination, including the removal of institutional barriers to advancement of the members of their sect within their respective nations.¹

These developments, while not entirely coordinated, have arisen in the contemporary period on account of three main factors. First, Iranian influence has been significant. Hezbollah owes its influence in large part to Iranian funds, military training, ideology, and guidance. Shī'ī movements in Nigeria, Senegal, Malaysia, Indonesia, and elsewhere have been fostered by Iranian efforts to gain Shī'ī converts and to support Shī'ī religious communities worldwide. Secondly, Washington's decision to invade Iraq and to put an

¹For an overview, see Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, with a new Afterword (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016).

end to the Ba‘th regime has also been crucial, for it granted Iraqi Shī‘īs a national political platform. Thirdly, the anti-authoritarian spirit that has characterized the Arab Spring has proved instrumental in unleashing long-term, pent-up aspirations for civil rights, equitable treatment, and more economic and political opportunities for Shī‘īs in nations such as Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In many regions, a combination of the three factors has been at work.

As occurred in earlier periods of Shī‘ī political ascendancy in the Islamic world, various Sunnī groups, both within the respective nations and in neighboring regions, have strongly decried these developments and have worked to resist, thwart, and undermine them, striving to attack and suppress Shī‘īs, to curtail Shī‘ī social, political, and economic prominence, and to eliminate Shī‘ī discourse from the public sphere.² Thus, Sunnī anti-Shī‘ī groups have killed Shī‘īs in Pakistan in frequent bombings and drive-by shootings. Similar incidents occur regularly in Afghanistan. Sunnīs have suppressed Shī‘ī civil and political resistance movements in Bahrain and the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia. The Sunnī Bahraini government enlisted the help of the Saudis in order to terrorize Shī‘ī neighborhoods, intimidate the Shī‘ī populace, and arrest and imprison Shī‘ī activists. The Saudis targeted Shī‘ī towns in the eastern al-Ḥasā province and arrested hundreds. In January 2016, they executed Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent religious leader of the Saudi Shī‘īs, despite a tacit understanding that religious scholars are exempt from the death sentence. The Iranian government immediately summoned the Saudi ambassador in Tehran to condemn the execution, and the Saudi government summoned the Iranian ambassador in Riyadh to reprimand Iran in response. After a mob attacked the Saudi embassy in Tehran, Saudi Arabia and Iran broke off diplomatic relations. Attacks on Shī‘īs, in some cases supported or condoned by government forces, have occurred in Indonesia, Malaysia, Senegal, Nigeria, and elsewhere. A mob brutally killed Ḥasan Shahāta, a prominent Shī‘ī authority and activist in Egypt, in Giza in June 2013. While it is not certain that the Muslim Brotherhood organized this public murder, Muḥammad al-Mursī’s government certainly did nothing to stop it. Egyptian security forces regularly harass Shī‘īs and have thwarted local Shī‘īs’ attempts to form a political party.

These conflicts have become so numerous, widespread, and violent that the current situation resembles the wars of religion, the complex set of conflicts between Catholics and Protestants that plagued Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Like the European wars of religion, these Sunnī-Shī‘ī conflicts are being fought with rhetoric and ideology as much as they are through assassinations and on the battlefield. This is so despite frequent claims

²Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 1998), 118–25.

that what appear to be religious conflicts are only apparently so and are not really based on religious creed or conviction.³ However, observers must realize that religious differences are usually – perhaps necessarily – connected with other political, social, and economic motives. That such other factors are involved does not erase the fact that the conflicts are framed primarily in religious terms.

Jihād forms part of Islamic legal doctrine and is a standard chapter in manuals of Islamic law that set forth its legal parameters. Modern scholars have discussed those parameters, their bases, and disputed points in detail.⁴ For the purposes of the present study, it should be noted that the technical legal discourse is always in the background when *jihād* is invoked but that its salience varies widely. Legal doctrine certainly affects how *jihād* and *jihād* propaganda are deployed, but the discourse revolving around *jihād* has literary, social, and political aspects that go far beyond the narrow confines of legal interpretation. It occurs in a wide variety of genres of writing, including historical chronicles, collections of *ḥādīth* reports, sermons, and poetry, as well as in many types of popular speech. Thus, in this discussion the common modern Iranian slogan “Death to America” or the description of the United States of America as “the Great Satan” are prominent examples of *jihād* propaganda, even though they do not directly use the term *jihād*, cite legal principles or justification, or usually occur in a statement by a sanctioned Islamic legal authority.

The invocation of *jihād* plays striking and curiously contradictory roles in these conflicts. For example, in modern Iraq, a key claim in the ideology of Shī‘ī cleric Muqtaḍā al-Ṣadr and his followers is that they have been performing *jihād* against outside forces, especially against U.S. and Coalition forces, and that this entitles them to the support of the Iraqi populace, both Shī‘ī and Sunnī, in contradistinction to groups and individual actors who adopt a strategy of cooperation or accommodation. At the same time, a key facet of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) propaganda is the idea that *jihād* must be conducted against the Shī‘īs in addition to, or even more than, against American and other Western forces. One consequence of this is that it becomes increasingly difficult for Washington and other Western powers to find allies, because parties on both sides derive legitimacy from engaging in *jihād* – or at least claiming or threatening to engage in *jihād* – against the

³For such a view, see Shireen Hunter, “Sunni-Shia Tensions Are More about Politics, Power and Privilege than Theology,” Nov. 4, 2013, <https://acmcu.georgetown.edu/Sunni-shia-tensions> (accessed Jan. 7, 2021).

⁴On *jihād* in general, see Emile Tyan, “*Djihād*,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 2:538–40; and W. Montgomery Watt, “Islamic Conceptions of Holy War,” in *The Holy War*, ed. Thomas P. Murphy (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 141–56; J. Kelsey and J. T. Johnson, eds., *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (New York: Greenwood, 1991); Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

United States and other outside forces, while another is that the Shī'īs find themselves in the ironic position of claiming the mantle of *jihād* while at the same time being its target. While the particular circumstances of contemporary conflicts may be different from those that occurred in pre-modern times, the contours of the *jihād* rhetoric surrounding those conflicts exhibit many resonances and parallels with earlier historical examples.

A taxonomy of *jihād*

A historical survey suggests the following taxonomy of *jihād* with regard to Sunnī-Shī'ī relations. In this assessment, instances of *jihād* and *jihād* propaganda fall into five main categories within this rubric.

- (I) Sunnī *jihād* against a Shī'ī foreign power.
- (II) Shī'ī *jihād* against a Sunnī foreign power.
- (III) Shī'ī use of *jihād* propaganda against a foreign power – usually a Christian power – as a means to gain legitimacy among Sunnīs.
- (IV) Sunnī-Shī'ī cooperation and solidarity through *jihād* against a foreign power.
- (V) Sunnī *jihād* against an internal, Shī'ī enemy.

The following remarks present some historical examples for each category and analyze how they worked. For each case, modern and contemporary examples are presented for comparison.

***Jihād* as justification for war between Sunnī and Shī'ī powers (I and II)**

Jihād has often been used as a justification for war between Sunnī and Shī'ī states. Perhaps the most obvious example is that of the conflicts between the Ottoman and the Safavid Empires in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which were justified by both sides through invocation of *jihād*. Both powers derived general legitimacy from their *jihād* efforts against Christian powers, in the Ottomans' case against the Byzantines, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and other states, and in the Safavids' case *jihād* against the Georgians, which they supplemented with *jihād* against heretical Islamic enemies.

Islamic law generally forbids *jihād* against other Muslims. In order to engage in *jihad* against Islamic states or groups of Muslims, Islamic states had to argue that the Muslims being attacked were actually unbelievers, Muslims in name only. For this reason, throughout the sixteenth century the Ottoman sultans called on prominent jurists to issue *fatwās*, or Islamic legal rulings, that declared the Safavids unbelievers. Prominent authors of such *fatwās* include Muftī Mullā Nūr al-Dīn b. Yūsuf al-Karāsīwī (d. 1521), Kemalpaşazade, who served as the Ottoman *shaykh al-Islam* from 1526 to

1533, and Ebū s-Su‘ūd, who served as *shaykh al-Islam* from 1545 to 1574. Conflating the Qizilbash, the Safavid polity, and Shī‘ism in general, these rulings served as justifications for a series of major campaigns against the Safavids in 1514, 1532–36, 1548–49, 1553–55, and 1578–90.⁵ In 1579, the renegade Safavid *ṣadr*, or head of the religious administration, Mīrzā Makhdūm al-Shīrāzī (d. 1587) wrote *al-Nawāqid fi al-rawāfiḍ*, an anti-Shī‘ī polemic dedicated to Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–1595), which argued that Shī‘is were thoroughgoing unbelievers and urged the Ottoman authorities both to topple the Safavid state and to exterminate Shī‘ism in Iran.⁶

On the Safavid side, the chief anti-Shī‘ī ideologue was the jurist ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-‘Āl al-Karakī (d. 1534). ‘Alī al-Karakī joined the Safavid court when Shah Ismā‘il I’s forces conquered Baghdad in 1508 and spent much of the next two decades with the Safavid court while the Shah conquered territory after territory in central Iran and Khurasan. Al-Karakī wrote a number of works upholding the legitimacy of Safavid rule and justifying Safavid policies, including the imposition of a land tax, the establishment of Friday prayer, and the cursing of those Companions of the Prophet whom the Shī‘is consider enemies of the Prophet’s family, such as Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Ā’isha. ‘Alī al-Karakī served as the leading legal authority of the Safavids until his death in 1534,⁷ and while individual *fatwās* by him have not been preserved, they must have existed, and they must have argued the legitimacy of *jihād* against the Ottomans.

Another prominent anti-Sunnī ideologue of the Safavids was Mīr Ḥusayn b. Ḥasan al-Karakī, a grandson of ‘Alī al-Karakī who became the *shaykh al-islām* of the capital Qazvin late in the reign of Shah Tahmāsb (r. 1524–1576) and remained the leading Islamic legal authority of Safavid Iran until his death in 1592–93, during the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 1587–1629). Mīr Ḥusayn al-Karakī wrote a work entitled *Naqd di ‘āmat al-khilāf fi kufr ‘āmmat ahl al-khilāf* (Tearing Down the Bulwark of Dissenting Opinion, on the Unbelief of the Generality of Our Opponents), which declared all Sunnī Muslims unbelievers.⁸ Mīrzā Makhdūm al-Shīrāzī, the renegade *ṣadr* who promoted the pro-Sunnī policies of Shah Ismā‘il II (r. 1576–1578) and later defected to the Ottomans, reports that Mīr Ḥusayn owed his popularity among the Qizilbash to his anti-Sunnī fanaticism, declaring, “He has written nothing except for one treatise in which he holds that the adherents of all Muslim sects

⁵See Elke Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden im 16. Jahrhundert nach arabischen Handschriften* (Frieberg im Breisgau: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1970).

⁶Mīrzā Makhdūm al-Shīrāzī, *al-Nawāqid fi al-rawāfiḍ*, MS Garrett 2629, Princeton University Library.

⁷The best account of the life and career of ‘Alī al-Karakī remains Caroline Joyce Beeson, “The Origins of Conflict in the Ṣafawī Religious Institution” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1982).

⁸On Mīr Ḥusayn al-Karakī, see Devin J. Stewart, “The First *Shaykh al-Islām* of the Safavid Capital Qazvin,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 3 (1996): 387–405; Stewart, “The Lost Biography of Bahā’ al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī and the Reign of Shah Ismā‘il II in Safavid Historiography,” *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 2 (1998): 177–205; Stewart, “Polemics and Patronage in Safavid Iran: The Debate on Friday Prayer during the Reign of Shah Tahmasb,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72, no. 3 (2009): 425–57.

except that of the Twelver Shī'īs are unbelievers.” Mīrẓā Makhdūm does not connect this work explicitly with *jihād*, but it evidently could have served as evidence of the legitimacy of *jihād* against Sunnīs, including the Ottomans and others. Mīrẓā Makhdūm reports also that Mīr Ḥusayn had 20,000 *fatwās* in circulation. Again, these have not been preserved, but they very likely included justifications of anti-Sunnī *jihād*.⁹ Mīr Ḥusayn is known to have written a *fatwā* that argued that all Sunnīs are *najīs*, or ritually impure, in answer to a question of Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 1587–1629), and this ruling as well must have been based on classifying them as unbelievers.¹⁰

Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Karakī (fl. 1556–68), an uncle of Mīr Ḥusayn and the son of ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-‘Āl al-Karakī, also participated in the project of ideological opposition to Sunnīs. His exact dates are not known, but he was active during the later reign of Shah Tahmāsb and seems to have resided in Mashhad, the site of the shrine of the Eighth Imam, ‘Alī al-Riḍā. There, in 1564–65, he completed the work *‘Umdat al-maḡāl fi takfīr ahl al-dalāl* (The Principal Statement, Declaring the People of Error Unbelievers), which argues that all Sunnīs are unbelievers, while also denouncing Sufis.¹¹ Like his uncle’s treatise, this work was probably intended primarily to justify armed conflict against the Ottomans. A similar work from the same period was *Risāla dar ithbāt-i kufr-i mukhālifān* (Treatise on the Unbelief of [Our] Opponents [i.e., the Sunnīs]), by a certain Mullā Ḥaydar ‘Alī.¹²

Extant sources preserve a *fatwā* by Mīr-i Dāmād (d. 1631), the *shaykh al-islām* of Isfahan, who provided Shah ‘Abbās I with justification for conducting *jihād* against the Ottomans in 1625. The Ottoman general Ḥāfiẓ Aḥmed Pasha besieged Baghdad in 1625–26, attempting to retake it from the Safavids, who had conquered most of Iraq from the Ottomans in 1624, and the *fatwā* permitted the Shah to declare *jihād* against the Ottoman forces and to treat them accordingly.¹³

Similar anti-Sunnī and anti-Shī’ī tracts were exchanged between the Safavids and their Sunnī neighbors to the east, the Uzbeks or Shaybānids (1500–1599).¹⁴ The denunciation of the opposite sect as unbelievers was part and parcel of the series of military conflicts between the two powers over Khurasan. The Moghul conquest of the Shī’ī kingdoms of Bijapur and Golconda in the Deccan may be added to this list.¹⁵ The Moghul emperor

⁹Mīrẓā Makhdūm al-Shirāzī, *al-Nawāqid fi al-rawāfiq*, MS Garrett 2629, Princeton University Library, fol. 102r.

¹⁰Mazhar Advāy and Anvar Khalandī, “Vā-kāvī-yi maḡhūm-i jihād va-maḡādiq-i ān dar dawra-yi saḡaviyya,” [“Unearthing the Concept and Cases of *Jihād* in the Safavid Period”] *Mutāla‘at-i Tārīkh-i Islām* 9, no. 35 (Winter 1396/2018): 25.

¹¹Stewart, “Polemics and Patronage,” 441–46.

¹²Advāy and Khalandī, “Vā-kāvī-yi maḡhūm-i jihād,” 25.

¹³*Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁴See Martin Dickson, “Shah Tahmasb and the Uzbeks: The Duel for Khurasan with Ubayd Khan, 930–946/1524–1540” (Ph.D. diss. Princeton University, 1958), 192–3; and Bianca Scarcia-Amoretti, “Una polemica religiosa tra ulama’ di Mashad e ulama’ uzbecchi nell’ anno 977/1588–89,” *Annali dell’ Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, (1964): 641–71.

¹⁵G.T. Kulkarni, “Deccan Invasion (1682–1707) and a Psycho-Religious Analysis of Aurangzeb,” *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 37, no. 1/4 (1977–78): 61–7.

Awrangzeb (r. 1658–1707) not only justified the invasion as a *jihād* but went so far as to rename Bijapur and Golconda *Dār al-Jihād* “the Abode of *Jihād*.”¹⁶ Many earlier and later conquests were justified in a similar manner.

On both the Sunnī and the Shī‘ī sides, claims to be pursuing *jihād* provoke a number of questions regarding the legitimacy of the enterprise, especially the issue of whether the sanction of the legitimate ruler of the Muslim community has been obtained. If not, then the *jihād* in question may be determined to be illegitimate. For Sunnīs, the main issue appears to be whether individuals in society may take up *jihād* on their own, irrespective of whether they are a small group of actors or an organized political or social group. In general, Islamic legal manuals answer this question in the negative, but one important loophole is the exception made for defensive *jihād*. If *jihād* occurs in response to an outside attack, it may be acceptable without the explicit sanction of the ruler of the community. A common pattern in premodern eras was for the vigilantes to present themselves to the caliph, or the Muslim ruler, and to attempt to shame him into declaring *jihad*, endorsing their *jihād* efforts, and providing them with arms, funds, and other support. Especially since the late twentieth century, many Sunnī Islamist groups question the legitimacy of their current government, even if it is ostensibly Islamic and Sunnī, and argue that in the absence of such a legitimate authority they can pursue *jihād* without the state’s permission, and even against the state itself.

For Shī‘īs, one of the main issues is the status of a Shī‘ī ruler during the Occultation of the Imam. Since the Twelfth Imam, who is circulating among the believers incognito, remains the true, legitimate authority, some jurists argue that *jihād* is entirely in abeyance until the Imam reveals himself and openly leads the forces of the Muslims. In the Safavid period, the Shah appears to have claimed the authority to declare *jihād* for himself, and it was recognized as one of his de facto powers, despite the fact that the jurists, claiming to be the general representatives of the Imam, arrogated to themselves many of the prerogatives of the Imam, including the right to collect *khums*, a religious tax on income, and the right to authorize Friday prayer.¹⁷

One detects in the Shī‘ī legal tradition a number of terms and arguments that are used to support the authority of the jurists regarding various areas of activity in the absence of direct, intentional contact with the Twelfth Imam. Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022) argued that the jurists were the subject of *tafwīd*, or delegation, by the Imam and, on that basis, that they were authorized to serve as judges and to carry out the prescribed criminal punishments specified

¹⁶Abisha S. Hudson, *Golconda and the Qutb Shahs* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1920), 40.

¹⁷On the authority of the jurists, see Said Amir Arjomand, ed., *Authority and Political Culture in Shi‘ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Ahmed Moussavi, *Religious Authority in Shi‘ite Islam: From the Office of Mufti to the Institution of Marja‘* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996); Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 210–17; and Stewart, “An Eleventh-Century Justification of the Authority of Twelver Shiite Jurists,” in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts*, eds. Asad Ahmad et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 468–97.

in Islamic law. In the eleventh century, Abū al-Faḥ al-Karājikī (d. 1057) argued that the jurists were *wasā'it*, or intermediaries, between the Imams and the believers and so could serve as *muftis*, or legal consultants, for the Shī'ī public. Nevertheless, the main theory of the jurists' religious authority current in recent centuries is that of general deputyship (*al-niyāba al-'amma*), according to which leading jurists are considered to be serving as *nā'ib 'amm*, or general deputy, of the occulted Imam and so may carry out a number of the Imam's prerogatives. The main historical proponents of this view were 'Alī al-Karakī (d. 1534) and Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī (d. 1558), both of whom wrote in the sixteenth century. The theory has been widely accepted within Twelver Shī'ism ever since. Nevertheless, it appears that neither of the two religious scholars claimed the authority existed for the jurists to declare *jihād*. In general, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a trend toward increasingly wide claims to authority on the part of the jurists, culminating in Ruhollah Khomeini's theory of *wilāyat al-faqīh*, or the general authority of the jurist, according to which the jurists should actually be in charge of governance in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, and, as the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) showed, this included the authority to declare and lead *jihād*.

A fascinating development occurred in the early nineteenth century against the background of conflicts between Iran and expansionist Russia, including the Russo-Persian Wars of 1804–13 and 1826–28. Mīrzā Abū al-Qāsim al-Qummī (d. 1816), one of the leading legal authorities of the time of the first conflict, professed the view that *jihād* was in abeyance and could not be conducted legitimately. In contrast, Ja'far Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' (d. 1812) adopted a diametrically opposed view, contending not only that *jihād* was legitimate but also that the Twelver Shī'ī jurists were the ones who could legitimately declare *jihād*. He subsequently addressed a document to the Faḥ 'Alī Shah Qajar (r. 1797–1834), justifying *jihād* against the Russians and delegating authority to lead the *jihād* effort to the Shah.¹⁸ Kāshif al-Ghiṭā''s action solved the problem of legitimacy by presenting the Shī'ī ruler with a sanction that theoretically derived from the authority of the Twelfth Imam, on the grounds that the leading jurist was acting as his representative. In modern Iran, the theory of the comprehensive authority of the jurist has solved this problem more directly. The leading jurist has taken over all of the juridical and political functions of the Twelfth Imam. Since the comprehensive authority of the jurist has been incorporated into the constitution of the Islamic Republic, the *rahbar*, or leader, is the commander of the armed forces. As such, he is capable of authorizing and carrying out *jihād* directly.

In recent times, calls for *jihād* against foreign Muslim powers certainly occur in political propaganda, though they tend to be tempered by

¹⁸Anne K. S. Lambton, "A Nineteenth-Century View of Jihad," *Studia Islamica* 32, (1970): 181–92; and Robert Gleave, "Jihad and the Religious Legitimacy of the Early Qajar State," in *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*, ed. Robert Gleave (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 41–70.

international pressure and by the realization that an outright declaration of *jihād* against other Muslims is a potential liability, as it is likely to provoke condemnation by both Muslim and Western observers as politically incorrect and an illegitimate stance in the context of global and inter-Muslim relations. A number of powers, however, do not shy away from such propaganda, even though they may not explicitly advocate *jihād*. Perhaps the closest to open declarations of *jihād* between Sunnī and Shīʿī states is the current political confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Despite pressure from the United States for Saudi Arabia to change the language in its textbooks that vilify Jews, Christians, and Shīʿīs, and in spite of some efforts on the part of the Kingdom to reconcile with its Shīʿī citizens in the 1990s and early 2000s, it has over the last decade adopted a strongly anti-Shīʿī policy.¹⁹ Without declaring *jihād* outright, the Saudis regularly denounce the Iranians as *Majūs*, or Zoroastrians, implying that they are apostates, adherents of an unacceptable heresy. The Saudi Grand Mufti ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Shaykh suggested as much in 2016, when he called Iranians “the sons of Zoroastrians” (*abnāʾ al-majūs*). He was dismissed from his position for making this statement for reasons of public relations, but he was voicing a common opinion among Saudi Wahhābi clerics.²⁰

Mushrikūn, or polytheists, is the other regular code-word that the Saudis regularly use to refer to the Shīʿīs, both Iranian Shīʿīs and their own citizens. Since the original *mushrikūn* in the Qurʾān designated the pagan opponents of the Prophet Muḥammad, this use reflects the view that Shīʿīs are unbelievers and have a status worse than that of Jews and Christians. A number of prominent Saudi jurists have outright denounced Shīʿīs as unbelievers, including the former Grand Mufti ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bāz (d. 1999) and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Nāṣir al-Barrāk.²¹ The contemporary Saudi cleric ʿAlī Khudāyr al-Khudāyr recently issued a *fatwā* declaring all Shīʿīs unbelievers:

The Shīʿīs who merely express support for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib—may God be pleased with him—and for the descendants of the Prophet and who merely adopt ʿAlī as a model of behavior have gone extinct. As far as I know, not one of them exists today. Those present today are the Rāfiḍa [i.e., the Twelver Shīʿīs], the Ismāʿīlī occultists, the Nuṣayrī occultists, and the Druze occultists.²² These four groups are the ones who deify the descendants of the Prophet [Āl al-Bayt] and seek their intercession, and they are tomb-

¹⁹The Saudi stance toward Iran is closely related to their oppression of Shīʿīs in Saudi Arabia. See Guido Steinberg, “The Shiites in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia al-Ahsa, 1913–1953,” in *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political History*, eds. Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 236–51; Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shiʿis of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi, 2006).

²⁰Matt Payton, “Iranians are Not Muslims’, Says Saudi Arabia’s Grand Mufti,” *The Independent*, Sept. 7, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-grand-mufti-iran-sunni-muslims-hajj-a7229416.html> (accessed Dec. 26, 2018).

²¹Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 236; and Emile Nakhleh, *A Necessary Engagement: Reinventing America’s Relations with the Muslim World*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 29.

²²The original has *bāṭiniyya*, or esotericists, meaning those who believe that there is a hidden meaning behind the plain or prima facie meaning of Islamic scriptural texts.

worshippers [*qubūriyyūn*]. Thus, these groups are polytheists and unbelievers [*mushrikūn kuffār*] and are not Muslims, and there is no difference in status between their scholars or the ones they accept as authorities [*muqalladīhim*] and the ignorant among them. They are all polytheists and are not Muslims, and they cannot be excused for worshipping other than God on account of ignorance.²³

The Saudi government and the Wahhābi religious establishment consistently vilify Iranians as well as Shī'īs in general and are engaged in a propaganda campaign to convince the United States and their other allies that Iran poses an existential threat to the entire Middle East and should therefore be opposed by any means possible.²⁴ The absence of explicit declarations of *jihād* are mainly due to a reluctance to engage in direct military conflict with Iran. Instead, the conflict is conducted by proxy in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere.²⁵ For their part, Iranian clerics have typically been less willing to issue explicitly anti-Saudi *fatwās*, though Iranian rhetoric about Saudis has become harsher in recent years. In a speech to parliamentary representatives from Islamic nations in 2018, 'Alī Khāmene'ī, current leader of the Islamic Republic, denounced the Saudis and accused them of betraying the Muslim nations through political cooperation with Israel and the United States.²⁶

Shī'ī claims to legitimacy among the majority through *jihād* (III)

Historically, when Shī'ī regimes came to power, they did so as a sectarian minority among a Sunnī majority, and it was not possible for them to attempt to convert the populace to Shī'ī Islam, nor they did they view it wise to pursue that goal. By emphasizing the Shī'ī basis of their political hegemony, they would merely have invited resistance on the part of the Sunnī populace and undermined their own legitimacy. Stressing the need for doctrinal conformity would thus bring about their own exclusion. For this reason, many Shī'ī dynasties proved more ecumenical than their Sunnī counterparts, since fostering doctrinal plurality worked in their own favor and allowed them to argue for their own inclusion in public discourse and in the Islamic polity. A prominent example of this phenomenon is found in the religious policies of the Fatimid dynasty, generally recognized as having been relatively ecumenical. For example, they appointed Mālikī judges for the general populace,

²³*Fatwā* on the Shī'ī, "Alī Khuḍayr al-Khuḍayr," <https://tawhedwsarchive.wordpress.com/2016/09/01/>, (accessed Dec. 29, 2018), my translation.

²⁴Toby Jones "Saudi Arabia's Not so New Anti-Shi'ism," *Middle East Report* 242, (Spring 2007), 29–32; Toby Craig Jones, "Saudi Arabia's Dangerous Sectarian Game," Jan. 4, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/05/opinion/saudi-arabias-dangerous-sectarian-game.html> (accessed Dec. 26, 2018).

²⁵Max Fischer, "How the Iranian-Saudi Proxy Struggle Tore Apart the Middle East" *New York Times*, Nov. 19, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/world/middleeast/iran-saudi-proxy-war.html> (accessed Dec. 29, 2018).

²⁶"Iran's Supreme Leader: Saudis Betrayed Muslim World," *Mail & Guardian*, Dec. 30, 2018, <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-01-17-irans-supreme-leader-saudis-betrayed-muslim-world> (accessed Feb. 24, 2021).

both in Tunisia and in Egypt. In the twelfth century, the Fatimids established four chief judgeships in Egypt, including not only Twelver and Ismā'īlī Shī'ī judges but also Sunnī judges from the Mālikī and Shāfi'ī *madhhabs*, or schools of jurisprudence.²⁷ At their premier institution of learning, the Dār al-'Ilm in Cairo, the Fatimids likewise supported many Sunnī 'ulamā', including jurists and theologians.²⁸

Such an ecumenical approach was not, however, adopted by all Shī'ī dynasties. The Safavids eschewed it and opted instead for the general conversion of the populace to Shī'ī Islam.²⁹ The Islamic Republic of Iran is following suit, and regularly discriminates against Sunnī communities in Kurdish and Baluchi regions and against Sunnīs in general. The Shī'ī government's failure to adopt an ecumenical approach has exacerbated many problems in contemporary Iraq as well.

Concerted efforts to pursue *jihād* against the Byzantines formed a major facet of the political propaganda of the Ḥamdānids, a Shī'ī dynasty that ruled in northern Syria (944–1002) and Iraq (906–990) from its capitals in Aleppo and Mosul, respectively. The anti-Byzantine campaigns of the Ḥamdānid ruler, Sayf al-Dawla (r. 945–967), including the battles of al-Ḥadath and al-'Ammūriyya, has been immortalized by the Shī'ī poets al-Mutanabbī (d. 965) and Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī (d. 968). Abū Firās was himself taken captive by Byzantines, later ransomed from them, and wrote a series of *Rūmiyyāt*, or “Poems of the Greeks,” glorifying Ḥamdānid *jihād* efforts. This poetry forms part the lasting legacy of that dynasty and Shī'ī and Sunnī Muslims alike have embraced it. One indication that the strategy of adopting *jihād* on behalf of both Sunnīs and Shī'īs was highly successful is the legacy of Sayf al-Dawla. Indeed, the heroic figure of Sayf al-Dawla and the martial poetry of al-Mutanabbī and Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī have been widely appreciated by Sunnī audiences for centuries.

Accounts of the Fatimid conquest of Egypt and Syria beginning in 969 make it clear that pledges to undertake *jihād* against the Christian powers formed a major part of Fatimid propaganda. They critiqued the Ikhshīdids (935–969), their predecessors who ruled Egypt and part of Syria, for their limited and unsuccessful *jihād* efforts, and they claimed to be legitimate rulers especially because they took up the anti-Byzantine *jihād* with renewed vigor.³⁰

²⁷Adel Allouche, “The Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships in Fatimid Egypt,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, no. 2 (1985): 317–20. Cf. Joseph H. Escovitz, “The Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships in the Mamluk Empire,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102, no. 3 (1982): 529–31.

²⁸Heinz Halm, “Al-Azhar, Dār al-'Ilm, al-Raṣad. Forschungs- und Lehranstalten der Fatimiden in Kairo,” in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, eds. U. Vermeulen and D. de Smet (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 99–110; Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 71–78; Paul E. Walker, “Fatimid Institutions of Learning,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 34, (1997): 179–200.

²⁹Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

³⁰Shainool Jiwa, *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire: Fatimid Egypt and the Founding of Cairo, The Reign of the Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz from al-Maqrīzī's Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā'* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 17, 69, 71, 74, 81, 82, and 103.

Shī'ī attempts to use *jihād* against external forces as a means to claim general legitimacy in an Islamic context must be seen as parallel to the propaganda of many Sunnī states, such as those of the Seljuks, Zengids, Ayyubids, Mamluks, Ottomans, Sa'dids, and others. Sunnī dynasties very frequently have used *jihād* and *jihād* propaganda to bolster their claims to legitimacy among their own subjects and among other states in the Islamic world, and Shī'ī states have adopted a similar rhetorical and political strategy. The difference is that in the Shī'ī examples, the claimants usually have represented a sectarian minority within the community rather than the majority.

While the Iranian government can adopt a policy of coercion vis-à-vis Sunnīs within Iran, it often claims to be performing *jihād* against outside forces as a way to gain sympathy among Sunnīs outside of Iran. Its constant railing against the United States and its threats to conquer Israel are designed to garner support with the public in majority-Sunnī nations who are disillusioned with their own leaders' lack of effective opposition to American and Israeli influence and especially with their efforts to fight for the Palestinian cause. Hezbollah's and Iran's support for Hamas is an important part of this strategy. Nevertheless, this strategy has succeeded in a very limited fashion, for it has not created widespread good will toward Iran in Sunnī societies.

What has worked is Hezbollah's resistance to Israel in southern Lebanon. Despite a history of strained and violent relations among Sunnīs, Shī'īs, and Christians in Lebanon, and bitter conflict with both Palestinians and Christian forces, Hezbollah has gained widespread approval in Lebanon because many people view it as having driven out the Israeli forces and cleared the occupied zone in the South in 1999–2000. One significant factor in its adherents not being denounced as Shī'ī heretics and potential traitors is the fact that Lebanon is not a predominantly Sunnī nation; if it had been, it would have been more difficult for Shī'īs to gain social approval and political power. Because Christians occupy a preeminent position that is enshrined in the constitution, Sunnīs and Shī'īs accordingly have a structural incentive to make common cause. Perhaps most decisive is the widespread perception that Hezbollah is doing what the Lebanese army is incapable of doing or unwilling to do.

A strategy similar to those of the Islamic Republic of Iran and of Hezbollah has been adopted by the Houthis in Yemen. The Houthi movement is a predominantly Zaydī Shī'ī one that, in the long run, has attempted to promote a Zaydī revival in Yemen. The Houthis hark back to a time before the last ruling Zaydī Imam, Muḥammad Sayf al-Islām al-Badr, was toppled in a coup d'état in 1962, when the Zaydī imams had ruled a state in the north with roots that went to the ninth century. Following years of civil strife, a multi-party system was introduced in Yemen and the al-Ḥaqq Party was established in 1990. Al-Ḥaqq represents a Zaydī, Islamist form of opposition to the

dominant powers in the republican government that have existed in Yemen in one form or another since 1962. Its membership was dominated by leaders from Ṣa‘dah, the Zaydī stronghold in the north of Yemen. In 1991, they signed an accord in which they ostensibly disavowed any sectarian allegiance and pledged that they did not maintain the limitation of political rule to “the two lineages” (*al-baṭnayn*) – namely, the descendants of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, the Prophet’s two grandsons through ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. This apparent concession implied that al-Ḥaqq had given up the Zaydī obligation of *khurūj*, or rebellion, against all governments that were not under the leadership of a rightful Imam. In the 2000s, these Islamists grew more and more outspoken and adopted the name Anṣār Allāh, or “the Allies of God,” which invokes the call to support God’s cause addressed in Qur’ān 61:14 to the Medinan Companions of the Prophet. In 2003, they embraced the slogan, *Allāhu akbar; al-mawt li-Amrikā; al-mawt li-Isrā’īl; al-la‘nah ‘alā al-yahūd; Al-nasr li-l-islām* “God is great! Death to America! Death to Israel! Damn the Jews! Victory to Islam!” The Houthis participated in the popular Yemeni revolt during the Arab spring in 2011, but they were not satisfied with the coalition government of ‘Abd Rabbuh Maṣṣūr Ḥādī that ultimately gained power. In cooperation with the former president ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ, the Houthis took over the government in 2014–15, and since then have been controlling much of the territory in northern Yemen as well as resisting Saudi military intervention. The ongoing use of the slogan above, together with the Houthis regular designation of their military operations as *jihād* and of themselves as *mujāhidūn*, represents a clear effort to gain the support of Sunnī Muslims by presenting themselves as performers of *jihād* against foreign powers.³¹

In the medieval period, Similar Shī‘ī attempts to garner the backing of Sunnī states or Sunnī majority populations by claiming or promising to fight the Byzantines or other external enemies met with varied success depending on the specific conquest. In contemporary times, Hezbollah has succeeded in gaining widespread support in Lebanon through propaganda and armed resistance to Israel. Likewise, the Iraqi leader Muqtadā al-Ṣadr, a member of a prominent Shī‘ī clerical family but, by all accounts, of limited personal religious authority, managed to gain political influence in large part through his declarations of *jihād* against the coalition forces that toppled Saddam Hussein and occupied Iraq. In this case, though, he did not succeed in winning over many Sunnīs to his cause, and he has made overtures to Iraqi Sunnīs only recently.³² So far, his followers have met with little success in gaining Sunnī

³¹“Houthi Propaganda: Following in Hizbullah’s Footsteps,” *Al-Arabi*, April 12, 2015, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2015/4/12/houthi-propaganda-following-in-hizballahs-footsteps> (accessed Oct. 18, 2016).

³²Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq* (New York: Scribner, 2008); and Jane Arraf, “Ahead of Iraq’s Elections, Muqtada Al-Sadr Reinvents Himself – Again,” *National Public Radio*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/04/03/598004675/ahead-of-iraqs-elections-muqtada-al-sadr-reinvents-himself-again> (retrieved Dec. 30, 2018).

support through resistance to the United States, mostly on account of their perceived anti-Sunnism and their role in actively fighting against Sunnīs.

Unified efforts to conduct *jihād* against outside forces (IV)

In some cases, calls for unified *jihād* efforts have resulted in actual cooperation between Shī'īs and Sunnīs in conflicts against external forces. In the ninth and tenth centuries, Sunnīs and Shī'īs cooperated extensively in the military campaigns against the Byzantine in the marches (*al-Thughūr*) of northern Syria and northwestern Iraq. Sunnīs and Shī'īs also cooperated against the “Franks” during the Crusades. During the siege of Tripoli between 1102–1109, Fakhr al-Mulk, the ruler of the Shī'ī Banū 'Ammār principality, who had earlier avoided cooperation with Sunnīs, sought an alliance with the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustazhir and Seljuk Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muḥammad Tapar. In 1108, while his capital was still under siege, he traveled to Baghdad to plead for military assistance with both of these leaders. Nonetheless, his plea for cooperation was unsuccessful, for the Crusader Franks took Tripoli the following year.

A striking example of inter-sectarian cooperation is provided also by Abū al-Faḍl Ibn al-Khashshāb (d. 1125), the judge and leader of the Shī'ī community of Aleppo in the early twelfth century. He led and organized Muslim resistance to the Franks in Aleppo and surrounding region between 1110 and 1125. When a Crusader force besieged Aleppo and desecrated its Muslim cemetery, he was responsible for confiscating four major churches in the city and converting them into mosques. Like Fakhr al-Mulk, he also traveled to Baghdad to enlist the support of the Abbasid Caliph, who had not responded to earlier pleas, and started a riot there. In 1119, by enlisting help from Mardin and Mosul, he was instrumental in events leading up to the Battle of Sarmada (*Ager Sanguinis*) in 1119, in which the entire army of the Principality of Antioch was killed or captured, and Roger of Salerno, who ruled Antioch as regent at the time, was killed.³³

In modern times the 1920 rebellion against the British in Iraq has been consistently upheld as a symbol of national unity because both Sunnīs and Shī'īs opposed the British during the conflict. The British had occupied Iraq during the First World War, and a series of local uprisings, mainly in the Middle Euphrates region, targeted British forces over a period of about four months before being quashed. The rebellion was supported by the Shī'ī religious establishment, including the leading jurist Muḥammad Taqī al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, who encouraged Shī'īs and Sunnīs to unite in armed struggle against the British infidels. The conflict has lived on in Iraqi memory as

³³Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 108–10; and Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 1:37; Ross Burns, *Aleppo: A History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 107–23.

a profound moment of cooperation across sectarian lines and as a key step toward the formation of the modern Iraqī nation state.³⁴

The combined *jihād* theory and *shī'īs* as an internal enemy (V)

Invocations by Sunnī states of *jihād* against *Shī'īs* within their own borders, which currently are a widespread phenomenon, are not a modern innovation. These calls have a long history and are backed by a highly developed ideological position. Such views became especially important during the Sunnī revival in the eleventh century and during the Crusading period, and they have left a legacy on Sunnī Islamic institutions and modern politics. In response to the tremendous political power established by *Shī'ī* dynasties in the tenth and eleventh centuries, Sunnī political leaders, along with the Abbasid Caliphs as well as conservative Sunnī '*ulamā*', promoted a campaign to remove *Shī'ism* from the public sphere, both through military conquest and through activities in the political, social, and academic spheres. The Abbasid Caliph al-Qādir (r. 991–1031) and his successor al-Qā'im (r. 1031–1075) promulgated the Qādirī Creed, which proclaimed that one could not debate with *Shī'ī* or Mu'tazilī '*ulamā*' in public. When Maḥmūd of Ghazna conquered the Buwayhid capital of Rayy in 1029, he exiled or executed Mu'tazilis, Twelver *Shī'īs*, and Ismā'īlī *Shī'īs* and burned their books.³⁵ Succeeding Sunnī dynasties, including the Seljuks, Zengids, Ayyubids, Mamluks, and Ottomans adopted this approach to varying degrees.

According to this theory, *jihād* against external forces, generally Christian powers, must be accompanied by *jihād* against internal adversaries who weaken the Islamic polity. These internal foes are heretics who undermine the religion of the Muslims. They are also a military threat because they, as natural traitors to the Islamic polity and are willing to plot, cooperate, and ally with foreign enemies. They accordingly must be suppressed, made to conform, or eradicated altogether in order to promote the unsullied resolve and political unison required so as to face all threats from the outside. Moreover, among heretics in general, the most dangerous historically are the *Shī'īs*. In response to the Crusades, the combined *jihād* theory became a standard part of Sunnī *jihād* propaganda, and was promoted both by the Sunnī '*ulamā*' and by political elites in Syria, Egypt, and elsewhere. This theory of a combined *jihād* is at the basis of works such as *The Forty Hadiths for Inciting Jihad* of Ibn 'Asākir (d. 1176) and the *fatwās* of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) on *jihād*. The

³⁴Abbas Kadhīm, *Reclaiming Iraq: The 1920 Revolution and the Founding of the Modern State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012); and Eli Amariyo, "History, Memory and Commemoration: The Iraqī Revolution of 1920 and the Process of Nation Building in Iraq," *Middle Eastern Studies* 51, no. 1 (2015): 72–92.

³⁵Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 141–51.

concept was thoroughly incorporated into Sunnī religious discourse during the twelfth through fourteenth centuries.³⁶

Nūr al-Dīn the Zengid (r. 1146–1174), who ruled in Syria in the twelfth century, was one of the most prominent proponents of a combined *jihād* that included the suppression of Shī‘ism within his realm as a major component of the counter-Crusade. The anti-Crusader *jihād* involved an intensive political mobilization of the populace on multiple levels. It was considered crucial to suppress internal heretics, who were understood to work against the unity and strength of the Muslim community. These heretics were primarily the Twelver Shī‘īs, but also included the Ismā‘īlīs, the Nuṣayrīs, or ‘Alawīs, and the Druze. Nūr al-Dīn meanwhile acted to limit open displays of Shī‘ism in the public sphere. In 1146, when Nūr al-Dīn assumed power in Aleppo, Shī‘īs probably constituted about half the population of the city. He immediately outlawed the distinctive Shī‘ī call to prayer. That this was understood by local Shī‘īs as a calculated and oppressive act is clear from their subsequent actions. When Nūr al-Dīn fell ill in 1157, Shī‘īs asked his brother Nuṣrat al-Dīn Amīr-Amīrān, who was acting as his deputy, to allow them to reinstate the Shī‘ī dawn call to prayer and to post the slogan *Muhammad wa-‘Alī khayr al-bashar* “Muhammad and ‘Alī are the best of mankind” in public.³⁷

When Saladin negotiated his takeover of Aleppo following the death of Nūr al-Dīn in May 1174, the Shī‘īs of the city made the following demands before they agreed to accept him as their ruler:

- Permission to institute the distinctive Shī‘ī dawn call to prayer, which includes the phrase *ḥayya ‘alā khayri l-‘amal* “Come to the best of deeds” instead of the Sunnī phrase *al-ṣalātu khayrun min al-nawm* “Prayer is better than sleep.”
- Permission to use the eastern side of Aleppo’s congregational mosque for Shī‘ī prayers.
- Permission for chanters to perform in markets and at funerals and other occasions as well as to mention the names of the Imams.
- Permission to utter five *takbīrs*, or chants of *allāhu akbar* “God is great!” – at funeral prayers.
- Permission to have marriage contracts administered by a Shī‘ī jurist, the Sharīf Abū al-Makārim Ḥamza b. ‘Alī b. Zuhra (d. 1189–90).³⁸

Saladin agreed to their list of demands, which reveals what had been disallowed as a result of Nūr al-Dīn’s actions nearly three decades earlier.

³⁶For an excellent overview, see Suleiman A. Mourad and James E. Lindsay, *The Intensification and Reorientation of Sunni Jihad Ideology in the Crusader Period: Ibn ‘Asākir of Damascus (1105–1176) and His Age, with an Edition and Translation of Ibn ‘Asākir’s Forty Hadith for Inciting Jihad* (Brill: Leiden, 2013).

³⁷Abū Shāmah, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn*, 5 vols., ed. Ibrāhīm al-Zaybaq (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1997), 1:347.

³⁸Abū Shāma, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn*, 2:349.

Nūr al-Dīn's intention was clearly to remove visible signs of Shī'ī religiosity from the public sphere.

Anti-Shī'ism became part and parcel of the anti-Crusade, a crucial facet of the other motivations to pursue *jihād* against the Franks, which included the patronage of works on the religious merits of Syria in general and Jerusalem in particular, the promulgation of treatises and sermons on the duty to perform *jihād*, the erection of monuments such as *madrāsas*, or colleges of Islamic law, and the construction of Nūr al-Dīn's famous and elaborate *minbar*, or raised platform, which was prepared for al-Masjid al-Aqṣā in anticipation of the recapture of Jerusalem and which was transported and installed there after its conquest in 1187. *Jihād* propaganda under Nūr al-Dīn's direction, and continuing into later centuries, stressed the need to perform *jihād*, liberate Jerusalem, establish political unity, and promulgate doctrinal conformity. It also insisted on pursuing *jihād* against Sunnī Islam's internal as well as external enemies.³⁹

In the combined *jihād* theory, Shī'īs were regularly viewed as a fifth column of traitors within the Muslim polity. Sunnīs accused Shī'īs of cooperation and collaboration with the Byzantines, Franks, and Mongols. In some cases, Sunnī dynasts and 'ulamā' referred to actual cases of collaboration in order to bolster their claims. The Shī'ī leader Dubays II b. Ṣadaqa al-Asadī (r. 1108–1135), of the Mazyadid dynasty in al-Ḥillah in southern Iraq, formed an alliance with Crusader Franks and laid siege to Aleppo in 1124.⁴⁰ Ibn Taymiyya blamed the Shī'īs for cooperation with the Mongols and facilitating the conquest of the Muslim states of Iran and Iraq, presumably referring to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) who, after the fall of the Ismā'īlī stronghold at Alamut, became attached to the entourage of Hulagu, and Ibn al-'Alqamī (d. 1258), the Shī'ī vizier of the Abbasid Caliph who was blamed for handing Baghdad over to the Mongols. Ibn Taymiyya likewise impugned the Shī'īs for allying with the Franks against the Muslims.⁴¹ Shortly after the Mamluk campaign of 1300 against heretics in Kisrawān, a mountainous region northeast of Beirut, Ibn Taymiyya wrote a letter to the Mamluk Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir (r. 1293–94, 1299–1309, 1310–1341), congratulating him on his decisive course of action and urging him to continue. He accused the Twelver Shī'īs and others of

³⁹Nikita Elisséeff, *Nur ad-Din, un grand prince musulman de Syrie au temps des Croisades (511–569 h./1118–1174)*, 3 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1967); Elisséeff, "The Reaction of the Syrian Muslims After the Foundation of the First Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem," 162–72 in *The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures*, ed. M. Shatzmiller, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 400–1453; Emmanuel Sivan, *L'Islam et la Croisade: Idéologie et propagande dans les réactions musulmanes aux croisades* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1968); Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 117–70; Yasser Tabbaa, *Constructions of Power and Piety in Medieval Aleppo* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); and Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001).

⁴⁰C.E. Bosworth, "Mazyad, Banū," *Encyclopedia of Islam* 6: 965–67; Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951–54), 2:171–3.

⁴¹Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 37 vols., ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim (Riyad: Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya wa-l-Awqāf wa-l-Da'wa wa-l-Irshād, 2004), 28:478–79.

harboring heretical beliefs, collaborating with the Mongols and the Franks, and selling Muslims as slaves to the Crusaders in Cyprus. He described the Shi‘is as adherents of this “accursed sect.” He reports that they considered an unbeliever anyone who did not believe that the Twelfth Imam was the true leader of the Muslim community, held that the literal meaning of the Qur‘ān is true, expressed love for or approval of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and other Companions of the Prophet, or held any of a litany of characteristic Sunnī doctrines.⁴² For these and other reasons, the Shi‘is, for Ibn Taymiyya, are worse unbelievers than Jews and Christians, especially since they claim to be Muslims, for the unbelief of apostates is worse than ordinary unbelief.⁴³

It is difficult to pinpoint the birth hour of the combined *jihād* theory, but one is tempted to place it in the tenth century and to attribute it to Abū Bakr al-Nābulṣī. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Sahl b. Naṣr al-Nābulṣī al-Ramlī (d. 973–74) was a Sunnī *ḥādīth* expert and a fervent anti-Shī‘ī. He resided in al-Ramla, the capital of the province of Palestine, though he was originally from Nablus. After the Fatimids invaded Syria, he fled to Damascus, but when the Fatimid governor of Damascus later established control over the region, he was able to arrest al-Nābulṣī. He was transported to Egypt in a cage and brought before the Fātimid Caliph al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh (r. 953–975). The Caliph reportedly confronted him as follows.

Al-Mu‘izz asked him, “I have heard that you said, ‘If I had ten arrows, I would shoot nine of them at the Greeks [i.e., the Byzantines] and one arrow at the Egyptians [i.e., the Fatimids].”

He responded, “I did not say that.”

Al-Mu‘izz thought that he gone back on his word, so he asked, “How did you say it?”

He said, “I said that I ought to shoot nine of them at you, and then shoot the tenth at them.”⁴⁴

In order to punish such effrontery, in 973–974, al-Mu‘izz had al-Nābulṣī paraded around the city for a day, flogged him the next day, and flayed him alive on the third.⁴⁵ Abū Bakr al-Nābulṣī’s dramatic statement, which links the Shī‘ī ruler with the Byzantine emperor and then stresses that the Shī‘is are far

⁴²Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 28:398–409, esp. 400–2.

⁴³Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 28:474–75.

⁴⁴Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 11:284.

⁴⁵On Abū Bakr al-Nābulṣī in general, see Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam fi tārikh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*, 19 vols., ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atā and Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1992), 14:245–46; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ahmad al-Dhahabī, *Tārikh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-a‘lām*, 53 vols., ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1989), 26:310–2; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, 23 vols., ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt et al. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1984), 16:148–50; Salāh al-Dīn Khalīl b. Ayyub al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, 29 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2000), 2:33; and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy b. Aḥmad al-Hanbalī al-Dimashqī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fi akhbār man dhahab*, 10 vols., ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arna‘ūt and Muḥammad al-Arna‘ūt (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1986–89), 4:337.

worse enemies than the Byzantines, may be seen as proposing a combined *jihād* theory long before the anti-Crusade of the twelfth century.

The groups most worthy of attention as a parallel phenomenon to these medieval states and thinkers who treated Shī'ī as an internal enemy and a necessary target of *jihād* in the contemporary Muslim world are probably Sipāh-i Ṣaḥāba (The Army of the Companions) and its successor organizations, Pakistani anti-Shī'ī movements whose ideologies are based squarely on the combined *jihād* theory. Sipāh-i Ṣaḥāba was established by Haq Nawaz Jhangvi in Pakistan in 1982 in order to combat Shī'ī influence following the Iranian Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The express goal of the organization was to eradicate Shī'īs from majority Sunnī Pakistan. Although the extremist group was banned in 1997 and again in 2012, its platform continues to be supported by Lashkar-e Jhangvi, Ahl-e Sunnat wa-l-Jama'at, and Millat-e Islamia Pakistan.⁴⁶ At a political rally held on Yadgar Chowk Square in Peshawar, Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, in one part of his speech, criticized a Shī'ī polemical work about the Ḥanafī legal school, Ghulām Ḥusayn Naqvi's *Ḥaqīqat-i Fiqh-i Ḥanafī* (The Truth about Ḥanafī Law), exclaiming:

[Ghulām Naqvi writes that] the caliphate of Abū Bakr Ṣiddīq was such that it had been borne out of a donkey. Read! Read! . . . You want unity with these people? Brotherhood with these people? Ties of love with these people? Such language they use for Abū Bakr! . . . And these infidels, these damned ones don't just stop at Abū Bakr. Just look! Keep listening, and then decide. Today, I will not let you disperse from this audience before you make a decision against them. On page 34, it is written about the pure one, 'Ā'isha. He calls her the Zuleikha [i.e., Potiphar's wife] of Mecca! I request the government to let me hold my speeches freely for a month. If by then I do not force these Shī'īs to flee off to Iran, the government is free to exile me from the country!⁴⁷

Similarly, Ahmed Ludhianvi, the current leader of Ahl-e Sunnat wa-l-Jama'at, was videotaped at a political rally in which he suggested that that they battle Pakistani Shī'īs, stating:

To Yūsuf Razā Gilānī [Pakistani Prime Minister, 2008–2012] I would like to say, with utmost etiquette, that the Shī'a of Parichanar have announced a *jihād* on the People of the Sunnah. What does this mean? That there will be a war with them, *jihād* with them, fighting with them. We have to this day never announced a *jihād*, nor have we announced fighting, nor have we, to this day, used our power, but if the Shī'a, thinking this to be our weakness, want to take things this far, I would ask Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani and Pervez Musharraf, that for a time period, we be given permission and they too be given permission, and whatever part of Pakistan the Shī'a want to choose—the Shī'a can choose Karachi . . . they can choose Islamabad, they can choose Rawalpindi, they can choose Peshawar. Wherever they want to choose, O rulers, if you give

⁴⁶Eamon Murphy, *Islam and Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: The Terror Within* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

⁴⁷Allama Haq Nawaz Jhangvi Shaheed (R.A.), *YouTube*, Jan. 11, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAZ5ocHuUBc> (accessed Jan. 7, 2021).

permission, in twenty-four hours if there is a single Shī‘a left in Pakistan, do not call us the army of the Companions any longer!⁴⁸

Here Ahmed Ludhianvi suggests that the Pakistani government should allow an all-out war on Shī‘is in Pakistan, the goal of which is extermination of the sect. Referring to the Sunnī side in this genocidal campaign, his phrase *ṣahāba-ka sipāhī* “the army of the Companions” is a word-play on the name of the banned Sipāh-i Ṣahāba organization. Such groups regularly term Pakistani Shī‘is “American agents” and “the near enemy” in the global *jihād* against American influence.⁴⁹ The organization’s slogan does not mince words: *Kāfir Kāfir hē, Shī‘a Kāfir hē* (“Infidels are Infidels, Shī‘is are Infidels”).

The following is a statement of the Baluchistan Unit of the Lashkar-e Jhangvi:

Shias Are Unbelievers [*Kāfir*].

Shias Are Subject to Compulsory Killing [*wājib al-qatl*].

All Shias are subject to compulsory killing, and we will cleanse Pakistan of this impure community. Pakistan means “The Land of the Pure,” so the Shias have no right to dwell in this nation. We have with us all the necessary fatwas and attestations by religious scholars in which Shias have been deemed unbelievers. Just as other martyrs of our organization have launched successful *jihad* against the Hazara Shia community of Afghanistan, our mission, too, is to eliminate the impure communities of Shias and Hazara Shias from every city, every village, and every corner of this nation. In all of Pakistan, and especially in Quetta, a successful *jihad* is being launched—and will continue to be launched—against the Hazara Shias. We will turn Pakistan into a graveyard for Shias. We will annihilate their houses with bombs and suicide attacks. We will not stop to rest until the banner of true Islam is brandished in Pakistan. Our martyrs have gained immense success in Parachinar, and are now awaiting instructions for carrying out the noble mission in the rest of Pakistan. *Jihad* against the Hazara Shia community is now an individual compulsory obligation upon us all. . . .

Commander-General, Lashkar-i Jhangvi⁵⁰

This announcement states explicitly that Shī‘is are unbelievers and claims that this view is supported by the *fatwās* and statements of religious authorities. In their view, the Islamic legal ruling regarding them is that they must be killed, and they feel entitled and obligated to undertake the task on their own. Their primary focus is not the entire Islamic world but rather the nation-state of Pakistan, though they also invoke *jihād* in the neighboring country of Afghanistan. Their attention focuses in particular on the Hazara ethnic

⁴⁸Mohammad Ahmad Ludhianvi, *YouTube*, Nov. 27, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3h3n2c03rM>. (accessed Jan. 10, 2021).

⁴⁹Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 168.

⁵⁰“We Are the Walking Dead”: Killings of Shia Hazara in Balochistan, Pakistan. (Pakistan: Rampant Killings of Shia by Extremists, June. 29, 2014) News Release, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/29/we-are-walking-dead/killings-shia-hazara-balochistan-pakistan> (accessed Feb. 25, 2021).

group, many of whom have “Oriental” features and are easily distinguishable from other Pakistanis. Their explicit goal is the eradication of Shī‘īs within Pakistan; they intend to make Pakistan a graveyard for Shī‘īs. Another statement vows to make Pakistan “another Karbala” for the Shī‘īs.⁵¹ Pakistani zealots who adhere to this ideology are working to spread it elsewhere, including in Afghanistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Overall, many radical Sunnī Islamic movements have incorporated similarly virulent anti-Shī‘ism – including calls for *jihād* against Shī‘īs worldwide – into their standard propaganda.⁵²

Abū Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqāwī (d. 2006), the leader of al-Qā‘ida in Iraq, embraced the combined *jihād* theory, and it was also adopted by ISIS and other radical Islamic groups. In January 2004, al-Zarqāwī wrote an infamous letter to Osama bin Laden in which he explained the situation in Iraq. In the letter, he pays a great deal of attention to the Shī‘īs and argues that in order for al-Qā‘ida’s expansionary plans in Iraq to work, the group must attack and undermine the Shī‘īs. He describes the Shī‘īs as follows:

[They are] the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom. Here we are entering a battle on two levels. One, evident and open, is with an attacking enemy and patent infidelity. [The other is] a difficult, fierce battle with a crafty enemy who wears the garb of a friend, manifests agreement, and calls for comradeship, but harbors ill will. . . .⁵³

Al-Zarqāwī thus pairs *jihād* against the infidels with war against the Shī‘īs but warns that the second group actually constitute the more dangerous enemy because they appear to be allies. Despite this, they are craftier and even more inimical at heart. Assessing the situation, he notes that, “The unhurried observer and inquiring onlooker will realize that Shī‘ism is the looming danger and the true challenge. . . .”⁵⁴ He cautions that Shī‘ism should not mistakenly be understood to form part of Islam, contending, “Shī‘ism is a religion that has nothing in common with Islam except in the way that Jews have something in common with Christians”⁵⁵ He furthermore cites a number of Muslim authorities to prove that Shī‘īs are infidels and lists a number of their supposed heresies including, worshipping at graves, circumambulating shrines, declaring the Companions of the Prophet infidels, and insulting revered figures of early Muslim community, including “the mothers

⁵¹Lashkar-e Jhangvi, “DOPEL Database of People with Extremist Linkages,” <https://dopel.org/LeJ.htm> (accessed Feb. 25, 2021).

⁵²Meir Litvak, “Worse than the Jews: The Anti-Shiite Polemics of Sunni Islamic Radicalism,” in *Sunna and Shi’a: The Changing Balance of Power*, ed. Tamar Yegnes (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center, 2008), 43–57 (in Hebrew); V. G. Julie Rajan, *Al-Qaeda’s Global Crisis: The Islamic State, Takfir and the Genocide of Muslims* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁵³February 2004 Coalition Provisional Authority English translation of terrorist Musab al Zarqawi letter obtained by United States Government in Iraq,” <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm>. (accessed Dec. 31, 2018). I have modified the translation slightly.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

of the believers” – that is, the wives of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁵⁶ Shī‘ism, in his view, is based on hidden rancor. He counsels that the Shī‘īs will never give up their deep-seated hatred of Sunnīs thus:

The dreamers who think that a Shī‘ī can forget the historical legacy and [his] old black hatred of the *Nawāṣib* [those who hate the Prophet’s lineage], as they fancifully call [the Sunnīs], are like someone who calls on the Christians to renounce the idea of Christ’s crucifixion. Would a rational person do this?⁵⁷

In other words, according to al-Zarqāwī, reconciliation or cooperation with the Shī‘īs is futile, because they cannot change. If they show a willingness to compromise, it is simply a false, deceptive facade. Like the medieval proponents of the combined *jihād* theory, al-Zarqāwī accused Shī‘īs of cooperation with the infidel outsiders, writing:

These are a people who added to their infidelity and augmented their atheism with political cunning and a feverish effort to seize upon the crisis of governance and the balance of power in the state whose features they are trying to draw and whose new lines they are trying to establish through their political banners and organizations in cooperation with their hidden allies, the Americans⁵⁸

The Shī‘īs in Iraq, by al-Zarqāwī’s lights, are thus endeavoring to impose their political will on the Sunnī populace through cunning, dishonest manipulation, and a concealed alliance with the Americans, the obvious infidels. Although he is writing seven centuries later, al-Zarqāwī’s text brings up many of the themes found in Ibn Taymiyya’s *fatwās* against the Shī‘īs that al-Zarqāwī cites later on in the same letter.

***Jihād* and its place in Sunnī-Shī‘ī relations**

In the pre-modern Islamic world, *jihād* and *jihād* propaganda served distinct purposes and operated in a number of distinct modes in the context of Sunnī-Shī‘ī relations. Much evidence suggests that many of these modes of *jihād* follow stable patterns. There are significant continuities of *jihad* discourse between medieval and modern times, so that an understanding of historical uses of *jihād* may be useful for putting recent events in perspective. Despite the rise of the modern nation-state, advances in communication and transportation, changes in politics, economics, and military technology, the ways in which relations between Sunnī and Shī‘ī Muslims are framed and discussed – religious brotherhood and cooperation at one end of the spectrum and religious execration and anathema at the other end of the spectrum – show remarkable continuities. The similarities between modern and historical

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

invocations of *jihād* with regard to Sunnī-Shī‘ī relations are many, and the examples are closely parallel in their rhetoric and patterns of implementation.

One simple yet telling sign of continuity is the widespread contemporary revival of the medieval term of opprobrium for Shī‘īs, *rawāfiḍ* (sing. *rāfiḍī*, collective pl. *rāfiḍa*). Literally “rejectors” and technically “deserters,” the term may have been used originally by hardline Shī‘īs to refer to those of their number who were willing to compromise with the Shī‘īs’ early enemies, the Umayyads. Shī‘ī sources generally suggest that the appellation originated as a label for the followers of Zayd b. ‘Alī (d. 740) who rejected him because he refused to denounce the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr (r. 632–634) and ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–644). Be that as it may, in the standard Sunnī understanding, the term refers to the Shī‘īs’ rejection of the first leaders of the Muslim community after the passing of the Prophet, especially Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. In accordance with the inexorable logic of polemics, in which each slander is met with a counter-slander, Shī‘īs coined a corresponding denigrating term for the Sunnīs, *nawāsib* (sing. *nāsibī*, collective *nāsiba*), meaning “those who fight against” the descendants of the Prophet. The appellation *rāfiḍī* and its cognates have become a standard feature of modern anti-Shī‘ī rhetoric among radical Sunnī political groups invoking the entire framework of medieval Islamic polemics.

Current ideological conflicts have led to the dredging up of a litany of traditional staples of inter-sectarian polemics on both sides of the Sunnī-Shī‘ī divide. Among the most common is the idea that Shī‘ī Islam arose as the invention of a single man, ‘Abd Allāh b. Saba’, a Jewish convert from Yemen who sought to undermine Islam from within. A second familiar canard of Sunnī polemicists is that the Shī‘īs attribute to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the Imams a status superior to that of the Prophet Muḥammad. A related and frequently repeated claim among Sunnīs is that the Shī‘īs believe that the angel Gabriel made a mistake: He was supposed to deliver Allāh’s message to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib but delivered it to Muḥammad instead, confused by the tremendous resemblance between the two. There is much more. Shī‘īs attribute knowledge and attributes that belong properly to God alone to the Imams. They worship at the Imams’ tombs and believe that the Imams have the powers of intercession. On account of their regular use of *taqiyyah*, or dissimulation, the Shī‘īs are hypocrites and traitors at heart. Like the *Munāfiqūn* mentioned in the Qur’an, who paid lip-service to Islam in public but who worked to undermine the Prophet behind his back, they can never be trusted. The Shī‘īs lie and fabricate in order to falsify history and to support their heretical doctrines. Once one grabs the end of the rope, the whole tangle of medieval polemics, with its myriad major and minor ramifications, gets pulled out of obscurity. While the world has obviously changed, there are striking similarities between modern and medieval instances of discourse on these topics, suggesting that elements of the discursive and institutional traditions in

which they are embedded have remained stable over time, despite radical changes in historical circumstances.

Several of the modes of *jihād* presented here appear contradictory or at least at odds with each other. In modern history, *jihād* as a unifying force in the face of external threat may be seen in many examples, such as in the role the Shī'īs and their legal authorities played in resisting the British in Iraq just after the First World War. *Jihād* propaganda against the United States, the West, and Israel is used *ad nauseam* by the Islamic Republic of Iran to gain legitimacy in the view of the Sunnī majority of the Islamic world, and it is used in a similar fashion by Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. The combined *jihād* theory, according to which Shī'īs should be targeted as the internal enemy along with, or even more than, the external enemy is widespread among militant Sunnī groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The same is true for al-Qā'ida, ISIS and other radical Sunnī groups. The ideology has many supporters in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, and radicals are actively spreading it elsewhere, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nigeria.

The similarities in *jihād* propaganda across time are evident to the actors themselves, who cite historical examples as justification for their own actions. Iraqi Sunnīs denounce the Shī'īs for collaborating with the coalition forces invoked al-'Alqamī, the Shī'ī vizier blamed for the fall of Baghdad in 1258 to the Mongol conqueror Hulagu. Decrying the influence in Iraq of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sunnī propagandists refer to Iranian politicians and the agents of Iranian influence in Iraq as neo-Safavids, likening them to the dynasty that converted the majority of Iran to Shī'ism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and conquered Iraq twice, ruling there 1508–1534 and 1629–1638.⁵⁹ Al-Zarqāwī and ISIS regularly connected their own anti-Shī'ism with that of the historical anti-Crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, lauding Nūr al-Dīn the Zengid as an ideal hero who was active in the exact same historical region, northern Syria and northern Iraq. Al-Zarqāwī's polemics drew extensively on the writings of Ibn al-Taymiyya, who endorsed the combined *jihād* theory enthusiastically and portrayed Shī'īs as traitors to the Muslim community who were willing to ally with the Mongols and the Crusading Franks against Sunnī Muslims.⁶⁰

Yet, understanding the durable patterns is only a first step; questions ensue. What are the factors that determine the particular choice of mode of sectarian propaganda that any one group will use? And what determines the success of a particular mode of propaganda? A critical factor is the relative strength of the agent vis-à-vis the intended audience. History shows that in general, powerful

⁵⁹A. D. Farast Mar'ī, “*al-Ṣafawīyyūn al-juḍud wa-muḥāwalāt tashyī' al-'Irāq*” (The Neo-Safavids and Attempts to Make Iraq Shī'ī), *al-Bayān*, June 27, 2013, <https://www.albayan.co.uk/article2.aspx?id=2931> (accessed Feb. 17, 2021).

⁶⁰February 2004 Coalition Provisional Authority English translation of terrorist Musab al Zarqawi letter obtained by United States Government in Iraq, <https://2001-2009state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm> (accessed Dec. 31, 2018); and Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 205–6.

majorities are willing and eager to impose their preferred version of doctrinal orthodoxy on a weaker minority, or at least to suppress minority religious discourse in the public sphere, while dynasties belonging to the minority group are reluctant to do so. Sunnī dynasties such as the Zengids, Ayyubids, and Mamluks adopted programmatic and explicitly anti-Shī'ī policies. In the case of the Ayyubids and the Mamluks, suppression of Shī'ism eventually resulted in the eradication of the Shī'ī communities of Egypt, who either left for Syria or Yemen or converted to Sunnī Islam. In many cities of historical Syria, such as Tyre, Tiberias, Tripoli, and Aleppo, the Shī'ī population was radically reduced and marginalized. Shī'ī communities were removed from the major urban centers and retreated to the mountains and the countryside. In contrast, when Shī'ī dynasties such as the Fatimids, Buwayhids, and Ḥamdānids came to power, they generally adopted more ecumenical policies, because, as minorities, they understood that endeavoring to impose their will on the Sunnī majority by compulsion would backfire, provoking widespread resistance.

Exceptions to the rule that minority status leads ruling regimes to adopt an ecumenical policy certainly have occurred. By all accounts, the Qarmāṭīs, Ismā'īlī Shī'īs who established a state in Eastern Arabia in the late ninth and tenth centuries, were not an accommodating lot. They raided Iraq, regularly attacked the Iraqi pilgrimage caravans, and most famously raided Mecca, carried off the Black Stone embedded in the wall of the Ka'ba, and held it for ransom for twenty years. What allowed them to adopt this stance was for the most part their remote geographical location. The Khārijīs, who also adopted a confrontational stance toward the Muslim majority, both Sunnīs and Shī'īs, ended up in remote locations – Oman, Mzab in southern Algeria, and the island of Jerba, off the coast of Tunisia. Similarly, the Zaydī Shī'īs, whose doctrine required their Imams to rebel against illegitimate rulers and establish a state, ultimately found themselves in the mountainous regions of northern Iran and Yemen.

A more difficult case to explain is that of the Safavids. The Safavids were clearly intolerant of Sunnī Islam and intent on converting the populace to Shī'ism, despite the fact that Shī'īs were certainly a minority in Iran upon their accession to power in 1501. Various explanations for this decision have been proposed, the main one being that adherence to Shī'ism made it possible to maintain a solid ideological front and to strengthen military resistance to the Ottomans, which were necessary for the political and military success of the Empire and its bid to control strategic territory, not to mention a large section of the lucrative Silk Road.⁶¹

⁶¹Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict (906–962/1500–1555)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1983).

A major cause of the current conflict in Iraq is the fact that the Shī‘īs who are influential in the government estimate that they constitute the clear majority and so are powerful enough to impose their will. They feel justified in punishing Sunnī Iraqis for the historical oppression of Iraqi Shī‘īs. The U.S. government’s decision to keep all members of the former armed forces and the Ba‘th Party out of the government went a long way toward facilitating this strategy. However, Iraqi Shī‘ī politicians’ plans have largely failed to produce a stable regime for a number of reasons, in addition to incompetence and widespread corruption. Sunnī Arabs do not constitute such a small minority in Iraq overall and, in fact, constitute a majority in significant regions of the nation. They also have a strong historical memory of being the most powerful segment of the Iraqi population. Furthermore, they are supported by Sunnīs from outside of Iraq, including in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and the Gulf. Meanwhile, the Iranian government has been exercising highly visible influence on politics in Iraq through local Shī‘ī groups, which undercuts the political legitimacy of the Shī‘ī politicians among the Iraqi populace generally.

Recent scholarship on Sunnī-Shī‘ī relations in the Islamic world has invoked a new term, “sectarianization,” in an effort to stake out a middle position between those who claim that Sunnī-Shī‘ī tensions are the product of primordial conflicts that have continued, unbroken, from the seventh century until the present and those who assert that they are simply a mask for other political, social, and economic motivations. According to the proponents of the concept of sectarianization, the current conflicts between sects are political constructs, meaning that they draw on existing historical memory and features of religious identity but that they are the result of particular manipulations by various actors within modern social systems and political structures.⁶² In this author’s view, such an approach is successful in capturing much of what is transpiring in current political and ideological conflicts between Sunnīs and Shī‘īs. Certainly, historical memories, compelling myths and symbols, prevalent stereotypes, and common knowledge that revolve around sectarian differences do not inevitably lead to conflict. Undoubtedly, as well, political actors and social movements draw on pre-existing legacies of sectarian material and manipulate them for their own ends. Nonetheless, one should advance two significant critiques regarding the deployment of the concept of sectarianization as an explanatory tool. The first has to do with a simple problem of reception. Because of the emphasis on political manipulation in this model, a naïve reception equates it with one of the models the advocates of sectarianization are trying to avoid, that which

⁶²See Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, “Introduction: The Sectarianization Thesis,” 1–22 in *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, eds. Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), esp. 5–8; Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (New York: Columbia University, 2011).

argues that sectarian conflicts are only other political or economic conflicts in disguise. Sectarianization, once it occurs, entails that the ensuing tensions and conflicts have actually become religious tensions and conflicts, even if some would question the religious motives or understandings of the actors involved. Moreover, if wars ensue, they are in fact religious conflicts, just as the conflicts in Europe from the sixteenth through the early eighteenth centuries were wars of religion. Of course, those hostilities involved many other political, social, and economic factors, too, but they were framed as religious conflicts, and both sides adopted various forms of religious discourse in pursuing and in justifying them.

A second critique is that the theorists of sectarianization tend to see it as a modern phenomenon. While the particular parameters of political rule and economic systems may have differed in the medieval and pre-modern Islamic world, the phenomenon of a reservoir of sectarian myth, symbols, views of history, and social prejudices being manipulated toward particular political, social, and economic ends was as true of the battles over the Caliphate in the seventh and eighth centuries, the establishment of Shī'ī hegemony over most of the Islamic world in the tenth century, and the counter-Crusade of the twelfth century as it was in Lebanon in the nineteenth century or Iraq in the twenty-first century. The reasons for this attitude are two. Some of the examples of sectarian tension have broken out into dramatically open conflict in recent times, and many modern historians and political scientists lack a detailed understanding of the numerous sectarian conflicts that have taken place in the course of Islamic history, as well as of their extent.

Conclusion

An examination of contemporary Sunnī- Shī'ī conflicts in light of the history of Islamic sectarian polemics suggests that those who argue that the religious conflicts between Sunnīs and Shī'īs in the contemporary Islamic world are not truly religious in nature, but rather disguised military, political, colonial, or economic conflicts are mistaken. While other motives for hostilities certainly exist, the consciousness of sectarian religious difference is not a mirage or a screen that merely masks other elements, and the actors involved in the conflicts are not under the influence of a false consciousness. Rather, the features of sectarian history and tradition, including a robust and variegated history of Sunnī-Shī'ī polemic on both sides, form part of the very fabric of thought in which ideas of conflict are expressed. This author nevertheless agrees with the proponents of sectarianization when they argue that Sunnī-Shī'ī conflicts are constructs created by particular actors and movements for particular motivations, including economic and political goals.

As Talal Asad has argued, Islam is a discursive tradition. It is composed of a collection of discourses that seek to justify current practices and norms by drawing on sacred texts such as the Qur'ān and *hādīth* and other historical and doctrinal material. This concept is useful in that it allows modern scholars to capture the modern invocations of historical material in complex ways that transcend overly simple conceptions such as the faithful transmission and reproduction of tradition, on the one hand, or rebellion against the past, on the other. Unfortunately, it is not as useful as one would hope, primarily because Talal Asad's work does not provide concrete examples or delineate the actual structures of the discourses that make up Islam.⁶³ The present study provides a taxonomy of one small section of Islam's discursive tradition, situated at the intersection of two much larger Islamic discourses: that of *jihād* and that of Sunnī-Shī'ī relations. Both Sunnīs and Shī'īs are able to draw on a rich and complex tradition of religious polemic that covers many and varied topics: theological dogma concerning the attributes of God and the status of the Prophet and the Imams; the lives of the Imams and the status, characteristics, and historical deeds of the Prophet's Companions; legal issues such as inheritance law and temporary marriage; pilgrimages to shrines of the Imams; the celebration of 'Āshūrā', 'Īd al-Ghadīr, and other holy days; matters of ritual such as the practice of combining prayers or the *tarāwīh* prayers during Ramadan nights; popular practices such as matters of food, dress, naming practices; and the interpretation of military and political events throughout Islamic history. All of these have accumulated over time to form an abundant library of resources for current polemics. Furthermore, it is not just the content of polemics that is recycled; the patterns and contours of such discourse preserve striking regularities, and this is because the historical discourse constrains modern rhetoric. The concept of *jihād* figures prominently in this complex body of material, but it is not monovalent. Historical memory provides several modes of *jihād* that modern actors may choose to implement, in action, rhetoric, or both, and on account of the structure of the discourse on which modern movements draw, history is bound repeatedly to provide examples of the five categories of the use of *jihād* and *jihād* propaganda explored in this article.

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⁶³Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986).

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