

# **Power of Association: Shiite Quietism and Activism in the Middle East**

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## **Abstract**

At a time in which Shi'ism is in the ascendance in the Middle East, this study challenges much recent research and writing on contemporary regional politics by questioning the notion that a meaningful distinction can be drawn between quietism and activism among Shiite clerical elites. In challenging the nature of this supposed difference, this research tries to explore Shiite clerical political responses to, and involvement in, three key political events: Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, and the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006. It draws on archival material including personal letters, telegrams, newspaper reports, records of political statements delivered by Shiite clerics at the commencement of their daily lectures in religious seminaries, and public manifestos of key clerics and groups relating to these three events; as well as over 300 hours of recorded interviews with key Shiite religious leaders and those closely associated with them from all three countries. In explanation of when, where, and why clerical elites assume an active role in the political arena, this thesis makes a contribution, not only to the understanding of Shiite clerical elite activism; it also employs a framework that contributes to social movement theory by employing a notion of 'political opportunity structure' that captures the interaction between perception and objective factors. Its main finding is that the responses of clerical elites to key political events arise not from doctrinal differences, but from contextual factors and the perceptions that those clerics formed of them.

*To Homadokht*

*When the rose is gone and the garden faded  
You will no longer hear the nightingale's song.*

*Rumi*

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## GLOSSARY

**‘Alim (plural. Ulama):** the educated class of Muslim scholars.

**Allameh:** An honorary title carried by the clerical scholars of Islamic science, jurisprudence, and philosophy.

**Arbaeen: (lit. ‘The Fortieth [day]’):** The Shiite religious observation that takes place forty days after the Day of Ashura to commemorate the martyrdom of the third infallible Imam, Hussein Ibn Ali. The day falls on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Safar, the second month of the Islamic Lunar Calendar.

**Ashura:** The Shiite observance marking the anniversary of the third Imam’s martyrdom in 680. It falls on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic Lunar Calendar.

**Ayatollah: (lit. ‘The Sign of Allah’):** A high-ranking Shiite clerical elite. In the contemporary era, the clerical elite titles start with *Theqat al-Islam* (The Trustee of Islam), followed by *Hujjat al-Islam* (The Proof of Islam), *Hujjat al-Islam wa al-Muslemin* (The Proof of Islam and to Muslims), *Ayatollah*, and *Ayatollah Uzma* (The Grand Ayatollah).

**Fatwa:** A legal pronouncement issued by a qualified Muslim jurist regarding a specific issue at a given time.

**Hadith:** Tradition concerning the Prophet Mohammad and the Infallible Imams’ lives and utterances.

**Hawza:** A traditional Shiite seminary where clerics are trained.

**Ifta:** The act, by a qualified Muslim jurist, of issuing a legal pronouncement (fatwa).

**Ijtihad: (lit. ‘Striving and exerting’):** Making deductions in matters of Islamic law, in cases in which no explicit text is applicable.

**Infallible Imams:** The twelve saints, from the abode of the Prophet Mohammad, who are his legitimate successors. The first of them is Ali Ibn Abu Talib, the prophet’s son-in-law, following by Hassan the elder son of Ali, Hussein the younger son of Ali, and the nine descendants of Hussein.

**Kalam: (lit. ‘Science of Discourse’):** A scientific practice in Islamic philosophy that seeks to confirm theological principles through dialectics, debates, and argument.

**Khums: (lit. ‘The one-Fifth’):** A religious tax, obligatory for Shiite laities, representing a contribution of 1/5 of their annual income to the infallible Imam or his deputies.

**Majlis: (lit. ‘A place of Sitting’):** Technically it refers to the House of Parliament.

**Marja’ Taqlid (plural Maraji’):** The highest-ranking clergy who is followed by groups of Shiite laity as the general deputy of the infallible Imam during the Occultation Era. Marja’iyya refers to the position held by the Marja’.

**Mujtahid:** A cleric competent enough to engage in ijtihad.

**Mulla:** One of the titles generally used, especially in pre-contemporary era, for a man trained in Islamic jurisprudence and law.

**Nass:** A known and clear legal injunction of the Quran, the Prophet, and the Infallible Imams' traditions.

**Occultation Era:** Refers, in Shiite principles, to a period during which the twelfth Infallible Imam has disappeared and is unseen. The era is divided into two consecutive periods. The former Minor Occultation Era, from 874-941, when the Imam was in contact with his followers through his four special deputies; and the Major Occultation Era, since 941, when the Imam appointed no special deputy.

**Omour Hesbiah: (lit. 'Non-litigious Affairs'):** In Shiite jurisprudence it refers to general affairs to which social order is linked.

**Ra'y: (lit. 'Verdict'):** In Islamic jurisprudence it means a personal opinion in adapting the law.

**Seyyed:** An honorific title denoting to the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad.

**Sharia:** The Islamic Law. In Shiite Islam it refers to the body of canonical laws deducted from the Quran, and from the Prophet's and Infallible Imam's traditions, which lays down certain responsibilities for Muslims.

**Sheikh: (lit. 'The Elder'):** A title in Arabic that carries the meaning of 'chief' of the community, tribe, family, or village.

**Taqiyya:** In Shiite jurisprudence, it refers to a form of dissimulation of the faith in order to diminish the risk of enemies' persecution.

**Waqf (plural Awqaf):** An Islamic endowment of a building, plot of land, and sometimes cash that is used for charitable and religious purposes.

**Zann: (lit. 'Dubious Supposition'):** Valid conjecture or speculation of a jurist about the soundness of an Islamic tradition, which does not entail more than a probability.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Shiite Clerical Elites and the Modern Middle East

Many scholars and political observers have been concerned to understand the nature of, and likely balance of power between, what has been characterized as Shiite ‘quietism’ and ‘activism’ in the current politics of the Middle East. This thesis challenges the notion that a meaningful strategic distinction can be defined between these supposed political factions among the Shiite clerical elite.

For centuries, orientalist have generally viewed the Twelver Shiite<sup>1</sup> sect as ‘moderate’ and, relative to other Muslim sects, politically quiet.<sup>2</sup> With the rise of activism on the part of Shiite clerical elites in Iran, however, scholars began to reconsider Shiite political doctrines and to search in them for elements they might have previously overlooked in their understanding of Shiite Islam. It no longer appeared as quietistic relative to the various other Islamic political ideologies. Since then, this previously ‘most moderate’ faith has been characterized as a ‘revolutionary’ and politically ‘active’ ideology.

The establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, as well as its impact on the Middle East, surprised scholars and policy makers. No one expected a revolution in Iran, or at least not one led by the Shiite clerical elite and their followers (Ajami 1988: 135). The Revolution consequently triggered a wave of scholarly research and writing on the political tendencies of Shiite Islam. It also inspired a reassessment of historical incidents, which had been decisive in modern Shiite clerical elites' political activism.<sup>3</sup>

It is undeniable that the explicit rise of an activist Shiite religious elite in Iran, caught the attention of scholars, and began a new trend in the study of the politics of the Middle

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<sup>1</sup> Twelver Shiism, Ithnā 'Ashariyya, or Imam Shiism, is the largest branch of Shiite Islam. Its adherents believe in a succession of twelve divinely guided Imams that served as leaders of the community following the death of the Prophet Mohammad. Throughout this study, the term ‘Shiite’ is used to refer to this main branch, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> Writing just twenty years prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Reader Bullard (1958: 44) maintained that Shiite sects could be divided into two general groups: ‘moderate and extreme’, with Twelvers classified as the ‘most moderate sect’.

<sup>3</sup> A case in point is studies of *Fadaian e Islam*, the Devotees of Islam group, in western academia (see, e.g., Behdad 1997). The group was politically active in Iran during the 1940s and 1950s under the leadership of a young Shiite cleric, Mojtaba Navvab Safavi. It is noteworthy that, except for a number of short reports that appeared in *Time Magazine* in February and December 1952, which addressed what was characterised as a ‘Fanatical Islamic Group’, there was not much research on the group prior to the 1979 revolution in Iran. More information on the group and its role in the politics of contemporary Iran will be discussed in Chapter 4.

East. Much of this scholarly work has focused on explaining the emergence, in the modern world, of a supposedly more extreme Shiite doctrine (Martin 2003: 147).

Gaining a better understanding of different political factions within Shiite Islam became even more important in light of post-1979 events. From the very early stages of the Islamic Republic, religious elites in Iran addressed themselves to both Shiite and Sunni Muslim masses, and called on them to rise up against oppressors, defined as the imperialism of the West, and the Communism of the East. However, as time went by, the new regime in Iran succeeded in primarily influencing only the Shiite communities of the region, by awakening in them a religio-political identity (Nasr 2004). For the Shiites of the Middle East, the Islamic Revolution provided, not only a model for political activism, but also a source of moral and financial support.<sup>4</sup>

The aspirations of the Shiite government of the Islamic Republic were not limited to influencing Shiite communities through these means. In 1982, it formed a resistance group in south Lebanon, later known as Hezbollah, to represent the rights of Lebanon's Shiite community in the country's on-going civil war (Norton 1985). The rise of Hezbollah was aided by, and helped to further advance, a decisive shift in Lebanon's sectarian balance of power in favor of the Shiite community. In the mid-1980s it became evident to most scholars and analysts that Shiite Muslims had passed beyond what, in retrospect, appeared to have been a politically quiet phase and, at least for a large fraction of the community, had been converted to a more activist Islam (Keddie 1983). Yet, given the pace of change in regional politics at that time, there was still no clear understanding of how this transformation had taken place, and how the actors involved interacted to produce this political activism

Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 was another event that brought about a change in the balance of sectarian power in favor of Shiite communities. The ascent of the Shiite community in post-Saddam Iraq has raised concerns among many regional and extra-regional actors, not least among them the Sunni Muslim rulers of the region. It became evident, as Vali Nasr noted, that the Middle East that would emerge 'from the crucible of the Iraq war', though it 'might not be more democratic', would 'definitely be more Shiite'(2006: 59). The war and its aftermath accelerated a Shiite socio-political revival in Iraq. After decades of having been deprived of basic social and political rights, the Shiite community was given an opportunity to actively pursue an expansion of its rights. Some Sunni leaders viewed this development with alarm. Just a month before the Iraqi National Assembly Election in 2005

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<sup>4</sup> The Shiite uprising in Saudi Arabia in the late 1970s and Shiite revolts in Bahrain during the 1980s were triggered by the 1979 revolution. See Keddie 1983a, Kechichian 1985, and Louer 2008.

Jordan's King Abdullah I warned that a 'Shiite Crescent' was emerging in the Middle East. He warned that

[i]f pro-Iran parties or politicians dominate the new Iraqi government, a new crescent of dominant Shiite movements or governments stretching from Iran into Iraq, Syria and Lebanon could emerge, alter the traditional balance of power between the two main Islamic sects and pose new challenges to U.S. interests and allies (Wright and Baker 2004).

While the notion of a 'Shiite Crescent' is largely meant to serve as a call for Sunni solidarity and vigilance by authoritarian Sunni regimes in the region, it does capture a newly-emerged political reality in the contemporary Middle East (2006: 59).

The establishment of a Shiite government in Iraq appears to have inspired the Shiite clerical elite who, for decades, had remained quiet under the rule of the Baath Party, to become more politically active. This activism has confronted scholars, once again, with new questions. Attention has focused, in particular, on questions about the political role of the clerical elite in Qom and Najaf Seminaries following the war in Iraq (Cole 2006, Barzegar 2008, Haji-Yousefi 2009, Mervin 2010). Scholars have tended to view this activism as the expression of a distinctive type of Shiism, and to seek support for this view in the complexities of Shiite political doctrines (Nasr 2004, Visser 2006).

Understanding the role played by the Shiite clerical elite in the political transformations that have taken place in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon during the last four decades requires an exploration of the responsibilities they account for themselves vis-à-vis their relevant community, and how they perceive the world. Although Shiites comprise about ten to fifteen percent of the Muslim World, they represent the majority of the population in the Persian Gulf (where over sixty percent of the world's fossil fuels are to be found). However, the internal dynamics of the Shiite community appear to be an area about which there is much confusion among scholars and policy-makers. The aim of this study is to provide greater clarity about the seeming transformation of Shiite politics and, in this way, to contribute to a better understanding of the nature and dynamics of Shiite clerical elites political activism.

### **The Literature**

The term 'Shiite Activism' emerged just thirty-six years ago, with the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979. Since then, scholars have tended to characterize Shiite

Islam as comprised of two different political factions: quietism and activism. But, as the following discussion of the literature will show, this distinction is based on misunderstandings, both of Shiite political thought, and of the contemporary political history of the Middle East.

It is possible to identify three main streams in the literature. The first stream assumes that a fundamental difference exists within Shiite Islam between 'quietism' and 'activism'. According to this view, the popularity of Imam Khomeini's doctrine in 1970's has produced new political practices, which in turn, have given rise to two separate tendencies within Shiite Islam. The different tendencies have been characterized in various ways: 'quietism' and 'activism', 'quietism' and 'revolutionary' Shiism (Nakash 2003, Rahimi 2004), 'quietism' and 'resistance' (Keddie 1983), 'silent' and 'speaking' Shiism (Marcinkowski 2006), or 'quietism' and 'Islamism' (Cole 2003). This dichotomization sees quietism, the deliberate withdrawal from direct involvement in politics, as rooted in traditional Shiite Islam (Hamoudi 2009). Early Shiites believed that, during the Occultation of the Infallible Imam, the main duty of his followers is to await his re-emergence, and to remain politically quiet and avoid active confrontation with unjust rulers. It is in this sense that the Shiite clerical elite of Najaf Seminary as, for example, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini (d.1991) and Grand Ayatollah Sistani, are characterized as representative of an orthodox Shiite 'quietism' (see e.g. Axworthy 2013: 319). At the other pole are Shiite clerics, like Imam Khomeini who, according to this stream of thought, represent an activist Shiite politics that had (Axworthy 2013) never been practiced previously (see e.g. Keddie 1983).

The notion that this dichotomy exists is to some extent the result of the views of different Shiite clerics themselves. On the one hand, religious elites, like Khomeini, who believe that activism is not justified as a means of opposing oppressors and establishing an Islamic state during the Occultation Era (Hamoudi 2009). On the other hand, clerics as, for instance, Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr (d. 1999), have argued that 'quietist Shi'ite leaders implicitly' uphold 'the oppressive status quo'. Al-Sadr drew a distinction between 'silent' jurists and 'speaking' jurists. For him, 'the only ethical course' for a Marja' was 'to speak out against tyranny'.<sup>5</sup>

Another modification of the quietism-activism dichotomy that has been suggested is the definition of four distinctive Shiite political tendencies: Islamism, Quietism, Semi-

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<sup>5</sup> Cole 2003: 552. The ideas of Mohammad Sadeq Sadr, however, need to be understood in relation to the circumstances he was facing in late twentieth century in Iraq. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Quietism, and Ambiguous Liberalism. According to this view, Islamist or *activist* Shiite clerics are those who propagate the idea of *Wilayat e Faqih*, the Guardianship of the Jurist, the belief that the government desired by God, is one ruled by Shiite Mujtahids based on their interpretation of Shari'a. Thus, Haidar Hamoudi considers the two most renowned advocates of this doctrine, Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Sadr, to be Shiite activists; while Shiite *quietist* clerics, in his view, are those (as, for example, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini) who avoid interference with politics and the state. The third category, semi-quietist Shiite clerics, are those located somewhere between the Islamists and Quietists. These are clerics who take a more ambivalent position with respect to the issue of political engagement: they neither pursue the establishment of the Shiite state, nor do they absent themselves from the political scene. Hamoudi considers Grand Ayatollah Sistani, current leader of the Najaf Seminary, to be a semi-quietist cleric. In the last category, are the ambiguous category labeled as 'liberal Shiite clerics'. These clerics, like Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah of Lebanon, believe that part of 'a Muslim's cultural and human responsibility' involves a sort of religio-political pluralism, one that maintains a secure co-existence even with those non-Muslims 'with whom there are disagreements' (Hamoudi 2009).

Another stream of the literature assumes that Shiite Islam is, in its very essence, political, and that if some elites seem more extreme than others, it is because of the context in which they find themselves (Visser 2006). A consideration of Shiite history throughout the Occultation Era leads them to conclude that whenever conditions have permitted them to do so, the Shiite clerical elite has exhibited a strain of activism, even when they had previously been perceived to be committed to quietism. Contexts which have permitted Shiite clerical elite political activism include the rise of the Safavid Dynasty in 1501 in Iran, the Tobacco Protest of 1890 (Fuller and Francke 2001, 2000), the Persian Constitutional Revolution in 1905 (Keddie 1966, Arjomand 1985), and the Iraqi Shiite revolt against the British Empire in 1920 (Hairi 1977). What this research suggests is that, even if a line can be drawn between Shiite quietism and activism, it will be at best an unclear and unstable one (Tripp 2002). The proponents of this stream argue that what seems to some to represent two distinctive political factions, are really only different tactics clerical elites use either to achieve justice during the Occultation era or accommodate the community to the rule of *usurpers* (Rahimi 2004). As Abdulaziz Sachedina observes, both quietism and activism respond 'to the existence of



injustice in the Muslim polity; both are seen as part of the long-term attempt to establish a just polity in historical time; and both are sanctioned in religious texts'.<sup>6</sup>

What this suggests is that the distinction between quietism and activism is not based on doctrinal differences, that the aim of adherents of both so-called factions is to protect the community while it has been deprived of the infallible source of the leadership and that, in pursuing this aim, they may take different approaches, sometimes moderate and sometimes more extreme, according to the context. Thus, two main tenets of Shiite belief, *taqiyya* and martyrdom, representing quietism and activism respectively, should best be understood as representing *two sides of the same coin* (Enayat 2005, Abrahamian 1982, Sachedina 1994). While advocates of quietism seek to find the safest path of passing through the Occultation Era, their activist counterparts take a more proactive approach to preserving the faith. Historical evidence supports this view, as Shiite clerical elites have tended to be more active in times of war or national occupation, (Enayat 2005, Abrahamian 1982, Sachedina 1994). This shows that the supposed distinction between quietism and activism is closely related to the context. As Sachedina states,

Under some conditions of politics and society, the activist mentality may be seen as latent within Shiite quietism; under other conditions, it may be seen as the dominant tendency of Shia (while quietism would be seen as a survival strategy). Shiite activism has emerged, in recent times as in the past, after a period of relative quietism, largely because of the central role played by Shiite religious leaders in reading the “signs of the times” and discerning what possibilities for action are present. When the times are right for action, the Shiite religious leadership may well teach radical doctrines — which is to say, teachings directed toward swifter achievement of the just social order (2010: 237).

Proponents of the third and final stream of the literature, go a step further and focus on how the personality of Shiite clerical elites shapes their understanding of their religio-political role (2010:237). They note incidents in the history of Shiite Islam that suggest that, under different circumstances, a given Shiite leader might act as either a quietist or activist. But rather than positing the existence of two disparate doctrines within Shiite politics, they analyse the personality and political thought of clerical elites to explain these differences. The personalities and political thought of two Shiite religious leaders of modern times,

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<sup>6</sup> However, the exponents of the quietist posture have often been, in practice, supporters of authoritarian politics and have offered unquestioning and immediate obedience to almost any Muslim authority that publicly adhered to the Sharia' (2010: 237).

Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran and Grand Ayatollah Sistani of Iraq, have been analyzed most extensively. It has been argued that Khomeini, the pivotal Shiite clerical elite activist in the modern Middle East, did not exhibit much evidence of activism and political engagement prior to 1963. During the 1940s and 1950s when he was accounted as one of the most esteemed teachers of the Qom Seminary, he was reluctant to interfere in politics at any level. He therefore provides an example of how the practice of quietism and activism can be found to characterize a single Shiite cleric (Rahimi 2008). The case of Sistani is equally interesting. He has become more actively involved in the politics of the Shiite community in Iraq since 2003; but prior to the overthrow of Saddam's regime in Iraq, he had not engaged in a single political activity (Martin 2003). The political trajectories of both Khomeini and Sistani moved from a quietist stance towards more activism. There are Shiite elites who started from an activist stance and then moved towards quietism. Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, the spiritual leader of the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah from 1982, and Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, deputy Supreme Leader to Imam Khomeini, are two notable examples: both gave up direct involvement in politics at the last stages of their lives (Rahimi 2004, Hamoudi 2009). It is evidence of both political quietism and activism in a single Shiite cleric that leads contributors to this third stream to question the very existence of the dichotomy in Shiite politics.

A review of these three streams of the literature suggests that the use of the quietism-activism dichotomy to explain the political positions of Shiite clerical elites has worked to obscure rather than illuminate the political dynamics of Shiite clerical elite political activism in the Middle East. Terms like 'Quietism', 'Activism', 'Islamism', or 'Semi-Quietism' as applied to Shiite Islam have been difficult to define and apply. For example while some studies characterize Sistani as a 'quietist' (Martin 2003), others see him as 'semi-quietist' (Marcinkowski 2007), while still others see him as 'an active Machiavellian' (Visser 2006). It may be that none have succeeded in explaining his political doctrine properly. Those who have tried to define two seemingly different political tendencies within Shiite Islam have not provided robust grounds for their arguments; and their application of these categories to the Shiite clerical elite has produced confusion rather than clarification.

In sum, a better understanding both of Shiite political thought and of the role of Shiite clerical elites in politics is needed; particularly at a time of growing concern about the Shiite ascendance in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon and its likely impact on the future of the Middle East. While scholars have offered evidence that challenges this assumed religio-political dichotomy, there has been no attempt to challenge it through an analysis of the factors which

influence the political stances that Shiite clerical elites have taken. The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to explore these factors in greater detail.

### **The Argument and Analytical Framework**

This study seeks to explain the processes that incline a Shiite clerical elite towards assuming activist political posture. A number of assumptions need to be set out and some concepts should be considered at the start in order to clarify the role of Shiite clerical elites in contemporary Middle East politics. These are more specifically the Shiite Clerical Elite, the Political Opportunity Structure, and the role of Perception, *ijtihad*, in seizing political opportunities by the Shiite clerical elite.

#### ***The Shiite Clerical Elite***<sup>7</sup>

What do we mean by the Shiite clerical elite? What are their interests? Do they constitute a social class? During the life of the Prophet, there were Muslims who devoted themselves to learning the divine message and broadcasting it to the Muslim laity.<sup>8</sup> Since then, Muslims from all social backgrounds who become acquainted with the teachings of the *Quran* and the traditions of the Prophet and his successors have become members of the clerical elite. Their responsibility in general, as the *Quran* has set forth, is to ‘warn others’ about divine rules and obligations and to protect the citadel of Islam.<sup>9</sup> The most prestigious clerical elites in Shiite Islam, however, were those twelve righteous successors of the Prophet, known as Infallible Imams. Their responsibility was to preserve the original divine message that had been revealed to the Prophet and to transmit it in compliance with contextual changes impacting Muslim society.

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<sup>7</sup> This study focuses on those clerical elites who adhere to the traditionalist Usuli Schools. Unless stated otherwise, throughout this research the terms ‘clerical elite’, ‘the clergy’, and ‘Ulama’ refer to this category of clergy, which represents the majority of Shiite clerical scholars.

<sup>8</sup> The necessity of forming a group of scholars, or a Muslim clerical elite, was explicitly mentioned in the *Quran*. The relevant verse reads: ‘it is not for the believers to go forth all at once; for there should be separate from every division of them a group to obtain understanding in the religion and warn their people when they return to them’ (IX: 122).

<sup>9</sup> The term ‘protecting the citadel of Islam (and/or the faith)’, *hefz beyzat al-Islam*, literally protecting Islam’s testicles, is a common concept in the lexicon of political jurisprudence. It refers to those Islamic and Shiite principles that the faith’s very existence is dependent upon. Sheikh Ja’far Najafi Kashif al- Ghita (d.1812) states that *Beyzat al-Islam*, refers to those critical foundations of Islam without which the existence of Islam and the Muslim community are in danger (1984, Vol: XXI: 18-19). Also Mirza Mohammad Hussein Naini (d. 1936) declares: ‘*hefz beyzat al-Islam [protecting the citadel of Islam] is Protecting Islam from outsiders’ interference, and concerning over their relevant ploys, through employment of the defence powers and enhancing the warfare capacities*’ (Naini 2003:5). Throughout this study, whenever the term citadel of Islam is used, it implies the exact meaning for ‘beyzat al- Islam’.

With the commencement of the Major Occultation, fallible Shiite clerical elites have acted as the Imams' general deputies, and since then, have led the community and undertaken almost the same set of responsibilities. As an agency, an effective social ensemble, they have changed over the course of the last eleven centuries. However, their main responsibility as socio-political actors has remained largely the same throughout the course of this time.<sup>10</sup> From the establishment of Shiite Islam until modern times, being a Shiite cleric was not considered as an occupation; nor did it confer social privileges. Therefore, Shiite clerical elites cannot be considered as forming a social class *per se*. Historically the Shiite clerical elite forms a social stratum within the community, whose members are grouped based on shared values and responsibilities, and interact with each other in regard to those responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> The Shiite clerical elite, with respect to the divine responsibility that has been assigned to them, betrays an entropic dynamic: 'the order of the clerical authority is in its disorder' (Amanat 1988). The power of Shiite clerical elites throughout history rests in the extent to which they, as an individual and/or a social status, are able to direct the will of the laity and to mobilise them towards the objective of protecting the faith's citadel. To fulfil this strategic role, clerical elites have used different tactics in interacting with the laity, with specific social classes as, for instance, the merchants, landowners, petty bourgeoisie, and with the state.

Facing different circumstances, diverse upcoming events during the transitory phase of occultation era, clerical elites are responsible for protecting the community and for leading the community.<sup>12</sup> Shiite clerical elites are (1) responsible for pursuing one objective at all times, which is 'the protection of the citadel of the faith', and (2) charged with engaging in a process of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and remaining vigilant in their practice and deployment of their *ijtihad* and in rendering judgements as they know that they are fallible.

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<sup>10</sup> A more detailed overview of the Shiite clerical elite will be presented in Chapter 2. Historical snapshots of their structure will be presented in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

<sup>11</sup> According to the fundamental principles of Shiite Islam, the Shiite clerical elite is 'the proof' of the Infallible Imam to all members of the community. Consequently, according to Shiite thought, Shiite clerical elites by definition cannot form a social class, as this would imply the existence of a schism in their relations with other elements within society. Some scholars maintain that it is more relevant to describe membership in the Shiite clerical elite, the *Shiite Ulama*, as a social status (Litvak 1998: 2); or as Moaddel (1986: 520) suggests, as a social category.

<sup>12</sup> According to Shiite doctrine, during the time in which the twelfth Imam was serving his minor occultation (873-941), a Shiite follower wrote a letter to him asking for his guidance concerning a series of issues that had arisen for his followers. In response, a deputy of the Imam provided a signed script, *tawqi*, stating that: '[a]s for the events which may occur in future, refer to the transmitter (*ruwat*) of our traditions (*hadith*); who are my proof (*Hujjat*) to you, and I am the proof of Allah to you all' (Saduq, *Kamal al-Din wa Tamam al-Ne'mah*, Vol. II: 483).

According to relevant traditions believed by the majority *Usuli Mujtahids*, those clerical elites qualified to serve as ‘transmitters of the Imams’ hadiths’, have assumed a divine responsibility and authority to exercise *ijtihad*, based on Islamic scripts and in regard to existing circumstances, in order to lead the community.

### ***Political Opportunity Structures***

The concept of ‘political opportunity structure’ provides a means to explain, sometimes to predict, the ‘periodicity, style, and content of activist claims’ in a political context (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Sidney Tarrow defines political opportunity structures as ‘consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements’ (1996: 54).

The political opportunity structure is the ‘most widely used concept’ in defining the characteristics of the relevant external environment to the contentious politics (Della Porta 2013). Although, the social movement theorists may not necessarily share a common delineation of the concept, the majority of scholars focus on ‘the opening and closing of political space and its institutional and substantive location’ when studying a social movement (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 277). Whilst ‘open opportunity structure’ may encourage political actors to engage in collective actions and to form a social movement, ‘the close opportunity structure’ impedes the emergence of contentious politics.

Furthermore, close and/or open political opportunity structure as a component of a given political context can involve factors located at multiple levels of analysis. To systematically address these levels, this study consider the objective political opportunity structure at six interrelated levels of analysis: International, Regional, National, Societal, Bureaucratic, and individual (Singer 1961). For instance, international relations would influence the openness or closeness of political opportunity structure for a movement. At regional level, especially throughout the volatile Middle East, the political transformations in a given country have the outmost influence on opportunity structure of the neighbouring country. At national level, state’s repressions would result in close political opportunity structure. At societal level, the socio-political structure of a country has its part in defining the political opportunity for a movement. At bureaucratic level, the coherent organisational structure among elites may be considered as a factor that opens new political opportunity structure. And finally at individual level, the activities of a charismatic leader would facilitate or hinder the seizure of political opportunity structure.

Nonetheless, the concept of political opportunity structure has been criticised on the grounds that scholars tend to emphasize objective political opportunities without reference to perception (Goodwin and Jasper 2004). The overall argument is that an opportunity is only an opportunity if it is perceived to be one by agents (Suh 2001, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Thus, effective use of the concept requires a consideration of agents' subjective interpretations of political opportunities.

### ***Perception (ijtihad)***

While different dimensions have been attributed to the political opportunity structure within the relevant literature, it seems that recognition of close/open structure is crucial in formation of social movements. To invite mobilisation, political opportunity should be perceived as 'open' by potential actors. Nonetheless, while political actors act upon their perceptions about the available resources and opportunities, their interpretation 'will not always mirror reality' (Banaszak 1996: 31). To explain the process of clerical elites' perception in Shiite world, one should consider the concept of *ijtihad*. Among Shiite clerical elites, this interpretation will necessarily involve their engagement with divine law through *ijtihad*.

*Ijtihad* is the maximum 'exertion of mental energy' by a qualified cleric, a Mujtahid, to search for and apply the faith's principles for the purpose of discovering the divine law applicable to a given circumstance (Hallaq 1984). Every move a Shiite cleric makes, every opinion he expresses, and every socio-political posture he adopts is rooted in the principle that he interprets as applicable to the circumstances he is facing. Indeed, a Mujtahid, as the title delivers on its part, acts and lives based on his *ijtihad*.

As explained previously, during the Occultation Era, when the Shiite community is deprived of the leadership of the infallible Imam, clerical elites act as general deputies of the Imam. To discover the divine law governing a given circumstance, it is incumbent upon a qualified Shiite jurist, a Mujtahid, to exert his utmost effort to interpreting fundamental principles in ways that provide an appropriate response to those circumstances. Mujtahids believe that the response they make to changing circumstances based on their *ijtihad* represents a tactical decision, and not a strategic one that bears on the fundamental principles that are set out in the Quran by the Prophet and the Imams. The *ijtihad* of a clerical elite is a determining factor in his political positioning in response to given circumstances. Shiite elites are given the right to interpret the Quran and religious traditions in ways that respond appropriately to occurring events. This is something not given to the religious authorities of

other Islamic sects, and it gives a unique dynamism to Shiite clerical elites in their responsibility as leaders of the community. Also it should be noted that it is licit for Shiite clerical elites to reason differently from their fellow clerics in response to similar socio-political circumstances.

The Shiite community, deprived of the infallible source of leadership during the occultation era, is under constant threat until the promised day of the Imam's re-emergence. Until then, the general deputies of the Imam, vigilantly aware of their shortcomings, strive to protect the citadel of the faith and the integrity of the community. Central to fulfilling this responsibility, which sometimes requires that they pursue political activism, is the power to mobilise the laity. It is where their interpretations about the political opportunity structure become influential.

Through this study we argue that whether Shiite clerical elites adopt an activist or relatively quietist political posture depends on the interpretation they render of a given political opportunity structure and the objective political opportunity structure. Therefore, to address the shortcomings of the literature, throughout this study 'the political context' for Shiite activism is defined as the interaction of objective political opportunity structure and the perception of the clerical elite about that given structure. The different stances taken by clerical elites in different contexts can be shown to be attributable, not to doctrinal differences but, at least in part, to the actors' different perceptions of the political opportunity structure at the time.

### **The Argument and Hypothesis**

This study challenges the notion that there exists a *strategic* distinction between 'activism' and 'quietism'. It sees 'quietism' and activism', instead, as *tactical* political postures. Thus, a Shiite clerical elite's seemingly quietist posture in a given context may, in fact, represent the utmost political activism possible at a particular time and place. It may also be part of an activist political strategy. For instance, during the National Movement in Iran (discussed in chapter 4), Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi assumed a relatively quietistic posture in public but, as archival materials revealed decades later, was at the same time engaged in back-channel negotiations with the royal court. Thus while, at some points in the thesis, these terms (as well as 'quietist/activist', and 'quietistic/activist') are used, they are used as descriptive – not analytical – terms, and only in order to distinguish between different political postures assumed by Shiite clerics in relation to specific contexts. In other words, the terms are used,

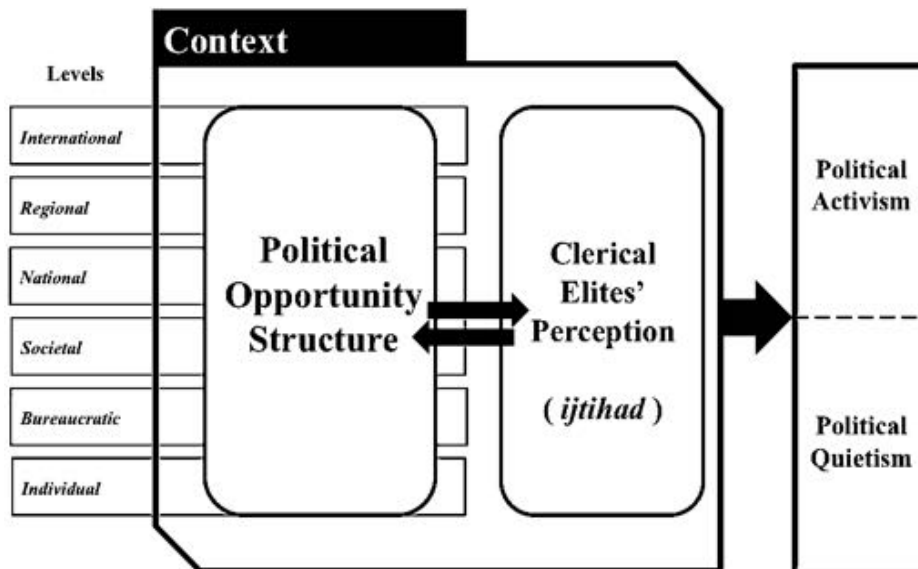
when necessary, not to refer to some strategic difference, but only to describe positions taken by specific clerics at a certain time and place.

There has not been extensive study of perception and political opportunities and application of the concept of perceived opportunities to case studies. This thesis strives to shed some light on this still *terra incognita* within the literature by exploring the role that perception of whether opportunities enable or constrain social mobilisation plays in the decision of Shiite clerical elites to become politically active or to stay out of politics. It argues that the principle that constructs clerical elite authority within the Shiite community -- the responsibility to preserve the very existence of the faith and its followers -- is a strategic and cohesive one. The argument to be developed here is that that decision of the Shiite clerical elite to assume an activist political posture at a given time and place depends on the political context-- that is, (1) the multilevel political opportunity structure which bears on the ability of clerical elites to mobilise their followers, and (2) their perception of that structure. Would the context to be permissive, a Shiite clerical elite will be more likely to become actively engaged in politics to fulfil his role vis-à-vis the community; otherwise the Shiite clerical elite remain politically quiet in restrictive context.

An analysis of the perceived political opportunity structure in a given circumstance provides a means of understanding what has been labeled in the literature as ‘quietism’ and ‘activism’ on the part of Shiite clerical elites as tactical political practices. Shiite clerical elites, like any other political actors, might perceive the political opportunity structure as being open or closed, the context to be either permissive or restrictive. The hypothesis of this study is, as follows: whenever the Shiite clerical elite perceives the open structure he will be more likely to engage in politics, either individually or through alliance with other leaders, through giving legal opinions or engaging in legal arbitration. Nevertheless, Charles Kurzman argues that there is a possibility of a mismatch between the objective and perceived political opportunity structures. He states that political opportunities are subjective, and actors may either fail to perceive those, which might appear objectively to exist, or perceive opportunities where none exist (1994). For their socio-political responsibilities, it is universally believed among the Usuli Shiite clerics that qualified Mujtahids have the responsibility of *Qadha*, giving legal opinions in disputes among their Shiite followers. Consequently, Shiite clerical elites will engage in political activism to secure this task whenever they perceive the open political opportunity structure. (A summary of the argument is represented in Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1 The Context for Shiite Clerical Elites Political Activism and Quietism**



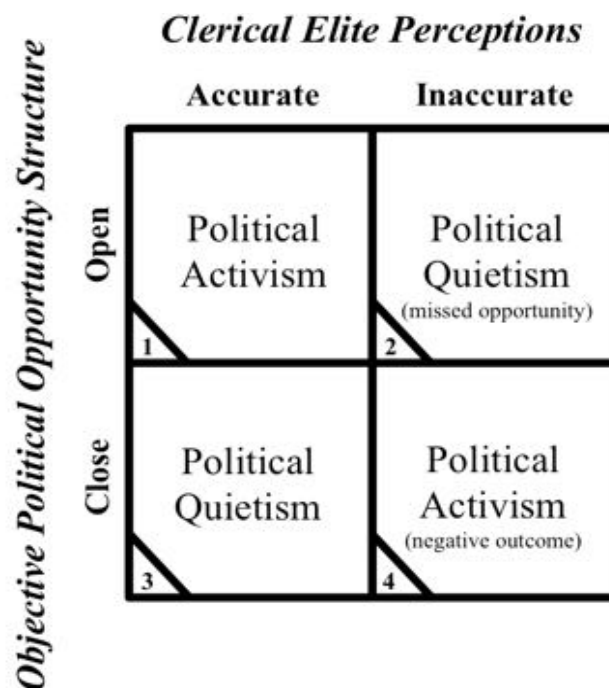
Four distinctive outcomes may be drawn from the analytical framework, which are presented in Figure 1.2 below. Like any other political actor, the clerical elite cannot seize a political opportunity unless they perceive there to be an opportunity. If there exists a relatively open political opportunity structure, and clerical elites have an accurate perception of it, they will become activist (Quadrant 1); if they misperceive it they will remain quiet and miss the opportunity to take action (Quadrant 2). If the opportunity structure is relatively closed, and clerical elites perceive it accurately, they will remain quiet (Quadrant 3); if they misperceive it, they will be active (Quadrant 4).

Modern Shiite history provides examples of all four possible contexts and outcomes. As the thesis will show, in all the three of its case studies the political opportunity structure and elite perceptions produced the outcome represented by quadrant 1: the political opportunity was relatively open, the Shiite clergy perceived it accurately, and this produced a permissive context for their becoming actively engaged in politics. Quadrant 2: the 1991 Shiite Uprising in Iraq illustrates a circumstance in which the political opportunity structure was relatively open but the clergy missed the opportunity due to misperception. At the time, lay Iraqis were ready to actively oppose the regime of Saddam, but the clerical leadership in Najaf was unwilling to take action, and its delay in engaging in politics led to the crackdown of the popular uprising. Where the political opportunity structure is closed but the clergy,

perceiving it inaccurately, assumes a politically activist posture (Quadrant 3), their activism will fail in achieving their objectives. A notable case in recent Shiite history is the activism of the Shiite clerical elite during the Persian Constitutional Revolution. At the time the opportunity structure was relatively closed for clerical activism, however the majority of the clergy became politically active, with disastrous results for clerical authority. On the other hand, if Shiite clerical elites perceive a closed opportunity structure accurately (Quadrant 4), they will remain quiet and stay out of politics. This case represents the majority of the faith's pre-modern history.<sup>13</sup>

In overall, the judgments of Shiite clerical elites about a given structure are essentially influenced by the process *ijtihad*. Through exercising their *ijtihad*, clerical leaders of the Shiite community may perceive a given structure as open and/or close for engaging in contentious politics. Therefore, by considering the interaction between the existing political opportunity structure and clerical elite interpretations of that structure throughout the history, this study aims to gain a better understanding of Shiite elite politics, of the possibilities for inter-faith alliances, and their potential influence on the contemporary Middle East.

Figure 1.2 The Analytical Matrix



<sup>13</sup> Relevant cases for each quadrant will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

In investigating the political role that the Shiite clerical elite played throughout the history which led to the faith ascendancy in 1979 Iran, 2003 Iraq, and 2006 Lebanon, this thesis sheds light, as well, on the power that they, as political actors, may achieve in order to mobilise their followers.

In ‘The Powers of Association’, the French philosopher, Bruno Latour, points to an essential paradox in the exercise of power: ‘Power over something or someone is a composition made by many people’. Thus, ‘[t]he amount of power exercised varies not according to the amount of power someone has, but to the number of other people who enter into the composition’ (1986: 265). The exercise of Shiite clerical authority throughout the faith’s history has been marked by this paradox. Although this thesis focuses on individual members of the Shiite clerical elite, indeed their ability to exercise power depended on their ability to form associations with others and, most notably, with the laity.

The title of this thesis, ‘Power of Association’, reflects this feature of Shiite clerical authority. As will be observed throughout the next chapters and discussed in further detail in the final chapter, Shiite clerical authority was developed concurrent with the emergence of the faith and has been further developed throughout Shiite history. Seen as divinely-assigned, this authority has provided the Shiite clergy with enormous *potential* power. Their power, however, becomes politically *actual* only when they were provided with a permissive context that enables them to form alignments with each other, and to mobilise the laity to act in a given context. The power of association, or the power of solidarity, in this sense, is possible when the Shiite clergy, as a unified body, accurately perceives the existence of an open political opportunity structure, seizes it, and is able to successfully mobilise the community to engage in contentious politics.<sup>14</sup>

### **Methodology, Data, and Sources**

This study focuses on three cases of Shiite clerical elite political engagement in the contemporary Middle East -- three examples of transformative events in which the Shiite clerical elite played an important political role. These cases -- the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, and the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006 -- allow us to explore both the political opportunity structures that clerical elites confronted at specific times and places, and how the perception (ijtihad) of individual Shiite

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<sup>14</sup> The power of association, which refers to the solidarity of Shiite clerical elites and which can be employed to successfully mobilise the laity mass, is shown in three schematic figures at the end of chapter 4, 5, and 6.

clerical elites led to their taking an activist political stance in response to unfolding circumstances.

The political opportunity structures that clerical elites faced in each of these cases were multi-leveled, and the development both of these structures and of clerical elite perceptions of them occurred over the course of the modern history of the countries concerned. The political opportunity structure of Iran in 1979, along with the perception of the Shiite clergy at the time (the context of the Islamic Revolution) were shaped throughout the decades following the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905. The 1920 Iraqi Revolt influenced the post-2003 Shiite ascendancy in Iraq. The activities of Imam Musa Sadr beginning in 1958 provided a foundation for the Shiite hegemony achieved in post-2006 Lebanon. Consequently, a substantial part of the narrative of each case study is devoted to explaining factors that had been developing throughout the modern history of Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon and that contributed to the objective political opportunity structures that existed at the time of these events. To understand the political postures that Shiite clerics assumed in each of these cases, the history of these events must also be read from their point of view. In sum, how the modern history of Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon shaped the objective political opportunity structure in each of the specific events that constitute cases of Shiite clerical elite political engagement, and how they were seen through the eyes of Shiite clerical elites, are of central importance in explaining the three cases. Consequently, only a relatively short part of the narrative is devoted to describing the actual ‘case study’ – i.e., the specific events in which clerical elites assumed an activist posture.

The recent history of the Middle East offers three examples of transformative events in which the Shiite clerical elite played an important political role: the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, and the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006.

### ***The Islamic Revolution of Iran, 1979***

In the wake of 11 February 1979, mass protests against what, at that time, was generally held to be one of the most powerful governments in the Middle East,<sup>15</sup> enabled a wide variety of opponents of the regime to overthrow the Persian monarchy. Although various groups with

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<sup>15</sup> Just months before the revolution, the Shah of Iran was believed to be one of the strongest regional leaders. In his famous visit to Iran in early 1978, President Carter made his New Year’s toast saying: ‘Iran, because of the great leadership of the Shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world. This is a great tribute to you, Your Majesty, and to your leadership and to the respect and the admiration and love which your people give to you’. Quoted in Kurzaman 1996.

different ideologies and political views played an active role in the fall of the Pahlavi monarchy, it was a Shiite clerical elites, with their vigorous social networks and charisma, that played the most crucial role in coordinating urban mass resistance against the Shah (Singer 1961). Two months after the overthrow of the monarchy, Iran officially became the first Shiite state of the modern Middle East in after a referendum in April 1979 in which an absolute majority of Iranians voted for the Islamic Republic. The Shiite state was constituted on the basis of the theory of the Absolute Guardianship of the Jurist advocated by Imam Khomeini and his colleagues. Since then, this idea has influenced Shiite activist movements throughout the region.

### ***Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2003***

The second crucial case is Operation Iraqi Freedom. This was a military operation in which a coalition of forces -- led by the United States -- invaded Iraq in March 2003 with the aim of overthrowing the government of Saddam Hussein and establishing a system deemed to be more compatible with Western interests. The invasion and its aftermath remains the focus of an on-going controversy. The invasion was consistent with a new doctrine promoted by the United States administration at the time: a doctrine of pre-emptively striking against rogue regimes which threatened the international community (Schmidt and Williams 2008). Parliamentary elections held in 2005 under the transitional law established following the invasion, brought Iraqi Shiites to power after centuries of being ruled by Sunni Muslims. The leaders of Najaf seminary and, particularly, Grand Ayatollah Sistani's fatwa calling for 'one man, one vote' on the eve of the election, played an undeniable role in bringing about the triumph for the Shiite community (Jones 2007: 257). Amid huge numbers of casualties, sectarian violence, and civil war, the Shiites of Iraq provided with an opportunity to form the *first Shiite government in the Arab world*. Since then, the Shiite clerical elites of Najaf and Karbala seminaries have played an active role in the politics of the country.

### ***The Israel-Hezbollah War, 2006***

The third case to be explored is the war of July 2006 between Lebanon's Shiite organisation, Hezbollah, and Israel. Hezbollah is a social and political movement that enjoys huge mass support in Lebanon, especially among the Shiite community, which comprised about forty

percent of the country's population at that time.<sup>16</sup> In July 2006, Hezbollah's paramilitary forces fired rockets across Israel's northern border, killing three soldiers and capturing two. They demanded the release of four Lebanese prisoners held by Israel in exchange for the two captured Israeli soldiers.<sup>17</sup> Israel blamed the Lebanese government for this incident; and, despite Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's denial of Lebanese government responsibility, Israel launched airstrikes not only into Southern Lebanon towards Hezbollah's strongholds but also targeted Lebanon's civilian infrastructure.<sup>18</sup> After 33 days of constant attacks, and without having achieved its planned objectives, Israel accepted a ceasefire (Woodward 2004). Although Lebanon sustained considerable casualties and damage, Hezbollah and its secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah, claimed victory for itself. Since Israel had failed to achieve its stated goals, made earlier by Prime Minister Olmert, this represented the first defeat of the Israeli army in the Middle East while fighting with a neighbouring Muslim state.

These three cases have much in common. First, in all cases, Shiite clerical elites mobilised the community in support of political action. All these cases have three additional features in common. Second, in Iran and Iraq, Shiites constituted the absolute majority of the population and in Lebanon they constituted the most populous sect. Approximately 92% of Iran's population are Shiites; they constitute about 65% of Iraq's population and more than one-third of Lebanon's population.<sup>19</sup> Third, in all cases, and in contrast to their Sunnite counterparts, Shiite clerical elites enjoyed a degree of autonomy from the state. Shiite clerical elites are supported by funds from their followers, especially wealthy merchants. Consequently, with the exception of a few brief historical periods, their authority has remained rooted more in their popular constituency than in the state's support. Shiite clerical elites in Iran of 1979, Iraq in 2003, and Lebanon 2006 were all independent of formal state power, thus providing them with greater freedom of action. Finally, in these cases, Shiite clerical elites actively engaged in forming a transnational network.

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<sup>16</sup> Fawaz Gerges, 'Hezbollah and the future of Lebanon,' *Dissent Magazine*, June 1, 2008, accessed February 28, 2012, [http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/hezbollah-and-the-future-of-lebanon](http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/hezbollah-and-the-future-of-lebanon).

<sup>17</sup> Press Conference with Hasan Nasrallah, Al-Manar TV, 12 July 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Helena Cobban, 'The 33-Day War,' *Boston Review*, November 2, 2006, accessed February 28, 2012, <http://www.bostonreview.net/cobban-33-day-war>.

<sup>19</sup> The statistics are based on data from various scholarly reports, local governments and western NGOs. For detailed statistics on Shiite population see 'Mapping the Global Muslim Population,' *Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life*, October 7, 2009, accessed June 30, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/>

Transnational relationships have formed among Shiite clerical elites over the course of many centuries. However, these relations were strengthened with the resurgence of Qom seminary in Iran in the early twentieth century. Since then, evidence suggests that Shiite clerical elites have supported their colleagues who are active in other countries by providing them with moral and financial support.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, there has been constant exchange among scholars in seminaries across Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. Grand Ayatollah Hairi, the founder of Qom seminary in Iran, moved there from Karbala, Iraq; the majority of the leaders of Najaf seminary, including Grand Ayatollah Sistani, are descended originally from Iran; and the leader and resurrector of the Shiite community in Lebanon, Imam Musa Sadr, was a student of both Qom and Najaf seminary before migrating to Lebanon in 1958.

Despite these similarities, the three cases also exhibit differences. The political opportunity structures in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon differed and, so therefore, did the context in which the events that each case highlights unfolded. Although, international and regional factors in all three countries overlap to some extent, national, societal, bureaucratic, and individual factors comprising the political opportunity structures varied considerably. For example, three distinctive national-level factors shaped the political opportunity structures in each case: nationalism in Iran (Pahlavi 2007), tribalism in Iraq (Cottam 1979: 134), and sectarianism in Lebanon (Nakash 1994). Different political opportunity structures distinguish each of these cases from the others and, together, make these studies individually unique, yet collectively comprehensive.

Bureaucratic-level factors also differed across the three cases as a result of the nature of Shiite clerical elite organisations in each country. In Iran, the main centre for Shiite clerical elites, Qom seminary, is less than a century old. At the time of the Iranian Revolution, the seminary had been suffering repression from Reza Shah Pahlavi's government, and it was only after Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi assumed sole leadership of the seminary that it became one of the most influential Shiite centres of the world. On the other hand, Najaf seminary in Iraq has remained the main centre of Shiite clerical elite scholasticism since it was founded in the eleventh century. Yet, the majority of Najaf seminary leaders had Iranian descendants and, especially in modern times, this factor restrained their freedom of action with regard to the Arab-majority Shiite laity. Lebanon offers a contrast with these two cases. In Lebanon, Shiite clerical elites have not had a cohesive organisation at all. No distinguished Shiite seminary is based in modern Lebanon; in

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<sup>20</sup> Some cases of these relationships are discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

fact, the majority of the country's Shiite clerical leaders are students of Iraqi and Iranian seminaries. Shiite seminaries in Iran and Iraq, and the absence of a distinguished seminary in Lebanon, have definitively influenced opportunities for Shiite clerical elite organisation in these countries.

These three cases have not only undeniably influenced the politics of the contemporary Middle East; but, given their common features and different political opportunity structures, they offer an opportunity to analyse the factors which shaped the course of Shiite clerical elite political activism in different contexts. Each is intended to show how different Shiite clerics, with different perceptions of the existing political opportunity structure, conducted themselves.

### ***Data and Sources***

This study explores how Shiite clerical elites perceived the world around them in order to explain why and how they sought to mobilise their followers for the political activities that culminated in the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the toppling of the Baath regime in Iraq, and the emergence of Hezbollah as a formidable power in Lebanon.

The relevant context of this activism consists of the political opportunity structure that existed at the time and the perceptions that Shiite clerical elites had of that structure. To explore this context, the thesis draws on a range of source materials.

Information about the relevant *objective political opportunity* structures that clerical elites faced at the times in which they sought to mobilize their followers for active political engagement is drawn largely from secondary sources. To understand *the perceptions of key clerical elites* involved in these events, the study draws on three distinct, yet collectively comprehensive, data sources: historic archives, original manifestos, and interviews with elite Shiite clerics. Discussion of perceptions of clerical elites who confronted challenges in the earlier history of Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon – in the Persian Constitutional Revolution, the great Iraqi revolt against British Occupation in 1920, and the Lebanese Civil war – draws on material in historic archives, including personal letters, formal telegraph messages, and newspaper reports. I also consulted public manifestos of the groups involved in the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the formation of the Shiite government in post-Saddam Iraq, and the Shiite parties, Hezbollah and AMAL in Lebanon.

Only a handful of papers and book chapters produced by scholars in the west concerning the Shiite political ascendancy in the Middle East explore the role and perceptions of Shiite clerical elites who engage in politics; and few of these have used interviews to



illuminate their reflections and the perceptions that led to this engagement. This thesis addresses this methodological gap: to further our understanding of how Shiite clerical elites perceived the nature of the opportunity structure they confronted, I conducted over three hundred hours of open-ended interviews with elite Shiite clerics in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon.

The social science literature points to a number of methodological obstacles in interviewing elites. Most frequently cited in the literature are two difficulties: the reliability of the data produced by interviews, as they may be quite subjective in their natures, and gaining access to elites (Mikecz 2012, Berry 2002). One of the main objectives of my research was to explain how Shiite clerical elites perceive the world around them; therefore, for my interviewees being subjective about my questions was not a major issue. However, in cases, where it was necessary, I triangulate the data gathered through interviews with other interviews and/or secondary sources.

Shenton and Hayter (2004) point out that in qualitative investigations, the researcher's success both in gaining access and positioning himself properly has a significant effect on the quality and trustworthiness of the data. However, my personal background gave me a unique advantage with respect to both of these issues. First, it put me in a position to gain access to various religious and political figures in Iran (mainly in Tehran and Qom), Iraq (in the cities of Najaf and Karbala), and Lebanon (in Beirut and the south). Second, because I was in a position to obtain direct and indirect personal recommendations, I was seen by my clerical elite interviewees as part of their rank and file. Consequently, I not only was given access to the subjects I wished to interview, but was usually greeted warmly by them. This enabled me, to a considerable extent, to overcome both methodological difficulties involved in interviewing elites.

The pool of interviewees ranged from elite informants (e.g. teachers of Shiite seminaries, and local politicians) to prominent individuals at the forefront of contemporary Middle Eastern politics (e.g. the Grand Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf, and former President Hashemi Rafsanjani of Iran). Over sixty elite figures agreed to allow me to interview them. I compiled an initial list of potential interview subjects by approaching the highest ranking *Maraji'* in Iran and Iraq and those closely associated with them (i.e. their sons, representatives, and students). In the process of conducting interviews and compiling information from various other sources, I re-evaluated the list, removing some figures and adding others (as, for instance, as a result of my visit to, and the recommendations I received from, *Maraji'* offices in Qom and Najaf).

For my interviews with clerical elites, I formulated a set of open-ended questions designed to address the hypothesis of the thesis, and to fill gaps in the literature relating to the events that form the basis of the three case studies presented in the thesis. These questions changed somewhat after I began conducting interviews in order to avoid repetition and to fill in remaining gaps. Every interview started with a broad and open question as to whether the interviewee believed that there exists two Shiite Islams among the clergy -- one politically 'quiet' and the other 'active'. Their answers to this question were important not only for determining clerical elite perceptions concerning this putative dichotomy that western scholars have defined, but also as a means of understanding how current members of the Shiite clergy relate themselves to current regional politics. In many cases, responses to this broad opening question were very elaborate, indicating that the interviewees had given much thought to the political postures assumed by the Shiite clergy. It appeared that they had already thought about this so-called 'quietist/activist' schism among Shiite clerical elites, and that the issue is the focus of an ongoing debate among many of them. They were willing to answer all my questions and engaged with me in a sympathetic manner. It seemed to me that clerical elites wanted their voices to be heard in the west.

The responses of the high-profile individuals with whom I conducted interviews constitute an original contribution to our knowledge of Shiite political activism and to the current Shiite political ascendancy in the Middle East. They provide insider information about the political postures assumed by clerical elites in relation to key events in the contemporary history of the region. In some cases, the highest ranking *Maraji'* of Najaf and Qom recommended that I meet with their sons or trusted entourages for further face-to-face discussion. For example, after a half hour interview, Grand Ayatollah Sistani advised me to seek my answers from his son, Seyyed Mohammadreza who, as he stated: 'has more time to explain these issues for you in further detail'. Overall, the interviewees reveal clerical elite perceptions of different political opportunity structures, both at key points in the faith's history and with respect to the three cases that are the focus of this study, and the processes through which they interpreted them. Taken together, the information gained from these interviews presents the perspective of a main participant involved in each of the case studies. Where possible, data from these interviews relating to the objective political opportunity structure were checked against other, mainly secondary sources. Finally, limitations on space, and the consequent need to present a reasonably concise set of narratives, meant that only excerpts from the interviews I conducted during the past four years could be included in the thesis. Most of the data collected through interviews are

presented in footnotes and to serve as evidence for and further illumination of the argument that is elaborated in the body of the thesis. Although somewhat longer than one would expect elite interviews normally to be, the interviews represent an important facet of the thesis and should provide a valuable resource for future studies. Indeed, I will be presenting a compendium of the full-length interview material in a volume that further elaborates Shiite clerical elite perceptions of the contexts that they are facing in the contemporary era.

### **Organisation of the Study**

The next chapter (**Chapter Two: *Shiite Doctrines and Clerical Authority***) provides an understanding of Shiite jurisprudence and the socio-political role of the clerical elite. It reviews arguments concerning clerical authority prior and during the Occultation Era, and the function of *ijtihad* as a means of inferring religious law from the faith's principles. It also defines the institution of Shiite Marja'iyya. The chapter then discusses the factors that influence the process of *ijtihad* by members of the Shiite clerical elite, and how this creates different contexts and different political postures.

The thesis then presents an historic overview of the role of the Shiite clerical elite in politics, and their interactions with governments since the emergence of Shiite Islam fourteen centuries ago (**Chapter Three: *Shiite Activism: A Historical Review***). It starts by explaining the historical role of Shiite clergy as deputies of the Infallible Imam who mediate between laities and the principles of the faith, and how the Occultation of the last infallible Imam defined their authority and created a socio-political vacuum within the community. It clarifies the main variables which this study employs to explain when clerical elites are likely to be more or less active in politics: the interaction of different objective political structures with different Shiite elite perceptions. It traces a turning point in the history of Shiite politics, the rise of Safavid Persia and offers a novel reading of the stance of the Shiite clerical elite during the Persian Constitutional Revolution (between 1906 to 1911), which marked the emergence of Shiite clerical activism in the contemporary Middle East.

The next three chapters focus on the case studies in a chronological order. First, there is an exploration of Shiite activism in the Islamic Revolution of Iran (**Chapter Four: *Iran 1979, First Shiite State in the Middle East***). The chapter begins with a discussion of the socio-political context of the post-Constitutional Revolution; it then examines the role played by Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi in the institutionalisation of the Qom Seminary and the political posture which he adopted while he was the sole Shiite Marja' of the Shiite world.

Finally, it reviews the rise of Khomeini as the most active religious figures of the time and the role of the Shiite clergy in establishing the first Shiite state of the Middle East.

**Chapter Five** (*Iraq 2003, Ascent of the Shiite Majority*) focuses on the political ascent of Shiites in post-Saddam Iraq. It starts by tracing the background of the events that are the focus of this chapter: the role of the Najaf clerical circle throughout the Shiite world, the leadership of the clerical elite in the 1920 revolt in Iraq and why, in its aftermath, the Shiites of Iraq felt swindled, and how this resentment within the community surfaced almost nine decades later; the political postures of Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim and of Mohammad Baqer Sadr prior to and after the rise of the Baath Party in the late 1960s; incidents that occurred during the Shiite uprising against Saddam's regime in 1991, and the role of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini in that uprising. With this as a background, it then explores the role of Shiite elites in post-Baath Iraq, with a focus on Grand Ayatollah Sistani's activities and political practice.

**Chapter Six** (*Lebanon 2006, the Shiite Triumphant*) begins with an overview of the Shiite community in Lebanon and how, in the mid-twentieth century a reformist Shiite cleric, Imam Musa Sadr laid the foundation for the later transformation of what was then a fragmented community; the place of the Shia in the politics of the country, and the series of activities beginning in the 1980s that led to the foundation of Hezbollah. It then moves to a discussion of regional, the threat of Israel and of Shiite commitments to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the impact of these factors on Lebanese internal and external policies. Finally, it focuses on the role of Shiite clerical elites in the events of 2006, and the Hezbollah-Israel war.

Finally, **Chapter Seven** (*The Power of Association and the Future of the Middle East*) collates the findings of this study, current Shiite political doctrines in the Middle East, and the socio-political revival of Shiite hegemony in the region. It discusses the nature of the challenges which Shiite political activism may have for the region, and offers recommendations regarding possible interactions. Finally, the chapter sets out the factors that have limited the study, and suggests avenues for further research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Shiite Doctrine and the Clerical Authority

Shiites believe in five distinctive principles: monotheism, prophecy, resurrection, justice and the Imamate.<sup>1</sup> Monotheism is the belief that Allah is the ONE who is self-sufficient and needless, and that nothing is equal or comparable to him. Shiites believe that individuals have infinite necessities and, thus, are obliged to be part of a community. Social life provides individuals with a set of rights and responsibilities. Consequently, it is inevitable that earthly rules and regulations should be established to implement such rights and responsibilities. The legislative and executive authority should be just and innocent. This would not be possible without a divine authority to lead the human community. Allah has exerted such divine authority on earth by sending prophets and messengers, of whom Mohammad is the seal and the last one. Shiites also believe that, as Allah is the most ultimate and complete creator, he is the source of justice. According to them, there should therefore be another world in which good individuals are rewarded and depraved individuals are punished. This is how Shiites justify the need for the resurrection and the judgment day. Finally, they believe that, as it is impossible for the Prophet to leave humanity abandoned without a leader, there is a necessity for divinely guided leaders, who are called Imams. Therefore, as Allah has ultimate authority over all humans, he would assert this authority through his prophets. After Mohammad sealed the prophecy, the infallible Imams have become responsible to lead humanity.<sup>2</sup>

What are the specific roles of the Prophet and the infallible Imams during their lifetimes in regard to humanity? And what if they are unable to accomplish these roles within the particular circumstances they might be facing? What if their followers do not have direct access to infallible Imams that will define their responsibilities? And are there any alternatives, though fallible, to handle the roles of the Imams when they are out of reach? To answer these questions, Shiite principles provide a series of

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<sup>1</sup> The Sunnite Muslims generally do not account the Justice and the Imamate to be the Islamic Principles.

<sup>2</sup> The Shiite principles discussed in this chapter are mainly derived from the book, *Ashnayi Ba Usul-e Din*, written by Grand Ayatollah Wahid Khorasani.

explanations that eventually consolidated clerical authority among the believers.

The 'Imamate' and the 'Occultation' are the two main beliefs among Shiite Muslims. Shiites believe that the only way for Muslims to become dynamically adapted to the fast pace of socio-political changes is to consider these two cornerstones. Indeed, the socio-political behaviour both of the Shiite elite and of the laity throughout history can be understood through the prism of these two discourses. According to the Imamate discourse, Shiite Muslims believe that, after the death of Prophet Mohammad, the new-born Islamic community was still in need of divine leadership. Although the Prophet had delivered some preliminary Islamic principles, to understand how to apply those principles in real-life was still unclear. According to Shiite tenets, the Prophet assigned the role of leadership of the community to his legitimate successor, Ali Ibn Abu Talib. He was not only assigned by the Prophet, but also appointed by Allah to further propagate the message that had been delivered by the Prophet. Therefore, Shiites believe that, without the succession of Ali and his sons, Islam would become incomplete. In support of this belief, they point to this Quranic verse:

O Messenger, announce that which has been revealed to you from your Lord [the succession of Ali], and if you do not, then you have not conveyed Allah's message completely.<sup>3</sup>

In the eyes of Shiites, the majority Muslims chose to disobey the Prophet's wishes that they acknowledge Ali as his legitimate successor. Consequently, concurrent with the death of the Prophet, Shiites were forced into a marginal position within the community and they have practised remonstrance against the majority Sunnites ever since. Although Ali and his sons were put aside by the ruling power, they still had the responsibility assigned to them by God to construe and convey the divine message until the promised day when the last Imam will be re-emerged.

Therefore, the 'Occultation' might be considered as the outcome of the Imamate principle. With the rise of threats to the life of the last infallible descendant of Ali, Shiites believe that he was occulted from the scene in 874 CE. They believe that he will re-emerge in the future in order to fill the world with justice and crown the suppressed humans who are the heirs of God on the Earth. This constitutes the Messianic posture of Shiite Muslims, which represents the most influential factor in the

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<sup>3</sup> Quran, V, 67

faith's socio-political engagements during the last eleven centuries (Amanat 2009).<sup>4</sup> According to the Shiite belief, the last infallible Imam introduced deputies to lead the community during the Occultation Era. These deputies are either 'specific' -- those explicitly named by the Imam himself, or 'general' -- those recognised by the Imam implicitly. The General Deputies of the Imam during the Occultation Era are those clerical elites capable of extracting religious laws from the tenets of the faith in relation to occurring circumstances. The infallible Imams had already laid down for them a series of prerequisites for holders of this position. During the pre-Occultation Era, the Imams accomplished the role of delivering the divine message; and it is the responsibility of their righteous deputies to pursue their mission further, to propagate the principles, and to preserve the community, while the last of them is absent from the scene. This is the framework constructed by the Imams for their followers.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the most significant responsibility of the Shiite elite is to preserve the community and its principles, in different arising circumstances, until the day that the conditions become permissive for the re-emergence of the last Imam.

In order to describe the roots and structures of the Shiite clerical elite authority, this chapter considers two distinctive periods in the history of the faith: the era of the Prophet and the infallible Imams and the Occultation Era.<sup>6</sup> Section I of the chapter probes the Prophet and his infallible successors' socio-political responsibilities to deliver and institutionalise the divine message according to Shiite beliefs. The next section emphasises the formation and consolidation of Shiite jurisprudence in regard to its clerical authority during the Occultation Era.<sup>7</sup> The last part of this chapter redefines the 'Marja'iyya' in order to resolve some ambiguities surrounding clerical authority in Shiite Islam.

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<sup>4</sup> While the Shiites were bereaved to have lost direct access to the divine and infallible leadership, they believe that the Imam is present and does live on the Earth and is the source of divine blessing for the humanity. According to Shiite beliefs, the last Imam lives among people but he is not recognised by them and does not hold earthy authority until the promised day of his return (Mohammad Sanad Bahrani, interview with the author, Qom, August 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Saeed Javadi-Amoli, interview with the author, Qom, August 2014.

<sup>6</sup> To fulfil the objectives of this research, the majority of viewpoints expressed in this chapter have been compiled from the Shiite sources and interviews with Shiite clerical elites residing in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon.

<sup>7</sup> To present the evolution of Shiite clerical authority schematically, this chapter presents five consecutive figures; the first four show the four major foundations of Shiite clerical elite authority; the fifth figure seeks to clarify the institution in contemporary Shiite's beliefs.

## **I. Shiite Political Thought During the Era of the Prophet and the Infallible Imams**

This period starts with the establishment of the first Islamic state by the Prophet Mohammad in Medina in 620 and terminates with the start of the last Shiite Imam's major Occultation in 941. According to Shiite beliefs, during this era Muslims had access to the infallible leaders, either directly or through specific deputies. According to Shiite belief, true Islam started to flourish through the rule of the Prophet, and was developed and established by the endeavours of his twelve infallible successors.<sup>8</sup>

After thirteen years of propagating Islam, the restrictive context of Mecca made it impossible for the Prophet to fulfill his responsibilities properly. Thus, he accepted an invitation made by the tribes of Yathreb (later known as Medina), and he migrated there and formed the first Islamic state. Henceforth, the responsibilities of the Prophet vis-à-vis the Muslim community were extended to three distinctive functions: the revelation of the divine message exactly as it had been related to him, the establishment and rule over the Islamic government, and the issuing of legal judgments for his followers.

The first and most important role of the Prophet was to deliver the divine message; he was the last messenger to receive the will of God through the revelation and had the duty to lead humanity toward felicity.<sup>9</sup> The second role of the Prophet, which materialised after his settlement in Medina, was to establish a government based on the divine rules of Islam. The fact that the tribes' sheikhs and inhabitants of the city had greeted him with open arms provided him with an opportunity to publicise Islam more easily at the time.<sup>10</sup> The last, but not least, of the Prophet's roles was to legislate for and arbitrate among Muslims. This was the authority that God had

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<sup>8</sup> Although the majority of Sunnite Muslims account Shiite Muslims as *rawafid*, defectors from Islam, Shiite Muslims believe that true Islam, the one, which God and his prophet, Mohammad, desired, is the one that is now expressed in Shiite Islam. (Seyyed Jawad Alavi Broujerdi, interview with the author, Qom, August 2011).

<sup>9</sup> The Quran clearly asserts that the Prophet has neither gone astray nor has erred, nor does he speak of his own desire and what it says is all revealed, and is the message of God to humans (Quran, LIII, 2-4).

<sup>10</sup> [Shiite] Muslims believe that the ultimate authority over humans belongs to God and that he asserts this authority through his last Prophet. He asks the believers to obey the Prophet unconditionally in Quran where he states: 'Obey Allah and obey the Messenger [Mohammad] and those of you who are in authority' (Quran, IV, 53).



assigned to him, as it is believed that only divine laws may deflect humans from obstinacy.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Prophet has delivered the divine message, he did not have time to thoroughly expand and compile it during his lifetime. Moreover, the life of the Islamic state hardly exceeded ten years, and Muslims were unfamiliar with the principles of Islamic rule and legislation. At the time he passed away, the common belief was that, without a competent leader, the new community would go astray. Thus, the main question was over a successor who could take on the roles performed by the Prophet. In seeking an answer to this question, Muslims divided into two camps: the majority, later to be known as ‘Sunnites’, believed that representatives from the community should elect the successor or ‘caliph’. The minority ‘Shiites’ believed that the Prophet had answered this vital question during his lifetime and had named Ali Ibn Abu Talib, his son-in-law, as his righteous successor.<sup>12</sup>

Shiites believe that the Prophet’s caliph should be free from sin, as his major role is to lead the community based on divine will. This marked a period of consolidation of Imamate discourse. The Imamate in Shiite Islam mainly rests on the idea of ‘the permanent need for a divinely guided Imam to act as the authoritative teacher of mankind in all religious matters’. The Imam<sup>13</sup> thus is ‘the only legitimate successor of the Prophet [Mohammad]. Whoever obeyed the Imam was a true believer, and whoever opposed or rejected him, an infidel’ (Madelung 1971:497). Thus, the infallible Imams’ responsibilities are exactly the same as those of the Prophet, with a single difference: they are not God’s messengers, and only exist to protect and interpret what the message that the Prophet has already delivered (Motahhari 1985).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Shiite scholars believed that such role has clearly been identified for the prophet in Quran when it states: ‘[Mohammad] judge between them by what God has revealed to you’ (Quran, V, 48).

<sup>12</sup> In support of this belief, Shiites point to a series of occasions when the Prophet clearly nominated Ali. Among the most significant of these incidents, was the grand Muslim gathering in *Ghadeer Khumm* on 19 March 632, during the Farewell Pilgrimage of the Prophet Mohammad.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Imam’ in Arabic literally means a leader who has some followers; either leading people astray toward evil or leading people toward justice and goodness. In Shiite theology though, an Imam who is assigned by God, the sole source of justice, should act justly as well. Shiite Islam principally extends the concept of justice even to fallible Imams (e.g. mosques’ leaders).

<sup>14</sup> Tabatabai 1977: 70. Shiites believe that Allah has revealed the divine message to Mohammad through the holy Angel, and the Prophet taught the message to his only

Likewise, the infallible Imams are the most competent to perform the role of judicial authority. As the most complete available informants of the divine will, they are righteous substitutes for the Prophet in arbitrating justly among Muslims. The logical corollary to these roles is that Imams become the most competent individuals to rule the Muslim community; however, depending on the opportunity structure they face, they may not be able to assert this divinely assigned responsibility.<sup>15</sup>

Mainstream Shiite belief holds that infallible Imams have the right, bequeathed by the divine source, to rule whether or not the context provides them with the opportunity to establish their reign on the earth. On the day of the Prophet's death, Ali, the legitimate successor, according to Shiites, was deprived of the Caliphate position. Instead, Abu-Bakr (d. 634) became the Prophet's first caliph, with the result that Ali was cut off from public affairs and retreated to his house for the next twenty-five years. Umar Ibn al-Khattab (d.644) and Uthman Ibn Affan became the second and third caliphs (Tabatabai 1977). When Uthman passed away in 656, some Muslims who owed their allegiance to Ali asked him to become the fourth caliph. Although he rejected the offer initially, he eventually agreed to become the caliph, as the people's will left him with no other choice. Later, he narrated the incident personally and stated,

If people had not come to me and supporters had not exhausted the argument and if there had been no pledge of Allah with the learned to the effect that they should not acquiesce in the gluttony of the oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed, I would have cast the rope of Caliphate on its own shoulders and would have given the last one the same treatment as to the first one. Then you would have seen that, in my view, this world of yours is no better than the sneezing of a goat.<sup>16</sup>

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legitimate successor, Ali, directly. Thus the divine knowledge has been inherited from every Imam to his next successor and finally to the twelfth Imam. Therefore, the Twelve Shiite Imams are the divine experts of Islam and the sole infallible religious reference for Muslims. In general Shiites believe that the Quran and the people of the House, the Twelve Infallible Imams, are two weighty and complementary sources inherited by Muslims from the Prophet to achieve the God's will.

<sup>15</sup> Yet would the Infallible Imams have succeeded in establishing the Islamic state, what could have happened afterwards? And what would be the situation after the reign of the last Imam ended with his natural death? According to the Shiite principles, if all Imams had the opportunity, the circumstances after the rule of the Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, would have been so propitious, that humans would not have had any necessity for further divine guidance in order to find the path of the truth and justice (Motahhari 1989). Thus, as this is not the case, humanity should expect the day of his re-emergence, when a perfect utopia will come about. For Shiite arguments regarding this case see Motahhari 1989.

<sup>16</sup> *Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon III.

This statement shows that, while Shiites believe in the right of infallible Imams to rule, the support of the community has an undeniable influence in institutionalising this position. It confirms that the desire of the Imam to rule only comes after he has established his spiritual role as the developer of the divine message.

Ali's caliphate lasted about five years. His son, Hassan, ascended to power in 661. Like his father, Hassan, he was opposed by, and continued to fight with, the Ummayyad, Muawiyah (d.680), the rebellious governor of Syria. However, betrayed by a group of his army's commanders, Hassan eventually was forced to sign a peace treaty with Muawiyah. He handed the caliphate post to Muawiyah after just six months of being in office. With the conclusion of this treaty, this Shiite Second Imam migrated to Medina and resigned from politics. He remained 'quiet' for the rest of his life. Hassan's younger brother, Hussein, became the third Shiite Imam. He was loyal to the terms of his late brother's treaty with Muawiyah, and thus remained relatively quiet. Nonetheless, when Muawiyah appointed his own son, Yazid, as the heir to the caliphate, breaching the terms of the treaty, Hussein could not remain indifferent. Responding to the request of Iraqi Muslims, Hussein migrated to Kufa with the aim of revitalising the religion of his grandfather. On the way to Kufa, on Ashura of 680 the army of Yazid attacked Hussein and his companions at Karbala, and brutally massacred them.

After the ruthless death of Hussein, the third Shiite Imam, his son, Ali Ibn al-Hussein, became the fourth Shiite Imam. The strict surveillance by Umayyads over the activities of the Imam and his Shiite followers compelled them to completely retire from public life thoroughly. The life of the fifth Shiite Imam, Mohammad Ibn Ali, occurred simultaneously with a series of Muslim civil wars that made the Umayyad Caliphs weaker than ever. Consequently, the door was left open for the Imam and his followers to establish teaching circles in Medina in order to propagate Shiite principles. This era was monumentally important in the history of the Shiite faith. It was the first time since the time of the abdication of the Caliphate by the Second Imam, that Shiites had an opportunity to consolidate the divine message through the teachings of the infallible Imam. It was during this era that the theory of the Imamate was principally framed (Lalani 2000).<sup>17</sup> The situation became even more

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<sup>17</sup> Jafri 2007:253. The early consolidation of the Shiite jurisprudence is owed to the teachings of the fifth Imam. As his son, the sixth Shiite Imam states: 'Before him [Mohammad Ibn Ali], the Shiite Muslims did not know what should be considered as lawful

favourable for the Shiites during the life of the sixth Imam, Ja'far Ibn Mohammad (Tabatabai 1977). During the era of his Imamate, the Shiite principles were institutionalized and he started to spread and to develop them throughout the known world. He instructed more than four thousand pious students and, making the most out of the permissive opportunity structure existing at the time, encouraged them to disseminate the divine message throughout the community.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the last years of his life were concurrent with the consolidation of the Sunnite Abbasids, who had been succeeded by the Umayyads. After Ja'far Ibn Mohammad passed away, his son, Musa Ibn Ja'far, received the Imamate. By that time, the Abbasid caliphate had established its reign and had started to control the activities of the Shiites in order to diminish their potential threats. Consequently, the seventh Imam was put in the Caliphate jail for most of his life.

The Shiite principles had been already transplanted into the community through the teachings and activities of the previous Imams, and their students and disciples had migrated all over the Islamic world. Yet the followers' direct access to the infallible Imam was under the strict control of Abbasid caliphs. Over such contingencies, the Shiites of Iraq, Hejaz, and Iran were required to refer to someone in order to ask their religious questions and duties. This, perhaps, was the very first stage of the initiation of the Shiite Marja'iyya as the authority of religious reference in the history of the faith. The Imams' companions were among the earliest elite figures that became the references for Shiite laity—substitutes responsible for leading the community when the infallible Imams were not accessible to lay followers.<sup>19</sup>

The Abbasid Caliph, al-Ma'mun, harshened the situation for the Shiite and forced the Eighth Imam to migrate from Medina to Tus, in Iran. He also made the Eighth Imam accept to become the heir to the throne, because he hoped to attract popular support and strengthen his shaky caliphate at the time. However, he had no

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or unlawful, except that which they had heard from the ordinary people [which were not necessarily based on the Shiite doctrine]. It was just after my father's endeavors that his students, the Shiite elites, began to publish what they have learned from him directly throughout the Islamic world'.

<sup>18</sup> The Sixth Shiite Imam, Ja'far Ibn Mohammad al-Sadeq, is known as the *Sheikh al-A'immah*, the eldest of the Imams. In commemoration of his role in spreading Shiite Islam, the Twelvers have ever since also been known by his name as *the Ja'faris*.

<sup>19</sup> Sheikh Abbas Qomi's *Muntahá al-Ámál*, Vol. II: 871. Some of these elite figures, among them Zurarah Ibn A'yan al-Sheybani, even have specific verbal endorsements of the Imams. A case in point is when the Ja'far al-Sadeq states: 'If this man [Zurarah], did not exist my traditions would have been lost'.

other choice but to kill the Imam in 818 CE. The Ninth Shiite Imam, Mohammad Ibn Ali, remained under the strict surveillance of the Abbasid as well. The level of the Abbasid's oppressions toward Shiite Imams increased even more during the era of Ali Ibn Mohammad, the tenth Imam, to such extent that they kept him under house arrest during his lifetime. His son, Hassan Ibn Ali, the Eleventh Shiite Imam, never had the opportunity to exit the military base of Abbasid in Samarra over his whole life. According to Shiite beliefs, these harsh strategies and intolerable suppressions eventually led the Twelfth Imam, Hujjat Ibn al-Hassan, to be occulted from the scene.

However, by 874 CE, over the activities of the previous Imams and their pious disciples, the Shiite community became ready, to some extent, to deal with the new circumstances. After the faith's tenets were institutionalised by the teachings of the Fifth and the Sixth Imams, the Shiite community was more reliant on their trustworthy companions and disciples, as direct access to the next Imams was severely limited and controlled. The success of the previous Imams became more evident, as the eleventh Imam had the greatest number of specific deputies all over the Islamic world. It shows that, just years before the Occultation, the Imams had laid the cornerstone of Shiite principles and their followers were taught how to exploit them in upcoming events in order to preserve the faith and further develop it.<sup>20</sup>

The belief that the twelfth Imam, Mahdi, is alive but has been occulted, and that the establishment of the 'just Islamic order' is awaiting his re-emergence is central to Shiite faith (Sachedina 1998, Cook 2011). According to this belief, he had a minor occultation that lasted sixty-nine years and terminated in 941; since then, he is passing the Major Occultation. The majority of Shiites believe that, during the minor occultation, the Imam had appointed 'the Four Specific Deputies' to mediate between the Imam and his followers concerning Shiite religious and social affairs.<sup>21</sup> The specific deputies were assigned to handle two of the Imam's responsibilities: the interpretation of the divine message and judicial arbitration among the community.<sup>22</sup>

It seems that the former period was aimed to prepare the Shiite community more than ever for the Major Occultation period as Ali Ibn Mohammad al-Samarri (d.

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<sup>20</sup> Mohammad Javad Alavi Broujerdi, interview held in Qom, Iran, January 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Shiite tradition holds that four deputies acted in succession to one another: Uthman Ibn Sa'id al-Asadi, Abu Jafar Mohammad Ibn Uthman, Abul Qasim Husayn Ibn Ruh al-Nawbakhti, and Abul Hasan Ali Ibn Mohammad al-Samarri

<sup>22</sup> These two roles are known in Shiite lexicon as *Ifia*, giving legal opinions, and *Qadha*, arbitration based the faith's regulation.

941), the last of the Four Deputies, claimed to have received a letter from the Imam, which reads as follows:

May Allah grant the great reward to your Muslim brothers in mourning of your death; you will pass away in six days. Order everything and do not appoint any successor for yourself as the Major Occultation period has been already started ... As Allah wishes, I will re-emerge after a long period when the Earth is filled by oppression and brutality ... Be aware that anyone who claims that he has seen me or come directly on my behalf is a liar and calumniator.<sup>23</sup>

Although the notion of the Imam's specific deputies that was originated in the time of the Fifth Imam was terminated by the death of al-Samarri, years earlier, the Twelfth Imam clarified the Shiite duty over his Major Occultation. He stated the following:

When I will remerge? It is upon the will of Allah, and you should be aware that whoever determines the time for that is a deluder ... and in the upcoming incidents, refer to those who narrate our traditions; they are my proof to you as I am the proof of Allah to them.<sup>24</sup>

Shiites believe that the narrators of the Imams' traditions are his general deputies—the Shiite clerical elites, who are competent enough to induce religious law from the principle sources: the Quran and utterances of the infallible Imams. Therefore, with the commencement of the Major Occultation Era, while the Shiite laity would be deprived of direct access to the infallible Imam, the authority of leading the community would go the clerical elite until the re-emergence of the Imam.

## **II. The Consolidation of Shiite Clerical Authority During the Occultation Era**

The prophet delivered the divine message, and the infallible Imams laid down the Shiite principles through interpreting that message. Nevertheless, a series of incidents caused the occultation of the last Imam and materialized the Messianic thought in Shiite Islam.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For full details of the letter see Majlesi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. LI: 361.

<sup>24</sup> Saduq, *Kamal al-Din wa Tamam al-Ne'mah*, Vol. II: 483.

<sup>25</sup> The Shiite Messianic belief differs from that of Jewish's and Christians' viewpoints. An important point of disparity is that, as the majority of Christians believe that after Jesus had been crucified and buried, he was resurrected from his tomb, ascended to heaven, and will

Shiites principally believe that the Imam will ‘emerge’ rather than will ‘be presented’ or come back in the future.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Shiite doctrine is believed to be innately dynamic. The fact that the infallible Imam has been always present on the Earth implies that, over time, as the context changes, Shiite doctrine should adapt itself to the given circumstances. Nevertheless, the question still remains of who has the responsibility to act on his behalf during the Occultation Era? And what is the driving force behind this sort of dynamism? Based on numerous and trusted traditions, Shiites believe that the authority would be vested in those qualified clerical elite, who will lead the laity until the ‘promised day’ when the Imam will re-emerge.



The **Shiite Principles**, delivered by the Prophet and the infallible Imams, construct the core of the faith.

**Figure 2.1/5 The Shiite Principles**

As mentioned earlier, the community was awaiting commencement of the occultation of their last Imam, based on the traditions of the Prophet and previous Imams. With regard to the responsibilities of the clerical elite, Prophet Mohammad had acknowledged a special role for the scholars.<sup>27</sup> The infallible Imams have also confirmed the issue in greater detail. During the Imamate of the Sixth Shiite Imam, a group of elite formed the closest circle of the Shiite propagation office. Upon the confirmations of the infallible Imams, those pious disciples were responsible to give legal opinions, called *ifta*, and to arbitrate among laity based on the just legal

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come back to earth in future. The Shiite belief in the occultation, however, does not mean that the last Imam is not living on Earth and is perhaps in heaven. It implies that he is on Earth but that no one recognizes him. In this sense, Shiites believe in a more spiritual role for the Infallible Imam vis-à-vis his leadership of humans: while he is present and beside them, and assists them, as humans would from ‘a sun while it is occulted behind the clouds’.  
(Mohammad Sanad Bahrani, interview with the author, Qom, August 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, Vol. I: 334. For this Shiites refer to the Prophetic traditions in which, on numerous occasions when Mohammad states: ‘would the infallible Imam does not live on the Earth, it falls apart with all its inhabitants’.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid: 34. In a reliable tradition from the Prophet refers to clerical elite, the Ulama, as the heirs of the prophets.

regulations of the Shiite principles. Thus, the Imams had focused on instructing the principles to those elite and permitted them to deduce religious law in upcoming circumstances.<sup>28</sup> The mainstream Shiite belief is that Imams depicted the situation of the Occultation Era and stated,

If the Shiite Ulama—who invite people to Allah, who are proofs to Allah, and who are the protectors of the people against the Evil—would not survive during the occultation of the last Imam, people have no alternative but to become apostate from Islam and to go astray. Indeed, they will capture the hearts of true believers, and they are the true servants to Allah.<sup>29</sup>

Whenever the Imams have been asked how the Shiite laity will survive during the Occultation Era, when the community has not direct access to the infallible Imam, the answer was that the laity should refer to the Shiite clerical elite. Hence, the Shiite religious elite has been nominated as the secondary expositor of the divine law after the Prophet and the infallible Imams. Nonetheless, because the clerical elite could not be infallible, infallible Imams have laid down sets of prerequisites for the laity to consider while following these general deputies.<sup>30</sup> According to this, since the dawn of the Major Occultation, the qualified Shiite elite has started to publish numerous treatises and books that answer the laities' inquiries in order to keep the community as vivid as possible.

With the rise of the Shiite Buyids in mid-900, just years after the commencement of the Major Occultation Era, the clerical elite had been offered the opportunity to disperse and to develop the Imam's will throughout the Islamic World.<sup>31</sup> In order to adapt the principles to the contingencies of the Occultation Era,

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<sup>28</sup> Sheikh Hurr al-Aamili, who is among the most renowned Shiite scholars, narrates from the Sixth Imam, who, in addressing one of his students, Hisham Ibn al-Salem states: 'We lay down the principles for you, and it is your duty to develop the subsidiary practices, tafri', from those you were taught'. See Al-Hurr al-Aamili, *Wasail al-Shia*, Vol. XVIII: 51.

<sup>29</sup> A Hadith from the Sixth Imam. For the full text see Majlesi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. II: 6.

<sup>30</sup> In a tradition from Hassan Ibn Ali, the Eleventh Shiite Imam, the Imam clarifies that believers should follow those of the Shiite elite who are 'pious, keepers of the faith, pursue reason independent of their own desire, and are obedient to Allah'. See Tabarsi, *Al-Ehtejaj*, vol. II: 263.

<sup>31</sup> One of the most renowned elite at the time was Sheikh Tusi (996-1067) - known as *Sheikh al-Tai'feh* (the master of the faith) who initiated the first phase of the evolution of the Shiite Jurisprudence. While the Abbasids in Baghdad were under the tutelage of the Buyids, he made the most out of the political opportunity, and developed a robust network of students. Yet, with the empowerment of the Sunnite Seljuqis in Baghdad, he migrated to Najaf, and



the Shiite elite was to exert *ijtihad*. The term is derived from the root *J-H-D* in Arabic, which literally means ‘the utmost striving and exertion in doing an action’. Technically, the term has two totally different meanings in Islamic jurisprudences.

The first meaning, which is held by the majority of Sunnite religious elite, interprets *ijtihad* as a personal reasoning, or *ra’y*, in deducting an Islamic law (Watt 1973).<sup>32</sup> The second meaning is held by Shiite Mujtahids, who forbid the application of *ijtihad* in the sense of personal reasoning to the religious law. Al-Sharif al-Mortaza, who is one of the proponents of this stream, explains that ‘*ijtihad* [according to the belief of Abu Hanifa’s followers] is seeking for an overriding opinion in issues that have no evident indicators; yet the dubious supposition, *zann*, does not have any place in Islamic jurisprudence and a jurist is not allowed to establish his opinion based on this’.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, the Shiite clerical elite interprets the *ijtihad* as a process of signifying ‘the application by a jurist of all his faculties to the consideration of the authorities of law with a view to finding out what, in all probability, is the law’.<sup>34</sup> This legitimate sense of *ijtihad* is the action, which has been practiced since the era of the Prophet and his infallible successors to their particular students and disciples and is still common among the qualified elite, Mujtahids.

Although exerting *ijtihad* had been common among the Shiite religious elite since the era of the infallible Imams, it was Allameh Hilli (1250–1325) who labelled the process and redefined it retrospectively. His endeavours heralded an evolutionary turning point in Shiite jurisprudence. Hilli’s reading of the process of *ijtihad*, which has prevailed among Shiite jurisprudence since then, is principally different from that of the Sunnite Sunnite School, especially *the Hanafis*. At the time Hilli was living, Shiite jurisprudence had become so pervasive that a restating of the *ijtihad*, a mechanism of clerical elites’ perception was necessary. Since then, jurisprudence has

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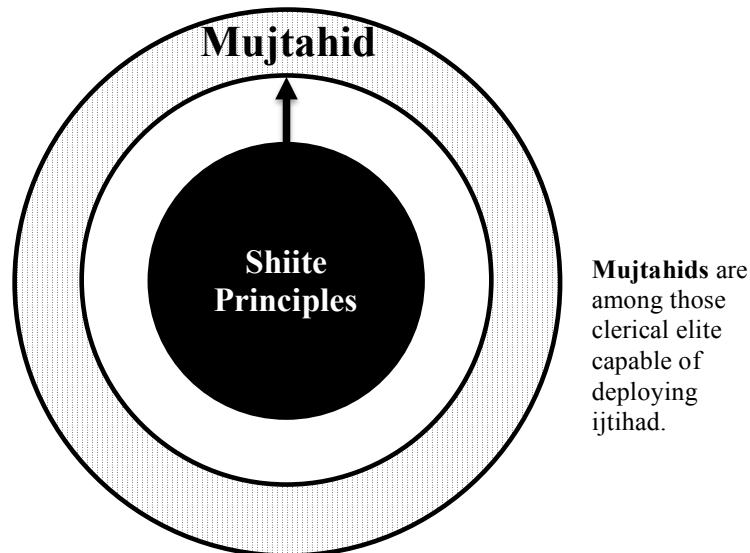
founded the first Shiite seminary there in 1038. For the details of his role and that of the other Shiite elites in Evolution of the Jurisprudence see Kadivar, 1997.

<sup>32</sup> Motahhari 1989. A group of Sunnite scholars, mainly Hanafis, believe that as the principle sources - Quran’s injunction and the Prophet’s traditions - are not conclusive, the Sunnite Imams may deduce the law relying on his very own *personal reasoning* and *analogy*.

<sup>33</sup> Sharif al-Mortaza, *al-Shafi*: 31

<sup>34</sup> See ‘Following a Mujtahid’ Available: <http://sistani.org/index.php?p=251364&id=48&pid=2116>. (Accessed 12 January 2012).

become the most noteworthy driving power of the Shiite dynamism utilized by the clerical elite.<sup>35</sup>



**Figure 2.2/5 Mujtahid and Ijtihad**

A Shiite cleric aiming to become a Mujtahid must be able to deduce the religious law from the faith's principles; and for this he must have some qualifications and have comprehensively studied religious courses. Shiite believers are divided into two groups: they are either Mujtahids, who personally strive to resolve the legal Islamic legal questions, or they are ordinary laymen, who should seek the assistance of a Mujtahid.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, *ijtiḥad* adds two corollaries to Shiite jurisprudence: it establishes a group of Shiite clerical elites, the Mujtahids, and it also recommends the laity to follow the verdict of a special religious elite. It is from this that the concept of Taqlid, and the office of Marja'iyya, the highest-ranking position among Shiite clerical elites, have been moulded.

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<sup>35</sup> In Shiite jurisprudence, the legitimate sources for deducting religious laws are the Quran, the Traditions, the Consensus of the clerical elite, and the logic. Ijtihad in this last sense thus, counts as a tool for the Shiite clergy. See Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> This main Shiite jurisprudential school founded around the role of ijtiḥad is known as Usulism. Upon the death of Allameh Hilli, Shiite Mujtahids gained a wide constituency from among the laity. By the time of the Safavids' empowerment, Shiite clerical elites, who then had the support of the Monarchs, formed a new social group. However, there were moments in the history of Shiite Islam when this mainstream experienced harsh criticism not only from outside (e.g. Sunnite jurisprudence) but also internally. The inter-faith, Akhbari-Usuli, dispute will be reviewed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### **III. Marja' Taqlid: The Highest Shiite Clerical Elite Authority During the Occultation Era**

The third evolutionary phase of Shiite jurisprudence in regard to its clerical authority was initiated by the endeavours of Sheikh Mortaza Ansari (1781–1864). Following the crackdown of the internal scholastic oppositions, the Usuli School had been restored once again in Najaf Seminary during the nineteenth century. Moreover, with the introduction of peace treaty between Ottomans and Persians, streams of Iranian pilgrims to Najaf and Karbala had developed the economy of the holy cities and their religious schools. Under such circumstances, Sheikh Ansari became the leader of the seminary, following the death Sheikh Mohammad Hassan Najafi (1785–1849), and became known as the first Shiite Marja' Taqlid.<sup>37</sup>

The role of Sheikh Mortaza in institutionalizing the concept of Taqlid and developing the extent of Shiite jurisprudence is undeniable. He has been so central to the concept of Shiite Marja'iyya that the characteristics of a Shiite Marja' Taqlid are defined by his personal characteristics and manners; he was well known to be most pious, knowledgeable, and dissociated from earthly matters (Amanat 1988). A Marja' Taqlid, a position that originated mainly during the era of the Sheikh, is believed to be held by the most righteous Mujtahid of the time. It makes clear who, among all other Mujtahids, is more capable of becoming the supreme exemplar, and thus the virtuous religious reference for ordinary Shiite laymen.

The practice of Taqlid was initiated at the time of the Sheikh and, respectively, each Shiite believer has three alternatives to practicing the Ancillaries of the faith. These range from praying to Jihad (Momen 1985). He should be either a Mujtahid himself, capable of inferring the law from the principles personally or, if he is not, he should follow a Marja' Taqlid's verdicts in religious matters; finally, if he is not a Mujtahid and would not like to follow any Marja', he 'should act on such precaution which should assure him that he has fulfilled his religious obligation'.<sup>38</sup> The rationale behind the Taqlid is evident: not every single Shiite layman has the time to spend

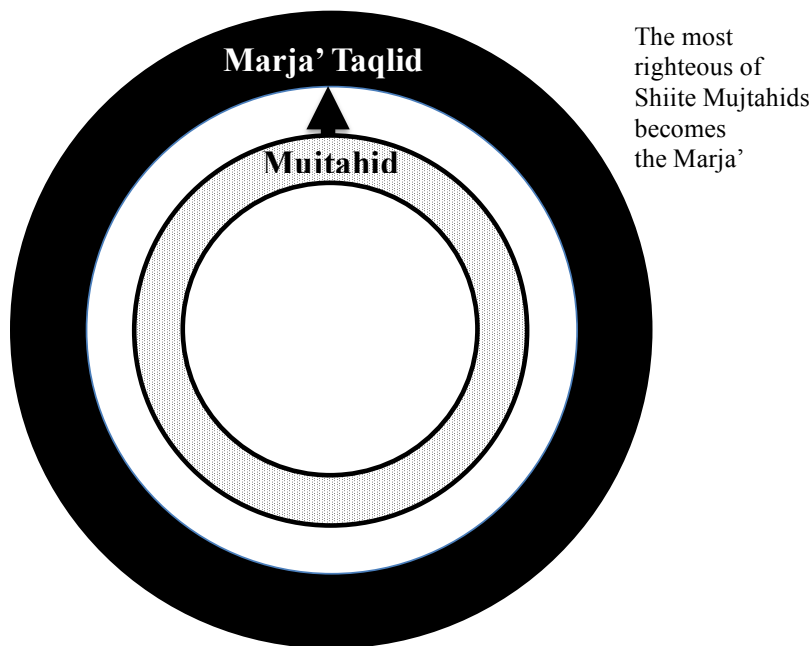
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<sup>37</sup> For the first time in the history of Shiite Islam, circumstances were fruitful for the development of the office of Marja' Sheikh Mohammad Hassan Najafi, taking advantage of scholarly and financial resources in Najaf, wrote one of the most comprehensive books on Shiite jurisprudence, *Jawahir al- Kalam*, with ran over more than 20,000 pages. This extensive volume (compared to Sheikh Tusi's for example), is another example of how Shiite jurisprudence was developed over nine centuries, as the situation, and perhaps laymen's inquiries, changed dramatically.

<sup>38</sup> See 'Following a Mujtahid' Available: <http://sistani.org/index.php?p=251364&id=48&pid=2116>. (Accessed 12 January 2012).

years in religious lectures to become an expert in religious principles. Quran justifies this in the following statement:

It is not possible for the believers to go forth all together. Why, then, does not a party from every section of them go forth, that they may become well versed in religion, and that they may warn their people when they return to them, so that they may guard against evil?<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 2.3/5 Shiite Mujtahids and the Position of Marja'yyia**

Nevertheless, the word 'Taqlid' has not only been misunderstood by some western scholars, but also by some Shiite secular scholars have misinterpret the term, at least technically. The mainstream literature has mistranslated the term 'Taqlid' to mean 'imitation' or 'emulation' (Amanat 1988, Kazemi Mousavi 1985, Gleave 2007). It believes the term to mean 'imitation', in the sense of a person observing an action and replicating it exactly; which is the sort of behaviour that a monkey would be expected do.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Quran, IX, 122

<sup>40</sup> This mundane misinterpretation has been reproduced in speech of an Iranian Professor Hashim Aghajari, dated November 2002. He went further and criticized the Marja'iyya system by declaring that: 'the people are not monkeys who merely imitate. The pupil understands and then acts, and then tries to expand his own understanding, so someday he will not need the teacher'; Which amazingly is still a strong trend even among some non-

This fundamentally differs from how the Shiite clergy define the term technically. ‘*Taqlid*’ from the infinitive of ‘*Qal-la-dah*’ basically refers to throwing ‘*Qiladah*’, a necklace or, more precisely, a dog’s leash, on somebody’s neck. Consequently, the act of *Taqlid* in the Shiite Ancillaries is not tantamount to a blind mimicking of whatever a learned jurist does or says, which is illicit principally (Motahhari 1985). It instead metaphorically means that a Shiite laymen can throw a leash on the neck of one of the most righteous Mujtahids and follow him in order to have less responsibility and more peace of mind when it comes to practising the complexities of his faith (Makarem Shirazi 2009). It is like assigning one’s religious accountability to his Marja’ *Taqlid*.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, Marja’ *Taqlid* can be more properly translated as the ‘supreme religious reference’ in English.

Among the most crucial factors for a Mujtahid to attain the support of his fellows and gather a group of followers, are the time and the place he is living in. In fact, in the case of Sheikh Ansari himself, who is the first fully-fledged Shiite Marja’, these factors played an extremely important role. Prior to his era, following a ‘sole Marja’ *Taqlid*’ was not a routine among the Shiite laity (Kazemi Mousavi 1996); most commonly, the lay Shiite Muslims had been used to following a local Marja’. Yet it seems that the Marja’iyya of the Sheikh, throughout the Shiite world, owed partially to the auspicious circumstances he was living in. A major case in point was the development of communication technology concurrent with his rise as the leader of Najaf seminary. The telegraph lines had just been introduced in the region, a communication medium which years later played a central role in broadcasting the clerical elite’s messages from Iraq to followers residing in Iran.<sup>42</sup> Another influential factor was the financial development of the Najaf seminary at the time. Iraq is the host to a handful of Shiite holy cities; the money that is brought annually by millions of pilgrims has an undeniable impact on the economy of the country. In the post-Safavid era,<sup>43</sup> the Shiite clerical elite has relied on religious taxes received from their followers to finance the seminaries and their objectives.<sup>44</sup>

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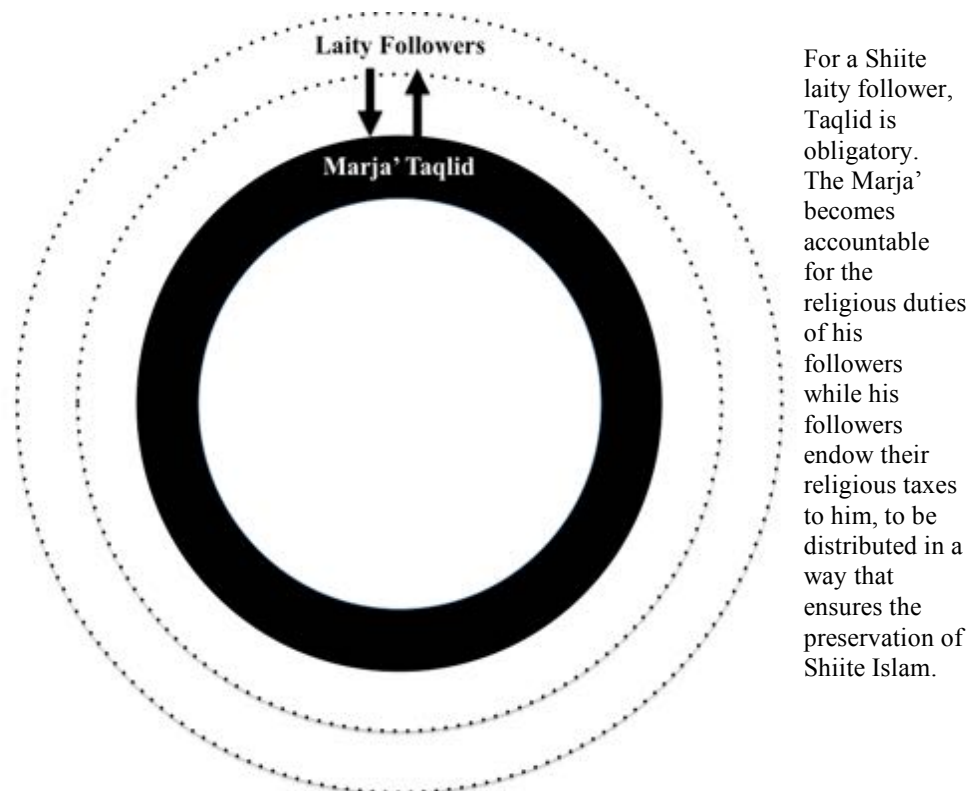
clergy Shiite elite. For a review on Aghajari’s speech see Thomas Friedman, ‘A story worth watching: An Islamic reformation,’ *The New York Times*, 4 December 2002.

<sup>41</sup> The first page of each Marja’ *Taqlid*’s book of laws has a signed declaration statement, stating that ‘the author will be responsible for any consequences of utilising these verdicts’.

<sup>42</sup> The role of telegram was undeniable during the tobacco revolt in 1891, and the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905. More remarks will be discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>43</sup> As in Safavid era, Shiite clerical elite was extensively dependent to the monarchs’ endowments financially. The dissolution of Safavid dynasty and rise of the Afsharid in Iran

It was in the era of Sheikh Mortaza that, with the advance of the communication developments, the Shiite laity started to send their religious taxes directly to their Marja' Taqlid, and the Sheikh distributed the funds among religious students who were at the seminary. Following the activities of the Sheikh, the Maraje' who succeeded him have continued to ensure that an extensive share of the religious taxes is distributed among seminary students.



**Figure 2.4/5 Relationship between the Marja' Taqlid and Shiite Followers**

Since the mid-nineteenth century, in contrast to its Sunnite counterparts, the Shiite clerical authority has become independent of state powers, relying on the religious taxes of the laity. The position of Marja' Taqlid has been detached from any worldly funds by its definition; thus it is more capable of attaining the trust of his followers to

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made them to migrate from Iran to Iraq and to seek other sources of financial means. For more information See Kazemi Mousavi 1996, Chapter 7.

<sup>44</sup> Lambton 1964. Principally every Shiite follower should pay one-fifth, Khums, of the remaining of his annual profit to his Marja' Taqlid. Half of these religious taxes is the share belonging to the infallible Imam, and should be spent on the furtherance of Shiite Islam. The other half should be distributed among the destitute children of the prophet, known as Seyyeds.

receive their religious taxes and to distribute these among fellow religious students properly. Therefore, if religious taxpayers perceive that their Marja' has lost his qualifications, they would not support him financially. In losing this support, he would inevitably lose his position.

Moreover, as the recommendations of just and well-informed Mujtahids in introducing a Marja' is crucial, there are some other control mechanisms over the activities of Marja'iyya. This has formed an enduring monitoring over each Shiite Marja' Taqlid from the very first day he joins the seminary as an ordinary religious student up until the time he holds office as the highest clerical authority within the community.

During the Major Occultation Era, hundreds of Mujtahids have become Marja' Taqlid. There were some periods when Shiite Muslims from all around the world referred to a 'sole' Marja' Taqlid (e.g. the Era of Sheikh Mortaza Ansari); there were also some periods in Shiite history when numbers of qualified Mujtahids have held the position, all at the same time. Yet they consistently respect each other's opinions on religious matters. A dispute over a religious or social case among Marja' Taqlid is similar to the dispute of two physicians over a medical case. As the Shiite principles are surrounded by divine and moral messages, there is no room for different Maraje' to fight over their personal desires.

Nevertheless, the institution of Shiite Marja'iyya has been advanced through positive competition toward the objective of developing the most compatible reading of the principles to the context. Consequently, Maraje' may always offer a critical review of each other's legal opinions in a constructive atmosphere. However, if in exceptional cases a Marja' passes this framework, he may naturally endanger his own credibility and his support among his fellows.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, the point of views taken by different Maraji' over a given structure are absolutely contingent on their very personal perception on how to preserve the principles of the Shiite Islam at the time. In other words, the strategy and main goal for each Shiite Marja' or the general body of Shiite clerical authority are identical, although Marajae' may differ in the tactics that they adopt.

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<sup>45</sup> Mohammad Sanad Bahrani, interview with the author, Karbala, January 2012.

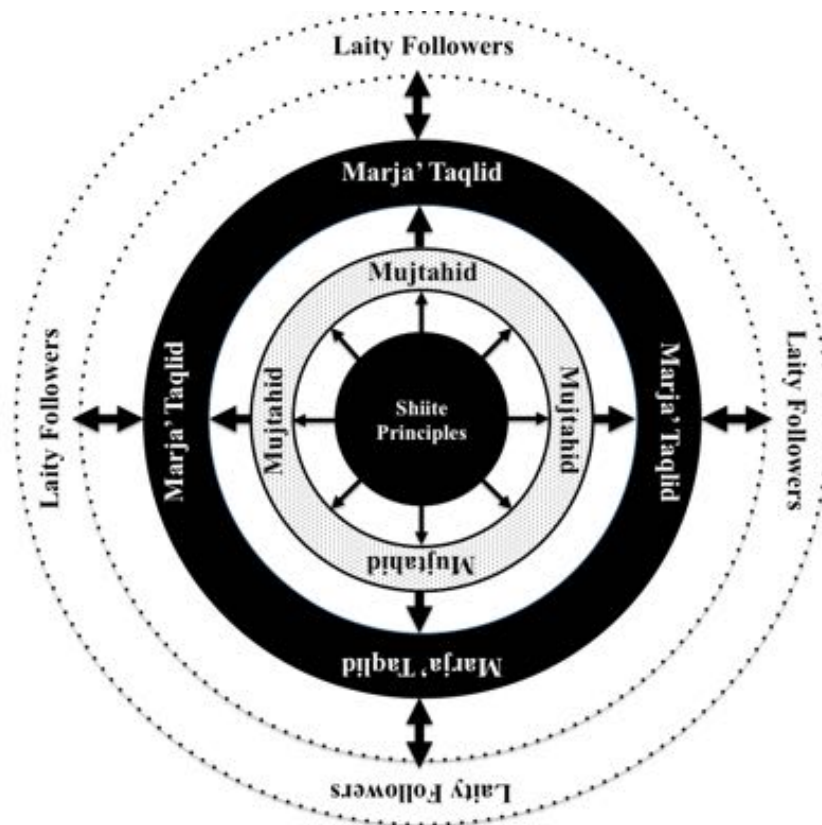


Figure 2.5/5 The Institution of Shiite Marja'iyya

## Conclusion

Based on Shiite sources, the goal of this chapter was to present a more precise understanding of Shiite clerical authority by exploring the faith's principles and the role of qualified clerical elites during the Occultation Era. It has discussed how it is incumbent for a Shiite Mujtahid to lead the community through the exercise of his *ijtihad* and this is influenced by his perception of a given opportunity structure.

To lead the community and to protect the citadel of the faith during the occultation era, the Shiite clerical elite may engage in political actions. Yet, what does 'political' mean in the eyes of the Shiite clergy? In general, politics encompasses practices that reproduce and transform the social relations. In this sense, and as the next chapters will elaborate, Shiite clerical elites are among the most significant political actors of their relevant communities and throughout history have strived to transform social relations whenever necessary to advance the goals they have for the community.



Politics is used in different ways in this thesis. It is, first, used to refer to the level of divine politics. About this level, clerics are explicit as to what politics entails. However, reviewing the political postures held by the clergy throughout Shiite history, it is clear that, in some cases, it is also used to refer to the more mundane and pragmatic level of politics, including how clerical elites engage with secular authorities and with their followers (e.g. in the case of the Mujtahids and the Safavid formation), how they work to obtain funding and strategize and maneuver with respect to these things (e.g. the Tobacco Revolt in Persia).

Addressing high-profile Friday prayer Imams in Tehran, Imam Khomeini defined politics as the practice whose aim is ‘to guide the community . . . to consider all interests of the human and the society and to lead them towards what is good for them’ (Vol.13: 248). With this end in mind, Shiite clerical elites are aware that any state under the rule of a fallible figure during the Major Occultation Era is not ideal. A state monitored and guided by the Mujthaid, however, is the best alternative for surviving the period when, deprived of access to the infallible source of leadership, the survival of the community is under constant threat.

At this ‘divine’ level of politics, the clergy is considered more righteous than the secular ruler, as it not only considers the mundane affairs of the community but also reflects, as they govern, the rule of God. In the eyes of clerical elites, during the occultation era, it is the preservation of the faith and community that constitute the authentic principles of Shiite Islam. Shiite clerics, to this end, are the bearers of these principles, and it is their responsibility to deduce the most appropriate action compatible with a given context.

Yet to fulfill their responsibility, they may engage in various political maneuvers, not necessarily at the level of divine politics. This was the case, especially in more recent centuries, when nation-states and a sense of nationalism was emerging throughout the Islamic abode. In seizing the most from the existing political opportunity structure, the clergy may engage in alliances with secular states, and with other communal groups, to advance its goals. A notable example of such a practice is the alliance between Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi and the Shah of Iran against the communist Tudeh party in 1950’s (see Chapter 4).

In a given context, the clergy, as the fallible political actor may, in the name of religion, engage in another, more mundane level of politics. To retain their autonomy

from the state, the clerical elite may consider seeking the assistance of specific social classes (e.g. wealthy landowners and merchants).

To understand Shiite political postures held by the clerical elite, one should study his perceptions and interpretations of the situation he is facing. As is shown through this chapter, the authority of Shiite clergy has not been dependent on any source of routine power, yet at the same time gains its credibility through the support of the Shiite masses. This is one of the most significant points that the current literature fails to address properly. Understanding how the Shiite clerical elite perceives the political opportunity structure and acts accordingly, is an area in the current literature that needs to be addressed in more detail. One can only hope for a better understanding of this quasi-federal structure and the possibility of a closer interfaith-association among different Shiite communities in the region. In order to do so, the following chapters try to examine the Shiite clerical elite's activities throughout the faith's history up until the contemporary era.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Shiite Activism: A Historical Review

Politics constitutes the backbone of Shiite Islam and its clerical authority. This chapter reviews a number of historical developments in order to probe the political postures of Shiite clerical elites in more detail. Using Shiite sources, this chapter describes how, between the tenth and twentieth centuries, Shiite clerical elites facing different political opportunity structures developed their *ijtihad* and assumed different political postures.

Even during the lifetime of the Prophet, the partisans of Ali (Shiites) developed a unique political posture that became consolidated around the charisma of the Prophet's son-in-law. When, Abu Bakr became the First Caliph in 632 CE instead of Ali Ibn Abu Talib, these partisans of Ali, acting on the instructions of their leader, Ali withdrew from active engagement in Islamic politics in conformity. However, the seemingly quietist posture that Ali and his companions adopted was conditional. Ali clarified this in a public address after the appointment of Uthman in 644, in which he stated the following:

You have certainly known that I am the most rightful of all others for the Caliphate. To Allah, as long as the affairs of Muslims remain intact and there is no oppression in it save on myself, I shall remain quiet, seeking reward for it [from God] and keeping aloof from its attractions and allurements for which you aspire.<sup>1</sup>

The condition set by Ali, to remain politically quiet, and in return to be rewarded by God. This implies the culture of expectation among followers of Ali in the immediate aftermath of the Prophet's death. The line of Shiite infallible Imams that followed this path in their political lives to this path, and their specific and general deputies have made this their practice during the Occultation Era. This distinctive political doctrine was put into practice by the Shiite Imams during the early stages of the foundation of the Muslim Empire in the seventh century in the aftermath of the epic battle of

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<sup>1</sup> *Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 73.

Karbala, when the Imams' doctrine did not permit the taking of military action against the caliphate or other routine powers.<sup>2</sup>

This seemingly quietist posture in no way implies that Shiite Imams became apathetic toward political affairs. Despite their belief that Islamic rule was their divine right, and that the caliphs were unjust rulers, they became involved in politics only covertly and only at times it was necessary in order to protect the Shiite community's interests. A means of advancing this mission was to encourage their pious companions to collaborate with unjust rulers in favour of the community. One of the most renowned examples of this strategy was the case of Ali Ibn Yaqteen, the devoted companion of the seventh Shiite Imam who became chancellor to the Abbasid Caliph.<sup>3</sup> While collaborating with an unjust ruler is forbidden in Shiite Islam, at times such involvement becomes licit. For instance, when the life of a Shiite is endangered, it becomes obligatory for other Shiite Muslims to cooperate with rulers, when they are confident such cooperation will prevent further threats.<sup>4</sup>

Shiite clerical elites, the general deputies of the infallible Imams during the Occultation Era, adhered to a similar political doctrine. However, the implications of this doctrine have varied from time to time as a result of the existence of differing political opportunity structures. Section I of this chapter focuses on explaining how Shiite clerical elites, confronting different political opportunity structures and with differing perceptions of them, assumed different political postures during the early stage of the Occultation Era. While Shiite clerical elites were aware that their interpretations of a given opportunity structure were fallible, it was still incumbent upon them to issue a judgment in order to lead their laity followers.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, throughout Shiite history, most cases in which there appears to be political disunity among clerical elites with respect to how they believe they should respond to a certain incident or situation, is really a difference in the tactics that, based on their

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<sup>2</sup> Although over the course of the first two Islamic centuries there had been armed rebellions among the descendants of Imam Hassan, the second Shiite Imam, against the Caliphate apparatus, the infallible Imams had never approved those political activities because they feared that the very existence of the Shiites would be abolished under the harsh rule of the Umayyads and, later, of the Abbasid Caliphs. (Rasoul Ja'farian, interview with the author, Qom, June 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Amin al-Amili, *A'yan al-Shia*, Vol. VIII: 371.

<sup>4</sup> Sheikh Mortaza Ansari, *al-Makseh*: 56.

<sup>5</sup> 'God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned,' *Quran*, II, 286.

perceptions, they choose to adopt in order to pursue their divine responsibility. Even before the rise of the Safavid Dynasty in the sixteenth century, when Shiite Islam became the state religion in Persia, the Shiites, though deprived of an infallible leader, were presented with unique opportunities to propagate their faith.

Concurrent with the commencement of the Major Occultation, the Shiite Buyid Dynasty (934-1062) launched a rebellion against the Abbasid caliphate, the pivot of Sunnite Islam at the time, and succeeded in destroying its political supremacy. This provided an opportunity for Shiite clerical elites to propagate their faith with more freedom. Although numerous books and treatises had been produced during the period, little had been written on Shiite politics and social affairs, as clerics and their followers did not expect that the occultation of the Imam would last for long. Hence, most of the judgments issued by clerics concerned jurisprudential questions, as responses to political inquiries, they believed, could await the day when the Imam would reappear and establish the last state.<sup>6</sup>

With the fall of Baghdad, the Abbasids' capital, in 1256, Shiites were once again provided with an open political opportunity structure. Clerical elites took this opportunity to become politically active for several reasons. First, the Occultation of the Imam, the ultimate just ruler, had reached its three-hundredth anniversary, and his general deputies were facing numerous inquiries from lay followers regarding the political affairs at the time (Kohlberg 1992). Second, when the Mongols invaded the Islamic world in the thirteenth century, their rule did not distinguish between Sunnite and Shiite sects. Consequently, during the reign of the Mongol Ilkhanids in Persia, and with the absence of Sunnite hegemony, Shiite clerical elites perceived the political opportunity structure to be permissive, and rejectionist Sufi and Shiite movements emerged in Persia and Iraq. This was the context within which the rise of the Safavids took place.

Section II of this chapter probes the political activism of the Shiite clerical elite throughout the Safavid era. In 1501, Ismail established the Safavid dynasty with the support of his Sufi devotees. Given the popularity of Shiite Islam among the Persians, Ismail was inspired to declare it to be the state religion in order to unite

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<sup>6</sup> Since the commencement of the Major Occultation Era, Shiite scholars have written thousands of books addressing jurisprudential questions. While chapters in books devoted to *Taharat*, religious cleanliness, numbered more than a hundred pages, political questions were discussed minimally as, for instance, in a sub-section in *Ahkam al-Bey*, in a chapter entitled 'Business Laws'.

different parts of the country. The establishment of the Safavid Dynasty caused a wave of immigration of Shiite clerical elites to Persia from all around the Islamic world. However, the Shiite clergy had to await the reign of Ismail's son, Shah Tahmasb, before it was able to institutionalise its authority and initiate a scholastic movement in Safavid Persia. Because they provided the Safavids with religious legitimacy, clerical elites were enabled to form a prestigious social stratum and to share power with the monarchs. For the more than two centuries of Safavid rule, Shiite clerical elites were provided with a unique political opportunity to develop their *ijtihad* concerning the socio-political affairs of the Shiite community. During this era, they succeeded in compiling thousands of books and treatises, and established numerous seminaries to nurture future clerical elites. This glorious era came to an end, however, with the fall of Isfahan to Sunnite Afghans and the subsequent rise of the Afsharids in 1736. Thus, two centuries after the Safavids had provided a safe haven for Shiite clerical elites seeking to launch political movements, the political opportunity structure in Persia became relatively closed; and, pushed out of politics in Persia, they then migrated to the holy cities of Iraq.

Nonetheless, the social status that the clerical elites had achieved in Safavid Persia had succeeded in entrenching their authority in the Shiite world at the time. Therefore, when the Qajars ascended to power in Persia, they sought the Shiite clerical elite's support for their rule. After a short period of decline, the Shiite clerics once again returned to the forefront of the community's politics. This time, however, with the rising influence of the West and of non-Muslim communities, and the strengthening of colonial powers in the region, Shiite activism was pursued to achieve different goals from those of the previous eras. Not only did the Qajar monarchy support the Shiite clerical elite in exchange for their legitimization of Qajar rule in Persia, the clerical elite also succeeded in mobilizing the masses against the so-called 'infidel' powers during the Russo-Persian Wars of the nineteenth century. This association between the monarchy and the clerical elite sometimes became strained, however and, especially, when the actions of the Qajars clashed with the interests of the religious elites and their followers. This occurred, for instance, in the Tobacco Protest of the 1890s and in the Persian Constitutional Revolution in the early twentieth century.

The remainder of this chapter elaborates these socio-political developments with a concentration on the role of clerical elites. While the first and second sections

of the chapter cover the major historical incidents that influenced Shiite activism prior to and during the Safavids, Section III of the chapter describes the socio-religious role that the Shiite clerical elite played in the post-Safavid period and until the contemporary era.

### **I. The Commencement of the Major Occultation: The Emergence of the Early Mujtahids**

With the commencement of the Occultation Era, and in the absence of an infallible source of religio-political leadership, Shiite clerics, the narrators of the Imam's traditions, assumed the central role of leading the community. However, at the time the abode of Islam was mainly under the rule of the Sunnite Abbasids. Given this political structure, Shiite clerics saw their responsibility as safeguarding the essential principles of the faith through their teachings and by the production of *ijtihad*. At the same time, perhaps because they hoped that the Occultation of the infallible Imam would not last long, the majority of religious elites remained politically quiet. The perceptions of Shiite clerical elites concerning the political opportunity structure at the time were shaped by these assumptions.

Subsequent to the commencement of the Major Occultation Era, the Shiite Buyids ascended to power.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to their predecessors in Persia, the Buyids defied the Abbasids, descended on Baghdad in 945, and brought the caliph under their tutelage. Their authority over Persia and Iraq coincided with Shiite rule in Egypt (the Fatimids), Syria (the Hamdanids), and Yemen (the Zaidis) (Momen 1987). However, Shiites were still evidently threatened by the well-established Sunnite hegemony throughout the Islamic world; thus it was impossible to fully consolidate Shiite political power at the time. The Buyids, therefore strove to retain their popular constituency during their reign by preserving the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad and, in that way, maintaining the balance between Shiite and Sunnite communities.

The timing of the 'Shiite golden century' could not have been better for the religious elites. Perceiving an open political opportunity structure, Shiite clerical elites started the process of consolidating the tenets of the faith in response to the

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<sup>7</sup> Prior to the Buyids, local rulers loyal to the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad had governed Iran since 821, exerting authority over the majority of the eastern part of the Islamic world. Samanids centred in Balkh, ruled from 819 to 999; Tahirids governed Khorasan for 52 years and remained loyal to the Abbasids until 873, when the Saffarids overthrew them. The Saffarids dominated the majority of eastern Persia until 1003 (Sourdél 1977).

discontent of the Occultation Era. Mohammad Ibn 'Ali Ibn Babawaih Qomi (923–991), *Sheikh Saduq*, was among the forerunners of this scholastic movement. Settled in Rey, just miles from the Shiite stronghold of Qom, he managed to compile hundreds of books and treatises under the benevolent rules of the Buyids.<sup>8</sup>

During the same period, Seyyed Mortaza (965–1044), wrote an independent treatise on politics, *Mas'alah fi al-Amal ma'a al-Sultan*, in which he states that, under some circumstances, Shiites may licitly collaborate with an unjust ruler. He says that, in reality, the collaborator in this case is 'acting on behalf of the infallible Imams [just rulers]', as he is obeying their commands (Madelung 1980). Henceforth, Seyyed Mortaza's verdict, which was a relative breakthrough at the time, has gained the support of a majority of clerical elites.<sup>9</sup>

The demise of the Abbasids also provided an opportunity for Shiite elites to collaborate with the state and to mediate its attitude towards the Shiite community. It was as a result of this development that in 1180, when al-Nasir became caliph, the supposedly highest Sunnite political figure, he bestowed his patronage on Shiite Islam.<sup>10</sup>

Occurring simultaneously with this was the beginning of the Mongol campaign in Middle Asia. The Mongols were groups of nomad warriors who, united under the leadership of Genghis, came to power in a region neighbouring China and

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<sup>8</sup> He produced more than 300 hundreds books on various issues of Shiite jurisprudence. Among them is *Man La Yahzar Al Faqih*, one of the four main Shiite books embracing Shiite Imams traditions. His school of thought was pursued by one of his prominent students, Sheikh Mufid (948-1022) who was settled in Baghdad. Living in the midst of the Sunnite-Shiite hostilities in the Abbasid capital, Mufid restored the Shiite Kalam School that had experienced a period of quiescence by engaging in a series of debates with Sunnite scholars. The *change of context from the Imams' era*, and freedom of speech, which was new for Shiites after the Battle of Karbala, demanded that the religious elite to become more engaged in debating with the representatives of other sects in order to transmit the essence of Shiite Islam to outsiders. In doing this, Sheikh Mufid opened new arenas for his successors (Mohammad Sanad, interview with the author, Qom, August 2011).

<sup>9</sup> The development of Shiite Islam in Iraq, and especially in Baghdad, had begun centuries before the Buyids, at the time of Salman's government of Madian during the caliphate of Umar Ibn al-Khattab. Consequently, from the early days of the city's establishment, its western suburb, known as Karkh, had always been a Shiite stronghold. Although Persians, all authors of the Shiite Four Books had lived in Baghdad for decades: Kulayni spent the last years of his life in Baghdad and was buried there in 941. Saduq was in Baghdad during 966, and Sheikh Tusi was the leader of Baghdad seminary until the fall of city at the hands of the Seljuqids in 1055. The power of the Shiite of Baghdad reached such a level that in 897 that the Abbasid caliph, al-Mu'tadhid, ordered that a curse be pronounced on Muawyyah in mosques willing to appeal to their community. See Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntazam fi Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*, Vol. XII: 371.

<sup>10</sup>Ibn Taqtaqi, *al-Fakhri fi Adab al-Sultaniyahwa al-Duwal al-Islamiyya*: 315.



Khawrazmid Persia on its western border. Professionals in the art of warfare, and with no distinctive religious affiliation, Mongols employed whatever means were available to expand their rule.

Genghis's descendants furthered the Mongol advance in the Islamic world and, in the mid-thirteenth century, established the Ilkhanid Dynasty in Persia and Iraq. The Ilkhanid ruler at that time, Hulagu Khan, faced two threats: the Ismailis in Alamut, and the Abbasids of Baghdad (Laroudi 2009: 103). In 1256 he invaded the Ismailis' fortress and abolished their government forever, and then afterwards rode toward Baghdad.

Alienated from the local culture, and without the least compassion towards Sunnite, Shiite, or any other sect or ideology, the Mongols had just one principle: to conquer the land through mass destruction and to show the utmost brutality (Jafarian 2011). Nevertheless, as long as enmity existed between the Sunnite caliph and the Mongols, the political opportunity structure was relatively favourable for the Shiite minority that under the changing balance of power was able to assert itself. This change would ultimately substitute an oppressive Sunnite rule with the rule of the more flexible Ilkhanids. Three major Shiite personalities were involved in this shift of power: Nasir al-Din Tusi, previously under the service of the Ismailis, Ibn Alqami, the minister of Abbasids in Baghdad, and Seyyed Ibn Tawus, the distinguished Shiite cleric of Hilla (Jafarian 2011: 639).<sup>11</sup>

### ***The Fall of Baghdad: A Permissive Context for Shiite Clerical Elites Activism***

The fall of the Abbasids to the Mongols provided the Shiite elite an unsurpassed opportunity to become actively involved in politics. Since the commencement of the Occultation Era and throughout various upheavals, numerous Shiite scholastic movements had emerged to protect the faith's principles and the Shiite community. With the abolition of the Sunnite Abbasids, a group of Shiite clerics perceived the political opportunity structure to be relatively open for pursuing their socio-political responsibilities and for according those responsibilities a more concrete status.

Concurrent with the outbreak of Genghis's campaign against the Khawrazmid,

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<sup>11</sup>Jafarian 2011: 646-65. Some sources, mainly written by Sunnite historians, accuse Nasir al-Din Tusi and Ibn Alqami of treason and encouraging Hulagu to go to war with the Abbasids. Reviewing the corruption of the Caliphate at the time, and the roots of these narrations back to the works of Ibn Taymiyyah, Jafarian proves that the destructive role of Shiite statesmen in the incident is more a false allegation than a historical reality.

and drifting from place to place like many other Muslim scholars, Nasir al-Din Tusi finally took refuge with the Ismailis of Quhistan in 1227. There he was given an office which enabled him to develop his *ijtihad* and to compile several books and treatises. But with the Mongol siege of the Ismaili fortress, Tusi recommended that the Ismaili ruler, Rukn al-Dawlah Khourshah, surrender to Hulagu in order to reduce the number of casualties (Mar'ashi 1984: 85).

The reason Tusi was willing to collaborate with the advancing Mongols had to do with his *ijtihad*, which can be extracted from one of his most renowned books, *The Nasirean Ethics*, or *Akhalq –e- Nasserī*. In this book he writes that ‘humans are civic in their nature’ and that, to ‘manage their social life, they are in need of a structured system’: the politics through which the elites could restore the rights of the laity.<sup>12</sup> He expressed the belief that a society has one of two forms: it is either ‘complete’ or ‘incomplete’. He argued that it is incumbent for everyone, lay or elite, to fully exploit his capabilities towards transforming an incomplete society into a complete one (Isfahanian and Karimi 2006). Tusi offered his services to Hulagu in the hope of establishing the complete society he had sought, just as he had done previously when he had joined the then-formidable Ismailis.

Another Shiite cleric who witnessed the fall of Baghdad and became involved in the politics of the post-Abbasid era was Ibn Tawus (1193-1266). Previously, the Abbasid Caliphs had offered Ibn Tawus the opportunity to serve at the court. Yet, his ascetic personality barred him from collaborating in the earthly matters that arose under the unjust rule of the caliphate. He justifies his political posture in a letter to his son:

When the caliph became disappointed with my response to his several attempts, he sent one of my dearer friends, who asked me: ‘How can you refuse to work with the caliph, while Seyyed Razi and Seyyed Mortaza had done otherwise?’ I replied that they both were living at the time of Shiite Buyids, who were preoccupied with the caliph and subjugated the caliphate; thereby, by accepting the position, they could proceed with their divine intentions.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this, after the conquest of Baghdad, Ibn Tawus accepted the position of Neqabat (*Head of Seyyeds*), perhaps due to Nasir al-Din Tusi’s warning that to refuse Hulagu’s offer would be dangerous for the Shiite community and its religious elite.

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<sup>12</sup> Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Akhalq e Nasserī*: 252.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Tawus, *Kashf al-Mahajjah li Thamarat al-Muhjah*: 168-70.

Etan Kohlberg observes that, after Hulagu entered Baghdad, he ordered all Muslim scholars to form a convention to issue a fatwa on the question of who is better: ‘a just infidel ruler or an unjust Muslim ruler?’ The first one who confirmed in writing and granted a privilege to the former over the latter option was Ibn Tawus, whose recommendation was then followed by the rest of the Shiite elite (Kohlberg 1992: 10).<sup>14</sup> Consequently, Ibn Tawus’ *ijtihād* confirms that, when it comes to choosing between justice and faith, he preferred the former.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately the prudential activities of Tusi, Ibn Alqami, and Ibn Tawus helped to ensure that the Shiite community, Islamic libraries and schools, and several towns and cities remained intact in spite of the Mongols’ destructive campaigns. With the fall of the formidable Ismaili fortresses and the Abbasid caliphs, and the establishment of the religiously neutral Ilkhanids in Persia and Iraq, a promising era began for the Shiite community. Moreover, since the Sunnite Abbasids were considered to be enemies of the Ilkhanid dynasty, Shiite scholars had more political opportunities than their Sunnite counterparts during the early rules of Mongols.

As mentioned earlier, Mongols were religiously tolerant. In 1295, however, Ghazan converted to Islam and required his court and the majority of Mongols who were in Iran to embrace Islam (Bausani 1968: 542). Despite being surrounded by Sunnite Hanfi and Shafi’i viziers, Ghazan bestowed his patronage on Shiite Islam.<sup>16</sup>

Uljeitu, Ghazan’s successor, ascended the throne in 1304. His rule in Persia marked an important turning point for the Shiite community and enabled their clerical elite an opportunity to consolidate their authority to the favour of their followers. Though at the time Persia had a Sunnite majority, Uljeitu converted to Shiite Islam and gave orders for the name of Imam Ali and his sons to be invoked in sermons. In

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<sup>14</sup> The term ‘Muslim’ when it appeared in the phrase ‘an unjust Muslim ruler’, implied the ‘Sunnite’ at the time as, during the period, the appointment of a Shiite ruler seemed beyond the imagination of anyone. Therefore, Ibn Tawus’ response should be regarded in its relevant context.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to all the aforementioned reasons, another reason that Shiites cooperated with the Mongols against the Abbasids was that they were expecting such an incident based on their traditional beliefs. They believed that Imam Ali had predicted the overthrow of the sons of Abbas by an army of ‘Turks with round faces and folded eyes’. Allameh Hilli narrates the tradition when he introduces his father, Sadid al-Din Hilli, who represented the city at the court of the Hulagu asking for safe-conduct prior to the outbreak of the war with the caliph. He says that Sadid al-Din promised the Mongol ruler a momentarily triumph over the Abbasids, reading to him the prophecy of Imam Ali. See Allameh Hilli, *Nahj al-Haq wa Kashf al-Sidq*: 6.

<sup>16</sup> Kashani, *Tarikh e Uljeitu*: 98-9.

1309, just fifty years after the fall of Baghdad, Uljeitu ordered coins to be inscribed with the name of Imam Ali and declared Shiite Islam to be the religion of his state.<sup>17</sup>

In a surviving treatise, addressing the Sunnite community, Uljeitu defends his conversion as follows:

Whoever is wise enough understands that [the conversion to Shiite Islam] is rooted in embracing the most righteous path in order to please the prophet. I trust that I will be rewarded for this move. Therefore, anyone who accepts this will prosper in front of God and there will not be any duress on those who do not agree with this. The sermon and the coin inscription, however, are the ruler's right and should be under my name. Therefore, I order to call and inscribe the glorious name of Amir al-Mu'minin, Ali, and his infallible sons, prior to my name.<sup>18</sup>

With Shiite Islam established as the official religion of the state for the first time since the caliphate of Imam Ali, the ruler invited Shiite clerics from all around the Islamic world to come to Persia and propagate the faith's principles.

The most prominent Shiite personality who accepted the royal invitation and attended to the Ilkhalid court was Allameh Hilli (1250–1325). He played a pivotal role in establishing Shiite Islam in Persia during the auspicious rule of Uljeitu by instructing in portable Shiite schools. With the support of the ruler, Shiite scholars, at the individual level, were succeeded in influencing the socio-political structure in favour of the community throughout Persia and Iraq.

After the death of Uljeitu, the authority of the Ilkhanids became enfeebled in Persia, and opposition movements raised the flag of independence in every corner of the country. Shiite clerical activities during the reign of Uljeitu had influenced most of these movements.<sup>19</sup> One of these opposition movements was formed by Sarbadars of Sabzevar, a group of militant Sufi dervishes and yeomen who had ruled in Khorasan for almost fifty years until 1386 (Momen 1987: 93).

Although it is dubious that Sarbadars were a purely Shiite movement from the outset, it is evident that, during the last stages of their reign, popular pressure pushed their rulers to patronise the faith. A letter written by the Sarbadar ruler, Ali Mua'yyid,

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<sup>17</sup> Abdullah Ibn Fadlallah, *Tarikh e Wassaf*: 302.

<sup>18</sup> For the full text of the treatise, *Fawaed -e- Uljeitu* see Rahimlou 1973.

<sup>19</sup> The Sufi and Shiite rapprochement took place concurrently with the start of the Mongol invasion of the Islamic world in the early thirteenth century. This newborn approach received popular support, especially after the fall of Baghdad. For the transformation of Sufi and Sunnite movements to the Shiite Islam see Jafarian 2011:677-89, and Momen 1987:96.

to Shahid Awwal (1334-1385), is noteworthy with regard to this development. Ali Mua'yyid invited the Shahid to migrate to Sabzevar to lead the community, telling him, 'We are concerned that our homeland will be subject to the wrath of God due to the lack of a leader and guidance'.<sup>20</sup> Although Shahid Awwal, who was preoccupied with establishing a seminary in Jabal Amil (Lebanon) at the time, did not agree to move to Sabzevar, he wrote one of the most famous Shiite books, *al-Lum'ah al-Dimashqiya*, as a response to the Sarbadar ruler. He was the second supreme Shiite cleric, after Alameh Hilli, to become involved in politics and was one of the foremost Shiite political theologians during the period.

Concurrent with the Sarbadars and the establishment of the Timurid Dynasty in Eastern Persia,<sup>21</sup> various Sufi orders were active throughout the Islamic world. Among these was the Zahediyeh Sufi order, located in northern Persia, which enjoyed huge popular support due to the charisma of their late spiritual leader, Sheikh Zahed Gilani, and the Sheikh's son-in-law, Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili. With the rising popularity of Shiite Islam throughout Persia and eastern Anatolia, Sheikh Safi's descendants and their followers succeeded in establishing the Safavid dynasty and in declaring Shiite Islam as the official religion of the dynasty in 1501.

Five centuries after the Occultation of the last Shiite Imam, the community was provided with an opportunity to enjoy greater freedom and to eradicate the power of Sunnite rulers in Persia. Throughout this period, the Shiite clerical elite, as the general deputies of the infallible Imam, led the laity and strove to protect the community. However, the rise of Shiite Buyids (934 CE), the fall of the Sunnite Abbasid Caliphate (1258 CE), and the rule of Shiite Ilkhanid (1308-1316) made the most important contribution to enabling the Shiite clerical elite to exert their socio-political responsibilities. These structural turning points also allowed the Shiite clergy to develop its *ijtihad* in regard to the relationship between religion and politics. They were pushed to utilize the power of *ijtihad* in order to find out how they might participate in the political affairs of their community in order to fulfil the role accorded to them by the infallible Imams. And eventually, through the activities they pursued over the course of the 560 years that had passed since the commencement of

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<sup>20</sup> Shahid Thani, *Al-Rawda al-Bahiyah fi Sharh al-Lum'ah al-Dimashqiya*, Vol. I: 143.

<sup>21</sup> Established by Timur, they ruled throughout a vast part of Iran and central Asia from 1370 to 1507. Their authority over Iran declined with the rise of the Safavids. For a history of Timurid Iran see Manz 2007: 146-177.

the Occultation Era, the people of Persia were ready to embrace Shiite Islam. This also influenced the Safavid rulers, who made Shiite Islam the official religion of their rule in order to unite the various parts of the country around a common belief.

## **II. The Establishment of the Shiite Safavid Dynasty: Seizing the Advantages of an Open Political Opportunity Structure**

The establishment of the Shiite Safavid dynasty in Persia is one of the most significant events in the shaping of political Shiite Islam in the modern era. The Safavid dynasty provided Shiite clerical elites with a relatively open political opportunity structure for propagating their views and institutionalising Shiite Islam in Persia. The Shiite clerics, who had been invited to share authority with the Safavid rulers, were presented with a unique opportunity to develop their *ijtihad* with respect to political questions. It was during this period that the foundations of the Shiite clerical elite's modern activism were established. There was a group of Shiite clerical elites who preferred not to become involved in politics; but though they remained politically quiet, their teaching at seminaries supported their politically active colleagues.

With the dissolution of the Abbasids, the popularity of Sufism and Shiite Islam increased and, throughout Iraq, eastern Anatolia, and Persia, it remained at its peak level for centuries. This can be seen with respect to several socio-political movements that were active from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries in the region. With the demise of the formidable pivot of Sunnite orthodoxy in Baghdad, the Shiite clergy became more active, and their rapprochements with different Sufi orders finally redounded to their benefit.<sup>22</sup> In 1501, Ismail, who was fourteen years old at the time, established the Safavid dynasty with the support of his Sufi devotees<sup>23</sup> and declared Shiite Islam to be the religion of his state.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the main factor leading to

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<sup>22</sup> One significant example of those movements was the rise of militancy among Sheikh Safi's household. The Sufi Safavid order became militant in the mid-fifteenth century, under the leadership of Sheikh Junayd (d.1460), the grandfather of Ismail (Jafarian 2011)

<sup>23</sup> Savory 1974. A group of Shiite Ghulat warriors strongly committed to the Safavid supreme spiritual leader. Since the era of Sheikh Haydar, Ismail's father, they became fully at the service of the Safavids against their enemies and played a crucial role in the establishment of the dynasty by Ismail.

<sup>24</sup> Khwandamir 1983, Vol. IV: 467-8. The operation of Shiite Islam as the state religion was generally limited by Ismail to six elements: (a) reading prayer sermons in the name of the changing Twelve Imams, (b) the following of Shiite rituals by Prayer leaders, (c) changing the Adhan to the Shiite style, (d) inscription of the name of the Imams on coin, (e) cursing the

the establishment of an official Shiite dynasty in Persia was the popularity of the faith among the Persians, at a time in which the country was sandwiched between two formidable Sunnite ruling groups -- the Ottoman Turks, and the Uzbeks. The result was the increased popularity of Shiism among the majority of Persians, who were nominally Sunnis -- at least in major cities -- but were extremely sympathetic to Shiite Islam. This later led to the swift institutionalization of Ismail's reign.

The official establishment of the Shiite dynasty received tremendous support from the majority of Shiite religious elites, from Persia to Jabal Amil in Lebanon.<sup>25</sup> Protected by the safe haven provided by the newly-established state, religious elites were able to freely propagate their opinions. However, their political involvement and influence vis-à-vis the state varied from time to time over the course of the ensuing two centuries.

### ***Shiite Clerical Elite Activism in Safavid Persia: Clerical Elites and a Perceptibly Open Political Opportunity Structure***

The Shiite clerical hierarchy was constructed within the context provided by the Safavids, as well as by the earlier Shiite Mujtahids whose actions served as a forerunner to it by their pursuit of solutions that involved compromise with monarchs and sharing power with the state. In the early years of Safavid rule, the ruler's authority was comprised of tribal Sufism and extreme Shiite Islam (Lambton 1988). When Ismail

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first three Caliph in public, (f) killing whomever opposed these orders. Therefore, the conversion to Shiite Islam, at least during the early stages of Safavid rule, encompassed nothing more than a few insubstantial changes. In sum, the rise of Ismail and declaration of Shiite Islam as the religion of his reign did not abolish Shiite social institutions and order in Persia.

<sup>25</sup> Numerous studies have focused on the role of the Jabal Amil Shiite scholars and their migration to Persia and involvement in the Safavid's court. While for example Hourani (1986) believes in their collective exodus, Abisaab (2004) mentions their influential role; some like Newman (1993) state their marginal role. Beyond the numbers of Jabal Amili Shiite scholars who migrated to Persia after the founding of the Safavid dynasty, the role that their jurisprudential school has played is undeniable. As we have seen over this chapter, three main issues should be noted in this regard: (1) the majority of Shiite ulama supported the Safavids; and though some may have been critical of some of its activities, at least during the rule of the Sunnite Ottomans, nobody was opposed to its very existence; (2) while Persian Shiite scholars were inclined toward philosophical and theosophical schools of thought, Arab Shiite scholars were devoted to the jurisprudential school, and (3) the impact of Jabal Amili Shiite scholars was not limited to those who migrated to Persia; there were some scholars, like Shahid Thani, who had never been in Persia but greatly influenced the development of Shiite political thoughts through their teachings and students, during and after the Safavids (Rasoul Jafarian, interview with the author, Qom, June 2012).

was crowned in Tabriz, he was accounted as a God in the eyes of his pious followers. Minorsky quotes a Venetian merchant present in Tabriz at the time as saying that Shah Ismail 'is loved and revered by his people as God and especially by his soldiers, many of whom enter into battle without armor expecting their master to watch over them in the fight' (1943: 13). But the Safavids further incited the Persians by inventing a family tree that allowed them to claim legitimacy through direct descent from the Seventh Shiite Imam.<sup>26</sup> It was in such circumstances that Ismail began to establish his reign and found a dynasty which was to rule throughout Persia for more than two centuries. His was the longest lasting Persian state to exist in the post-Islamic era, since 637 CE. To unite the Persian territories, Ismail began a series of conquests right after ascending to the throne in 1501. He succeeded in conquering Iraq in 1508. When he seized authority over Khorasan from the Sunnite Uzbeks in 1510, he summoned the Shiite clergy, Arabs, Persians, and other notables to Herat to celebrate the victory.<sup>27</sup> However, at least until the Battle of Chaldiran, in 1514, Shiite clerical elites did not exercise much influence over political affairs. His revolutionary activities in Persia were facilitated by his personal charisma and the power of the sword of his Sufi devotees.

Although Shiite clerics had started to adapt to the newly-emerged political opportunity structure, it was only after Ismail's defeat at Chaldiran, when what his followers considered to be his divinely-inspired charisma started to diminish among his supporters, that the existence of the young dynasty found itself in desperate need of another source of legitimacy. Consequently, what was to become a long-lasting connection between Safavid monarchs and Shiite religious elites was established. As a result of this, a trend of Shiite *ijtihad* started to develop, mainly through the initiatives of Jabal Amili (Lebanese) scholars. A number of these Mujtahids travelled to Persia where they were granted official positions in the state apparatus (e.g. Sheikh al-Islam), while some preferred to remain in Jabal Amil and support the Safavids remotely.

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<sup>26</sup> Shaybi 1991: 391. The Shiite Imams were popular among Persians throughout post-Islamic history. Consequently one major factor for the development of the Safavid apparatus in Iran was the claim that they belonged to the Sadat progeny. However, the reliability of this claim is believed to be quite controversial.

<sup>27</sup> Amini 2004: 357-8. Amir Sadr al-Din Ibrahim Amini Hiravi (d.1535), the writer of *Futuhāt-e-Shahi*, narrates that in the aftermath of Uzbek's overthrow from Khorasan, 'Shah Ismail entered Herat on 31 December 1510 and was regularly visited by the elite and notables from Iraq, Khorasan, Sabzevar, and Azerbaijan. While some Shiite scholars settled in Khorasan close to the Eighth Imam's shrine, others headed back to where they came from'.



The relationship between the Shiite clergy and the Safavids had its ups and downs over the course of some two hundred years although, in general, both parties benefited from it. The support of clerical elites provided rulers with the legitimacy they needed among the community, and the leverage they needed to advance their doctrines against hostile Sunnite neighbouring states. At the same time, the rise of the Safavids offered opportunities for the Shiite clerical elite to propagate the faith's principles and to strengthen its foundations.

Among the most notable forerunners of this auspicious association was Nur-al-Din Abu al-Ḥasan Ali Ibn Ḥussein Ibn Abd-al-ʿĀli, known as Mohaqeq Karaki (1464–1533). Born in the suburbs of Baalbek in Lebanon, Karaki belonged to the Jabal Amil Shiite school of thought, which had been founded by Shahid Awwal decades earlier.<sup>28</sup> In 1509, he was stationed in Najaf, when the city was conquered by Safavid troops.<sup>29</sup>

A year later, Karaki, along with scores of other Shiite clerics, travelled to Persia for the first time and stayed in Khorasan for almost two years. During this period, he took advantage of the existing political opportunities to propagate his *ijtihad* by writing a series of treatises and books.<sup>30</sup> Through the pages of those treatises, Karaki attempted to define a new role for the Shiite clerical elite and its socio-political status within the community. Around 1511, Karaki wrote one of his first famous treatises in support of Ismail's order on the ritual cursing of Sunnite Caliphs (Stanfield-Johnson 2004: 59). It was in the introduction to this treatise that, for the first time, Karaki addressed the Safavid rule as the 'supreme, impressive,

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<sup>28</sup> Shaybi 1991:411. One of the major characteristics of Shahid Awwal's jurisprudential thought was the unique role he reserved for Shiite scholars and their guardianship over the community. While he was leading the seminary of Jabal Amil, he used to send his deputies to the neighboring cities in order to propagate the faith and perhaps to collect money for developing the religious schools.

<sup>29</sup> Khansari 1991, Vol. IV: 363. After conquest of Baghdad, Shah Ismail cherished Shiite clerics by endowing them great deals of properties. Along with land grants, the Shah gave orders for seventy thousands dinars to be given to Karaki to spend among the religious students.

<sup>30</sup> One of the earliest works of Karaki is his treatise on Kharaj, written months before his travel to Iran. He implies in the introduction of the treatise, which does not mention anything about Safavid rule contrary to his later works, that he wrote the treatise to address the criticism of his fellow Shiite jurists. In this sense, his acceptance of the royal endowments resembled Seyyed Radhi's behaviour when encountering the unjust ruler of his era (Mohaqeq Karaki 1989: 85). Eight years later, Ibrahim Ibn Sulaiman Qatifi (d.1538), known as the most famous critics of Karaki, wrote a response to this treatise, which is called *al-Siraj al-Wahhaj fi Daf'e 'AjajQati'at al-Lajaj*.

honourable, Musawi,<sup>31</sup> and expressed the hope that God Almighty might prolong its victory and empowerments'.<sup>32</sup> In 1515, following his return to Najaf, Karaki wrote another influential treatise on Friday prayers, in which he defined his view of the role of the Imam's general deputies.<sup>33</sup> He claimed that, during the Occultation Era, a fully qualified jurist could lead the Friday Prayer as the infallible Imam's deputy and on his behalf.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, it was only during the rule of Ismail's successor that Karaki was provided an opportunity to put this view in practice.<sup>35</sup>

Shah Tahmasb ascended to the throne in 1524, when he was only ten years old, and after Ismail's charisma and support had declined. His fifty-two year long reign represented one of the most fruitful periods for the consolidation of Shiite clerical authority. He paved the path for a group of Arab Shiite clerics, including Karaki, to develop their *ijtihad* with the full support of the royal court.

Consequently, while Ismail's reign was the era of the establishment of the Shiite Safavids, Tahmasb's rule promised an era of Shiite consolidation throughout Persia. His most important contribution during the reign of the young king, to the status of the Shiite clergy occurred when, during a visit to Iraq in 1528, he issued a

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<sup>31</sup> Referring to the Safavid progeny's claim that comes from Imam Musa Ibn Jafar.

<sup>32</sup> Karaki, *Nafaḥat al-Lahut fi la'n al-Jebt wa al-Taqt*: 35.

<sup>33</sup> The congregational prayer on Friday, *Jumu'ah*, has always been a sign of the religio-political bond between the Muslim ruler and the community. While among the majority of Sunnite Muslims, anyone who is appointed by the ruler could lead the Friday Prayer; the leadership of this prayer was generally exclusive to the infallible Imams and their specific deputies in Shiite Islam. The rise of the Shiite Safavid Dynasty, along with the accusations of the Sunnite Ottomans in regard to recitation of the prayer, led Shiite scholars to consider the conditions of conducting the Friday Prayer during the Occultation Era. Although Karaki's treatise paved the way for some Shiite jurists to lead the Friday Prayer, the discussion was so sensitive that it took decades for Shiites to conduct the congregational Friday Prayer routinely. For a detailed history of the Friday Prayer in Shiite Islam and during Safavids era, see Jafarian 2002: 15- 102.

<sup>34</sup> Hassoun 1998, Vol. I: 168. Karaki believed that the Mujtahid of the Age should encompass thirteen different characteristics, including faith, justice, and a strong memory.

<sup>35</sup> Karaki had not been given the opportunity during the Shah Ismail's era due to the two major reasons: first the Shah, who projected a great charisma did not require an alternative source of legitimacy for his rule, and secondly, the Safavid court at the disagreed with the clergy, perhaps fearing the danger of losing their positions to an Arab Shiite Jurist. One of the Persian Shiite Scholars who opposed Karaki was Mir Jamal al-Din Astarabadi who was the Safavid's Sadr between 1514 to 1525 under Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasb. While he was responsible for the awqaf and Royal endowments to the Shiite clerics, between 1514 and 1518, Karaki had been excluded from grants previously offered to him (Khwandamir 1983, Vol. IV: 549). For more information on disputes between Karaki and some Safavids' court members, see Abisaab 2004:17-19.

decree stating that opposition to Karaki, the deputy of the infallible Imam, is equal to idolatry.<sup>36</sup>

Karaki travelled to Iran for the second time, and this time with a greater authority. When he entered the capital, Qazvin, the Shah addressed him and said: ‘Today you, as the deputy of the Imam, are more righteous to rule; I am carrying out your orders on your behalf, as one of your humble agents’.<sup>37</sup> The majority of Karaki’s activities during this era were focused on issuing religious verdicts, which ranged from forbidding wine drinking to teaching Shiite jurisprudence. In acknowledgement of his pragmatic approach and achievements, the historian Rumlu declared that he was the most politically influential Shiite cleric since Nasir al-Din Tusi (2006: 349).<sup>38</sup>

### ***The Solidarity of Shiite Clerical Elites in Safavid Persia***

Karaki was in Persia for only three years during Tahmasb’s reign. But the teachings of the school that he founded at that time remained predominant in the country for decades as a result of the activities of his family, students, and Arab colleagues who migrated to Persia after he had. Indeed, he had established the cornerstone of a structure that provided his descendants with opportunities to pursue the further strengthening of the clerical sociopolitical authority. It should be noted that this extended well beyond the activities of the clerics who migrated to Persia and held high-ranking positions in Safavid courts.<sup>39</sup>

Some Shiite clerics remained in their hometowns in Iraq and Lebanon and never visited Persia; yet they supported the Shiite state and aligned themselves with their colleagues who had migrated to Persia. Shahid Thani (1506–1558) and

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<sup>36</sup> Khansari 1991, Vol. V: 170. For the edited English translation of Shah Tahmasb’s decrees, see Arjomand 1988: 250-62.

<sup>37</sup> Khansari 1991, Vol. V: 162.

<sup>38</sup> However, because of some internal hostilities, perhaps from his historic enemies, Karaki headed back to Najaf after three years. Later on, Shah Tahmasb issued another decree and tried to induce him to travel to Persia once again. In his letter, Shah Tahmasb states that the development and propagation of Shiite Islam, as a means to bring about the emergence of the Imam, is the utmost goal of the Safavids; and that, to achieve this goal, everyone should follow the Ulama, among whom Karaki possessed the greatest prestige (Afandi 1981, Vol. III: 460). Preparing to travel to Persia, however, Karaki passed away in 1533. The coincident, prompted a theory that he had been poisoned. Consequently, some contemporary Shiite scholars of Karaki, acknowledged him as the *Shahid -e- Thani*, the Second Martyr (Ibid: 442).

<sup>39</sup> Izzuddin Hussein Ibn Abd al-Samad Amili (d. 1576) and his son, known as Sheikh Bahaei (1547-1621), were among those Arab scholars who migrated to Iran and became Sheikh al-Islam in the court of Shah Tahmasb I and Shah Abbas I.

Moqaddas Ardabili (d.1585) were among this group of clerical elites. While the former was settled in Jabal Amil, which was at the time under the authority of the Sunnite Ottomans, the latter resided in Najaf and never visited the Safavid capital. Nevertheless, both supported Safavid rule and produced verdicts that strengthened the state's Shiite base. For both, perhaps the reason, which recurred in many other cases throughout Shiite history, was to protect the seminaries of their towns of residence and to foster the next generation of clerics.

Shahid Thani never left Jabal Amil for Persia, but was teacher to a number of clerics who later held positions in Safavids courts. He further developed the judgements of Karaki concerning the Friday Prayer, clarifying his *ijtihad* and perception concerning the support of the Shiite state during the Occultation Era. In contrast to his predecessor, who believed that the Friday Prayer was optional, Shahid Thani was the first Shiite cleric who believed that conducting Friday Prayers should be obligatory. He observed that Shiites had not conduct the Friday Prayer throughout history because of the necessity, at times, to conceal their faith. But because, as he stated, 'the excuse is withdrawn in this era', he argued that everyone should strive to fulfil this religious practice routinely (Jafarian 2002: 146). In the same clause, he implicitly endorsed the rise of the Shiite dynasty as a favourable development for the community.

The teachings of Moqaddas Ardabili, who exhibited a more apolitical personality and saintly conduct, also supported the rise of the Safavids. Although he never visited Persia, it seems that there was a mutually respectful relationship between him and the monarch.<sup>40</sup> He clearly states that any form of government during the Occultation Era, including that of the Safavids, is unjust, although he prescribes active involvement in their court with the aim of protecting Shiite Islam against its enemies. After reciting the Quranic verse of 'And do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest you be touched by the Fire',<sup>41</sup> Moqaddas justifies cooperation with (unjust) Safavid rulers and states:

If someone agrees to the survival of a Shiite or non-Shiite regime,  
because its unjust ruler likes the believers and hence protects their

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<sup>40</sup> Khansari 1991, Vol. I: 203.

<sup>41</sup> *Quran*, XI, 113.

interests and faith, and prevents the domination of their enemies, this verse does not apply to him.<sup>42</sup>

These remarks from the Mujtahid clearly show that, although he had reservations about the rule of Shiite Safavids, he preferred them to the Ottomans and Uzbeks.

Eventually, the clerical elites perceived that the political opportunities provided by the rise of the Shiite dynasty were favourable to the fulfillment of their objectives, and seized them. With their perception of the opportunity structure as being favourable, the Amili Shiite Mujtahids and their students focused on propagating their judgments, building religious schools with royal financial support, and strengthening their social base by filling religious positions like leading prayers, *Pishnamazi*, in major mosques. Their authority had reached such a level in less than fifty years after Karaki that they could have easily overthrown the monarch's power.<sup>43</sup>

However, with the rise Shah Abbas, the political opportunity structure became closed for clerical elites. This eventually led to an internal schism among the Shiite clergy, the subsequent rise of anti-Mujtahids Akhbaris, and the end of clerical activism for the coming century.

### ***Shah Abbas and the Decline of Shiite Mujtahids' Authority in Persia***

In 1587, after almost a decade of disorder throughout the Safavid realm, Abbas ascended the throne. His reign was among the most important in that era of Persian history and shaped the early socio-economic structure of the country during subsequent centuries. Soon, Abbas, who had replaced his father with a group of army commanders, started to eradicate threats to his throne and became the only voice of the dynasty.<sup>44</sup> The young monarch started to develop his own devotee regiments, known as Ghullar Ghulams, and diminished the centralized power of Sufis and Qizilbash elites (Falsafi 1990: 223). Iskandar Beg Turkaman notes that he individually monitored every single affair of politics and religion and was 'the

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<sup>42</sup> Moqaddas Ardabili, *Majma' al-Faidah wa al-Burhan*, Vol. XIII: 68.

<sup>43</sup> Golsorkhi 1994. Shiite clerical elite allied with some Qizilbash commanders, used their authority and forced Shah Ismail II to rescind his anti-Shiite Islam orders, which were made under the influence of the king's master and pro-Sunnite Sadr, Mirza Makhdam Sharifi.

<sup>44</sup> Falsafi 1990:185-193. Shah Abbas killed Murshid Quli Khan Ostaglu, the kingmaker army leader, along with some other Army leaders, on a grand scale to show his independence in Royal affairs. After that, the autocratic rule of Shah Abbas was established and no religious or political figures were able to disobey his orders throughout his reign.

moderator of the religion and the state's affairs, and the developer of the people and kingdom's arrangements' (1992, Vol II: 532).

Notwithstanding the mutual respect that existed between the king and these religious figures, the power of clerical elites and their engagements in politics was restrained during this era. In contrast to Tahmasb's reign, during this period, it was the Shiite clerical elite who became the King's agents at the royal court.<sup>45</sup> Beyond this they still retained the privileges of the Awqaf that the king had allocated for religious affairs.<sup>46</sup> Impediments to the rising authority of Shiite clerical elites, who had no other alternative under the arbitrary rule of the king, along with the decay of *ijtihad* among the renowned Shiite mujtahids of the time, resulted in the rise of a religious scholastic movement known as Akhbarism or 'Islamic Scripturalism' (Gleave 2007). Generally opposing the *ijtihad* and the role of Shiite mujtahids in any social affairs, the movement was begun under the leadership of Mulla Mohammad Amin Astarabadi (d. 1627), who resided in Hijaz. Astarabadi was among those astute Shiite clerics who harshly attacked Usuli scholars like Sheikh Mufid, Sheikh Tusi, and Allameh Hilli, and accused them of deviation from the path of the Prophet and the Imams (Astarabadi 2005: 172-3). He believed that, instead of conducting *ijtihad*, which derived from Sunnite jurisprudence, Shiite scholars should rely on the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams as the most important source of Islamic law.<sup>47</sup>

Astarabadi's reservations soon found traction among people in Persia, Bahrain, and Iraq, initiating a dark age of Usuli mujtahids beginning in the early seventeenth century. The dynamism of the Shiite Usuli School, which was anchored to the power of *ijtihad*, was displaced by the dogmatic Akhbari School, which focuses mainly on the literal exegesis of traditions. Although Akhbarism was a setback for Shiite scholarship,<sup>48</sup> it had one main advantage: it inaugurated a mass collection of Shiite traditions with the support of Safavid monarchs. A case in point is The *Bihar*

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<sup>45</sup> Della Valle 2005: 309. Pietro Della Valle, the Italian traveller who was a contemporary of Shah Abbas, states that the king criticised the clerical elite who were demanding him to stop the war with the Muslim Ottomans, and said 'they have become irritating, and if I hear from them once again, I will order them all to be massacred'.

<sup>46</sup> Falsafi 1990: 877-81. After his decisive victory over the Ottomans, Shah Abbas offered to allocate a huge portion of his possessions to Awqaf in the name of the Prophet and Infallible Imams.

<sup>47</sup> For a detailed list of differences between the Akhbari and Usuli schools of thought, see Gleave 2007: 311-314.

<sup>48</sup> Khansari states that Astarabadi's activities 'degraded the grand Ulama of the faith and ruined the principal foundations of the religion' (1991, Vol. I: 136).

*al- Anwar*, consisting of thousands of Shiite traditions, compiled by Mohammad Baqer Majlesi (1616–1698).<sup>49</sup> He was among those Shiite clerics who enjoyed popularity among the community and enforced his will on the rule of Shah Sultan Hussein, the last Safavid ruler.<sup>50</sup>

The popularity of Akhbarism among Shiite scholars and the masses occurred concurrently. The Shiite community was then a great supporter of the clerical elite and, by the final years of the Safavid dynasty, the clerical authority appeared to have reached its peak. This can be compared to the position of Allameh Majlesi within the Safavid court and his popular support among the inhabitants of Isfahan. However, Majlesi did not live to witness the fall of the Safavids and he died in 1698 CE, just five years after Shah Sultan Hussein ascended to the throne.

In 1722, the incompetence of the dynasty was increasing, and soon the capital of the Safavids, Isfahan, surrendered in the face of a revolt of Afghan Ghalzais, who rose against the Shiite monarchy and toppled Shah Sultan Hussein. A period of seven dark years for the Shiite Persians commenced when, in October 1722, the Safavid ruler abdicated the throne in favour of Mahmud Afghan (Axworthy 2006:39).<sup>51</sup> Ashraf, the cousin of Mahmud, succeeded him and became the ruler of Persia in 1725. After ascending to the throne, he revealed his extreme hatred for the Shiites and Persians when he categorized the inhabitants of his rule into seven distinct classes: Sunnite Ghalzais, Armenians, Sunnite Dargaznis, Multan Indians, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Shiite Persians (Lockhart 1958: 298). It seemed the permissive context of Shiite activism was soon to be ended by the fall of the Safavids; however, the foundations that had been laid down by the activities of the Shiite clerical elites and their entourages throughout Persia, and the popularity of the Shiite Safavid rulers, who

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<sup>49</sup> Khansari, Vol. VII: 96. Mohammad Baqer Majlesi, along with Mohammad Ibn Hassan, known as Hurr Amili (d.1693), the writer of *Wasael al-Shia*, and Mulla Mohsen Mohammad Fayz Kashani (d.1679), the writer of *al-Wafi*, known as 'the three later Mohammads, the collectors of the faith's traditions', were all adherents of the Akhbari School.

<sup>50</sup> Allameh Majlesi is among those Shiite scholars who have been under harsh attack by the majority of western Orientalists, accused of having played a crucial role in the fall of the Safavids. It seems that this historical misunderstanding started with Sir John Malcolm's criticism of the role of Majlesi for brutally killing some Sufis during the reign of Shah Sultan Hussein (1815:595). The historic evidence on which Malcolm relies is seriously distorted. Later on, Sir Percy Sykes (1915:214), Browne (1959, Vol. IV: 403), Minorsky (1943), and Lockhart (1958:38) all made false conclusions based on the assumptions of Malcolm about the role of Allameh Majlesi. For a critical review of Orientalists' viewpoints on Majlesi see Algar 2010.

<sup>51</sup> For a list of causes of the Safavid decline, see Minorsky 1943: 23.

were believed to be the descendants of the infallible Imams, were strong enough to withstand the enmity of the Sunnite Afghan invaders. As a matter of fact, eventually an Afsharid commander, Nader, enjoying the charisma of a Safavid prince, Tahmasb II, was able to reunite Persia and expel the Afghan invaders after seven years of occupation.

The Safavids had come to the power in Persia by fashioning their doctrines to those of Shiite Islam. At the time, Shah Ismail announced that Shiite Islam was to be the religion of his newly-established state, and a powerful sense of pro-Shiite Islam was felt throughout Persia. The establishment of the Shiite dynasty at a time in which the Islamic abode was under the influence of the formidable Sunnite Ottoman Empire provided an opportunity for Shiite scholars to develop a new *ijtihad* in order to make the most of an opportunity structure that was favourable to their goals.

Throughout the Safavid era, there were some Shiite clerics who, based on their interpretations of the existing political opportunity structure, migrated to Persia to become actively involved in the politics of the monarchy, while the rest of the scholars, those who did not leave their hometowns and were seemingly proponents of political quietism, did not do anything to undermine the Shiite state. In general it can be said, then, that the Shiite clergy of the time worked to make the most out of the open opportunity structure and to institutionalise their authority throughout the community. Although their authority had been subjected to various upheavals during the two centuries of Safavid Persia, in general, the Shiite religious elite achieved an unsurpassed position, one which laid a foundation for the performance of their socio-political roles over the subsequent centuries and up until the contemporary era.

### **III. Shiite Clerical Elites and the Politics of the Post-Safavid Era**

Following the fall of Isfahan in 1722 to the Sunnite Afghan Ghilzai, the Shiite supremacy in Persia faced a decade of stagnation. The historical irony was that thousands of Shiite clerical elites and notable families fled to the holy cities of Iraq and took refuge among the Ottomans, despite their former enmity towards them. The process of mass migration accelerated even more when Nader liberated Persia from the Afghans and founded the Afsharid Dynasty in 1736. On 22 January of that year, Nader, who triumphantly defeated the Afghans, had pushed back the Ottoman and Russian forces. Having restored Persian sovereignty once again, he ordered all notables to be gathered in Mughan Plain to decide the future of the country (Amoretti



1968). After a month he conditionally agreed to found a new dynasty, which would be called the Afsharids. The most significant of the conditions that he set force, was the abolition of Shiite Islam as the official religion of Persia. Addressing the gathering, he said: ‘Previously, Sunnite Islam had been practiced throughout Persia. It was the Safavids who abandoned our ancestors’ religion, in favour of their own state interests, and thus substituted Shiite Islam and caused degeneracy herein and shed blood’.<sup>52</sup>

He then asked the notables to think over his conditions and to express their opinion. The only opposition came from Mirza Abdul Hassan Mullabashi, a famous cleric who was later executed in Mughan to signal Nader’s stance against the Shiite hegemony in Persia. This sent a strong message to the Shiite clergy that there would not be any opportunity for political activism, at least not while Nader held office. Nader went even further by confiscating all Awqaf from the clerics in favour of his army and moving the capital from Isfahan to Mashahd, which showed the utmost departure from the Safavids’ politics (Roemer 1986).

Nevertheless, it has not been clearly understood whether Nader was a despot and brutal ruler, or if he was a benevolent Muslim who sought to dedicate his efforts to uniting different Islamic sects (Marwi 1960: 416). In the last stages of his reign, a twofold reality became more evident than ever: while the seeds of Shiite Islam that had been planted during the reign of the Safavids were flourishing among the majority of Persians,<sup>53</sup> which, in a sense, transformed the state-clergy relationship to a laity-clergy relationship. In other words, the Persians showed patronage toward Shiite Islam and the clerical elites were still benefiting from this.

When Nader was killed in 1747, Persia once again went through anarchy. Eventually in 1750, Karim Khan established the Zand Dynasty and named Shiraz as the capital of his new rule. As one of the most well reputed kings of Persian history, he left Khurasan to the family of Nader, for his honour, and allocated a pension to Ismail III until his death. This also indicates how, more than a half a century since the fall of the Safavids, the surviving members of the dynasty remained popular in the eyes of Persians. The fate of Karim Khan’s dynasty, however, did not follow the same

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<sup>52</sup>Mirza Mehdi Khan Astarabadi, *Tarikh –e- Jahan Goshaye Naderi*: 349.

<sup>53</sup>Roemer 1986. When the central Safavid state was toppled in 1722, their popularity by no means came to an end, at least among Shiite Persians who honoured their progeny. Nader was promoted among Persians as the ally of the Safavid princes, Tahmasb II, and Abbas III and was accounted as their regents until the establishment of the Afsharid dynasty. After Nader, Karim Khan and his allies became regent to another Safavid prince, Ismail III, who died in 1773.

path. Some years after his death, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar killed the last Zand king, Lotf Ali Khan, in 1794, two years before Qajar's coronation in Tehran, the capital of his new dynasty.

The ascension of Agha Mohammad Khan to the throne, inaugurated a new period of Shiite political activism was unwrapped. This time, however, contrary to the Safavid era, the Shiite clerical elite did not only have the experience of establishing a relationships with the state, but also had been of enjoying great popularity among the masses, which constituted a new constituency for them. The Qajars came to power at the time when Usuli, pro-*ijtihad* Shiite clerics were once again finding their ways to the forefront of society, the position that had been lost during the later Safavid era and the decades of the interregnum period.<sup>54</sup>

In such circumstances, Agha Mohammad Khan became the new monarch and swore to protect Shiite Islam.<sup>55</sup> In contrast to the Safavids, the Qajars did not have the advantage of having a prestigious background. Thus, the new monarch tended to incline towards Shiite clerics as a means of consolidating the legitimacy of his rule. This set in place the foundation of a benign and respectful relationship between Qajar rulers and Shiite clerical elites who, at the time, were enjoying an ever-increasing popularity among their lay followers in Persia and in the holy cities of Iraq. This, again, provided a political opportunity for the Shiite clergy. This was at the same time that the colonial powers of Britain, Russia, and France were active in the region.

Qajar Persia witnessed three major incidents which involved the active engagement and pivotal role of Shiite clerical elites in politics: The Russo-Persian Wars, the Tobacco Protest, and the Persian Constitutional Revolution.

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<sup>54</sup> Some years earlier, after a century of decline, the Usuli Shiite Islam had been strengthened when Wahid Behbahani (d.1791) overthrew Akhbaris' domination over the Shiite seminaries of Iraq and Persia. Born in Isfahan, Behbahani fled to Behbahan, then Najaf, and when he ceased to find its seminary useful, he finally resided in Karbala, in the late 1740's. At the time its strong Akhbari School was under the leadership of the moderate, Sheikh Yusuf Bahrani (1695-1772). It was then, that a point, he started to challenge his Akhbari counterparts and engaged in a series of religious discussions with Bahrani. The last nail in the coffin of Akhbari domination came in 1772, when the then prestigious Usuli leader of Karbala seminary read the funeral prayer of Bahrani and consolidated his power throughout the Shiite clerical network. Beyond Wahid's endeavours against the Akhbari School, his role in fostering a handful of students, who shaped the future of Usuli Shiite clerical network, is substantial and promised a more active political role for them. See Motahhari 1996: 496 and Cole 1985.

<sup>55</sup> Rustam al-Hukama 2003: 466. Agha Mohammad Khan was among those rulers who had pretended fondness toward Shiite rituals. Hence, he is known as the Mujtahid of the Kings, *Mujtahid al-Salateen*, and his body was sent to be buried in the Shiite holy cities of Iraq.

***The Russo-Persian Wars: The Shiite Clergy and Jihad Against the Colonial Powers***

The history of Russo-Persian conflicts goes back to 1722, at the time both of the fall of the Safavids and the rise of Peter the Great in Russia. The founder of the Russian Empire wished to prevent the growth of influence of his rivals, the Ottomans, in the Caspian and South Caucasus. In his will, Peter advised his successors that, to rule the world, 'they must hasten the downfall of Persia, push on to the Persian Gulf' (quoted in Lehovich 1948). It was in this context that Georgia and the Caucasus became the frontlines of a Russo-Persian conflict. In 1723, when Persia was under the occupation of Afghans, a handful of Persian provinces were annexed to Russia. However, in 1735, Russia returned them to Persia in order to gain Persian support for a war with the Ottomans. This by no means brought to an end the Russian grand ambition of vanquishing Persian authority in the region. Over the succeeding centuries, whenever an opportunity became available, Russia tried to pursue the will of Peter the Great and to enforce its hegemony in Persia.

Russian supremacy was diminished in the southern Caucasus and Georgia with the rise of Agha Mohammad Khan and his expedition against the ruler of Tbilisi in 1795. Later on, in 1804, the Russians invaded the region, during the reign of Fatah Ali Shah in Persia, and this led to a protracted war between the two countries. At the time, two other major powers, Britain and France, were actively influencing the situation to their own advantage, mainly at the cost of Persia.<sup>56</sup> Nine years on, and despite the resistance of Persians under the leadership of Abbas Mirza, the Persians were forced to sign the Treaty of Gulistan (1813). This outcome was a great disappointment for the Persians and it represented a strong threat to Qajar legitimacy. Consequently, the Shah and Abbas Mirza sought to attract the support of the Shiite clergy as a means of reversing the precariousness of their rule and restoring their lost dignity (Nategh 1975).

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<sup>56</sup> Mahmood 1974, Vol. I: 33-181. In 1801, Sir John Malcolm, the British representative, entered Persia and signed a treaty that enlisted the support of the Qajar of India against the ruler of Afghanistan, and to prevent the rising power of French nationals in Persia. It is significant that later in 1806, the Shah, trapped in a war with the Russians and disappointed by the lack of British support, accepted Napoleon's proposal to sign a peace treaty with France, which was concluded a year later (the Treaty of Finckenstein). Upon the conclusion of this Treaty, Persia declared war against Britain and received military training from France. No French military aid was given to Persia, however, as just less than two months later Napoleon signed an agreement with Tsar Alexander of Russia, the Tilsit Treaty. Persia failed once again to attract the support of European powers in the course of the war with Russia; it is said that Persians were threatened by Russians, scoffed by French, and never had been treated fairly by Britain's forces.

The Shiite clerical elite had been involved in the Russo-Persian war years earlier, when Abbas Mirza sent envoys to Iraq and to Qom, Kashan, and Isfahan in Persia, with the request that Jihad decrees be issued against the ‘infidel’ Russian invaders. This shows the popular status of the religious elite at the time of early Qajar rule. Although they were not directly engaged in politics, some clerical elites even outside of Persia enjoyed significant support from lay Shiites. Sheikh Ja’far Najafi, known as Kashif al-Ghita (1743–1812), was among those high-ranking clerics who accepted the royal envoys and issued a Jihad decree against the Russian forces.<sup>57</sup> He expressed the view that

[it] is obligatory for every Muslim who wishes to obey the Prophet and infallible Imams to follow the Shah’s order in war with enemies of God ... Everyone should obey the verdicts of those who appointed the ruler as the protector of the nation from calamities [Shiite Ulama], therefore any objection to the ruler [’s request of Jihad] is equal to God’s opposition and deserves his wrath and punishment.<sup>58</sup>

Kashif al-Ghita, in a clear expression of his political views concerning the rule of the Qajar Shah, asked his followers to go to war with the ‘enemies of God’, meaning the Russians, in order to protect the Islamic abode from outsiders’ threats. His call, which was supported by the majority of his colleagues, marked the start of clerical activism in the post-Safavid era, after almost a century during which the Shiite clergy had preferred to remain out of direct engagement in politics. The Shiite clergy had asked to utilize its capabilities to mobilize the masses in support of the state and the campaign against the Russians. As general deputies of the Imam, the clerical elites supported the Qajars as a means of protecting the Islamic abode.

The clerical elite’s mobilisation of Persian Shiites played a more significant role in the second war with the Russians.<sup>59</sup> The war broke out in May 1826 and, this time, Shiite clerics from all around the Islamic world became directly involved in the war.

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<sup>57</sup> Mirza Abul Qasim Jilani, known as Mirza Qomi, from Qom, Mulla Ahmad Naraqī, from Kashan, and Mir Mohammad Hussein Khatoonabadi, from Isfahan, were among a group of famous Shiite personalities who wrote treatises supporting the sovereignty of Islamic Persia against Russian invaders. See Sepehr, *Nasekh al-Tawarikh*, Vol. I: 181.

<sup>58</sup> Kashif al-Ghita, *Kashf al-Ghita ‘an Mubhamat al-Shariat al-Gharra*, Vol. IV: 334.

<sup>59</sup> Sepehr 1998, Vol. I: 363. Years earlier, Abbas Mirza’s agents had informed the Shiite clerics about the resentments of Muslim inhabitants of North Persia who had been under the authority of Russia since the treaty of Gulistan. It was in this context, that the religious elite decided to support the Jihad against Russia and mobilised their followers to participate in the second war.

They not only issued Jihad decrees, but some members of the Shiite clergy also joined the army and personally engaged in warfare.<sup>60</sup>

Among these was Seyyed Mohammad Mujahed, one of the most renowned clerics of the time.<sup>61</sup> This ultimately provided the Qajar court a chance to advance its military campaign and liberate almost all occupied territory under the Gulistan within the first month of the war. However, soon the course of events turned against the Persians. Their early victories were followed by serious defeats on several fronts. This led to a continuing conflict between Abbas Mirza and the religious leadership.<sup>62</sup> To show their resentment at the state's negative propaganda, Seyyed Mohammad and his religious entourage left the front in September 1826. Following this, the Persian army suffered a series of defeats, and Persia was obliged to sign the disadvantageous Treaty of Turkmenchay in February 1828 (Keddie and Amanat 1991).

The clergy was blamed for this misfortune. The Qajar court claimed that the second war had been triggered by the will of clerics and neither the Shah nor Abbas Mirza had favoured the new campaign against Russia from the outset.<sup>63</sup> Although the Shiite clerics had supported the Jihad against Russia after receiving a green light from the Qajar court, the outcome of the war delivered a severe blow to their status among the Shiite community compared to the blow suffered by other involved parties. The majority of clerics had misperceived the political opportunity, and thus bitterly stayed out of politics during the coming decades, which was the second major defeat to their

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid: 365. Historians named five hundred Shiite scholars from Iraq and Persia who joined the military campaign directly.

<sup>61</sup> Azad Kashmiri, *Nujum al-Sama fi Tarajem al-Ulama*: 388. Born as Seyyed Mohammad Tabatabai in 1767 in Karbala, he was the son of Seyyed Ali Tabatabai, the writer of *Riaz al-Masael*, who had supported the Jihad against Russia during the first war. It is written that when he joined the campaign, he was so popular among the Shiite community that, in Qazvin, people consecrated the water left from his ablutions and accompanied him up to the frontline of the war with Russia.

<sup>62</sup> Azad Kashmiri 2008: 389. Some believed that after the first triumphant phase of the war, Abbas Mirza was told by some of his corrupt advisors that if 'the warfare ends with rapid victory, then Seyyed Mohammad will become a great threat to the throne, as he enjoys the utmost popularity amongst Persians and plays a vital role in mobilising the masses and in the defeat of the Russians'. Consequently the crown prince decided to accept the Russian envoy's offer of a cease-fire in September 1826. This was a factor in turning the tide against the Persian army.

<sup>63</sup> Nategh 1975: 9-42. The latter disclosed documents, including reports of Sir Henry Willock, the British envoy to Persia (1815-1826) and a manuscript of Mirza Saleh Shirazi, the Persian attaché to Russia, which accused Abbas Mirza of manipulating the clerics to support the second war against Russia, though Persian forces had no chance of resisting their opponents.

social status after the rise of Nader Shah.<sup>64</sup> In the succeeding decades, the Shiite clergy, who felt manipulated by the Qajars during the war with the Russians, tried to become more focused on teaching students and sending them to different cities to propagate the Shiite principles, and in this way, to strengthen their authority among Shiites.<sup>65</sup>

The rise of Sheikh Morteza Ansari (1781–1864) in Najaf, the first sole Shiite Marja' of the Occultation Era, occurred subsequently, as the region was going through dramatic changes. It was during Ansari's leadership that a telegraph line connected Persia, home to the majority of Shiite Muslims, to Iraq, where the most notable Shiite clerics resided. This contributed to the centralization of Shiite Marja'yya and created a sense of there being a more coherent transnational network among various members of the clergy. This also provided a major source of religious taxes for leaders of the seminary. It also strengthened the relationship between the clerical elite and their followers, a factor that played a major role in the Tobacco Protest of 1890 and later during the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905.

### ***The Tobacco Protest: Early Formation of a Trans-National Shiite Clerical Elites Network***

Sixty years since the Shiite clerics' direct participation in the Russo-Persian wars, a group of clerics, interpreting the existing political opportunity structure as relatively open, decided to become more active and to strengthen their authority through supporting the Persian merchant class. At the time, the clerical elite network had been established among various personalities residing in Persia and in the holy cities in Iraq who had been in direct contact with each other. Newspapers and presses had been established throughout the region and a sense of popular awareness, due to changes associated with modernism, had advanced among the laity and elites. These all made Shiite clerical elites at that time one of the most influential social strata. Eventually,

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<sup>64</sup> Algar 1980: 94. Although clerical popularity declined with these accusations, the religious elite still exercised great influence over the Shiite community. On a smaller scale, Mirza Masih Mujtahed, the famous clergy of Tehran, led a protest against the Russian envoy, Gribayedoff, in 1829, and some minor Shiite elite supported Mohammad Shah's campaign against the British in Herat. However, their support never provided them with the consensus that had been forged with respect to the second Russo-Persian war.

<sup>65</sup> Agha Bozorg Tehrani 1991, Vol.IV: 323. The migration of Shiite ulama from Iraq to Persia reached such a level that, at some point, Mohammad Shah Qajar sarcastically asked Sheikh Mohammad Hassan Najafi (d.1849), then the leader of Najaf Seminary, 'if you have opened a factory to produce Mujthahids'.

the clergy made an alliance with the merchant class and, together, the two played a pivotal role in the social movements against the state in what later coalesced in, and became known as, the Tobacco Protest.

Naser al-Din Shah, the fourth Qajar Monarch, ascended the throne in 1848. His reign was concurrent with the introduction of European modernism in the region. He was the first Qajar ruler who was forced to introduce reformist measures in order to bring about advances in the country. However, historical evidence suggests that, throughout his reign, he acted indecisively and at times contrary to popular interests.<sup>66</sup>

During his third visit<sup>67</sup> to the west in April 1889, which was mediated by his chancellor, Amin al-Sultan,<sup>68</sup> the Shah granted to Major Gerald Talbot the monopoly right of Persian tobacco business for fifty years (Lambton 1965). In March 20, 1890, while visiting Tehran, Major Talbot finalised and signed the agreement with the government and started to work out the preliminary arrangements for the new business inside the country.

This not only raised Russian objections (Lambton 1965) but further prompted civil protest on the part of an alliance of Persian merchants (Moaddel 1992) and Shiite clerical elites.<sup>69</sup> Although the local merchants were among the earliest opponents of the concession, due to the unstructured nature of their activities, they were incapable of mobilising the masses to advance their objectives. Consequently, they had to ask

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<sup>66</sup> Ramezani 2004:28. Amir Kabir (d.1852), Naser al-Din Shah mentor and his first Chancellor, and the Kingmaker, mentioned the inconsistencies of the Monarch once in a letter, where he criticised the Shah and his evasive orders about the court reform process and says: ‘you cannot rule if you escape from reform. Let’s say one day I become sick or deceased, do you want to rule or not? If your answer is positive, then why do you refuse to reform?’

<sup>67</sup> Prior to the Shah’s first visit to Europe in 1872, Paul Julius Freiherr von Reuter, a British subject, obtained from the Persian government a seventy-year concession that would grant him substantial authority over the economy of the country. As Curzon states, the concession was ‘found to contain the most complete and extraordinary surrender of the entire industrial resources of a kingdom into foreign hands that has probably ever been dreamed of, much less accomplished, in history’ (Curzon 1892: 480). Although almost a year later the concession was withdrawn in the face of popular protest, Mulla Ali Kani, the esteemed Mujtahid of Tehran, and Reuter the opponent of Russia, received the major share of the Persian Imperial Bank (Abrahamian 1982:56).

<sup>68</sup> Lambton 1965. Mirza Ali Asghar Khan Atabak (1858 –1907), one of the strongest politicians of the Qajar period, had been bribed by the British Régie Company to facilitate the Monopoly of Tobacco Concession.

<sup>69</sup> Adamiyat 1981: 10. One of the first signs of opposition came from an editorial in the Akhtar Newspaper, which named the concession as a ‘traitorous act of the monarchy against the innate rights of the nation’ and criticized Major Talbot in an interview that was conducted in Istanbul, comparing the terms of the agreement with the one that the British Régie Company had signed with the Ottomans.

Shiite clerical elites to form an alliance in order to mobilise the masses. Shiite clerical elites, themselves, had already been threatened by the mass immigration of the company's foreign cadres, which endangered to introduce a new culture into Persia's conservative society (Teymouri 1979: 42). Furthermore, the merchant class was traditionally among the key financial sponsors of the Shiite clergy, and any threat to their interests would ultimately impact the financial health of the clerical elites. Therefore, an alliance was formed between the merchants and clerical elites against the terms of the monopoly concession.

The first city that experienced popular convulsions was Shiraz, which produced the greatest amount of tobacco. In April 1891, the leading Mujtahid of the city, Seyyed Ali Akbar Fal-Asiri, expressed his resentment of the terms of the concession and asked his followers to rise against it, saying,

O' Men, you should move to not wear the ladies' robes! I have a sword and two drops of blood and I will tear up the belly of any foreigner who would like to enter Shiraz for monopoly of tobacco (Quoted in Teymouri 1979: 69).

The harsh opposition of the clergy against the concession disturbed the government, which had not taken the merchants' objections seriously until then, and it took steps to involve itself in the affair and calm the protests. The Mujtahid of Shiraz, Fal-Asiri, was deported to Iraq overnight.<sup>70</sup>

The news of Shiraz and what the government had done to Fal-Asiri was soon reached by the Grand Marja' of the time, Mirza Mohammad Hassan Shirazi (1814–1896), who resided in Samarra in Iraq. The Marja' then sent a telegram to Naser al-Din Shah and advised him not to act against the Quran. In a telegram, dated 28 July 1891, he addressed the Shah as follows:

Even though I have ever asked nothing from your Majesty so far, upon the receipt of a series of letters and based on what I have heard from informants, I have to remind you that to permit the foreigners to interfere in the internal affairs, their authority over Muslims' community by operating banks, tobacco, railways, etc. is contrary to the explicit text

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<sup>70</sup> Two days later, when the city was informed about his exile, the markets were shut down and people gathered in the holy shrine of Shah Cheragh to show their support to the Mujtahid of the city, however the demonstration brutally suppressed by the government forces. See Ibid.



of the Quran and the divine honour, humiliates the government's independence, disrupts the community's order, and causes distress to the nation.<sup>71</sup>

The tone of the letter clearly shows that, at that early stage, the Shiite Marja' was hoping to resolve the turmoil through peaceful means and without engaging in any contentious politics. However, the state was not in a mood to accept popular demands. Thus eventually, the contention reached Tabriz. In the summer of 1891, the people of Azerbaijan, led by merchants and the famous cleric, Mirza Jawad Mujtahid Tabrizi, marched in protest against the concession. The protesters' resentments in the city went beyond the control of even the clerical leadership. The government reacted by suspending the concession's activities in Azerbaijan, a setback that worked in favour of the protesters.<sup>72</sup>

The uprising in Isfahan caused a breakthrough for anti-state movements. Following the leadership of the Mujtahid Agha Najafi Isfahani (1846–1914), people decided to impose a boycott on the consumption of tobacco. Religious elites of the city issued a decree that tobacco was unclean and that any sort of transactions with foreigners was illicit (Keddie 1966: 94). Unrest increased in the city: the merchants boycotted the tobacco business, coffeehouses shut down, and smokers smashed water pipes in streets.<sup>73</sup> Later, a threatening telegram was sent to the people of Isfahan from the royal court, ordering the clerical elites and their followers to resume the tobacco consumption (Adamiyat 1981: 59). Although the state's iron fist did not inhibit the clerical elites, merchants, and people from exercising their civil rights, it made Agha Munir al-Din Isfahani, another renowned Shiite scholar of Isfahan, leave the city for Samarra in Iraq, where Mirza Shirazi was residing at the time.

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<sup>71</sup> For the full text of the telegram see Karbalayi 1998: 88. Sheikh Hassan Isfahani Karblayi was stationed in Samara at the time and was among Mirza Shirazi's students. His book, *Tarikh e Dokhanyeh*, which was written during the revolution, describes the events of the Tobacco Protest from the religious elite's point of view.

<sup>72</sup> After the demonstration in Shiraz and its follow-ups in Tabriz, Naser al-Din Shah reviewed the terms of the concession that had been granted. To calm the Azerbaijani protesters, in September 1891 he sent a telegram to Tabriz indicating that 'he had started to contact the company hoping to withdraw the concession', yet asked for some time to sort things out. For details of this telegram see Adamiyat 1981: 41.

<sup>73</sup> Safaei 1967: 41. At the outbreak of the popular demonstrations Zell al-Sultan, the prince governor of Isfahan, sent a message to Agha Najafi, questioning his decree. He remarked sarcastically that 'wine is more unclean than tobacco, thus evidently you should not emphasize forbidding tobacco more than forbidding wine'. Agha Najafi responded: 'We are practicing our religious duty; you should also work on your own customary responsibilities'.

Subsequently, the Mirza, sent his second telegram to Naser al-Din Shah (Karbalayi 1998: 96). The Shah and his circle of ministers, led by Amin al-Sultan, and caught between Persian popular demands from one side and threats from the British company on the other, chose not to respond to the cleric's demands. At the time, the nature of the domestic turmoil which had initially been violent but had calmed down considerably, gave the state confidence that it could manage the protesters and accede to the demands of the Régie. However, the protest in the capital turned events in favour of the protesters and pushed the government to review its policies.

In early December 1891, a rumour circulated in the streets of the capital indicating that the Mirza Shirazi had responded to Mirza Hassan Ashtiani, the leading Mujtahid of Tehran, and had boycotted the consumption of tobacco. The text of his letter, which does not exceed two sentences, breathed new life into the protests against granting a tobacco monopoly to the Company. The letter read as follows:

In the name of God, the compassionate the merciful; as of today, the consumption of tobacco in any form is tantamount to war against the Imam of the Age. (quoted in Karbalayi 1998: 118)

The letter implied that, as long as the concession remained, protesters from different social classes and the religious elite would continue their resistance. It was a clear sign considering the existing political opportunity, and the clerical elite perceived that its role was to become actively engaged in politics in fulfillment of its divinely-assigned responsibilities.

On the next day, thousands of copies of the Mirza's fatwa were sent to different cities and caused social uprisings throughout the country. The Fatwa had been issued by the right person and at the right time. Soon, an effective alignment was formed among the clergy, merchants, and the laity who had been threatened by the concession, and who now had obtained the spiritual leadership of the sole Shiite Marja' against the state.

This new phase of the popular protest, with the support of the Mirza's fatwa, seemed more durable, and it forced the Shah to reconsider the agreement with the British company. At a meeting between the chancellor and a group of Tehran's notables, the government withdrew the internal rights of the company, hoping to calm the protests and nullify the fatwa. Nonetheless, the new telegram of Mirza Shirazi, indicating euphoria at the recent developments, caused the government to crack down

on the Tobacco Protest. The officials' acknowledgment of Mirza Shirazi's active role further developed popular contention and made the opposition more united and more determined to push for its objectives.

On 3 January 1892, Naser al-Din Shah sent an envoy to Mirza Hassan Ashtiani ordering him 'to either smoke tobacco at the pulpit of the mosque, or leave the Dar al-Khilafah of Tehran for a while' (Karbalayi 1998: 167). The decision of Ashtiani to leave Tehran rather than to disobey Mirza Shirazi's fatwa pushed the capital to the verge of a revolution. Upon receiving the news, thousands of people demonstrated at the house of the Mujtahid of the city and headed toward the Shah's palace, chanting against him. With the intervention of the palace's guards, scores of protesters were killed and wounded, but their actions demonstrated their sincere determination to the Shah himself and to the remnants of the concession's supporters.<sup>74</sup> By nightfall, the Shah and his entourage were reluctantly began to consider the means of paying compensation to the British company. Two days later, the government of Persia officially withdrew the concession.<sup>75</sup> On 26 January 1892, the Mirza Shirazi's telegram was sent to Tehran indicating the re-legalization of tobacco consumption.

During the Tobacco Protest, from April 1891 until January 1892, Shiite clerical elites in general had acted as mediators between the laity and their followers, especially the merchant class, and the state. Although at the outset the protests were ignited by the Persian merchant class (Moaddel 1992),<sup>76</sup> their uprising gained attraction among the masses only after the Shiite clergy had agreed to utilize its influences against the concession. It was indeed the popular constituency of Shiite clerics that helped the protest to reach its objectives. Those Shiite clerics who became actively engaged in politics during the turmoil had perceived the political opportunity structure to be relatively favourable. After all, the main alibi for their activism was to protect the benefits of their followers and allies against the domination of outsiders

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<sup>74</sup> For a detailed account of the event see Feuvrier, *Trois Ans à la Cour de Perse*: 330.

<sup>75</sup> Teymouri 1979: 205-223. The Persian government was forced to accept 500,000 Sterling as compensation for the British company. The amount, which was lent from the Imperial Bank of Persia, owned mainly by Britain, and laid a huge debt on the Persians' shoulders.

<sup>76</sup> Some studies, including Keddie 1966 and Lambton 1965, have emphasized the role of Russia as one of the main reasons for the Revolt's success. Although Russia was among the main opponents to the concession from the outset, its role in managing and shaping the popular protests was minimal. See Moaddel 1992.

over the Islamic abodes. On another level, the clerical elites also succeeded in deploying what was, at least in embryonic form at the time, a transnational network that extended throughout Persia and the holy cities of Iraq at the time. When they perceived the political opportunity structure to be relatively open, the Shiite clergy seized its advantages and played a determinative political role. During the later Constitutional Revolution, however, the clerical elite's activism did not lead to a similarly favourable outcome, as the secular counterparts to that revolution were eventually able to hijack the social movement that had been set in motion by the Shiite clergy.<sup>77</sup>

***Shiite Clerical Elites and the Persian Constitutional Revolution: Different Perceptions of the Existing Political Opportunity Structure***

Shiite clerical elites, who had lost a portion of their popular support during the Russo-Persian wars, perceived and seized a political opportunity during the later nineteenth century when they enjoyed great popular support in the aftermath of the Tobacco Protest. By then, Shiite clerical authority was consolidated among the laity, and the clergy's successful support of the merchant class during the protest had attracted other social classes' attention to the potential of the Shiite clerical elite. A group from among the secular intelligentsia therefore attempted to conclude an alliance with the clergy when a wave of constitutionalism became pervasive throughout the country. This promised a new political opportunity structure which, once again, pushed the clerics to the forefront of the political scene during what became a Constitutional Revolution in Persia in the early twentieth century.

An alliance between religious and secular elites at the time constituted the leadership of the Revolution. Yet, the course of events and the outcome of the revolution were by no means what the religious elite had predicted. The consequences of the revolution showed that Shiite clerical elites had misperceived the nature of the political opportunity structure and, thus, their political activism undermined their authority among their followers. When the dust of the revolution settled, the Shiite

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<sup>77</sup> Abbasi Fardoyi 2007: 103. Later Hassan Modarres, one of Mirza Shirazi's students wrote, that with the victory of the Tobacco Protest based on the central role of the Shiite clerical elite, the sole Marja' of the time was surprisingly unhappy about the whole circumstances. In replying to Modarres, Mirza states: 'Now, the superpowers realized that what the real source of the people's authority is, and what the driving force behind the Shiite masses is. Thus, from today they will work hard to destroy this source [the Shiite clerical popularity]. I am concerned about the future of the Islamic nation'.

clergy, as a social group within the community, had lost a great deal of its popular support, and were confronted with a closed opportunity structure for years to come.

The long reign of Naser al-Din Shah came to an end when he was assassinated in 1896. He was succeeded by Mozaffar al-Din Shah, his ill and weak-willed son. His rule coincided with a wave of civil demands by Persians and the new intelligentsia which looked toward the western European democracies as their ideals. Although the wave of liberalism had started during the last years of Naser al-Din Shah, evolving international, regional, and national structures promised to produce new political opportunities for the clerical elites in Persia in the early twentieth century.<sup>78</sup>

The concept of a limited monarchy, initially, had been introduced by secular elites who had observed democratic developments in the West. However, they were unable to gain the support of the masses, who were mostly religious and illiterate at the time, for this goal. They therefore sought the support of Shiite clerics, who had greater popularity, and who had shown their capabilities during the Tobacco Protest. In a letter written during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, Mirza Agha Khan Kermani (1854-1897) expresses to Mirza Malkam Khan that perhaps the intelligentsia would reach their goals sooner if they sought 'limited assistance from the Mullahs' (Adamiyat 1976: 30).

However, clerical elites did not have a clear understanding of the concept of constitutionalism at the time (Tavakkolian 2014). The clerical elite's political activism during the Persian Constitutional Revolution was like playing on a football pitch without knowing where the goalpost was set. This crucial weakness eventually showed itself to be the clerical elite's Achilles heel. Following the Revolution, the renowned Shiite Mujtahid of Tehran, Sheikh Fazlollah Noori, was executed (in 1909) Seyyed Abdullah Behbahani was assassinated (in 1910), and Akhond Khorasani, the Shiite Marja' of Najaf, reportedly was poisoned (in 1911). The post-Revolution age became, for Shiite clerics, a dark time which, for decades, they engaged in no overt political activism.

The last section of this chapter tries to explain the role that the Shiite clerical

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<sup>78</sup> The Japanese victory over Russia in the 1904-05 War, and the Russian Revolution of 1905 which resulted to the establishment of a limited Constitutional Monarchy, were among the most important regional incidents that influenced the Persians, especially the intelligentsia. Furthermore, the Persians interpreted the Japanese victory over Russians in the war as the victory of the only Asian constitutional power over the only major non-constitutional country of the time. For the perceptions of Persians toward these regional political transformations see Ein al-Saltaneh 1995: 1472.

elite played during the Constitutional Revolution in Persia. Its aim is to probe whether the different camps that formed within this elite was based on strategic disparities or on their different perceptions of the political opportunity structure that existed at the time.<sup>79</sup>

In March 1905, during the anniversary of Ashura, a group of people and religious students marched through the streets of Tehran after listening to Seyyed Abdullah Behbahani harshly attack the behaviour of foreign officers.<sup>80</sup> Soon, an alignment was formed between Behbahani and Seyyed Mohammad Tabatabai, another leading Mujtahid of Tehran. From that date these two, referred to as the ‘Two Seyyeds’, (*Seyyedain*), represented the constitutionalist religious elites of Tehran during the Persian Constitutional Revolution.

Another anti-state protest broke out in December 1905, when the governor of Tehran, ‘Ala al-Dowleh, publicly bastinadoed a group of esteemed merchants of the city for not lowering the price of sugar. This incident, quite similar to what had happened earlier during the Tobacco Protest, led to the conclusion of another alliance between the religious elite and the merchant class against the Shah, his chancellor, and the governor of Tehran. On 13 December 1905, a large group of clerics and religious students, led by the Two Seyyeds, left the city, taking sanctuary in the holy shrine of Shah Abd al-Azim in Rey.<sup>81</sup> After days of negotiations between the refugees and the state’s representatives, the Ottoman ambassador to Tehran was asked to act as an intermediary and convey the protesters’ demands to the Shah and his chancellor. Among a series of preliminary demands, such as the dismissal of the governor of Tehran and Mr. Naus, the Belgian custom officer, the religious elite added one more demand: the establishment of a ‘house of justice’ that would assess the people’s petitions and complaints and act on them fairly and with equality (Kermani 1997:

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<sup>79</sup> For a detailed history of the Persian Constitutional Revolution see Browne 1910, Kermani 1997, Kasravi 1984, and Hairi 1977.

<sup>80</sup> Rezwani 2002: 67. During their protests, people chanted against the despotic rule of the Shah and his chancellor, Ein al-Dowleh, and asked for the dismissal of Mr. Naus, the customs minister of Persia who was accused of humiliating Islam and the religious elite by attending a masque ball wearing a turban and clergy attire.

<sup>81</sup> This incident, from 13 December 1905 to 1 January 1906, is known as the ‘minor migration’ in the lexicon of the Persian Constitutional Revolution. The ‘Major Migration’ occurred when the Shiite clerical elite left Tehran for the city of Qom in July 1906 and resulted in the Shah’s agreement to sign the constitutional monarchy.

358).<sup>82</sup> Eventually, Mozaffar al-Din Shah accepted their demands and asked clerical elites and their followers to return to the capital in early 1906. In his royal decree, the Shah addressed his chancellor as follows:

As I repeatedly have stated my true personal intentions about this matter, and as the foundation of the official house of justice for executing the Islamic law and the social welfare are among the most important tasks, I give order for the establishment of such a legal body to define and to implement Sharia rules throughout the country.<sup>83</sup>

The royal recognition of the refugees' demands was a triumph for the religious elite, although it did not fulfil the goals of the secular constitutionalists, who believed at the time that they could ask for more (Dowlat Abadi 1992, Vol. II: 35).

When the reformist clerical elite became disappointed by the failure of the Shah to fulfil his promises, they organized another agitation against the government of Ein al-Dowleh (d.1927) in the summer of 1906. This time, the Seyyedain sought the assistance of the leading Mujtahid of Tehran, Sheikh Fazlollah Noori, who had a close relationship with the chancellor.<sup>84</sup> This led, in July 1906, to the formation of an association between the clergy and the secular constitutionalists. The main group of clerics left Tehran to take refuge in the holy city of Qom, and the other constitutionalists took sanctuary in the British Embassy in Tehran, where they believed was a safe place. They increased the extent of their civil demands. This time, the clerical elite's opposition was more solid than the one earlier during the minor migration, as they were enjoying the support of Sheikh Fazlollah, who had a close relationship with the grand Maraji' of Najaf, Akhond Khorasani, and Seyyed Kadhemyazdi (Malakzadeh 1984, Vol.I: 366). A few days later, the secular constitutionalists called for the establishment of a *National Assembly* instead of a House of Justice (Kasravi 1984:113).

Hoping to ease the turmoil, the Shah, who was seriously ill at the time, agreed

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<sup>82</sup> Kermani 1997:358. It is believed that the idea of establishing the house of justice, which at the outset was solely a judicial demand rather than a political one, was not among the clerical elite's list initially. After consultations with the Turkish Ambassador and some secular figures, like Yahya Dowlat Abadi, who had been among the refugees, this article was later added to the list.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Kermani 1997, Vol. I: 366.

<sup>84</sup> Mohit Mafi 1984: 92. Sheikh Fazlollah, who had not accompanied the earlier sanctuary in Rey, promised not to abandon his fellows who were opposing the government in the future. He answered the Two Seyyeds that whenever they would like to organise another anti-government movement, they could count on him.

to endorse the establishment of a constitution. The first decree, dated 5 August 1906, addressed the chancellor and ordered the swift 'establishment of an assembly of representative of the Qajar princes, the religious and secular elite, landowners, and merchants in Tehran to consult and to assist the reform process which would benefit both the government and the nation of Persia' (Kermani 1997, Vol.I : 552). This decree, however, was not recognized by the constitutionalists because of its vagueness and failure to mention the will of the masses. Consequently, Mozaffar al-Din Shah issued a second decree two days later, which read as follows:

To complete our previous decree, dated 5 August 1906, we give an order for the establishing of the Majlis based on what we have already promised. After the election of the representatives, we will sign the presented articles of the constitution that will aim to restore the nation's rights and to implement the sacred law of Sharia law.<sup>85</sup>

This letter was communicated to the clerical elites stationed at Qom. However, the secular constitutionalists who were mainly took refuge in Tehran and had the support of the British Chargé d'Affairs, opposed the second royal letter and asked that both previous decrees be combined into a third one and that 'Islamic Assembly' be changed to 'National Assembly'. On 9 August 1906, the third royal decree was read to those who had taken sanctuary in the British Embassy in Tehran. In this third decree, the Shah ordered the establishment of a 'National Assembly'. Following that, the letter of the clerical elite was read to other constitutionalists, who were then asked to leave the Embassy as their goals had been 'fulfilled' by the government (Kermani 1997, Vol.I : 563).<sup>86</sup>

Two months later, the first Assembly opened in Tehran. On 30 December 1906, just a few days prior to his death, Mozaffar al-Din Shah was fortunate in being able to engrave his name in the history of Persia by signing the first Persian Fundamental Law. His autocratic and Russophile son, Mohammad Ali, ascended the

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<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Kermani 1997, Vol. I: 558.

<sup>86</sup> Dowlat Abadi 1992, Vol. II: 82. The religious elite stationed in Qom was presented with the second decree, the one that mentions the establishment of the Islamic Assembly, and they had responded to that. Through the will of the secular constitutionalists who had succeeded in gaining a royal promise concerning the establishment of a National Assembly, they pretended that religious elites were aware of the contents of the third handwriting. This marked the first setback for the religious constitutionalists vis-à-vis their former strategic allies, the secular constitutionalists. Later on, the religious elite did not find an opportunity to declare that secular figures had manipulated them.



throne in January 1907. From the earliest days of his reign, Mohammad Ali Shah showed his opposition to the constitution and the Assembly by not inviting any of its members to his coronation ceremony. Nonetheless, the members of the assembly were busy working on the ratification of the constitution's amendments, later to be known as the Supplementary Fundamental Law of Persia. Since the ratification of the amendment, the constitutionalist religious elites in Tehran had been united in their activities. Nevertheless, witnessing the fanatical actions of secular parliamentary members, the clergy leadership in Tehran formed two distinctive camps: one led by the Seyyedain, who had agreed to the constitution that had been established, and the other led by Sheikh Fazlollah Noori, who mistrusted the initial goal of the secular constitutionalists.

In addition to the daily editorials written by modernist secular constitutionalists against the religious camp, Sheikh Fazlollah was opposed to some articles of the draft Supplementary Fundamental Law which he considered to be anti-Islamic (Abbasi Fardoyi 2007). He thus became actively involved in trying to prevent their ratification at the Assembly's court.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, he proposed that an article be added to the Supplementary Fundamental Law indicating that each parliamentary act should be observed by a group of appointed Mujtahids before ratification in order to check whether it was consistent with Sharia laws (Arjomand 1981). There were discussions in April 1907 among parliamentary members, accompanied by the *Seyyedain* and Sheikh Fazlollah Noori, about the article that Sheikh Fazlollah had proposed.<sup>88</sup> Although Noori enjoyed the full support of his high-ranking colleagues in Najaf at the time, a minority faction of the Assembly led by Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh began to attack him and the other religious figures around him.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> More specifically, Sheikh Fazlollah and his followers opposed Article No.8 which implied that 'the Persians [from any sect or with any religion] are to enjoy equal rights', Article No. 20 that endorses the free press. For a detailed list of the Articles, see Browne 1910: 372-84.

<sup>88</sup> Kasravi reports that after the opening of the first Majlis and during the writing of the Supplementary Law, the Two Seyyeds and Sheikh Fazlollah were still supporting the Assembly. Since they 'considered themselves the ones who had brought about the Constitution, they did not cease looking after it'. They were participating in the Majlis' deliberations, although they had different aspirations; Sheikh Fazlollah in this sense was looking for 'promulgation of the Sharia' through the Assembly (1984: 285).

<sup>89</sup> Kasravi 1984: 323. Outside the Assembly also, the responsibility for putting pressure on the religious elite was divided between the secular newspapers, like *Habl al-Matin* and *Sur Israfil*, and the people of Tabriz, who under the influence of the secular constitutionalists were chanting against the Sheikh saying: 'We want a constitutional law, not the [law of] sharia'.

Despite these contentions, the determined Sheikh Fazlollah continued his activities, which led to the ratification of Article II of the Supplementary Fundamental Law. This article, passed by members of the Assembly, states the following:

At no time must any legal enactment of the Sacred National Consultative Assembly, established by the favour and assistance of His Holiness the Imam of the Age, the favour of His Majesty the Shah of Islam, the care of the Proofs of Islam, and the whole people of the Persian nation, be at variance with the sacred principles of Islam or the laws established by His Holiness the Best of Mankind. It is hereby declared that it is for the Ulama to determine whether such laws as may be proposed are or are not conformable to the principles of Islam; and it is therefore officially enacted that there shall at all times exist a committee composed of not less than five Mujtahids or other devout theologians, cognizant also of the requirements of the age in this manner (Browne 1910: 372).

The ratification of this article represented progress for Sheikh Fazlollah and his companions. The clerical elite believed that having such an article would secure their interests in the new regime and would also guarantee the rule of Sharia in Persia. Consequently, and putting tactical differences aside, the Seyyedain met with Sheikh Fazlollah Noori in June 1907 and orally agreed to respect their mutual interests in any future activities (Kasravi 1984: 372). While the Seyyedain guaranteed that the Assembly's laws 'would always be compatible with the law of Sharia', Sheikh Fazlollah promised to stop opposing the Assembly and not to organize any rally against it (Kasravi 1984: 373). However, the course of events, which were mainly under the direct influence of secular figures inside the Assembly and was supported by their propaganda machine, seemed completely out of the Seyyedain's hands. The upcoming events proved that secular constitutionalists had promised something to the clerical elite and, nonetheless, were covertly doing something else. With the establishment of the constitution, the constitutionalist religious elite had no further use for their previous secular allies, who were working to develop the country along the lines of western European models. Thus, the objectives of the secular constitutionalists' could not be aligned with that of any member of the Shiite clerical elite and would basically undermine the principles of Shiite Islam (Tavakkolian 2014).

The posture of the secular constitutionalists became threatening enough for the

Sheikh and his followers, who at the time were known as the proponents of the Islamic Constitutionalism, *Mashruteh Mashrue'*, to take sanctuary in the Rey on 21 June 1907.<sup>90</sup> From this date on, the determined Sheikh Fazlollah found a pulpit to express his views of the ongoing events. His stirring speeches, which were opposed to the secular constitution and emphasised the Islamic nature of the country, filled the news headlines throughout Persia and reached the Shiite clergy in Najaf. In one of their proclamations, which was issued during their stay in Rey, the Islamic Constitutionalists replied to their secular opponents as follows:

We clearly announce to all the Muslim people of Persia that, today, the National Assembly does not have a denier, neither from the Mujtahids nor from any other groups. Therefore, if some jealous and ill-minded figures accused Sheikh Fazlollah of not recognizing the National Assembly, it is a lie, a lie ... As his eminence once mentioned, especially in his speech last Friday: I am not ruling out the very existence of the National Assembly, and even I believe that I have entered to this prior to anyone else; I was the one who brought all other Ulama, who were residing in Iraq and other countries and had been quiet about this issue, to support this popular movement ... My initial intentions and goals have not been changed since then. I clearly declare to all of you, and publish it to those who are not present here: I want that National Assembly that the majority of Muslims are demanding. The one that is founded on the principles of Islam, that is not against the Quran, and that does not pass any law that might contradict the principles of the sacred J'afari faith.<sup>91</sup>

History proves that, in comparison with his constitutionalist colleagues, Sheikh Fazlollah Noori's perceptions about what was going on at the time, and the movement's deviations from its initial Islamic goals, was more accurate. His advantage over those high-ranking constitutionalist clerics in Najaf was that he could monitor the covert actions of secular figures closely while he was in Tehran. In Noori's opinion, the rule of the autocrat Mohammad Ali Shah was more preferable to

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<sup>90</sup> Zargarinejad 2011, Vol. I: 36-41. On 19 June 1907, some constitutionalist hardliners attacked the gathering of Islamic Constitutionalists in the Bazaar's mosque and, when they succeeded in dispersing the gathering, agreed to attack the houses of the Islamic Constitutionalist leaders and to expel them from the city. Although the upheavals calmed down as a result of the initiatives of Seyyed Mohammad Tabatabai, the lives of Sheikh Fazlollah and his followers were placed in serious danger by the actions of fanatical constitutionalists.

<sup>91</sup> For the full account of the public letter see Rezwani 1983, *Lawayeh e Sheikh Fazlollah Noori*: 44.

that of the secular constitutionalists.<sup>92</sup> After all, the activities of Sheikh Fazlollah in Rey and his treatises, which were produced by his companions during the time they take refuge in the holy shrine of Shah Abd al-Azim, marked a significant turning point in the divergence of perceptions among the religious elites during the constitutional movement in Persia and Iraq.<sup>93</sup> This was a disparity that everyone could have predicted would have occurred sooner or later, as the Shiite clerical elite had entered the constitutional movement based on loosely-defined goals. Kasravi clearly states this when he acknowledges their leading role in the Persian Constitutional Revolution, but also states that, at the same time, they ‘did not understand the constitution, as they were later to see it’ (Kasravi 1984: 259).<sup>94</sup>

Concurrent with these tensions, the political opportunity structure was going through dramatic changes.<sup>95</sup> In Tehran, Amin al-Sultan, the renowned chancellor of Qajar, who had benign relationships with both religious camps, was assassinated in front of the Assembly (Malakzadeh 1984, Vol. III: 471). This, along with further guarantees by the Assembly to consider Islamic Law before their decisions, led to the end of the Islamic Constitutionalists’ sanctuary and their return to the capital in September 1907 (Turkaman 1984, Vol.I : 363-6).

On 23 June 1908, upon his failed assassination plot, Mohammad Ali Shah ordered the bombardment of the National Assembly. Subsequently, a group of

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<sup>92</sup> Zargarinejad 2011, Vol. I: 75-79. His later support for the Shah in opposition to National Assembly members gives clear evidence of his perceptions and *ijtihad* concerning the existing opportunity structure.

<sup>93</sup> In the aftermath of the June 1907 upheavals in Tehran and Rey, the high-ranking clerics of Najaf, all of whom were political activists in Persia at the time, divided into two groups. One, led by Akhond Khorasani and backed the two Seyyeds in Tehran, demanded the continuation of the existing constitution. The other group, mainly gathered around Seyyed Kadhemyazdi, supported Sheikh Fazlollah Noori and demanded a restoration of the Islamic face of the movement.

<sup>94</sup> Kasravi 1984: 287. He also wrote once that the constitutionalist religious elite of Najaf and Tehran ‘did not understand the proper meaning of the Constitution and the implications of the spread of European laws. They were not properly aware of the obvious great incompatibility between the Constitution and the Shiite sect. On the one hand, these zealous people saw the chaos in Iran and the weakness of the government and saw no other solution for this than a constitution and Majlis, and supported them very resolutely. On the other hand, they were in the grip of their faith and could not ignore it. They remained stuck in the middle’.

<sup>95</sup> Browne 1910:172. Russia and Britain also came up with an agreement in regard to their foreign policies in the region, including Persia. Eventually, an Anglo-Russian agreement was concluded on 31 August 1907, in order to decrease rivalries between the two powers. Persia was divided into three spheres: the North was to come under the influence of Russia, the Southeast would go to Britain, and the centre would remain under the authority of the central government.

constitutionalists were hanged. Some took refuge in the British Embassy in Tehran, and others, including the Seyyedain, were expelled from the capital. A period of the 'sole autocratic rule of the Shah' commenced. With the Sheikh Fazlollah Noori preferring to stay quiet, along with the banishment of the Seyyedain from Tehran, the religious leadership of the constitutional movement was placed on the shoulders of the religious elite of Najaf during this period. The Shah had made a strategic mistake by seeking assistance from the foreign Russian forces. This left the clerics of Najaf with no option but to immediately condemn Mohammad Ali Shah. At the time, they were not only worried about the Shah's autocracy, but were also alarmed about the threat of foreign sovereignty over the Islamic land of Persia. Therefore, when the Shah sent a letter to clerical elites in Najaf stating that he had shut down the National Assembly because he feared that its activities would diminish the sacred religion of the prophet, the Shiite clergy responded,

Your Highness must consider thoroughly what has been done to your nation and state. You, as a Muslim ruler, should not have used your position to dismantle the principles of Islam ... God willing you will stop undermining the religion and the nation, and thus will prevent us taking further action.<sup>96</sup>

The respectful tone of the telegraph clearly indicates that, as early as July 1908, even the constitutionalist clergy of Najaf were hoping to ease the upheavals by peaceful means. Yet the course of future incidents forced them to abandon this path. It seemed that the political divergence of the Shiite clerics reached its peak during this period: while those residing in Najaf, frustrated by the despotic actions of the Shah, issued a fatwa indicating that the struggle to restore the Constitution was equal to taking part in 'Jihad alongside the Imam of the Age',<sup>97</sup> Sheikh Fazlollah Noori, freed from the radical activities of the suppressed Assembly, issued a decree that confirmed that a 'constitution [as of what we have seen], is incompatible with Islam from many facets'.<sup>98</sup> These declarations clearly show that the Shiite clerical elite had different perceptions concerning the basic meaning of the concept of a constitution. In the eyes of constitutionalist clerics stationed in Najaf at the time, the new regime was more of

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<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Kermani 1997, Vol.II: 187-8.

<sup>97</sup> For the full account of the telegraph from the constitutionalist clerics of Najaf, Khorsani, Mazandarani, and Tehrani, see Kasravi 1984: 730.

<sup>98</sup> See Turkaman 1984, Vol.I: 106.

a 'limited monarchy' -- one that would respect the socio-political role of the clergy and perhaps decrease the state's authority in their favour. Yet the principles of constitutionalism, as the Persian secular intelligentsia was demanding at the time, would consequently decrease the role of Sharia and would propagate concepts like freedom and gender equality, which may contradict the very foundations of Shiite *ijtihad* at the time. The Sheikh was aware of this trend, and thus opposed secular constitutionalism based on these grounds.<sup>99</sup>

From June until July 1908, which was known as the 'Minor Autocracy' period, the Assembly was shut down and the two camps of the religious elite -- those supporting and those opposing the constitution based on their very different perceptions -- produced a series of treatises. Perhaps the most renowned book in support of the constitution is one written by Mirza Mohammad Hussein Naini, the disciple of Akhond Khorsani, entitled *Tanbih al-Umma wa Tanzih al-Mella*. To prove that constitutional monarchy is preferable to autocratic monarchy, and hence would be more suitable for the Muslim community during the Occultation Era, Naini categorized states into three types: the government of the infallible Imam, the autocratic monarchy, and the constitutional monarchy. He stated that autocratic unjust rule encompasses three expropriations of the rights of God, infallible Imam, and the Nation, while constitutional monarchy would only infringe upon the right of the infallible Imam to rule; hence the latter is to be preferred over the former during the absence of the Imam (Naini 2003: 46-48).

Meanwhile, Mohammad Ali Shah was under constant internal and external pressures initiated through the active engagement of the constitutionalist elite of Najaf. The clerics stationed in Iraq at the time sent a handful of telegraphs to foreign governments, especially the Muslim Ottomans, demanding their political assistance to restore the constitution in Persia. Furthermore, they issued a fatwa addressing all Muslims, asking them to boycott the despotic rule of Mohammad Ali Shah and to not pay their taxes to the government.<sup>100</sup>

On 9 May 1909, the Shah agreed to issue a decree and to restore the constitution within two months. However, it was too late, and the Nationalist forces triumphantly entered the capital in July, just days earlier than the date of a promised election. The Shah, fearing for his life, took sanctuary in the Russian Embassy. The conquest of

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<sup>99</sup> Mehdi Ansari, interview with the author, Qom, August 2013.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

Tehran by the constitutionalist forces could not be promising for the Shiite clerical elite, especially when the life of Sheikh Fazlollah Noori and his companions were under serious threat. Eventually, the constitutionalist court sentenced the Sheikh to death by hanging on 31 July 1909. When he was preparing to be executed, he addressed the crowd:

God Almighty, you are my witness that, in these last minutes of my life, once again, I remind these people that the founders of this regime [the constitutional government] are infidels who have deceived the nation; this regime is fundamentally against Islam (Tondar Kia 1955: 247).

The Sheikh's destiny, which was exceptional throughout Shiite history, made other members of the clergy, who had been manipulated by other political actors, reconsider their political postures. As soon as the news reached Najaf, Akhond Khorasani sent a telegram to the constitutionalists, who were governing the city, and ordered them to safeguard the life of Sheikh Fazlollah. However, the telegram only became public after the Sheikh's execution.<sup>101</sup> By killing one of the most famous Mujtahids of the time, the secular constitutionalists sent a concise and clear message that they would not tolerate any opposition to their intention, even if it came from their former allies.

Throughout the Constitutional Revolution, all members of the Shiite clergy had been actively involved in politics. Since the early stages of the incident, some Shiite clerics were aligned with secular constitutionalists, while some had concerns about the upheavals that were going on. The former group of religious elites succeeded in securing the support of Akhond Khorasani and his companions in Najaf, while the latter group of clerics, led by Sheikh Fazlollah, was soon to find out that the intentions of the secular constitutionalists were not compatible with the principles of Shiite Islam.

After the fall of Tehran, Akhond Khorasani and other so-called 'constitutionalist clerics' and their laity followers were pushed more toward the Sheikh's judgments (Tavakkolian 2014: 35-82). Thus, the secular constitutionalists got the upper hand in seizing the political opportunity structure, while the majority of Shiite clerics were baffled about the outcome of their endeavours. In the eyes of the Shiite clerical elites, especially those supporting the constitutionalist camp, they had been manipulated by secular forces during the turmoil. Therefore, the Constitutional

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<sup>101</sup> Abdolreza Kefayi, interview with the author, Qom, August 2011.

Revolution left a wound on the body of Shiite religious elites, and this wound took some seven decades to be healed. Once Imam Khomeini, addressing a group of Shiite clerics, stated: ‘You should take lessons from history and must not let outsiders propagate evil temptations among your ranks, as they had done during the Constitutional Revolution’.<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter briefly examined the historical trajectory of the Shiite clerical elite’s political activism as it related to their perceptions about the political opportunity structures they confronted since the commencement of the Major Occultation Era.<sup>103</sup>

Since 941, the Shiite laity has been deprived of divine and infallible leadership, and the clerical elite became responsible for leading the community until the promised day when the Imam will re-emerge. This constitutes the Shiite Occultation discourse which is promoted by all members of the clerical elite. Seemingly different political tendencies exhibited by different Shiite clerics throughout history could be seen as a result of their perceptions about the political opportunity structure that they confront, and their implications for how they fulfil their socio-political responsibilities vis-à-vis their relevant communities. Thus, the political activism and/or quietism of the Shiite clergy in a given context represent more of a tactical disparity than a strategic one.

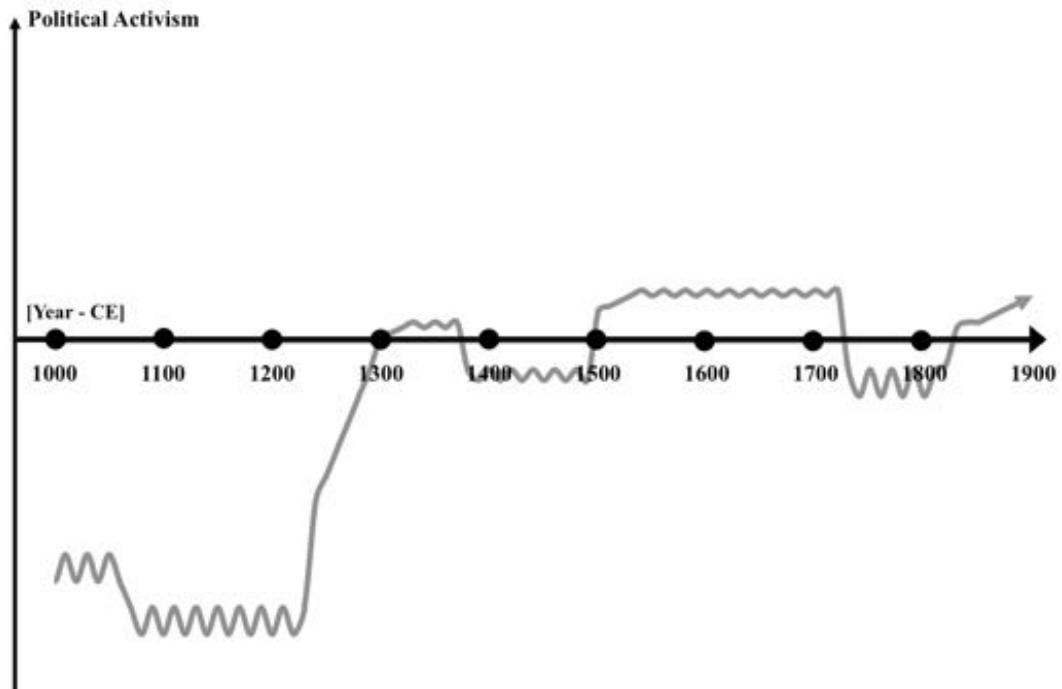
Concurrent with the occultation of the last Imam, Shiite clerics, his general deputies, who at the time did not expect the era to take long, devoted their activities to answering the inquiries of the laity in ways that were compatible with the changing contexts in which they found themselves. Therefore, their early *ijtihad* did not encompass political affairs at all. Taking advantage of the empowerment they experienced under the Shiite Buyid Dynasty, Shiite personalities of the early ages strived to compile books and treatises to propagate the tenets of the faith in a way that responded to the community’s emerging questions. Politically, they became less active, at least overtly, among the circles of their students and schools to undertake this responsibility.

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<sup>102</sup> *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol.18: 135-137.

<sup>103</sup> Figure 3.1 indicates a figurative representation of the Shiite political activism during this period.





**Figure 3.1 Clerical Elite Political Activism During the Occultation Era**

Four centuries after the commencement of the Occultation Era, with the development of Shiite *ijtihad* and emergence of more active personalities, the reign of the Sunnite Abbasid caliph came to an end. This favourable opportunity structure led groups of Shiite clerics to assume an activist posture to protect the community. This new trend, along with the further development of Persian interests in Shiite Islam, helped the Safavids to establish their dynasty in 1501. This heralded a period within which Shiite clerics from all around the world either exercised political activism or supported their colleagues while praying for the triumph of the new Shiite dynasty.

The open structure for the Shiite clerical elite's political activism reached its peak with the consolidation of Safavid rule in Persia. Although some members of the Shiite clergy who were seemingly quiet did not partake in the routine politics of the era, none opposed the activism of their fellow clerics. Yet, with changes in the political opportunity structure, and to the dismay of Shiite religious elites, an internal schism occurred and the static Akhbari School marginalised the Usuli Mujtahids in the mid-Safavid era. Subsequently for a century to come, Shiite clerics were barred from political involvement. This coincided with the fall of the Safavids and emergence of Nader Shah Afshar, who decreased state support for Shiite clerics and made them seek refuge in the holy cities of Iraq, there to quietly pursue their routine

activities. The first setback for the Shiite clergy in the aftermath of Safavids, however, turned out to be in their favour eventually. It was as a result of this setback that clerical elites were forced to think about alternative sources of financing, and it thus led to the consolidation of a valuable social base among the Shiite laities. Henceforth, they became independent of the state and received their legitimacy, along with financial support, from the people. This change made the Qajar rulers seek the assistance of clerical elites in establishing their rule in Persia, and in mobilising the masses to participate in war with Russian forces during the early nineteenth century. The second political impediment for Shiite clerics came after the conclusion of the Turkmenchay Treaty, when the state propaganda machine blamed the miseries of war on the clerical leadership. This again caused the religious elite to abandon activism. Decades later, they played an active role during the Tobacco Protest in Persia and made the monarchy and the British reconsider their policies in favour of Shiite clerics, their allies, and their followers. The structured activities of the Shiite clerical elite at the time were partly owed to the formation of the basic transnational network they had succeeded in shaping. The triumph of the Shiite religious elite camp during the Revolt pushed them once again to the forefront of politics during the Persian Constitutional Revolution. Yet, their political activism this time cost them a great deal in regards to their authority and their popular constituency. They basically lost the game to the contingencies of the modern context, their misperceptions, and internal schisms. When the dust of the Revolution settled all members of the clerical elite, ranging from those who had approved the secular constitutionalist to those who had opposed the mainstream revolutionaries, found out that the outcome would be inconsistent with Shiite principles or with the will of clerical elites. Therefore, the last experience of political activism for the clerical elite in pre-contemporary history taught them that, to achieve success, they have to thoroughly consider their perceptions of the existing structure of political opportunities and wait for a more permissive context.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Iran 1979: The First Shiite State in the Middle East**

The previous chapter presented a brief review of Shiite political thought from the commencement of the Major Occultation Era in the tenth century to the Persian Constitutional Revolution in the twentieth. The aim was to explore how the Shiite clergy responded to the political opportunity structure that was available to them through the prism of their personal perceptions. This and the next two chapters focus on the activities of Shiite clerical elites in modern Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. These chapters seek to shed light on the activities of Shiite clerical elites as they face different circumstances and political opportunity structures in the modern Middle East.

The Shiite political revival in the region during the last century had its roots both in the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1907 and in the revolts against British and French forces in Iraq and Lebanon. The increasingly pervasive Shiite political supremacy we are witnessing throughout the Middle East today is the result of a political transformation that, within specific contexts, has been relatively developed by Shiite elites in conformity with their perceptions and political postures over the last century. This chapter employs political opportunity theory in order to explain how Shiite clerical activism led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>1</sup>

The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 marked the beginning of a period in the modern political history of the Middle East during which the Shiite clergy, seizing the opportunities that this pivotal event afforded, introduced a model of Shiite government based on the theory of the ‘Guardianship of the Jurist’.<sup>2</sup> The movement which developed around the leadership of Imam Khomeini, and that led the overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy in Iran, emerged from the perceptions and experiences that the Shiite

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Kurzman discussed this context in a frequently cited article, ‘Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979’ (1996). However, through a more detailed historical analysis focused on the specific role of Shiite clerical elites, this chapter tries to illuminate an additional facet of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

<sup>2</sup> The theory of Guardianship of the Jurist, as was explained in Chapter One, has always been embedded in Shiite jurisprudence. It was the influence of new contextual factors that enabled Khomeini to build up new readings based on the theory and to institutionalize this socio-political role for the Shiite clerical elite in Iran in the aftermath of the Revolution. For more information on the development of the theory, see Khomeini 1981.

clerical elite had accumulated throughout the centuries of the Occultation Era that began in the tenth century. It was evident in the aftermath of its establishment in February 1979, which the Islamic Republic of Iran was supported by a great numbers of Shiite clerics. The new government was centred on the rule of the Shiite clergy, and it emerged as a result of the relatively open political opportunity structure that its leadership had correctly perceived and had acted on at the time.

As previously discussed, after the Occultation Era commenced and deprived the Shiite community of an infallible source of leadership, qualified Shiite clerics, acting as the general deputies of the Imam, assumed leadership of the community. At the time of the emergence of the Shiite Safavid dynasty in the sixteenth century, the Shiite clerical elite had increased their involvement in politics, with some Shiite personalities becoming associated with the rule of Shiite monarchies. They were, thus, provided with an unsurpassed opportunity to promote Shiite doctrines. Henceforth, a majority of the religious elite constituted, either directly or indirectly, the backbone of government and exercised an active leadership role in the Shiite community and in protecting the principles of the faith. Their role in the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Persia in 1906 heralded a turning point in Shiite political jurisprudence and practice. However, the outcome of that revolution was not favourable for the majority of the Shiite religious elite, and during the decades that followed, they were forced to abandon politics.

Clerical elites believed that they had become involved with the Constitutional Revolution to protect the citadel of Shiite principles and to support the will of their followers by confining the monarch's power and establishing an assembly.<sup>3</sup> Taking the opportunity structure into account, at the time, Shiite clerics were generally connected with the majority of the population, and succeeded in mobilising the masses against the despotic rule of the Qajars. Throughout the centuries since the rule of the Safavids, they had succeeded in establishing a more personal, one-to-one relationship with various members of the laity by engaging in every possible aspect of the laity's routine life, ranging from providing education and conducting marriage ceremonies to managing funerals. Although they did not want to establish an Islamic state ruled by a Shiite cleric -- perhaps because they did not perceive the political opportunity structure to be open at the time, they sought to require the state to respect the clergy's socio-political role.

The course that events took, however, moved against the will of high- ranking

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<sup>3</sup> Abdolreza Kefayi, interview with the author, Qom, August 2011.

Shiite clerics.<sup>4</sup> Though they undoubtedly had played a role in mobilizing the masses, due to the clear mismatch between the political opportunity structure that existed at the time and the perception of that structure on the part of the constitutionalist clergy, the clergy eventually lost the game to other actors and were pushed out of the political arena. The execution of the Grand Mujtahid of Tehran, Sheikh Fazlollah Noori, had the utmost negative effect on Shiite clerical authority at the close of the Constitutional Revolution. Consequently, the political structure of the post-constitutional revolution era was one that was characterized by a decline in the authority of the Shiite clerical elite. This huge blow to their popular status ultimately decreased the political activism of the clerical elite for decades.

The post-Constitutional Revolution era in Persia coincided with social, economic, and political disarray. Ahmad Shah Qajar, who succeeded his father in 1909, was unable to restore central governmental authority throughout the country as, just a few days after his coronation at the age of 18 in July 1914, Persia became a backyard to the belligerents of the Great War.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the First World War, the writ of Ahmad Shah's government hardly extended beyond the capital city of Tehran and a few other big cities. It was provincial with tribal chiefs holding actual authority throughout Persia. With the collapse of Tsarist Russia, which had been the power in Persia since the Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828), Britain became the most powerful political player in Persia. According to an Anglo-Persian Agreement -- signed between the Prime Minister Vosuq al-Dawleh and the British Chargé d'Affaires, Sir Percy Cox, on 9 August 1919 -- Persia was nominally independent but its military and financial affairs were subject to British tutelage (Elwell-Sutton 1978: 10).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In the process of writing the Fundamental Law in post-Constitutional Revolution Iran, the Shiite elite were expecting the Second Article of the Supplementary Law, which reserves for Shiite clerics the role of monitoring the ratified Law and, in this way, provide them with a sort of involvement in the politics of the country. Nonetheless, in subsequent years this article was never employed, and this worked to push them aside in parliamentary deliberations of current affairs.

<sup>5</sup> At the outset of the conflict, Russian troops entered Persia from the north, while British and Ottoman forces entered from the south and northwest. In early 1915, Russians, after seizing Tabriz from Ottoman forces, headed toward Tehran (Atabaki 2006: 2). It was only the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in October 1917 that prevented the destruction of Persian authority (Sheikholeslami 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Internal politics became polarised over this Agreements: the government campaigned for its ratification by the National Assembly, while opposition to it was formed of forces ranging from religious politicians like Seyyed Hassan Modarres, to Mostawfi, a Qajar elite politician (Katouzian 2006: 125). Ahmad Shah, however, flip-flopped between these two camps. Eventually, while visiting Britain just weeks after signing the Agreement, he hesitantly expressed his support for it and left its fate to be decided by the National Assembly. Historians have two distinctive views about Ahmad Shah's political life. Some believe he sacrificed Qajar dynastic rule because of his

Internal political turmoil in Persia between proponents and opponents of the 1919 Agreement, and the emergence of rebel groups throughout the country to the dismay of the young king, urged concrete initiatives to sustain the integrity of the country. Persia was desperately in need of a saviour who could both prevent the country's disintegration and satisfy British political goals. It was in this context that Reza Khan, a mid-ranking Cossack officer at the time who seemed equipped to play this role, seized power in a bloodless coup on 22 February 1921.

The rise of Reza Khan on the Persian political scene occurred during the early stages of the establishment of Qom seminary by the Grand Ayatollah Hairy. A power vacuum in Persia during the early 1920s had provided an opportunity that enabled the Shiite elite to strengthen the religious centre in Qom, under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Hairy. Concurrently, Najaf Seminary was facing a dark period with the occupation of British forces, and the majority of clerics preferred to work toward strengthening the foundations of Qom seminary in Persia.

The leadership of Grand Ayatollah Hairy, who believed that the political opportunity structure was not open for activism and thus remained politically quiet at the time, constituted the first phase of the Shiite political trajectory in modern Persia. His life in Qom as the Shiite Marja' coincided with the rise of Reza Shah and his introduction of a modernization-secularization campaign throughout the country. Indeed, it was the Grand Ayatollah's providence that sustained the very fragile foundation of the Qom seminary against the repressions of the Pahlavi state. Consequently, his successors, who inherited the leadership of the seminary after he passed away in 1937, did not attempt to pursue any form of political activism, despite concerns about the initiatives of Reza Shah.

In 1941, in the midst of World War II, Allied forces removed Reza Shah from power and placed his son, Mohammadreza Pahlavi, on the throne. The rise of the young Mohammadreza Pahlavi inaugurated a political interregnum in which a relatively open political opportunity structure consolidated various socio-political poles of opinion propogating differing ideas throughout the country. Among these different poles were the Shiite clergy who, freed from the pressures generated by Reza Shah's rule, began to seize the opportunities that the time afforded to shape developments in their own and their followers' favour. The leadership of Qom seminary, at the time, was in the hands of three

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approach toward the ratification of the 1919 Agreement (Mosaddegh 2000), others believe that he was a selfish ruler who lost his throne because of his personal laxity (Sheikholeslami 1989).

Shiite figures, who were known as *Maraji' Tholath*.<sup>7</sup> Short of financial resources, they were in need of a more prestigious leader. Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi, a renowned student of Akhond Khorasani, who had been teaching in the local seminary of Broujerd in west Iran for almost three decades, seemed most fitted to fill the position. With his settlement in Qom in 1946, a new spirit invigorated the life of the city's seminary and Shiite political activism began to gradually increase.

Some religious forces had challenged the political posture of the Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi during his leadership of the seminary, for he had maintained a unique political engagement with the Pahlavi monarch, a coexistence that, although it had gone through a series of upheavals, was also based on mutual respect and understanding. When the Grand Ayatollah passed away, Mohammadreza Shah was able to pursue his revolutionary socio-economic development schemes undeterred by the potential opposition of religious authorities. But when, in early 1963, he publicly announced the details of the so-called 'White Revolution', he drew the condemnation of the Shiite clerical elite of Qom. At the time, the political opportunity structure was far more open to the clergy than in the 1920s when Reza Shah had started his modernization-secularization programmes. By 1963, and as a result of the activities of Hairi and Broujerdi, the Qom seminary was strong enough to denounce state activities that were considered threatening to Shiite clerical authority. Nine renowned Shiite clerics of the Qom seminary, among them the 62-year-old Ayatollah Khomeini, proclaimed in an open letter on 17 February 1963 their condemnation of a state referendum that was to be held on the reform and asked the government to comply with Islam and to respect the Fundamental Law of Iran.<sup>8</sup> The clash between the Shah and clerical authorities heated up in the following months until eventually, in June 1963, Ayatollah Khomeini was arrested in Qom and transferred to Tehran.

On 5 June 1963, there was a mass demonstration of Iranians in opposition to Ayatollah Khomeini's being taken into custody that provided a shocking reaction to the Shah and his ruling apparatus. It heralded the rise of a socio-political movement formed around the clergy, although one that required further development in order to be able to achieve a tangible victory. By the time that the government banished the Ayatollah to Turkey, he and his entourage had succeeded in consolidating their anti-state activities.

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<sup>7</sup> Sadr Sadr al-Din Sadr (d.1954), Mohammad Hujjat Kuh Kamarei (d.1953), and Mohammad Taghi Khansari (d.1952) who, from 1936, led the seminary for eight years, are known as the *Three Maraji'*.

<sup>8</sup> *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol.1: 145.

While his proponents were forming a covert network in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini started to develop his political doctrine in Najaf. Throughout the years between 1963 and 1979, other members of the Shiite clergy were politically active in pursuing the same goal, albeit in a more discrete manner. Various Shiite figures, responding to the opportunities afforded by the structure, though sometimes with different tactics, were actively engaged in Iranian politics and in the condemnation of the Pahlavi government's policies.

In early 1979, these activities culminated in the overthrow of the monarchy in Iran and, eventually, in the consolidation of an Islamic Republic. How was this powerful association formed among various members of the Shiite clerical elite in Iran? How did clerical elites succeed in seizing the advantages offered by the political opportunity structure? Did it entail overcoming some meaningful disparity among the religious leadership, that between the so-called 'activists' and 'quietists' in order to reach that point? This chapter addresses these questions by probing the role of the context at the time -- the political opportunity structure at the time in Iran from the Constitutional Revolution until the establishment of the Islamic Republic, and clerical elite perception of concerning.

Section I of this chapter reviews the post-constitutional revolution and the rise of Pahlavi rule in order to explain the elements of political opportunity structure that the Shiite clergy confronted in the early era of contemporary Iran. The establishment of Qom Seminary under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Hairi, the centre's socio-political strengthening through the activities of Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi, and the religious elite's political activities within the Iran National Movement in the mid- twentieth century, are the main focuses of this section. Section II reviews the post-1953 coup period, when Mohammadreza Pahlavi's power was consolidated in Iran. The interaction of Shiite clerics and Mohammadreza Pahlavi, the rise of blatant Shiite activism through the 1963 uprising, and the emergence of the active Shiite Marja' Taqlid, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, shape the backdrop of this section's arguments. The last section of this chapter focuses on clerical activities and associations involved in establishing the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. Its aim is to shed light on the factors at different levels of analysis that, with the central role of Shiite clerical elites, led to the establishment of the first Shiite state of the modern Middle East.

## **I. The Rise of the Pahlavi: Prelude to the Shiite Clerical Elite's Political Activism in Modern Iran**

The era of the first Pahlavi ruler occurred concurrently with t dramatic socio-political



changes for Persians. Political activism on the part of the Shiite clerical elite during this period was much influenced by the post-constitutionalism context. Based on their bitter recent experience, clerics chose to stay out of the politics. The Shiite clergy was inclined to stay out of politics at the time. Instead, as the rule of Reza Shah was being consolidated, the Shiite clerics of Persia, led then by Grand Ayatollah Hairi, preferred to concentrate on establishing the Qom seminary rather than openly opposing the secular policies of the government. The political quiescence of the religious elite during Reza Shah's reign was not linked solely to the personality of Ayatollah Hairi, but was maintained until Reza Shah was removed from power by Allied forces in 1941. This section seeks to explain the political posture assumed by the clerical elite during this time through an examination of the political opportunity structure that confronted the generation of Qom Seminary's leaders and their perception of it.

Persia, under the reign of Ahmad Shah Qajar, was in absolute chaos, and was nowhere close to adopting the principles of democratic parliamentary rule (Ghani 1998: 21). At this time, international relation was going through dramatic changes. The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution had wiped out the Tsarist Russian hegemony in Persia and the British were seeking to reinforce their influence in the East by means of their proposed 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement. Disappointed by the failure to win ratification of the Agreement, a faction of British policymakers in the region turned to the alternative of planning a coup to unseat Ahmad Shah Qajar. Meanwhile, a group of mostly urban middle class Persian constitutionalists, frustrated by Qajar rule and the lack of socio-political development, sought to establish a new political paradigm in Persia. Their goal was to establish the rule of an 'enlightened despot' capable of transforming the conditions of life for the underprivileged and developing Persia's fragmented society into a united one (Ansari 2012: 66).

### ***Reza Shah and the Qom Seminary: The Political Posture of Grand Ayatollah Hairi in Confronting a Closed Opportunity Structure***

Reza Khan had sought to achieve these goals by advancing the interests of both the British and the internal political actors at the time. The 1920s was the decade of Reza Shah and his aspirations to modernise the country. However, as with all Persian rulers in the post-Safavid era, he had to develop a framework for dealing with the Shiite clerical elite. This became even more important when, just four years prior to the establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty, Grand Ayatollah Hairi had established the Qom Seminary in 1921. The relationship between Reza

Shah and the religious elite at the early stages of his rule was overshadowed by the restoration of the Qom Seminary. This, consequently, defined the structural political opportunity presented to the Shiite clerical elite at the time. Reza Shah had sought to modernize the country by advancing the interests of both the British and internal political actors. During the 1920s, Reza Shah pursued this aspiration. However, as with all Persian rulers in the post-Safavid era, he had to develop a framework for dealing with the Shiite clerical elite. This became even more important because in 1921 just four years prior to the establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty, Grand Ayatollah Hairi had established the Qom Seminary. The relationship between Reza Shah and the religious elite during the early stages of his rule was overshadowed by the restoration of the Qom Seminary; and this defined the political opportunity structure that confronted the Shiite clerical elite at the time.

The Pahlavi-Shiite clerical relationship under Reza Shah can be traced through three distinct periods. First was the pre-Pahlavi dynasty period, between 1921 and 1925, during which Reza Khan was generally obedient to the Shiite clerical leadership. During this period, Ahmad Shah Qajar and his Prime Minister, Reza Khan, competed with each other to form alliances with clerics residing in Qom (Akhavi 1980: 29). In the second period, from 1925 to 1927, Reza Khan ascended the throne and, confident of his position, let his relations with the Shiite clerical leadership sour. Finally, during the third period, from 1927 until the last days of Reza Shah's reign, there was growing enmity between the state and the religious elite.

In 1921, Grand Ayatollah Hairi, a prominent student of Mirza Shirazi, the leader of the Tobacco Revolt, arrived in the holy city of Qom near Tehran to restore the city's dormant religious seminary.<sup>9</sup> Born in 1859, Grand Ayatollah Hairi personally witnessed the political transformations in Persia and Iraq during the early twentieth century. In the last years of Ottoman rule, and with the political opportunity structure in Iraq undergoing dramatic changes, he committed himself to strengthening clerical authority in neighbouring Persia, where the majority of the Shiite population resided. In pursuit of this goal, he undertook to do whatever he found to be necessary and, in the given circumstances, viable. After the establishment of Reza Shah's rule, the religious activities of Shiite clerics became restrained. Consequently, Grand Ayatollah Hairi chose to focus on his school

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<sup>9</sup> Hairi 1977: 136. Prior to this, between 1900 and 1906, Hairi had settled in the city of Arak, just a few miles from Qom. However, with the rise of Constitutionalism in Tehran, he preferred to leave Persia and to settle, first, in Najaf and, then, in Karbala. In 1913, he left Karbala and went once again to Arak, from where he moved to Qom to re-establish the seminary.

rather than to interfere in day-to-day politics. Based on his personal interpretation of the political opportunity structure at the time, he chose to remain politically quiet (Hairi 1977: 136). The course of later events proved this to have been a providential choice, as this politically quietistic posture ultimately worked to the benefit of the Shiite elite and their lay followers in Iran.

It was about the same time that the Grand Ayatollah settled in Qom that Reza Khan (later known as Reza Shah) emerged on Iran's political scene. Reza Khan was a pious Shiite and a man of integrity; and he came to be regarded by the clerical elite as a person capable of protecting the community. It was on this understanding that his relationship with the religious leadership developed in Persia, especially after October 1923, when Reza Khan became Prime Minister in the absence of the Qajar Shah. However, a key turning point in the relationship between Reza Khan and the clerics occurred following the commencement of the Republican Movement by his supporters in Persia.<sup>10</sup>

Reza Khan viewed Republicanism as similar to what Mustafa Kemal had established in neighbouring Turkey, and as a means of abolishing the Qajar dynasty and ascending the throne (Bahar 1992, Vol. II: 42). However, in this he faced formidable opposition from merchants, some members of parliament, and the clerical apparatus. Perhaps the most influential and active of his opponents was Seyyed Hassan Modarres (1870–1937), a clerical member of parliament. The debate in Persia about Republicanism exacerbated the political turmoil in the country and led Reza Khan to seek assistance from high-ranking Shiite clerics in Qom, including two Grand Ayatollahs, Mohammad Hussein Naini (1861–1936) and Abu al-Hassan Isfahani (1860–1946), both of whom had been banished from Najaf by King Faisal of Iraq and had settled on Qom.<sup>11</sup>

The two Grand Ayatollahs had previously sought sanctuary and support from the seemingly religious Reza Khan against occupying British forces in Iraq. In the view of the clerics at the time, the abolition of the Islamic Ottoman Caliphate by Kemal Ataturk had forged an identification of Republicanism with secularism. The Shiite clergy had traditionally been more confident with a monarchical form of government, a system that they believed would be more likely to respect their socio-political role than one associated with the new concept of 'republic'. Therefore, after meeting with Reza Khan, the Shiite

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<sup>10</sup> Abrahamian 1982: 123-5. The campaign reached its zenith in early 1924 when articles appeared in newspapers demanding a secular state and warning Iranians of the threat posed by the corrupt Qajar dynasty, foreigners and the clerics.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed description of the expulsion of the Najaf clerical elite from Iraq to Qom see, Chapter 5.

leadership of Qom issued a signed statement and public declaration of their opposition to the Republican Movement.<sup>12</sup> On that same day, Reza Khan proclaimed that, upon the request of the Shiite clerical elite, and to 'preserve the majesty of Islam and the independence of Persia' a republic should not be supported anymore (Akhavi 1980: 29).<sup>13</sup> Eventually, Reza Khan succeeded in forming a major faction in parliament which, in October 1925, voted to abolish Qajar rule and to name Reza Khan as the new head of state. By vote of the Constituent Assembly, on 15 December 1925, Reza Shah, the founder of what would become the Pahlavi Dynasty, took the oath *to uphold the Fundamental Laws of Constitution, to support the Shiite faith, and to devote himself to Iran's independence* (Algar 1991).

Reza Shah had managed to attain implicit, although conditional, support from the Shiite clerical elite in Najaf. However, the Grand Ayatollah Hairi had remained out of the political arena, and had concentrated on the development of the Qom seminary. However, he did not reply to the Court's invitation either to participate personally or to send an envoy to Reza Shah's coronation ceremony. Shortly after the formation of the new dynasty in August 1927, an official proclamation appeared in the press stating the following:

Some people have tried to provoke division and discord throughout the country in the name of preserving religion ... Nobody is entitled to independently preach 'Forbidding the Evil' with justification of the religious propagation; otherwise he is worthy of the utmost punishment (Quoted in Makki 1979, Vol.IV : 379)

By this declaration, Reza Shah started to challenge the activities of the clergy; and signalled the emergence of a newly restrictive political opportunity structure. The ratification of the Compulsory Conscription in 1926, perceived as a threat to some clerics. The new law obliged youths, including those who wished to study at religious seminaries,

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<sup>12</sup> For the full text of the letter signed by Naini, Isfahani, and Hairi see Mustawfi 1964, Vol. III: 601.

<sup>13</sup> Herz al-Din 1985, Vol. I: 49. Reza Khan later visited Naini and Isfahani in Najaf to seek their support for his future political plans, and he promised to employ Article II of the Supplementary Fundamental Law, which provided for the monitoring by five Shiite Mujtahids of the activities of the National Assembly in order to prevent the ratification of laws that might be in non-compliance with Islam. Sheikh Mohammad Herz al-Din, a contemporaneous biographer of the ulama, claims that Reza Khan, then the Minister of War to Ahmad Shah, met with the clerics of Najaf, including Isfahani and Naini, in the holy Shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, and promised that upon ascending the throne, he would obey the clerics and deploy Article II of the Supplementary Fundamental Law. He goes on to state that, 'however, after he returned and ascended to throne, he did not fulfil what had been promised' (: 49).

to participate in military service. In response, Aqa Nur Allah Najafi,<sup>14</sup> the renowned Mujtahid of Isfahan called for a mass demonstration against the law and the clerics to take sanctuary in Qom. Between September and December 1927, more than a thousand clerics from all around the country entered Qom and were welcomed by the Grand Ayatollah Hairei. Although the demonstrators' explicit demands were for the modification of the Compulsory Conscription Law, the execution of Article II of the Supplementary Fundamental Law, and control of the press, their ultimate goal was to either make Reza Shah fulfil what he had made oath on, the protection of Shiite Islam, or to abdicate his rule (Makki 1979, Vol.IV: 417). In a private meeting with his trusted circle, Aqa Nur Allah stated that

This improvident, impious servant of foreigners [Reza Shah] is basically incapable of rule. We should force him to abdicate, which is an easy task. We must push this donkey down, as we had already raised it up!<sup>15</sup>

In this, it appears that Aqa Nur Allah had perceived there to be an opportunity to ensure that the Shah would fulfil his duty to respect Sharia law and clerical authority. Groups of Shiite clerics gathered in Qom just miles from the capital forced the government to send envoys to broker a deal with the demonstrators and ask them to go back to their hometowns. However, while negotiating with the official envoys in January 1928, Aqa Nur Allah passed away mysteriously, leaving his companions no alternative but to give up pursuing their demands. Consequently, one of the last Shiite clerical movements opposed to Reza Shah's rule was stalled just when it appeared to be making progress towards achievement of its goals. Henceforth, Reza Shah would become more vigilant in guarding against the emergence of any movement that might threaten his reign, especially one led by religious figures. Hairei's political posture, accurately held over the accurate perception of the unfavourable structure, had tightened hands of Reza Shah to attack the religious leadership in Qom. The Grand Ayatollah's main concern, at the time, was to minimize the state repressions against his newborn seminary. Therefore, perceiving a close political opportunity structure, mainly from the hostile policies of the state, he maintained politically quiet and advised his followers to do so.

Nonetheless, an opportunity for Reza Shah to provoke Hairei's opposition, and

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<sup>14</sup> Najafi 2005. Born in 1859, Mohammad Mahdi Najafi Isfahani, was one of the prominent religious leaders of Iran who, along with his brother, Aqa Mohammad Taqi (d.1914) was actively involved in the Tobacco Revolt and the Constitutional Revolution.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Mahdavi 1988, Vol. II: 149.

perhaps to close down his religious institute, came to the fore in March 1928. While the Shah's wife and daughters were visiting the Holy Shrine in Qom, Sheikh Mohammad Taqi Bafqi, a high-ranking disciple of Hairi, criticized their dress and lack of head-cover. Within hours, Reza Shah and his companions began a campaign against Qom and brutally beat Sheikh Mohammad Taqi Bafqi in the holy shrine (Makki 1979, Vol.IV: 282). The whole of this religious city was thrown into turmoil in response to what was perceived to be an outrageous act on the part of Reza Shah. For its part, the state was prepared to crack down on any sort of protest, and finally to prosecute the Grand Ayatollah. Nevertheless, the Grand Ayatollah issued a fatwa stating, 'Any talk around the incident of Hajj Sheikh Mohammad Taqi is against the sacred law of Islam and illegal'.<sup>16</sup> In the eyes of the Grand Ayatollah, the political opportunity structure at the time was so restrictive that any movement against the rule of Reza Shah would threaten the very existence of the Shiite seminary. His posture, although seemingly passive, was designed to ensure that the seminary would be protected from state repression. He remained politically quiet at the time, because he believed that any criticism against the government would threaten the very existence of Shiite Islam in Persia.<sup>17</sup>

The Qom incident, nonetheless, was perceived by the clergy as disloyalty on the part of Reza Shah to their sacred beliefs. They and their followers perceived that the structure for social activities under the Pahlavi rule was one of the most restrictive they had ever faced. Thus, as the leader of the community, Grand Ayatollah Hairi chose to remain politically quiet and to devote his life, instead, to religious teaching and to developing the seminary.

Reza Shah's socio-economic initiatives and modernisation revolution began in 1927. Over the coming years, the government's modernisation of the economic, juridical, and educational systems<sup>18</sup> undermined the status of the clergy, which had always exercised authority over these affairs. While these initiatives were being established throughout the country under the 'iron fist of Reza Shah' (Abrahamian 2008: 63) Shiite clerics, who were mainly under the influence of Hairi's leadership, pursued a strategy of not interfering in politics and, in this way, preserved the citadel of Shiite Islam in Iran under Pahlavi rule.

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Makki 1979, Vol. I: 210.

<sup>17</sup> Abd al-Hussein Hairi, interview with *Hawzah Journal*, No. 125, December 2004.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed review of Reza Shah's modernization initiatives, see Banani 1961, chapter 5, 6, and 7. For a review of how these initiatives restrained Shiite clerical authority in Iran, see Faghfoory 1993.

However, there took place another clash between the Shiite religious elite and the state following the return of the Shah from a visit to Turkey in 1936. In January of that year, the royal family appeared in public unveiled for the first time in the history of Modern Iran.<sup>19</sup> The government then promulgated the law of ‘Women’s Emancipation’, by which no Iranian women should wear a veil, or *chadur*, in public (Faghfoory 1993). Years earlier, in 1928, the government had ratified the ‘Dress Unification’ law, requiring Persians to observe uniformity of dress. Although Shiite clerics were, with some conditions, exempt from the law,<sup>20</sup> life for religious students became miserable.<sup>21</sup>

With this, religious students, some were already critical of Hairi’s perception in the face against Reza Shah’s initiatives, became more critical of this political posture. Despite this, the position Hairi maintained -- that his disciples must tolerate pressures from state activities and wait for the time when Qom seminary would become formidable enough to stand up against despotism – was generally trusted. He exhorted students to focus on studying and not to bother with what the state was doing with regard to their religious attire. He urged that they remain quiet ‘even’, he said, ‘if they take off my own turban’.<sup>22</sup> The new law regarding women, however, was a serious challenge to Islamic beliefs. As perhaps the government had anticipated, it was not only controversial throughout Persia’s conservative social groups, it also provoked opposition from the clerical elite. The community became divided between the supporters of the law, mainly secular modernists, and its opponents, the Shiite clerics and their followers. The holy cities of Qom and Mashhad were in greater turmoil than anywhere else, due to the great influence of religious elites. On 3 July 1935, and for the first time, Grand Ayatollah Hairi sent a personal telegram from Qom to Reza Shah, which read as follows:

To Your Majesty, May God Almighty perpetuate your reign. It is clear that I always have desired the prosperity of the Imperial government. Nonetheless,

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<sup>19</sup> Throughout this study, the term ‘Persia’ has been used to refer to the country of Iran prior to 1935. It was in 1935 that Reza Shah Pahlavi requested that the international community refer to the country as ‘Iran’ instead of ‘Persia’.

<sup>20</sup> Based on the Dress Unification Law, for a cleric to become exempt from the law he has to have a license from two prominent Mujtahids or be a full time member of a seminary and have passed an official examination. *Ettelaat Daily*, 25 December 1928, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>21</sup> There are a handful of stories and memoirs of students who, in order to retain their religious attire, were forced to leave town during daylight hours and take sanctuary from police forces in the suburbs. Imam Khomeini, a student at the time, states that ‘fearing the reinforcement police of Reza Shah, the religious students in Qom either imprisoned themselves in their rooms or would leave town and spend the day in the suburbs’. For a detailed story of the life of clerical students at the time, see *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol. XI: 396.

<sup>22</sup> Abd al-Hussein Hairi, *interview with Hawzah Journal*, No. 125, December 2004.

I must note that current affairs are in evident opposition to the Sharia Law and the sacred beliefs of Shiite Islam, a cause for concern for all Muslims. Indeed, as one of the pious patrons of Islam, it is your responsibility to resolve the issue...I hope that by your immediate act, you will relieve my concerns and those of all the Shiite of Iran.<sup>23</sup>

The tone of the letter clearly shows that Hairi was trying to fulfil his role as the leader of his religious followers, yet at the same time to show respect for the state and prevent further tension. However, Reza Shah issued a discourteous reply to the telegram, demonstrating to the Grand Ayatollah, once more, that religious leadership did not carry weight in Reza Shah's reign. A telegram<sup>24</sup> signed, not by the Shah, but by Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Foroughi, was sent to Hairi advising him not to trust 'the rumours' and implicitly threatening him with state prosecution should he choose to do otherwise.<sup>25</sup>

The mass uprising against the law was more substantial in the city of Mashhad. These, the prominent Marja', Seyyed Hussein Qomi (d. 1947) addressed opponents of the new law by stating that

Islam needs devotees and Muslims should rise [against this law], and I am ready to devote myself to this cause. (Quoted in Wahed 1987: 77)

Qomi's reaction was harsher than that of Hairi. The introduction of the new regulations threatened clerical authority; and since Hairi had chosen to avoid directly confronting the state, Qomi became determined to fulfil Hairi's responsibility. Consequently, Ayatollah Qomi, who had until then stayed out of politics, decide to go to Tehran and personally discuss the concerns of the religious elite and their followers with Reza Shah. On 1 July 1954, the Ayatollah arrived in Tehran and stayed at the city of Rey near to the Shah Abd al-Azim holy shrine. Soon, the house in which he was residing became the centre for opposition groups, and thousands of people visited him every day to listen to his words. Concerned over the prospects of a popular uprising, the government cordoned off the area

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<sup>23</sup> National Archives of Iran, Document No. 116001-17, Pack-198.

<sup>24</sup> Responding to Hairi, Foroughi denies that the Hijab has been banned and says that the Shah is 'surprised that you believe this nonsense' (ibid).

<sup>25</sup> It is said that, following the telegram, Reza Shah made a personal visit to Hairi's house in Qom and, referring to developments in Turkey, where a similar law was due to be ratified, warned him not to interfere. Apparently Reza Shah addressed Hairi saying: 'As if I am Yazid and you are Imam Hussein. What do you want from me? You should change your behaviour otherwise I will crush the seminary to debris' (Mohammad Hussein Fazel Isfahani, eyewitness of the meeting; quoted in *Yaad Quartely*, Qom 1989, Vol. 14: 106).



and put him under house arrest.<sup>26</sup> Upon hearing news of these developments, the Ayatollah's followers in Mashhad on 10 July took sanctuary in the Goharshad Mosque next to the Imam Reza Holy Shrine. After four days of protests, with crowds chanting that 'the Shah is a new Yazid ... Imam Hussein protect us from this Evil Shah', government forces opened fire on the crowds and hundreds were killed and wounded (Abrahamian 2008: 94). Later on, Ayatollah Qomi was banished to Iraq, where he remained until his death.

The message of the Goharshad incident was clear for the Shiite religious leadership: the Pahlavi government would not tolerate any opposition to its secularisation scheme. Consequently, it would appear that the clerical authority had no option but to seek to preserve the citadel of Shiite Islam in Iran by remaining politically quiet. This was the posture that was adopted by Grand Ayatollah Hairi until he passed away in January 1937, just months after the Goharshad Rebellion. Upon the death of the Grand Ayatollah Hairi Yazdi, the government issued a proclamation permitting only one ceremony to be held in Qom and forbade commemoration of his death in any other cities. Reza Shah, relieved of a possibly formidable opponent, had already weakened the Shiite establishment in Iran and crippled clerical authority. Imam Khomeini would later call those days the darkest era of the Qom seminary, when 'just around one hundred clergy survived under the harsh impositions' of Reza Shah's anti-Islamic policies.<sup>27</sup>

In accordance with the will of the late Grand Ayatollah, the leadership of the Qom seminary was inherited by two of his prominent disciples: Ayatollah Sadr al-Din Sadr and Hujjat Kuh Kamarei.<sup>28</sup> Hairi's successors assumed a very similar political posture to that of their predecessor, as the context would not permit them to do otherwise. They struggled to minimise the seminary's encounters with the state until September 1941, when Anglo-Soviet forces removed Reza Shah from the throne in favour of his young son, Mohammadreza Pahlavi.

In 1941, the twenty years during which Reza Shah had been the face of Iran came to an end and it appeared that this would put an end, too, to the miseries that the Shiite clerical elite had faced. The first twenty years of Pahlavi's rule, especially the years between 1927 and 1941, would be among the most oppressive periods for Shiite clerical

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<sup>26</sup> For the first and contemporaneous account of Qomi's activities in regard to the incident, see Adib-Heravi 1948: 282.

<sup>27</sup> *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol. II: 207.

<sup>28</sup> Later on, Mohammad Taghi Khansari joined the two; see Hashemian 2010.

authority in the history of Iran. As described in this section, the rule of Reza Shah coincided with the early stages of the foundation of the Qom seminary under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Hairi Yazdi. This period is now regarded as one of the most politically quiet in regard to the activities of the Shiites in the history of modern Iran. Nevertheless, in evaluating the context and the political posture of Hairi, it can now be concluded that he assumed this posture in order to protect the very existence of Shiite clerical authority and to preserve the community with a minimum of loss throughout a critical period in its history. Thus, though this tactic was sometimes criticised by groups of his colleagues,<sup>29</sup> the majority of the clergy supported his political posture. As his reign continued, and as of Reza Shah became a quintessential dictator, the Grand Ayatollah and his followers devoted themselves to more indirect forms of political involvement in order to strengthen the fragile foundations of the seminary and its, then, small number of members. They had to await a more permissive context in which to re-establish clerical authority in Iran.

#### ***Young Mohammadreza Shah and the Interregnum Era: An Open Structure for Clerical Activism***

With the abdication of Reza Shah in September 1941, his twenty-two year old son, Mohammadreza, ascended the throne. For the religious elite who had witnessed two decades of Reza Shah's supremacy in Iran, this was perceived as establishing a political opportunity structure that would be favourable for once again restoring their authority. The greater freedom afforded by the combination of the ineffectiveness of the young Shah, the dismantling of the armed forces, and the occupation of Iran by Allied forces, permitted different ideological currents within the country to emerge and to seek popular support. Concurrent with the coronation of the new Shah, and inspired by the Soviet Union, the Tudeh Party of Iran was established and, having succeeded in gaining the support of a group of leftist intelligentsia, soon became one of the main political parties in Iran (Abrahamian 2008: 111). There also emerged nationalist movements, whose members were mainly the remainders of those who had been active during the Constitutional Revolution who sought to seize the maximum advantage offered by the political opportunities offered by this political interregnum.

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<sup>29</sup> The grandson of Hairi, Abd al-Hussein Hairi, states that his major concern was to protect the new seminary from threats emanating from the Pahlavi regime. As he once stated to one of his fellows, Sheikh Mohammad Khalesizadeh: 'the seminary is the most significant one at this time. To preserve its very foundation is the foremost priority at this time and I do not involve myself in any activity that may threaten its security'. See *Hawzah Monthly*, No. 125, December 2004.

Perceiving there to be an open political opportunity structure, the clergy sought to reinforce its authority based on the Qom seminary. In this regard, the state-clergy relationship formed two distinctive periods under the rule of Mohammadreza Pahlavi. The former era was concurrent with the rise of Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi as the sole Shiite Marja', and the latter began in the post-Broujerdi era and lasted up until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. While the former is seen as a period of consolidation for Shiite clerical authority in Iran, the latter period was one in which Shiite clerics succeeded in developing their political positions concerning Islamic government and the establishment of the first Shiite state in the modern Middle East. Movement towards these ends was undeniably founded on the leadership of the Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi and his activities while leading the Shiite world.

#### ***Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi and the Revival of Shiite Clerical Authority in Iran***

The death of Grand Ayatollah Hairi and the restrictions that the clerical elite had experienced under Reza Shah's rule reduced the socio-political role of the Qom seminary during the 1940s. At the time, the seminary was under the leadership of three disciples of the Grand Ayatollah who collectively had been struggling to ensure its continued existence. With the opportunities offered to the seminary and its leadership during the political interregnum following the removal of Reza Shah, Shiite clerical elites sought to strengthen and to re-institutionalise their authority. The Qom seminary, then still entangled with financial obstacles to managing its routine activities, was in desperate need of a unique personality famous and charismatic enough to fill the position of its late founder. A candidate that came to the fore through the endeavours of a group of Shiite clerics in Qom and through the initiative of Ayatollah Khomeini,<sup>30</sup> was Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Broujerdi, who had been residing in the local seminary of the city of Broujerd for decades.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> After the death of Hairi, a group of reformist clerics in Qom initiated a campaign to ask Broujerdi to go to Qom and assume the leadership of the seminary. The most active member of this group was a, then, middle-aged teacher of the Seminary, Ruhollah Khomeini, a former student of Hairi. Khomeini had been in contact with Broujerdi, sending him letters and envoys to persuade him to move to Qom. The campaign achieved its goal in 1946, and for years to come, Khomeini was one of the closest companions of Broujerdi (Mohammad Javad Alavi Broujerdi, interview with the author, January 2012).

<sup>31</sup> In December 1944, Broujerdi was admitted to a hospital in Tehran for medical treatment. During the month he was in Tehran, groups of people, including Mohammadreza Shah, members of the merchant class, and Shiite clerical elites, visited him in Qom. The main demand of the latter group was that he should go to Qom and assuming leadership of the

Two major Shiite Marja' of Najaf Seminary – the Grand Ayatollahs Isfahani and Qomi -- passed away within months of Broujerdi's arrival in Qom, providing him with a great opportunity to operate as the sole Marja' of the Shiite world. For the next decade, Qom seminary became the most important Shiite centre in the world. During the fifteen years of his leadership of the Shiite community, Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi managed to establish a great relationship with the regime of Mohammadreza Shah. The Broujerdi era might be seen as representing a period of mutual respect between the religious elite and the state in Iran, one which allowed a revival of Shiite clerical authority, and provided the preliminary stage for the institutionalisation of this authority throughout the country.

While Broujerdi led the seminary in Qom, Iran was going through a socio- political transformation. However, the Grand Ayatollah's political posture had been formed through his personal experience in the Constitutional Revolution.<sup>32</sup> As he stated repeatedly on various occasions,

The Constitutional Revolution in Iran taught me not to be involved in political affairs if I did not have a clear idea of their origins and outcomes.<sup>33</sup>

He personally witnessed how the interest of the clergy had been undermined as a result of their basing their activism on inaccurate perceptions during the Persian Constitutional Revolution. Therefore, he had become cautious in his evaluation of the political opportunities that existed for political activism. In regard to the national, regional, and international socio- political changes that occurred during the time he was the most renowned Shiite leader of the world, changes ranging from the formation of the National Movement in Iran to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, the Grand Ayatollah

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seminary after his discharge from the hospital. Broujerdi agreed to visit Qom, but with some reservations. The main concern of the Grand Ayatollah at the time was the situation of those three Shiite clerics who had already been leading the seminary. All three were ranked lower than Broujerdi, based on their age and teachers; and it was believed that, over the Broujerdi's migration to Qom, their status would be damaged among the community and their followers. Eventually, Broujerdi entered the holy city of Qom on 10 February 1945, to reside there for the rest of his life. The political opportunity structure had already made it possible for Shiite clerics to fulfill their socio-political vision and now, together with the unique characteristics of Broujerdi, the situation for the Shiite clerical elite in Iran could not have been more promising (Mohammad Javad Alavi Broujerdi, interview with the author, Qom, January 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Ali Davani, a contemporary historian of Qom seminary, relates that Broujerdi once told him: 'I had attended the sittings of Akhond Khorasani during the Constitutional Revolution in Najaf... I witnessed how he made a mistake in the execution of Sheikh Fazlollah Noori and how he had blamed himself over the incident... since then whenever it comes to politics, I worry that I might also make a mistake' (*Yaad Quarterly*, Vol.6, Spring 1987: 25).

<sup>33</sup> Mohammad Javad Alavi Broujerdi, interview with the author, Qom, January 2012.

adhered to a singular doctrine: whenever he personally perceived that the political opportunity was open and his word was effective, he assumed an activist posture and communicated a clear message to the state; otherwise, he tried to stay out of politics and to protect the seminary and strengthen its foundations.

While leading the Shiite community, the Grand Ayatollah confronted challenges, among which were societal encounters in which, for example, he had to take a position against Ayatollah Kashani and the extremist Shiite group of Fadaian-e-Islam. In regard to his relationship with the state, he tried to build a mutually respectful relationship: while he did not interfere in the routine political manoeuvres of the government, he also expected that the Shah and his regime would leave religious affairs to him and the Qom seminary. He also worked to consolidate his political posture vis-à-vis his laity followers and other members of the Shiite clergy. Perhaps the most challenging period for his leadership of the community occurred between 1949 and 1953, when the policies of the anti-imperialist National Movement challenged the political structure of Iran with the support of some members of the clergy, including Ayatollah Kashani and Navvab Safavi.

### ***The Shiite Clerical Elite and the Iranian National Movement***

With the removal of Reza Shah's iron fist, various movements sought to mobilise social bases and to make strategic alliances which would enable them to reach their goals. A trend of political activism during this time, in which the young Shah had not yet consolidated his power, focused on opposing domination by the superpowers. In 1940s Iran, these anti-imperialist activities focused on efforts to nationalise the oil industry. Nationalistic and religious groups, which were united by this common goal, were incorporated under the umbrella of the Iran National Movement.

Like their secular nationalist partners, the religious faction of this movement represented a wide array of actors. These ranged from the supreme leader of Qom Seminary, Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi, who preferred to remain an observer of the political process and to monitor the activities of other elite clerical members (and who was harshly criticised by some other clergy fellows for not being actively involved in politics), to the radical Fadaian-e-Islam, whose members believed that the political opportunity structure was sufficiently open to permit the establishment of an Islamic government. Ultimately, the outcome of the movement proved that the seemingly quietist approach of Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi was far more beneficial for the preservation of Shiite authority and for his followers than was the political activism engaged in by the other clerical parties.

Fadaian-e-Islam, or the devotees of Islam, was a group of Navvab Safavi's followers whose political activities were part of the political scene in Iran for almost a decade between 1945 and 1955. Born as Seyyed Mojtaba Mir-Lowhi, Navvab Safavi was in his early twenties when he left Najaf seminary and went to Iran to form a front against the anti-religious movements led by a group of secular intelligentsia, including Ahmad Kasravi in 1945.<sup>34</sup>

In early 1946, an open letter, later known as 'the declaration of the Religion and Revenge', was published by Fadaian-e-Islam stating:

We are alive and the revengeful God is alert. The blood of the deprived has long been dripping from the fingers of the selfish voluptuous people, who are hiding, each with a different name and in a different colour, behind the black curtains of oppression, thievery, and crime. Once in a while the divine retribution puts them in their place, yet the rest would not learn the lesson . . . we are free and alert, believers in God and fearless (Quoted in Khoshniyat 1981: 21)

The wording of this letter shows that the group, hoping to make the most out of existing opportunities, was on the verge of launching a revolution in Iran. Subsequent history showed that they were prepared to be as extreme as possible in order to eradicate all obstacles in the way of achieving their goal, which was the establishment of an Islamic state in Iran. Ten days later, Hussein Imami, a member of Fadaian, assassinated Kasravi in Tehran. The incident made Navvab Safavi, a young clergyman in his twenties at the time, one of the most famous figures in Qom and Najaf.<sup>35</sup>

The goal of Navvab Safavi and his young entourage at that time was to establish a transnational 'Islamic State' throughout the Muslim World. This avant-garde vision was

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<sup>34</sup> Martin 1993. During the early 1940s, relieved of the secular policy of Reza Shah, clerical authority was about to rise again in Iran. Fretful of its re-empowerment, a group of Iranian scholars, the most famous of which were Ahmad Kasravi, Reza Qoli Shariati-Sangelaji, and Ali Akbar Hakamizadeh, wrote books and initiated campaigns attacking the principles of Shiite Islam. In response, members of the Shiite clergy counter-attacked by writing treatises and preaching in mosques to refute the accusations. One of those refutations is contained in the book, *Kashf al-Asrar* (The Unveiling of Secrets), which Khomeini had written in 1944 in response to Hakamizadeh's book, *Asrar-e Hezar Saleh* (The Secrets of a Thousand Years). Some clerics, like Navvab Safavi chose a more combatant approach in dealing with the insults of this group of scholars.

<sup>35</sup> Davani 1979, Vol. II: 195-6. At a religious gathering in Tehran, and in response to the concern of Sheikh Mohammad Tehrani who was shouting from the pulpit that 'Kasravi openly insults Imam Jafar Sadeq and Imam of the Age and there is nobody who could suffocate him', a young cleric, Mojtaba Mirlowhi, stood up and said loudly that 'the sons of Imam Ali are alive and will respond to him'. He said that, later, when Navvab Safavi went back to Najaf after the death of Kasravi, everyone in Najaf recognized him.

extreme and misconceived in the eyes of others in relation to the existing political opportunity structure at the time. Consequently, it was not fully embraced by the clerical leadership of Qom. However, during the period that they were active in Iran's politics, Fadaian's supporters tried to form a coalition with various religious and nationalistic movements. To increase their religious prestige, Fadaian was desperate to gain the support of a more renowned and established figure, a member of the Shiite clergy who enjoyed popular support and was more aligned with the group's mission. At the time, Ayatollah Kashani seemed to be someone who could fulfil this need.

Seyyed Abu al-Qasim Kashani (1882–1962) was another student of Akhond Khorasani, and was famous for his anti-British activities.<sup>36</sup> His unique interpretation of the political opportunity structure and his personal profile reinforced the clerical activism that was occurring in Iran in the late 1940s.<sup>37</sup> The Ayatollah's political posture was aligned with the mission that Fadaian-e-Islam and their leaders had set for themselves at the time. His blunt rejection of the policies of foreigners and of the government of Iran during the 1940s fit with Navvab Safavi's view of these policies which Safavi had characterized as 'oppression, thievery, and crime'.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, Kashani and Navvab's enemies were the same, and these enemies were threatened by the revenge of Fadaian's supporters.

The Kashani-Navvab coalition was strengthened when, in June 1948, Abd al-Hussein Hazhir assumed the Premiership. Following a call from Ayatollah Kashani, hundreds of people demonstrated in front of the Majlis to demand the overthrow of the government, the foreigner's agent in their opinion. Soon demonstrators filled the neighbouring streets. Although after some days the revolt against the government quieted

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<sup>36</sup> Sharif Razi 1973, Vol. I: 267-71. During the Great War, he had fought against British forces in Iraq along with groups of other Shiite clerics. During the anti-British revolt in Iraq that led to the 1920 rebellion, Kashani, who was young at the time, was in the forefront of the fight along with his famous father, Seyyed Mustafa Kashani. It was through this experience, that a close relationship had been built between Kashani and Mohammad Taghi Khansari, who had also been active in the fighting.

<sup>37</sup> In the summer of 1944, Kashani, who was harshly critical of British policies in Iran, was arrested for his pro-German activities and spent almost a year in the Allied Forces' detention camps (Qanatabadi 1998: 262-4). When, at the end of the World War he was freed and went back to Tehran to support his followers, he was more hostile to foreign forces and their supporters in the country. Thus, he again started to accuse the government of Qavam and his Democratic Party of being British Agents. This led to a second arrest in July 1946 (Abrahamian 2008: 116).

<sup>38</sup> Davani 1979, Vol.II: 197. At the time of the appointment of Broujerdi as the leader of Qom seminary, Navvab Safavi had clearly shown his support for Kashani. In a gathering to mark the death of Isfahani, the late leader of Najaf Seminary, Navvab took the podium and asked the crowd to demand that the Iranian government set Kashani free. The demand was fulfilled just a few months later.

down, the minority faction in the Parliament moved closer to Ayatollah Kashani and sought to find out more about Navvab Safavi's capabilities (Rahnema 2009: 35).<sup>39</sup>

In February 1949, an alibi was provided for the young Shah to strengthen his state power and demonstrate his authority to his political opposition, which ranged from the socialist Tudeh Party to religious groups led by Kashani. A would-be assassin shot the Shah while visiting the University of Tehran, but failed to kill him. In the aftermath of this assassination attempt, the Shah, making the most of the public sympathy this had generated, began to expand his authority. Subsequently, the leftist Tudeh Party was banned and its leaders were put in prison. Ayatollah Kashani, who was accused of having a relationship with the assassin, was imprisoned in Qazvin, from where he was sent to exile<sup>40</sup> in Lebanon.<sup>41</sup>

Concerned about the re-emergence of another ruler like Reza Shah, Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi sent a telegram to the Shah in which he disassociated himself from the incident and expressed his wishes for the health of the monarch.<sup>42</sup> In his eyes, the threat represented by the Shah's regime for the Shiite community and its clerical authority was at the time far less than that of the communist Tudeh Party. Following this, the Qom seminary leadership issued a proclamation that read as follows:

Those who wear the cleric habits, either residing in Qom seminary or other religious seminaries, are not allowed to interfere in political affairs or be manipulated by the political parties and, for its part, the Qom seminary does not recognize them and would not provide them with sanctuary. As the seminary clearly has shown since its establishment by Grand Ayatollah Hairi, it is pure from all political affairs and would not pollute itself with political

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<sup>39</sup> Khosroshahi 1996: 76. Opposition to the government of Hazhir was, at the time a common denominator among Kashani, Navvab Safavi, and the minority of the 15th Session of Parliament which, in 1949, formed the National Front in Iran. In the aftermath of the June incident, some nationalist members of Parliament issued a letter to the speaker demanding the impeachment of the Prime Minister.

<sup>40</sup> Rahnema 2009: 67-8. Asking support from the sole leader of the seminary, a group of Fadaian affiliates took sanctuary at the house of Broujerdi in Qom. However, following days of the Grand Ayatollah's cold reception, which had been prompted by the group's rough actions, they left the city and returned to their own cities. Nevertheless, it is believed that it was in response to Broujerdi's lobbying that the government agreed to banish Kashani to Lebanon instead of convicting him in court.

<sup>41</sup> Abrahamian 1982: 250. The Shah also ordered the creation of Iran's second Constituent Assembly, which offered him a set of powers beyond what he had already had been granted under the existing constitution. The Assembly was formed under the Martial Law. Its members finally voted for the establishment of the Senate, with half of its members to be appointed by the Shah. The Shah was also given the right to dissolve Parliament and to nominate the Prime Minister, which the Parliament could either confirm or reject.

<sup>42</sup> *Ettelaat Daily*, 14 February 1949, Tehran, Iran.



conflicts and interventions.<sup>43</sup>

The position that the Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi assumed indicated that any sort of overt political contention with the state would be costly to the seminary of Qom. His interpretation of the political opportunity structure at the time, when the power of religious forces was minimal compared to that of foreign countries (i.e. the Soviets, Britain, and the US), was completely different from that of Ayatollah Kashani. Moreover, the Shah's apparatus, and his benign attitude toward the Shiite clerical leadership at time, was what the seminary needed in order to focus on its routine affairs and its further development. Nevertheless, with Fadaian's radical interpretation of political Islam, once again, as in the Constitutional Revolution, members of the Shiite clergy in Iran seemingly diverged with regard to their positions toward the state.

In October 1949, a group of nationalist Iranians led by Mohammad Mosaddeq (1882-1967) issued a declaration demanding free parliamentary elections and calling for a general strike.<sup>44</sup> On the day of the strike, demonstrators moved quietly toward the palace while in front of them, marched Mosaddeq and Hussein Imami, a renowned member of Fadaian-e-Islam (Iraqi 1991:39). This activist political opposition to the election issue shows that, at the time, an alliance had been formed among Mosaddeq's followers (later to be members of what was to be known as the National Front),<sup>45</sup> the exiled Ayatollah Kashani, and Navvab Safavi's group, Fadaian-e-Islam. This represented a strategic alignment between elites who would ultimately work together toward bringing about the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry in March 1951.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 21 February 1949.

<sup>44</sup> On 17 July 1949, a controversial agreement was signed between Golshayian (Iran's Minister of Finance) and Neville Gass (the representative of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company), as a supplement to the 1933 Oil Agreement. Although the Shah agreed to the new terms, in order for it to be ratified, the agreement needed a favourable vote from Parliament. Activities of some Nationalist members of the 15th Parliament, like Hussein Makki, delayed the decision over the fate of the agreement, and the matter ultimately passed to the next session of Parliament. It was in this context that the government, along with British affiliates in Iran, were keen to structure the parliamentary election in a way that would guarantee the passage of the agreement. See Makki 1981, Vol. III: 9-33.

<sup>45</sup> Abrahamian 2008: 115-6. In the campaign against the supremacy of the British and their affiliates in Iran, Mohammad Mosaddeq founded a National Front in 1949 comprised of a number of political parties. The Front, which had as its main objective to nationalise the oil industry, was closely associated with Kashani and his religio-political network.

<sup>46</sup> For their part, Fadaian-e-Islam assassinated Hazhir, the minister of the court in May 1949. Within days, the assassin, Hussein Imami, was executed and a day later, the election in Tehran was cancelled, giving another opportunity for a religio-nationalist coalition. The irony was that to prove their willingness to take part in a free democratic election, this coalition had no option but to make use of terror (Kinzer 2003: 66). Eventually, the result of the new election

All the pieces of the puzzle of the movement for the nationalisation of the oil industry were falling into place. With Mosaddeq and Kashani in the Parliament, and the implicit support of clerical elites in Qom, the only obstacle remaining the nationalist movement was the premiership of the former armed forces commander, General Haj Ali Razmara.<sup>47</sup> He had been appointed as Prime Minister in order to ratify the supplementary oil agreement. However, during his short-lived government, he was subjected to harsh, orchestrated attacks by the opposition, who were seeking the nationalisation of the oil industry.

Nevertheless, once again, the radical Fadaian-e-Islam came to the aid of the National Front and, in early March 1951, destroyed this last obstacle, Razmara, to the nationalisation of the oil.<sup>48</sup> Navvab Safavi, who had been institutionalised as the executive of the nationalists by then, also issued a declaration on behalf of his group and addressing the Shah, 'the son of Pahlavi', threatened his 'illegitimate regime' with further hostile retaliations if the assassin, a member of Fadaian, was not 'freed with full respect' (Khosroshahi 1996: 128).<sup>49</sup>

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was declared in April 1950, in which Mohammad Mosaddeq and Kashani, who was still in exile in Lebanon, were elected to represent the people of Tehran in the new parliament. Two months later, Kashani came back from exile, and met with the members of the National Front and Mosaddeq. Just days after he arrived in Tehran, Kashani went to Qom to meet with the Shiite clerics. It was there that Broujerdi met him at the house of Grand Ayatollah Khansari and the two exchanged views. It is said that Kashani, who had a different posture from that of Broujerdi at the time, addressed him and said: 'I do not want you to confirm whatever policy I follow, but just not to falsify it'; to which the leader of Qom seminary responded: 'I will say to all that I recognise you as the qualified Mujtahid'. The rapprochement of these two religious and political leaders of the time clearly shows that, despite there having previously been a degree of mutual resentment, they shared a common strategy, though with different approaches. For the full account of the meeting see Rahnema 2009: 142.

<sup>47</sup> Makki 1981a, Vol. III: 82. He was considered to be a traitor in the eyes of both nationalists and religious elite factions of the National Movement. On the day he went to the parliament asking for a vote of confidence in his cabinet, Mosaddeq addressed him and said: 'God is our witness, that even if they would kill us and tear us to shreds, we will not tolerate the injustice of these people... we will beat them and will die ... if you are from the army I am more armed than you, I will kill, I will kill you right here'.

<sup>48</sup> Turkaman 1991: 413. It is said that in planning the plot, Navvab Safavi met with members of the National Front, including Makki, Baqai, and Fatemi, and some affiliates of Kashani, and that he assured them of Razmara's annihilation. Days after the assassination of the Prime Minister a bill to nationalize the oil industry was passed in parliament and approved by the Senate. Following this, demonstrators filled the streets of Teheran chanting anti-British slogans and a comprehensive strike commenced in the oil fields of the southern provinces.

<sup>49</sup> The anti-state positioning of Fadian-e-Islam reached the point at the time that they directly attacked the Shah and directly threatened for the first time to 'deploy the Islamic Law without any reservation', and that he, along with other members of the government apparatus, should expect a harsh retribution. For the full text of the declaration see Khosroshahi 1996: 177-8.

The leadership of Qom seminary had supported the oil industry nationalisation, either explicitly by sponsoring Ayatollah Kashani, or implicitly through back channel discussion conducted by Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi with the Shah.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, signs of the internal schism in the movement appeared as soon as Mosaddeq assumed the premiership. It seemed that each faction, which had different goals for joining the movement, was rushing to get the upper hand over the others at the time.

Fadaian-e-Islam, who believed that they had an undeniable share in this triumph, passed a letter to the Prime Minister demanding the application of Islamic Law throughout the country.<sup>51</sup> The government, led by Mosaddeq, not only refused to give in to this demand, but also imprisoned Navvab Safavi on charges he had faced long before the foundation of the National Movement (Iraqi 1991). As a result of this, the relationship between Fadaian and the other faction of the movement deteriorated.<sup>52</sup>

Entangled with an international lawsuit and economic sanctions imposed by Britain, the government of Mosaddeq was under pressure from different fronts (Gasiorowski 1987). Concerned about covert actions of the British against his government, Mosaddeq offered his resignation to the Shah in July 1952 and was succeeded by Ahmad Qavam. The new prime minister, who enjoyed the support of the royal court and of Britain, issued a public declaration threatening the opposition front with harsh reprisals.<sup>53</sup>

At this point, Ayatollah Kashani, perceiving the imminent destruction of the anti-British front, which had been the cause to which he had devoted his political life, supported Mosaddeq and issued a straightforward response, declaring,

Ahmad Qavam must know that, in a country whose suffering citizens have already exerted themselves from the dictatorship eventually after years of miseries, he cannot suppress the freedom of thought and threaten people with

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<sup>50</sup> Following the expulsion of the British affiliates from Iran and the nationalization of the oil industry, Britain threatened to launch a military response. Broujerdi sent a delegate to the Shah and informed him that, if Britain continued its threats against Iran and the popular government of Mosaddeq, the Shiite leadership would issue the Fatwa of Jihad against British forces and retaliate accordingly (Mohammad Javad Alavi Broujerdi, interview with the author, Qom, January 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Iraqi 1991. Soon after the premiership of Mosaddeq, Fadaian requested his government to submit to Islamic Law, and more specifically to (1) make public praying obligatory in state organisations, (2) make Hijab obligatory in Iran, (3) ban the selling of alcohol, (4) and dismiss all female employees from public organisations.

<sup>52</sup> Makki 1981: 304. Rejecting the demands of Fadaian and referring to those untimely questions, Kashani stated that 'some would like to disrupt our battle [against Britain] by making these requests at this time ... these are either servants of Britain, its mercenaries, or stupid'.

<sup>53</sup> For details, see Nejati 1987: 223-4.

mass executions ... I publicly declare to all my Muslim brothers to partake in this sacred Jihad and, for the last time, prove to the allies of colonialism in Iran that that they have no chance of ever re-establishing their power.<sup>54</sup>

The clash between the supporters of the National Movement and the government of Qavam resulted in tens of casualties in the revolt on 21 July 1952 (Makki 1981). By evening the government had resigned and the Shah had re-established the premiership of Mosaddeq. The demonstrators felt even more triumphant when, during the coming days, the International Court of Justice voted in support of Iran against British claims (Rahnema 2009: 118).

Nevertheless, the schism between Ayatollah Kashani and Mosaddeq was about to come to the surface following the nomination of the new cabinet. Mosaddeq initiated a series of military, and judicial reforms in favour of the Premier's office, dissolved the senate, and made the parliament dependent on a quorum (Gasiorowski 1987). Consequently, for the Shah, all he had done to assume greater authority for himself over the course of the previous decade was diminished within months. Turning away from his previous allies, especially Ayatollah Kashani, in order to consolidate his reforms, Mosaddeq was gradually drawn toward the Tudeh party and its allies. This was a political manoeuvre that would cost him the trust of the majority of the Shiite clerical elite, who until then had remained politically quiet. Events eventually reached the point that, on 19 August 1953, and in the face of a US-British coup against his government, Mosaddeq had minimal popular support and was forced to resign and end his political life forever.<sup>55</sup> The success of the coup marked the end of the national movement in Iran and resulted in the marginalisation of its constituent factions in the politics of the country.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, the mainstream Shiite clerical elite did survive the turmoil, thanks to Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi's more accurate perception of the political opportunity

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid: 226. Fretful because of popular support for Kashani, Qavam sent his envoys to change Kashani's attitude toward the government. However, the Ayatollah did not agree to support the new cabinet and asked for that Mosaddeq be returned to office. For a full explanation of the government's incentives, see Makki 1981b: 188-94.

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of the 1953 coup and the fall of Mosaddeq's government, see Gasiorowski 1987.

<sup>56</sup> In the aftermath of the 1953 Coup, Mosaddeq was put on trial and then kept under house arrest for the rest of his life. In 1956, Kashani, who had at that time lost his social base, was questioned about the case of the Razmara Assassination and was about to be imprisoned. However, Kashani was released and acquitted of all charges following an ultimatum from Broujerdi in which he threatened the Shah that he would 'come personally to Tehran' if Kashani was not released immediately. See Sadeqkar 2000, Vol. II: 744-51.

structure, and the political posture he assumed as a result.<sup>57</sup> Following the coup, and in contrast to recent incidents, especially the Constitutional Revolution, the majority of Shiite clerics, under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi, succeeded in preserving their authority and in developing it further. Throughout the movement, despite the hostile political confrontation of Fadaian-e-Islam with the state and the Shah, both Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi and Ayatollah Kashani had striven to protect the integrity of the country and the Constitution. Although they had differences in their perception of the nature of the existing political opportunity structure, which was a tactical disparity, their main objective was to preserve the Shiite foundations of Iran. Some scholarly studies argue that, with respect to some points, Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi and Ayatollah Kashani had different political opinions with regard to the National Movement (Rahnema 2009). Nonetheless, the overall relationship between these two religious leaders was based on a common Shiite framework and both had learned similar lessons from the experience of the Constitutional Revolution, particularly the lesson that they must not publicly oppose each other's activities.<sup>58</sup>

Following the coup, Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi, who had remained quiet throughout these events, sent a telegram to the Shah offering his blessings and expressing the wish that his return to Iran would result in the 'reform of the previous corruption, the glory of Islam, and the welfare of Muslims'.<sup>59</sup> The Grand Ayatollah's perception of the opportunity structure during the time that Iran was under pressure from foreign forces, led him to support a state that was considered to be an Islamic one.<sup>60</sup>

The state-clergy relationship was developing to the mutual interests of both following the coup. Both parties had found out that, if they could not overrule the other, they could profit from engaging in a respectful association based on give-and-take. The Grand Ayatollah did not interfere directly in the politics of the state and, in turn, he was

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<sup>57</sup> Ahmadi *et al.* 2009: 118. Seyyed Hussein Budala, a close affiliate and student of Broujerdi, describes his teacher's concerns about the schism among all three sides of 'the triangle of the oil nationalisation movement', namely Mosaddeq, Kashani, and Fadaian-e-Islam. He quotes Broujerdi as saying that 'if these three sides fall apart, not only will every side be hurt but it will also damage the clerical authority and the status of Islam as well'.

<sup>58</sup> For a firsthand account of this bilateral relationship, see interviews with Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi's students compiled in Ahmadi *et al.* 2009: 53, 118, 163, 183-4.

<sup>59</sup> *Ettelaat Daily*, 25 August 1953, Tehran, Iran. Mohammadreza Pahlavi at the time was stationed in Rome in order for the coup to be accomplished.

<sup>60</sup> Mohammad Javad Alavi Broujerdi, interview with the author, Qom, January 2012.

free from state intrusion into religious affairs.<sup>61</sup> This non-threatening relationship was favourable to the propagation of the faith and fostered the development of Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi's comprehensive, transnational vision. During his leadership of the Shiite community, he initiated reforms that resulted in a revival of the authority of the clerical elite in later decades. The population of religious students in Qom increased dramatically from about 100 at the time that Hairi passed away, to about 5000 students under the leadership of Broujerdi (Akhavi 1980: 72).

In general, throughout the political trajectory of the Qom seminary, as the context evolved, the previous quiescent phase under the leadership of Hairi was transformed into a quasi-active one under the authority of Broujerdi. Consequently, in 1961, when Broujerdi passed away, various members of the Shiite clergy were then able to exert their authority throughout the community just as they were about to play a more critical role in the politics of Iran. As the Shah was celebrating his twentieth year in power, clerical elites were ready to perform their socio-political role in a way that was more compatible with the contingencies of the contemporary era. Nevertheless, they were in need of a solid political *ijtihad* and a charismatic leader to promote the will of the Shiite clergy. This contributed to producing a political opportunity structure that shaped the political postures of the Shiite clerical elite in Iran until the establishment of the Islamic Republic.

## **II. Shiite Clerical Elites and the Consolidation of Mohammadreza Pahlavi's Power**

The death of Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi in 1961 coincided with a new religio-political structure in Iran. This was a time in which the power of British policies in Iran was at its most modest and a new emerging superpower, the United States, had begun to deploy its power throughout the country. From the perspective of the Shah, who owed his regained rule to the US, it was an opportunity to consolidate his authority. Iran stood at the crossroads of modernisation and the government, based on recommendation from the Kennedy administration in the US, had put a revolutionary program in place in order to advance it (Milani 1994: 45). This program, the so-called 'White Revolution', was seen by various political actors, including Shiite clerical elites, as threatening to its interests. It was

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<sup>61</sup> For examples of the relationship between Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi and the Shah, see interviews with Seyyed Hussein Budala and Sheikh Ali Safi Golpaygani in Ahmadi *et al* 2009: 105- 42.

in the context of this opposition to the White Revolution that Ayatollah Khomeini was singled out as the new face of the Iranian Shiite clerical elite.

From 1961 to 1979, clerics in Iran were more politically active than clerics had been as any time since the commencement of the Major Occultation. The new structure activated a reformist group of religious elite which the initiatives of the two deceased leaders of the seminary, Hairei and Broujerdi, had fostered. They were ready to actively partake in politics according to the will of their affiliates. They succeeded in forming a transnational network of their colleagues, extending from Iran to Iraq and Lebanon, in order to pursue their objectives at the time. It was through this established network that, in the early 1970s, the political posture of Ayatollah Khomeini, based on his perception of the nature of the political opportunity structure at that time, and with the support of other members of the Shiite clerical elite, broadcasted to Iranians, led to the establishment of the first Shiite state in the Middle East.

### ***The 1963 Uprising in Iran: The Foundations of Contemporary Shiite Activism in Iran***

The process of finding a successor for Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi prompted a new reformist school of thought among the Shiite clerical elite in Iran. The new structure in Iran, the discontent of the modernism for the clergy, demanded them to develop a new *ijtihad* to redefine the socio-political role of clerical elites (Algar 1991). Consequently, a group of reformist Shiite clerics emerged on the socio-political scene of Iran to develop alternatives and work to adapt religious institutions to the prevailing context.<sup>62</sup>

The core viewpoint of these groups was that the role of the Shiite clerical elite and the Marja'iyat in the new context goes beyond the merely religious affairs of the community and extends to socio-political concerns, as well. Retrospectively, the state was seeking an alternative to the Grand Ayatollah who would be less likely to interfere in internal affairs.<sup>63</sup> To its favour, the government of Shah, which was about to outbreak the

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<sup>62</sup> Following Broujerdi's death, a group of clerical elites and religious modern thinkers published a series of papers re-examining the role of Shiite institutions compatibility with the contingencies of the time. The book, entitled *Bahth-i dar Bareye Marja'iyat wa Ruhaniyyat* (A Discussion about Marja'iyat and Clerics), was published in 1962. For a brief English review of the book see Lambton 1964. An excerpt of the book's introduction reads as follow: 'Marja'iyat not only oversees individual religious practices, but also performs social and political functions in our country. It encompasses a huge weight in this world and hereafter' (Tabataba'i et al. 1962: 5).

<sup>63</sup> Although Broujerdi had generally refrained from engaging in the politics of the Pahlavi state, his prestige among the community had always been a threat to the regime's authority. In some cases as, for instance, in land reform initiatives, the Grand Ayatollah had

new reform plans, was looking for a more passive and quiet clerical leadership, and perhaps was more eager to shift the centre of Shiite Islam from Qom to Najaf.<sup>64</sup>

John F. Kennedy assumed the administration in the White House at this very pivotal time. Then, the Middle East was not a battleground of a major war, which provided the opportunity for the new administration to review its foreign policy to thwart the Soviets' influence in the region (Summitt 2004). To complement its foreign policy in the Middle East, at the time Arabs of the region were engaging the cold war with Israel under the initiatives of Nasser. Iran was seemingly a more reliable and trustworthy regional partner for the US. Therefore, the Kennedy Administration agreed to support the Shah's regime financially, although with some reservations, to commence its development programs (Goode 1991).

In the absence of the parliament and the threat of a seemingly powerful Shiite clergy in Qom, the government of Ali Amini passed the Land Reform Law in January 1962. Moreover, to keep the clerics of Qom quiet, the Prime Minister gave them regular visits to ensure them of a nonthreatening outcome of the initiatives for the religious elite and their followers.<sup>65</sup> For some time, while Amini was in the office, the clergy showed no contention against the new programme.

The clash between the Shah and Ali Amini, who was frustrated and felt abandoned by the US, reached a point that the latter submitted his resignation in June 1962. He was

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discreetly warned the government against pursuing its planned policies. The Shah himself acknowledged the role of Broujerdi in postponing Iranian reform initiatives in a later commemoration of the White Revolution. A detailed overview of the Grand Ayatollah's warnings to the Shah concerning his Land Reform initiatives, is available at: <http://broujerdi.org/content/view/1066/68/> (Accessed 10 May 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the Qom in 1961 was strong enough to lead the Shiite community. As a result of Haire and Broujerdi activities in revitalizing the seminary, days after the death of Broujerdi, in Qom, the most renowned Shiite elite gathered and nominated Mohammadreza Golpaygani (1898-1993), Kazem Shariatmadari (1905-1986), and Shahab al-Din Mara'shi Najafi (1897-1990) as those responsible for the financial affairs and leadership of the seminary. Within the meeting, Khomeini declared that he 'prefer to go on with his academic responsibilities' as the seminary teacher and does not want to involve with financial issues'. Although, Khomeini was among the famous teachers of the seminary, quite distinctive among clerical elite of the city, and close in age and ability with the other three Ayatollahs, the evidences show that in 1961, he did not have the intention of holding the conventional Marja'iyya position. Until the date, he had not been published his Resalah, *the book of Juridical Edicts*, neither been distributing religious taxes among his students, two main prerequisites of the position-holder in Shiite Islam. It was the upcoming events along with the demands of his close disciples and followers that pushed him to nominate himself as a Shiite Marja'. (Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, interview with the author, Tehran, November 2013).

<sup>65</sup> Moin 1999: 72. Amini, on a visit to Qom for a few days in late December 1961, listened to the advice of the four renowned clerics of the seminary about current affairs. In general he maintained a sympathetic relationship with the religious elite throughout his premiership.



substituted by Amir Asadollah Alam, who was a more obedient figure to the Shah (Ansari 2001). On 8 October 1962, the Iranian newspapers released the points of the government's reform program. The Shah's 'White Revolution' was aimed to fulfil the socio-economic 'demands of the public' through six initial steps: land reform, the nationalization of forests, the privatization of public factories, the institution of profit-sharing schemes for workers in industry, women's suffrage, and the formation of the literacy corps (Arjomand 1989: 72). Hours after the news reached Qom, Ayatollahs Khomeini, Golpayegani, Shariatmadari, and Morteza Hairi gathered in an extraordinary meeting and decided to each send a telegram to the Shah and inform him of the religious authorities' concerns over the bill (Davani 1979 ,Vol. III : 29). In their telegrams, the Shiite elites, in solidarity, respectfully addressed the Shah and asked him to revise the bill in a way that would not contradict the Islamic jurisprudence and the Fundamental Law; they specifically requested the government to abstain from the new electoral law that would allow the non-Muslims to vote and be elected in parliamentary elections.<sup>66</sup> A week later, the Shah responded to the telegrams and, while ensuring the clerics that he would 'let the government know their concerns', he also humiliatingly advised the senders to 'pay more attention to the situation of other Islamic nations' and the contingencies of the new world (Davani 1979 ,Vol. III : 36).<sup>67</sup>

Disappointed by the Shah, the clerics unanimously flooded their telegrams to the Prime Minister, albeit this time with less precaution. The telegram of Ayatollah Khomeini, which was sent to Alam on 20 October 1962, reads as follows:

Over the long recess of the parliament, it seems that the government is considering some programs that contradict the divine law and clearly are against the Fundamental Law ... the women's right to enter the parliament and other provincial councils contravenes the indisputable laws of Islam, the interpretation of which, according to the articles of the [Supplementary] Fundamental Law, is given over to the Shiite jurists, and no one else has the right to interfere ... Likewise, the abrogation of the qualification that electors and candidates must be Muslim, which is stipulated by the fundamental Law, and replacing the policy of swearing the oath on the Holy Qur'an to one that stipulates swearing on a 'holy book', are an infringement of the said law, are precarious for Islam and the independence of the country... Now that His Majesty has referred the ulama to the government, it is expected that, in

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<sup>66</sup> For the text of the telegrams, see Davani 1979, Vol. III: 31-38.

<sup>67</sup> In his telegram to the elite of Qom, the Shah addressed the leaders of Qom seminary as 'Hujjat al-Islam', a title lower in rank to 'Ayatollah' in Shiite hierarchy, in order to humiliate them.

compliance with the undisputable laws of Islam and the country, this matter be resolved as soon as possible ... In closing, I would like to remind you that the ulama of Iran and the Shiite seminaries will not remain quiet on matters that breach the Sharia Law.<sup>68</sup>

Ayatollah Khomeini had perceived a threat to Shiite clerical authority at the time. He was willing to ease the tension with the state through peaceful measures. Like him, other members of the clergy in Qom, Tehran, Mashhad, and even Najaf sent similar telegrams to the government.<sup>69</sup> Eventually, over the collective actions of the Shiite clerical elite, and the threat of popular uprising,<sup>70</sup> the government issued a declaration in November 1962 of the withdrawal of the six-points bill.

Despite the state's tactical setback, the Shah gave a speech in early January 1963 and, while he attacked the 'black reactionary agents', he asked the public to 'vote yes' to the reform program through a referendum (Rajabi 1999: 181). His message to the Shiite clerical elite was sound and clear: he would fight them to the expense of his rule.<sup>71</sup> The Shiite clergy, as a whole, boycotted the referendum to show their stance regarding the state's initiatives; yet, the government declared that more than 99% voted in favour of the reforms over the referendum of 26 January.

In response to the state propaganda, the Shiite clerical elite issued a signed declaration, condemned the result, and mentioned that the whole process was 'anti-Islamic' and 'anti-Constitutional'. The nine Shiite clerics who signed the declaration, stated,

The clerical authority, despite of all the pressures and humiliations that the state intends to make on it, considers its religious and moral duty to draw the people's attention to the benefits and disadvantages of this programme. ... The people of Iran are against these initiatives and had showed their objections earlier, when the state repressions were lesser ... although the government had agreed to give up the bill, now with its established domination over the will of the people, which has been reached by the imprisonment and torture of various religious and clerical classes, it has initiated the programme that's sequel will hurt Islam and the Muslims ... May God wake our government up and offer his mercy over our people and

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<sup>68</sup> *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol. I: 80.

<sup>69</sup> A collection of telegrams against the six-points bill are compiled in the second volume of *Asnad e Enghelab e Islami* 1995, Tehran: Markaz Asnad Enghelab Islami

<sup>70</sup> A firsthand account of the clerical elite's threats of mass mobilisation against the government initiatives has been given in in memoirs of the leading preacher of that time, Mohammad Taqi Falsafi. See Falsafi 1997:238-41.

<sup>71</sup> *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol. I: 133.

the Islamic nation.<sup>72</sup>

At the time, the joint perception of the Shiite clerical elite was that they were protecting the tenets of the faith through their collective activism. For his part, the Shah responded to the religious elite almost a month later, and said, ‘I have seen and heard that some who are like depressed snakes have immersed in their own dirt . . . like louses, which face the rays of the sun gradually, finding out how unfortunate they are . . . would these sordid and vile elements not awake from their sleep of ignorance, the fist of justice, like thunder, will be struck at their head in whatever cloth they are, perhaps to terminate their filthy and shameful life’ (Quoted in Moin 1999: 89). However, a more evident reaction of the government to the opposition group, especially the clerics, occurred on 22 March 1963. At the time, a group of SAVAK agents stormed into the Feyzieh seminary school in Qom and assaulted the gathering (Algar 1991).

The incident proved that state repression toward the religious community had fortified, and that the state would not tolerate any sort of opposition; it already had crippled the leftists and nationalist groups and, this time, the religious movements were the targets. In terms of the monarch and his personality, it was as if a new Reza Shah had come out of his son, Mohammadreza Pahlavi. The Shah showed his determination that he would fight against the Shiite authority as his father had done, if the latter party would continue interfering in political affairs. The political opportunity structure was going to be the closest since Mohammadreza ascended to the throne. The context had transformed during the last three decades and the Shiite clerical elite relied on their newly emerged personalities; they proved that they are not going to remain quiet, as they had done during Reza Shah’s rule.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The high-ranking clerics who signed the declaration were Morteza Langaroodi, Ahmad Zanjani, Mohammad Hussein Tabatabai, Mohammad Mohaghegh Damad, Mohammad Golpaygani, Kazem Shariatmadari, Rouhallah Khomeini, Hashem Amoli, and Morteza Hairi. For the full text of the declaration see Husseinian 2008: 204-6.

<sup>73</sup> The Shiite clerical elite in Iraq supported their colleagues in Iran in this. Seemingly quiet, the leader of Najaf Seminary, Mohsen Hakim, sent a telegram of condolence to his fellow Iranian clerics in early April 1963 and invited them to make an exodus to Iraq in order to issue a unanimous decree against the Shah. Although the elite of Qom did not agree to go to Najaf, the telegram from Hakim shows the possibility that existed of a ‘Jihad decree’ against the Iranian government and, as the Shah had recognized him as the Shiite leader of the time, it was very costly for the Iranian regime. The harsher reaction, however, came from Khomeini, a renowned teacher of Najaf seminary at the time. Through a set of questions and answers, which later was distributed in a pamphlet called ‘Serious Warning of Ayatollah Khomeini about the Jewish involvement in Iranian politics’, he issued a harsh decree against the Shah and threatened him and his regime with utmost opposition and no concession. In this regard, the

Nevertheless, in Iran, clerics were preparing themselves for the mourning month of Muharram to shout their opposition against the state on the pulpits and throughout all gatherings. The promised day arrived on Ashura of 1963, when Ayatollah Khomeini reached the podium at Feyzieh School and made his revealing speech against the government and its pro-western policies and offensive statements against the clerical elite; addressing the Shah, he clarified his posture over the circumstances and thus stated,

Your Highness! You are being deluded. I wouldn't like to see everyone rejoice if your departure was arranged ... I don't want you to end up like your father. Don't aggravate the people so. Don't oppose the clergy so ... the ulama and the religious scholars of Islam, are they really defiled animals? Do the people see them in this light? If so, why do people kiss their hands? ... Sir, I hope to God that this is not what you mean. God forbid that you were referring to the ulama when you said the black reactionaries ... You are now forty-three years old; learn at least something from your father's fate ... listen to what the clerical elites have to say, as they are those who seek the welfare of the country and the people ... Both our country and our religion are in jeopardy ... Indeed, you must do something to change this situation. You are being blamed for everything. You don't realise that on the day when a true outburst occurs, not one of these so-called friends of yours will want to know you ... We are full of regret and sorrow. We truly regret the situation in which Iran finds itself. We regret the state of our ruined country, of this cabinet and of those running our government.<sup>74</sup>

Following this speech, on 5 June, Ayatollah Khomeini was arrested in Qom and sent to Tehran. The news of his imprisonment led to outbreaks of insurrection in different cities of Iran. The state acted harshly and finally surmounted the turmoil with hundreds of casualties (Algar 1991). The June 1963 uprising, which was the most serious threat toward the Shah since 1953, crystalized the opposition groups and undermined Pahlavi authority (Martin 2003: 58). The incident often is regarded as the beginning of the Shiite political activism that eventually resulted in an overthrow of the monarchy in Iran.

### ***The Political Posture of the Leader: Ayatollah Khomeini at the Path to becoming the Imam***

In the aftermath of the June 1963 uprising, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini was singled out among the Shiite clerical elite and became known as the most famous proponent of Shiite

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rise of Najaf's elite in support of the Iranian people and clerics is reminiscent of the Persian Constitutional Revolution era. The full text of Khomeini's statement against the Shah is available at: <http://www.alkhoei.net/arabic/pages/book.php?bcc=17&itg=61&bi=132&s=ct> (Accessed 8 May 2014).

<sup>74</sup> *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol. I: 243.

activism at the time. His rise to the position was much owed to his persistent personality and overall perception regarding the role of clergy in the modern era. Born in 1902 as Rouhalla Musawi, he lost his father to a group of bandits when he has just five months old. At the age of nineteen, Khomeini became one of the disciples of Grand Ayatollah Hairi in Arak, whom he accompanied to migrate to Qom to re-establish the Shiite seminary. While he was studying the Shiite jurisprudence under the supervision of Hairi, he showed a remarkable interest in philosophy and Gnosticism, subjects that were not the usual curriculum of Shiite seminaries at the time (Moin 1999).<sup>75</sup> The later activities of Ayatollah Khomeini perceivably proved that those studies have infused his perceptions and shaped his political posture over the decades to come (Moin 1999: 39-52). To this end, Khomeini succeeded in combining Shiite Philosophy, Gnosticism, and Jurisprudence and in consolidating his political posture when the perceived political opportunity structure was favourable for political activism (Rajae 2007, p. 116).

In June 1963, Khomeini was going to present his novel *ijtihad* about the role that a Shiite clergyman should hold in the socio-political affairs of the community, given the context he encounters. As a high-ranking Shiite cleric, he had the support of his colleagues at the time. In protest to his custody and the crackdown of the mass demonstrations of June 1963, a large group of Shiite clerics gathered in Tehran and summoned numerous meetings to find out how to respond to the regime's actions.<sup>76</sup> Eventually, the high-ranking clerics succeeded in making the state release Ayatollah Khomeini and put him under house arrest, through lobbying with the royal courts.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Among all of Khomeini's teachers, Mirza Mohammad Ali Shahabadi (1874-1950), the ascetic scholar of Philosophy and Gnosticism, had the most influence in his life, as the Grand Ayatollah himself later recalled. For the role of Philosophy and Gnosticism on the formation of the political doctrine of Shiite clerical elites in contemporary Iran, see Fadayi Mehrabani 2014.

<sup>76</sup> More than 50 high-ranking Shiite figures were travelled from their cities to take part in this protest and to support Khomeini; among them were Shariatmadari, Mara'shi Najafi, Morteza Hairi from Qom, and Milani the leader of Mashahd seminary. For a full list of who were present in this civil protest and their activities while they were in Tehran see Davani 1979, Vol. VI: 131.

<sup>77</sup> Perhaps one of the most famous declarations that was issued over the incident and in support of Khomeini's movements at the time, was the one which came from the Freedom Movement of Iran, an Islamic faction of the National movement, entitled 'the dictator sheds blood'. In this declaration they emphasized that, with the blessings of the religious elites and upon their decrees, 'anyone who give up the opposition [against the regime] at this time, is a traitor to Islam, Quran, and Freedom'. This declaration caused the leaders of the movement, namely Mehdi Bazargan, Yadollah Sahabi, and Mahmoud Taleqani, who were in prison already due to their opposition to the White Revolution, severe consequences and each were sentenced to a long imprisonment. For a full text of the FMI, see Davani 1979, Vol. IV: 142.

Meanwhile, Alam was replaced by Hasanali Mansour who, since the early days of his premiership, sought to reach compromise with Shiite clerical elites (Husseinian 2008a: 452). The regime's policy toward the clerics, at least in the public surface, was dramatically changed from Alam's era. On 5 April 1964, Masnour delivered a speech in which he stated that 'Islam is one the most pioneering and noteworthy religions of the world and the clerical elite are valuable to us. I have the duty to deliver the utmost compassion of His Majesty to the clerics';<sup>78</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini was released the following day and entered Qom to be greeted warmly by his entourage and the people of the city.

Nonetheless, the Grand Ayatollah became more determined to achieve his religio-political cause and started to propagate his political posture as soon as he went back to Qom.<sup>79</sup> The new round of tension between Khomeini and the regime was fuelled when the Parliament passed the Capitulation Bill in October 1964. Then, in one of the most vehement speeches of his life, Ayatollah Khomeini attacked the government's policy on relinquishing jurisdiction toward US subjects in Iran. He stated,

They have sold us, they have sold our independence ... If some American's servant, some American's cook, assassinates your Marja' Taqlid in the middle of the bazaar, or runs over him, the Iranian police do not have the right to apprehend him.

He then harshly criticized the government's strategy in restraining the clergy's involvement in socio-political affairs:

[The government] has come to understand well that, if the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit any government to do whatever it would like, whatever is against the interests of the nation. If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit the Parliament to come to such a miserable state as this. They will strike this government in the mouth. They will strike this Parliament in the mouth and chase these deputies out of both its houses.

So, the influence of the religious leaders is harmful to the nation? No, it is a

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<sup>78</sup> *Ettelaat Daily*, 5 April 1964, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>79</sup> Following his return to Qom, Khomeini, then at the centre of attention, denounced the rumours of his compromise with the regime and advised his fellow clerics to not lose their thunder against the unjust rule of Shah. In one of his public sermons after his release, he clarified the duty of Shiite clerics and stated: 'today it is not the time to sit in our house and to pray, it is the day of fighting. Today is the day that the government attacks the religion, thus we should stand against it, and I will stand until the last drop of my blood... You [clerics] should also loudly declare that and warn the people on the pulpits that a danger is threatening the religion... the government does not want to see a powerful clerical authority in Iran'. See *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol. I: 305.

threat to you, detrimental to you traitors, not to the nation. You have realized that, as long as the influence of the religious leaders exists, you cannot do everything you want to do, commit all the crimes you want, so you wish to destroy their influence. You thought you could cause dissension among the religious leaders with your intrigues, but you will be dead before your dream can come true. You will never be able to do it. The religious leaders are united.

He went on, warned the various religious groups of the ongoing circumstances, and declared,

Once again, I esteem all religious leaders; I kiss the hands of all the religious leaders. I kiss hands of the religious students.  
Gentlemen, I warn you of danger. Iranian army, I warn you of danger. Iranian politicians, I warn you of danger. Iranian merchants, I warn you of danger. The ulama of Iran, maraje' of Islam, I warn you of danger ... It is a dangerous situation; there are issues kept under cover that we know nothing about.

He also condemned the political posture that was assumed by some of his fellows at the time:

Should I not be saying this? Those gentlemen who had said that we must hold our tongues and not utter a sound—do they still say the same thing on this occasion? Are we to keep quiet again and not say a word? They sell us and still we are to keep silence? They sell our Qur'an and still we should hold our tongues? By God, one who does not cry out in protest and does not express his outrage commits a sin.

In closing, for the first time he implicitly presented his *ijtihad* regarding the authority of Shiite jurists in politics and, while accusing the members of the parliament and the senate who had enacted the capitulation bill, announced,

Those old men in the Senate are traitors, and all those in the lower house who voted in favour of this affair are traitors. They are not our representatives. The whole world must know that they are not the representatives of Iran. Alternatively, suppose they are; now I dismiss them. They are dismissed from their posts and all the bills they have passed up until now are invalid ... From the very beginning of the constitutional period in Iran according to the text of the law, according to Article 2 of the Supplementary Constitutional Law, no law is valid unless the Mujtahids exercise a supervisory role in the parliament. Which Mujtahid is supervising the parliament now? They have to destroy the influence of the clergymen! If there were five clerics in this parliament, if there was only one clergyman in this parliament, he would

punch them in the mouth! He would not allow this bill to be enacted.<sup>80</sup>

His monumental speech, as a whole, confirms that, as early as 1964, the Ayatollah was determined to consolidate the socio-political role of the clergy in Iran. He was keen to diminish any threat against clerical authority, and in this he also sought the assistance of his fellow colleagues to reconsider their roles and to reformulate their perceptions about the available political opportunity. His statement also showed that if the Fundamental Law of Iran had been deployed precisely and the state had respected the role of clerics as acknowledged by the law, perhaps the Shiite clergy in Iran was more eager to offer their concessions to the constitutional monarchy rather than taking the opposition status, which later led to the establishment of the Shiite theocracy in Iran. The opportunity for the Shah's apparatus had been missed, however.

Along with Ayatollah Khomeini, other members of the clergy in Qom also held various gatherings and made their opposition to the bill known. In a religious gathering at his house, Ayatollah Shariatmadari condemned the members of parliament and the senate for enacting the bill. Although the majority of the Shiite clerical elite had unanimously positioned themselves against the bill, the wording of Khomeini's statement was far stronger than that of his fellows.<sup>81</sup> As his anti-state activities perceivably were going out of control, Khomeini was sent to exile in Turkey on 4 November 1964.

The expulsion of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini from Iran heralded a new phase in the movement of Shiite clerical elites against the monarchy. The course of future events proved that he by no means mitigated his political activities while he was in exile; rather, he managed to strengthen a transnational network of active religious elites throughout the region in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon to pursue the objective of establishing the Islamic state (Martin, 2003, p. 201). A network comprising various social groups was devoted to the clerical elite, and especially its spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini. While he was in exile, it was the responsibility of this network to propagate the political posture of Ayatollah Khomeini and to maintain his relationship with the public and other members of the elite.

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<sup>80</sup> *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol.1: 415.

<sup>81</sup> A simple comparison of Shariatmadari's speech with that of Khomeini's shows that, in the context of a similar political structure, and with similar opinions concerning the role the Shiite elite should play in political affairs and in protecting their community, it is the personal perceptions of Khomeini that pushed him towards making a more active and blatant response (Ali Akbar Mehdipour, interview with the author, Qom, May 2013).



***The Formation of the Concept of the Absolute Guardianship of the Jurist: The Grand Ayatollah's Years in Najaf***

On 5 September 1965, Ayatollah Khomeini left Turkey for Najaf, where he spent the next thirteen years. His life in Najaf had the paramount influence of shaping the jurisprudential cornerstones of the Shiite revolution that he later led in 1979. During those years, free from the pressures of Iranian government and perhaps making the most out of the Iran-Iraq enmity, Khomeini got a chance to develop the foundations of his political *ijtihad*. His reading of the Shiite sources, and the role he defined for the clergy, was shaped in a way that could substitute the monarchical regime in Iran, making the most out of the political opportunity structure.

Consequently, the years in Najaf contributed to the consolidation of the Shiite clerical elite's movement in Iran in various ways: it helped the remaining clerical elite and the pious religious students in Iran to work in clandestine groups to further their cause while the state was deluded about the abolition power of religious forces, and it facilitated the Ayatollah's network in Iraq and Lebanon to activate itself under the safe haven provided to them by the socialist government of Iraq, which was hostile to the Iranian monarchy at the time.

The Iranian government hoped that, once in Najaf, the other Shiite elite of the seminary would overshadow Ayatollah Khomeini; hence his political activism would diminish gradually. Nonetheless, it was Ayatollah Khomeini himself who enjoyed the opportunity of the exile years to form his *ijtihad* and to make the most out of the Najaf school of thought. He was offered an opportunity to review the path he had taken and to crystalize the route he must take to achieve his goals. To this extent, the Najaf seminary and its leadership, Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim, had the most to offer the Ayatollah. Perhaps the most important lesson he learned by being in Najaf was that context and full fledged popular support have a great influence on the success of Shiite political activism.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> When Khomeini entered Najaf, the high-ranking clerics of the seminary separately visited him. On the second night following his arrival that Hakim visited him and advised him to start teaching in Najaf. Later, in a routine visit, Khomeini met Grand Ayatollah Hakim to thank him for his hospitality. It was at this meeting, on 19 October 1965, that the two engaged in an exceptional discussion about the Shiite community in Iran and the role that the Shiite elite should take in its protection at that time. When Khomeini asked Hakim to 'visit Iran and see what is going on against the Shiite community personally' and to take a more active position against the Iranian regime, Hakim responded in this way: suppose that after 'I find out what is going on in Iran precisely', if I take an action that does not have sufficient influence, it will 'be doomed'. Still attempting to persuade Hakim to rise up and lead the opposition Khomeini reminds him that 'with the amount of people who follow you, you have the greatest power'. Hakim then responded that 'I could not see that many people would listen

Since his arrival in Najaf, Khomeini started to teach in its seminary and groups of students from Iran, Iraq, and other countries attended his lectures (Moin 1999: 152). It was on 21 January 1970 that he commenced the discussion over the ‘guardianship of the jurist’ in Najaf and, through thirteen sessions, he presented his political posture about the role of the Shiite clerical elite in the modern time. The discussion clearly showed that the Grand Ayatollah not only worked to dismantle the Pahlavi dynasty, but also considered the establishment of a Shiite state as a proposed alternative (Jafarian 2008: 291).

In his book *The Islamic Government*, which is composed of his lectures, he clearly states that the ‘governance of the [qualified] jurist is a subject that in itself elicits immediate assent’ and should be pursued to protect the very foundations of Shiite Islam (Khomeini 1980: 7). He then argues that to perform the divine responsibilities, including *Ifia* and *Qadha*, Shiite Mujtahids should enjoy ‘an executive power’ in the modern era that could be achieved by establishing an Islamic government under the auspicious of the clergy. To this end, he states,

Since the commencement of the Minor Occultation down to the contemporary era—a period of more than twelve centuries that may continue for hundreds of millennia if it is not appropriate for the Occulted Imam to manifest himself—is it proper that the laws of Islam be cast aside and remain unexecuted, so that everyone acts as he pleases and anarchy prevails ... Both law and reason require that we not permit governments to retain this non-Islamic character.<sup>83</sup>

Upon stating the core of his opinion about the Shiite clerical elite’s authority over the community, he then call for his colleagues to revitalise their capabilities, ‘collectively and

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to me thoroughly and obey my orders’. Years later, after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini confessed that the perception of Grand Ayatollah Hakim that, at the time, Shiite clerical activism would not have popular support, was accurate. For detailed accounts of the Hakim-Khomeini meeting in Najaf, see Tabarayan 2010: 177-190. For Imam Khomeini’s recollections of the posture of Grand Ayatollah Hakim at the time, see *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol. XIV: 175.

<sup>83</sup> Khomeini 1980: 23. He clearly states sooth reasons for arguing the necessity of establishing an Islamic Government led by the clerical elite: (1) the existence of a non-Islamic political order necessarily results in the non-implementation of the Islamic political order; (2) all non-Islamic systems of government are systems of *kufir*, since the ruler in each case is an idolater, and it is our duty to remove from the life of Muslim society all traces of *kufir* and destroy them; (3) it is also our duty to create a favorable social environment for the education of believing and virtuous individuals, an environment that is in total contradiction with that produced by the rule of idolatry and illegitimate power; (4) in order to assure the unity of the Islamic community, in order to liberate the Islamic homeland from occupation and penetration by the imperialists and their puppet governments, it is imperative that we establish a government; and (5) it is our duty to be a helper to the oppressed, and an enemy to the oppressor; thus, clerics have a duty to struggle against all attempts by oppressors to establish a monopoly over sources of wealth or make illicit use of them.

individually', to implement the laws of Islam by establishing an Islamic government (Khomeini 1980: 35).

Therefore, for the first time in the history of Shiite Islam, the clergy had a leader who was political and charismatic enough to ask for mass mobilisation, and who deduced a tangible doctrine that would require the religious elite to rule based on the accurate perception about the political opportunity structure. To materialise the Grand Ayatollah's political posture in Iran, the Shiite clergy needed to wait for an appropriate point in time when the political opportunity structure and the popular will could facilitate their activism. Less than a decade since the time Khomeini delivered his position, the international, regional, and national opportunity structure reached a salient point in Iran: the rule of the clerical elite could succeed the 2500 years of monarchical regime.

### **III. The Power of Shiite Clerical Elite Solidarity in Iran Within a Permissive Context**

By the mid-1970s, the regime of Shah had encountered a series of oppositions from various socio-political groups ranging from religious groups, mainly under the leadership of the clerical elite, to leftist parties. Within the opposition, however, the religious elite had the advantage to seize the most out of the political opportunity in Iran at the time. The death of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini's eldest son, Seyyed Mostafa, in Najaf was a turning point that pulled the clergy to the forefront of the opposition leadership. The incident heralded a series of uprisings against the state that eventually led to the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

To consolidate their authority, the various members of the Shiite clergy in the region revitalised their networks and aligned their political postures to that of the opportunity structure in order to mobilise their followers at the time. Among them, the elite of Qom supported the anti-regime movement, and their exiled colleague, all through the last fifteen years and especially from October 1977 to February 1979, when they succeeded in establishing the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This period of about one year, which resulted in the triumph of the revolution in Iran, marked the highest level of the clerical elite's political activism in Islamic History.

#### ***The Hawza of Qom: The Hub of Modern Clerical Activism***

More than half a century since its reestablishment by Grand Ayatollah Haiiri, over the activities of the Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi and his inheritors, the Qom Seminary had

reached an unsurpassed position in the 1970s. It had played a crucial role during the 1963 uprising and, after the expulsion of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini from Iran, his colleagues Grand Ayatollahs Mara'shi Najafi, Shariatmadari, and Golpayegani were in charge of leading the centre in Iran.<sup>84</sup> Along with these high-ranking elites, there were also numerous clerics who had formed a robust network to prevail the Shiite political doctrine throughout the most remote towns and to mobilise the laity against the Shah.

In victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Shiite Marja'iyya of Iran had supported the socio-political posture of Khomeini by directing the internal community while he was in exile. Although with different perceptions about the political opportunity structure, each of the high-ranking Maraji' of Qom had his share in the dismantling of the monarchy and establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Seyyed Shahab al-Din Marashi Najafi was born in 1897 in Najaf. Later, he decided to reside in Qom and taught at its seminary. Over the sixty years he lived in Qom, he managed to foster numerous students, who mostly formed the clerical leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran. By the death of Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi, who was then an established Marja', Marashi became known as one of the three leaders of the Qom seminary. With the rise of anti-state demonstrations in 1963, the Grand Ayatollah supported the popular movement by issuing several declarations (Marashi Najafi 2010). However, he mainly focused on building the greatest Shiite library in the World while teaching at the seminary, and had sponsored the movement through the net of his pious students. Even after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Grand Ayatollah Marashi Najafi remained among the most famous Marja' of Qom. He full-fledgedly supported the leadership of Khomeini and his successor, Ayatollah Khamenei.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> While the Qom seminary was the cradle and shaped the core of Shiite political activism in Iran, the seminary of Tehran, which was 200 years old at the time, had an influence in mobilising the people of the capital and the merchants of the Bazaar in support of the objectives of the religious revolutionaries. Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Ahmad Khansari (1891-1985) was the centre's leader at the time of the Islamic Revolution. Although he never engaged in blatant political activism during his life, perhaps due to his personal asceticism, he supported Khomeini all through the movement. Following his death, Imam Khomeini praised his personality by stating that he was among the most pious clerics in Shiite history and one resembling the infallibility of the Shiite Imams (Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad, interview with the author, Tehran, November 2013).

<sup>85</sup> Grand Ayatollah Mara'shi represents a great example of a Marja' among that group of religious elites willing to protect the citadel of Shiite Islam through activism. From the beginning of the rise of the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader of the activist Shiite forces, he had supported Khomeini's political movement and worked to gain the support of his other colleagues for it. Following Khomeini's arrest in 1963, he was the first Shiite Marja' who issued a declaration demanding that the government release him. When Khomeini was

Another high-ranking Marja' who was in Qom during the formation of the religious anti-regime movement, from 1963 to 1979, was Grand Ayatollah Mohammadreza Golpaygani. A student in Arak, he was among one of the closest disciples of Hairi who migrated to Qom to teach at its seminary. During the era of Broujerdi's leadership, Golpaygani was among the most renowned clerics of the seminary and, in 1961, he agreed to pay half of the religious students' stipends, while Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari was paying the other half (Davani 1979). When he held the Marja'iyya position, he was in full affiliation with other active clerics of the post-Broujerdi era. However, reviewing the political trajectory of his life, he became seemingly quiet in the aftermath of the March 1963 Feyzieh School incident until the last months of the Pahlavi Dynasty Dissolution. During this period, however, he issued a series of declarations condemning the general policies of the government.<sup>86</sup> Perceiving the political opportunity structure as unfavourable, he had preferred to remain politically quiet in order to protect the foundations of the seminary and the religious students from any encounter with the regime (Emami 2003). However, while the Revolution was reaching its last stages in January 1978, the Grand Ayatollah became actively involved in politics and joined his elite colleagues in their mass opposition to the Pahlavi.<sup>87</sup>

Although he did not believe in the 'absolute' guardianship of the jurist over the religio-political affairs of the community, when it comes to the leadership of the lay followers, he, like the majority of Shiite high-ranking Marja', reserved an undisputable right for the clergy. To this end, he stated,

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expelled from Iran, Mara'shi sent his son to meet with the Grand Ayatollah to see if there was anything the leadership of Qom seminary could do to support the anti-regime uprising. And after the triumph of revolutionaries in Iran, he repeatedly showed his support for Khomeini's leadership saying: 'I am not capable as you to lead the country even for an hour.' For a detailed role of Mara'shi Najafi in the Revolution in Iran, see Seyyed Mahmood Mara'shi Najafi, interview with Khamenei, January 2012 available at: <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/others-dialog?id=10848> (Accessed 15 May 2014).

<sup>86</sup> Like the majority of the religious elite who were active during the Shah's rule, Golpaygani was by no means a supporter of the regime. For a list of his declarations against the state's actions prior to the revolution, see Emami 2003.

<sup>87</sup> Although some hardliner clerics had harshly attacked his quiescent posture at the time later, when the Islamic Republic had been established, most of them acknowledged the prudence of the Grand Ayatollah's perception about the political opportunity structure at the time. For an account of those acknowledgements see Ma'adikhah 2006: 91.

The [laity] Muslims cannot be dismissed of the politics of the Islamic state, let alone the clerical elite, who had the position of the general deputyship [of the infallible Imam].<sup>88</sup>

Nonetheless, the context had the utmost influence on his political activism. As for the two distinctive periods of 1962–1963 and 1978–1979, when the clerics were actively involved in the politics of Iran, he was one of the forerunners of the religious elite opposing the rule of the Shah.

The last renowned Shiite Marja' residing in Qom through the formation of the Islamic Revolution of Iran was Grand Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari. As an Azeri Marja', he was enjoying a great popular status among the Azeri Shiite followers and a greater sum of the religious taxes than most of his colleagues.<sup>89</sup> During the course of 15 years ending with the Islamic Revolution, perhaps the most significant input of the Grand Ayatollah to strengthen the Shiite political revival in Iran was the establishment of the Dar al-Tabligh al-Islami in Qom prior to the expulsion of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini from Iran.<sup>90</sup>

On 1 May 1964, deploying his followers' endowments, Shariatmadari established the Islamic Institute in Qom with the goal of reforming the education system of the seminary (Jafarian 2008: 327). Soon, reformist groups of the clerical elite joined the ranks of the institute; it was through the initiatives of the centre that the first clerically-run magazine of Iran, *Maktab –e- Islam*, was published to bridge the gap between the developing community and teachings of the Qom seminary.<sup>91</sup> Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari had been politically active since he became the Marja', albeit at a more moderate pace than Grand Ayatollah Khomeini. A brief comparison of his anti-state declarations' wordings with those of Khomeini's during the 1963–1979 period clearly

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<sup>88</sup> For the text of his declaration, see *Asnad e Enghelab e Islami* 1995, Vol. I: 136-7.

<sup>89</sup> Ali Akbar Mehdi-pour, interview with the author, Qom, May 2013.

<sup>90</sup> At its birth, the establishment of *Dar al-Tabligh* in Qom was regarded as an act that might cause an internal schism among the clergy who were engaged in anti-state activities and it, thus, prompted a series of objections, mostly from political active clerics, including Khomeini. However, through the mediations of some renowned religious elites, the dispute between Shariatmadari and Khomeini was settled later. For an account of the arguments of both sides and the resolution of the dispute, see Jafarian 2008: 327-41.

<sup>91</sup> The Publication of *Maktab e Islam Magazine*, at the time was considered among the most avant-garde activities of the religious elite. The spiritual and financial sponsor of the magazine was Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari and the initial editorial board was compromised of some modern Shiite thinkers like Musa Sadr. The role of its articles in awakening the Shiite community in Iran and bridging the elite-laity gap is undeniable. For a first hand account of the magazine's history, see Davani 2003.

confirms that, while both Marja' reserved an undeniable right for clerical activism, perhaps due to their innate personal characteristics, their political positions become seemingly different. Nevertheless, the course of historical incidents and the manoeuvres of the Grand Ayatollah vis-à-vis the political opportunity structure in Iran, put him among the most politically active Shiite elite of all time. While Khomeini was in exile, Shariatmadari had remained seemingly quiet; it was in the course of post-1978 circumstances that he, like the majority of other high-ranking clerics in Iran, exerted activism with the aim of establishing the will of the religious revolutionaries.

The Hawza of Qom had become the centre point of Shiite political activism by the eve of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Through the activities of Hairi and Broujerdi, the seminary had reached a prestigious socio-political stance among the Shiite laity by 1961. It was in the aftermath of Broujerdi's sole leadership that his inheritors started a phase of political activism in Iran to make the most out of the political opportunity structure. While Khomeini was in exile, his other colleagues tried to shape the backbone of the revolution by strengthening the network of the seminary and promoting its authority throughout the country. To this end, when the political opportunity was perceivably favourable for the establishment of the Islamic Revolution, the majority of the clerical elite formed a solid association and led the religious revolutionaries to topple the unjust rule of Pahlavi and to establish the Islamic Government in Iran.

### ***The Establishment of the Clergy-led State in the Modern Middle East***

The level of clerical elite political activism in Iran during the 1970s was evidently influenced by the perceived political opportunity. Throughout history, there were numerous Shiite clerics capable of mobilising the laity aligned with their politically activated causes; some had tried to establish the rule of Islam, yet, mostly because of the mismatch between structural and perceived political opportunities, they failed to institutionalise their posture. In February 1979, however, the Shiite clergy succeeded in seizing the most out of the international, regional, and national opportunity structure to their favour. All the required factors for their political activism in Iran converged at the point that hastened the fall of Iranian monarchy and the establishment of the first Shiite state of modern times.

The crucial turning point for the clerical elite's alignment toward mobilising the anti-state movement was the death of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini's son, Seyyed Mostafa, on 23 October 1977 in Najaf. The various religious and secular opposition groups tried to

use the incident as leverage to unite the anti-Shah forces. It seems that the period of quiescence preparation for the religious forces, which commenced in June 1963, had reached the point that promised a trend of solid activism against the regime of the Shah. Numerous gatherings were held throughout the country to express the community's condolences to the Grand Ayatollah, who was serving his exile in Najaf.<sup>92</sup>

To further diminish the role of Khomeini and his politically active network, the Shah's apparatus published a discourteous editorial in *Ettelaat Daily* in January 1978. Trying to exclude the activities of the Grand Ayatollah from those of other high-ranking clerics in Iran, the author reviewed an inauspicious alliance that had formed between the 'black' and 'red' colonialism, referring to rough religious elements and the leftists, over the June 1963 uprising against the White Revolution of Shah. The author had gone on and accused Khomeini of being a British agent.<sup>93</sup>

Once again, in resemblance to the 1963 uprising, the people of Qom filled the streets and showed their resentment toward the slanderous editorial. The clash between the state forces and demonstrators resulted in several killed and wounded. The incident of Qom initiated a series of chain mourning gatherings, every forty days, in Tabriz, Yazd, and other cities of the country (Husseinian 2008b: 165). The perceived political opportunity had been changed by the clergy and their lay followers (Kurzman 2003). The country was pushed to all-out chaos by August 1978, when Jafar Sharif Emami, known for his trustworthy relationship with the clerics, was asked to form a new cabinet. Nevertheless, the course of the revolution had reached a point of no return on 9 September 1978, when the army opened fire on the people in Tehran and killed scores of them and marked the 'Black Friday' of the Iranian Revolution (Algar, 1991). By then, religious forces had formed a robust association of quarrelling with the state and planning for an interim-government, seizing the most out of the available political opportunity.

In early October 1978, over the request of the Iranian government, Imam Khomeini was expelled from Iraq to reside in Neauphle-le-Château in France. Khomeini had been offered a great political opportunity to broadcast his opinions throughout the world. By the

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<sup>92</sup> In Najaf, Grand Ayatollah Khoei read the prayer over the body of Seyyed Mostafa, who was to be buried in the holy shrine of Imam Ali. In Qom, just in one case, 6000 people gathered in the A'zam Mosque accompanying Golpaygani, Mara'shi Najafi, and Shariatmadari to mourn the death of Khomeini's son. SAVAK officers reported that great numbers of anti-government declarations signed by 'the Combatant Clerics of Qom' and 'the Iranian Student Confederation' were distributed among the attendees. (Archives of Markaz e Asnad e Enghelab e Islami, Revived No. 393: 4).

<sup>93</sup> *Ettelaat Daily*, 6 January 1978, Tehran, Iran.



further fuelling of the tensions, Mohammadreza Pahlavi decided to appear on the National TV and to finally ask the people and their religious leaders to ease the on-going protests in order to protect the only Shiite citadel of the world; yet it was too late for any sort of compromise. In his speech, he stated,

I, as your King, have sworn to protect the country's territorial integrity, national unity, and Shiite Islam ... I also heard the message of your revolution ... Here, I ask the Grand Ayatollahs and the prestigious scholars, who are the religious and spiritual leaders of the people, and the guardians of Islam and especially the Shiite faith, to protect this only Shiite state of the world by inviting people to calm down through their guidance.<sup>94</sup>

It was too late for the Shah, however. In 13 January, Khomeini ordered the formation of a new paramount body, the Revolutionary Council, to work on the post-Shah era (Martin 2003, p. 156). Three days later, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi left the country forever.

The country without the Shah and a stable state was counting the seconds for the return of Imam Khomeini. Eventually, on 1 February 1979, he returned to Iran and was warmly greeted by the people. By then, the abolishment of the Shah's regime was a matter of days and weeks away. Three days after the return of Khomeini, the Revolutionary Council recommended Mehdi Bazargan to become the Prime Minister of Iran's interim government. In his decree to the Revolution's new Prime Minister, Imam Khomeini confirmed how he believed in socio-political role of the Shiite clergy:

At the suggestion of the Revolutionary Council and based on my canonical and legal rights, originated from the vote of the overwhelming majority of Iranians for leadership of the movement ... because of my trust in your sincere faith in the holy tenets of Islam as well as my awareness of your Islamic and national endeavours, I hereby appoint you to form the interim government to attend the affairs of the country, especially with regard to conducting referendum and referring to the votes of the people about changing the political system of the country to the Islamic Republic (Sahifeh Imam Khomeini, Vol.VI: 54).

The first official announcement of Imam Khomeini, as the leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, was a manifestation of his *ijtihad*, which had been fostered during the last fifteen years. He not only recognised the role of the laity's support, but also mentioned that the leadership of the community is a divinely assigned responsibility for the Shiite cleric. According to the will of the revolutionaries and Khomeini's supporters, the Army of the Shah signed a neutrality declaration on early 12 February 1979, which marked the

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<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Tabatabai 2010, Vol. III: 59.

abolishment of the monarchy and the establishment of the new government under the leadership of the Shiite clerical elite in Iran.

With the triumph of the Revolution and establishment of Iran's interim government under the premiership of Bazargan and supervision of the Revolutionary Council, Imam Khomeini left Tehran to reside in Qom and teach at the seminary in March 1979.<sup>95</sup> The last sequence of the Shiite clerical elite's effective association was the series of meetings in which the four Marja' of Qom participated to monitor the activities of the Revolutionary government and to institutionalize the Shiite tenets in the Islamic Republic of Iran. After fourteen centuries, clerical elites had managed to seize the opportunity to establish the rule of Shiite Islam.

## **Conclusion**

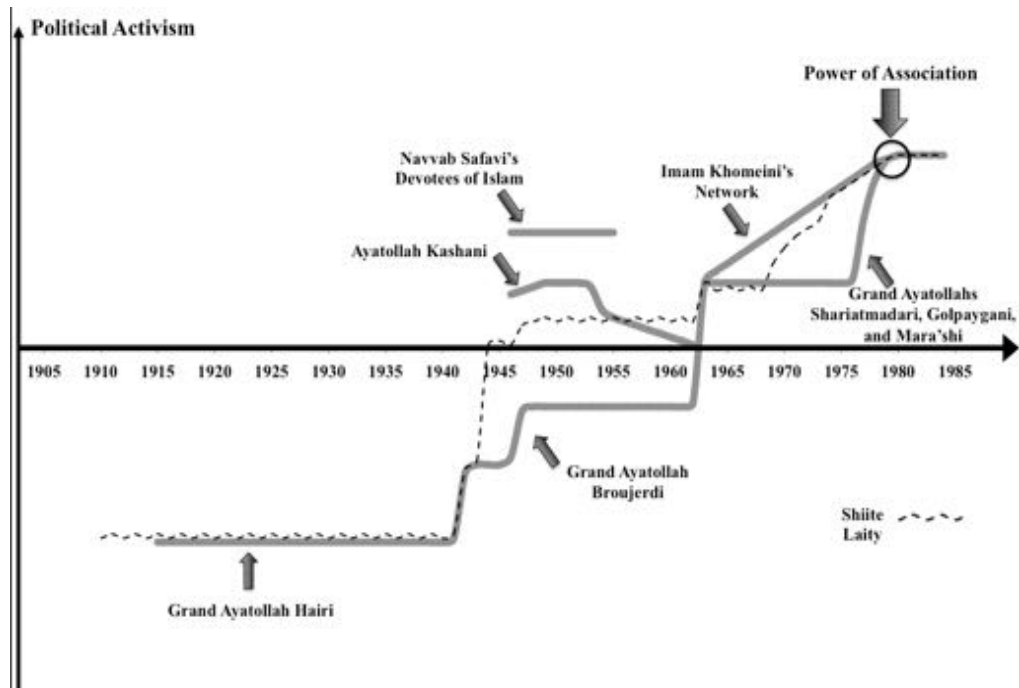
The course of seven decades of the Shiite clerical elite's activities in Iran, from the Constitutional Revolution to the establishment of the Islamic Republic, has witnessed the emergence of various clerics, who positioned differently when interpreting the political opportunity structure (see Figure 4.1 for an illustrative trajectory of Shiite clerical elite activism in modern Iran). Some remained quiet and some were extremely active, but all performed in a way to protect the principles of Shiite Islam. Nevertheless, at the last phase of the era, from 1963 to 1979, the circle of high-ranking clerics worked together to form an association that would make them powerful enough to consolidate their socio-political objectives and seize the most out of the political opportunity structure.

During the early stages of the post-Constitutional Revolution, the context was by no mean permissive for any sort of clerical elite political activism. Members of the clergy in Iran not only had relatively lost popular support, but they personally were frustrated by the Revolution's outcome. Therefore, considering the political opportunity structure, Grand Ayatollah Hairi, decided to remain quiet and work on institutionalising the new seminary in Qom. Later, as the structure was changed, Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi strived

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<sup>95</sup> In April 1980 Imam Khomeini had a heart attack and was rushed to Tehran. When he was discharged from the hospital, upon the advice of his doctors, he resided in the northern suburbs of Tehran in the village of Jamaran where the climate was better for his health. He lived in Jamaran for the rest of his life. The migration of the Imam to Tehran was auspicious for the interim government and for Prime Minister, Bazargan who had struggled to control the post- revolution situation with respect to the activities of the Revolutionary Council. With the Imam in Tehran, the meetings, and perhaps arbitrations between various members of the government and the council, became much easier (Sadeq Tabatabai, interview with the author, Tehran, November 2012).

to further develop the political authority of the seminary leadership. The unfolded events proved that Broujerid's interpretation over the opportunity structure was more accurate than other members of the clergy, including Ayatollah Kashani, and Navvab Safavi.



**Figure 4.1 Clerical Elite Political Activism in Modern Iran**

In 1961, however, the popular status of the seminary was ever rising due to the activities of its deceased leader. It was then that a politically active clergyman, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, started his movement and challenged the state. With him expelled from Iran to work on his thoughts in Najaf, his entouarges in Iran shaped a competent network to propagate the Grand Ayatollah's messages. Other high-ranking Maraji' residing in Qom at the time were actively involved in politics, although with more discretion. Eventually, in early 1978, the political opportunity structure became favourable to strike the final play of political contention. Through a course of almost one year, all members of the Shiite clergy in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon formed a solid transnational network to consolidate the power of the clerical elite and dismantle the regime of the Shah in order to establish the Islamic Republic in Iran.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Iraq 2003, Ascent of the Shiite Majority**

This chapter explores the current Shiite political ascent in Iraq through an examination of the perception of Shiite clergy over the political opportunity structure in modern Iraq, the context that has shaped their political postures. The Shiite community constructs the Arab identity of Iraq. Arab Shiites constitute about 60% of the country's population, with Sunni Kurds and Sunni Arab religio-ethnic groups each accounting for around one fifth of the population.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, the Shiite community has always been seen, by Ottoman and subsequent governments, as an Iranian fifth column within the country.

Concurrent with the Muslim conquest of Iraq in 638, Shiite communities emerged in the area. At that time, the Second Caliph appointed Salman the Persian, one of Ali's close disciples, as governor of the city of al-Mada'in who implanted the first Shiite community in Iraq. Later, Imam Ali, as the Fourth Caliph, moved to Iraq and named Kufa as the capital of his caliphate. Since then, Shiite Islam has been thoroughly intertwined with Iraq. The establishment of the Shiite seminary of Najaf in the eleventh century by Sheikh Tusi was a watershed in the development of Shiite Islam in Iraq.<sup>2</sup> For centuries and until the mid- 20th century, when Grand Ayatollahs Hairi and Broujerdi restored the seminary of Qom in Iran, Najaf was the most important Shiite scholastic centre in the world. With the rise of Shiite Safavid in Persia, neighbouring the Sunnite Ottomans, authority over the area was exchanged between the two Empires four times, resulting in further pressure on the Shiite community there until, with the Treaty of Zahab in 1639, Iraq was placed under Ottoman rule and remained there until the dissolution of the Turkish dynasty.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Batatu 2004: 40. The demographic trend has been much the same for the last sixty years. The 1947 Iraqi census recorded that about 51.4% of the population in Iraq was made up of Shiite Arabs, while Sunni Arabs comprised 19.7%, and Sunni Kurds comprised 18.4% of the population.

<sup>2</sup> Nakash 1994a. The late eighteenth century saw the beginning of a series of massive conversions of Iraq's Sunnite tribes to Shiite Islam, which continued until as late as 1917.

<sup>3</sup> Matthee 2003. Iraq was affected by Ottoman-Safavid hostility during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Shah Ismail Safavi conquered Iraq in 1509, but in 1535, the Ottomans, under Suleiman the Magnificent, succeeded in reacquiring Iraq. But then in 1623, Persia, under Shah Abbas, was able to annex Iraq. However, in 1638, the Ottomans expelled Persians from Iraq forever.

The re-empowerment of Shiite authority in Iraq during the eighteenth century was, to some extent, owing to the hostile attitude of Nader Shah towards the Shiite clergy in Iran. Settled in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, Shiite clerical elites who had passed the permissive context of the Safavid age, were forced to seek support from the laity and became independent of the state. This transformational move later provided them with an unparalleled opportunity in the early nineteenth century and boosted the authority of the clerical elite throughout the Shiite world. Their leadership through the Russo-Persian wars, Tobacco Revolt and Persian Constitutional Revolution in the following century were all the result of such a shift.

Inasmuch as the Najaf, Karbala and Samarra Shiite leadership were actively involved in the politics of Iran, they remained quiet with regard to the politics of Iraq due to the close political opportunity structure, partially imposed by the Ottomans' restraining policies.<sup>4</sup> With Ottoman rule about to be dismantled in the region, Shiite leadership of Iraq, for the first time in its modern history, perceived a favourable opportunity structure and became actively engaged in domestic politics and fought against the foreign British forces to protect one of the main abodes of Shiite Islam during the Great War. This course of resistance against British forces lasted until 1921, when Faisal I, a Sunni and non-Iraqi national, was nominated as king of Iraq. Frustrated by the outcome of their political activities, the Shiite clergy in Iraq were pushed aside from the routine politics of the country for the coming decades. During this interregnum period for political activism in Iraq, it became the Qom seminary's responsibility to assume the role of leadership throughout the Shiite world.

The abolition of the Hashemite Monarchy in Iraq in 1958 heralded a new era in which the Shiite clerical elite was able to revive itself and to become, once again, actively involved in the politics of the then newborn Republic of Iraq. From 1958 until today, various religio-political movements, under the leadership of Shiite clerics, have been playing prominent roles in the politics of Iraq and competing to represent the will of the Shiite population. These movements experienced the permissive context during the Arif Brothers' governments, from 1963 to 1968, as well as the

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<sup>4</sup> Vakili-Qomi 1966. According to this research conducted fifty years ago by the Institute for Social Studies and Research in Tehran, 34 of the over 58 Shiite Marja' who had led the seminary since its foundation were originally Persian, while only 16 were Iraqi nationals, among them the late Mohsen Hakim. The nationality of the Shiite leadership in Iraq played a pivotal role in constraining the political activism of the centre, especially during the modern history of Iraq when Pan Arab ideology prevailed throughout the Middle East.

repressions of the Baath administration, yet managed to survive and their authority prevails in today's Iraq (Nasr 2006a, Nakash 2006). During this period, numerous Shiite clerics have emerged in the political mise-en-scène of modern Iraq, each presenting a relatively unique posture responding to the political structure, aiming to protect the Shiite community and to preserve the tenet of Shiite Islam. During the last half a century, Shiites and other Iraqis have had to deal with the establishment of the 'Republic of Fear' by Baathist proponents and the rise of Saddam's arbitrary rule (Makiya 1998). Under the utmost political pressure throughout the period of Iraqi dictatorship, the Shiite leadership was responsible for leading a community facing three devastating wars and numerous failed coups and uprisings. In the aftermath of these upheavals, which resulted in millions of casualties, came the political ascent of the Shiite majority in post-2003 Iraq, a sociopolitical status that is partly owed to the solidarity of Shiite clerical elites during these years.

To explain the process behind the current Shiite political ascent in Iraq, this chapter describes the political activities of Shiite clerical elites and their perceptions about the opportunity structures of the country's modern history since 1920. Section I of the chapter considers the political engagements of the Shiite community during the first decades of the twentieth century when Iraq emerged as a new state in the modern Middle East. This section investigates the role of the clerical elites, and their perceptions over the political opportunity structure during the war with foreign British forces, which resulted in their political postures in the 1920 Iraqi revolt, and in the midst of the formation of the Hashemite Monarchy in Iraq. Section II explores the context of the Republic of Iraq, and the political activities of Shiite personalities in Iraq as, for instance, Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim and Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Sadr, as well as the revival of Shiite political activism in the aftermath of the Iraqi monarchy. Section III examines the relatively restrictive political structure of the country during the rise of the Baath party in Iraq, and explains the stances of Shiite clerical elites during the war with Iran. More precisely, it probes the role that the Shiite leadership of Najaf, under the initiatives of the Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim Khoei, in protecting the seminary through a very critical era. *Section IV*, the last part of this chapter, draws attention to the solidarity of the country's Shiite clerical elites under the Marja'iyya of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the process that resulted in the political ascent of the Shiite community in today's Iraq.

## **I. From Ottoman to Independent Iraq: Shiite Clerical Elites and Modern Politics**

The Shiite clergy of Najaf played a prominent role in leading the Persian Constitutional Revolution in early 20th century. Thus, inasmuch as the outcome of the revolution was considered a setback for the religious leadership, the clerics of Iraq, along with their colleagues in Iran, were pushed out of political affairs, and preferred to reconsider their political postures. Yet, with the outbreak of the Mesopotamia Campaign during World War I, and the occupation of Iraq by the British forces, the Shiite clerical elites who perceived a great threat to the Shiite leadership were inevitably involved in defending the abode of Islam. For nine years, during which Ottoman Iraq was under British occupation, the majority of Shiite clerical elites were actively involved in the politics of the country. Their activism, however, yielded little for them; for, in August 1921, under the auspices of Britain, the Iraqi monarchy was established and Faisal, a non-Iraqi and Sunni son of the Sharif, became the new king. The Iraqi Shiite movement of 1914-1920 had, under the leadership of the clerical elites, fought with foreign occupiers and even succeeded in establishing a short-lived local Shiite state. However, facing the restrictive political opportunity structure caused by the dissolution of the Ottomans and the British Mandate in Iraq, the Shiite clergy gave up politics and claimed that it was adhering to what seemed a greater mission: protecting the holy cities in Iraq and their Shiite seminaries. Consequently, although the first two decades of the twentieth century had witnessed considerable political activism on the part of the Shiite clerical elites in Iraq, during Iraq's monarchial era, which ended in 1958, the clerical elites remained quiet.

The Shiite clergy in Iran and Iraq, at the outset of World War I, did not exhibit any sort of sectarian political activism. They seemed to recover from the experience of the Constitutional Revolution, and, in order to reassess their capabilities for mass mobilisation, they took more time to reconsider their postures.<sup>5</sup> With the death of Akhond Khorasani in 1911, clerical leadership of the Iraqi Shiite community had been transferred to Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Kazem Yazdi, who had seemingly been less active during the Persian Constitutional Revolution. Nevertheless, when in 1914 the British forces invaded Iraq, he and his entourage refused to backstab the Sunnite

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed primary source about the negative effects of the Persian Constitutional Revolution on dividing the seminaries of Najaf and Karbala see Najafi Ghoochani 2007.

Ottomans. Against all the odds, Yazdi issued a Fatwa of Jihad and even sent his son to the front to fight with ‘non-Muslim’ British forces.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the initial victories, due to a series of events, at regional and national levels, the schism became evident within the Ottoman-Iraqi alliance.<sup>7</sup> In March 1917, British forces entered Baghdad, ending Ottoman rule in Iraq forever (Tripp 2002: 32).

A week after the conquest, the British commissioner in Iraq issued a bilingual proclamation to the Arab people of Mesopotamia, extending his hand towards the people of Iraq against the Ottoman government.<sup>8</sup> However, the evident inconsistencies in British leadership over the occupied territories (Sluglett 2007: 13),<sup>9</sup> coupled with the expulsion of Ottomans from Iraq, provided the Shiite clerical elites, amongst the main political actors at the time, with a permissive opportunity structure to mobilise their followers towards the independence cause (Ansari 2010, Vol. II: 330).

Two years after the Mesopotamia Campaign, not all parts of Iraq were under British tutelage. The holy city of Najaf, for instance, was still under the control of its Shiite inhabitants. The war between Najafis and British forces broke out later that year. This caused the 1918 ‘Uprising of Najaf’, in which Iraqis rose to protect the city from British occupation (Nakash 2006: 75). Throughout the conflict, two Najafi notables, Seyyed Mohammad Ali Bahr al-Ulum and Sheikh Mohammad Jawad Jazaeri, formed ‘The Islamic Revival Society’ to pursue their political objectives in a more structured way (Al-Asadi 1975: 169). The foundation of the Society was, indeed, the first explicit Islamic action of the Shiite community towards claiming independence in Iraq. Nevertheless, it was eventually weakened by an internal schism, thus losing the support of the seminary’s leadership. In March 1918, the hardliner faction of the Society stormed the residence of the British attaché in Najaf and assassinated him

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<sup>6</sup> For the text of Yazdi’s fatwa against the British, see Davani 1979, Vol. I: 212.

<sup>7</sup> With the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the Ottoman Empire invaded Russia’s northern border, thus decreasing their armed presence in the south where they had been engaged with British troops. The Arab Revolt of the Sharif of Hejaz also fuelled tension between Turks and the Arab ethnic groups of the Empire during this critical time. Moreover, harsh policies by the Ottoman government against the people of some Iraqi cities, especially Hilla, as well as increases in taxes, alienated other Iraqis from the Ottomans. For a series of other factors that fuelled the Arab-Turkish Ottoman schism during the Great War, see Sluglett 2007: 8-41.

<sup>8</sup> The full text of the Proclamation is available at: [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The\\_Proclamation\\_of\\_Baghdad](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Proclamation_of_Baghdad) [Accessed 7 July 2014].

<sup>9</sup> See Toby Dodge, ‘Failing in Baghdad -The British Did It First,’ *The Washington Post*, 25 February 2007.



(Sluglett 2007: 221). This led to the city being besieged by British forces. Eventually, after more than forty days, and with the rise of an internal schism among the Shiite community of the city, the siege was lifted, British troops entered Najaf, rounded up hundreds of rebels, expelled dozens to India and executed scores of them in retaliation (Al-Hassani 1935, Vol. I: 38).

In the aftermath of the Najaf Uprising, Britain sought to consolidate a master strategy for its presence in Iraq considering the changing political equations in the region.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, Arnold Wilson, the British Civil Commissioner in Baghdad, strived to institutionalise the British mandate for Iraq asking for the support of Iraqi notables (Nakash 1994: 63). In the midst of these developments, Grand Ayatollah Yazdi passed away in April 1919 and Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Shirazi inherited the clerical leadership. His political leadership of the community within the chaotic situation of the time enabled the Shiites of Iraq to play a pivotal role in the 1920 revolt against the British mandate.

### ***Shiites of Iraq and the 1920 Revolt***

The 1920 Revolt against the British presence in Iraq was a nationwide struggle for the freedom and independence of the country, and it constituted the very foundations of today's Iraq. For the Shiite community in Iraq, which played an unsurpassed role in the revolt, it represents the most significant incident for Iraqi unity, though its outcome never served the Shiite community as they had expected (Nakash 2006: 78). Although short-lived and limited to a defined territory, it was during the revolt that the Shiite clerical elites succeeded in founding the first Islamic state of the twentieth century, under the leadership of Mohammad Taqi Shirazi.

In May 1920, a group of Shiite clerics, notables and tribal chiefs gathered in the house of Mohammad Taqi Shirazi in Karbala to decide how to respond to the changing political structure.<sup>11</sup> They agreed to work on awakening Iraqis to break

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<sup>10</sup> During the Iraqi revolt, British hegemony throughout the Middle East was undergoing dramatic changes. Neighboring Iran, where the majority of Shiite Muslims resided, was falling apart, and Britain was forced to propose an Anglo-Persian treaty as a means of protecting its interests. In Egypt and Sudan, there were anti-imperialist rebellions that resulted in restricting British troops to the Suez Canal zone; and turmoil in Palestine appeared increasingly unpromising for British interests. For details of anti-British developments in the Middle East at that time, see Fromkin 1989: 415-64.

<sup>11</sup> Al Fir'awn 1952: 9. The committee consisted of five Shiite clerical figures: Sheikh Mahdi Khalesi, Seyyed Abu al-Qasim Kashani, Seyyed Hebat al-Din Shahrestani, Mirza Ahmad Khorasani, and Sheikh Mohammadreza Shirazi.

Britain's hold over Iraq; if the British forces resisted, then their intention was to mobilise their followers to confront the occupiers with arms (Al-Wardi 1974, Vol. V : 128). Therefore, as a first step, the Grand Ayatollah issued an open letter, addressing his 'Iraqi Brothers' in which he stated:

Be informed that your brothers in Baghdad, Kazimayn, Najaf, Karbala and other regions have come to a joint decision to demonstrate peacefully to demand their civil rights. Their righteous demands are basically the independence of Iraq based on the formation of a just Islamic rule. Hence, it is your duty to send your representatives to Baghdad, maintaining peace and order, and trying to prevent an internal schism. I also advise you to respect all opinions throughout this grand Jihad.<sup>12</sup>

His proclamation issued in early 1920, shows that he believed that, at the time, the Shiite leadership should establish an Islamic state in Iraq and considered this to be a righteous demand. Yet later, when British officers did not respect this demand, an armed revolt was launched in Baghdad. Consequently, Shirazi issued a fatwa that read as follow,

[i]t is the duty of Iraqis to plea for their rights. In demanding them, they should maintain peace and order. Were the British to prevent them from obtaining their rights it is legitimate to make use of defensive force.<sup>13</sup>

Mahdi Khalesi of Kazimayn and Shariat Isfahani of Najaf, two distinguished clerics of Iraq, welcomed his fatwa. Subsequently, the urban populations of these holy cities, supported by the Shiite tribal fighters, joined the revolt against the British (Nakash 2006: 77).

By July 1920, various British bases in the mid and lower-Euphrates had been liberated by the revolutionary forces (Tripp 2002: 43). However, to the dismay of revolutionaries, Shirazi passed away in August. Grand Ayatollah Shariat Isfahani succeeded him and the leadership of the Shiite revolt against British forces transferred from Karbala to Najaf. Although the Grand Ayatollah pursued the cause of his predecessor, the revolution was reaching its demise. In late August, British troops were called from India, Iran and Britain to crack down on the revolutionary bases in

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Al-Wardi 1974, Vol. IV: 183.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Al Fir'awn 1952: 195.

Iraq. By November 1920, the armed revolt of the Iraqi people against British forces was crushed and the belligerent parties agreed a cease-fire (Nakash 1994: 72).

The engagement of the Shiite community in the 1920 revolt brought it nothing but despair. The deaths of the Shiite clerical leaders, who had led the community through independence, for a short period, were a drastic blow to the consistency of activism carried out by Shiite clerical elites at the time. Each of the leaders resided in different cities; therefore, political leadership was handed from Karbala to Najaf and, with the death Grand Ayatollah Sharia' Isfahani in December 1920, to Kazimayn, where Sheikh Mahdi Khalesi resided. This further weakened the Shiite clerical elite-laity political leadership while they were fighting with British forces and eventually caused their defeat.

In November 1920, and to consolidate the British mandate in Iraq and contain any further popular revolt, Sir Percy Cox, popular among Iraqis, persuaded Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kailani, to form a council of ministers under British supervision (Tripp 2002: 44). It was under the auspices of this political structure that Iraq became an independent Arab monarchy.

### ***The Rise of the Hashemites and the Subordination of Iraq's Shiite Community***

For almost a decade, the Shiite clerical leadership in Iraq had been actively engaged in the politics of the country and strived to gain independence from British rule and to establish an Islamic state. Their political leadership during the occupation of Iraq had extended beyond the Shiite community, and in some cases, prevailed in other communities. Abdul-Aziz Al-Badri, an Iraqi Sunni Mufti, confirms this, saying: 'in post-Ottoman Iraq, Shiite clergy of Najaf, Karbala, Baghdad, Samarra, and Kazimayn mobilised Iraqis against the British occupation through issuing fatwas and indeed it was those verdicts that made the Iraqi tribes fight against the British forces in order to liberate Iraq from the filth of colonialism and infidelity' (Al-Badri 1966: 244). This however resulted in resentment towards Shiite authority by British policy-makers in Iraq. Gertrude Bell, the oriental secretary to the British commissioner in Mesopotamia, expressed this resentment in a letter to her father:

I don't for a moment doubt that the final authority must be in the hands of the Sunnis, in spite of their numerical inferiority; otherwise you will have a mujtahid-run, theocratic state, which is the very devil.<sup>14</sup>

It was in such a circumstance that political opportunities for Shiite activism were diminishing in Iraq at the time. On the other hand, the cost of the British presence in Iraq was increasing and London was being harshly criticised for its post-WWI policies in the region (Sluglett 2007: 31). To discuss a more stable solution to the future of the ex-Ottoman territories, the Cairo Conference was called in March 1921. It was during the conference that Britain decided to support the establishment of an Arab monarchy in Iraq under the rule of Faisal, son of Hussein Ibn Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, and, as a Hashemite, a descendent of the Prophet.<sup>15</sup>

Responding to the outcome of the conference, the Shiite leadership of Najaf and Kazimayn took two different stances with regard to the nomination of Faisal. While Grand Ayatollahs Isfahani and Naini of Najaf opposed any government established under the tutelage of Britain, Sheikh Mahdi Khalesi and Seyyed Mohammad Sadr of Kazimayn welcomed the decision of the Cairo Conference (Al-Basir 1924: 341).<sup>16</sup> Faisal became King Faisal I of Iraq in August 1921, the first monarch of the newborn Iraqi state.

A clash between the Shiite clerical leadership and the state broke with the spread of news concerning the terms of an Anglo-Iraqi Treaty during the summer of 1922.<sup>17</sup> The Treaty embodied almost the same issues that the British had aimed to achieve with the Iranian government three years before, and would place Iraq's financial, military and foreign affairs under close British supervision. In order to ratify the Treaty, and Iraqi Constituent Assembly had to be established (Nakash 1994: 78). This provided the Shiite clerical elites with an alibi to confront Faisal and his

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<sup>14</sup> The letter was dated 3 October 1920, when the Iraqi revolt was easing down. The full text is in the Gertrude Bell Archives in Newcastle University, and is available at [http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter\\_details.php?letter\\_id=425](http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter_details.php?letter_id=425) [Accessed 29 June 2014].

<sup>15</sup> For a full account of the conference's outcome see Sluglett 2007: 39-41.

<sup>16</sup> Nakash 1994: 76-7. The Shiite clerical elites' support of Faisal was conditional; he had apparently assured Khalesi that, upon receipt of the throne, he would protect the monarchy from the British. In any case, the Shiite clerical leadership had very little room for maneuver in the nomination of Faisal given the socio-political context of the country at the time.

<sup>17</sup> The full text of the treaty is available at: <http://www.galeuk.com/iraq/pdfs/Treaty%20of%20alliance%20btw%20GB%20&%20Iraq%2010%20Oct%201922%20CO%20730%20167%201.pdf> [Accessed 1 July 2014].

government, as they believed the pre-agreed conditions of their support, to oust British supremacy in Iraq, had been breached.

In November 1922, Khalesi, Isfahani and Naini issued a series of fatwas against Muslims who wished to participate in the upcoming Constituent Assembly Election (Nakash 1994: 79). To counter Shiite clerical anti-monarchical activities, the cabinet of Prime Minister Abd al-Muhsin Sa'dun (1922-1929) passed a bill, allowing the government to 'deport foreign nationals' who engaged in anti-state activities.<sup>18</sup> Considering that the majority of the Shiite clergy in Iraq at the time were originally Persians, the bill represented a declaration of war against Shiite clergy in the holy cities. On 25 June 1923, Khalesi along with his sons and nephew were expelled from Iraq to the Hejaz and later resided in Iran based on the government's initiatives. Subsequently, the rest of the Shiite clerical elites, and most notably, Isfahani and Naini were, humiliatingly, deported to Qom (Nakash 1994: 82). The government was then able to carry on with its plans without the concern of meaningful opposition from the Shiite community. The Constituent Assembly was established in March 1924 and it later ratified the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, as well as the Fundamental Law of Monarchical Iraq (Marr 2012: 28).

The main concern of Shiite clerics, who had been expelled to Iran, was the destiny of the Seminary of Najaf. Without their leadership of the Seminary and allocation of religious taxes among prospective students, the Seminary's survival was cast into doubt.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, for Faisal and his reign to endure robustly, he had to reach an agreement with the Shiite clergy, who still held sway over a large popular constituency encompassing much of Iraq's population at the time. This mutual interest resulted in a series of covert negotiations between Faisal's envoy and the expelled Shiite elites in Iran during which the latter promised not to interfere in internal Iraqi politics if the government let them return to Najaf (Al-Wardi 1974, Vol. VI : 261). Eventually, the Shiite clerical elites chose to protect the 1000 years old seminary by returning to Iraq, rather than remaining politically active while far away. The political opportunity structure in Iraq at that time gave them no other alternative but to choose to stay out of politics for the coming decade and await a more permissive context. Subsequent history would show that an opportunity for the Shiite

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<sup>18</sup> For the text of the government's proclamation see Al-Hassani 1988, Vol. I: 130.

<sup>19</sup> Hadi Ansari, interview with the author, Tehran, August 2013.

clerical elites to return to the front lines of politics in Iraq would not occur for more than three decades.

Over a decade between 1914 and 1924, the Shiite clerical elites strived to consolidate the right of the Iraqi population in facing foreign British forces. Through the movement of Jihad that took place while Iraq had still been nominally under Ottoman rule, to the Najaf uprising, and finally the 1920 revolt, where Iraqis rose up as one nation, the clerical leadership had been at the forefront of the Iraq political scene. Nevertheless, the course of structural political opportunity, the deaths of the strong leaders and internal schism over the future of the newborn country, were all factors that imposed detrimental blows on their political movement. By April 1924, when Shiite clerical elites returned to Iraq, the foundation of the monarchy had been consolidated thanks to British policies, and the context was as restrictive as possible for Shiite political engagement. Throughout most of the Hashemite rule in Iraq, the Shiite clergy stayed relatively quiet waiting for a more permissive context.

## **II. The Republic of Iraq: A Permissive Context and the Formation of Shiite Political Movements**

Throughout the Hashemite period in Iraq, which lasted for more than three decades, the Shiite clergy refrained from political activism. However, the sociopolitical structure of the Shiite community in Iraq had been undergoing a great transformation, with the rise of rural-urban migration and the introduction of modern schools. The shortage of Shiite clerical elites in responding to those changes was inevitably causing a gap for Shiite laity (Wiley 1992: 22). For thousands of Iraqi Shiites, Communism and Arab Nationalism were more promising ideologies for elevating their social status. On the other hand, and due to the strong sense of tribalism in Iraq, the Shiite community was less likely to show any sort of political activism based on an ‘explicit Shiite agenda’ (Kubba 2004: 143). This would ultimately close the political opportunity structure for Shiite clerical elites in Iraq, and restrain them from overt political activism throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

The defeat of those Shiite clerics, who had perceived the political opportunity structure open for activism in post-1958 Iraq, had its main root in this void between the Shiite elites and laity, an ‘ever-lasting’ restrictive structure at a societal level. With the establishment of the Republic of Iraq in 1958, the Shiite clerical leadership perceived an opportunity for political activism. Over the coming decade, during

which Iraq went through three coups, the Shiite clerical elites constantly worked towards institutionalising its authority throughout the community and the country. By the time of the rise of Baath to power in 1968, this ascending trend towards political activism was terminated and the Shiite clerics in Iraq were gradually pushed towards quiescence. Nevertheless, it was in July 1958, during the change in the political opportunity structure in Iraq over the fall of the monarchy, that Shiite clerics decided to get involved in the politics of the country once again with a view to fulfilling the causes of the community.

At the time, a group of Iraqi officers, under the leadership of Abd al-Karim Qasim, attempted a military coup against the government, overthrew the monarchy and announced a Republic in Iraq on 14 July 1958. The rise of Qasim, whose mother was a Shia, and his anti-sectarianism policies, provided the Shiites with an open political opportunity to restore their social status and to become active in the politics of the country. At the same time, the clergy in Najaf perceived a threat from Communist-Marxist affiliates who shared power with Qasim (Husseini Hairi 1996: 80).<sup>20</sup> Later in 1958, a group of renowned Shiite clerics established the 'Ulama Association', *Jama 'at al-Ulama*, aiming to elevate the sociopolitical consciousness of the Shiite community in contrast to other appealing ideologies (Wiley 1992: 34).<sup>21</sup>

The establishment of the Association under the auspices of the Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim, and the direct participation of renowned Shiite personalities, was a response to the growing influence of Communist and Pan Arabist ideologies among the Shiite laity in Iraq, which had been changing the structure in dismay at the religious camp of the time. Throughout its activities, the Association and its members strived to present an argument for Shiite politics to conform to the contingencies of the context and the modern world. Therefore, it is fair to call Hakim, the prestigious Arab leader of the seminary, a revitaliser of modern Shiite political activism in Iraq.

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<sup>20</sup> Dekmejian 1995: 120. The Shiite clerical leadership in Iraq saw the emergence of a Nasserist orientation as a threat, as they would lose their popular status if Iraq were to become a Sunni-dominated, secular Pan-Arab state headed by Nasser.

<sup>21</sup> The founders of the Association were among the most renowned members of the clerical elite in Najaf, just a level lower than the seminary's leadership circle. Among them were: Sheikh Murtada A'l-Yasin (the maternal-uncle of Mohammad Baqer Sadr), Seyyed Muhamamd Taqi Bahr al-Ulum, Sheikh Mohammadreza Mozaffar, and Seyyed Ismail Sadr. For a thorough review of founding members and their political missions, see Al-Siraj 1993: 116.

***Political Posture(s) of Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim and Shiite Political Activism in Modern Iraq***

Born into a prestigious family in Najaf in 1889, Mohsen Hakim was son of Seyyed Mahdi Hakim, the renowned leader in the south of Lebanon (Tabarayian 2010, Vol. I: 46). In his twenties, he sat in on lectures by Akhond Khorasani and Seyyed Mohammad Said Habubi (d.1915), one of the religious leaders of the Jihad movement against the British invasion. Mohsen Hakim, in his early twenties at the time, fought with the foreigners alongside other Shiite clerics at the front. With the death of Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Abulhassan Isfahani in 1946, Hakim became the leader of the Najaf seminary, while at the same time, Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi had been just appointed to take charge of the Qom seminary in Iran. Nonetheless, his leadership, his sons' and students' legacies from Shiite political movements in Iraq have prevailed until today. He personally witnessed Ottoman Iraq, the British Mandate, the Hashemite Monarchy and the governments of Qasim, the Arif Brothers and the Baathists in the Republic of Iraq. Therefore, assessing his political trajectory, shaped by his perceptions of the political opportunities presented to him, would provide an incomparable case through which to study the activism of Shiite clerical elites in the modern history of Iraq. At an individual level, he himself influenced the opportunity structure in Iraq, as he was the only *Arab* Shiite cleric who held the position of Marja'iyya on the eve of the rise of Pan Arabism throughout the Middle East. None of his mostly Iranian predecessors and successors during the contemporary era has had such an impact on the Iraqi context.

With the death of Grand Ayatollah Isfahani, the Shiite Marja'iyya was moved to Iran. With the rise of Broujerdi in Qom, Hakim concentrated his activities on teaching and fostering students in the Najaf seminary.<sup>22</sup> During the reign of the Hashemites, Hakim and his colleagues in Iraq managed to mitigate the relationship with the state by staying out of politics. It was as a consequence of their activities that the number of religious students in Iraq rose dramatically.<sup>23</sup> Indeed these were the Iraqi, Iranian, Lebanese, Afghani, Pakistani and Indian students who shaped the

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<sup>22</sup> Tabarayian 2010, Vol. I: 194. Other famous members of the Shiite clergy in Najaf at that time were the Grand Ayatollahs Seyyed Abdul Hadi Shirazi, Hassan Bojnourdi, Seyyed Mahmoud Shahroodi, Seyyed Abu al-Qasim Khoei and Sheikh Hussein Hilli.

<sup>23</sup> The estimated number of students in the Najaf seminary had increased six-fold after Mohsen Hakim took its leadership. Interview with Seyyed Mohammad Baqer Hakim quoted in Tabarayian 2010, Vol. I: 311.



cadres of Shiite political movements at the dusk of the Hashemite rule and the establishment of the Republic in Iraq.

The fall of the monarchy in Iraq and the rise of Qasim provided an opportunity for the Shiite religious leadership in Iraq to come out from its cocoon and become more politically active. At the same time, the threats of Communism and Pan Arabism were at their height, with the abolition of the Islamic monarchy. Similarly to other underprivileged Shiite communities in other Arab countries, the Shiite laity in Iraq were mostly recruited by the Communist parties hoping to elevate their social status at the time (Wimmer 2003).

To kill two birds with one stone, with the approval of Grand Ayatollah Hakim, a group of Shiite activists in Najaf founded the 'Ulama Association', as the first step towards the mostly religious revival of the community in the Republic of Iraq. However, the permissive context for Shiite activism and their benign relationship with Qasim terminated very soon, when he introduced socio-economic reforms in September 1958 (Sluglett and Sluglett 2001: 57). To the dismay of the Shiite clergy, Qasim's administration passed the Personal Status Law. The new initiative was intended to give Iraqi women equal rights with men in social and individual matters. This threatened the religious authorities and, for them, was a sign of the rising power of Communism in Iraq (Nakash 1994: 135).

A group of deprived Iraqis welcomed Qasim and his reforms as a shimmering light after decades of darkness, and, as such, were more aligned to the state than the religious authorities; the political opportunity structure was, thus restrictive on a societal level. It appears that the Shiite leadership of Najaf was listened to more by the Sunnite laity than by their own community (Al-Alawi 2011: 243). A clear indication of this was the formation of the 'Islamic Party' in February 1960, when this *Sunnite* political party introduced the *Shiite* Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim as their spiritual leader (Wiley 1992: 37). The moment at which Hakim became directly involved in the politics of Iraq came just days after the formation of the Sunnite Islamic Party. To prevent more members of the laity from joining the Communist party, which was perceivably a great threat to Shiite authority, the Grand Ayatollah issued a breakthrough fatwa on 12 February 1960 and branded Communism tantamount to 'infidelity' and 'Atheism' (Aziz 1993). For the next three years, the

political activities of the Shiite clerical elites were aligned with those of anti-state secular and nationalist movements.<sup>24</sup>

Qasim's government was toppled in early 1963 by the Baathist-nationalist coup and Abdul Salam Arif seized the presidency. Although the short-lived government of Qasim provided the Shiite clerical elites and their followers with a more favourable opportunity structure in which to elevate their social status, its affiliation to Communism made religious groups take a position against it (Mallat 1993: 15). After all, the history of Shiite Islam had proved that political triumph comes only after the protection of Islamic principles for every Shiite religious leader, amongst whom Mohsen Hakim was not an exception.

With the demise of the more secular Qasim, the government of Aref ascended to power and, due to his sectarian tendencies, the repression against Shiite communities increased.<sup>25</sup> Albeit for obvious reasons, at the outset, President Arif tried to mitigate the relationship with state-Shiite clerical elites by sending his envoys to meet with Hakim in 1964. It was at this point that the Grand Ayatollah advised the new administration to be loyal to 'what Iraqis' were demanding. He also recommended the government and stated,

Previously I had warned some Iraqi rulers, whom God punished very harshly, that Iraqis are Muslims and would not surrender to anything except an Islamic regime... opposing their beliefs would further fuel tensions between the people and the government. Therefore, it is for the government to respect the popular will by passing laws in conformity with Islamic principles, for we will use all of our strength to defend our religion and causes.<sup>26</sup>

Hakim's political stance at the time was aimed at preserving the Islamic face of Iraq. For some time, the state also acted accordingly; for example, it abolished the Personal Status Law. However, again the clash between Shiite clerical leadership and the government broke out, when President Arif labeled the Shiites as Communists,

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<sup>24</sup> Al-Alawi 2011: 244. During this period, a series of essays by Mohammad Baqer Sadr was published in *Al-Hurriya*, the journal run by Iraqi Nationalists and Baathists. This is indicative of the existence of an unwritten alliance between Shiite religious forces and Arab Nationalist activists against the rule of Qasim in Iraq.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid: 255. On 18 November 1963, Arif broke his alliance with the Baathists and formed a new government, supported mostly by Nasserist army officers. On the same day, he issued a proclamation and called the Shiites of Iraq *Shuyuis* — Communists — who should step down from any key positions they held in Iraq.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Tabarayan 2010, Vol. I: 490.

*Shuyu'i* and further restrained the financial sources of the Shiite clergy by nationalising the business and trading sectors in Iraq (Wiley 1992: 40).

Simultaneously, to protect the Shiite community, some family members and students of Hakim were working on advancing their sociopolitical cause in a more covert manner.

With the death of Abdul Salam Arif and succession of his brother Abdul Rahman, once again the political opportunity structure became favorable for the Shiite clergy in Iraq and Hakim, who had held the most significant Shiite leadership position in the world since the death of Broujerdi in Iran. In his message after the death of Abdul Salam, Hakim proposed the formation of 'a governing council', *Majlis al-Siyadah*. In response to his initiatives, Iraq would be governed under the authority of a non-sectarian council comprised of three distinct members: a Sunni Arab, a Shiite Arab, and a Kurd (Tabarayian 2010, Vol. I: 513). Although, his plan did not gain a hold in Iraq at the time, during the next two years, the clerical leadership of Najaf was provided with the most permissive context for political activism towards consolidating Hakim's political posture at least among the Shiite community. Therefore, the era is known as the golden age of Shiite political activism in Iraq since its independence (Sluglett and Sluglett 2001: 220).

In July 1968, the Baathists seized power in Iraq for the second time, this time to remain in power for a longer period. The first two years of the Baath government ran concurrently with the last years of Grand Ayatollah Hakim's leadership of the Najaf seminary. The new regime implemented an exclusivist mode of government in Iraq, which did not tolerate even the smallest contention. At the time, the Shiite religio-political movements were among the foremost internal threats to the authority of the new regime. Therefore, confrontation with the state-Shiite clergy broke out in the very earliest days.<sup>27</sup>

After months of tension between the regime and the Najaf seminary over the blatant actions against Shiite clerical authority in Iraq, the Baathists issued a warrant against the son of the Grand Ayatollah, Seyyed Mahdi Hakim, and charged him with

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<sup>27</sup> With the rise of the Baath in 1968, the office of the Presidency was abolished and the Revolutionary Command Council became the ultimate decision-maker in Iraq. Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, an Iraqi army officer from the city of Tikrit, became the first chairman of the Council. Through exclusivist rule of the Baathists in Iraq, the inhabitants of Tikrit and its neighbouring towns and cities, irrespective of their religious identities and propensities, were awarded the highest political and army positions. For the exclusivist policies of the Baath in recruiting from among specific regions in Iraq, see Al-Alawi 2011: 275-89.

treason over his alleged covert relationship with Israel, the Kurdish opposition and Iran (Tripp 2002: 195).<sup>28</sup> Within days, the close circle of the Grand Ayatollah left the country fearing further prosecutions by the repressions of the regime against the Shiite activist. For the Grand Ayatollah, however, he chose to migrate to the neighbouring city of Kufa, where he remained politically quiet for the rest of his life.

The political trajectory of Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim in Iraq exemplifies a unique case in the activism of the Shiite clergy in the modern history of the Middle East. His activities with regard to the political structure of Iraq, from time to time and in various circumstances, explain how perception of clerics influences and also is influenced by the change in political opportunity structure; and ultimately may lead to the rise and/or demise of political activism amongst the Shiite clergy. With the abolition of the monarchy in 1958, the new phase of the Grand Ayatollah's political activism had been initiated and throughout the following decade it had ebbed and flowed. As the repressions of the Baathist state provided close political opportunity, the Grand Ayatollah presented the most politically quiet phase of his life.

When Hakim passed away in June 1970, the Baath Party further restricted the Shiite clergy by eliminating those clerics who had been politically active. Therefore, to protect the Shiite community in Iraq and the very foundation of the Najaf seminary, the clergy, most notably Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim Khoei, chose to become politically quiet. Some younger clerics, though, had different perceptions about the political opportunity structure and held more active posture. Among this younger group was Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Sadr, an ardent student of Hakim and Khoei, who paid a high personal price for his activism at the time.

### ***The Perception of Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Sadr: Shiite Activism and its Mission in Iraq***

Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Sadr was born in 1935 in Kazimayn to one of the most prestigious Shiite families. He is perhaps among the most predominant activist clerics of the contemporary era; a figure who exhibits Shiite transnationalism by himself. His unique *ijtihad* about the role of Shiite clerical elites in politics was seen over writing

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<sup>28</sup> Michel Aflaq planned a conspiracy against Mohsen Hakim and instructed Baathist rulers to impose a series of restrictions on Shiite seminaries in Iraq. For full details of his confession, see confessions of Hardan al-Tikriti, the ex-Baathist Vice President of Iraq quoted in Tabarayan 2010, Vol. II: 62-4.

the constitution of the first Shiite state of the World, the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>29</sup> He was the most distinguished active cleric in modern Iraq, who founded the Islamic Dawa Party, and also he built a great connection with Shiite movements in Lebanon, and supported his cousin, Imam Musa Sadr, in his activities there.<sup>30</sup> In other words, he can be named as the central individual to be directly involved in contemporary Shiite revival in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, what singles him out as one of the most reformist and brilliant clerics in modern history within the Shiite world, is his distinctive *ijtihad* towards political roles, his belief that a religious elite should face up to modern developments. His political trajectory, from 1958 to 1980, encompasses four distinct phases: from 1958 to 1960, as a young Shiite cleric, he was affiliated to the Ulama Association and wrote editorials for the *al-Adwa* journal; at the same time, he, along with other reformist colleagues, founded the Islamic Dawa Party, in response to the perceived open political structure provided by the rise of the Qasim administration; the third phase commenced in 1964 when he cut direct relations with the Dawa over the recommendation of the Grand Ayatollah Hakim to work on his *Marja'iyya*; and finally, the last phase of his life, began at the same time as the rise of Shiite revolutionaries in Iran in 1978, when he decided to stand against the repressions of the Baath regime supporting the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

‘Our Mission’ (*Resalatuna*) is the title of the book compiled from weekly editorials he wrote for the Ulama Association, *al-Adwa*, as early as June 1960.<sup>31</sup> In the foreword of this treatise, he identified preconditions for mobilising the laity, Shiite and Sunnite, as follows:

Every community to be mobilised needs an enriched school [of thought] at its disposal. Nonetheless, to revolutionise the community, it needs, not only a doctrinal school, but to understand it thoroughly and also to have a robust faith in it ... [W] ere these three conditions to emerge in one

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<sup>29</sup> His proposed amendment to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been published along with four other articles in a book entitled, *al-Islam Yaqud al-Hayat* (Islam Guides Life). See Sadr 1980.

<sup>30</sup> Mohammad Baqer Sadr is the first cousin and brother-in-law of Imam Musa Sadr, the religious leader associated with Lebanon’s Shiite revivalism.

<sup>31</sup> Husseini Haeri 1996: 82-3. The first five editorials of *al-Dawa*, the journal of the Ulama Association published since June 1960, were written by Sadr and signed as ‘the Ulama Association of Najaf’. Under pressure from hostile elements in the city, who accused Sadr of imposing his political posture on other Shiite elites in the seminary, he stopped publishing editorials in the journal.

community, that community becomes capable of achieving a true revival and can initiate a transformation based on the nature of its doctrine.<sup>32</sup>

In his opinion, Islam provided succinct politics; however, the Muslim community had neither understood its foundations nor had it believed in its capabilities to elevate its socio-political status. Sadr believed that the mission of the clerical elites, in any given circumstances was to work on the two latter conditions in order to mobilise the community to revitalize opposition to their miserable situation. Thus, his activities over the next two decades, as a renowned member of the Shiite clergy of Iraq, were devoted to building such a structure.

With the establishment of the Republic in Iraq, Communist and Arab-Nationalist parties got an opportunity to promote their ideologies. Responding to their threat, Sadr concentrated on showing the Muslim laity that, not only could these political movements not provide them with a concrete ideology but also that Islam and its principles were what they should be seeking the salvation through. His two main treatises, 'Our Philosophy', *Falsafatuna*, and 'Our Economy', *Iqtisaduna*, were written from 1959-1961 aiming to show that Islam had a more precise response for the community than any other ideologies which had (Mallat 1988). He declared his position clearly when he stated,

Since the establishment of the dominion of the imperialist powers over the Islamic world, Islam has lost its function as the basis of the social order, and essentially alien principles, such as capitalist democracy and Marxist socialism, have taken its place. In addition to having begun to determine the outward development of Muslim society, these ideologies have had an adverse effect on the development of Muslim thought, in the sense that many Muslims have lost the ability to conceive of Islam as the all-embracing spiritual foundation of their lives. In this situation, mere reform or correction is not sufficient, and the various un-Islamic social orders and their ideological principles must be replaced by the principles of Islam, and the achievement of this goal is a revolutionary task (Quoted in Sluglett and Sluglett 2001: 196).

For him to consolidate his position, a medium was needed, and the Ulama Association, which had been founded by traditional Shiite clerics, was clearly not capable enough at the time. Consequently, with the aid of a group of young and reformist clerics, Sadr established a more politically constructed party, the Islamic

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<sup>32</sup> *Jamaat al-Ulama fi Najaf al-Ashraf*, 'Resalatuna,' *al-Adwa*, I (9 June 1960): 1.

Dawa, *Hizb al-Dawa al-Islamiyya*, around 1958 in Najaf.<sup>33</sup> The goal of Dawa's founders at the time was to organise, to mobilise and to lead the laity, in order to establish a government based on Islamic values (Aziz 1993). Making the most of the in hand opportunity structure, they sought to fill the gap between Shiite clerical elites, their political postures and the community that had been largely absorbed by other rival camps in the Iraq of the early 1960s.

The establishment of Dawa and its subsequent activities had the support of Hakim, then the highest ranking Marja', and it soon got a grip on the Shiite youth in Iraq (Wiley 1992: 32). The popularity of the party triggered opposition to its spiritual leader, Mohammad Baqer Sadr, as well.<sup>34</sup> With opposition stirred up against the Party, to ensure the conformity of the seminary and the religious dignity of Sadr, Grand Ayatollah Hakim advised him to resign from the Party while continuing to support it indirectly (Husseini Hairi 1996: 94).<sup>35</sup> Since then, the third phase of Sadr's religio-political trajectory commenced during which he concentrated on teaching in the seminary, developing his political thoughts, and becoming the ideologue of Shiite activism albeit this time in a discreet manner.

Sadr had confined himself in the seminary, taught jurisprudence and developed his circle of followers and students until 1970. With the death of Hakim, Sadr supported the Marja'yya of his other teacher, Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim Khoei. Nonetheless, he sought transformational *ijtihad* in defining the position, in conformity with the contingencies of the modern context. At just about the same period, a group of his colleagues in Qom were asking for similar shifts vis-à-vis the position.<sup>36</sup> They were asking, based on Sadr's *ijtihad*, if a Shiite Marja' would like to

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<sup>33</sup> Some believe that the Dawa Party was founded years earlier than the Ulama Association in 1957 by a group of young Shiite students of the Najaf seminary. The Party's main founders were Mohammad Baqer Sadr, Seyyed Mahdi Hakim, and Seyyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah. For a review of the Party's role in the politics of Iraq, see Dai 2008.

<sup>34</sup>Wiley 1992: 39. Apart from the government of Qasim and his early communist tendencies, which had basically been the target of al-Dawa's social activities, Arab Nationalists were also targets of the Party's opposition activities.

<sup>35</sup> Years later, during the rule of the Baath in Iraq, Sadr issued a fatwa forbidding students and affiliates of the Najaf seminary to join political parties (Aziz 1993). His close disciples would argue that this action can be seen as an instance of *taqqiya*, meant to protect the seminary from pressures from the regime and that, to the last day of his life, he supported the activities of religious political parties. For a first account narrative see Husseini Haeri 2008: 142.

<sup>36</sup> The activities of some reformist Shiite clerical elites of Qom in introducing a new definition of the Marja'iyya position after the death of Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi has been discussed in Chapter 4.

lead the community in the modern world; this supreme position would have to be reformulated from its individual subjective form to become a more comprehensive and objective, structured aim, *Maudhuwya* (Aziz 1993).

In other words, Sadr's *ijtihad*, influenced by his perception of the political opportunity structure and the contingencies of the modern world, demands a horizontal reshape of the Marja'iyya position. He believed that it is impossible for one cleric to fulfill all the requirements of the position, be it in terms of religious, social or political leadership of the community. Therefore, he declared his own Marja'iyya in 1972, to complement the responsibilities of other Marja' towards presenting what he mentions as the 'proper' and the 'righteous' Marja'iyya, *Saliha wa Rashida*.<sup>37</sup> There was another reason for Sadr to give up the party. At the time, he reached the conclusion that for his political *ijtihad* to prevail he should pursue the path of becoming a Shiite Marja'. Becoming a Marja', the highest possible religious position in the community, would have provided Sadr with an opportunity, at a bureaucratic level, to make his stance widespread amongst Shiites globally, and would also secure him from state prosecution.

In February 1977, during a ritual walk of Iraqi Shiites from Najaf to Karbala in commemoration of the *Arbaeen* of Imam Hussein, a clash broke out with government forces. Groups of pilgrims turned into angry demonstrators and an uprising formed against the regime (Tripp 2002: 208). Although *the Shiite Intifada* of 1977 initially surprised the state, by sending armed forces to Najaf and Karbala, Baathists ousted the demonstrators, killed many and sentenced thousands. In the aftermath of the uprising, Mohammad Baqer Sadr was called to Baghdad for a further inquiry. In the eyes of the regime's security apparatus, it was Sadr and his entourage who mobilised the masses against the government. Therefore, from this time on, the Baathists sought an opportunity to restrain him and any other religious opposition forces who might trigger a threat to the government of Baghdad.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> In terms of this, there is evidence that proves Khomeini's personal support. In general, Sadr was among the most notable of his students, and there always remained a great teacher-student relationship between the two. In an interview with Khomeini's son, Abd al-Saheb Khomeini, he mentioned that the Grand Ayatollah had stated that, 'had Sadr been alive; he would have been the best alternative for leadership of the seminary after my death' (interview with the author, Tehran, July 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Nu'mani 1996:212. Mohammad Baqer Hakim (d.2003), the student close to Sadr and founder of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, was arrested after the February Incident and sentenced to life in prison; yet he later escaped and went to Iran. Sadr



From February 1977 onwards, the state repression against Mohammad Baqer Sadr's activities was agitated. The Islamic Revolution in Iran heralded more direct confrontation between Sadr and the Baathists in Iraq. For him, the triumph of Shiite revolutionaries in Iran under the leadership of Imam Khomeini was the realisation of a dream. As he confirmed just days after the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran:

The only thing I have sought in my life is to make the establishment of an Islamic government on earth possible. Since it has been formed in Iran under the leadership of Imam [Khomeini] it makes no difference to me whether I am alive or dead because the dream I wanted to attain and the hope I wanted to achieve have come true, thanks to God (Quoted in Aziz 1993).

Therefore, while he congratulated the Shiites of Iran<sup>39</sup> on their victory against the secular rule of the Shah, he recommended that the Iraqis support their coreligionists and pursue the same mission in their own country.<sup>40</sup>

In a treatise he sent to Iran after the revolution, to be considered in the drafting of the Islamic Constitution,<sup>41</sup> he accentuated the sociopolitical role of Shiite clerics and declared:

The Muslim and triumphant people of Iran have succeeded in deposing the evil regimes forever... It is because they have been adhered themselves to the Shiite Marja'iyya earlier than any other nation ... The establishment of an Islamic Republic has not only revived the Iranians

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himself stated that, while he was in custody in Baghdad, Izzat al-Douri, then the Minister of State, threatened him with revenge for the role he had played in the uprising.

<sup>39</sup> In an open letter to Iranian revolutionaries in December 1978, months before their victory, Sadr had advised them to support Imam Khomeini and to obey his orders and promised them that their 'triumph is nigh'. This letter was accompanied by numbers of others that were issued by him confirming the incidents in Iran after the establishment of the Islamic government. For a text of the letter, see Ameli 2006, Vol. IV: 8-10.

<sup>40</sup> While Sadr was under house arrest in Najaf (in July 1979) he issued an open letter, addressed to Iraqis, stating that: 'It is incumbent on every Muslim in Iraq and every Iraqi outside Iraq to do whatever he can, even if it cost him his life, to keep the jihad and struggle to remove this nightmare from the land of beloved Iraq, to liberate themselves from this inhuman gang, and to establish a righteous, unique, and honourable rule based on Islam'. For the detail of his open letter to Iraqis see Ameli 2006, Vol. IV: 201.

<sup>41</sup> Sadr also contributed in drafting the Islamic Republic's constitution by sending copies of his jurisprudential verdicts on the role of Shiite clerical elites in modern politics to Iran after the victory of the revolution. For a full text of his treatise, see Sadr 1979: Chapter I.

but also, in this dark era, has shed a saving light on the Islamic community throughout the world.<sup>42</sup>

His unreserved support for the Iranian Revolution's leadership, along with his bold approach to the establishment of the Islamic state, provided Sadr with a new nickname, 'Iraq's Khomeini' (Mallat 1993: 51). To prevent the imitation of circumstances in Iran, the Baathist regime in Iraq found a way of prosecuting him. In order to fulfill a long-due promise, the Ayatollah was sent to Baghdad on 5 April 1980, only days after the Islamic referendum in Iran. Four days later, Mohammad Baqer Sadr's dead body, was presented to his family in Najaf, to be buried during the night (Al-Nu'mani 1996: 327).

The short, 46-year life of Mohamad Baqer Sadr, in the midst of a formative period, his noble political posture and his unique *ijtihad* was quite fruitful for Shiite political activism in the Middle East. Over his life, with the aid of his colleagues and students, he succeeded in presenting a sample conceptual framework for Shiites in Iraq, Iran and Lebanon. Although he has not lived enough to witness the ascendance of Iraqi Shiite communities, it became the duty of his followers,<sup>43</sup> to institutionalise his political *ijtihad* in the future Iraq. The Shiites of Iraq and their clerical leadership, however, had to deal with the arbitrary rule of Saddam for the following decades.

### **III. Baathist Iraq and the Najaf Seminary: The Grand Ayatollah Khomeini's Political Posture Facing Closed Opportunity Structure**

During the thirty-five years of Baath rule in Iraq, the Shiite religious and political movements faced the utmost repression as a result of state policies. During the two earliest years of Baathist rule in Iraq, Mohsen Hakim was forced to give up his social activities and to quietly take refuge in his house in Kufa. After the death of Hakim in 1970, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, who accurately perceived the political opportunity structure to be closed, the restrictive context, remained politically quiet aiming to

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<sup>42</sup> For the full text of his note see Sadr 1979: 14-19.

<sup>43</sup> In his message on the death of Sadr, Imam Khomeini showed that he had cherished Sadr's activities: 'it is not a matter of wonder that the late Ayatollah is martyred. The wonder is here that the Islamic nations, particularly the noble nation of Iraq and more particularly the tribes of Tigris and Euphrates and the Iraqi youth and university students, have remained indifferent at this agony and havoc that has hit Islam... It is, indeed strange that they give the cursed Baath party of Iraq the opportunity to kill the pivots of our pride one after the other... I hope [the Iraqi nation] will eradicate this element of shame from Iraq. I pray God to wipe out this tyranny from Iraq' (*Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol. XII: 253-4).

protect the Najaf seminary and the very foundations of the Shiite establishment in Iraq from the threat of Baathist repressions. Those who, contrary to Khoei's perception, became engaged in politics, like Mohammad Baqer Sadr, were brutally annihilated by the regime.

Baath arbitrary rule reached its peak after Saddam Hussein ascended to power. Shiites were among those religio-ethnic groups who suffered the most due to the policies of the regime,<sup>44</sup> especially considering the outbreak of the war with Shiite Iran. Over the eight years of warfare, Shiite clerical elites in Iraq remained politically quiet; they neither supported the Iraqi army, nor positioned themselves against the Islamic government of Iran. Taking the objective political opportunity structure of Iraq at the time into account, this stance was the optimum alternative to protecting the community. Covertly retaining their association with their fellow Iranians was the best they could do to show their dismay, though implicitly, with Iraq's policies during one of the longest wars in the modern world.

Nevertheless, an opportunity to reiterate their political activism once again was provided to them in the aftermath of the Gulf war in March 1991. The Shiites of Iraq reached the point of establishing a short-lived local government in southern Iraq, supported by the Shiite clerical elite of Najaf (Tabarayan 2012). Yet, due to the closed political opportunity structure, especially at international and regional levels, and due to some internal inconsistencies, the uprising failed and Saddam's regime swiftly cracked down on it. The incident, however, indicated that the Shiite clerical elites had never been apolitical, and their tactical quiescence during Saddam's rule was due to the restrictive context, which had crippled any sense of activism. Just months after the failed uprising, Khoei passed away and his student, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani became the leader of the seminary. The political opportunity structure, however, had become more closed in post-Gulf War Iraq. Entangled by international sanctions, Iraqis and the Shiite religious leadership were counting the days down until they perceived an opportunity. In such a dark era, Sistani had remained under house arrest, and the routine activities of the seminary reached their lowest point since its establishment in the eleventh century. In post-March 2003, with Saddam out of Iraq's

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<sup>44</sup> A historical irony is that Baath ideology had been brought from its cradle, Syria, to Iraq in 1951 by a group of Shia, headed by Fuad Rikabi. However, by the time the Baathists had consolidated their power and seized the government in 1968, its key members had been dramatically transformed. For a historical review of Shiites and Baathism in Iraq, see Sluglett and Sluglett 1991.

political picture, with the dramatic change in the political opportunity structure, the Shiite community and its religious leadership succeeded in reaching power and becoming active once again after decades (Nakash 2006). Making the most of the favourable opportunity structure provided to them, Shiite clerical elites and their laity followers strived to elevate their sociopolitical status in Iraq, taking their demographic share into account.

About the same time as the Baath Party came to power in Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim Khoei became the leader of the Najaf seminary in 1970. Born in the Iranian city of Khoi in 1899, he moved to Najaf in his early youth and remained there for the rest of his life. Over seventy years of teaching at the Najaf seminary, he succeeded in fostering thousands of pious students and became known as ‘the most revered Shiite Jurist of the Occultation era’.<sup>45</sup> While in the West, he was known as the most apolitical cleric of modern times (Otterman 2004, Patel 2006), his political posture during the 1963 Uprising in Iran, the Iran-Iraq war, and the 1991 Uprising in Iraq should be reassessed to get a more accurate picture of how he perceived modern politics. During the 1963 Iranian uprising, Khoei was perhaps the most active Shiite cleric supporting his fellow Iranians from Najaf and condemning the regime of Pahlavi, in some cases being even harsher than Khomeini himself.<sup>46</sup> In his message, sent to his colleagues in Iran, he clearly advised them to lead the people through the course of ‘Jihad’ against the oppressors, when he stated:

It is an honor for me to sacrifice my negligible blood to the path of God in order to protect the religion and Quran and to abolish the despots. Because living under the oppressors and enemies of Islam is tantamount to death and even worse... Today, in this holy Jihad, there is a great burden on the shoulders of Iranians and the religious leaders of this movement, and it is hoped that they will be able to bear this responsibility in full... The victory for the Iranians is possible only if they follow their distinguished religious leaders and become united under their flag.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Mohammad Sadeq Rouhani, interview with the author, Qom, Autumn 2013.

<sup>46</sup> In 1963, Khoei published a pamphlet containing a series of questions and answers about the circumstances in Iran and condemned the arbitrary rule of Mohammadreza Pahlavi in the harshest possible tones. For a full text with his opinions about the government of Iran, see *Tasrihat al-Kahtireh lil Imam al-Khoei* available at:

<http://www.alkhoei.net/arabic/pages/book.php?bcc=17&itg=61&bi=132&s=ct> [Accessed on 5 May 2014].

<sup>47</sup> For the full text of the letter see Asnad Enghelab Islami, Vol. III: 143.

He was also one of the most active supporters of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini during his exile in Najaf, forging a close relationship that lasted until the date the leader of the Islamic revolution went back to Iran.<sup>48</sup> Yet all these activist posture seemingly came to an end when he encountered the unfavourable opportunity structure of Iraq under the rule of the Baath Party.

When he became the leader of the seminary in 1970, the Grand Ayatollah mainly devoted his life to protecting the scholastic nature of the centre and to probing the affairs of religious students. He correctly perceived the political opportunity structure to be closed for political contention. He, personally, had seen the disloyalty of the Shiite laymen to his predecessor, Hakim, and was well aware of the Baathist's anti-clergy policies. Therefore, his perception over the political opportunity structure, made the Grand Ayatollah hold a quietist posture at the time.<sup>49</sup> To this end, what made Khomeini lead the revolution in Iran and what pushed Khomeini to remain politically quiet in Iraq under the Baath regime was more the result of the different structures of political opportunity in the two countries, than of advocating two different versions of Shiite Islam. The life of the Grand Ayatollah, especially while he held the Marja'iyya position at Najaf, is thus known to have been led during one of the most politically quiet eras in the history of the Shiite community. After all, he was responsible for preserving the very foundation of Shiite Islam in Iraq while the country was going through the most critical incidents, among which the war with Iran was a case in point.

### ***The Iran-Iraq War and levels of Political Opportunity Structure: Shiism, Arabism, and Iraqism***

One of the longest wars in modern history broke out between Saddam's Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran in September 1980.<sup>50</sup> The war resulted in the engagement of

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<sup>48</sup> Eslami 1994. Khomeini was one of the first members of the Shiite clergy in Najaf to meet with Khomeini; he greeted him in 1964. In the winter of 1977, it was Khomeini who prayed over the body of Seyyed Mostafa, the deceased son of Khomeini in Najaf. He also issued a proclamation and supported the constitution of the Islamic Revolution and asked people to vote for it.

<sup>49</sup> Contrary to some of his fellow Maraji', such as Khomeini, Khomeini believed that 'the qualified Shiite jurist has the right to issue a fatwa for aggressive Jihad during the occultation era'. Thus, the circle of clerical authorities that adhered to Khomeini's ijtihad could go far beyond that of Khomeini's, who limits the Guardianship of the jurist to only the 'defensive Jihad'. For the characteristics of his ijtihad, see the interview with Ahmad Madadi, *Mehrnameh Monthly*, Tehran, Iran, No.12, May 2011.

<sup>50</sup> For a detailed analysis of this conflict, its background, course of events and outcomes, see Chubin and Tripp 1988, Rajaei 1997 and Karsh 2002.

almost half of the entire Shiite population of the world and proved to be a devastating era. It had no winner, but provided much misery for the Shiite communities in the two countries (Potter and Sick 2004: 8). On the Iranian side, almost all Shiite clerical elites supported a defensive Jihad against the Iraqi invasion. At the other side, none of the leading Shiite clerics in Iraq condemned their Iranian coreligionists during the course of the war. After all, they could not blatantly condemn a state that was run by a fellow Shiite cleric, which would be seen as a threat to the clerical authority in the eyes of the laity and outsiders. Nevertheless, groups of Iraqi Shiites fought for their country for various reasons (Nakash 2003). The course of the conflict is characterised strategically into two distinctive periods: from September 1980 until the Spring of 1982 during which Iraq had the upper hand on the ground and managed to occupy vast territories from Iran; and from the liberation of Khorramshahr in May 1982 until the cease-fire on 20 July 1988, when the Iraqi army was mostly holding a defensive position. Accordingly, the exceptional war propaganda machines of the belligerents divided into two ideological stances. While, during the former period, the Iraqi government anchored its strategy on promoting Arabism to attract Arab citizens from Southwestern Iran, during the second phase, Tehran sought to grasp the support of Shiite communities in Southern Iraq. Consequently, the course of the conflict became exceptional in recent history of the Middle East, for the encounter between these two ideologies in which neither side was able to overcome the other during the eight years of hostilities (Bakhash 2004: 22).

In April 1980, Saddam Hussein gave a speech in the city of Ninevah and accused the leaders of the Islamic Republic of repressing Iranians and threatening neighbouring Arab countries. He continued by saying that Iranian leaders should acknowledge Arab citizens' right of autonomy and should know that 'those who are in Arabistan [Khuzestan] are Arab, and the blood in their veins is Arab'. He then addressed the Arab citizens of Iran, emphasising the Baathist ideology, and stated,

[t]he Arab homeland must have one territory, and the Arab people must be one nation. It must follow the principles that unite the Arabs and not the path that divides them into shares among covetous states (Quoted in Ahmadi 2008: 124).

For the following two years, this exclusivist reading of Arabism and Iraqi nationalism formed the backbone of Baghdad's rhetoric (Al-Khafaji 2000). To this end, the Baath

regime of Iraq initiated an Arab-Persian war of words with their counterparts in Iran hoping to attract the support of the Arab rulers of the region.<sup>51</sup>

In September 1980, appearing on national television, Saddam declared an all-out invasion of Iranian territories. In this, he had believed that with the fall of the Islamic Republic not only would there be a demise in the threat of 'export of revolution' to the Iraqi Shiite community but also that he would become the one and only respected Arab leader in the world (Karsh 1990). At the same time, the Shiite leadership in Iran managed to utilise a spiritual and national rhetoric to mobilise Iranians to defend the country's territorial integrity against the invasion. The initial position of Khomeini facing the invasion was a continuation of the stance he had prior to the Islamic Revolution. In his first speech after the start of the conflict he addressed Iranians and Iraqis, as follows:

Throughout the period that we were involved in the movement in Iran, we always had almost nothing by way of forces and weapons of war in comparison to the now-defunct Shah's army... In a war, power does not lie in numbers. What is important is one's power of thought; that same power which, by relying on God in the early days of Islam, enabled a small force to overpower large armies and throw them into disarray... For whom do the other armies, etc. fight? The Iraqi army fights for Saddam Hussein. Which sane person will give his life for Saddam? Our soldiers have a good reason: they say that they will go to God if they get killed. Such morale is the most important factor. This kind of spirit stems from a devout belief that a person getting killed is actually a victory in that he will go to rest in God's protection.

He continued with a harsh criticism of the Baath government and stated:

This man [Saddam] resorts to various lies. He claims to be an Arab. Not so, he is an American [stooge]. He and his regime are not Arabs as Arabs are Muslim. They now claim to follow Islam. The people of Iraq should take note of the fact that this war is one between Islam and heresy. It is incumbent on all Muslims to defend Islam. Granting the impossibility of this man prevailing over Iran and destroying the Islamic Republic, the repercussions of this world will be felt in all the Muslim countries.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For a review of Baath propaganda through the course of the war with Iraq and the emergence of Saddam's 'Aggressive Arabism' and 'New Iraqism' see Al-Khafaji 2000.

<sup>52</sup> For the full account of his speech see *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol. XIII: 253-4.

Khomeini's political *ijtihad* at the time was focused on intensifying Islamic beliefs of the citizens of both countries against the secular regime of Iraq. Although no other Arab countries, except Libya and Syria, supported Iran throughout the conflict, the religious stance of Khomeini was a weighty resource, an equivalent to which Saddam lacked throughout the war. To this end, none of the Shiite elites residing in Iraq supported the Baath cause and, although they were under harsh repression within the state, they even covertly supported the Iranians by allowing the expenditure of the religious taxes in of the interests of Iranian soldiers.<sup>53</sup>

Khomeini's discourse of Jihad and Martyrdom during the war was also received warmly by groups of Iraqis. Among them were the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq and the Islamic Action Organisation; both had been founded and led by exiled Iraqi Shiite clerics.<sup>54</sup>

During the course of the eight years of war between Iran and Iraq, both Saddam's Arabism and Khomeini's Shiism had taken hold, though partially. The result of the devastating war, however, proved that none had triumphed over the other in the end. Neither had Saddam succeeded in conquering the hearts of the Arab-Iranians in his favour, nor had the Islamic Republic caused an all-out Shiite uprising against the Baath regime. Nevertheless, the political postures of the Shiite clergy in Iran and Iraq were relatively aligned during the warfare. While the religious elites in Iran were actively engaged in the war, their Iraqi colleagues supported the Shiite cause covertly, due to the closed political opportunity structure of Iraq. Some years later when, for a short time, they perceived a shift in political opportunity, the clerics in Iraq played a crucial role during the 1991 uprising.

### ***The 1991 Uprising: a Permissive, but Missed, Opportunity for Shiite Activism***

Frustrated about trying to achieve his preset goals in the war with Iran, Saddam Hussein engaged in another devastating conflict with Kuwait. In August 1990, Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait and, after two days, Saddam declared Kuwait to be the 19<sup>th</sup> province of the Republic of Iraq and assigned Iraqi de facto governors for the

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<sup>53</sup> Although not a single written verdict from the Grand Ayatollah has been found in support of the Iranian army during the war, perhaps for security reasons, it is said that the Khomeini had allowed his representatives, *wukala*, to spend his followers' religious taxes on Iranians. See Eslami 1994.

<sup>54</sup> For the activities of SCII, mainly conducted by the entourage of Mohammad Baqer Sadr and the Hakim family, see International Crisis Group Report 2007, *Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council*.



‘Provisional Government of Free Kuwait’(Hiro 2003).<sup>55</sup>After months, when international arbitrations had failed, the First Gulf War between Iraq and US-led coalition forces broke out in early 1991;<sup>56</sup> a war that eventually led to the defeat of Iraq. What was imposed on Iraqis in the aftermath of the conflict, taking the future international sanctions into consideration, was even more caustic than the regime they had endured during the war with Iran. However, the ever-weakening nature of Saddam’s apparatus after the war provided a seemingly open political opportunity structure to the Shiites of the south and Kurds in northern provinces of Iraq to rise against the government of Baghdad. The 1991 Iraqi uprising, though it was initially, absolutely popular, without a meaningful elite leadership, was a case with utmost significance in the contemporary history of Iraq, especially in study of clerical activism. Though Iraqi Republican Guards cracked down the popular uprising harshly, the religious elite of Najaf, led by Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, succeeded in establishing a short-lived Islamic government. The unfolding incidents, and the role that the Shiite clergy played during the 1991 uprising, questions the very foundations of the argument that asserts that the Najaf seminary was a politically quiet centre.

Triggered by the speech given by President Bush in mid-February 1991, resentful Iraqis perceived an opportunity to mobilise their resources wishing to topple Saddam.<sup>57</sup> Subsequently, in early March 1991, an Iraqi tank officer showed his hatred of the government’s policies by firing a shell through a portrait of Saddam in Basra. Soon the Shiites of Basra, Nasiriya and Karbala spilled out onto the streets, stormed the state buildings and marched in popular uprising. A week later, the Kurds of the northern provinces joined the uprising and, within days, popular forces took the control of 14 out of Iraq’s 18 provinces.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The main reason for Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait was the dispute over the repayment of loans Iraq had received from Persian Gulf countries during the war with Iran. For an analysis of the Gulf War see Mearsheimer and Walt 2003.

<sup>56</sup> For the Iraq-US relationship during the war with Iran and at the beginning of the Iraq-Kuwait conflict, see Pollack 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Addressing the Iraqi army and people, President Bush stated: ‘*Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside, and then comply with the United Nations resolutions and rejoin the family of peace-loving nations. We have no argument with the people of Iraq. Our differences are with that brutal dictator in Baghdad*’. The full account of President George H.W. Bush’s statement is available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PPP-1991-book1/html/PPP-1991-book1-doc-pg148.htm> [Accessed 01 August 2014].

<sup>58</sup> Tabarayan 2012: 230. During the 1991 uprising, the government maintained its authority in just four provinces, those of Baghdad, Saladin, Anbar and Nineveh.

On 4 March the movement succeeded in getting control of Najaf. This prompted the religious elites and tribal chiefs of the city to gather in the house of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini to discuss the ongoing events. Consequently, for the first time since he was appointed leader of the seminary, Khomeini perceived an open opportunity to engage in politics. The first step for the clergy was to control the popular movement. Thus, the Grand Ayatollah issued a letter, dated 5 March 1991, addressed to his 'dear faithful children', and advised them to respect 'Islamic values', to 'bury corpses' and to 'distribute food' fairly among the poor. However, a second letter issued by Khomeini two days later bore a more authoritative tone. In it, he appointed an executive committee<sup>59</sup> to act as a point of reference during the 'transition period'. His letter read, as follows:

These days, as the country is witnessing critical circumstances; thus the order should be preserved, security restored, the situation should be normalized, and an appropriate management of popular interest should be achieved ... Consequently, the public interest urges us to assign a committee responsible for monitoring affairs in a way that its decisions would be tantamount to my wish... Therefore, I appoint number of renowned scholars whose providence and efficiency are trusted by me... It is incumbent to my faithful children to obey and to pay attention to their orders and to support them in fulfilling their role.

The main difference between the two letters rests in their distinctive addressees: while the first letter relates to the affairs of the city of Najaf, the second letter addresses a broader, national spectrum (Tabarayan 2012: 281). The role he and his close companions played during the turmoil placed the Shiite Marja'iyah of Iraq solidly at the forefront of the popular uprising against the regime of Saddam.<sup>60</sup>

The events, however, soon turned against the revolutionaries, especially when the International support they had sought, never came to their help. In mid-March, feeling betrayed by the Bush administration and acknowledging their misperceptions over the political opportunity, the revolutionaries were subject to harsh attacks from the state air force and artillery shelling. The loyal Baath forces cracked popular

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<sup>59</sup> The Committee had nine members, among them Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Khomeini, son of the Grand Ayatollah, and Seyyed Mohammad Sabzevari, the son of Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Abd al-'Ala Sabzevari, another politically active Marja' of Iraq during the uprising. For a comprehensive list of the Executive Committee members and brief biographies of them, see Tabarayan 2012: 279-83.

<sup>60</sup> For a detailed insider account of the Shiite Marja'iyah's role over the uprising see the interview of Abdul Majid Khomeini with *al-Sharq al-Awsat daily*, 6 March 2000.

resistance with tanks bearing placards saying ‘No Shi’a [in Iraq] from this day on’, and by the last week in March, the Shiite uprising in the south had been fully swept from the streets (Marr 2012: 232).

Scholars have suggested various reasons for the failing of the popular uprising in 1991 in Iraq.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the focal point of the Shiite uprising’s collapse resides in the misperceptions of the religious leadership about the political opportunity structure. To this end, the structure reflected the community’s situation in the midst of the Islamic Revolution in Iran; the positions of the elites and laity had been swapped. In 1979, the religious leadership of Najaf, under the initiatives of Mohammad Baqer Sadr, became engaged in politics aiming to topple the Baath, yet it could not attract popular support. During the 1991 Shiite Uprising of the south, the people filled the streets chanting against Saddam and his Baath apparatus, yet the clerical leadership, which had lost its faith in popular loyalty, was incapable of mobilising and organising the revolt in a timely manner. In both cases, the failure of political activism rests with the mismatch of structural and perceived political opportunity in Iraq.

#### **IV. The Power of Shiite Clerical Elites’ Solidarity: Grand Ayatollah Sistani and the Future of Iraq**

The defeat of the popular uprising promised an even more unfavourable opportunity structure for Iraqis, including the Shiite community and its clerical elites.

Concurrently, there were severe sanctions imposed on Saddam’s regime by the international community. The regime of Baghdad had lost its regional allies, as well, in the aftermath of the Gulf War. For the Shiite community, an even darker decade of miseries was still to come.

In less than a year since the uprising, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini passed away, in August 1992. Among his few disciples who were in Najaf at the time, the seminary leadership and Marja’iyya was received by Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, then at his early sixties. Sistani was born in the holy city of Mashhad in Iran in August 1930 to a clerical family. He migrated to Najaf in 1951 to pursue his religious study and resided there until now. While he was in Najaf, he attended the lectures of a group of Shiite Maraji’ at the seminary, including Khomeini. Nevertheless, when the Baath repression

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<sup>61</sup> One of the main factors that alarmed the US-led coalition into not supporting the popular uprising was the bold role the Iranian-backed Badr brigade forces throughout the turmoil in Iraq. For a series of other factors that led to the collapse of the 1991 Shiite uprising see Marr 2012: 229 and Jabar 2003.

against the seminary was intensified in the 1980s, Sistani was among those few Iranian clerics who managed to stay at the seminary and became one of the members of the entourage closest to Grand Ayatollah Khomeini. In the later years of Khomeini's life, the question of his successor and the destiny of the seminary after his death came to the fore. The seminary was witnessing a critical circumstance, and the regime of Baghdad had not only confined its activities through expulsion of thousands of non-Iraqi students and teachers, but had also cut most of its relations with other Shiite centres throughout the world, most notably the Qom seminary. To this end, Khomeini asked Sistani to conduct prayers on his behalf in al-Khadra Mosque in the late 1980s; this was a gesture that, to some extent, clarified his decision over the future leadership of the seminary. When Khomeini passed away, it was Sistani who led the prayer for the deceased Marja' and managed the small gathering at the funeral.

By late 1992, Grand Ayatollah Sistani announced his Marja'iyya and came to be known as the leader of the Najaf Seminary. Nevertheless, the context for the Shiite community in Iraq was as restrictive as ever. In 1993, Saddam ordered the closure of al-Khadra Mosque in Najaf, and Sistani was virtually forced into a house arrest. Concurrently the regime was looking to support another Marja', preferably a non-Persian figure. Ayatollah Mohammad Mohammad Sadeq Sadr (1943-1999) seemed a likely alternative at the time. He was cousin and a close student of Mohammad Baqer Sadr. He had also attended the lectures of Imam Khomeini during the 1970s (Cole 2003). Nevertheless, his Arab ethnic background made Sadr II<sup>62</sup> the most plausible figure, in eyes of the regime, which had started propaganda against the non-Iraqi Shiite leadership, 'the deviant' foreigner's agents, in the aftermath of the 1991 uprising (Allawi 2007: 54). Therefore, a period of benign relations formed between Sadr II and the regime of Baghdad.

At the outset, Ayatollah Sadr perceived an open political opportunity to advance his mission throughout the country. Saddam, defeated in the Gulf war and under crippling international sanctions, on the other hand, was willing to mitigate the state relations with the Shiite community. Sadr was invited to conduct Friday Prayer sermons in Kufa by the government, a medium through which he could broadcast his opinions (Haugh 2005). Appealing to middle class Iraqis, and specifically tribesmen,

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<sup>62</sup> In the recent history of Iraqi Shiites, *Mohammad Baqer Sadr* is known as the first Sadr, his cousin *Mohammad Mohammad Sadeq Sadr* is titled the second Sadr, while *Muqtada Sadr*, the current leader of the Mahdi Army in Iraq, has been named the third Sadr.

soon the Ayatollah received a considerable constituency amongst the laity in Iraq.<sup>63</sup> His perception about the political opportunity structure at the time made him hold a quasi-activist posture in comparison with the Najaf leadership. To this end, the two camps had tactical differences in interpretation of the political structure. His activism in Iraq at the time reached the point at which he formed an ‘informal Sharia court’ run by his deputies throughout the country (Allawi 2007: 58).

Nevertheless, the honeymoon between the state and the Sadr II movement had terminated by the late 1990s. With the rising popularity of Ayatollah Sadr, the administration in Baghdad perceived a threat to its authority. This led to a period of tension between the state and the Ayatollah’s followers. On his part, Sadr was unsuccessful in changing the perception of other clerical elites in Iraq about the structure. He stood alone amongst the group of clergy, those whom he called the advocates of ‘silent jurisprudent’ at the time (Cole 2003). Eventually, the activism of Ayatollah Mohammad Mohammad Sadeq Sadr cost him his life in early 1999.

With the assassination of Grand Mohammad Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr, the regime once again proved that it did not accept even a small amount of political activism on the part of the Shiite clergy in Iraq. The political activism of Sadr II was also seen to result from his misperception of the political opportunity structure. Some scholars, nevertheless, accused other Shiite figures of misperception and of not supporting the activism of Mohammad Sadiq Sadr, hence, they missed the open political opportunity structure (Allawi 2007: 60).

Whether the Grand Ayatollah was responsible for the misperception, or it was on the part of other Shiite leaders, or even both, what is clear is that the context was restrictive for Shiite activism at the time. The most important reason for such an unfavourable structure was indeed the policies of the Iraqi state. It became evident for the Shiite clergy that while Saddam is in power, the idea of political activism was nothing but wishful thinking. Therefore, from 1999, while the Shiite clerical elites in Iraq remained as quiet as ever, it was the responsibility of those Shiite actors who were in exile to strive to topple the Baath regime in Iraq. A powerful association was formed in this situation. The responsibility of the Najaf clerical leadership, especially

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<sup>63</sup> Allawi 2007: 58. Ayatollah Mohammad Sadr introduced ‘jurisprudence for the tribes’. As his perception over the political opportunity structure at societal level matters, the Ayatollah had accurately perceived that, to become actively engaged in the politics of Iraq, it was necessary for him to come up with a coherent resolution for Shiite tribes. Yet as the upcoming events unfolded, this was not the whole picture in Iraq during the 1990s.

Grand Ayatollah Sistani, was to protect the seminary and the community by remaining in Iraq. At the same time, a handful of Shiite figures in exile, among them Ayatollahs Mohammad Baqer Hakim (1939-2003) and Mohammad Bahr al-Ulloum (1927-2015), were trying to deploy all available means against the regime of Saddam.<sup>64</sup>

Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Hakim was son of the great Marja' of the Najaf seminary, Mohsen Hakim, and a close disciple of Mohammad Baqer Sadr, who cofounded the Islamic Dawa Party in 1959. With the rise of state repression against Shiite clerics in Iraq, Hakim chose to flee from Iraq and was stationed in Qom from 1979. Regionally, the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran did strengthen the activities and foundations of Iraqi Shiite organisations, which were mainly operative outside Iraq from the early 1980s. Some Shiite parties like Islamic Dawa and the Islamic Action Organisation, formed in Karbala by members of the Shirazi family and under the leadership of Mohammad Taqi Modarresi, had been established earlier in Iraq (Marr 2012: 170). In 1982, Mohammad Baqer Hakim also founded the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. The SCIRI, under his leadership, played an unsurpassed role amongst Iraqi opposition groups and enjoyed the support of the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Nakash 2003). During almost two decades in exile, Mohammad Baqer Hakim was known as the most famous of the clergy amongst Iraqi opposition groups. The Badr Brigades, the military corps of SCIRI also positioned the Ayatollah and his party among the most active powers within the group of Shiites of Iraq who have fought against the regime in Iraq since 1982 (Elhadj 2006: 178).

Another Shiite cleric who was active against Saddam in the late 1990s was Ayatollah Mohammad Bahr al-Ullom. Born into a prestigious Shiite family and a close companion of Mohammad Baqer Sadr in the Dawa Party, Bahr al-Ullom, along with some other politicians, established the Iraqi National Congress in 1992 with a mission to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein.<sup>65</sup> One of the main founding members of the Congress was Ahmad Chalabi, an Iraqi Shiite politician who was active in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in lobbying against the Baath regime. The Iraqi

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<sup>64</sup> Ibrahim Bahr al-Ulloum, interview with the author, Najaf, December 2013.

<sup>65</sup> See 'What Role for the Iraqi National Congress in Iraq,' *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 1, 2002, available at <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/role-iraqi-national-congress-iraq/p4330> [Accessed 10 June 2014].

oppositions groups succeeded in ratifying the Iraq Liberation Act in 1998 (Ehrenberg 2010: 29). The act, passed by the US congress and signed into law by President Clinton, provided a political opportunity at an international level for those opposition groups trying to get rid of Saddam in Iraq.

Eventually, with the commencement of President Bush's administration, and aligned with his doctrine of a 'War on terror' drafted in the post-9/11 era, a coalition of international forces, led by the US and Britain, invaded Iraq in March 2003. Within less than three weeks, the Baath apparatus collapsed in Iraq, Saddam fled only to be captured nine months later, and the Coalition forces created the provisional authority in April 2003 to deal with executive, legislative and judicial affairs in Iraq during the interim phase (Marr 2012: 258). To proceed with the routine politics, CPA established the Iraqi Governing Council with 24 members mainly from Iraqi opposition groups; thirteen members were Shiites and Ayatollah Mohammad Bahr al-Ulloum was nominated as the council's first president in July 2003.<sup>66</sup>

After more than eight decades, since the establishment of Iraq, the Shiite community and its leadership was provided with an open structure to become actively engaged in politics and to elevate their sociopolitical status throughout the country. With the arbitrary regime of Saddam out of the picture, Shiite clerics and politicians were joined in a powerful association to represent their relevant communities. In the early stages, the Marja'iyya, and especially Grand Ayatollah Sistani, supported more active figures indirectly through their fatwas and blessings. Yet, with the assassination of Mohammad Baqer Hakim in August 2003, the role of Sistani became more important in the politics of post-Saddam Iraq. The political structure in Iraq had changed to become open for his activism. In response to the questions in the Washington Post in June 2003, Grand Ayatollah mentioned that in post-Saddam Iraq '[clerics] are provided with favorable circumstances to fulfill their responsibilities, to educate people, to settle the ongoing disputes among people of Iraq, and to become active to the interest of Iraqis religion and worldly matters' (Al-Khaffaf 2010: 30).

To this end, the Grand Ayatollah's pragmatic approach was developed in order to institutionalise the role of Marja'iyya and the Shiite clergy in the sociopolitical affairs of post-Saddam Iraq. His stance against the coalition authorities demanding a general election and numerous fatwas asking for all Iraqi unity made

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<sup>66</sup> Ibrahim Bahr al-Ulloum, interview with the author, Najaf, December 2013.

him one of the most influential leaders of the contemporary era. Just months after the abolition of Saddam's regime in Iraq, Sistani issued a fatwa, which read as follows:

These occupiers do not have the authority to appoint the members of the constitution writing council. There is no guarantee that this council will produce a constitution that responds to the paramount interests of the Iraqi people and expresses its national identity of which Islam and noble social values are basic components...there must be general elections in which each eligible Iraqi can choose his representative in a constituent assembly for writing the constitution. This is to be followed by a general referendum on the constitution approved by the constituent assembly. All believers must demand the realization of this important issue and participate in completing the task in the best manner (Quoted in Arato 2004).

Making the most of the open political opportunity structure, and perceiving it accurately, Sistani played an important role in the process that led to the 2005 general election in Iraq; and through this process, he always insisted on the importance of Islamic values in a future government of Iraq. Sistani believed that a democratic Iraq would necessitate direct popular election and asked for a one-man-one-vote formula (Rahimi 2007). Taking the Shiite population in Iraq into the account, Sistani's active role during the interim phase provided the Shiite community with great opportunity. With the initial boycott of some Sunnite parties, the majority of the assembly's seats were reserved for Shiites.<sup>67</sup>

The post of premiership, with the utmost executive authority, is reserved for Shiites in Iraq. Making the most of the open political opportunity structure, through accurate perception, the Shiite clergy in Iraq mobilised the laity in institutionalising the sociopolitical rights of the community. The activist stance taken by the Shiite leadership and the powerful association they formed through the interim phase provided the Shiite community with a unique status since the establishment of the country. The ascent of the Shiite majority in Iraq has an undeniable relationship with the rise of Shiites throughout the region; as Vali Nasr (2006b) correctly indicates, the 'Middle East that will emerge from the

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<sup>67</sup> Marr 2012: 287. The National Iraqi Alliance consisted of Shiite parties (e.g. Dawa, SCIRI, Islamic Action Organisation, and Iraqi National Congress) won the majority of 140 out of 275 seats on the Council of Representative of Iraq in the January 2005 parliamentary election. Later that year, in December, when Sunnite parties ran for election, again, Shiite parties won the majority of seats.



crucible of the Iraq war may not be more democratic, but it will definitely be more Shiite’.

## **Conclusion**

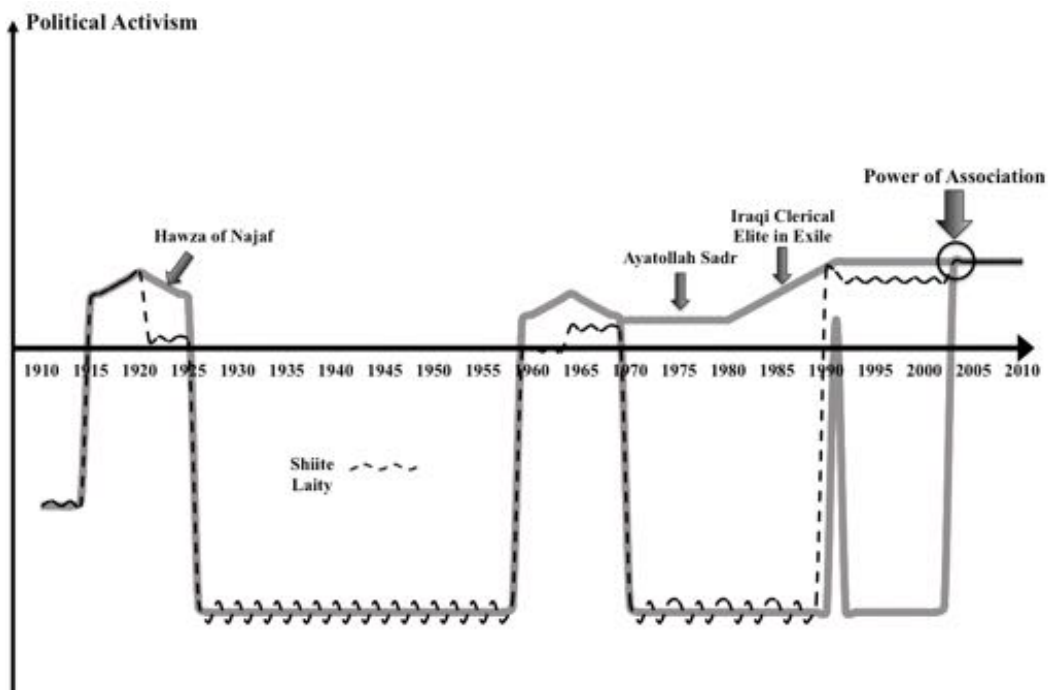
With the importance of the role of the Najaf seminary, Iraq could fairly be called the main cradle of Shiite clergy throughout the world. Nevertheless, since its establishment, except for a short period during the Safavids, the seminary has mostly been under the rule of non-Shiite governments. This has, inevitably, made the clerical elites residing in Iraq more inclined towards holding a quietist posture in terms of facing the political opportunity structure. However, there have been some historical snapshots within which the Shiite clergy in Iraq perceived an open political opportunity structure and became politically active to fulfill their responsibilities vis-à-vis the community (see Figure 5.1 for an illustrative trajectory of Shiite clerical elites’ activism in modern Iraq).

The British Mesopotamia Campaign during World War I was an instance of this political activism. Perceiving the threat of foreign occupation, the Shiite clergy engaged in politics and led the community into resisting the British forces in 1915. However, to the disadvantage of the Shiite majority in Iraq, the British mandate established the Iraqi monarchy. Over more than three decades, Shiite clerics in Iraq preferred to stay out of politics and to focus on strengthening the status of the Najaf seminary. At the same time, in neighboring Iran, the Qom seminary was becoming more important in terms of Shiite clergy leadership globally.

With the abolition of the Hashemite Monarchy in Iraq, the Shiite clerical elites in Iraq perceived a relatively open political opportunity to become active. This is when Shiite movements, like the Islamic Dawa, with the support of the Najaf Marja’iyya emerged onto the political scene in Iraq. For a decade, a group of Shiite clerics was offered favourable circumstances for broadcasting their opinions concerning the sociopolitical affairs of the community. The spiritual leadership of Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim, and unique *ijtihad* of Mohammad Baqer Sadr were two important clerical engagements in Shiite politics in Iraq at the time. Nonetheless, with the rise of Baathists in Iraq and the state repressions of the Shiite clergy, the political opportunity structure became once unfavourable for clerical activism. Concurrently, the establishment of the

Islamic Republic in Iran intensified the hostility of the state against the Shiite community, which had been alarmed by the rise of their coreligionists in neighbouring country. This eventually led to the annihilation of Mohammad Baqer Sadr by Saddam's regime in 1980.

The Iraq war with Iran (1980-1988) put the Shiite leadership residing in Najaf into an even more unfavourable position in terms of opportunity structure for political activism. The accurate perception of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, then the leader of the Najaf seminary, made him remain politically quiet hoping to preserve the very existence of the Shiite centre in Iraq, confronted with the arbitrary rule of Saddam.



**Figure 5.1 Clerical Elites' Political Activism in Modern Iraq**

Iraqis' miseries were increased when, after signing a ceasefire with Iran, the government of Baghdad occupied Kuwait and later engaged in the Gulf War in the early 1990s. Defeated in the war, the Shiites and Kurds in Iraq orchestrated a popular uprising in March 1991 against the regime of Saddam. For the Shiite clerical leadership, which had previously felt abandoned by the masses, they misperceived the relatively open opportunity and delayed in becoming active. This misperception was eventually considered to be one of the main reasons for the failure of the uprising

(Abd al-Jabbar 2003). The death of the prestigious Khomeini in 1989 took place at a most critical time for the Shiite community.

By this time, at an international level, Iraq was under the most crippling financial sanctions. At a regional level, the majority of countries felt resentful of Saddam's administration and saw him as a threat to regional instability. At a national level, the Iraqis were polarised into different political camps. At a societal level, Shiites felt betrayed by the US, which did not support them during the uprising, and they were under severe state repression. The Shiite seminary, at bureaucratic level, was virtually dismantled and mosques were closed by official order. And finally, at an individual level, there was seemingly a divergence of opinions between Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq Sadr and the mainstream of the Shiite Marja'iyya in Najaf over the political posture the Shiite clergy should take.

In such a context, interpreting the political opportunity as open, Grand Ayatollah Sadr initiated the Sadr II movement and became relatively active in politics. Nonetheless, he failed to mobilise the laity against Saddam's regime, perhaps at least partially due to the lack of alignment with other elites at the time, and he was assassinated in 1999. On the other hand, the clergy of Najaf, under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, remained politically quiet, as they perceived the political opportunity structure to be closed. The upcoming events proved that the judgment of the latter group over the political structure was more accurate than that of Sadr's. At the same time, those Shiite groups who had fled the country initiated a process of lobbying with international and regional powers to topple the Baath regime in Iraq.

Post-9/11 circumstances provided a political opportunity for the Shiite leadership and Operation Iraqi Freedom, aiming to overthrow Saddam Hussein, began on 20 March 2003. With the abolition of the Baath regime in Iraq, the Shiite clergy perceived an open opportunity structure and became active in post-2003 Iraq. The clerical leadership succeeded in seizing an opportunity in favour of the Iraqi Shiites and the community was rewarded with the highest sociopolitical status in the current era; this was the status they had waited for since the establishment of the country.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Lebanon 2006, the Shiite Triumphant

The last two chapters discussed how the activities of Shiite clerical elites, shaped by their perceptions about the political opportunity structure — the context — led to the formation of the first Shiite state in Iran and the ascent of the Shiite majority in Iraq. The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the trajectory of the activism of Shiite clerical elites in Lebanon over the last five decades. The Lebanese Shiite community tends to be misunderstood, not only by outsiders, but also by other Shiite communities in the Middle East. One reason for this is the complicated politics of Lebanon, and especially its sectarian heterogeneity. An account of Lebanese politics, it becomes even more complex when the unique Shiite personalities, whose actions have influenced the community since the mid-twentieth century, are added to the analysis. In order to describe the process that has transformed the ever-quiescent Shiite minority in Lebanon into one of the most politically active communities in the region, this chapter will scrutinise the post-Ottoman roots of the sect and will trace its various political movements up until Hezbollah's War with Israel in 2006.

Section I of the chapter starts with a brief review of Lebanon's history in order to describe the context that the Shiite community has faced. It aims to depict the elements of opportunity structure at international, regional and national levels, which have ultimately shaped today's Lebanon and have impacted on its Shiite community. It covers the late Ottoman and Mandate Lebanon, and the Republic of Lebanon. To underpin the relevant structural political opportunities that have influenced Shiite activism in Lebanon, this section goes through the foundation of sectarianism in the late nineteenth century and the geographical diffusion of Lebanese sects. It then describes how the different Lebanese communities took part in the establishment of the 'Greater Lebanon' upon the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, under the French Mandate; and how the Lebanese notables eventually compromised the National Pact, *Mithaq al-Watani*, and institutionalised the country's confessional political order.

Section II of this chapter concentrates on the role of Imam Musa Sadr, his unique personality, and how his perception about the political structure of Lebanon — the context — has revived the Shiite community in Lebanon. To this end, the brief activities of the Imam will be discussed to describe how he succeeded in mobilising the community and transforming it from being a quiet yet ineffective sect to becoming the single most active

community in Lebanon during the 1960s to the 33 Days war of 2006. This section begins by introducing Imam Musa Sadr as the leader who seized the opportunities and actively sought to elevate the community's status for the first time in the history of Lebanon. Relatively speaking, by recalling snapshots of his activities in Lebanon and presenting his unique *ijtihad*, the chapter goes on to emphasise his legacies for the community.

Throughout Section III, this chapter tries to shed light on the rise of Shiite political activism prompted by the mysterious disappearance of Imam Sadr and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For the first decade after the loss of its charismatic leader, the Shiite community experienced an interim phase full of hostilities and inter-sectarian conflicts, until the establishment of Lebanon's second republic in the early 1990s. The final section, Section IV of the chapter, covers the role of Shiite political activism in forming the solid resistance movement against the threat of Israel. The termination of the Cold War, the start of a new phase in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the emergence of the so-called 'Resistance Axis' in the Middle East, have formed the post-1990s politics of the community and Lebanon at a broader level. Therefore, this section focuses on the new form of political activism, which the Shiite community of Lebanon currently represents, under the leadership of its new charismatic leader, Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah. To this end, the political opportunity structure of post-2000 Lebanon is examined in relation to the Shiite community and its overarching influence throughout the country and the region.

### **I. The Entangled Community: The Shiites in the Lebanese Context**

Lebanon has formed a bridge between the West and East since ancient times. Phoenicians, the early inhabitants of the territory which is known today as Lebanon, were among those pioneer civilisations who were influential in creating language and developing regulated trade. This history, along with its fertile land, is an innate part of Lebanon's context. The distinctiveness of the Lebanese entity in relation to other parts of the Ottoman Empire, especially Syria, has its roots in the historical events that happened during the nineteenth century (Salibi 1971).<sup>1</sup>

The demographic distribution of its three major sects, which has had an important impact on the socio-political development of the country up until today, follows the contours of its three distinctive geographical clusters: coastal cities, mountainous areas and peripheries

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<sup>1</sup> Hourani 1986. At the time, the Ottoman territories comprising Mount Lebanon, Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, the Beqaa Valley and Jebel Amil, were home to more than fifteen different sects. Sunni Muslims were settled in the big port cities of Tripoli, Sidon and Beirut; Mount Lebanon was the stronghold of Christians and Druze, while Shiites were found mainly in the South as well as in the Beqaa Valley.

(Harris 1997: 23). Afraid of Egypt's Sunnite Mamluk Dynasty and, later, of the Ottoman rulers, the Shiite community settled in peripheral areas, including the South of Lebanon and Baalbek in the Beqaa Valley, in order to protect themselves from oppression. Following the rise of sectarian conflicts and based on the Ottomans' Tanzimat land reforms, aiming to preserve the Sultanate's territorial integrity, Mount Lebanon Mutessarifate was offered to Christians and they became exempt from military service (Hourani 1986).<sup>2</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, the socio-political structure of Lebanon had been formed with every religious sect attached to certain geographical areas: Sunnite became a majority within the coastal cities; the mountains became the Christians' stronghold, while the Shiites were marginalised in the peripheries of the South and the Beqaa. The geography, and the unique sectarian characteristics of Lebanon, have led to the development of an elite class, with an extensive role in the politics of the country, and the concept of *Za'imism* (Hottinger 1966). The *Zu'ama*<sup>3</sup> were Lebanese notable families and figures whose power perhaps first emerged based on land, as they were among the major landowners in rural areas (Dekmejian 1975: 11).

The *Za'im* was the focal point of the feudal client-patron relationships that formed in the eighteenth century, alongside the sectarianism that developed in the late nineteenth century and shadowed the country's political opportunity structure at least until the late twentieth century (Hamzeh 2001). Hence, the Lebanese became more attached to their communities that conglomerated around a *Za'im* than to their religious sects or national identity. For example, a Shiite commoner in Beqaa tended to introduce himself firstly as a member of the Haidar Family, then a Shiite and, maybe eventually, as Lebanese. Therefore, to understand the politics of Lebanon, one must consider the characteristics of this elite class and the relationship which it has with the laity in each sect's geographical stronghold. This *Za'im*-laity relationship has been influenced by the political opportunity structure, at an individual, societal and national level since then.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For the first time in the history of Lebanon, the Mutassarifate scheme institutionalised different sects' identities (Farah 2000: 256). In association with the Ottomans' central government, the Christian governor of Mount Lebanon was obliged to seek assistance from an administrative council consisting of twelve members from six different religious sects, namely Maronite, Druze, Sunnite, Shiite, Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic (Makdisi 2000: 84).

<sup>3</sup> Hottinger 1966. *Zu'ama*, plural for *Za'im*, refers to elites among all Lebanese sects who serve as patrons to the laymen and peasant clients.

<sup>4</sup> An interesting example of *Zu'ama* empowerment is, indeed, the rise of Shiite *Zu'ama* in the South during the early years of the last century. During the first Balkan War, while the Sunnite community was under the fully-fledged support of the Ottoman Sultan and Christians, as *dhimmi*s, were exempt from participating in the War, the pressure intensified on the Shiite laity to go to the

Nevertheless, with the emergence of modern commercial centres around Lebanese ports, especially Beirut, feudal power was complemented with business professionalism. The agriculture industry lost its influence in the country's economy, while industries like tourism, banking and finance were becoming the main ingredient of economic development as well as the sources of political power (Dekmejian 1975: 22). Obviously, to become an influential businessman in the expanding metropolitan cities, one needed to be among those who had previously been major rural landowners.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, the rural Zu'ama, who had built their political apparatus within their relevant communities, became the elite political actors in urban areas like Beirut, and the most influential political players, especially at the dusk of the Ottoman Empire.

In the early years of the twentieth century, the region witnessed the emergence of two major developments: the Arab Awakening throughout the Ottoman Empire, and the direct intervention of European powers in the aftermath of the Great War (Kayali 1997, Dawn 1973, Hourani 1983). There was an active ideology of Arab unity, from Morocco at the western edge of the Atlantic Ocean to Oman neighbouring the Arabian Sea; it was a pervasive ideology during the early twentieth century. Arabism had become an 'oppositional cultural-political identification' against the Ottomans (Dawn 1961). In Lebanon, Muslims, especially the Sunnite community, embraced the ideology to elevate their social status. This, however, promised a series of conflict in Lebanon as, concurrently, Britain and France were keen to protect the confessional groups of Mount Lebanon after the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The Maronites, and more generally Christians, were under the sponsorship of France, the *Merciful Mother* of Christians of the region. With the victory of the Allies in the Great War, France was offered the mandate over Syria and Lebanon. The inhabitants of the new mandate were divided into two groups: the Muslims, most of whom were seeking to establish the

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warfront. Taking the circumstances into account, the chances of return for the Ottoman soldiers were at their lowest. As a result, the Shiite community rose up against the discrimination. Eventually, the central government agreed that each Shiite soldier could be exempt from mandatory military participation with a payment of 75 Liras. This resembled blood money to most of the Shiite young men. As a result, groups of Shiite peasants who had land or any other kinds of property sold them to large Shiite landowners in order to acquire the exemption money; others who did not have property were forced either to participate in the war or to acquire the money from elites and remain in debt to them for several years. Thus, the Shiite Zu'ama became even more powerful and expanded their influence over the community. For a full account of the incidents see Chamran 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Great landowner families in different parts of Lebanese territories were among the most influential political leaders in later Lebanon. Maronite figures like Frangieh and Khazen, Sunnites like Karami and Solh, Druzes like Jumblatt and Shiite like Asaad and Osseiran were all among the major rural landowners in Lebanon in the late nineteenth century. For a comprehensive list see Dekmejian 1975: 17.

Greater Syria; and the mainly non-Muslim majority in Mount Lebanon, who sought to establish an independent Lebanon through the annexation of the coastal cities of Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon, along with the fertile Beqaa Valley in the north (Hourani 1946). Eventually, in September 1920, the French High Commissioner, General Gouraud, declared the establishment of Greater Lebanon with Beirut as its capital (Salibi 1971). However, predictably, this signalled the outbreak of internal tensions between Christians and Muslims, who felt defeated.

The Shiite community played a critical role in easing the conflict. While the French administration acknowledged the Shiite as an independent sect, it hoped to attain the support of the community for Lebanese statehood. In January 1926, Shiites were granted the right to have their own sectarian court based on the Ja'fari School of Jurisprudence (Halawi 1992: 157). For them, it was indeed a more promising outlook to become a minority with guaranteed rights in a smaller Lebanon rather than to be a minority in a Greater Syria in which they would have no tangible power (Shanahan 2005: 52). The gamble paid off for the French and Christians in Lebanon, as the divide between Muslims finally led to the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Lebanon under the French mandate in September 1926. Though the Shiites were recognised, not as a minor part of the Muslim community but as an autonomous sect among other Lebanese sects, the new structure was disadvantageous for the community to some extent. In the South, the rural Shiite farmers became disconnected from Haifa, as it was then under the British mandate, and in the North, the Shiites of the Beqaa, were cut off from Damascus. This was drastic for Shiites. Moreover in contrast to Christian farmers, who were mainly landowners, the majority of Shiite farmers were poor peasants working within a major feudal system. Subsequently, the Shiite community was split in two: those who acknowledged pan-Arabism, and those who believed that Lebanese identity would provide them with greater prosperity. This schism resulted in the emergence of an amorphous community which, in coming decades, suffered even more as Shiites in Lebanon were trapped between the two major communities of Lebanon geographically: Sunnite Muslims from central Lebanon and Maronite Christians from the heights (Hanf 1993).

### ***Independent Lebanon: The Outcast Shiite Community***

The tension between the Sunnite adherents of Greater Syria and the Maronites, became an enduring issue in the politics of the country. It was in such circumstances that a Sunnite leader from Tripoli, Mohammad al-Jisr, became the first to indicate Sunni willingness to take



a more direct role in the politics of Lebanon under the French Mandate and to settle the sectarian conflict. In 1927, he was appointed Speaker of Lebanon's Chamber of Deputies. After this, more Sunnites became eager to take part in the politics of the new republic (Solh 1993).

**Table 6.1 Lebanon 1932 Census Results**<sup>6</sup>

	<b>Residents</b>	<b>Emigrants</b>	
<b>Maronite</b>	227,800	123,397	
<b>Sunni Muslim</b>	178,100	17,205	
<b>Shiite Muslim</b>	155,035	11,510	
<b>Greek Orthodox</b>	77,312	57,031	
<b>Druze</b>	53,334	8,750	
<b>Greek Catholic</b>	46,709	29,627	
<b>Armenian Orthodox</b>	26,102	1,970	
<b>Protestant</b>	6,869	2,931	
<b>Armenian Catholic</b>	5,890	454	
<b>Jews</b>	3,588	415	
<b>Syriac Catholic</b>	2,803	312	
<b>Syriac Orthodox</b>	2,723	97	
<b>Chaldean Catholic</b>	548	25	
<b>Chaldean Orthodox</b>	190	-	
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	6,393	1,263	
			<b>Foreigners</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	793,396	254,987	61,297
<b>Population as of October 1932</b>		<b>1,109,680</b>	

In order to protect the Christian stronghold in Lebanon, the French administration conducted the first, and the last until the present day, National Census in 1932. The census was structured in a way that provided Lebanese Christians, and especially the Maronites, with a disproportionate share of political authority in relation to the other Lebanese sects (Maktabi 1999, Cobban 1985).<sup>7</sup> This ramification of the Lebanese 1932 census became the political cornerstone of the country for the coming decades. The confessional apparatus, economic

<sup>6</sup> *Official Gazette* of Lebanon, No.2718, dated 5 October 1932.

<sup>7</sup> Maktabi 1999. A biased policy in conducting the census was to take Lebanese immigrants into account. The final outcome of the census shows that out of 254,987 Lebanese immigrants, constituting over 22% of the country's total population, 215,844 were Christians.

development, political mobility and, perhaps, all the policies of the state from the 1930s to the 1980s were derived from the demographic ‘findings’ of this census; and as long as its data favoured the Maronite community, it became the sect’s touchstone for political supremacy in Lebanon.

In 1934, in the aftermath of the census, the post of president of the Republic went to a Maronite,<sup>8</sup> the single majority sect in the country, while three years later, the Sunnite, the second largest sect, received the same guarantee of control over the post of the premiership (Salibi 1971). Perhaps one of the main factors that provided the Sunnite with a significant share of political power in Lebanon was their bargaining power, which was brokered by the Sunni Zu’ama from the coastal cities. Since 1923, the Sunnite notables had pursued a systematic policy of cooperating with the Maronites and the French, based on opposition to attaching Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon to a Greater Lebanon. The lack of organisation structure among the Shiite community in Lebanon, coupled with internal rivalry among Shiite Zu’ama, had prevented the community from seizing the political opportunity, in contrast to their co-religionists, the Sunnite Muslims. Without these factors, they could have guaranteed for themselves a more viable authority, as they constituted the third biggest sect in Lebanon in those years – they missed the opportunity and any breakthrough for their sectarian interests was postponed to at least a decade later.

However, the conflict between pro-Western Maronites and the Sunnites who were more inclined towards Arab nationalism was far from having reached a clear settlement in Lebanon as a result of the power-sharing formula that the two communities had concluded.<sup>9</sup> The Maronite fear of being overwhelmed by the pan-Arabism of Muslim countries on the one

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<sup>8</sup> A Greek Orthodox, Charles Debbas (d.1935), was the first president of Lebanon and served for eight years between 1926 until 1934. Upon the disclosure of the census results, Habib Pasha al-Saad, a prominent Maronite political figure, became the first Maronite president of the Republic of Lebanon under the French Mandate in January 1934.

<sup>9</sup> Regional incidents had fuelled tensions between the two communities, as well. In the 1930s, following the gradual rise of Arab nationalism against the French and British presence in the region, the colonial powers were seeking a more indirect role in the politics of Arab countries. This trend started with the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930, in which the Kingdom of Iraq received nominal independence from the British Mandate and became an independent member of the League of Nations (Churchill 1985: Chapter 14). In September 1936, an anti-French strike led by a Syrian nationalist bloc resulted in a treaty of independence for Syria (Thomas 2005: 312). In the same year, the Anglo-Egyptian treaty was signed which required Britain to withdraw its troops from Egypt, except for the Suez Canal, and granted the country a great deal of independence from the British. These developments, along with the Arab revolt against the Jewish community in Palestine from 1936 to 1939, made the political scene in Lebanon more volatile than ever. It was in this situation that Sunnite and Maronite elites had come up with a kind of compromise in order to protect Lebanon’s national unity.

hand, and the Lebanese Sunnite community's worry over Western hegemony on the other hand, resulted in a series of intra-sectarian negotiations. The Zu'ama of both communities were hoping to come up with a more pragmatic solution to the future of Lebanon. Having interfered in Lebanese politics, Damascus and Cairo — which had had a successful set of negotiations with the Western powers — sent a green light to Lebanese Sunni leaders with regard to accepting the independence of Lebanon and cooperating with more moderate Maronite political figures (Khazen 1991: 18). The weak position of France as a result of its involvement in the Second World War provided an opportunity to a Maronite politician, Bechara al-Khoury, and a Sunnite Za'im, Riad al-Solh, to lay down a framework for the country's independence and the abolition of the French Mandate in Lebanon in 1943. The unwritten covenant agreed between the two on behalf of their respective sects became known as the National Pact, *Mithaq al-Watani*. According to this Pact, which formed the backbone of the country's political structure for the next five decades, Christians agreed not to seek Western intervention and to accept the Arab character of Lebanon, while Muslims agreed to giving up their aspiration to unite with Syria and to stay loyal to the Lebanese borders of 1920 (Al-Jisr 1964: 145). The National Pact was designed, in a way, to guarantee the Lebanese political status quo at the time; Maronite presidency and Sunnite premiership became a formal agreement based on the Pact. Later on in 1946, the Shiite sect as the third largest community in Lebanon was offered the post of Speaker of the National Assembly. The Pact guaranteed Maronite leaders the ability to make the most of their demographic power, and guaranteed the Zu'ama of other sects the institutionalisation of their power to mediate between their own sects and the government over Muslim participation in the political processes of the country. As mentioned earlier, the Pact was enacted as a way of dealing with the confessional diversity of Lebanon. However, it was founded on defective assumptions that the political opportunity structure would remain intact, the demographic proportions of the country would remain unchanged and the regional and international balance of power would never alter (Khazen 1991). Subsequent events proved these assumptions to be invalid, and pushed Lebanon towards the violent conflicts in 1958 and the fifteen years of civil war that commenced in 1975.

### ***The Republic of Lebanon: The Shiites Demand for a New Leadership***

The major impact of the National Pact on the politics of a sectarian and fragmented Lebanon was to give a monopoly of power to two sects: Maronite Christians and Sunnite Muslims, and to disregard the other sects. It initiated a new political structure in Lebanon, which could be

characterised as ‘Political Maronite’;<sup>10</sup> in such a political system, all other Lebanese sects were under the supremacy of Maronite rule. The president and the chief of the National Army were to be Maronite while the majority of cabinet seats, and the National Assembly were reserved for the Christians according to terms of the Pact. For a Shiite Za’im to become the Speaker of the National Assembly, he had to have the support of the Maronite leadership. The Speaker of the Assembly had been appointed for a shorter term than both president and prime minister. If he maintained Maronite support, he would hope to remain in office for another year; otherwise he had to step aside and give up his position to another Shiite Za’im who had succeeded in attaining the support of the Maronite president. These factors all meant that the Shiite notables and their relevant communities were in a lower position than those of the Maronites and Sunnite Zu’ama. Adding to this, as of the discontents in Lebanon’s geography, at the midst of the new Republic, while Maronite and Sunnite elites were in a position to serve the interests of their respective sects closer to the centre, the Shiite Zu’ama of notable families predictably became more disassociated from the community and its demands.<sup>11</sup> Since the majority of Shiite laities lived at a distance from the most developed areas of the country (central Mount Lebanon, Beirut and Tripoli), this gap was expanded inadvertently (see Figure 6.1 for an illustrative depiction of sectarian classes in Lebanon during the 1960s). Less than two decades after independence, Lebanon’s commercial hubs, the strongholds of Sunnite Muslims and Maronite Christians, were flourishing economically more than ever, due to the development of tourism and finance industries;<sup>12</sup> yet the majority of the Shiite community was marginalised in the peripheries of the country, excluded from enjoying the benefits of national economic growth.

Entangled within such a disfavoured situation, the Shiites in rural areas in the south flooded into the southern peripheries of the more developed port and capital city of Beirut, seeking jobs and a better life (Khuri 1967). In addition to this rural-urban migration that, perhaps, had been started decades earlier, some Shiite groups, mainly from the sect’s middle class, migrated abroad and dispersed to various countries, ranging from the Persian Gulf to

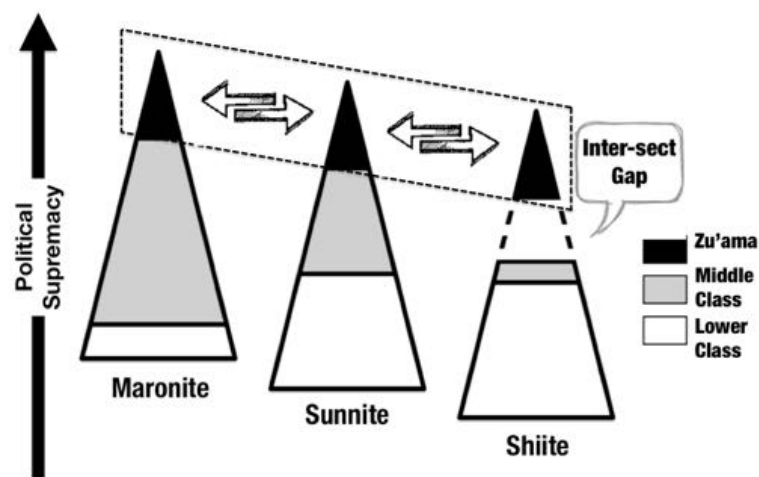
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<sup>10</sup> While based on the constitution, the president had the utmost executive authority; he was not accountable to the National Assembly. Parliament could ask for interpellation of the cabinet but not the Maronite president.

<sup>11</sup> Hani Fahs, interview with the author, Beirut, Lebanon, August 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Kasaba et al. 1986. The Eastern Mediterranean Ports have had an importance in World trade for centuries. During the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, in the late nineteenth century, they regained their significant economic position once again thanks to the new trends in World Trade and transportation evolutions. This unique characteristic influenced the formation of a bourgeois class dwelling in those areas at the beginning of the twentieth century.

South Africa; this created a substantial Shiite Lebanese diaspora mostly employed in high-ranking businesses. They became some of the most reliable financial supporters of their community back in Lebanon, later in the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> These two Shiite migration trends, from peripheries to the outskirts of Beirut, as well as to overseas, changed the political opportunity structure in favour of the community over the coming decades. Although, at the time, most Shiites still relied on the Zu'ama. In urban areas, to be recruited by a decent employer, they still needed to trust their Zu'ama and their mediating brokerage with the Zu'ama of other sects (Hamzeh 2001).



**Figure 6.1 An Illustration of Maronite, Sunnite and Shiite Social Classes in the 1960s**

The Arab Nationalism-Western Imperialism encounters influenced the political *mise en scène* of the Middle East for decades. Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, along with Arab Palestinians, became involved in the war with the newly established Israel, challenging its very existence in 1948. Although Lebanon declared its reluctance to participate on the Arab front, the first Arab-Israeli war had a tangible impact on the country's internal politics (Khalidi 1971). Divided at home around the Palestinian Cause issue, Lebanon's government signed the armistice with Israel to secure the country's border.<sup>14</sup> The war resulted in the defeat of Arab

<sup>13</sup> Mohammad D Nasrallah, interview with the author, Beirut, Lebanon, August 2012.

<sup>14</sup> *Lebanese-Israeli general armistice agreement 23 March 1949*; Available at: <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/71260B776D62FA6E852564420059C4FE> [Retrieved 27 December 2012].

forces, occupation of Arab territories in Palestine, and the mass immigration of Palestinian refugees to the neighbouring Arab countries, including Lebanon. Since then, the Palestinian refugees and their quest to return to their homeland has played a determining role in shaping the realpolitik of the region (Morris 1987: 588).

With the outbreak of the Cold War, the activities of Leftist parties, which were extremely appealing to the Arab masses at the time, were strengthened in the Middle East countries, including Lebanon.<sup>15</sup> Leftist groups active in Lebanon, were more successful in recruiting among the middle classes, inhabitants of the bigger cities and, especially, rural emigrants who had been moving from the peripheries of the country to settle around major cities (Seaver 2000). The Shiite youths, willing to play a more prominent social role and to gain access to sources of income, were among the major new members of these parties (Chamran 2009: 38).<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, the deficiencies of the Lebanese National Pact became clear for the first time in 1958. President Camille Chamoun's refusal to break diplomatic relations with France and Britain, two of the countries that initiated military action against Egypt in the Suez War, put him in direct opposition to Nasser, and to Nasser's supporters within Lebanon, including Lebanon's Prime Minister, Rashid Karami. This ignited a conflict of interests between Chamounists, mostly Maronites, and opposition groups, among them the followers of Sunnite and Druze Zu'ama who were excluded from national politics by the President, and eventually prompted the national turmoil in 1958 (Hottinger 1961). In 1958, the opposition rebelled and demonstrated in the streets against the government, while supporting Nasser's aspirations and the Arabic face of Lebanon.

With the fall of the pro-Western Iraqi monarchy on 14 July 1958, Chamoun asked for US military intervention. The US responded by sending about 14 thousand Marines to Lebanon (Dragnich 1970). The country was on the verge of a civil war, and bloodshed in some cities, like Tripoli, escalated. During the turmoil, the Lebanese Army and its Maronite

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<sup>15</sup> Halperin 2005: 1139-42. Leftist groups were introduced to the region just years after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. During the following decades, the ideology became more pervasive among the countries of the region and became one of the main concerns of the Western superpowers at the verge of the Cold War.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. In general, the Middle East had become an arena for US and Soviet Russian confrontation in general, in the sense that each superpower was seeking to ally with different regional states, and social classes. While oil rich monarchies of the Persian Gulf were more inclined towards the West, the rest were looking for an alliance with the East; whereas, generally, the notable merchant class in each state was more interested in Western Capitalism, Eastern Socialism seemed more appealing to the middle and lower classes. Communism and leftist ideology in the Middle East had taken root in the aftermath of the Great War.

chief commander, General Fouad Chehab, remained neutral towards both hostile parties, aiming to preserve the country's territorial integrity (Salibi 1966). Conceivably, this was the single most important factor that made the opposition parties, mainly Muslims, reach a compromise on the presidency and settle the dispute. Over the next six years, Chehab initiated a new phase in the history of Lebanon, later to be known as the Chehabist Era. Despite some internal opposition especially from Christians,<sup>17</sup> Chehab's political policies were continued through the election of a pro-Chehabist president, Charles Hilu, in 1964, thus extending Lebanon's prosperous civil society for six more years.<sup>18</sup>

Chehab's reforms undermined the reign of the Zu'ama and opened a new phase in Lebanon (Winslow 1996: 128). His administrative reforms were designed to promote national unity by involving all Lebanese sects in state power. Whereas historically Christians, especially Maronites, held the majority of public posts, Chehab started to change the established sectarian set-up in favour of minorities. Until then, Maronites had ensured that public offices were filled by individuals whose views were in accord with those of Maronite leaders and powerful families. Chehab began to dismantle this oligarchy that had controlled Lebanese politics since 1945 (Salibi 1961). This move was especially favourable for Sunnite and Druze Muslims who were among the most educated minorities. However, it also provoked a dramatic rural-urban migration, especially among those populations who were living in poverty in the peripheral areas of the country, and who were willing to seek better jobs in the big cities (Kobeissi 2009). Chehab's policies were also targeted at the Shiite community, mainly rural dwellers without higher education.<sup>19</sup>

During the Chehabist era in Lebanon, Muslims became more involved in national affairs; hence, the Lebanese identity was institutionalised among them for the first time since

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<sup>17</sup> One of the major opposition movements against Chehab and his seemingly pro-Muslim politics resulted in a failed coup in 1961 by middle ranking Christian army officers. See Beshara 2005, Chapter 6.

<sup>18</sup> Fouad Chehab was from a notable family from Mount Hermon in South Lebanon bordering western Syria. He became the first commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces after independence in 1945, an official entity which had gathered groups of underprivileged Lebanese soldiers, mainly from Shiite, Druze and Greek Orthodox sects, who sought a source of income by joining the army (Barak 2006). This had given the General a unique understanding of the country's social situation, and evidently, had influenced his political initiatives from the day he became president. Most notable among these were reforms in public administration jobs, and rural development policy. While in office, Chehab embarked on public reforms that, contrary to the decisions of his predecessors, Khuri and Chamoun addressed the needs of all Lebanese, especially deprived civilians who lived in peripheral areas (Agha and Khalidi 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Trabolusi 2007: 141. As an example, one of the plans was to build a dam on the Litani River in order to develop the irrigation of vast agricultural lands in the western Beqaa valley and in southern Lebanon.

independence. Chehab's reforms were sometimes implemented to the dismay of some Christians and members of the Shiite and Sunni Zu'ama; yet what encouraged the majority of middle and lower class Lebanese to wholeheartedly support his initiatives was rooted in political evolutions that were going on outside Lebanon as well.

To the favour of the Shiite community in Lebanon, the rise of Chehabism coincided with the emergence of a noble clerical leadership. To this end, the migration of an Iranian-born cleric, Musa Sadr, to Lebanon in the middle of the 1958 conflict, marked the beginning of a historic era, not only for the Shiite community but also for contemporary Lebanon. Franz König, a Cardinal of the Catholic Church, expressed this when he addressed Sadr saying: 'Your Majesty, I heard a lot about you. I believe that the history of Lebanon should be divided into two phases: the era of pre- Musa Sadr, and the Musa Sadr's era'.<sup>20</sup>

## **II. Political Opportunity Structure at the Individual Level: Imam Musa Sadr's Perceptions and Political Postures**

In the volatile context of the post-1958 conflict in Lebanon, the migration of Musa Sadr to Lebanon was seen as a golden opportunity for the Shiite community as it coincided with the mass rural-urban migration of Shiite peoples, and the commencement of the Chehabist reform era in Lebanon. He himself changed Lebanon's opportunity structure, on an individual level, for the Shiite community for the coming decades. Born in 1928 to the elite Shiite family of Sadr in Qom, Musa's ancestors were among the most prestigious Shiite clerical elites of Jabal Amel in Lebanon, with widespread activities and fame in Iraq and Iran at the time. Musa started to study Shiite jurisprudence under the teachings of his father, brother and many other Shiite elites of the Qom Seminary, including Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>21</sup>

Young Musa was among the most reformist clerics of the Qom seminary. Nonetheless, after a while, he perceived that the structure of Qom and its powerful traditionalist clergy were themselves obstacles in the way of his aspirations. The opportunity structure was not favourable for him and his colleagues to become active independently. At the same time, he was offered two opportunities: to act as Grand Ayatollah Boroujerdi's ambassador in the Vatican,<sup>22</sup> and to go to Lebanon upon the receipt of an invitation from his

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<sup>20</sup> Sadeq Tabatabai, interview with the author, Tehran, Iran, November 2012.

<sup>21</sup> During his studies in the Qom Seminary, Musa Sadr was a member of a larger group of pioneering young Shiite clerics along with others like Morteza Motahhari (d. 1971), one of the main ideologues of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Mohammad Beheshti (d.1981), who later became leader of the Iran Islamic Republican Party, and Abdul- Karim Mousavi Ardebili (b.1926), who was the Chief of the Islamic Republic of Iran Judiciary between 1981 to 1989.

<sup>22</sup> Muhsin Kamalian, interview with the author, Tehran, Iran, October 2012.



relatives, Allameh Sharaf al-Din's sons. In 1959, he chose the latter offer, seeking an opportunity to follow his aspirations to elevate the Shiite position in the modern world. His older brother, Seyyed Reza Sadr, mentions that, if Seyyed Musa had not been offered such an option to go to Lebanon, he would have chosen to take off his religious attire and to start a different life as a civilian lawyer in Iran.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Musa Sadr indeed owed his future status as one of the most prominent Shiite clerics of the century, to Lebanon, a debt that he started to pay off to all Lebanese from the first day he set foot in Lebanon.

Sadr had visited Tyre in Lebanon once in 1955, as a guest of Allameh Sharaf al-Din, the Shiite leader of the area. Abd al-Hussein Sharaf al-Din was among the renowned students of Akhond Khorasani in Najaf. After he finished his studies in the Najaf Seminary, he moved back to live in the city of Chehour and later in Tyre for the rest of his life. Hoping to reduce the enduring Sunnite pressures on the Shiite community since the rule of the Ottomans, he devoted his activities to Islamic unity.<sup>24</sup> The main facet of Sharaf al-Din's leadership in Lebanon was the foundation of modern schools in the area (Halawi 1992). Historically, the Lebanese Shiite clerical elites relied on the financial support of the Shiite Zu'ama; but, in what was perhaps the first time in the modern history of Lebanon, the laity and their endowments solely financed a school for the Shiite students of Tyre, established by Sharaf al-Din. He believed that the first step towards activating the community was to diminish their illiteracy so that they could grasp equal opportunities along with other sects in Lebanon. Although Sharaf al-Din succeeded in preserving a degree of independence from the Shiite Zu'ama of the south, the scope of his activities barely extended beyond the city of Tyre and its suburbs. However, his school, al-Ja'fariyya, was one of the cornerstones on which Musa Sadr built his legacy in Lebanon over the following decades.

Upon the recommendation of Sharaf al-Din and invitations from his sons, Musa Sadr went to Lebanon to reside there in 1959. With the Shiite community having lost its prominent leader, Allameh Sharaf al-Din, the Shiite Zu'ama of the south, who felt threatened by the arrival of the young aspirant Sadr, sought to engender hostility among Shiite clerics in order to divide and rule (Ajami 1986). Nonetheless, Jabal Amil had continued to enjoy the status in the Shiite world that it had developed as a result of its more than four centuries of religious heritage. During Safavid Persia, there were Shiite ulama of this region that contributed to the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> His influential book, *al Muraja'at* (The Book of Referrals), is one of the first attempts to develop a Shiite-Sunnite intra-sect dialogue; the book comprises more than a hundred correspondences between Allameh Sharafuddin and Sheikh Salim al-Bashiri, then head of Al-Azhar University.

rule of the Shiite monarch for the first time in history. However, the constant pressure of Sunnite Ottomans over the community and its religious scholars had, over the course of two centuries, left the Shiite of Lebanon in a pitiful state. Furthermore, Shiite clerics in Lebanon had been transformed into some of the most inactive and ineffective elements within the community. In general, Shiite clerical elites had become the Zu'ama's brokers, and the laity had become used to seeing them in this light.<sup>25</sup> Their activities were limited to reading funeral or wedding sermons in return for the money they would receive from Shiite laymen. Musa Sadr changed these circumstances; and while this provided him with the support of the Shiite community, it also earned him the resentment of some Shiite clerics.<sup>26</sup> Indeed he mentioned once that he had come to Lebanon in order to 'wipe away the dust that has been sitting on the Shiite Cleric's habit'.<sup>27</sup>

Sadr's grand ambition was to elevate the status of the Shiite community in Lebanon, to reshape its organisational structure, to make it a sect distinct from, rather than inferior to, other Lebanese sects. He believed that, based on its geographical situation, Lebanon was a unique showroom in which the acts of its inhabitants were revealed to the view of Western communities, and that it, thus, was essential for Shiite scholars, including himself, to represent their sect to the rest of the world and to improve the status of Lebanese Shiites in Lebanon.<sup>28</sup> It was this perception that led him to commence intra-religious talks from his early days in Lebanon. Contrary to the leaders of some other Lebanese sects, he desired that all Lebanese, no matter of what religion, should live together peacefully, free from sectarian discrimination. This was the goal to which he devoted his life, up until his last days in Lebanon.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Hani Fahs, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Mohammad D. Nasrallah, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Hawra Sadr, interview with the author, Tehran, October 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Imam Musa Sadr, recorded speech in Iran, date unknown.

<sup>29</sup> The impact of the then unconventional *ijtihad* of Musa Sadr extended beyond Lebanon's borders and influenced Shiite religious students in the Najaf and Qom seminaries in the 1960s and 1970s. One of the first examples of his unconventionality was his daring opinion concerning what Shiite jurisprudence refers to as *Najasat al-Ahl al-Kitab*: the 'impurity of the people of the book'. At the time, a majority of Shiite jurists believed that non-Muslims, including Christians and Jews are defiled and that Muslims should thus be cautious in their dealings with them. The Lebanese Shiite community had been counselled about this well-established Fatwa and, perhaps, most of Lebanon's Shiite clerics were its exponents. This simply made it impossible to achieve a peaceful relationship between a Lebanese Shiite Muslim and his Christian or Jewish neighbours. It was in such a circumstance that Musa Sadr stood against this belief through a very simple action in Lebanon, which surprisingly made the Shiite elites of Najaf and Qom reconsider their verdicts. (Mohsen Kamalian, interview with the author Tehran, October 2012).

As a result of his mould-breaking ideas, in the late summer of 1961, Sadr was approached by a group of Christian Patriarchs, Cardinals and Bishops in Lebanon, as a representative of the new Muslim elite, seeking his support and a mutual relationship.<sup>30</sup> In his dealings with the state, then led by president Fuad Chehab, Sadr had indicated his sincere support for Chehabist reforms by visiting him personally several times. The alignment of Musa Sadr and Fouad Chehab deepened over the coming years based on their mutual interests in pursuing an inclusive approach to Lebanese national sovereignty and integrity, despite its multi-sectarian nature. Consequently, Chehab remained one of the most significant supporters of Musa Sadr among other Christian politicians.

With regard to intra-sectarian cooperation, Musa Sadr had believed that the Lebanese could benefit from their heterogeneous society if they interacted more with each other and developed a mutual understanding. For him, sectarian discrimination was one of the greatest factors threatening Lebanon's integrity at the time. He expressed this view in an address to a gathering in Tyre in 1962:

We have lived in Lebanon for decades. Yet most of us have not developed a sense of national patriotism...have you ever seen Christian clerics stress that Muslims are deprived? Have you ever seen Muslim clerics worry about the underprivileged Armenians in Lebanon? If we lose the sincere nationalistic sense, our home becomes strange to us while we also become strangers in our home. My concern is that if we continue our current sectarian behaviour, soon nothing will remain of Lebanon.<sup>31</sup>

For his part, Sadr intended to influence the political structure in Lebanon and to mitigate the devastating role of sectarianism that had crippled the country for decades. After six years in Lebanon, Musa Sadr visited Iran in 1965, and was received warmly by his companions in Tehran, Qom and several other cities where he visited as a guest speaker. He was willing to attract the alignment of his fellow clergy all around the Shiite world, to facilitate a transnational network that may one day help him to mobilise the Shiite community in the region. At the time, Musa Sadr had become a famous cleric. This drew SAVAK's attention to his trips to Iran and its concern to discover more about Sadr's opinions about the Shah's regime and the region. However, the intelligence documents disclosed after the collapse of the Shah's regime confirm that SAVAK had misunderstood Sadr's political affiliation and

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<sup>30</sup> *Lisan al-hal* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 25 August 1961.

<sup>31</sup> *Al-Asr Daily*, Sidon, Lebanon, 5 December 1962.

ideology.<sup>32</sup> He continued his visit in Iran in spite of all SAVAK's controls and, in a speech he delivered in Shiraz, asked Iranians to rise up and become more active in the politics of their country. In his speech he said:

I do not know why you people are inactive. Why do our women not have religious gatherings? Why do they not study in modern schools? You people should not leave your religious leaders alone. You should believe that a Muslim is always successful either to achieve his goals or not ... Fear is misery, we have to rise up and proceed courageously, believing that God is the saviour of Muslims and the patron of their leaders.<sup>33</sup>

His speech clearly indicates how the supposedly quiet Shiite clerics had become politically active during six years, and invites the community to assume their place among other politically active nations in the Muslim world.

Back in Lebanon, Musa Sadr's activities began to explicitly advance his aim to establish a Shiite Council, an official body able to support the rights of the deprived Shiite in Lebanon and represent their demands to the central government. In a meeting with the President, Charles Hilu, Musa Sadr clearly presented what the southerners were seeking, and asked that the state support the development of the underprivileged areas.<sup>34</sup> Such activities brought Sadr incomparable popularity within the community. He was seen as a person who not only wanted to engender a sense of nationalism within all sects, but also backed the rights of the Shiite community. Nonetheless, the more popular he became in Lebanon, the more he attracted hostility from other sources of power, especially the Shiite Zu'ama.<sup>35</sup> It seemed that Sadr was more successful in seizing the opportunity to attract the support of the community than the traditional Zu'ama. The activities of Sadr and his initiatives were going to change the balance of power, to the dismay of the traditional feudal landowners. This did eventually provoke them to do whatever was in their power to protect their client-patron relationship. However, this new actor who had emerged on the political scene of Lebanon, Musa Sadr, was changing the political opportunity structure so that it was unfavourable to the Zu'ama at least within the Shiite community.

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<sup>32</sup> SAVAK document No. 241/574 dated 26 June 1965 claimed that Seyyed Musa Sadr was an Egyptian agent in Lebanon and had recently been given a car by the Egyptian Embassy in Beirut. In some other documents SAVAK officers claim that he might be a CIA or MOSSAD agent. See SAVAK 2000.

<sup>33</sup> SAVAK document No. H/7/8771 dated 5 October 1965.

<sup>34</sup> *Al-Hayat* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 19 February 1966.

<sup>35</sup> Khalil Hamdan, interview with the author, Nabatieh, August 2012.

Later, Musa Sadr attended a rally in Beqaa and addressed those who were urging the appointment of a Shiite leader to represent the community. He stated,

Half of Shiite villages are underprivileged ... the question is why are we oppressed and deprived? We are oppressed due to the lack of religious integrity among ourselves, and to compensate for this shortage, we require a religious council that can deal with commoners' religious demands... We need to be organised like other Lebanese sects.<sup>36</sup>

These were the initial moves made by Musa Sadr to gain an effective socio-political role in Lebanon, and towards founding the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, an assembly representing the Shiite community in government, which was eventually acknowledged by the National Assembly in May 1967. Later, in 1969, he was officially elected as the council's first leader, with the title of Imam. Yet he was under serious attack from some of the Shiite Zu'ama who were witnessing how their political power over the community was fading due to the Imam's ever-increasing popularity, not only within the community but also throughout Lebanon and perhaps among some regional leaders.

At the same time as the Arab Defeat in the Six Day War, Imam Musa Sadr issued a statement asking all Arabs to learn from this experience, to retreat and to believe that the war with Israel was not yet finished. He then promised that 'with the support of God the final triumph is ours'.<sup>37</sup> This was the public commencement of the Imam's 'resistance discourse' against what he entitled the 'Absolute Evil', Israel. He declared that,

The illegitimacy of the Israeli regime is evident to everyone, as is the legitimacy of the Palestinian resistance. We all know that from the early history of the Israeli government, they had adopted a racist stance. We are facing an illegitimate regime, which does not even act according to its own religious book ... Therefore, I should announce here, that to support the Palestinian cause, to liberate al-Quds, we all have to actively ally ourselves together. We have to put our marginal disparities aside in order to achieve victory over Israel.<sup>38</sup>

However, the Palestinian question was not as straightforward as it appeared initially in Lebanon. The Israeli threats, the inability of Arab leaders to deal with them, and an increasing numbers of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon became three of the most influential factors in Lebanon's politics and came to overshadow most of the Imam's endeavours to solve the

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<sup>36</sup> *Al-Hayat* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 20 August 1966.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 26 July 1967.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 17 September 1968.

problems of the South. In this, Imam Sadr was still under attack from some Shiite Zu'ama, which placed additional restrictions on his activities.<sup>39</sup>

Imam Sadr considered the Palestinian question to be one of the most important humanitarian and religious concerns for all citizens. However, the irresponsible activities of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) fighters in the South brought more misery to the Lebanese inhabitants of the area. Imam Sadr sought to maintain a balance between support for the Palestinians and for the welfare of the southerners, but his actions were limited by the heterogeneous organisation of the PLO, and the fear that the Sunnites might regard the Lebanese Shiites as traitors.<sup>40</sup>

Among all Palestinian leaders, Yasser Arafat was the one in whom Imam Sadr had most faith. The cooperation between the Imam and Arafat's *Fatah* organisation provided the foundation for a series of cooperative activities in the coming years. However, it soon became evident that Arafat did not have full authority over all PLO factions and their activities in Lebanon. The Imam valued, above all, the alliance with the Palestinians in pursuit of their sacred cause. He constantly referred to this alliance as the unity between the deprived *in* their homeland, the Lebanese Shiite, and the deprived *from* their homeland, the Palestinian refugees (Hujjati Kermani 2010: 65).

After Hafez al-Assad assumed the presidency in Syria, Imam Musa Sadr went to Damascus to congratulate him in May 1971. From the Imam's point of view, Assad could be seen as a resourceful regional partner for the Shiite community. Historically, all Lebanese sects have had international sponsors: France for the Maronites, Russia for the Greek Orthodox, Britain for the Druze, Saudi Arabia and Egypt for the Sunnite Muslims.<sup>41</sup> In the absence of the Iranian regime, which had already showed its reluctance to support the community in Lebanon, the Alawite regime in Syria became the best alternative for the Imam and his companions in Lebanon. This led to a strategic alliance between Hafez Assad and Imam Musa Sadr, from which both parties gained greatly for several years.

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<sup>39</sup> One of the Imam's critics was Kamil Asaad, one of the main feudal Shiites of the South, who employed his maximum capability to prevent the Imam's leadership of the SISC. When he lost on this front, he then focused on a variety of means by which to push the Imam to give up politics, and to limit him and the SISC to solely pursue religious issues. His wish was never fulfilled (Samih Haydous, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Kermani 2010: 89. In correspondence with one of his students, Imam Musa Sadr once refers to a statement by the Egyptian philosopher, Ahmad Amin: 'It is absolutely fair to say that Shiite Muslims have always provided a safe haven for those who have betrayed Islam'. He bitterly discloses that some religious Sunnite intellectuals had labeled Shiites in Lebanon as the enemy's fifth column.

<sup>41</sup> Sadeq Tabatabai, interview with the author Tehran, Iran, November 2012.

In addition to seeking a regional ally that could put pressure on Lebanon's government, Imam Sadr started to organise an inter-sectarian institute that could pursue redress for the demands of all of Lebanon's underprivileged citizens. With the election of Suleiman Frangieh to the presidency in Lebanon in 1970, the development of the South had been halted again. The government's disregard left the Imam no choice but to independently pursue plans for the development of the South. In his opinion, Lebanon had two classes: the 'privileged', mainly comprised of Lebanon's renowned and powerful families, and the 'underprivileged' citizens.<sup>42</sup> While the former class was mainly settled in coastal cities and Mount Lebanon, the latter was driven to the peripheries; whilst the privileged class was receiving plenty of attention from the government, the underprivileged class was suffering from the negligence of officials. Thus, Imam Sadr became determined to reduce the gap between those classes: a passion that not only gave him popularity among Lebanese of all sects, but also attracted powerful enemies, mainly from the powerful privileged class. Despite this, he eventually founded a socio-political organisation, not exclusive to the Shiite community, but belonging to all underprivileged Lebanese. Some leaders of other Lebanese sects, especially Armenians and Greek Orthodox, who were mainly settled in the South, joined him in pursuing this mission. In 1974, the Movement of the Deprived, *Harakat al-Mahrumin*, was born to advance the demands of all underprivileged Lebanese, no matter what sect they belonged to. Accusing the government of not fulfilling its responsibilities for the security of the inhabitants of the South, the Imam threatened that he would have no choice but to ask people to take up arms and to become actively engaged in establishing security for themselves.<sup>43</sup> He believed — and he expressed this belief through his actions — that praying and fasting and executing religious duties were not sufficient, and that God would not accept these religious obligations from those who did not perform their social responsibilities for their homeland and compatriots.<sup>44</sup> This turning point in the development of his political activism became apparent in his historic speech in Baalbeck, supporting the cause of the Movement. On 17 March 1974, coinciding with the Arbaeen of Imam Hussein, he addressed a crowd of 75 thousand supporters, almost ten thousand of whom were armed. He stated:

1335 years ago, when the captive family of Imam Hussein, the resident of Baalbek welcomed them and made the troops of Yazid flee and commemorated the martyrdom of Imam Hussein for the first time in history. Today we are

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<sup>42</sup> Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, October 2012.

<sup>43</sup> *An-Nahar* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 12 January 1974.

<sup>44</sup> Mehdi Firoozan, interview with the author, Tehran, January 2013.

witnessing that just like in those eras, the void is pervasive and nobody in the government cares about the right. We have gathered here once again to oppose something that our ancestors had opposed rightfully. Upon our legitimate demands to the government officials, they accused me of dreaming the presidency; now I declare loudly, clear to all, that I do not have such an objective. I challenge the officials that, if they fulfill our rightful civil demands, I shall immediately step down forever... Lebanese will remember that whatever Musa Sadr, his companions and followers have done so far was to maintain Lebanon's integrity and its security.

Resembling his movement to that of Imam Hussein's, Imam Sadr wanted to seize the most he could from the available political opportunity to attract the support of his laity followers as well as sending a strong message to the state. He then reproached Lebanese politicians, including the Shiite Zu'ama, who were criticising his involvement in politics and stated,

Now they advise me to confine myself to religious duties. I am asking them, what is religion? The religion that protects your unjust mandate and that makes people tolerate oppression is indeed not a worthy religion. How can I peacefully go to bed, while the South is under constant attacks of Israel?

At the time, Sadr was willing to broadcast his *ijtihad* about the sociopolitical role of Shiite clergy. The situation in Lebanon had made the Imam a political activist. In the middle of 1974, the turmoil between Lebanese sects, Palestinian guerillas and the warnings from Israel had reached a point that threatened a drastic encounter. It was in this political opportunity structure that Imam Sadr sought an alternative to protect deprived Lebanese and the endeavours that he had been working on for the sake of Lebanon's national integrity over the previous two decades. He had already gained enough popularity to enable him to speak loudly on behalf of deprived Lebanese of all sects. To show his determination to pursue the path he had chosen, he asked the crowd in Baalbeck to make this oath:

We swear to God, to his Prophet. We swear by human dignity, that we shall go on to vindicate the rightful demands of our community, and stand fearlessly beside all oppressed Lebanese. We stand beside what is right, throughout our homeland; we remain enemy to its enemies and hostile to Israel and its supporters.<sup>45</sup>

To this end, the Imam succeeded in mobilising the community behind his grand ambition. The Baalbek gathering halted all other Lebanese politicians' activities for days. The size of

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<sup>45</sup> *An-Nahar* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 18 March 1974.



the Imam's armed supporters who attended the gathering persuaded the majority of Lebanese leaders to urge the government to adopt their requested demands. In the coming days, Ghassan Tuani, the Christian editor of *An-Nahar* daily, described the gathering as a non-sectarian revolution that 'was not a revolution of a specific sect against other sects but it was a revolution of a specific sect representing all other Lebanese sects'.<sup>46</sup> A group of Lebanese religious elites, politicians, and intellectuals showed their support for the Imam's statement by visiting him personally.<sup>47</sup>

Twenty days after the Baalbeck gathering, Maruf Saad, the Nasserist leader of Sidon, invited Imam Sadr to give a talk in the city. For the Imam, to speak in the Sunni-dominated city, was a golden opportunity to present his non-sectarian position and challenge his rivals' accusations (Chamran 2009). This time, a larger gathering showed up to support him. He addressed the gathering and said:

If we restrict ourselves to religious praying and ignore the righteous demands of the deprived Lebanese, the oppressors would hang our pictures on walls and would worship us. But the Prophet Mohammad did not behave like this, and as his true followers we will not stay quiet over the oppressions... God has advised us to take our adornment in every mosque, today the man's adornment is his weapon.<sup>48</sup>

Then Imam Sadr walked and stood at the *Mihrab*<sup>49</sup> of the mosque, saying:

The place I am standing within, is called Mihrab. Have you ever asked yourselves, what is the relationship between war and mosque? It is called so, as this is the place to fight with the Evil; the oppressor and those who stay silent against him are both evils.<sup>50</sup>

These two gatherings clearly show the political manifesto of Imam Sadr and his perception around the political opportunity structure in Lebanon at the time. In April 1974, all of Lebanon saw a Shiite cleric who had wisely exploited his opportunities and become one of the most active political figures in the country. His perceptions about the sufferings of the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Pierre Gemayel, the leader of Phalanges Party, Sheikh Khaled, the Sunni Mufti, and Sheikh Abu-Shaqra, the Druze leader, were among those who visited Imam Sadr in the aftermath of the gathering, declaring their support for his righteous demands. See *Al-Hayat* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 24 March 1974.

<sup>48</sup> *An-Nahar Daily*, Beirut, Lebanon, 5 April 1974.

<sup>49</sup> An architectural dent in every Mosque showing the direction of Mecca; Mihrab with the Arabic root of H-R-B literally means place of war.

<sup>50</sup> *An-Nahar Daily*, Beirut, Lebanon, 5 April 1974.

Shiite community, along with the state's neglect, had pushed him to abandon quiescence and to become politically active in order to fight for his community's rightful demands. His reformist *ijtihad* and charisma made him a religious leader who was able to orchestrate social mobilisation. Indeed, his supporters did not exclusively belong to the Shiite community, but included the majority of Lebanon's underprivileged citizens.<sup>51</sup> Imam Sadr's political activities were also received warmly throughout the region. A unique document in this regard is the letter Ayatollah Khomeini wrote to him while he was in exile in Najaf. In his letter, the Ayatollah addressed him warmly and wrote to him:

I wish you the best and have to send my utmost gratitude for your deeds and struggles to assert Shiite rights and to cut the hands off oppressors of the community in Lebanon. I pray to God to save you for all of us; I pray to God to help you in mobilising Shiite youths, who are ready to sacrifice themselves in the path of God ... I pray to God Almighty to make us, the old clerics, young and active like you ... and let me ask you to pray for me and my future success before God<sup>52</sup>

Imam Sadr's civil disobedience coincided with the 1975 turmoil in Lebanon.<sup>53</sup> Though Lebanon would become divided between two fronts — Leftist elements and the PLO forming one side, and their rival Maronite groups forming the other — a common goal for both fronts was to become allied with Imam Sadr and to exploit his pervasive popularity in their own interests.<sup>54</sup> However, the intra-sectarian status that Imam Sadr had already chosen for his political stance did not allow him to incline towards either side. Although the Palestinians were expecting the Imam to make an alliance with them in opposition to the Maronite front, there was a critical issue impeding this. Imam Sadr had always appreciated the liberation of Quds, yet treated Palestinian refugees as guests of the Lebanese and especially southerners, not as a community that sought refuge in Lebanon to settle there forever. Unlimited Palestinian settlement in the south, *Tawtin al-Filistini fi Jonoob Lubnan*, was indeed one of the main aims of the PLO alliance with the Lebanese National Movement, and the scheme which attracted utmost strong objection from Imam Sadr.<sup>55</sup> In his opinion, the indefinite settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon would spoil their sacred cause to liberate the land of

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<sup>51</sup> Mohammad D. Nasrallah, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Letter dated 22 December 1974. See AMAL 2010: 395-96.

<sup>53</sup> From 1975 to 1990, Lebanon was entangled in a devastating civil war. For detailed information and various narratives of the Lebanese civil war see Fisk 2001, Hanf 1993, Harris 1997, Khazen 2004, Krayem 1997, Salibi 1976, and Winslow 1996.

<sup>54</sup> Khalil Hamdan, interview held in Nabatieh, August 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Hawra Sadr, interview with the author, Tehran, Iran, January 2013.

Palestine, and was indeed what Israel would like to achieve. On the one hand, Imam Sadr could not ally himself with Maronite fundamentalists who were seeking the aid of Israel, the absolute evil in his view, and who were willing to establish a Maronite clone of the Jewish state of Israel in north Lebanon.<sup>56</sup>

Left outside the bipartite conflict in Lebanon, Imam Sadr felt obliged to form a defensive militia wing for the movement, AMAL,<sup>57</sup> which could protect the deprived Lebanese from the extremism of both fronts. Having militia became more vital, when the majority of deprived southerners were trapped between the strongholds of both fronts. Therefore, AMAL was established as defensive militia belonging to all Lebanese who were threatened by hostility from other political parties. The organisation's charter clearly indicates two general terms for its members: believing in God and in human dignity.<sup>58</sup> Unlike other sectarian militia in Lebanon at the time, to become a member of AMAL, being a Shiite or Muslim was not obligatory. Contrary to what some scholars claim, that Imam Sadr's popularity was diminishing at the time due to his direct engagement in founding the militia (Gharbieh 1996, Norton 1987),<sup>59</sup> the support he received from hundreds of Lebanese intellectuals from various sects who signed a petition in his support proves his message had an appeal throughout the country by the mid-1970s.<sup>60</sup> Imam Sadr and his supporters were committed to an independent position that not only challenged the historical status of Lebanon's Zu'ama, but was also incompatible with the belligerents in the civil war at its commencement in 1975.

During the early stages of the civil war, Imam Sadr, who at the time was trusted by all Lebanese political parties, strived to arbitrate between hostile fronts, and invited them to develop a cease-fire plan and pursue reconciliation negotiations. On 20 April 1975, he invited a group of Muslim, Christian and Palestinian leaders to form a peace committee at the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council (SISC) office in Beirut, in order to come up with a comprehensive peace plan. He was also voted sole coordinator for the group, responsible for

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<sup>56</sup> Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, Iran, October 2012.

<sup>57</sup> *Afwaj al-Muqawamah al-Lubnaniyyah*, or Lebanese Resistance Regiments. As its name portrays, AMAL was formed as a Lebanese militia in 1974, non-aligned to either hostile fronts or a specific sect in Lebanon.

<sup>58</sup> Samih Haydous, interview with the author, Beirut, Lebanon, August 2012.

<sup>59</sup> For the English text of the AMAL charter, see Norton 1987, Appendix 1.

<sup>60</sup> More than 190 Lebanese intellectuals and politicians signed a petition in support of the movement. They were moderate leaders and scholars of all Lebanese sects, from Maronite, Orthodox, Armenian, Sunni, and Shiite. See *Al-Hayat Daily*, Beirut, Lebanon, 20 November 1974. Later when the public found out about AMAL's militia activities in July 1975, the Lebanese intellectuals announced their support for AMAL and its cause once again. See *Al-Anwar Daily*, Beirut, Lebanon, 12 July 1975.

meeting with all hostile parties and transmitting their demands between them (Adel 1981: 125). Praising his unique role in promoting national understanding, Karim Pakradouni, a Christian leader of the Kataeb Party, wrote in an open letter to Imam Sadr that,

Until yesterday, we were witnessing your moves fearfully, yet today we feel concern about your own security ... This is not the first time that you have put yourself forward to solve a problem in our country, but it is the first time that you are the only person who could possibly play out a positive role ... Today you are the only politician who can come up with an exit policy for the Palestinian-Lebanese conflict ... And what more I can add to Gemayel's opinion, when he called you *the peace Messenger of Lebanon*.<sup>61</sup>

However, in the face of fierce opposition to the Imam's initiatives, mostly from the LNM and their PLO allies, who were witnessing their victory in the conflict,<sup>62</sup> the Imam felt obliged to organise a huge strike in order to transmit his message throughout the country. In May 1975, he took refuge at al-Safa Mosque, located in the heart of the conflict in central Beirut, and commenced a hunger strike, asking all hostile parties to put down their arms and start negotiations. In his letter, he addressed all Lebanese and said:

Lebanon's conflict has crippled the country today ... I have done my utmost civil and national responsibility to avoid the drastic war in our beloved homeland, yet let me add that we have never been threatened by anything more dangerous than this conflict throughout our history ... Ironically I believe that the conflict does not have anything to do with our sectarian disparities or even the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon at its principles ... Therefore, from the very first hours of its commencement, I and a group of my friends from all sects, have done our best to solve the problem, though we have not reached any definite outcome... It seems that negotiations are meaningless, it seems that all ears are deaf. I hereby believe that our country requires a device more powerful than weapons, and more efficient than words, hence I found myself in the house of God to oppose those hostile parties who have polluted the soil of our country. I will continue my hunger strike, until the moment that this conflict will be wiped out from our Lebanon. I sacrifice my life to my homeland's peace, as this is the last thing I have to offer. However, for this to become fruitful, I demand the support of you Lebanese, from every corner of the country. I urge all of you to respect my action's peaceful nature and not to support it by arms. Today, I, as the helpless slave of God, am sheltered in his house, hoping he will save us all and our homeland.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Al-A'mal* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 30 April 1975.

<sup>62</sup> In general they were against the role of the Shiite Council acting as the key player in the crisis. Palestinians opposed the Imam at the time, as they were concerned over the disclosure of the terms of the Cairo Accord, something that might impact negatively on their settlement in Lebanon. See *Ousbou Al-Arabi* Weekly, Beirut, Lebanon, 5 May 1975.

<sup>63</sup> *Al-Anwar* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 28 June 1975.

Through this letter and symbolic act, Imam Sadr aimed to explain to people Lebanon's political opportunity structure and how he foresaw the outcome of the conflict. Six days on, with the massive support of Lebanese civilians, the military cabinet resigned and a new government was formed to reconcile the conflict. The cease-fire however, was not durable since Lebanon was trapped in a heterogeneous network of internal and regional hostilities. In response to the request of the Imam and his companions from other sects, the Syrian army intervened in the conflict in Lebanon. This coincided with far more dangerous encounters between PLO guerilla fighters and the Arab Deterrent Force under the leadership of Syria.<sup>64</sup>

While different Lebanese parties were involved in the civil war, the blind arrogance of the Palestinian guerilla fighters in the south brought enormous misery to Lebanese inhabitants by provoking the Israeli invasion in March 1978. At the time of the invasion, Imam Sadr was in Paris attending a religious conference. In a statement he issued right after the invasion, he restated his position with respect to Israel. However, this time he indirectly blamed Palestinians and their actions as a cause of the costly consequences for the Lebanese.<sup>65</sup> Although over the years Imam Sadr had called Israel the most formidable threat to the region's and to Lebanon's stability, the constant disregard of Lebanon's integrity by Palestinian guerilla fighters had left him with a sense of resentment. During the 1978 invasion by Israel of Lebanon, for which thousands of inhabitants in the south paid the price, it seemed that Imam Sadr was seeking a more pragmatic solution.<sup>66</sup> It was then that he started to seek the assistance of some regional Arab leaders who were major financial supporters of the Palestinians at the time, to mediate in the conflict and to control the movement of the guerrillas in Lebanon. During these visits, he was constantly in contact with President Sarkis, informing him of his progress.<sup>67</sup> He visited King Hussein of Jordan, and King Khaled of Saudi in April 1978, and finally went to Algeria to meet with President Boumedienne in June, when he was advised to seek the assistance of Ghaddafi who, at the time, was among the most

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<sup>64</sup> Dhaher 2000:104-106. In September and November 1976, Imam Sadr visited Anwar Sadat in Cairo, Hafez al-Assad in Damascus, King Khaled in Riyadh, and Sheikh Sabah in Kuwait, inviting them to hold an extraordinary Arab League Summit dealing with the Lebanon's conflict. In 16 October these four along with Yasser Arafat, PLO leader, and Elias Sarkis, then the president of Lebanon, gathered in Riyadh appointing Syria as their representative in Lebanon and urging Palestinian groups to respect the Lebanese sovereignty.

<sup>65</sup> *An-Nahar* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 17 March 1978.

<sup>66</sup> Sadeq Tabatabai, interview with the author, Tehran, November 2012.

<sup>67</sup> *An-Nahar* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 28 May 1978.

revolutionary leaders of the region.<sup>68</sup> Imam Sadr left Lebanon for Libya on 28 August 1978, to meet with Ghaddafi, a trip from which he never returned, leaving the Lebanese and the Shiite community abandoned and without a charismatic leader.

After twenty years of Imam Sadr's activities in Lebanon, his popularity among other Lebanese leaders in 1978 had never been greater.<sup>69</sup> He had become the voice of the Shiite community in Lebanon by challenging the traditional Zu'ama's position. A major catalyst for his popularity among the community was the amount of support he had received from Maraje' of Najaf and Qom. From the moment he entered Lebanon, he was in close contact with Grand Ayatollahs Hakim and Khoei in Iraq, and Grand Ayatollahs Shariatmadari, Golpaygani, Milani and Mara'shi in Iran.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, he had family relations with Grand Ayatollah Khomeini who, at the time, was in exile in Iraq. Having gained massive support for his activities in Lebanon, Imam Sadr became the one and only Shiite religious figurehead in the community in Lebanon.

At a broader regional level, Imam Sadr contributed to the Shiite community in Iran during their uprising against the Shah's regime. For years, it was clear to the regime's secret service that the Imam had provided the revolutionaries with a safe haven in Lebanon. However, at the funeral of Ali Shariati, he publicly criticised the Iranian regime, calling Shariati a true hero who had connected with the silent people and made them become actively involved and rise up against the oppressor, the Shah (Sadr 2005: 115). Additionally, Imam Sadr expressed his fully-fledged support for Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamic movement, and did all he could to help the Iranian movement under the leadership of the Ayatollah.<sup>71</sup> It is interesting that, in his last surviving written communication, his published article in *Le Monde*, dated 23 August 1978, Imam Sadr foresaw the Islamic revolution in Iran. In his article, Imam Sadr describes the Iranian uprising as a unique movement that challenges the hegemonies of the West and the East, and that seeks to fulfill the will of the masses. He expressed his support for the movement, saying that,

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<sup>68</sup> Mohsen Kamalian, interview with the author, Tehran, Iran, November 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Salah Zawawi, interview with the author, Tehran, Iran, January 2013.

<sup>70</sup> The hundreds of telegrams he had received from Maraje' in Iraq and Iran, in support of him, show Imam Sadr's esteemed position among the Shiite communities of Iran and Iraq. See SAVAK 2000.

<sup>71</sup> Imam Sadr provided mediation between Ayatollah Khomeini and Lucien George, a correspondent for *Le Monde* based in Beirut in April 1978 for an interview. For the first time, the world became familiar with the opinions of the Ayatollah regarding the situation in the region and Iran. Muhsin Kamalian, interview with the author, Tehran, November 2012.

This wave that will transform the face of Iran reminds the *Call of Prophets* for revitalizing human dignity and morality ... hence all free people around the world should support Iranians and their leader; all should condemn the bloodshed of the Shah's regime.<sup>72</sup>

His prediction came true just weeks later though, unfortunately for the Iranians and the Lebanese, Imam Sadr was not present to witness this victory in person. It was perhaps the case that the prospect of an alliance between two influential and charismatic Shiite leaders caused resentment among some international and regional leaders and was seen as a threat. This might have been a reason for Imam Sadr's disappearance. It was evident that the development of Imam Sadr's robust sociopolitical network in the region, and his unique pragmatic experiences, on the one hand, and the massive support of Iranians for Imam Khomeini, on the other hand, held out the prospect of a far more prosperous future for Shiite Islam in the modern Middle East.<sup>73</sup>

### **III. Establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Ascent of Shiite Political Activism in Lebanon**

Almost two decades after the Imam entered Lebanon, the majority in the Shiite community had become politically mobilised in response to his political stance. His reformist activities addressing the country's political opportunity structure, his unique and unsurpassed charisma and personality, and his novel *Ijtihad* over the role of clergy in society, shaped and mobilised the community's activities from the time he introduced his movement. With Imam Sadr removed from the scene, the question of the community's leadership became the most significant threat to the Shiite of Lebanon. The issue became even more complicated when, just six months after the Imam's disappearance, the first Shiite state of the modern Middle East was established in Iran. Nevertheless, although his mysterious disappearance added to the miseries of what had become a politically ambitious community, it provided his two main inheritors, the leaders of the SISC and AMAL, with an opportunity to prevail in their authority over the community in Lebanon.<sup>74</sup> The crucial dimension of the traditional political structure, namely the Shiite *Zu'ama*, had been crippled by the activities of Imam Sadr and the

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<sup>72</sup> *Le Monde*, Paris, France, 23 August 1978.

<sup>73</sup> Sadr al-Din Sadr, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Ajami 1985. To some extent, his fate resembled, for the Shiite, the Occultation Discourse, as his disappearance embodied Shiite twelfth Imam's status in modern times. This presented Imam Sadr's religio-political apostles with an initial advantage in assuming leadership of the community. Nonetheless, to consolidate their authority, they had to encounter two main rivals: the Shiite *Zu'ama* and a group of Shiite activist figures that had been active even during the Imam Sadr's era.

sociopolitical transformation of the community. Although Kamel Asaad was Speaker of the National Assembly at the time, six years after the last general election, the escalation of civil strife and the transformation of the national and regional political balance, were all a dismayed response to Shiite Zu'ama status. The Imam's presence had undermined their authority among the Shiite community, but to some extent his absence further alienated the community from the Zu'ama, whose hostility towards Imam Sadr, then the sacred occulted Imam, was evident. Despite all these factors, it seems that the last nail in the Shiite Zu'ama's coffin came in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Prior to the rise of revolutionaries in Iran, the Zu'ama were considered to be the Shah's allies. This, ultimately, led to their being regarded as an enemy of the Islamic Republic and, hence, blocked any chance for Iranians, the new foreign supporter of the community, to back the Zu'ama in Lebanon.

Another possible alternative for the leadership of the community was a group of religious figures and their supporters who, although they had respected Imam Sadr, had been critical of his moderate political stance. With the Imam out of the way and the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, this group got carried away with the idea of replicating the Iranian revolution in Lebanon. The group, however, comprised a heterogeneous pool of Shiite elite personalities. It ranged from the most accredited cleric, Seyyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, to some lower-ranking clerics who were considered to be the apostles of Seyyed Mohammad Baqer Sadr, the Lebanese branch of the Dawa Party.<sup>75</sup> With the rise of their allies in Iran and the enduring relationship which they had with the revolution's leader, Imam Khomeini, they were given an opportunity to dominate with their political practice throughout the community. However, initially their stronghold was restricted to the suburbs of Beirut, and areas of the Beqaa Valley, especially the city of Baalbeck. While Ayatollah Fadlallah was settling in Naba'a in eastern Beirut from 1966, upon his return from Najaf, Lebanon's Dawa Party members were active in the Beqaa.

The formation of the Interim Government in Iran was an auspicious development for the Lebanese companions of Imam Sadr, especially the leaders of AMAL and SISC. The members of the new government were mostly among those Iranian elite who, over years of struggle to topple the Shah, had built a close relationship with Imam Sadr and had enjoyed his fully-fledged support. Mustafa Chamran, the founding member of AMAL, was later

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<sup>75</sup> Davoodabadi 2012: 26. In early 1980, with the mass expulsion of Lebanese Shiite students from Najaf, they mostly joined this trend of political activism upon their return to Lebanon.



appointed Defense Minister in Iran.<sup>76</sup> Imam Sadr's nephew, Sadeq Tabatabai, was the government's spokesperson. However, they were not the only active Islamic faction in Iran at the time. Indeed, they comprised only a small group within the moderate front in post-revolutionary Iran, and there were groups of Islamists along with them who not only possessed a more hardline approach, but were also waiting for their extremist political stance to prevail over the new revolution.<sup>77</sup>

Notwithstanding, with the rise of the Shiite government in Iran, the abandoned Shiite community of Lebanon turned their eyes towards Iran and its religious supreme leader, Imam Khomeini; they were firstly, asking Iranians to use all available political measures to bring Imam Sadr back to Lebanon and, secondly, demanding both moral and financial support.<sup>78</sup> However, the direct inheritors of Imam Sadr's legacy in Lebanon, who might have assumed leadership of the community in his absence, confronted a set of internal and external obstacles. Perhaps one of the main internal impediments that AMAL and SISC confronted was the lack of a multi-faceted personality similar to Imam Sadr.

During the time Imam Sadr was the president-elect of the SISC, he founded the AMAL as an intra-sectarian defensive militia. While the former was devoted solely to pursuing sociopolitical rights for the Shiite community in Lebanon, the latter was established to protect the rights of deprived Lebanese regardless of their sect. The only fact that related the SISC to AMAL during Imam Sadr's time in Lebanon was his unique personality and his perception about the world around. This did not imply that the president of the SISC should govern AMAL. After Imam Sadr disappeared in 1978, conflict between Sheikh Mohammad

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<sup>76</sup> Three days before the victory of the Revolution in Iran, Chamran along with 500 militia members of AMAL tried to parachute to the centre of Tehran and to engage with the Shah's army. However, while their plane was in the air heading towards Iran, they were informed that the Iranian Chief Commanders of the army declared its neutrality towards the revolutionaries, and the regime toppled. (Adel Aoun, interview with the author, Tehran, January 2013).

<sup>77</sup> Ironically, the majority of these hardliners were among those revolutionaries who were trained in Lebanon and Syria during the Shah's regime, and were subsequently among the critics of Imam Sadr's activities in Lebanon. Mohammad Ali Montazeri, son of the Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, Jalaeddin Farsi, a member of the Islamic Republican Party, Mohammad Gharazi, and Abbas Agha Zamani, co-founders of the Revolutionary Guards, were among the active revolutionary combatants in Lebanon who were among the Shah's opponents. They generally had strong ties with the PLO and Fatah, and opposed Imam Sadr's moderate political views at the time in Lebanon. All were recipients of key positions in the first decade of post-revolutionary Iran (Sadeq Tabatabai, interview with the author, Tehran, Iran, November 2012).

<sup>78</sup> Just months earlier, in December 1978, Imam Khomeini had encouraged the Lebanese Shiites in his interview with an AMAL journal correspondent to 'assist their Iranian coreligionists in toppling the regime of Shah, as the revolutionaries are opposing Israel alongside them and will compensate them when they achieve victory'. See *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol.5, 7 December 1978.

Mahdi Shams al-Din, the Imam's deputy at the SISC,<sup>79</sup> and Hussein al-Husseini who led AMAL after Imam Sadr, escalated around this issue.<sup>80</sup> While Shams al-Din was reserving the AMAL's leadership for himself as the new head of SISC, Husseini, consistent with AMAL's charter, was keen to preserve the secular face of the movement and so opposed SISC involvement.

Shams al-Din was among a group of Shiite clerics who had quite similar views to those of Imam Musa Sadr, though he lacked the charisma of his predecessor. Like Imam Sadr, Shams al-Din was born in Iraq, but he was Lebanese by descent. While in Najaf as an esteemed student of Grand Ayatollahs Mohsen Hakim and Khomeini, he was involved in reformist religious groups and was acquainted with Imam Sadr there. After coming to Lebanon in 1969, he assisted Imam Sadr in the formation of the Shiite Islamic Supreme Council and, in 1975, was appointed vice president of the Council. The main difference between Shams al-Din and the Imam was their different personalities: while Imam Sadr was more engaged with laymen, Shams al-Din's activities and avant-garde ideas had more appeal among Shiite clerical elites. In other words, Imam Sadr had *walked with* the community, step by step, while Shams al-Din, as a Shiite modern-thinking cleric, was *far ahead* of the community; thus, the relationship between the Shiite of Lebanon and Shams al-Din was not established as robustly as with the Imam Sadr.<sup>81</sup> He was less of a political personality, though he was a reformist, Shiite cleric who was not as successful as Imam Sadr in building a social base among the masses. However, his thoughts on Islamic government and sectarian coexistence were revolutionary among the Shiite clerics of Lebanon, Iran and Iraq.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, AMAL's leading committee was dominated by a group of nouveau riche, secular Shiite political figures who had become known during the Imam's reign in Lebanon and included, most prominently, personalities like Hussein al-Husseini and Nabih Berri (Norton 1985). However, the lack of collaboration between the religious faction of the SISC, and the political wing of the AMAL movement, worked to the detriment of both groups with regard

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<sup>79</sup> As an honorary gesture to Imam Sadr, the position of the SISC president was not awarded to anybody else after his disappearance. After 1978, and until 1997, when Imam Sadr would have been 69 year old and, thus, would have been barred from serving as the president of the Council, other presidents of the SISC were given the title of vice-president.

<sup>80</sup> Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, October 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Samih Haydous, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Kadivar 1997:159-174. While in Iraq, Shams al-Din wrote *The Governance and Management System in Islam* (1954), one of the earliest books written by a Shiite cleric concerning modern Islamic government. Years later, in the early 1990s, he introduced his theory of 'the Guardianship of the Nation', that assumed a place alongside that of Imam Khomeini's and Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Sadr's thoughts concerning Shiite governance during the Occultation Era.

to replicating the leadership of Imam Sadr; and it was as a consequence of this that their influence over the Shiite community in Lebanon diminished during this period. Imam Musa Sadr's reputation had provided an anchor between SISC and AMAL after he disappeared. Nevertheless, SISC's role was confined to trivial religious activities, while the escalation of the civil war pushed AMAL leaders to engage in the war against other Lebanese citizens, in direct opposition to what Imam Sadr had wished.<sup>83</sup>

Confusion concerning its leadership entrapped the Shiite community in Lebanon in a series of national and regional developments. The Southern Lebanon Army was operating in the south on behalf of Israel, and the conflict between PLO fighters was at its peak after Imam Sadr's disappearance. It was at this time that a group of Iranian hardliner Islamists saw an opportunity to 'export the revolution'. Among them was the World Liberation Movement (WLM), headed by Mohammad Ali Montazeri, an Iranian extremist member of the clergy and member of the Islamic Republican Party, who had been based in Syria and Lebanon prior to the revolution in Iran. He was among the Iranian revolutionaries who had had a long-term relationship with Fatah and Colonel Gaddafi of Libya.<sup>84</sup> In the summer of 1979, Montazeri visited Lebanon along with 300 Iranian volunteers with the aim of engaging in Lebanon's civil war, expelling the Israeli army from the south, and supporting the PLO and the Shiite community. In a press conference held in a mosque in Beirut, he explained that he and those who had accompanied him from Iran had come to Lebanon 'to fight alongside our Muslim brothers and Palestinians to liberate Lebanon from the filthy hands of the Zionist regime and its Imperialist agents'. When he was asked how he would carry out this aim, he responded by raising his hand and shouting 'with our clenched fists, as we have done in Iran'.<sup>85</sup> However, the course of events that unfolded in the Islamic Republic in the months following the revolution restricted the activities of hardliner groups and prevented them from extending the revolution beyond the borders of the country.

Lebanon, like many other Middle Eastern states, also felt the impact of the Iran-US confrontation and the Iran-Iraq War. Perhaps the foremost consequence of the US approach

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<sup>83</sup> Hani Fahs, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

<sup>84</sup> After the Iranian Revolution, the proponents of this political doctrine had a close relationship with the PLO and Libyan Ambassadors in Iran, Hani Hassan and Saad Mujber. In addition to their extreme Islamic propensities, they were advocates of the left-inclined Islamic Internationalism, and hence became loyal to rejectionist Arab leaders like Gaddafi and Arafat in order to advance their views throughout Islamic countries. Therefore, in Lebanon, while they were against the Israeli occupation, they did not believe in sectarian coexistence between Muslims and Christians, and were thus against Imam Sadr and his more moderate political posture. (Muhsin Kamalian, interview with the author, Tehran, November 2012).

<sup>85</sup> Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, October 2012.

towards Iran, formed mainly in the aftermath of the hostage crisis, was the rise of Israel's regional strategic value to the White House (Ramazani 1986: 180). This provided Israel with more flexibility in pursuing its regional interests. With the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai on April 1982 and prospects of a long-lasting peace with Egypt, the security of the northern borders with Lebanon became the first priority for Israel. At the same time, the course of the Iran-Iraq war had shifted dramatically: the Iranian army liberated Khorramshahr on 24 May 1982 after two years of Iraqi occupation and gained leverage over the Iraqi army for the first time since the commencement of the War.<sup>86</sup>

Saddam was not only defeated on the battleground, but also his plan to represent the war with Iran as an Arab-Persian encounter was cast into doubt when the Syrian Arab Republic signed a strategic treaty with the Islamic Republic and shut its borders to Iraqi oil exports in early 1982 (Agha and Khalidi 1995: 12). For Saddam Hussein, Lebanon provided an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone: the Syrian army was present there at the time, and Iran exercised a large influence on its Shiite community. In Israel, on the other hand, the right-wing government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, along with the Defense Minister, Ariel Sharon, was preparing a plan to expel PLO guerilla fighters from Lebanon and to restore security on its borders. However, the new PLO attitude, in disengaging from provocative activities against Israel from within Lebanese territory, had stopped Israel from advancing its master plan, at least until a major excuse could be found. The excuse was provided by Iraq, when the Iraqi Intelligence Service along with its client Palestinian terrorist group, Abu-Nidal, attempted to assassinate the Israeli Ambassador in London on 3 June 1982.<sup>87</sup> Although, Abu-Nidal had left the PLO nine years earlier for Israel, as long as the plot provided an internationally-recognised provocation, this was enough reason to invade Lebanon, and Israel targeted PLO guerrilla fighter just three days after the incident (Goodarzi 2006: 61).

At the same time as the invasion of Lebanon by Israel, two divisions of the Iranian army and the Revolutionary Guards were transferred to the Beqaa via Damascus. While the Israeli army was heading towards the capital, the Iranian soldiers were forming positions alongside Syrian forces to engage in a war with Israel. However, the sudden cease-fire

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<sup>86</sup> Karsh 2002: 22-3. The first major engagement between the Iraqi army and Iranian forces occurred in Khorramshahr, the main non-oil port of Iran in the province of Khuzestan. Iraq succeeded in occupying the city within 34 days of its invasion of Iran and imposed its mandate over the city for almost two years.

<sup>87</sup> Later reports released by Scotland Yard confirmed that the three assassins were in contact with the Military Attaché's office at the Iraqi Embassy in London. See *Haaretz* Daily, Tel Aviv, Israel Dated 6 December 1982.

between Syria and Israel, and the call of Imam Khomeini asking forces to return to the battleground with Iraq, prevented any further engagement by Iranian troops. The majority of them headed back to Iran, while a few dozen remained in the Beqaa to train Lebanese.<sup>88</sup> In his message to the Iranian forces, Imam Khomeini acknowledged the whole plot as a hostile conspiracy against Iran and reminded his supporters that the ‘path to liberate al-Quds runs across Karbala’. He declared that,

The Islamic Republic’s enemies have manipulated us for a while; they were aware of our sensitivity to Lebanon, therefore, they came up with a plot to distract our attention from the war with Iraq. They knew that we are sensitive to Lebanon; thus, they came up with this plot.<sup>89</sup>

The Imam confessed that he had misperceived the transnational political opportunity structure at the midst of Iran-Iraq war, and had, thus, hastened to undo his moves by asking the Iranian forces to return. Although the Israeli invasion ultimately led to the PLO’s expulsion from Lebanon, it also provoked a paradigm shift among the Shiite of Lebanon. In the aftermath of the invasion, groups of Lebanese Shiite raised the banner of resistance against Israel with the close collaboration of forces from the Islamic Republic. As Israeli Prime Minister Rabin later recalled, the invasion had ‘let the genie out of the bottle’ (Norton 2009: 33).

### ***The Rise of Hezbollah***

Two weeks after the Israeli invasion, west Beirut came under siege. Prior to closing the siege around Beirut, the Israeli army, with the assistance of Lebanese militia forces, confronted AMAL resistance in Khaldeh for some days, though eventually all militia members, along with thousands of Palestinian fighters, were confined in west Beirut.<sup>90</sup> It was at this point that President Sarkis called for a National Salvation Committee to decide upon the fate of the PLO presence in Lebanon and the Israeli ultimatum. The group comprised six members from predominant Lebanese sects.<sup>91</sup> Nabih Berri, then the leader of AMAL, was invited to represent the Shiite community on the committee. For the AMAL members and clerical elite of the SISC that was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to consolidate their leadership over the

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<sup>88</sup> Mohsen Rafiqdoost, interview with the author, Tehran, January 2013.

<sup>89</sup> *Sahifeh Imam Khomeini*, Vol.16: 351-2.

<sup>90</sup> Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, October 2012.

<sup>91</sup> The Sunnite Prime Minister Shafik Wazzan, the Druze Walid Jumblatt, the Maronite Bachir Gemayel, the Orthodox Fouad Petros Sarkis, the Catholic Nasri Maalouf, along with the Shiite Nabih Berri, were members of the committee. (Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, October 2012).

community in Lebanon, since it was the first time that they had been called upon at this national decision-making level to represent the Shiite of Lebanon. While, ostensibly, Nabih Berri was reluctant to take part in the committee, the majority of AMAL and SISC leading clerics, including Shams al-Din, voted on his participation (Haytham 2004: 150). The deliberation of the committee on the issue of Palestinian expulsion from Lebanon was restricted to the decision of the Sunnite Prime Minister and Saeb Salam, who acted as the mediator between Arafat and the US envoy Habib. West Beirut was a Sunnite stronghold and, traditionally, was under the rule of the Salam and Solh families. Out of the committee's six members, the Christians were in favour of PLO expulsion while, in reality, the eventual decision of the Muslim bloc was in hands of Wazzan and those he was representing, the Sunnite Zu'ama of west Beirut.<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, with the incompetency of the SISC, Berri's participation in the committee caused a schism within the community in the summer of 1982. While the secular wing of AMAL was still under siege in Beirut, Hussein Musawi, the chief of the AMAL office in Baalbeck, announced his break from the movement and the formation of the Islamic AMAL, an organisation more inclined towards the Islamic Republican cause. This marked the rise of a strong rivalry within the Shiite community between the joint leadership of AMAL and the SISC. Unfortunately for the Shiite of Lebanon, the legacy of Imam Sadr, based on the unity of the community, human dignity and non-sectarian coexistence, was falling apart in the absence of a united and all-embracing leadership. The Council did not have effective authority, the AMAL leadership was entangled with the hostile attacks from Israel in the south and in Beirut, and the Shiite of the Beqaa were about to sectarianise the Imam's movement by labeling it as 'Islamic'. Therefore, the schism that Musawi initiated, contrary to what he claimed later, was not consistent with Imam Sadr's political stance but, more probably, was influenced by Fatah affiliates and their allies amongst Iranian politicians who were based, at the time, inside the Iranian embassy in Damascus.<sup>93</sup> At the time, when the south and Beirut were under Israeli occupation, the Iranian Ambassador in Syria, Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour, made contact with Muslim figures in the Beqaa and in Tripoli, areas outside the sphere of the Israeli occupation, to form a Lebanese resistance group against Israel and its allies. The common denominator within all of these groups and amongst these figures was opposition to the Zionist regime within the framework of the Islamic Republic, namely the theory of the Guardianship of the Jurist. Islamic AMAL, Lebanon's al-Dawa Party and a

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<sup>92</sup> Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, October 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Anonymous source, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

group of young clerics who had settled in the new-born seminary of Baalbeck were the main groups who responded to Mohtashamipour's call (Davoodabadi 2012: 27).<sup>94</sup>

In the autumn of 1982, whilst Israel and its allies were preoccupied with the conflict in Beirut and the South of Lebanon, the Lebanese Shiite of Beqaa formed a clandestine resistance group, later called Hezbollah, with the direct support of the Islamic Republic (Crooke 2009: 175). Dozens of Iranian Revolutionary Guard members who had been stationed in the Baalbeck seminary began training the Lebanese to ready them for an engagement with Israeli forces in the South. Later on, the 'leftover' Shiite members of the PLO, who were rejected by AMAL, joined Hezbollah and made the group even more formidable.<sup>95</sup> The emergence of Hezbollah in Lebanon not only promised a dramatic change for the Shiite community, but also introduced a new force into the balance of power in Lebanon and the region in the mid-1980s. However, the leaders of this new group had a long way to go in order to consolidate their authority throughout the community and to mobilise the Shiite masses through their extremist political stance. As a result, the Shiite community of Lebanon was polarised between those in the south and in the suburbs of Beirut, on the one hand, and a faction in the Beqaa bordering Syria under the rule of the new Islamic Resistance Party, on the other. When on 11 November 1982, a bomb detonated inside the Israeli base in Tyre, all the countries and parties involved in Lebanon were baffled by this new extremist trend.<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, evidence confirms that in this action and all other major activities against Israel until 1985, AMAL was cooperating with the Islamic Resistance group in the Beqaa.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> The Sunnite Islamic Unification Movement, which was a splinter group of the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, under the leadership of Sheikh Said Shaaban in 1982, and was based in Tripoli, was among the attendees. See Mohtashamipour interview with *Shahed- e-Yaran Quarterly*, Tehran, Iran, Vol. 40 Autumn 2006.

<sup>95</sup> Imad Fayez Mughniyah, then the head of Hezbollah's security division, was among those Shiite youth who were abandoned by the AMAL militia upon the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon and were well received by the newly-formed Hezbollah in the Beqaa valley. (Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, October 2012).

<sup>96</sup> At the time of the operation no party claimed responsibility. Later on in 1985, when Deir Qanoun al-Nahr, Qasir's hometown was liberated from Israeli occupation, Hezbollah revealed his name and claimed responsibility. Israeli officials, however, attributed the casualties to a gas leak, which resulted in 144 killed and injured. See Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Highlights of Main Events 1982-84*, Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign%20Relations/Israels%20Foreign%20Relations%20since%201947/1982-1984/HIGHLIGHTS%20OF%20MAIN%20EVENTS-%201982-1984> [Accessed 10 March 2013].

<sup>97</sup> Adel Aoun, interview with the author, Tehran, January 2013.

In its efforts to gain leadership of the community and to make the most out of the available opportunities, Hezbollah had pursued a multi-faceted policy from the outset: opposing the Multinational Forces presence in Lebanon, as a proxy for the Islamic Republic; legitimising Islamic Resistance against the Israeli occupation of the south; and consolidating its position as the only legitimate voice of the community (Kramer 1996). To act on behalf of the Islamic Republic, and perhaps the extreme faction in its leadership, the Shiite resistance carried out a series of attacks against the western fronts inside Lebanon (e.g. the US embassy bombings in 1983, and the taking of Western citizens as hostages). Hezbollah can be acknowledged to have attempted to import the Islamic Revolution from Iran and, as a matter of fact, the Islamic Republic had taken every opportunity to exploit the activities of its loyal Shiite party in Lebanon.<sup>98</sup> The Islamic Republic's authority over Hezbollah, however, lessened in the late 1980s.

In order to engage with the resistance against the Israeli occupation of the south, Hezbollah needed to expand its operations beyond the Beqaa. This aim was advanced by the activities of two important Shiite clerics, Sheikh Raqib Harb in Jeb-sheet, a village in the south, and Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah in the suburban areas of Beirut. Both were fully devoted to Imam Khomeini and his discourse. Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah had born in Najaf to a Lebanese parent, and returned to Lebanon in 1966 to be settled in Naba'a, in the east of Beirut. His return to Lebanon coincided with the rise of Imam Sadr as an active Shiite leader in Lebanon. Although they respected each other, Fadlallah's perception of the political opportunity structure was very different to that of Imam Sadr at the time;<sup>99</sup> though he hoped to spread his more extreme stance within the Shiite community, Fadlallah lacked Sadr's charisma (Khashan 2010). During the Imam Sadr's reign in Lebanon, Fadlallah was perhaps his most significant critic within the Lebanese Shiite clergy.<sup>100</sup> The disappearance of Imam Sadr encouraged Shiite clerics with similar political stances to that of Fadallah to attempt to raise their religio-political stature within the community. His political activism had further escalated by the eve of the Israeli invasion and with the establishment of Hezbollah by a

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<sup>98</sup> During the Reagan presidency, a group of extreme revolutionaries inside the Islamic Republic leadership had used Hezbollah several times. An example of those activities can be recalled in the case of the US-Christian Missionary in Lebanon, Benjamin Weir, who was taken hostage in May 1984. He was freed after sixteen months, just hours after the covert arms deal between the US and Iran. For a full account of the story, see Parsi 2007:119-20.

<sup>99</sup> Mohammad D. Nasrallah, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

<sup>100</sup> Later in 1999, Fadlallah repented of his deeds against Imam Sadr. After approving all of the Imam's actions and political viewpoint, he confessed that Imam Sadr's approach at the time was more suitable in response to the situation. See the interview with *al-Diyar* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 1 September 1999.



group of his young companions.<sup>101</sup> Similarly to all the other major Shiite clerics in Lebanon, Fadlallah opposed the Israeli occupation of the south and supported the cause of Islamic resistance; yet what singled out his political stance at the time from other Shiite clerics was, consistent with Hezbollah's policy, his prioritising of the establishment of the Islamic government in Lebanon above the liberation of the occupied territories (Mallat 1988a). At the time, his writings and sermons about the culture of Martyrdom and Jihad inspired his followers in Lebanon, especially Hezbollah's leading cadre. Moreover, he was seen as a religious figure loyal to the Palestinian cause, and when Israel was initially portrayed as a beautiful white stallion at the break of dawn that liberated the Shiite of the south from the hostility of Palestinians, it was he who was the first to call this viewpoint an 'illusion'. From his point of view, the only choice for Shiites was to resist Western hegemony and Israel in the name of loyalty towards Jihad, and by using all means (Kramer 1997).

With the ever-expanding activities of Hezbollah within the community, and partial withdrawal of Israeli forces from the south in early 1985, the party publicly announced its existence through an open letter on 16 February 1985.<sup>102</sup> This marked a turning point in the history of Hezbollah and indeed the Shiite community in Lebanon. As of that date, this new trend in Lebanon emerged publicly and announced its full compliance with the Islamic Republic and its unique interpretation of Islamic governance. The timing of the open letter coincided with the rise of AMAL in Beirut and the south. It seemed that, by announcing its existence publicly, Hezbollah wanted to prevent AMAL, then its internal rival, from claiming all credit for the resistance.

### ***AMAL and Hezbollah: Different Perceptions and Different Postures***

In late 1982, when multinational forces entered Beirut, Israelis were pulled back and stationed in restricted areas within the so-called security zone. On 17 May 1983, a biased agreement was signed between Lebanon's President and Israel through the mediation of the United States. The terms of the treaty were not only seen by Muslims as evidence of the President's servility towards the Israeli government, but also undermined the authority of President Gemayel over the Maronite community, as well (Eisenberg and Caplan 2010: 67). The first active protests against the 17 May agreement were held on that day by a group of Shiite

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<sup>101</sup> Davoodabadi 2012:58. Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah claims that Allameh was barred from joining Hezbollah officially as the party leader in 1982. However he remained as one of the major supporters of Islamic Resistance among the Shiite clerics of Lebanon.

<sup>102</sup> For the full text of the open letter see Norton 1987:167-187

clerics in Beirut, including Shams al-Din and Fadlallah, who took refuge in the Imam Reza Mosque (Qassem 2005: 133). With the intervention of the Lebanese Armed Forces, under the command of the President, the government was shown, evidently for the first time, to have formed a front against the Shiite community. The president appeared to still believe in the traditional political structure in Lebanon, the strategic alliance between Sunnite Muslims and Maronite Christians, and was underestimating the Shiite community. Nonetheless, as a result of Lebanon's sociopolitical transformation and consistent with transnational events, the Shiite community's status in Lebanon was not something that could be easily ignored in 1984. Perhaps Gemayel's misperception of the new structure was among one of the last examples of such practice.

Relatively ineffectual since the summer of 1982, Nabih Berri's AMAL found an opportunity to strengthen its grip over the leadership of the Shiite community in Beirut and in the south in February 1984 (Norton 1987: 99). Berri urged the Muslim members of the cabinet to step down in opposition to the President and, in response to this call, the cabinet submitted its resignation to Gemayel pushing him to a political impasse; later Nabih Berri and his allies took control of the west of Beirut (Haytham 2004: 208-9).

For the first time in the history of Lebanon, Shiites held authority over most of the country, an area that consisted of almost two thirds of the territory of Lebanon.<sup>103</sup> The following day, President Reagan ordered US Marines to evacuate Lebanon, and the ratification of the 17 May agreement was thrown into doubt. The credit for enabling the Shiite community to deploy its power throughout the country should be split between AMAL and Hezbollah, whose attacks on the barracks of the MNF had resulted in severe casualties months earlier.

Later in 1984, for the first time in the history of Lebanon, at the national level, Kamel Asaad, a Shiite Zai'm, stepped down, and Hussein al-Husseini, the former AMAL leader, was appointed as Speaker of the Assembly. When he used his gavel for the first time in Parliament, thousands of Shiites in Lebanon were chanting in the streets and celebrating the dawn of a new era in the history of their community in Lebanon. This involved the achievement of a status that had developed through the early endeavours of their Imam and which was now advancing rapidly through the efforts of his companions.<sup>104</sup> However, subsequent events demonstrated that perhaps the festivities were premature, for the oppression of the Shiites was not yet over in Lebanon.

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<sup>103</sup> *Al-Watan al-Arabi* Magazine, Beirut, Lebanon 2 March 1998.

<sup>104</sup> Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, Iran, November 2012.

The retreat of Israeli forces to the security zone in 1985, and the empowerment of AMAL and the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) militia in the west of Beirut followed the withdrawal of the MNF from Lebanon. Concurrently, groups of Palestinian guerilla fighters who had been expelled from Lebanon wished to go back to refugee camps and to restore their pre-1982 authority. It was at this time that, with the green light from Syria, the AMAL and PSP militia encountered Palestinians in the Sabra, Shatila and Bourj al-Barajneh camps who were allied to some Sunnite militia including Al-Mourabitoun. Eventually the 'War of Camps' broke out in April 1985 in west Beirut, and the Shiite and Druze militias, backed by Syrian forces, succeeded in dissolving the power of the Al-Mourabitoun and in controlling Palestinian activities inside their camps to some extent. In reality, however, the war was between Assad's Syria and Arafat, a hostility that had caused Lebanon, and its Shiite community particularly, nothing but despair. Moreover, evidence confirmed that the War of the Camps was partly initiated by President Gemayel and his Maronite allies, in the aftermath of the Tripartite Agreement,<sup>105</sup> to mitigate the military power of AMAL and PSP forces in west Beirut.<sup>106</sup> Three years on from the outbreak of the tension, AMAL had achieved no definite results but a drastic decrease in its military power. At this time, Berri, who had, perhaps, understood how he was being used by his rivals, declared the end of the camps' confinement as 'a gift for the Palestinian Intifada' in the West Bank, and officially removed his forces in the summer of 1988 (Haytham 2004: 270).

AMAL's confrontation with the Palestinians not only caused huge distress within the Shiite community in Lebanon, but also worsened its already unsteady relationship with Iran. For a faction of the community which was sympathetic to Hezbollah, Nabih Berri appeared to be emerging as a new Shiite Zai'm, a secular political broker who himself was active as a client to a more dominant source of power, in this case Syria.<sup>107</sup> A group of Iranian MPs accused AMAL of exploiting the Zionist will, in order to perpetrate sectarian conflict and to

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<sup>105</sup> Deeb 2003:118-120. The Agreement was signed among the Druze Walid Jumblatt, the Shiite Nabih Berri, and the commander of Lebanese Forces, Elie Hobeika on December 1985. It was seen as aiding Syria in its will to achieve further domination of Lebanon. However, President Gemayel and some other Christian militia commanders, like Samir Geagea who later replaced Hobeika in LF, rejected the agreement and asked for the further involvement of their relevant parties in political structure of Lebanon.

<sup>106</sup> From 1985 to 1987, fearing the rising power of the Shiite community as a result of the activities of AMAL, some Phalangist leaders supported Arafat and his Palestinian supporters by selling them Lebanese passports to facilitate their return to Lebanon. See Thomas Friedman, 'New Lebanon Allies: Christians and the PLO,' *The New York Times*, 8 January 1987.

<sup>107</sup> Ali Fahs, interview with the author, Beirut, Lebanon, August 2012.

violate the sacred Palestinian cause.<sup>108</sup> During a ceremony in 1987 marking the ninth anniversary of Imam Sadr's disappearance, Nabih Berri addressed a gathering in Sidon to clarify AMAL's position and to criticise the extremist actions of his Shiite rivals. For the first time since the disappearance of Imam Sadr, one of his descendants harshly criticised its fellow Shiites and said: 'with due respect, not everyone who wears a turban becomes a scholar'. His statement was directed at the Hezbollah figures who had recently criticised AMAL's political position by calling them 'insects who should be crushed by the hands of true Shiite'.<sup>109</sup> Recalling Israel as the absolute evil and the enemy of Muslims and Christians in Lebanon, Berri continued,

We adhere to the UN resolutions and continue to support the UNIFIL, who watch over our rights and the enduring presence of our people on their land. Any attacks against the UNIFIL means an attack against the resistance. The slogan is resistance, not terrorism. A very thin thread separates terrorism from the struggle. We are not against the peoples, but the rulers of the peoples are against us.<sup>110</sup>

He had announced his and AMAL's doctrine vis-à-vis Lebanon's political structure at the time. He clearly accused an extreme faction within the Iranian leadership, who in opposition to the will of Imam Khomeini, the supreme leader, had tried to obliterate the name of Imam Sadr and his companions in Lebanon and to propagate its fundamentalist doctrine within the Shiite community.<sup>111</sup>

In response to Berri's actions, Hezbollah organised a rally in Baalbeck on 3 September, four days after the Sidon gathering. There, Subhi Tufayli associated the party's actions fully with Imam Khomeini's doctrine and added that 'the UN soldiers witnessed Lebanon's loss with indifference, just as they witnessed the Palestinians' loss'.<sup>112</sup> The point of divergence between AMAL and Hezbollah at the time was around a number of critical

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<sup>108</sup> *Proceedings of the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 5 June 1985. Available at [http://www.ical.ir/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2378&Itemid=13](http://www.ical.ir/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2378&Itemid=13). (Accessed on 5 March 2013).

<sup>109</sup> Anonymous source, interview with the author, Beirut, Lebanon, Summer 2012.

<sup>110</sup> *Al-Nahar Daily*, Beirut, Lebanon 31 August 1987.

<sup>111</sup> His speech provoked a mixed response from the community. The Iranian representative walked out of the ceremony, and Shiite groups marched in the streets following the speech chanting against Iran and saying 'We clearly announce today that we do not want to see Iranians in our neighbourhood ever again'. As a result, Iranian nationals were banned from commuting to south Lebanon, and the AMAL militia tightly controlled their movements in the area until late 1988. (Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, November 2012).

<sup>112</sup> Radio Free Lebanon Reportage on 4 September 1987, as published in *Daily Report, Near East & South Asia*, FBIS-NES-87-172.

issues, mostly rooted in each party's essential identity. Opposing Lebanon's political sectarian structure and Maronite supremacy, AMAL nonetheless, was believed to participate in the government and to dedicate itself to reform from within. Therefore, the party claimed that it fully complied with the UN resolutions, with UNIFIL and protecting the sovereignty of the country against Israel until its forces withdrew completely from Lebanese territories.<sup>113</sup> In pursuing this cause, although the movement's leaders constantly declared their devotion to the cause of Imam Khomeini as 'the religious political leader of all Shiites in the world', they critically needed a strategic alliance with the Syrian regime.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, AMAL's clash with Palestinians during the War of the Camps should be analysed within the framework of the Assad-Arafat conflict. A bitter conflict that eventually mitigated both PLO's and AMAL's military powers, thus provided their national rivals with more political leverage.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, Hezbollah fully embraced the idea of establishing a replica of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Lebanon (Alagha 2011: 51) and the actions of their hardliner influential leaders at that time, like Tufayli, challenged every aspect of AMAL's political position. The party was representing the will of its *Wali e Faqih*, Imam Khomeini, and thus opposed the very existence of the Zionist regime of Israel, while it was devoted to the Palestinian cause unconditionally. Therefore, any compromise with Israel or its allies, and any dispute with Palestinians, by any party, whether AMAL or Assad's regime would consequently provoke the hostility of Hezbollah against those parties.<sup>116</sup>

The war- of-words phase terminated when, in early 1988, military clashes broke out between supporters of both groups in the south. With Israel continuing to strengthen its client, the SLA, and inflaming hostilities, the balance of power within the Shiite community shifted more towards Hezbollah. Consequently, when on 7 February, the US Colonel and UNIFIL officer William Higgins was taken hostage near Tyre, internal conflicts inside AMAL escalated and days later the movement commenced pre-emptive attacks against Hezbollah's bases in the south and in Beirut. The AMAL-Hezbollah fights erupted in the suburbs of Beirut on 6 May 1988. This eventually resulted in confining AMAL's authority to the territories in the south, where the movement still had strong public support (Qassem 2005: 145, Norton 2009: 43). But while the more extremist Hezbollah was consolidating its authority over the majority of the community in Lebanon, the party's fundamentalist

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<sup>113</sup> Mohammad D Nasrallah, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

<sup>114</sup> Nabih Berri, interview with *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, London, UK, 22 January 1989.

<sup>115</sup> Hani Fahs, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

<sup>116</sup> Ali Fahs, interview with the author, Beirut, August 2012.

caretakers in Iran were gradually losing their political bases inside the Islamic Republic leadership. Eventually, in late 1988, Iran officially announced that it was revising its foreign policy in Lebanon.<sup>117</sup> The Iranian call coincided with the joint meeting of the Tufayli, Fadlallah, and Shams al-Din with the Islamic Republic leadership in Tehran, and the successful mediations of Iranian envoys between the hostile Shiite parties in Lebanon.<sup>118</sup>

The change in the Islamic Republic's policy towards the Shiite community in Lebanon, notwithstanding, was rooted in some internal and regional factors as well. Just months after the Islamic Revolution, Iran had instigated the US embassy hostage crisis and, in 1980, entered into a fully-fledged war with Iraq. The moderate political elite inside the country's leadership, without any meaningful pragmatic experience in politics, found itself at the centre of multi-faceted national, regional and international pressures. At the same time that the government was confronting internal pressures from groups, ranging from secular nationalists to Islamic Leftists, demanding a share in ruling post-revolution Iran, the newly-formed Islamic state was thrust into a war by Saddam's regime, supported by almost all of Iran's Arab neighbours, all of which were allied to Europe and the US. In 1982, after a partial settlement with internal opposition groups and initial victories in the war with Iraq had been achieved, the regime's foreign policy in Lebanon came to be directed by a more fundamentalist faction that had strategic alliances with the PLO and its leader Yasser Arafat. It was not until halfway through the war with Iraq, that the doctrine of a group of moderate pragmatic political players, led by Hashemi Rafsanjani, gradually became embodied in the internal and foreign policy of the Islamic Republic. In mid-1985, the relationship between Yasser Arafat and the Islamic Republic had been strained because of the PLO's covert support for Saddam Hussein. However, Palestinians still had strong connections with the office of Ayatollah Montazeri, then the deputy supreme leader of the Islamic Republic.<sup>119</sup> The last nail in the coffin for the fundamentalist faction inside the Islamic Republic leadership and for Arafat's network in Iran in the post-revolution era was the execution of Seyyed Mehdi Hashemi, Ayatollah's Montazeri's relative and the mastermind behind the 'World Liberation Movement', in late 1987.<sup>120</sup> After that, the Iranian leadership inclined more towards realpolitik in their dealings with neighbouring states, reconsidered its ideological aspirations,

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<sup>117</sup> *Tehran Times Daily*, Tehran, 18 December 1988.

<sup>118</sup> Ali M. Besharati, interview with the author, Tehran, November 2012.

<sup>119</sup> Yasser Arafat interview with *al-Qabas Daily*, Kuwait, 6 June 1985.

<sup>120</sup> For an example of encounters between moderate-extremist factions inside the Islamic Republic leadership, see Parsi 2007: 100-138.

and reformed its foreign policy. The change in Tehran's attitude towards the Shiite community in Lebanon was concurrent with the transformation of the leadership inside Iran.

As a result of Iran's new policy and its strategic understanding with Syria, the leaders of AMAL and Hezbollah were summoned to Syria and, on 30 January 1989, signed a peace treaty. According to the terms of the agreement, Hezbollah committed itself to respect AMAL's authority in the south, not to violate the AMAL-UNIFIL alliance, and not to facilitate the re-migration of PLO fighters to their pre-1982 bases in the south. On the other hand, AMAL agreed to respect Hezbollah's right to coordinate its resistance operations against Israel from the southern territories.<sup>121</sup> Ten months later, while tensions were easing between the two parties, the Ta'if Agreement was concluded. This agreement called for the disarming of all Lebanese militia. As a result, while the hostility between AMAL and Hezbollah had been abating, it now erupted once again in the summer of 1990 in the Iqlim al-Tuffah area in the south. The rigidity of Sheikh Subhi Tufaily, who was at that time the secretary general of Hezbollah, was responsible for re-igniting hostilities.<sup>122</sup> After a hundred days of exchanging fire, shuttle diplomacy between Tehran and Damascus succeeded in producing a treaty based on mutual understanding once again. Later, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, new post-war leadership in Iran, and regional and national political shifts, Hezbollah's fundamentalist stance became gradually more moderate. AMAL and Hezbollah were both recognised as the legitimate representatives of Lebanon's Shiite community and joined the newly formed resistance axis, headed by Iran and Syria in the post-1990 Middle East.<sup>123</sup> While AMAL was more inclined towards involvement in political activities, Hezbollah maintained armed resistance to the Israeli occupation of the South.

#### **IV. Power of Solidarity: The Politics of Resistance**

The death of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran and with the introduction of the new and pragmatic foreign policy in the aftermath of the war with Iraq marked a turning point in the Iran-Lebanon relationship in the late 1980s. Recognising both the position of AMAL as the representative of Imam Musa Sadr, and the popularity of Hezbollah within the community in Lebanon, the Islamic Republic tended to support both parties as equally essential players in

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<sup>121</sup> Syrian Arab News Agency, Damascus, 30 January 1989, as published in *Daily Report. Near East & South Asia*, FBIS-NES-89-019.

<sup>122</sup> Mohammad Yazbeck, interview with *Rah Magazine*, Tehran, Iran, October 2011.

<sup>123</sup> Mohammad Ali Muhtadi, interview with the author, Tehran, November 2012.

the country and in the region.<sup>124</sup> The Iranian leaders' perceptions about the political opportunity structure in Lebanon had become more accurate after a decade of trial and error. During the previous eight years, though Shiite elites in Lebanon, like Shams al-Din and Fadlallah, had engaged in trivial disputes and disagreements, they constantly supported the resistance against Israel and promoted the rights of the Shiite community. Shams al-Din had moved away from AMAL in 1983 and was keen, after that, to represent the Shiite clergy as the head of SISC. On the other hand, although the West regarded Fadlallah as the leader of Hezbollah, in 1990 he had become a Shiite cleric who was more interested in Shiite scholastic life. Both were serving the Shiite community in Lebanon as representatives of Najaf and Qom Maraje' until 1990. After Imam Khomeini passed away and Saddam's regime lost control over the Najaf Seminary following the 1991 Shiite uprising in Iraq, Fadlallah presented himself as a new Lebanese Shiite Marja', and gradually removed himself from the political scene (Abisaab 2009). Shams al-Din had already attained a prestigious position within the Shiite world for his reformist thoughts on Political Islam with respect to coexistence with non-Muslim communities. Soon both of these distinguished Shiite clerics stepped aside from the activities of AMAL and Hezbollah and became known as supporters of the Shiite resistance, with the aim of achieving rights for the community within the country's new political structure.<sup>125</sup>

Nevertheless, in order to assume joint leadership of the Shiite community in Lebanon with AMAL, Hezbollah needed to reform itself towards greater moderation. Therefore, with a green light from Iran, Sheikh Subhi Tufaily<sup>126</sup> was replaced by Seyyed Abbas Musawi in 1991, after the Hezbollah-AMAL alliance had been strengthened.<sup>127</sup> It seemed that, although the rights of the Shiite community had been effectively ignored following the conclusion of the Ta'if agreement, the disunity among the various Shiite political actors held out the possibility of triumph.

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<sup>124</sup> Akbar Hashemi Rafsanajani, a written correspondence with the author, January 2013.

<sup>125</sup> It was believed that Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah was going to bring back long lost prestige to the Shiite Marja'iyat office in Lebanon after four centuries. However, after he declared controversial opinions challenging the reliability of some incidents of early Islamic history, he became somehow obsolete within the Shiite scholastic mainstream for the rest of his life. See Rasoul Jafarian, 'The Lebanon's Seminary and Iran,' *Bulletin of History of Iran and Islam Library*, 26 May 2008.

<sup>126</sup> Davoodabadi 2012: 53-4. Sheikh Subhi Tufaily was among the most extremist leaders in Hezbollah and maintained a strong relationship with Palestinians, especially the PFLP. As the Secretary General of Hezbollah, he constantly condemned Shams al-Din's moderate position. Although he served in Hezbollah until the end of the party's fifth enclaves, he later split from Hezbollah and opposed the party and the Islamic Republic in the post-1992 Lebanese general election.

<sup>127</sup> Ali M Besharati, interview with the author, Tehran, Iran, November 2012.



The rise of Seyyed Abbas Musawi in Hezbollah pushed the community one step further towards political compromise. In 1968, as a young student, he had met Imam Sadr and had enrolled in Tyre's Institute of Islamic Studies. Later he was recommended to Mohammad Baqer Sadr in Najaf, and soon Seyyed Abbas entered Sadr's circle of students in Najaf. Loyal to Imam Sadr, he was forced to leave Iraq in 1978, when he moved to Baalbeck, where he, with help from some other Shiite clerics, including Hassan Nasrallah, established a small seminary with the permissions of Shams al-Din and Fadlallah. After the rise of Imam Khomeini in Iran and in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion in 1982, he became one of the founders of Hezbollah. Trained by the Revolutionary Guards in Baalbeck he had been appointed as Hezbollah's commander in the South.<sup>128</sup> His unique personal characteristics, with touches of moderation, and his devotion to resistance against Israel, once again reminded the community of Imam Sadr in some respects (Qassem 2005). When, in 1991, he was appointed as Hezbollah's leader, the future of the community seemed to promise unity and mutual understanding. However, he did not last long in the post, as he was assassinated in an Israeli air raid along with his family on 16 February 1992.

Musawi had played a crucial role in transforming Hezbollah's identity from a military resistance group aiming to 'establish an Islamic state', to a socio-political party willing to participate in the new political structure in Lebanon. Consequently, his martyrdom contributed to the community's internal unity, as an all-embracing front – including Lebanese Shiite clerics, AMAL, Lebanese Parliament members and the government — condemning his assassination and demanding fully-fledged support for resistance efforts in the South.<sup>129</sup> Hours later, Hezbollah's leadership council appointed Hassan Nasrallah, closest advocate of Musawi in the party, as the new Secretary General.<sup>130</sup>

### ***Hassan Nasrallah: Political Perception and Posture***

The first post-war general election in Lebanon was considered a triumph for AMAL and Hezbollah's coalition lists in the South. Nabih Berri was elected the new Speaker of the Parliament, leading the political front in Beirut to advance the community's rights, while Hezbollah led an Islamic Resistance front in the south. The new Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri, along with the majority of politicians, supported the resistance in the South in order to force Israel to terminate its occupation and to comply with UN resolutions. This new internal

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<sup>128</sup> *Shahed-e-Yaran Quarterly*, Tehran, Iran, Winter 2008.

<sup>129</sup> *An-Nahar Daily*, Beirut, Lebanon, 17 February 1992.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

Lebanese balance of political power and the resistance cause were tested for the first time on 13 September 1993 with the conclusion of the Oslo Accord. Still facing continual Israeli aggressions, the Shiites of the south along with Palestinian refugees demonstrated in Beirut showing their resentment over the agreement between Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin. Minutes after the start of the demonstration, and in violation of a pre-set agreement with the government regarding the demonstration, the Lebanese armed forces opened fire on the public and killed nine demonstrators (Qassem 2005: 161). It was only Hezbollah's self-restraint that prevented civil strife from sweeping across Lebanon once again. This clearly showed that Lebanese people were fed up with the miseries of the civil war and had matured over the course of the preceding decade. Ten years earlier, an incident much less important than this, which occurred in September 1993, was considered a dangerous national dilemma.<sup>131</sup> There had been a dramatic change in perception of the political structure amongst the Lebanese political actors.

The war between the Islamic Resistance and Israel continued throughout the 1990s while the rest of Lebanon was moving rapidly forward to restore its economic and political order. However, in spring 1996, Israel commenced a military operation, 'Grapes of Wrath', against the Resistance and expanded its war — this time beyond the security-zone areas. By attacking the newly-built civil infrastructure in Lebanon, the Israeli administration tried to put pressure on the Resistance and the flow of arms from within. Yet the nature of Israel's attack, especially the shelling of the UN compound in Qana, attracted international condemnation. Two weeks after the operation, for the first time in the history of the Resistance, a written agreement, known as the April Accord, was finalised with Israel through the arbitration of Iran, Syria, France and the United States. According to its terms, the belligerents would refrain from involving civilians in their military encounters and the monitoring committee, including the arbitrators, would ensure the accord's ratification; in this respect, the accord was a success, though marginal, for the Resistance-Axis comprised Syria and Iran, along with the Shiite Lebanese combatants in the south (Qassem 2005: 168). The resistance of the Shiite community to the Israeli-supported SLA, and the support of Lebanon's government under Nabih Berri in Beirut, eventually succeeded in forcing Israel to comply with UNSCR 425 in May 2000; its withdrawal from the south resulted in an unexpected collapse of SLA missionaries, and south Lebanon, except for the disputed Shebaa territories in the Golan

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<sup>131</sup> The conflict between Hezbollah and the central government over the incident was resolved 20 months later when, in May 1995, the government issued a decree that characterised the nine casualties as 'National Martyrs'. *Al-Ahd Weekly*, Lebanon, Vol. 19, May 1995.

Heights, was liberated. For the first time in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel withdrew from an occupied land unconditionally. The incident gave the community and their leadership unsurpassed popularity throughout the Arab world. In the aftermath of the victory, Hassan Nasrallah appeared in front of his supporters in Bint Jbeil, praising Imam Khomeini and Imam Musa Sadr, as founders of the resistance in Lebanon, and acknowledging President Lahoud and Prime Minister Selim al-Hoss for their role in the victory over Israel. He declared that this is ‘not a victory for one sect and a defeat for another; this is Lebanon’s victory’, and he promised that this victory would ‘not be used by anyone to the detriment of this nation, or any part of his dear nation’s population’ (Noe 2007: 240).

Furthermore, he called Ehud Barak’s peace recommendations deceitful, and confirmed that the Islamic Resistance, with the backing of Lebanon’s government and population would continue to confront Israel until the release of all Lebanese detainees and the liberation of the remaining occupied territories. The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon consequently marked a turning point in Arab-Israeli relationships; it became evident that military force could be defeated by the culture of resistance and martyrdom, masterfully exploited through the activities of the Shiite community in Lebanon. The resistance struggles coincided with the rise of a new elite governing party in Israel, whose foreign policy was concerned with the country’s internal security and the start of a new political paradigm that would limit Israel’s historic expansionist strategy (Gerges 2002).

At the outset of the new Millennium, and a month after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, Hafez Assad, leader of Syria for almost three decades, passed away in June 2000. His legacy, however, continued through the Syrian Baath Party which supported Assad’s son, Bashar, as the new President of the Republic. In July, Ehud Barak and Arafat met at Camp David to negotiate over mutual issues and perhaps to establish a more enduring peace agreement. The failure to reach a comprehensive agreement resulted in the commencement of the Second Intifada within the Palestinian territories in autumn 2000. Nevertheless, at the same time, the international community and the region were confronting an even more complicated situation, involving a new paradigm initiated following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. This new paradigm cast a shadow over the future of the Middle East and questioned hopes of an imminent settlement of regional conflicts.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 incidents, President Bush introduced his new ‘war on terror’ doctrine with invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, propagating the establishment of a new Middle East order. After the overthrow of Saddam’s regime, the Resistance-Axis became

the first target of the government in Washington.<sup>132</sup> Over the initiatives of France and the US governments, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1559 on 2 September 2004 urging Syria to withdraw its forces from Lebanon and calling for the disarming of Hezbollah.<sup>133</sup> From the pro-Syrian bloc point of view, the Resolution was planned to influence the Lebanese parliament session on 3 September, when members were going to decide on the extension of the pro-resistance Emile Lahoud presidency.<sup>134</sup> Article 5 of the UNSC Resolution opposed the action and demanded a new presidential election in Lebanon without any ‘foreign interference or influence’.<sup>135</sup> The majority of the parliament, however, voted for the constitutional amendment, and postponed the Presidential election for three years.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, the proponents of UNSCR 1559 had already ignited a catastrophe for ‘Lebanon’s internal stability’ (Blanford 2006: 103).

A handful of cabinet members resigned after the constitutional amendment, later on Prime Minister Hariri also submitted his resignation to Lahoud, and was replaced by Omar Karami.<sup>137</sup> Soon the country became divided between supporters and opponents of the Syrian regime. One of the earliest attempts on behalf of the latter group was the Bristol Hotel Gathering in late 2004, when the Christian-Druze alliance issued a statement asking the new government to resign because the new Prime Minister’s pro-Syrian policies were aimed at ‘further deepening differences between the Lebanese’ during a period which they also labeled as a ‘very dangerous phase’ for Lebanon (Blanford 2006: 116). Although Hariri did not attend the gathering, he was soon singled out as the leader of the Syrian opposition. In early 2005, the UN Security Council issued another resolution, confirming that Israel had fully exploited

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<sup>132</sup> Parsi 2007: 223-37. Washington’s approach against Iran in the aftermath of the Allied operation in Iraq came as a surprise to the then reformist government of the Islamic Republic which had been closely complying with the US and its allies since the commencement of the ‘War on Terror’ doctrine. The Iranian government had been providing crucial intelligence support to the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime hoping for a more benign approach from the US government.

<sup>133</sup> France was the main sponsor of the Resolution. Given Rafik Hariri’s close relationship with French President Chirac, in Lebanon it was speculated that the Prime Minister was the promoter of the Resolution. See ‘Trial by Fire: the Politics of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon,’ *International Crisis Group*, 2 December 2010: 6.

<sup>134</sup> Emile Lahoud was elected as President in 1998, after being the Republic’s Army Commander-in-Chief for almost eight years.

<sup>135</sup> UNSCR 1559 is available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/41516a7e4.html> (Accessed on 12 March 2013).

<sup>136</sup> Hariri’s bloc voted in favour of the amendment. See *Al-Diyar Daily*, Beirut, Lebanon, 4 September 2004.

<sup>137</sup> Lahoud and Hariri had a history of conflict since 1998, when the then new president Lahoud launched an anti-corruption case against Hariri and his companions. See Robert Fisk, ‘Lebanon’s vast web of corruption unravels,’ *The Independent*, 6 December 1998.

the terms of UNSCR 425,<sup>138</sup> and asking the Syrian regime to comply with the UN resolutions and to withdraw its forces from Lebanon.<sup>139</sup> The Lebanese political structure became increasingly volatile, and violence erupted when, on 14 February 2005, a bomb was detonated in central Beirut which killed Rafik Hariri and dozens of his companions.

The Syrian regime was among the first to be suspected. A week later, thousands of Lebanese demonstrated in the streets of Lebanon demanding the withdrawal of Syrian forces, and so commenced what was later known as the Cedar Revolution.<sup>140</sup> This marked a new phase in the recent history of the country.

For years, Syria had formed the strategic backbone that held together the ideological bounds between Iran and the Shiite in Lebanon within the Resistance-Axis. The strategic understanding between Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Syrian regime was made even more enduring because of joint resistance to Israel and the goal of liberating the Golan and Shebaa. However, when in 2005, the anti-Syria consensus inside Lebanon strengthened, Hezbollah, as one of the greatest representatives of the Shiite community, complied with the will of the majority in response to the perceivably close political opportunity structure. Nasrallah, though, called upon his supporters to demonstrate in Beirut on 8 March 2005, as a farewell to the Syrians and a gesture of gratitude. On 14 March, anti-Syrian elements staged another demonstration claiming they were continuing the late Hariri's policy. These two demonstrations, later on, led to the establishment of two main political camps inside Lebanon. By the end of April 2005, all Syrian forces had left Lebanon and the country celebrated its independence from foreign forces after decades of Palestinian, Syrian and Israeli occupations.

In the aftermath of the Cedar Revolution and with the resignation of Karami, the Lebanese tycoon, Najib Mikati was appointed to form a new cabinet in April 2005. For the first time, to protect its resistance status, Hezbollah nominated a member for the Lebanese cabinet. The tactic was to undermine international opposition against the party and the Resistance-Axis (Qassem 2007: xvii). Furthermore Hezbollah, AMAL, Walid Jumblatt's

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<sup>138</sup> The UNSC endorsement over the compliance of Israel with its resolutions was in ignorance of the Lebanese claim over the occupied territories of Shebaa and Kfar Shuba in the south; thus it provoked Hezbollah's opposition.

<sup>139</sup> Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/42c3a5a2d.html> (Accessed on 13 March 2013).

<sup>140</sup> The name 'Cedar Revolution' appeared for the first time on 27 February in a press conference in Washington held by Paula Dobriansky, the US Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs. It seems that it was an effort to compare the Lebanese situation to that which occurred in Ukraine and Georgia years earlier rather than using the Arabic word 'Intifada' which might link Lebanon's situation with that of the Palestinian uprisings in Israel. See Jefferson Morley, 'The Branding of Lebanon's Revolution,' *The Washington Post*, 3 March 2005.

Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), and Saad Hariri's Future Movement, signed a formal quadruple alliance for the upcoming election in May 2005, the first post-Ta'if election without the interference of Syria. This was a strategic initiative by the Shiite elites to show their intention to become actively involved in national politics. The election outcome was victorious for all four of these parties.<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, months after the election, Walid Jumblatt, known for his flip-flop politics,<sup>142</sup> unilaterally called off the Quadruple alliance. In response to this move, seen as a betrayal of the Shiite community and the resistance cause, Hezbollah and AMAL ministers boycotted Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's government for seven weeks when Nasrallah publicly announced the dissolution of the Quadruple alliance (Qassem 2007: xviii). Hezbollah's announcement was followed by the declaration of a new memorandum of understanding between Nasrallah and Michel Aoun, leader of the Free Patriotic Front, two days later. The last article of the memorandum under the title of 'The Protection of Lebanon' clearly asserts that carrying arms is an honourable means for any party whose land is occupied to achieve sacred and political resistance.<sup>143</sup> The new mutual understanding between the Shiite community and one of the most significant Maronite leaders in Lebanon not only granted both communities favourable political opportunity in Lebanon but also showed the political weight and popularity of Hezbollah, which had easily formed a new alignment to promote its causes.

Hezbollah, representing the Shiite community, had seized a great deal of political opportunity. Aligned with Nasrallah, Nabi Berri called for a National Dialogue meeting in March 2006. Fourteen Lebanese elites from a wide range of political parties and sects, including Nasrallah, Saad Hariri, and Amine Gemayel, were gathered mainly to discuss five topics: the case of Hariri's assassination, Palestinian arms and the situation in the refugee camps, the future of the Lebanese-Syrian relationship, Lebanon's claims over the Shebaa farms, the presidency of Emile Lahoud, and the arming of the Islamic Resistance.<sup>144</sup> Through a series of talks, a consensus was reached over the first three issues. However, no settlement

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<sup>141</sup> AMAL and Hezbollah together received eight more seats in the new Parliament bringing their total number of seat to 28. However the ultimate winner of the election was Jumblatt and his PSP which received 16 seats in comparison to a mere 6 seats that it had won in the 2000 general election. See Inter-Parliamentary Union Website for the details of Lebanon's general election results, available at [http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2179\\_A.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2179_A.htm) (Accessed on 1 March 2013).

<sup>142</sup> For a brief account of his political personality see 'Walid Jumblatt: Mountain Leader and Redeemer of Political Imbalances,' *The Majalla*, available at <http://www.majalla.com/eng/2009/05/article554201> (Accessed on 28 March 2013).

<sup>143</sup> The Full text of the memorandum is available at [http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2006/02/full\\_english\\_te.php](http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2006/02/full_english_te.php) [Retrieved on 27 February 2013].

<sup>144</sup> *Al Safir* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 15 March 2006.

was reached over the termination of Lahoud's presidency.<sup>145</sup> Supporting the arm of the Islamic Resistance, Hezbollah's secretary asked for a comprehensive Strategic National Defence scheme that could satisfy Lebanon's national security concerns and align the armed resistance with the Lebanese armed forces. The decision on disarming Hezbollah was referred to as a 'working-group' while the participants agreed to resume talks over the issue of the presidency two months later; the issue remained unresolved at that time.<sup>146</sup>

### ***The 33-Days War: A Case of Shiite Solidarity***

To the disappointment of the international and regional opponents of the Resistance-Axis, one year after the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, Hezbollah and AMAL were playing a joint and pivotal role in Lebanese politics, something which became apparent during the National Dialogue sessions. Added to this, the situation was deteriorating for Israel, as Hamas, another party loyal to the Resistance-Axis at the time won the majority of votes in the Legislative Election of January 2006.<sup>147</sup> In retaliation against Hamas's abduction of Gilad Shalit,<sup>148</sup> Israeli forces invaded Gaza targeting Hamas. The Israeli operation in Gaza was still at its heights when Hezbollah ambushed an Israeli patrol on 12 July in Shebaa Farms, and captured two Israeli soldiers with the aim of restarting the prisoner-exchange scheme that had been halted unilaterally by Israel two years before (Qassem 2007). Hours later, Israel commenced a fully-fledged military campaign against Lebanon, with airstrikes targeting civilian infrastructure in Beirut, followed by a ground invasion that began a week later. Although at the outset Israeli Foreign Minister Olmert claimed the Israeli response would be 'restrained but very painful',<sup>149</sup> on 17 July Olmert stated: 'our nation is under attack from the southern and northern borders. We will then continue to operate with full force [against Lebanon] until the return of our two soldiers and the expulsion of Hezbollah from the area, and the fulfilment of UNSCR 1559'.<sup>150</sup>

Taking everything into account, and based on the historical relations between Hezbollah and Israel, especially in aftermath of the 2000 withdrawal, the Israeli reaction was

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<sup>145</sup> Qassem 2007:xxi. AMAL, Hezbollah, Free Patriotic Movement, ex-Prime Minister Omar Karami and Talal Arsalan, a Druze, were among the supporters of Lahoud.

<sup>146</sup> *Al Mustaqbal* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 17 May 2006.

<sup>147</sup> *The Guardian*, London, UK, 26 January 2006.

<sup>148</sup> An Israeli soldier who was captured by HAMAS commandos in a cross-border raid on 25 June 2006. After five years of captivity, he was returned to Israel in 2011 in a prisoner-exchange agreement with HAMAS. See Ronen Bergman, 'Gilad Shalit and the Rising Price of an Israeli Life,' *The New York Times*, 9 November 2011.

<sup>149</sup> *Haaretz*, Tel Aviv, Israel, 12 July 2006.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 18 July 2006.

far beyond what was expected by observers, and perhaps even beyond the perceptions of Hezbollah's leaders. The April Agreement of 1996 had committed both parties to a relationship which came to be known as 'rules of the game' (Norton 2007). According to this mutual non-written understanding, while Hezbollah and Israel respected the UN blue line, the Shebaa Farms area would be considered a fire-free zone for Hezbollah, and the Lebanese resistance would comply on the basis of 'an eye for an eye' principle, based on which it could respond to Israeli aggression with the same level of aggression (Sobelman 2004). Taking this structure into account, the harsh and comprehensive Israeli reaction had a seemingly far stronger motive than the return of its two soldiers from the Shebaa Farms area.

Although Hezbollah had not expected an Israeli response of such a kind, its swift engagement on the battleground proved that during the preceding years it had been strengthening its warfare capabilities. Concurrent with its military defence, Hezbollah commenced an all-embracing psychological war strategy. The first radio speech of Nasrallah on 14 July is one of the most influential examples of this. Addressing Israeli civilians, he said that, although Lebanon was under severe attack from Israeli forces, the ultimate victory belonged to the Resistance's combatants, as they are 'children of Mohammad, Ali, Hassan and Hussein' and they possess a 'faith that the earth has never seen'. To the surprise of every listener, he then continued by stating: 'At this very moment, off the coast of Beirut, there is an Israeli battleship that struck our homes and the lives of our civilians during last two days; you can see it burning and sinking along with dozens of its Israeli crew. This is only the beginning, and there will be a lot more said before the battle ends'.<sup>151</sup>

Seconds after his speech, the Israeli battleship that was harboured in Beirut, was hit by Resistance rockets and sank, while everyone watched the scene through the televised commentaries of Hezbollah propagating that the leadership of Hezbollah and its supporters had proven their devotion to the Shiite culture of Martyrdom and Jihad, and had boldly challenged the Israeli military for the first time in sixty years. For their part, Hezbollah's leaders would like to change the political structure in their own favour.

Thirty-three days after the outbreak of the tension, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1701 calling for an immediate ceasefire between Hezbollah and the Israel Forces extending the mandate of UNIFIL over the south of Lebanon, and asking the hostile parties to

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<sup>151</sup> Available at <http://english.moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=11707&cid=286> (Accessed on 25 February 2013).



restore their prisoner-exchange plans.<sup>152</sup> During the course of the warfare, almost a thousand Lebanese were killed as a result of the widespread attacks by Israel. However, since Olmert's two preconditions to the ceasefire were not fulfilled, Hezbollah claimed a 'divine victory' over the operation which is known in Lebanon as 'the Truthful Pledge' (Qassem 2007: xxiv). In addressing his Lebanese supporters, Nasrallah stated:

Once again, I repeat my statement in Bint Jbeil in 2000 that this victory belongs to Lebanon and its people and all noble people of the world. Therefore do not confine this great success within the bounds of sectarianism. Arab armies and their peoples now believe that they can easily, if they are determined enough, liberate all of Palestine from the Sea [Mediterranean] to the River [Jordan].<sup>153</sup>

Nasrallah's speech aimed to present Hezbollah's resistance as Lebanese or more broadly Arabic. Consequently, in the eyes of Hezbollah's leaders, the party had become influential in changing the political opportunity structure in favour of resistance against the aggressors — to become an inspiration to the masses in the Middle East.<sup>154</sup>

Nevertheless, the consequence of this incident, which raised the status of the Shiite community, goes beyond the issue of who was the winner or loser on the battleground. In Lebanon during the war, the majority of Lebanese, ranging from Christians to Sunnite Muslims, supported the resistance cause.<sup>155</sup> Throughout the Arab world, the community enjoyed the full support of the laity and Islamic movements, and Nasrallah was emerging as the new leader of the Arabs (Hamzawy and Bishara 2006). Among the regional leaders, although they criticised Hezbollah's adventurous activities at the outbreak of the conflict, later on they preferred not to explicitly condemn the war in the light of the increasing popular support for Nasrallah.<sup>156</sup>

In the face of such popular support throughout the region, perhaps the notable achievement for the Shiite community in Lebanon was the effectiveness that the alignment between Shiite elites, the leadership of Nasrallah-Berri, had presented during the conflict. While Nasrallah was leading the war on the battleground in the south, Berri was exploiting

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<sup>152</sup> The full-text of Resolution 1701 is available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8808.doc.htm> (Accessed on 14 March 2013).

<sup>153</sup> Hassan Nasrallah speech on 22 September 2006. See Noe 2007.

<sup>154</sup> Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, 'Hezbollah's Apocalypse Now', *The Washington Post*, 23 July 2006.

<sup>155</sup> El-Husseini 2010. Polls confirmed that during the conflict, 87 per cent of Lebanese supported Hezbollah's military response to the Israeli attacks; that included 89 per cent of Sunnite Muslims and 80 per cent of Christians.

<sup>156</sup> Andy Mosher, 'From Arab Leaders, Sympathy for Civilians but Not Hezbollah,' *The Washington Post*, 18 July 2006.

his capabilities in Beirut. When Hezbollah had the support of Iran and the Qom Seminary, along with all its settled Maraje', on 30 July 2006, in the midst of the war and when the chance of a ceasefire was waning mainly due to the US veto, Berri came up with the idea of asking for a more forceful reaction from the leader of the Najaf Seminary, Grand Ayatollah Sistani.<sup>157</sup> In response, the Grand Ayatollah sent a message to President Bush through an Iraqi courier, reminding him about the regional consequences of postponing the ceasefire.<sup>158</sup> The communication paid off, as a result of Ayatollah Sistani's status and the engagement of American forces in Iraq at the time. This was a successful seizure of political opportunity on a broader transnational scale. It was in the aftermath of the 33-Days war that it became evident that the Shiite community in Lebanon, which used to be among the most isolated and deprived communities in the region, had found a balance in its political activism under this new leadership. This undeniable political status deserves more thorough consideration, especially given that it contributes to an understanding of Shiite transnational networks prevailing through Iraq and Iran.

## **Conclusion**

Although Shiite clerical elites did not enjoy a favourable political opportunity structure at bureaucratic level, at least until recently, they have played a pivotal role in mobilising the community during the last fifty years (see Figure 6.2 for the illustrative trajectory of activism by Shiite clerical elites in modern Lebanon). In 1958, when Imam Musa Sadr, then a young Shiite cleric in his 30s, set foot in Lebanon, he had envisioned a thorough awakening for the Shiite community in Lebanon. He had come from a new generation of Shiite clerical elites. His perception of the modern world made him draw the deprived Shiite community of Lebanon along a route towards socio-political development. He believed that Lebanon's unique geo-political structure provided a window through which international audiences could view the message of Shiite Islam. His understanding of Shiism, as it appears in his writings and activities, was concentrated on the struggle over the rights of oppressed people, no matter what their belief or ideology. For Imam Sadr, the most important characteristic of humans, that distinguishes them from other species, is their dignity. Thus, he believes that in order to restore their dignity, the Shiite community must become actively involved in Lebanese society. What enabled this end, which indeed facilitated his activities, was the economic and socio-political structure, which Lebanon was going through at the time that

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<sup>157</sup> Hamed Khaffaf, interview with the author, Beirut, Lebanon, November 2012.

<sup>158</sup> For the full story see *Al-Safir* Daily, Beirut, Lebanon, 1 October 2011.

Imam Sadr migrated there in late 1950. In other words, the favourable opportunity structure of Lebanon at the time accelerated the Imam's involvement in political activism. The factor that made his political posture resonate within the Shiite community in Lebanon was his unsurpassed personality and charismatic leadership. He truly believed in bottom-up change. Thus, thanks to his personal characteristics, the Shiite community that had become ready to mobilise at the time of the country's socioeconomic transformations, was more open to his initiatives.

Hence, Imam Musa Sadr became the architect of Lebanon's new Shiite activism. In 1969, with the official establishment of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, which enjoyed the support of the community, he became known as one of the most active political figures in Lebanon. However, the path that he had taken, did not reach its ideal destination. While Lebanon and the Shiite community were still in need of his leadership, he had been wiped off the political scene in the country. The Imam's disappearance in 1978 left the community with a leadership vacuum. This critical dilemma has been a constant one throughout the history of Shiite Islam. The community, without a charismatic leader, therefore, was directionless in its attempts to attain stability and its final goal of revitalising its socio-political status in Lebanon. The alternative leader, who was nominally the Imam's successor, Sheikh Mohammad Mehdi Shams al-Din, although adhering to the political stance of his predecessor, was unable to mobilise the masses in the way that Imam Sadr could, perhaps as a result of changes in the political opportunity structure. He was forced to become politically quiet and left the political sphere to the secular AMAL leaders to fill the leadership role of Imam Sadr, although only partially.

While AMAL leaders were hoping to provide the community with leadership in the absence of Imam Sadr, they were weak successors in this position, as they lacked a religious facet. Therefore, it was Seyyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah who became the prime candidate for this leadership role. At the time, and based on his perception about the political opportunity structure, Fadlallah was holding the active posture. However, it was due to his encounters with Imam Sadr that an alliance between him and AMAL was impossible. For Fadlallah and his political posture to fill the community's leadership vacuum, and for him to become a popular leader, he had to hope for the emergence of a political wing among his followers that could succeed AMAL. The emergence of Hezbollah was a step towards fulfilling that idea. However, the Shiite community, at least in the south, which was loyal to Imam Sadr and his doctrine, did not fully embrace this new trend in leadership. This became concurrent with Fadlallah's personal decision in the aftermath of Imam Khomeini's and

Ayatollah Khomeini's death, when he desired to devote his life more to scholastic jurisprudence and to become a Marja', hoping to strengthen the clerical elite organisational structure in Lebanon.

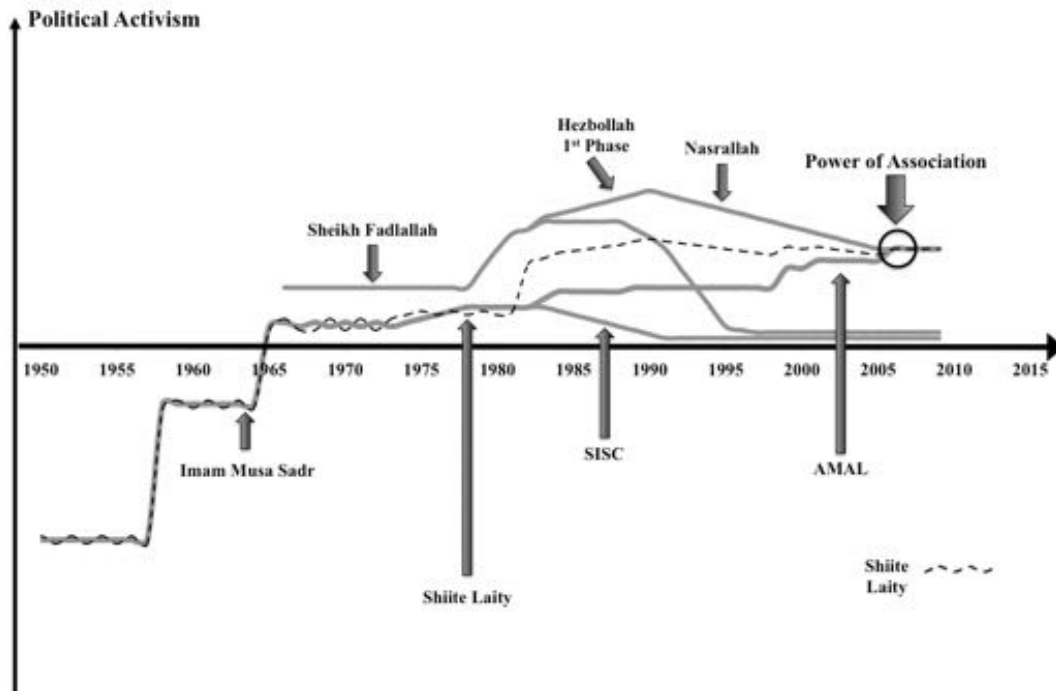


Figure 6.2 Political Activism of Clerical Elites in Modern Lebanon

Consequently, the leadership of the community was in the hands of two groups: AMAL, a secular politically moderate movement, and Hezbollah, a religious fundamentalist party under the leadership of Sheikh Subhi Tuafily. Considering the political opportunity structure at the time, neither of those parties was capable of mobilising the masses behind their objectives. The secular AMAL, which was seen to be hostile to the favourable Islamic Republic government, and the extremist Hezbollah that could not comply with the realities of Lebanon, did not provide a fulfilment of the Shiite community's desires at the time. While in the early 1990s both groups were active and somehow engaged in the community's leadership, albeit from different angles, the discharge of Tuafily from Hezbollah, and the party's new strategy changed the calculus entirely.

The ascent of Seyyed Abbas Musawi as the new Secretary General of Hezbollah, promised the emergence of a new Shiite leader who could possibly fill the vacuum that had been caused by the disappearance of Imam Sadr. In post-war Lebanon, he had the opportunity to lead the Shiite community towards the new political agenda of Hezbollah while building a

bridge with AMAL. Nevertheless, his reign did not last long, and his assassination was perceived as another miserable incident for the abandoned community in Lebanon. It was at this point that a new charismatic leader emerged onto the political scene in Lebanon in 1992. Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah was, perhaps, the most capable figure within the Hezbollah cadre, and he had become ready to assume the leadership of the Shiite community during the previous decade. Fortunately for the Shiite community, his accurate perception of the political opportunity structure empowered the community on the verge of the Ta'if agreement. Later, it became evident that the association between AMAL and Hezbollah, under the leadership of Nasrallah, perhaps, provides a leadership capable of mobilising the community behind its political doctrine. In the current international, regional and national context this auspicious association has displayed all the characteristics of the leadership that the Shiite of Lebanon have been seeking for decades.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **The Power of Association and the Future of the Middle East**

Shiite clerical activism in the Middle East is entwined with the political context. The instances of Shiite clerical activism on which this study focuses have taken place within a context defined by a particular structure of objective political opportunities structure coupled with clerical elite interpretations of that structure. As Chapter Two discussed, Shiite political jurisprudence maintains that during the Occultation Era, in the absence of an infallible source of leadership, it is the responsibility of competent Shiite elites to lead the community. As the general deputies of the occulted Imam, the main duty of Shiite clerical elites during this era is to protect the citadel of Islam, and help the community survive until the re-emergence of the infallible Imam. Therefore, in times of threat to their relevant community, whenever they perceive the political opportunity structure to be open, clerical elites will become actively engaged in politics to fulfil their responsibilities. Although the extent of political activism may differ from one leader to another, every clerical elite, based on his unique *ijtihad* will strive to protect the faith's principles when they perceive a threat and there are opportunities to do so in a given circumstance. This is considered universally to be one of the main tenets of the faith. Therefore, so-called 'activism' and 'quietism' should be understood as different tactics and political postures that clerical elites assume, rather than as representing the existence of a strategic disparity among them.

This study has sought to understand the ends for which the Shiite clergy become engaged in politics and the specific context within which Shiite clerics pursue an explicitly active role in politics. The so-called end for each cleric is to receive a sociopolitical status and authority through which he can fulfil the divinely assigned responsibilities (i.e. *Ifta* and *Qadha*). They believe that to protect the citadel of the faith they need to hold the legislature and judicial authorities during the occultation era. It challenges the view that a serious divide exists among Shiite clerical elites over the issue of their participation in the political arena. It employs an analytical framework that helps to show that so-called Shiite 'quietism' and 'activism' are tactical postures assumed by different clerical elites in response to different contexts. The context, as defined in this study, consists of the intersection between a given political opportunity structure and the perception that Shiite clerical elites have of it

(see Figure 1.1, in Chapter 1). What the study attempts to show is that when the context is permissive -- that is, when there exists a favourable political opportunity structure and Shiite clerical elites perceive it accurately -- it is more likely that they will adopt an activist posture in pursuing the fulfilment of their roles and responsibilities. But when there is a favourable objective political opportunity structure and Shiite clerical elites *fail* to perceive it accurately, then the context will be restrictive for activism, and the clerical elite will assume a quietistic posture.

Most researchers who have studied the political dynamics of the Shiite clergy, both throughout history and in the contemporary Middle East, have not based their conclusions on primary data; these historians, political scientists, scholars of international relations, and also policy makers, have consequently failed to provide us with a sound understanding of how Shiite clerical elites think and interpret the world around them. To fill this gap, this study has sought to gather the most reliable data for determining the perceptions of Shiite clerical elites in given circumstances, what they think and what rationales they employ for the postures they assume and the political practices they deployed. To do this the thesis has focused on three case studies in which instances of Shiite clerical 'activism' are explored and contrasted with instances of relative 'quietism'. It has draw on three types of sources. First, archival materials were used to develop a broader historical perspective on Shiite 'quietism' and 'activism' in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, including personal letters, telegraph messages, and newspaper reports. Second, some three-hundred face-to-face interviews were held with key Shiite religious leaders and those closely associated with them from Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. Third, public manifestos of key clerics and groups relating to Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979, the formation of a Shiite government in post-Saddam Iraq, and Shiite groups like Hezbollah and AMAL in Lebanon were studied, as was records of political statements delivered by Shiite clerics at the commencement of their daily lectures in religious seminaries. By reviewing these data on Shiite political jurisprudence, the history of Shiite movements, the Shiite revival in the modern era, and clerical activism in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, this study has attempted to shed light on this terra incognita in the literature. The concept of 'political opportunity structure' has provided the analytic backbone of the study.

To explain why a Shiite cleric inclines toward holding an activist or a quietist political posture in a given context, the study strives to show how members of the

Shiite clerical elite interpreted the world around them at that time. The analytical framework employed for this research was constructed on two interrelated elements: the objective political opportunity structure at the time, and the clerical elite's perception or interpretation of it, his *ijtihad*. These combine to produce different contexts for Shiite clerical elite political activism.

Since its formation in the seventh century, Shiite Islam has adhered to a concrete political doctrine. Diverging from their Sunnite counterparts over the issue of succession in the aftermath of the Prophet Mohammad's death, Shiites believe that twelve spiritual figures, infallible imams, are those most suited to rule and lead Muslims. Shiites have sought to adhere to this belief in highly restrictive contexts since the early decades of Islamic rule. It took almost twenty-five years for Ali, the first Imam of the Shiite Muslims, to seize an opportunity to take his rightful role as successor (caliph) to the Prophet Mohammad. After less than five years as Caliph, Ali was murdered. Subsequent to this, his son Hassan concluded a treaty (in 661 CE) in which he agreed to temporarily cede the caliphate to Muawiyah, a provincial governor of Syria who, reneging on the treaty, went on to establish the Umayyad dynasty. After this time, Shiite Imams were never again provided with an opportunity to form a government: pushed out of politics, they focused, instead, on leading their followers. From 661 CE, when Hassan Ibn Ali signed the treaty with Muawiyah until 941 CE, the start of the Major Occultation era, the main responsibility of Shiite Imams focused on spiritual leadership and developing the message of the Prophet. By teaching hundreds of students, and forming a network of deputies, infallible Imams tried to protect the foundational principles of Shiite Islam.

The occultation of the twelfth Imam (in 941 CE) marked the emergence of a group of Shiite scholars, the general deputies of Imams, responsible for protecting the faith. Over the following centuries, this group of Shiite elites formed a 'fully-fledged corps of religious professionals' to lead a community threatened by the absence of an infallible source of leadership (Louër 2008: 69). The basis of this *fallible* leadership is *ijtihad*, the deducting of religious laws from Islamic principles.

For the majority of Shiite clerical elites, the *Usulis*, *ijtihad* is the most important basis for continuing the leadership of infallible Imams. It is incumbent upon them to use their *ijtihad* to render judgments within the varying contexts faced by the community during the occultation era and until the promised day of the reemergence of the twelfth Imam.



At the start of the occultation era in the tenth century, the rise of the Buyid rule in Persia (934-1062 CE) provided Shiite scholars with a permissive context in which to formulate the principles of the faith and address the questions of the laity. Early Shiite works including those of Mohammad Ibn Yaqub Kulayni (d. 941), Sheikh Saduq (d. 991), and Sheikh Tusi (d.1067) were written during this period. It was during the favourable opportunity structure provided by the Buyids that Sheikh Tusi later (in 1030 CE) succeeded in establishing the Najaf seminary. Since that time, the seminary has continued to be one of the main centres of Shiite study in the world.

After centuries of Shiite scholarly stagnation under the Sunnite Abbasid Caliphate (751-1258 CE), a turning point for Shiite clerical elites occurred when the Abbasid dynasty (and Baghdad, the seat of their power) fell to the Mongols.<sup>1</sup> Free from Sunnite prosecutions, clerical elites, among them Nasir al-Din Tusi (d.1274) and Allameh Hilli (d.1325), were provided with a context in which they could further develop Shiite doctrines. The context for the Shiite community became so permissive under the rule of the Mongol Ilkhanid dynasty, that in 1309 the ruler, Uljeitu, declared Shiite Islam the official religion of his reign. This, coupled with Persian patronage of Shiite Islam, eventually led to the establishment of the Shiite Safavid dynasty in Persia (1501-1736 CE) in the early sixteenth century.

It was now six centuries after the occultation of the twelfth Imam and, with the the establishment of the Shiite Safavid dynasty in Persia , the community and its clerical leadership found themselves in new and favorable circumstances. The search for suitable political practices to fit these new circumstances inaugurated the political activism of the modern Shiite clerical elite. The institutionalization of the Safavid dynasty provided an opportunity for Shiite clerics to develop *ijtihad* along novel lines. Hundreds of Shiite scholars were invited to the Safavid court and were requested, while sitting by the side of the monarch, to provide the newly-established Shiite government with religious legitimacy. The majority of Shiite scholars, both those who traveled to Persia and those who stayed at home, supported the new dynasty (see Chapter 3).

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<sup>1</sup> Abbasid Caliphate was considered as the major Muslim rulers from 750 to 1258. Even during the reign of Shiite Buyids dynasty, they did not abolish the Abbasid Caliphate. Rather, perhaps over some socio-political reservations, they preferred to have the caliph's bestowment. For more details see Nagel, Tilman (1990). 'Buyids' *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/buyids> (Accessed March 28, 2015).

The rise of the Safavids provided a favorable political opportunity structure for Shiite clerical elite activism. Over the more than two centuries of the rule of the Shiite Safavid dynasty in Persia, the Shiite clergy were at the forefront of politics (Arjomand 1988: 81). However, this changed with the rise of anti-*ijtihad* scholars, the Akhbaris, in the early seventeenth century. Rejecting the role of Mujtahids, the proponents of the Akhbari School did not believe in the deputyships of the infallible Imam.<sup>2</sup> The emergence of Akhbarism, therefore, was a factor that closed the opportunity structure for Shiite clerical activism for decades.

With the demise of the Safavid dynasty in 1722 and the establishment of the Afsharid a decade later, the context became even more restrictive for clerical activism. The Shiite clergy were forced to abandon politics, their ties with the state were loosened, and the majority of them migrated to Iraq, then under the rule of the Sunnite Ottomans. For the following century, Shiite clerical elites focused on teaching at seminaries and remained quiet politically due to the absence of a favorable political opportunity structure. Yet, with the crackdown of the Akhbaris and the establishment of the Qajar dynasty in Persia (1794-1935 CE), the political opportunity structure was once again transformed for many of the Shiite clerical elite.

At the international level, the world was engaged with the hegemonic rivalries among the colonial powers of the time. Sovereign states were forming in the region and the introduction of new transport and communication technologies fostered the development of a sort of transnationalism among the Shiite community. This factor is considerable when taking into account the fact that, in the post-Safavid era, the clergy-state relationship had been replaced by the clergy-laity relationship to some extent: in contrast to their Sunnite counterparts, Shiite clerical elites had been successful in reducing their dependency on rulers and, instead, becoming more dependent on the public especially for their religious endowments and financial supports.. This, and the growing transnational links among clerical elites contributed, regionally, nationally and societally, to producing a relatively open political opportunity structure for clerical activism. As it is mentioned in chapter three, it was because of this uniquely open structure of opportunities, and clerical elite appreciation

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<sup>2</sup> Allameh Majlesi (d.1698), one of the most famous Akhbari clerics, narrates a tradition from the twelfth Imam: 'If someone claims himself to be the deputy of the Imam during the occultation, he is a liar, ousted from Allah's religion, calumniating Allah; he himself has gone astray and is leading others into error too'. See Bihar al-Anwar year, Vol XIII: 884.

of it, that Shiite clerical elites played an active role in the Russo-Persian wars (1826-1828 CE), the Tobacco Protest (1890-1892 CE), and the Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911 CE).

However, a review of Shiite history from the commencement of the occultation to the start of the modern era, confirms that the clergy failed to accomplish its goals through its political activism on various occasions. According to the argument of this study, this outcome results from a mismatch between the political opportunity structure and clerical elite perceptions of it -- and, specifically, a situation in which there exists a closed opportunity structure which clerics misperceive as being open. A case in point is Shiite clerical activism during the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906. In this case, some clerics, having misperceived the nature of the political opportunity structure at that time, became actively involved in the political arena, with the consequence that their activism produced an outcome that delivered a drastic blow to clerical authority (see Chapter 3). Three case studies were developed to further elaborate the role of context in determining the Shiite clerical elite activism in the Middle East. During the Islamic Revolution in Iran, in Post-Saddam Iraq, and with the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon, clerical political activism materialized when the clerical leadership was confronted with a relatively open political opportunity structure and, having accurately perceived it to be open, became politically active.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the arguments of this study make a contribution to social movement theory and the concept of 'political opportunity structure'. They also provide insights for scholars interested in the politics of the Middle East and historians of Islam, as well as policymakers interested in large-scale, long-term socio-political change, in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. These will be discussed in the next section.

### **I. Shiite Clerical Elites' Activism in the Modern Middle East: the Role of Perceived and Structural Opportunities**

For almost four decades, the concept of 'political opportunity structure' has been at the core of the study of social movements and contentious politics.<sup>3</sup> Proponents of this widely-used concept in the fields of Political Science and Sociology tended to

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<sup>3</sup> (Giugni 2009). Peter Eisinger (1973) is considered to be the scholar who used the term 'political opportunity structure' for the first time.

define 'political opportunities' more-or-less along lines consistent with Sidney Tarrow's definition: '*consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements*' (Tarrow 1996: 54). But in 1990s, most researchers, in an evident departure from this viewpoint, began to recognise the significance of actors' perceptions of the 'objective conditions'. Recent researchers argue that the perception, accurate or not, is important in the formation of contentious politics (Kurzman 2003). However, little has been done to explore the implications of this idea (Giugni 2009, Suh 2001). Therefore, the theoretical contribution that this study makes is to develop the concept of 'perceived political opportunity structure' through applying it to the study of political activism on the part of the Shiite clergy in the modern Middle East.

This study has endeavoured to understand the means through which actors and, specifically, the Shiite clerical elite, perceive objective structures. It argues that the majority of Shiite clerical elites, in their role as general deputies of the infallible Imam during the occultation era, believe that, in order to lead their laity followers it is incumbent upon them to render judgements that will protect the community from threats. The means by which a Shiite clerical elite interprets and, therefore, perceives the nature of the existing opportunity structure at any given time is through engaging in *ijtihad*. A qualified Mujtahid perceives his surrounding world through the lens of *ijtihad*. His *ijtihad* is influenced both by his understanding of the objective conditions as well as, to some extent, his own personal characteristics. Therefore, when facing a similar objective political opportunity structure, it is possible that two Mujtahids may arrive at two different interpretations. As long as they are endeavouring to apply Islamic principles to the current circumstances, each is abiding by his divinely assigned responsibility.

Encountering the political opportunity structure at a given time and place, the Shiite clerical elite would become politically active only when he perceives the opportunity structure to be open. If his perception is accurate, his activism will be successful; if it is inaccurate he will not achieve his goals. On the other hand, when the objective political opportunity structure is closed, a cleric who accurately perceives that structure will remain quiet; if he perceives the structure inaccurately, he will become active, but his activism will likely be unsuccessful.

The argument, therefore, is that the similarities and differences of Shiite clerical elites' political postures modern Iran, Iraq and Lebanon are attributable, not to sharply different interpretations of Shiite doctrines or different versions of Shiism, but to similarities and differences in the objective political opportunity structures they faced. 'Activism' and 'quietism', therefore, should be understood as representing, not a strategic or doctrinal divide in Shiism, but only tactical political postures that vary according to a given context.

To develop a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the objective political opportunity structures that Shiite clerical elites faced in the three case studies presented in previous chapters, these structures are conceived of as consisting of different levels of analysis -- different levels of social organization or generality, ranging from the international system to individuals. The objective political opportunity structures relevant to the case studies of Iran, Iraq and Lebanon presented in the last three chapters, exhibited both recurrent and unique factors.

At the international level, the political opportunity structure was quite overlapping for the Shiite communities in the Middle East. Especially, Shiite elites faced threats arising from the Cold War until the early 1990s. U.S.-Soviet rivalries represented the potential threat of a non-Muslim conquest of the Islamic abode. While Iran was inclined towards the western camp for the most of its pre-revolution era, the Republic of Iraq tended toward the east, and Lebanon was vacillating between the two camps during the course of the Cold War. The Shiite clergy strived to protect its followers from both the detrimental influences of anti-religious communism and the religious laxity and secularism introduced by western liberalism. Based on factors, which contributed to the opportunity structure at other levels, some clerics succeeded, and others failed, to mitigate these perceived threats to their communities.

At the regional level, the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in the aftermath of World War I and the rise of Kamal Ataturk changed political structures in Iraq and Lebanon and influence those of Iran (See the overview of clerical concerns about the event in chapter 4). The rise of Iraq republic in 1958, the civil war in Lebanon, and most significantly the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran had impacts, at regional level, on political opportunity structures of the neighboring countries. One impact of these regional upheavals was the development of a sense of religious transnationalism among Shiite communities in the Middle East. For instance, the popular uprising in 1963 in Iran attracted a response from the leadership of the Najaf

seminary in Iraq (see Chapter 5), as did the devastating civil war in Lebanon from 1975 to 1990 (see Chapter 6). Religious leaders in Iran opposed the atrocities of the Baath regime against the Shiite community in Iraq (1968-2003), and condemned the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the 1980s (see Chapter 5 and 6).

An important element of political opportunity structure at the national level is represented by the attitude of the state towards the Shiite religious community. Throughout the modern era, the Shiite community and its clerical leadership have been subject to relentless repression by Iranian and Iraqi states. The rise of Reza Shah Pahlavi in Iran became concurrent with his pressure on clerical establishments in Iran. Although during the early stages of Mohammadreza Pahlavi's reign some restrictions against the clergy were lifted, during the second half of his rule, clerics were the target of sanctions by the regime (see Chapter 4: 112). Due to the weakness of the central state, the Shiites in Lebanon were faced with a more open political opportunity structure; but the situation was worse for the Shiites in Iraq. The rise of the Baath regime in Iraq in 1968 heralded the start of the most severely repressive era for the Shiite community and for clerics settled in the holy cities. The state did not tolerate even the least amount of activism among the clergy and responded to them with the utmost harshness (Kadhim 2013). Over the course of the two decades that ended with Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the Shiite clerical elite in Iraq faced a closed political opportunity structure as a result, mainly, of state repression.

At the societal level, the political opportunity structures that existed in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon at the time of the events detailed in the case studies had few similarities. The vast majority of the population of Iran is Shiite, Iranian nationalism and Shiism construct the identity of most of the population of the country in the modern era. In as much as each Iranian national shows patriotism towards his country, he cherishes Shiite Islam, though not necessarily the activities of the Shiite clerics. This is a factor that is unique to the objective political opportunity structure faced by political actors in Iran, including the Shiite clergy. Thus, during the eight-year war with Iraq, Iran's Shiite leaders took advantage of this to promote an Iranian-Shiite discourse as a means of mobilizing the masses in Iran. The opportunity structures in Iraq and Lebanon are, to some extent, different. While both are hugely influenced by sectarianism, Iraqi society is still relatively dependent on tribal values as well.

The Shiites of Iraq came to constitute the majority of the population of the country during the process of conversion by Sunnite tribesmen to Shiite Islam in the

early twentieth century (Nakash 1994). Therefore, the traces of strong Arab and nomadic ties should not be underestimated in studying the Shiites of Iraq. Some Iraqi tribes still have both Sunni and Shiite members, both of whom show relatively strong patronage to their tribal values and sheikhs. Shiite clerics in Iraq have always been faced the dilemma of how to respond to this tribalism when considering how to undertake their sociopolitical responsibilities (see Chapter 5: 157). The Shiite clerical elite is less likely to engage in politics, or to expect a successful outcome if he becomes active, unless he has the support of tribal chiefs. This is also reflected in Lebanon, but through the lens of sectarianism. Lebanese identity is constructed along sectarian lines. Therefore, the main concern of the Shiite clerical leadership in Lebanon is to evaluate the consequences of their actions vis-à-vis the almost sixteen other religious sects that are found throughout the country. Nevertheless, the sectarianism of Lebanon's society has enabled Shiite clerics to form a strong relationship with the Shiite laity.

At a bureaucratic level, clerical elite organization structures vary in the three cases. The Najaf seminary in Iraq, established ten centuries ago, has been the most important center for Shiite studies throughout Islamic history. In contrast, the Qom seminary in Iran is only about a hundred years old. In Lebanon, and despite the enormous influence of Shiite Amili scholars (see Chapter 3) on contemporary jurisprudence, the country does not currently have any important seminary. It was only during Grand Ayatollah Broujerdi's leadership of the seminary in Qom (1947-1961), that the centre became known globally and that its status, to some extent, superseded that enjoyed by the Najaf seminary. At the same time, Najaf seminary was entangled with post-British mandate discontents. It is noteworthy that the majority of Najaf seminary leaders, excluding Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim, are Iranian by descent. This ultimately, especially at individual level, further closed the opportunity structure for the activism of the Shiite clergy in Iraq. The seminary in Qom has not had this problem. The centre was able to survive the threats of Reza Shah's rule under the providential leadership of Grand Ayatollah Hairi, and further strengthened its foundations under the leadership of Broujerdi. By the late 1950s the Qom seminary was known as the most important Shiite centre in the world. It was through this capacity that it succeeded in developing a robust network of clerics extending to the most remote cities in Iran. The exploitation of this network on the eve of the Islamic revolution played a most crucial role in orchestrating mass demonstrations against the

rule of Mohammadreza Pahlavi. In Lebanon, the absence of bureaucratic institutions for the Shiite clergy led Imam Musa Sadr to seek to establish the Supreme Islamic Shia Council in the late 1960s. Although its establishment succeeded in promoting the clerical leaderships' mission throughout the Shiite community in Lebanon, later, with Sadr out of the picture, the Council's effectiveness decreased and was largely replaced by AMAL and, later, by the Hezbollah Juristic Council.

The political opportunity structure for Shiite activism on an individual level has been relatively dependent on a handful of charismatic leaders, high-ranking Mujtahids, who have been active in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon during the modern era. As leaders of their relevant communities, each of these figures has sought to seize the opportunity, when it has been available, to pursue their sociopolitical roles and responsibilities. Facing different objective political opportunities on broader levels, these figures have, through their *ijtihad*s and other activities, contributed to the structure on an individual level. The novel *ijtihad* of Khomeini in the 1970s outlining the role of the clergy as participants in sociopolitical affairs, was not only crystallized as a response to the structure he perceived at the time, but also changed the objective political opportunity structure for his colleagues and followers and further developed contention against the regime of the Shah in Iran. This was similar for the role that Imam Musa Sadr played in revitalizing the Shiite community in Lebanon. In contrast, the *ijtihad* of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, influenced by his interpretation of what was a relatively closed political opportunity structure in Iraq during 1980s, pushed him towards assuming a quietist posture and, hence, further closed the political opportunity structure.

Evaluating the objective political opportunity structures at different levels further explains the rationale behind the political postures of different Shiite clerical elites in contemporary Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. The course of events that led to the current Shiite revival in the Middle East is mainly influenced by the contextual changes which have occurred in recent years and which, consequently, provided a relatively more open political opportunity structure for clerical activism. For their part, the Shiite clergy were able to accurately perceive opportunities where they existed and to seize them in order to benefit their followers. This constitutes a remote connection among the clerical elites and their followers in different communities across the region. The transnational Shiite network that has formed in the region is



based on clerical authority, their responsibility to protect the Shiite community, and clergy-laity religious relationships. The next section further develops this point.

## **II. Clerical Elite Association: Shiite Transnationalism**

The charismatic Marja'iyya network in modern times constitutes the backbone of Shiite transnationalism. Nevertheless, the development of this network has been started since eighteenth century. The fall of the Safavid capital, Isfahan, in 1722 marked a turning point in the Shiite clergy's relationship with the state and with its laity followers. During the two centuries of Safavid rule in Persia, Shiite elites had been engaged in a give-and-take relationship with monarchs and, to some extent, shared power with the state. During the same period, thousands of mosques and hundreds of seminaries were built throughout the country and the clergy, who had strong support from the state at the time, also succeeded in constructing a robust relationship with the laity. Clerics became the point of reference for religious matters and, in every corner of Persia, people abided by their verdicts in mediating conflicts, marriages, divorces, and deaths. There was an obvious vertical expansion of the clergy through Persian Shiite society. However, as a result of the Afghan invasions (1722 CE), and later the restrictive policy of Nader Shah (1736-1747), the majority of clerical elites preferred to leave Persia and settle in the holy cities in Iraq. However, contrary to what everyone expected, the clergy-laity relationship was not diminished and, in fact, became relatively stronger over the course of subsequent decades (see Chapter 3).

Though pious followers still sought the advice of clerics in religious affairs, the absence of a supportive Shiite state made clerical elites in Iraq dependent on financial support from the wealthy classes and on religious taxes coming from their laity followers in Persia. Every year, hundreds of trustworthy couriers were responsible for mediating between the Persian laity and the Maraji' who were residing in seminaries in Iraq. These couriers were responsible for collecting both religious taxes and religious inquiries from Persia, and bringing back the signed responses of the clerical elites. Later on, the introduction of new communication technologies (e.g. telegram) further facilitated this process. In the mid-nineteenth century, concurrent with the leadership of Sheikh Morteza Ansari (d. 1864), the sense of a transnational clergy-laity relationship was formed in Najaf seminary. The Qajar dynasty in Persia

was more open to the activities of the clerical elite, *usuli* Mujtahids had ousted the dogmatic Akhbari School, and the Persia-Iraq telegram line facilitated communications. It was in such circumstances that the leader of Najaf seminary was known as the sole Marja' of all Shiites throughout the Islamic world. Since then the eyes of the Shiites in Persia and other countries in the region focused on Najaf, the centre of this ever-expanding religious transnational network. The undeniable role of Mirza Shirazi, who resided in Samarra and was the highest-ranking Shiite Marja' of the time, in the Tobacco Protest in Persia can be understood in relation to this structure (see Chapter 3).

A hundred years later, the rise of an Islamic state in Iran, run by the Shiite clergy, raised the fresh question of the possibilities of religious and political Shiite transnationalism. A new stream of literature within Middle East studies and Political Science has tried to address this question. In her book, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*, Laurence Louër (2008) sheds some light on the nature of this transnationalism. Observing Shiite political movements within some Persian Gulf countries, she states that, although the Islamic Revolution in Iran energized Shiite activism throughout the region, it failed to create a robust transnational network (see Chapter 5). She believes that the ambition to 'export the revolution', initiated by the clerical leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran, failed; and maintains that what emerged, instead, to the dismay of the religious leaders of Iran, was a bipolarization of the Shiite Muslim community (2008: 218).

The argument of this study confirms Louër's claim about the importance of 'domestic space' in the formation of Shiite politics (2008: 299), in that the political postures assumed by the clergy are influenced by national and societal level factors that contribute to the political opportunity structure and, hence, by the domestic affairs of countries. But, can one declare the end of transnationalism in Shiite politics? Again, the analysis presented in this thesis implies the existence of a Shiite transnational network. This is based on scrutinizing the role of Shiite Marja'iyya in the routine affairs of their laities (which Louër and other scholars acknowledge). The religious responsibility of Shiite Marja' is not confined to a nation, tribe or a specific ethnic group; principally, its authority encompasses all the Shiites. A Shiite Marja', the most righteous Mujtahid at a given time, is responsible toward the community and should act respectfully. However, when he perceives a restrictive context, he may prefer to remain quiet politically. Imam Khomeini's views, based on his ijtehad,

applied to the Shiite communities throughout the world. He constantly addressed ‘all Muslims’, the ‘Islamic Ummah’, the ‘oppressed Shiites’ of Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other countries hosting Shiite Muslims, and conveyed personal judgments about on-going developments in those countries. This was not the case only when he became the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic; this position had characterised his sense of his religious responsibility decades before. As a Shiite Marja’ he was responsible for leading all Shiites, whether Iranian, Arab, Kurd or other. In Iraq, the same can be said of Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim (d.1970), Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim Khoei (d.1992), and Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani who, on different occasions, have expressed, and continue to express, positions on the affairs of non-Iraqi Shiite communities. Similarly in Lebanon, Imam Musa Sadr, Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah (d.2010) and, currently, Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah have all been outspoken about the affairs of Shiite communities in other countries.

Therefore, the activities of Marja’iyya go beyond the borders of the country in which they reside. This extends far further than family ties (e.g. Sadrs, Khoeis, Shirazis, Hakims) among members of the Shiite clerical elite. It is even far broader than the network of Prophet descendants, *Sayyids*, throughout the Islamic world, as detailed in some studies (Mauriello 2011). It includes a strong, to some extent personal, relationship between the Marja’ and his followers, which has been formed for centuries and is still valid despite all the discontents of the modern era. It is the case for the religious Iranian laity who follow the verdicts of Grand Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf, as for Lebanese laymen who follow Grand Ayatollah Khamenei, in Iran. This relationship forms the very foundation of Shiite transnationalism in the contemporary Shiite world.

Throughout this study, and through the snapshots and case studies of Shiite politics in the historical and contemporary Shiite world, examples of this network have been suggested. Apart from the relationship between Marja’ and laity followers, the clergy as a whole supports the strengthening of Shiite transnationalism. An Iraqi Marja’ who endorses a colleague residing in Iran, is reinforcing Shiite clerical authority (which is a Shiite principle in the eyes of the clerical elite) and benefiting a clergy that forms one, associated social stratum throughout the Shiite world. This dynamic also challenges the categorization of Shiite clergy as principally quietist or activist.

### **III. The Myth of Quietism and Activism: Shiite Clerical Elites and the Future of the Middle East**

This study has argued that there does not exist any strategic disparity among Shiite clerical elites in their political engagements. Those known as active Shiite clerics as well as those famous for their quietism all believe they have the same roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis the Shiite community as a whole. During the occultation era, the *usuli* Mujtahids, who represent the majority of Shiite clerical elites, reserve for themselves the exclusive right to issue *Ifta* and *Qadha*. Shiite clerical elites universally believe that it is incumbent upon them to issue legal opinions and interpretations of Islamic law in given circumstances. The majority of the clergy also reserve the right of issuing judgments to their followers among the laity, *Qadha*. These were among the responsibilities of the Prophet and the infallible Imams, and have been inherited by their general deputies and clerical elites during the occultation era.

Faced with the contingencies of the contemporary era and the structural changes that had occurred in the late 1970s, a group of clerics in Iran seized an opportunity and established an Islamic Republic. Imam Khomeini, the most famous cleric of the time, believed that institutionalizing the Shiite clerical *Qadha* requires the acquisition of executive power; to this end, the context was favorable for the Shiite clergy in post-Revolution Iran. At the first step, Shiite clerics succeeded in forming a judicial system in Iran based mainly on Islamic Sharia. A theme in documents found in historical archives, supported by excerpts of interviews conducted for this study with a handful of those closely affiliated to Khomeini, confirmed that, in post-revolutionary Iran, where the judicial system remained unchallenged, and the role of the clergy and its judgments were respected, clerics did not engage in political activism. However, the perception of potential threats by internal and external forces, have led the clerical elite to seek to further strengthen their authority in Iran by assuming a more activist political posture. So, for instance, the supreme leader, who had not agreed to allow Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti to be fielded as a candidate in the January 1980 presidential election, on the grounds that he was a cleric, in 1981 encouraged Seyyed Ali Khamenei to participate in elections in response to what he perceived as a threat to the very foundations of the Islamic Republic.

On the other hand, internal schisms among the revolutionaries were highest during the first decade after the revolution. International sanctions, and a devastating war with Iraq ignited a sense of irrational inconsistency amongst active clerics at the forefront of politics. Nonetheless, the spiritual and charismatic leadership of Imam Khomeini helped to mitigate these threats. This turn of events favored the moderate, yet active clergy in Iran in the last months of Khomeini's life. By the late 1980s, a group of active clerics had succeeded in consolidating their political position in Iran, and these sought to promote Iran as a crucial regional power and to abide with the norms of the international community.

With the end of Cold War, the consolidation of the regional role of the Islamic Republic, the expulsion of the internal opposition that had represented an existentialist threat to the Islamic state in the eyes of many clerics, and the expansion of clerical authority throughout the country, Iranian leaders confronted a new political opportunity structure, and so were obliged to redefine their political postures. Ever since, despite some critical upheavals (e.g. the nuclear crisis), they have pursued a relatively rational set of policies based on *realpolitik* and diplomacy.<sup>4</sup> This can be understood as the development by activist clerical elites of a new *ijtihad* that enables them to both fulfill their responsibilities and to act as members of the international community.

The objective political opportunity structure in Iraq is, to some extent, different to that in Iran. Although the Shiite community constitutes the majority of the population, it has experienced Sunnite supremacy since the emergence of the country in the 1920s. Nevertheless, with the fall of the Baath regime, the clerical leadership offered an opportunity to consolidate the rights of the community. As a first step, Grand Ayatollah Sistani insisted on a one-man-one-vote standard and asked the Iraqi Shiites to participate in the 2005 election. He pragmatically sought a way for the Shiite community to make the most out of its numerical majority in today's Iraq (Nasr 2006: 175). Perceiving the political opportunity structure to be relatively favorable, the Grand Ayatollah became active in politics -- though, for example being of Iranian

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<sup>4</sup> In the midst of the Iranian nuclear turmoil, Meir Dagan, director of the Mossad since 2011, declared in an interview that 'the regime in Iran is very rational ... they are considering all the implications of their actions'. Such a statement expressed by an Israeli high-ranking official reflects the nature of the Iranian leadership's policymaking during the last three decades. For the full excerpt of the interview see Lesley Stahl, 'Ex-Israeli spy chief: Bombing Iran a stupid idea,' *CBS News*, March 8, 2012, accessed June 11, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/ex-israeli-spy-chief-bombing-iran-a-stupid-idea/>

descent, with some reservations. He sought to strengthen and protect the community at that critical moment. In an interview I held with Seyyed Mohammadreza Sistani, he implied that the endeavours of his father were mainly focused on lobbying with elected members of the Provisional Assembly to prevent the ratification of 'anti-Sharia laws' in the new Iraqi constitution.<sup>5</sup> The objective political opportunity structure for Shiite activism in Iraq in 2005 was fundamentally different from that of Iran in 1980. The clerical leadership in Iraq had been a witness to the experiences of its colleagues in Iran over the previous three decades. This was what mainly responsible for the seeming divergence of the views of Khomeini's and Sistani, two of the most distinguished Shiite leaders of their times. Eventually, the pragmatism pursued by Sistani rewarded the Shiite community and its religious leadership in Iraq with the maximum degree of authority they have received since the birth of the country.

Since 2005, the clerical leadership in Iraq, though not directly active in routine executive political matters, has been the source of legitimacy for the state to which most people refer. In a handful of cases, and whenever they are requested, Grand Ayatollah Sistani and his entourage in Iraq have issued fatwas or mediated conflicts among different parties in order to stabilize the country's internal and foreign affairs. However, perhaps the most significant move in post-2003 Iraq was made on the eve of the fall of Mosul to the fanatics of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in June 2014. In the most exceptional act of almost a century of Shiite history, Sistani issued the Fatwa of Jihad calling on all Iraqis, Shiites and non-Shiites, 'to defend the country, its people, the honor of its citizens, and its sacred places'.<sup>6</sup> The Fatwa represents the greatest degree of political activism that has ever been exhibited by a Shiite cleric residing in Iraq. The irony is, however, that it came from the Grand Ayatollah who was believed by a majority of analysts to be the most famous advocate of political quietism among the Shiite clergy (Arato 2004, Khalaji 2006). The political postures taken by Sistani over the course of the last twelve years clearly indicates that he becomes engaged in politics when, in the context of an open political opportunity structure, he perceives both a threat to the Shiite community, especially when it

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with the author, Najaf, August 2013.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed review of the Fatwa see Abbas Kadhim and Luay Al-Khatteeb, 'What Do You Know About Sistani's Fatwa?' *Huffington Post*, July 10, 2014, accessed June 11, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/luay-al-khatteeb/what-do-you-know-about-si\\_b\\_5576244.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/luay-al-khatteeb/what-do-you-know-about-si_b_5576244.html)

comes from outsiders. His millions of followers, Iraqi politicians, and other regional players regard him as the most influential religious leader in Iraq.<sup>7</sup>

Shiite activism in Lebanon also has unique characteristics compared with those of Iran and Iraq. Interestingly, the Shiites in Lebanon had succeeded in establishing a legal court dedicated to their sect before the Shiites in Iran and Iraq. Indeed, the establishment of Ja'fari court in 1926 was a vehicle for Shiite sectarian identity in Lebanon (Weiss 2008). Due to the relatively closed objective structural opportunity structure in the country and, particularly, the mainly confessional nature of Lebanese politics, the Shiite clergy in Lebanon engaged in politics simply to protect the very existence of the sect. It took Imam Musa Sadr, the founder of clerical activism in contemporary Lebanon, more than fifteen years to form AMAL, the military wing of the Deprived Movement, in 1974. The manifesto of the movement indicates that it had formed as a means of protecting the deprived Lebanese communities (Shiites), which at the time was entangled geographically between the hostilities of Palestinian refugees in the south and the Maronites of Beirut and northern Lebanon.

Later on, with the commencement of the civil war in 1975 and constant threats from Israel, Shiite clerical elites moved further towards assuming an activist posture. Imam Musa Sadr's inheritors did the same. Most notably, the formation of Hezbollah around a handful of clerical figures was a response to the threats of Israeli occupation in post-1982 Lebanon. Although during its early years, the clerical leadership of Hezbollah asked for the establishment of an Islamic state, they later and with the emergence of a new charismatic leadership, moderated their posture consistent with the realities of the country's political structure. Today, Hezbollah of Lebanon forms a strong faction within the state and has a remarkable popular constituency. Moreover, as long as there is a threat of an Israeli invasion in the south, the historical stronghold of the Shiites, it is unrealistic to think that the party and its clerical leadership would voluntarily give up their armed resistance.

Reviewing the trajectory of Shiite clerical elite political activism in the Middle East since the early twentieth century, one could conclude that, when it comes to the

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<sup>7</sup> Larry Kaplow, 'Iraq's Most Influential Man Gets Pulled Back Into Politics,' *National Public Radio*, June 24, 2014, accessed June 11, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/06/24/325169087/iraqs-most-influential-man-gets-pulled-back-into-politics>

protection of the community from outsiders' threats, clerics form powerful associations, either by engaging in activism or supporting their active colleagues. In a post-9-11 World, and with the rise of transnational terrorist groups that impose constant threats to the regional order, it has become clear that what is perhaps the greater threat to stability in the region is the set of doctrines that are embraced by a small faction of fanatical Sunnite Salafists in the region. Today the active Shiite leadership in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon present a coherent pragmatic policy that complies with the norms of the international community. This, and the fact that Shiites are numerically a majority of the population of the Gulf, which is at the heart of the Middle East, suggest that this leadership would constitute a more reliable and suitable regional power broker, than current Sunnite leaders.

The findings of this study suggest that categorizing members of high-ranking Shiite clerics as either apolitical quietists or extremist activists obscures the realpolitik that is common to all of them, and the varying political contexts which arise in the Middle East. Shiite clerics are always potentially active. The very foundations of the faith have been constructed on politics. Above all, in times of threat, the clerical leadership is capable of orchestrating political contention whenever they perceive a relatively open political opportunity structure. To this end, especially in modern times, they may go beyond the exclusive domain of divine politics and engage in more pragmatic politics. To fulfill their responsibilities, as the heirs to the Prophet and infallible Imams, they form alliances with specific social class against common threats and might even join with autocratic state rulers. The end for them, as discussed above, is to protect the community during the ever-threatening era in which Shiites are deprived of the infallible source of leadership. Recognizing this is a crucial step towards understanding Shiite politics in the region today and how these politics might shape the future.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of the study of the role of political context in Shiite clergy activism in the contemporary Middle East was to explain how influential Shiite clerical leaders respond to their surrounding world. By exploring Shiite political thought, the history of Shiite movements, and Shiite clerical elite political activism in the modern era, this study endeavored to shed more light on trends within political Islam. It also represents a contribution to the theory through its development of the concept of 'perceived



political opportunity', a concept that has been widely used to study contentious politics since the late 1980s.

Its unique contribution has been to present an understanding of how Shiite clergy perceive and interpret the given political opportunity structures based on hundreds of hours of interviews with Shiite clerical elites, their affiliates, and local policymakers. Perhaps for the first time, and thanks to privileged access to the subject, a scholarly look at this highly relevant subject has been produced from a database largely gathered through engaging with the current Shiite leadership in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, there were a number of limitations with this study as a result of constraints arising from the context within which this inquiry was pursued. The authority of its findings was limited by two main factors. First, the study focused on analyzing the activities of Shiite clerical elites in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon and was not able to incorporate religious elites in other countries that have either a Shiite majority population (e.g. Bahrain) or are home to significant Shiite minorities (e.g. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia); and it does not evaluate the responses of Shiite members of the laity throughout the region. From this there flows a second limitation of this study, which is the absence of an analysis of the reformist movements that have been initiated by non-clerical Shiite intellectuals over a number of decades.

One of the main goals of this study was to unearth how Shiite clerics manoeuvre and position themselves in response to the sociopolitical upheavals they face and in broadcasting their opinions. Some scholars suggest that Shiite clerical authority in the contemporary era has been mitigated by the activities and novel opinions of a group of Muslim intelligentsia in recent years; and that the gap has 'widened between clerics and laymen' (Louër 2012: 126). The factor that may place the greatest limitation upon the effectiveness of the findings of this study is, indeed, the absence of 'other voices' throughout the Shiite world. Nevertheless, the traditional structure of Shiite Marja'iyya, made up of people who believe in *ijtihad* as a means of responding to occurrence developments, remains of utmost importance in understanding Shiite politics in today's Middle East.

To address the limitations of this study, while also further developing the application of its findings, some areas for future study might be suggested. This study constitutes the first comprehensive evaluation of Shiite clerical elite activism using the concept of 'perceived political opportunity structure'. This research opens doors

onto areas that, if elaborated, would make a valuable contribution to social process theory as, for instance, a study of popular, mass Shiite contentious politics in the region. How do the Shiite laymen respond to the calls issued by elites? How would its response compare to (non) Shiite Muslim states? Both these questions, if addressed by in-depth research, would complement the research undertaken for this thesis.

Another possible area for future study is how Shiite clerical activism might be applied to mitigating the Islamic extremism that has emerged in the region. This might explore the ways in which the Shiite leadership might be included in 'the religious leadership' in the Middle East, broadly defined. Today the political map of the Middle East is in flux. New waves of political Islamic revival, the re-emergence of sectarian struggles, and the ongoing formation of fanatical ideologies in the region, have spurred a resurgence of interest in the sociopolitical dynamics of the region. There are a growing number of organised Islamic groups in the region, representing diverse political goals, and generating tensions that threaten to move beyond the borders of the Middle East, despite the efforts of religious elites to control them. Hence the question arises about what role Shiite and Sunni clerical leaders have played and might in the future play in this violence. This study aimed to shed some light on one part of this equation. A more comprehensive understanding of religious leadership in the Middle East and of on-going inter- and intra faith dynamics is a critical necessity during this threatening era for global order and security.

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## Appendix 1 –

### Infallible Imams: Brief Contextual Remarks

Name	Known as	Imamate Period	Contextual Remarks
Ali Ibn Abu Talib	<i>Murtadha</i>	632-660	He became the Fourth prophet's caliph, twenty-five years after death of the prophet.
Hassan Ibn Ali	<i>Mujtaba</i>	660-70	He was the Caliph for the six months in 660. Yet later signed a conditional treaty with Muawiyya, the first Umayyad Caliph.
Hussein Ibn Ali	<i>Shahid</i>	670-80	Arose against Yazid, and martyred in Battle of Karbala on Ashura of 680.
Ali Ibn Hussein	<i>Sajjad</i>	680-712	He was under harsh surveillances of the Umayyads during his lifetime, due to the post-Ashura context.
Mohammad Ibn Ali	<i>Baqer</i>	712-33	His Imamate became concurrent with the Muslim rebellions against the Umayyad Caliphate.
Ja'far Ibn Mohammad	<i>Sadeq</i>	733-65	Last years of his life were simultaneous with the establishment of Abbasid Dynasty.
Mussa Ibn Ja'far	<i>Kadhim</i>	765-99	He spent most of his life in prisons of the Abbasid caliphs.
Ali Ibn Mussa	<i>Ridha</i>	799- 818	He was forced to migrate from Hejaz to Iran, and for a while was forced to become the heir-apparent to the Caliph, al-Ma'mun.
Mohammad Ibn Ali	<i>Jawad</i>	818-35	He remained under the control of the Abbasid Apparatus. Later was killed at the age of 27.
Ali Ibn Mohammad	<i>Hadi</i>	835-68	He was the under house arrest of the Abbasid Caliph, al-Mutawakkil to be killed later when al-Mu'tazz became the Caliph.
Hassan Ibn Ali	<i>Askari</i>	868-74	He spent all his life in an army base of Abbasid caliph in Samarra, later to be killed by al-Mu'tamid.
Hujjat Ibn Hassan	<i>Mahdi</i>	874-	He has been passing the Major Occultation Era since 941.

Appendix 2 –

List of Interviewees

#	Interviewee	Place/ Date	Notes
1	Alavi Broujerdi, Mohammad Jawad	Qom / Aug 2011 & January 2012 & May 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - Grandson of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Broujerdi
2	Amini, Ahmad	Najaf / Dec 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Najaf - Responsible for the library of Ayatollah Abdul Hussein Amini
3	Ansari, Hadi	Tehran / Aug 2011 & Nov 2013 & Aug 2014 [three sessions]	An analyst on the history of Shiitise in Iraq
4	Ansari, Mehdi	Qom / Jun 2012 & Aug 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - Working on Shiite clerical elite history especially their role in Persian Constitutional Revolution
5	Araki, Mohsen	Qom / Aug 2014	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - Former member of Iran's Assembly of Experts and student of Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Sadr
6	Atrissi, Talal	Tehran / Jan 2013	The professor at Lebanese University in Beirut
7	Bahr al-Ulum, Ibrahim	Najaf / Dec 2013	Former Minister of Oil in Iraq - Son of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Bahr al-Ulum
8	Besharati, Ali Mohammad	Tehran / Nov 2012 & Sep 2013	A senior Iranian diplomat - Former member of Parliament, deputy Foreign Minister, and the Interior Minister
9	E'temadian, Mohammadreza	Tehran / Dec 2013	Former advisor to the Islamic Republic Presidents Khatami and Ahmadinejad - Founding member to the Islamic Coalition Party
10	Eftekharzadeh, Hassan	Tehran / Oct 2012	A Shiite clergy residing in Tehran - one of the leading members of Hujjatieh Society

#	Interviewee	Place/ Date	Notes
1	<b>Fahs,</b> Seyyed Ali	Beirut / Aug 2012	The cultural deputy for Hezbollah of Lebanon
1	<b>Fahs,</b>		
2	Seyyed Hani	Beirut / Aug 2012	A Shiite clergy residing in Beirut - Member of Supreme Shiite Council and founding member to the Arab Society for Islamic-Christian Dialogue
1	<b>Faqih Imani,</b> Seyyed Mohammad	Najaf / Dec 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - Grandson of Grand Ayatollah Khoei
3			
1	<b>Firoozan,</b> Mehdi	Tehran / Jan 2013	Son-in-Law of Imam Musa Sadr
4			
1	<b>Haieri,</b> Seyyed Ali Akbar	Najaf / Dec 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Najaf - one of the close disciples of Mohammad Bager Sadr
5			
1	<b>Hakim,</b> Seyyed Ali	Beirut / Aug 2012 [two sessions]	A Shiite clergy residing in Beirut - Grandson of Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim and the General Secretary of the Imam al-Hakim foundation
6			
1	<b>Hakim,</b> Seyyed Ja'far	Qom / Aug 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Najaf - Grandson of Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim
7			
1	<b>Hamdan,</b> Khalil	Nabatyeh / Aug 2012	Member of the directing board of Lebanon's AMAL
8			
1	<b>Hashemi</b>		
9	<b>Rafsanjani,</b> Akbar	Tehran / Aug 2012 & Feb 2013 [w] & Nov 2013	Ex-president of the Islamic Republic of Iran
2	<b>Haydous,</b> Samih	Beirut / Aug 2012	The Director of Imam Musa Sadr Centre for Research and Studies in Beirut
0			

#	Interviewee	Place/ Date	Notes
2	<b>Ja'farian,</b> Rasoul	Qom / Jun 2012	A Shiite historian clergy residing in Qom - Former president of the Library and Archive Centre of the Islamic Republic of Iran Parliament
2	<b>Javadi-Amoli,</b> Saeed	Qom / Aug 2014	The president of Esra International Foundation for Revealed Science - Son of the Grand Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi-Amoli
2	<b>Kafayi,</b> Abdolreza	Qom / Aug 2011	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - Grandson of Akhond Khorasani
2	<b>Kamalian,</b> Mohsen	Tehran / Oct 2012	A researcher and biographer of Imam Musa Sadr
2	<b>Khafaf,</b> Hamed	Beirut / Aug 2012	Grand Ayatollah Sistani's spokesperson in Lebanon
2	<b>Khoei,</b> Abd al-Sahab	Tehran / Jul 2012	The director of Imam al-Khoei Foundation in England - Son of the Grand Ayatollah Khoei
2	<b>Lahooti,</b> Mohammad	Tehran / Aug 2012	The son-in-law of Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani
2	<b>Madadi,</b> Seyyed Ahmad	Qom / May 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - expert on history of Shiite Islam and Jurisprudence
2	<b>Mara'shi,</b> Hossien	Tehran / Sep 2013	An Iranian diplomat - Former member of the Parliament
3	<b>Marandi,</b> Mohammad	Beirut / Aug 2012	Iranian Political Analyst and an expert on American studies and Orientalism

#	Interviewee	Place/ Date	Notes
3	<b>Mehdipour,</b> Ali Akbar	Qom / May 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - Former representative of the Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari in Istanbul
3	<b>Moavenian,</b> Hamed	Qom / Aug 2011- Tehran / Jan 2014	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - close student of Grand Ayatollah Wahid Khorasani
2	<b>Hamed</b>		
3	<b>Mohaghegh Damad,</b> Mostafa	London / Mar 2012 - Tehran / Nov 2013 & Jan 2014	A Shiite clergy residing in Tehran - Grandson of Grand Ayatollah Abdul Karim Haini and former General Inspection Officer of the Islamic Republic of Iran
3	<b>Mostajabi,</b> Morteza	Isfahan / Aug 2014	A Shiite clergy residing in Isfahan - the former member of Fadaian Islam and cousin of Imam Musa Sadr
4	<b>Morteza</b>		
3	<b>Muhtadi,</b> Mohammad Ali	Tehran / Oct 2012	A Senior Arab World Analyst and the former chief of Iran's National Broadcasting Desk in Lebanon
5	<b>Mohammad Ali</b>		
3	<b>Musawi Bojnourdi,</b> Mohammad Kazem	Tehran / Aug 2012	An Iranian historian and founder of the Centre of Great Islamic Encyclopaedia
6	<b>Mohammad Kazem</b>		
3	<b>Musawi Hawayi,</b> Seyyed Jawad	Tehran / Nov 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Tehran - The Research Deputy of Iran's Islamic Development Organization
7	<b>Seyyed Jawad</b>		
3	<b>Musawi,</b> Ibrahim	Beirut / Aug 2012	The Former Media Officer of Hezbollah
8	<b>Ibrahim</b>		
3	<b>Nahavandian,</b> Mohammadreza	Tehran/ Aug 2014	The President Rouhani's Chief of Staff
9	<b>Mohammadreza</b>		
4	<b>Nasrallah,</b> Mohammad Deeb	Beirut / Aug 2012	The Director of Lebanese AMAL board
0	<b>Mohammad Deeb</b>		

#	Interviewee	Place/ Date	Notes
4	<b>Oun,</b> Adel	Tehran / Jan 2013	AMAL envoy to the Islamic Republic of Iran
1	<b>Rafighdoost,</b> Mohsen	Tehran / Nov 2012	The founding member of the Islamic Republic Revolutionary Guards and its first minister in cabinet of then the president, Grand Ayatollah Khamenei
4	<b>Rouhani,</b> Seyyed Ali	Qom / Dec 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - Son of Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Rouhani
3	<b>Rouhani,</b> Seyyed Sadeq	Qom / Dec 2013	A Shiite Marja' residing in Qom
4	<b>Sadr,</b> Hawra	Tehran / Jun 2012	The Director of Imam Musa Sadr Institute in Tehran - daughter of the Imam
5	<b>Sadr,</b> Sadr al-Din	Beirut / Aug 2012	The eldest son of Imam Musa Sadr
4	<b>Saeed Tehrani,</b> Mahmood	Karbala / Jan 2012	A Shiite clergy residing in Tehran - Son of Ayatollah Sheikh Hassan Saeed Tehrani, former representative of Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Hakim in Iran
7	<b>Sanad Bahrani,</b> Mohammad	Qom / Aug 2011 & Aug 2012 - Karbala / Jan 2012	A Shiite Marja' residing in Najaf
4	<b>Shahrestani,</b> Seyyed Jawad	Qom / Jul 2012	Son-in-Law of Grand Ayatollah Sistani and his senior representative in Iran
9	<b>Shahroodi,</b> Seyyed Mahmood	Qom / Aug 2014	A Shiite Marja' residing in Qom - Former Chief Justice of the Islamic Republic of Iran

#	Interviewee	Place/Date	Notes
5	<b>Shamkhani,</b> Ali	Tehran / Sep 2014	The Secretary of Supreme National Security Council of Iran
2	<b>Sharara,</b> Abdul Halim	Beirut / Aug 2012	The Chief Director of Religious Propagation department at Lebanese Shiite Supreme Council
5	<b>Shirazi,</b> Seyyed Hussein	Qom / Dec 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - Son of Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Sadeq Shirazi
5	<b>Shojoomi,</b> Ja'far	Tehran / Jan 2014	A Shiite clergy residing in Tehran - a senior member of Combatant Clergy Association
5	<b>Sistani,</b> Seyyed Ali	Najaf / Jun 2013	A Shiite Marja' residing in Najaf
5	<b>Sistani,</b> Seyyed	Najaf / Jun 2013	A Shiite clergy residing in Najaf - son of Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Sistani
6	Mohammadreza		
5	<b>Sobhani,</b> Mohammad Taqi	Qom / Aug 2011 & Aug 2012	A Shiite clergy residing in Qom - The Director of Imamate Institute
5	<b>Tabarayan,</b> Safa al-Din	Tehran / Jan 2013 & Nov 2013	A Senior Analyst of Shiite history in Iran and Iraq
5	<b>Tabatabai,</b> Sadeq	Tehran / Nov 2012	The First Islamic Republic of Iran government's spokesperson - nephew of Imann Musa Sadr
6	<b>Zawawi,</b> Salah	Tehran / Jan 2013	The official Palestine Liberation Organization envoy to Tehran