

Extremism in Islamic Shi'ite's Faith

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I-Introduction

The growing power of Islam itself is a significant topic for discussion but there is a new reassertion of an important sect within Islam: Shi'ism. The emergence of this new power has potential impacts on different issues like the geopolitics of Islamic World, energy, international relations and so on. For this reason, the proper way for dealing with this new phenomenon is to think in the framework of different scenarios for the future of this power. Not long ago, in the West in particular Shi'ism was typically viewed as a relatively small and unimportant sect of Islam, whereas today it is increasingly seen as a major influence in international affairs. During the past few decades, parallel to the political developments in the world of Shi'ism there has been a corresponding resurgence in Shiite studies.

II-Basics on Islam

It is interesting to know what the definition of religion in Koran is. Koran believes "religion is a path that God has placed before man so that by treading it man can reach Him". Koran also says Man has no choice but to follow religion. The root of the word of "Islam" is also conductive. Etymologically, Islam means surrender and obedience. Islam is the religion which invites men toward this end. Since its general purpose is the surrender of man to the laws governing the Universe and men, with the result that through this surrender worships only the One God and obeys only His command. As Koran informs, the first person who called this religion "Islam", and its followers "Muslims", was the Prophet Abraham.

III-Basics on Shi'ism

"Shi'ia" means literally partisan or follower, refers to those who consider the succession to the Prophet Muhammad, to be the special right of his family. In the field of the Islamic sciences and culture, Shi'ia follows the school of the Household of the Prophet. Shi'ia believes on returning from the last pilgrimage of Prophet Muhammad to Mecca on the

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way to Medina at a site called Ghadire Khumm, the Prophet chose Ali, his son of the law, as his successor before the vast crowd that was accompanying him.

Also Shi'ia believes that, in Thaghalayn tradition Prophet says:

“I leave two things of value amidst you in trust which if you hold on to, you will never go astray:

-Koran

-Members of my household

These will never be separated until the Day of Judgment.”

The cause of separation of Shi'ite minority from Sunni majority comes back to this fact the friends of Ali, believed that after the death of the Prophet, the caliphate and religious authority belonged to Ali. This belief came from their consideration of Ali's position and station in relation to the Prophet. When the Prophet died, while his household and a few companion were occupied with providing for his burial, the another group went to mosque where the community was gathered faced with sudden loss of its leader.

IV-Population

Shi'ites are not a lot, comparing to other Muslims which we name them Sunni. Sunni means a person who is following Sunnah. Sunnah means customs and refers to Prophet's behavior in daily life. It seems Shi'ites are 10 per cents of total Muslim population.



V-History of Shi'ism

The History of Shi'ia shows, first Caliph after Prophet was selected through the vote of the majority of the companions, second Caliph by the will and testament of the first, third

Caliph by a six-man council whose members and rulers of procedure were organized and determined by second Caliph. During the third Caliph ruling period, his relatives in Damascus (Umayyad), began to be lax in applying moral principles in government. In year 656, people rebelled and after a few days of siege and fighting, third Caliph was killed. Ali became Fourth Caliph. Caliphate of Ali lasted about 4 years and 9 month. During his period he followed ways of Prophet and brought conditions back to their original state. He forced the resignation of all incompetent political elements. He began a major transformation of a revolutionary nature which caused him innumerable difficulties. Ali continued his radically different type of government based more on righteousness than political efficacy. His opposition claim they wanted to revenge the death of third Caliph, instigated bloody wars during Ali's entire Caliphate. Finally, Ali was assassinated in Kufa Mosque (South of Baghdad). His shrine is in Najaf in Iraq. Ali is the first Imam of all of Shi'ites.

His son, Hasan, was recognized by the Shi'ia as second Imam and Caliph, but Mu'awiyah (Umayyad) marched with his army toward Iraq, and began to wage war against Hasan. Finally he was able to force Hasan to hand the caliphate over to him on the condition caliphate would be returned to him after the death of Mu'awiyah. Hasan was killed by poisoning. Hasan brother, Hussein became third Imam. Mu'awiyah's son, Yezid, became Caliph at 680. Yezid massacred Hussein in the most atrocious manner along with his children, relatives and friends in Karbala (Iraq). He displayed the heads of grandson of Prophet in different cities. The element of martyrdom in Shi'ia is referred to this event which was happened in 10th of Muharram 680 (Ashoura).

Tragic death of third Imam, Hussein, played a major role in the spread of Shi'ism, especially in regions of away from caliphate center, such as Egypt, Yemen and Persia. Before the end of first Islamic century and 40 years after death of Hussein, Shi'ia took advantage of the internal differences in Umayyad Empire and began to organize themselves.

In 13th century, Abbasid gained the caliphate in the name of Prophet's family, and at the beginning showed some kindness to Shi'ia, but soon they began to follow unjust ways of the Umayyad. Shi'ia learned to live for the most part in hiding and followed their religious life secretly without external manifestation.

In 14th century, Shi'ia able to breathe once again, many scientific and philosophical books were translated from Greek, Syriac and other languages into Arabic. People eagerly studied intellectual and rational sciences. Shi'ia theologians and scholars did their utmost to further scholarly activities and propagate Shi'ia teaching.

In 15th century, Abbasid government declined, the Buyids, who were Shi'ia had the great influence in Persia and Baghdad. Most of the Arabian Peninsula was Shi'ia except big cities. The Fatimids, who were Ismaili, conquered Egypt and organized a caliphate for 2 centuries, but, Shi'ism never became the official religion of any Muslim State.

In the 16th century, Ismail, a Shiite youth, began a revolt in Ardabil (Iran), with the aim of establishing an independent Shi'ia country. He succeeded in forming Iran, piece by piece in to a country and in making Shi'ism the official religion in his kingdom.

VI-Shi'ite different sectors

There are divisions within Shi'ism. Most of them are Twelve-Imam Shi'ia. Part of them who are living in Turkey and Syria are Alavis. Alavis are Shi'ites which are hiding their beliefs because of hard historical pressure of Ottomans and Turkish secular government in recent centuries. Part of Shi'ites is Ismailies. They believe to seven Imams instead of twelve Imams. They are also divided to two factions: Nazariah who are followers of Mr. Agha Khan and Mosta'liah. Zaydieh believe to four Imams. Doruz and Moghanna are also part of Shi'ite.

VII-Shi'ite's Beliefs

Majority of Shi'ites believes:

1. There are 12 Imams
2. The first was Ali, son of the law of Prophet
3. The 12th is Mahdi, who was born in 872 in Samarra (Iraq)
4. He was hidden from public view.
5. His occultation will continue as long as God wills it.

Therefore, Belief to existence of 12th Imam (Mahdaviat) is Doctrine of Hope in Shi'ia

VIII-School of Thoughts in Shi'ia

Religious Thought in Shi'ia is totally different with other Islamic factions. There are three methods of religious thought in Shi'ia:

1. The path of external and formal aspect of religion (Shariat)
2. The path of intellectual understanding (Hekmat)
3. The path of spiritual comprehension achieved through sincerity (Ikhlas) in obeying God (Tarighat)

In the path of external and formal aspect of religion (Shariat²), we are facing to verbal expressions such

- Believe in God and his Prophet
- Perform the prayers

The path of intellectual understanding (Hekmat³), we are interacting with the paths can discover the problems connected with faith, ethics, and general principles governing practical questions.

The path of spiritual comprehension achieved through sincerity (Tarighat⁴), men who have reached this knowledge have cut themselves off from everything and forgotten everything but God. Because Shi'ia believes the nature of man has tendency to "divine attraction (Jazabeh)". All of Sufies believe Imam Ali was the first Gnostic man (Sufi).

IX-Imitation

One of the most important issues in Shi'ism is Imitation (Taghlid). Acquiring knowledge of the principles of religion is possible to a certain extent for everyone, but acquiring

² In Arabic Shari'a

³ In Arabic Hekmah

⁴ In Arabic Tarighah

detailed knowledge of the injunctions and laws is not possible for every Muslim. Only a few persons have the capacity for demonstrative jurisprudence, because society needs different peoples with different duties. The duty of rest of the people is to seek guidance from capable and worthy men of learning, who are called religious jurists (*mujtahids* or *faqihs*). This act of following Mujtahids is called imitation or *taghliid*. The strength of the Shi'ia community lies in its independent and dynamic leadership. Unlike the Sunni community, Shi'ites have different legal schools. Each believer chooses a spiritual leader -- a person "worthy of emulation," usually an ayatollah.

X-Jihad

Jihad (Holy War) in Shi'ia has specific conditions. There are only two types of Jihad:

I-Preliminary Jihad: It was for expansion of Islam to other regions in the early century of Islam. Exclusively, it is the responsibility of Prophet and 12 Imams to do that, and such act is rejected in occultation of Imam Mahdi.

II-Defensive Jihad: this type of Jihad is permitted to prevent enemies to attack to the State and is permitted in occultation period. It is noteworthy that State in Shi'ia means the country which Shi'ia is living and totally is different with the concept of Muslim Society (Ummah). Within Islam, Shi'ites tend to be more hierarchical, disciplined and political. In addition, they are noted for their solidarity, including patriotism and opposition to foreigners. For example, during the Iran - Iraq War, most of Saddam Hussein's bravest soldiers were Shi'ites. The Shiites felt, and still feel, that they are Iraqis first and then Shi'ites. Therefore, they were united in patriotism against Iranians.

XI-Terrorism and Suicide:

Terrorism (Erhabiah) is prohibited because of the Koran Verse: "If you kill one person, it likes to kill all of society". Suicide is forbidden again by Koran: "Don't destroy your life by your hands".

XII-Majorities and Minorities

Statistic shows that there are between 120 - 200 million Shi'ites in the world. Countries with majority Shi'ite population, is easy to see their Shi'ites lineup. Iran and Iraq have a Shi'ite majority, and so does Bahrain. In Lebanon, Shiites are a significant plurality. In Syria, although they are a minority, they are the dominant power in government. They are the majority in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, and have a significant presence in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

Countries with Shi'ite majority:

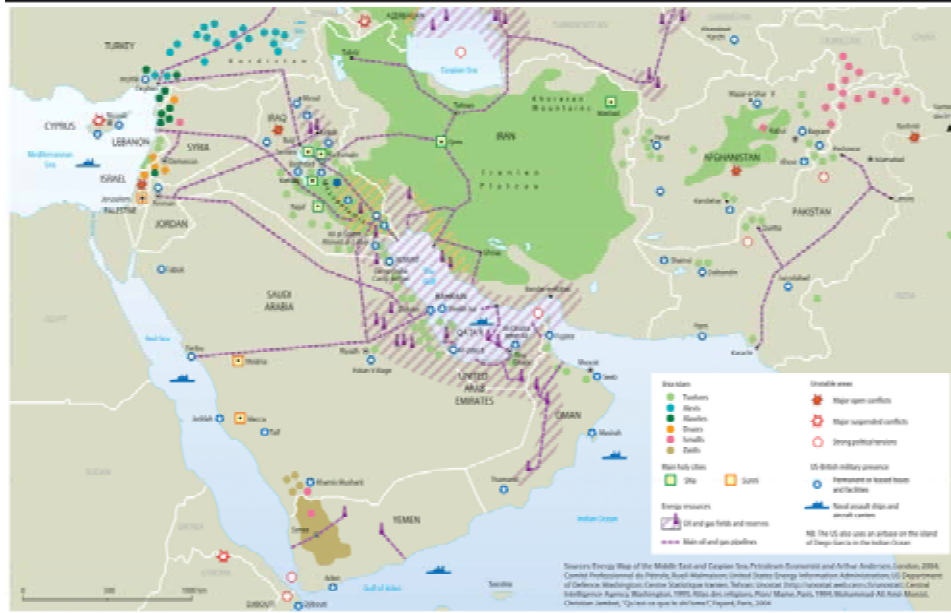
1. Iran
2. Iraq
3. Azerbaijan Republic
4. Bahrain

Countries with Shi'ite minorities:

1. Saudi Arabia
2. Lebanon

3. Syria
4. Kuwait
5. Afghanistan
6. Pakistan
7. India
8. Qatar
9. United Arab Emirates
10. Yemen

Different Branches of Shi'ia in Middle East



Counties with Oil Reserves more than 1 bill. t and Strategic Ellipse

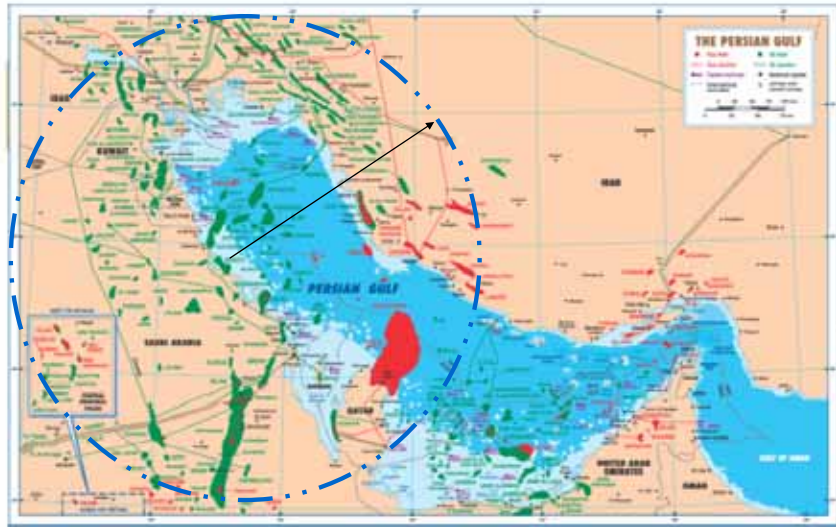


XIII-Strategic Circle

If I were to draw a circle with a 300-kilometer radius using Bahrain as the center point, the countries within that circle would hold 75% percent of the oil reserves in the Persian Gulf. Most of Shi'ites are living inside the circle. Thus we can estimate that 50 percent of the world oil reserves are under the feet of Shi'ite people. The countries with a Shi'ite majority—Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq--have 20 percent of the proved oil reserves of the total world. If the eastern part of Saudi Arabia with its majority Shi'ite population is included, this figure reaches 45 percent.

Current oil production in the Shiite world is about 8.8 percent of the world total. Iran produces 5.1 percent of total world oil production, Iraq, 3.3 percent, and Azerbaijan 0.4 percent. But oil production in the region could be raised to 20 percent of world production. Iran plans to increase its capacity to five million barrels per day (mbd). Iraq has the potential to produce five mbd also, within five years. And Azerbaijan plans to produce one mbd, bringing the total to 11 mbd in the not so distant future. Domestic consumption in these countries is not high, only about 4.2 percent of world oil consumption. In terms of natural gas, proved reserves in Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iran, and Iraq amount to about 21.5 percent of the world total. Production of gas is about 5.3 percent of world total, and domestic consumption is 5.1 percent.

50% of Oil and 25% of Gas under the feet of Shi'ites



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Shi'ia two oil Reserves Subsystems:
Persian Gulf and Caspian



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Shi'ia Crescent



XIV-Shi'ia Crescent

A powerful Shi'ite Muslim bloc now exists across the Middle East. The war in Iraq has produced an unintended consequence, a formidable Shi'ite Muslim geographical bloc that will dominate politics in the Middle East for many years. This development is also creating political and spiritual leaders of unparalleled international influence.

The United States supplied the key linkage for this bloc. By destroying the government of Saddam Hussein, it brought that country's Shi'ite majority to the fore, revealing a solid line of Shi'ite majority nations from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea.

XV- Shi'ite and Extremism

Why does Shi'ia behave less as extremist?

1. Outward of appearance of external and formal aspect of religion, is not the only way for Shi'ite and it is not important to reach to the God, there are other ways as intellectual understanding, and path of spiritual comprehension achieved through sincerity (Ikhlas).
2. Shi'ia has a perception of the future, they hope to be in a united world government by Mahdi, 12th Imam in future (Mahdaviat)
3. Shi'ites have tendency to Gnostic approach (Sufism) which is in contrast with extremism
4. Preliminary Jihad (attack to other regions) are prohibited.
5. Shi'ia does follow Source of Emulations (Marja) or jurisprudent (*faghih*). They are aged peoples with long experience in Islamic sciences.

XVI-Conclusions

- Shi'ia was created because of love to the Prophet's family
- All of Shi'ite Imams were killed by their enemies, the martyrdom phenomenon is important in their social life.
- Because of its minority, Shi'ia has continued to live for the most part of history in hiding and followed their religious life secretly without external manifestation.
- Shi'ism does not permit imitation of a dead mujtahid. This has kept Shi'ite jurisprudence alive and fresh throughout ages.
- The only governments which Shi'ia believes are Islamic were 10 years Prophet Muhammad 4 years Ali's administration.
- Shi'ia is serious on State concept, fighting to defend it.