



Political Islam Online

Shi'a - Internecine Conflict

Yesterday, the Lebanese religious scholar, *Muhammad 'Ali al-Husayni*,¹ -- a *Shi'a* -- indicted Iran's Revolutionary Guard for masterminding the attempt on his life a week ago and accused the Iranian leadership of having a plan to eliminate all Arab *Shi'a* religious leaders.



On the surface, *Husayni's* allegation that Iranian *Shi'a* leaders want to eliminate other *Shi'a* leaders may seem bizarre. If the motive for the assassination attempt was regional political domination, however, the intra-sect allegation is credible. The Iranian regime is unhappy over *Husayni's* challenge to *Hizballah's* dominance in Lebanon and his rejection of the *Wilayat Al-Faqih*² doctrine under which the people must follow the rulings of the leading Jurist on Islamic law. That doctrine, which was instituted by *Khomeini* during the Iranian revolution, serves as the underpinning for the role of the "Supreme Commander" in Iran. To understand *Husayni's* point, it is necessary to step back and examine that doctrinal concept through the lenses of linguistics, religion and politics.

As the leaders of religious/political movements in the Middle East juggle for political power, *Wilayat Al-Faqih* is the main doctrine used to gain the support of the masses in their quest to challenge the secular regimes and establish a supreme religious authority. In the restricted form of *Wilayat Al-Faqih*, there could be one or more leading Islamic Jurists and they had responsibility only over judicial matters and religious welfare. *Khomeini*, however, expanded the concept to include all matters concerned with governing the country and concentrated that expanded power in a single "Supreme Leader." *Hizballah* in Lebanon was built around this concept. *Hizballah* accepts the current Supreme Leader, *Khomeini*, de facto espousing the supremacy of a trans-national leader over national identity. It is this notion of a Supreme Leader that is the point of contention between *Husayni* and *Hizballah's* leader, *Hassan Nasrallah*. *Husayni*, who has political ambitions of his own, does not want to surrender the Arabian *Shi'a* identity to the Persians. Similarly, Iraq's most influential *Shi'a*, *Sistani*, accepts the *Wilayat al-Faqih* doctrine, but has never acknowledged *Khomeini* as the Supreme Leader. Until now, Iran has supported *Sistani*. If his stature grows within the *Shi'a* community outside Iraq, however, Iran's stance will likely shift. It is also noteworthy that the *Sunnis* have recognized the value of the *Wilayat al-faqih* doctrine to those seeking to consolidate power. The *Sunni* Muslim Brotherhood, which is seeking religious governing power in Egypt, has advocated for the establishment of a "Supreme Council" similar to the *Shi'a Wilayat al-faqih* [see PI 505].

Al-Husayni's objective is simple. By allying himself with *Shi'a* from Iraq and the Gulf, he gives his movement a national Lebanese/Arab identity. He rejects the idea of a foreign (Persian) Supreme Leader in an attempt to dethrone *Khomeini's* protégé *Nasrallah*. That is not an easy task to be sure. The alleged attempt on his life, however, may suggest that Iran and *Hizballah* are not taking any chances.

¹ *Muhammad 'Ali al-Husayni* is the leader of *Al-Majlis al-Islami al-'arabi* (the Arab Islamic Council)

² This term translates as "Governance by the Islamic Law Scholar, or Jurist"

ON LANGUAGE:

Fiqh: Islamic Jurisprudence - In its basic form it also means “knowledge” or comprehension”

Faqih - fuqaha’(pl): Islamic Jurist consult(s) – also: scholar(s) - expert(s)

Wilāyat: in this context means governance - guardianship – authority

Source: Al-Malaf – October 24th, 2007

<http://www.almalaf.net/more.asp?ID=44481&catID=13>