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The Atomic Bomb and the Religious Fanatics of Iran
Another Look at Shiite Islam

By Tal Davis

Recently the United States, with the unanimous acquiescence of the fifteen countries on the United Nations Security Council, signed a deal with the country of Iran to stop, or at least to defer, its development of nuclear weapons. The deal was hailed by the Obama administration as a historic agreement, but many expert observers question the capability of the system put in place to verify adequately whether or not the Iranians keep their side of the agreement.

One country, Israel, has unconditionally condemned the deal. They, more than anyone, understand the dangers involved. In any case, the United States, and any other countries willing to risk that Iran will honor this or any other treaty, need to remember just exactly who and what they are dealing with.

In 1979, radical Shiite Muslims, led by the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Moosavi Khomeini (1902-1989), overthrew Shah (King) Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980) and established the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since then, that nation has been ruled by a band of fanatical Shiite Mullahs (clerics). Khomeini's successor, and the current "Supreme Leader," is Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei (b. 1936). As such, he is not involved in the daily business of the government which is administered by an elected parliament, president, and cabinet (all from the only legal party). The Supreme Leader, nonetheless, provides the absolute authority for the regime's ideology and

must approve all major policy decisions (e.g. nuclear arms deals).

And just what is that overarching ideology? It is an extreme version of Shiite Islam called "Twelver Shiite Islam." In this article we will review the history and beliefs of that belief system and analyze its implications for modern Iran and the world's perspective on it. The Islamic world is divided into two major sects, Sunnis and Shiites. They both agree on the worldview and basic essential doctrines of Islam such as the nature of God, the annual Hajj to Mecca, the authority of the Prophet Muhammad (A.D. 570-632), and the written Qur'an. About 90% of Muslims are Sunnis and about 10% Shiite.

Islam was founded by Muhammad in the Seventh Century A.D. in Arabia (now Saudi Arabia). His life history, as presented by Islamic historians, is accepted as fact by all Muslims (though many non-Muslims dispute many of the historical claims). Nonetheless, after Muhammad's death conflicts arose among his followers. The greatest disagreement concerned the successor to Muhammad as Caliph (leader) of the movement. Muhammad had not designated a replacement before his death in AD 632.

Initially, most Muslims followed Muhammad's cousin, Abu Bakr, as the first post-Muhammad Caliph. Bakr died in AD 634 and was followed as Caliph by Umar (634-644). During Umar's reign, Islam spread by the sword throughout the Near East into Syria, Egypt, and west across North Africa. Umar also forced all Chris-

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tians and Jews to leave Arabia, but was killed in AD 644 by a rebellious Christian.

The third Caliph after Muhammad was Uthman, a son-in-law of the prophet. He died in AD 656. He was succeeded by another son-in-law named Ali ibn Abi Talib, the husband of Muhammad's daughter Fatima by his first wife Khadija. In AD 661, Ali also was murdered by some of his own soldiers. He was followed as Caliph by Mu'awiya, but not all Muslims were on board with his claims to leadership.

Thus, the Sunni/Shiite split began about this time in history. Muslims who favored Mu'awiya and the continued Caliphate became known as the Sunnis (Traditionalists). They believe that Islam's leaders were to be selected by a consensus of Muslim faithful. As Islam spread, however, the political unity of an overarching Caliphate dissipated. Today, no world Caliphate exists and Islamic authority is widely defused among many teachers and countries. Only the basic Islamic religious dogmas continue to unite all Muslims.

Nonetheless, the followers of the murdered Ali claimed that all true divinely inspired supreme leaders of Islam, which they termed "Imams," had to be direct descendants of Muhammad through the line of his first wife Khadija and their daughter Fatima. Thus, Ali was regarded as their first legitimate Islamic Imam and so they became known as the "Shia" or "Party" of Ali. The three Caliphs who preceded him are regarded as all illegitimate.

According to Shiite history, the second true Imam was Ali's oldest son, and Muhammad's grandson, Hasan. Hasan was a weak leader and only ruled for seven months

before being forced out in AD 662. He died in AD 669 when he was poisoned by his wife in Medina.

Hasan was followed in AD 662 by his younger brother, Husayn. He, however, was beheaded with his family in the Battle of Karbala in AD 680 while trying to reunite all Muslims under his leadership. Shiites regard Husayn as a great martyr for their faith and each year commemorate his death with processions of men whipping themselves in reenactment of his suffering.

Ali, Hasan and Husayn, according to Shiite doctrine, were followed by nine other Imams. This line of succession is the primary factor dividing Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Sunnis still see the leadership of Islam to be based on a consensus of world Muslims and do not regard it as necessarily having special divine inspiration. Shiites believe their twelve Imams all had special divine authority.

Here is a list of the Twelve Imams of Shiite Islam along with the dates of their births and deaths.

1. Ali ibn Abu Talib (600-661)
2. Hasan ibn (son of) Ali (624-669)
3. Husayn ibn Ali (626-680)
4. Ali ibn Husayn (658-712)
5. Muhammad ibn Ali (677-732)
6. Ja'far ibn Muhammad (702-765)
7. Musa ibn Ja'far (744-799)
8. Ali ibn Musa (765-817)
9. Muhammad ibn Ali (810-835)
10. Ali ibn Muhammad (827-868)
11. Hasan ibn Ali (846-874)
12. Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (868-?)

The key to understanding current Shiite doctrine lies in the fate of the last of the twelve Imams. In AD 874, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan suddenly disappeared and left no living successor from the line of Muhammad. Incredibly, the "Twelver" Shiites, believe al-Hasan is still alive and has been in hiding for 1141 years. This is what they call his "Occultation" (hiddenness). They believe in the last days he

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will return to the world stage as the "Mahdi" or "The Guided One." They believe a divinely endowed al-Hasan will lead the armies of Islam to final victory over the forces of Satan. All countries, religions, or armies not embracing their form of Islam will be destroyed in an apocalyptic war.

Here is where the issue of modern Iranian power comes into focus. The leaders of that country of 79 million people are all fanatical Shiites. They are fully convinced that the time for the Mahdi's return is in the near future. Faithful Muslims are expected to announce to the world his imminent return and to warn all nations to embrace Islam or else. On September 17, 2005, former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spoke to the United Nations General Assembly. In one section of his speech he said the following:

"From the beginning of time, humanity has longed for the day when justice, peace, equality, and compassion envelop the world. All of us can contribute to the establishment of such a world. When the day comes, the ultimate promise of all Divine religions will be fulfilled with the emergence of a perfect human being who is heir to all prophets and pious men. He will lead the world to justice and absolute peace. O mighty Lord, I pray to you to hasten the emergence of your last repository, the promised one, that perfect and pure human being, the one that will fill this world with justice and peace."

It is clear Ahmadinejad had the hidden Twelfth Imam in mind as "the promised one" who "will fill this world with justice and peace." An important aspect of this Shiite dogma is that prior to his appearing, the world will be plunged into a great conflagration of war between the forces of good (Islam) and the forces of Satan (everyone else). The Twelfth Imam will

therefore lead the forces of Allah to utter victory.

So what does this have to do with the issue of the Iranian nuclear weapons deal? I make no pretense of knowing if the current nuclear agreement is really a good one or not. A significant number of Americans are wary of it, and so they should be. The current rulers of Iran, including President Hassan Rouhani and Supreme Leader Khamenei, along with most Iranian people, are adherents of the Twelfth Imam myth. Before any agreement is final, it is crucial our negotiators understand the depth of this belief of the Iranian regime. They are, in essence, fanatical zealots of their religion. It is not just that they believe it, but that THEY BELIEVE IT!

For more than four decades I have studied the characteristics of cults and extreme religions. I have encountered first hand people who are true believers. That is, there are people who are convinced beyond any doubt that their belief system is absolutely correct and its prognostications for the future are inevitable. Some of these ideologies have resulted in catastrophic human suffering.

For instance, in the 20th Century millions of Germans were absolutely sure that Adolph Hitler was divinely sent to lead the German people to rule the world. Brutal Nazi fanaticism led to the unspeakable horrors of World War II and the Holocaust. Thankfully, that ideology died in the defeat of Germany and the death of Hitler in 1945 (though some neo-Nazis since then have attempted to resurrect it).

Likewise in the last century, millions of followers of atheistic Marxism were convinced of the inevitable historical victory of Communism in the world. They believed, therefore, that anything, no matter how violent or inhumane, done to further the prog-

ress of history toward revolution was right. That fanatical doctrine also led to the deaths of untold millions in the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and other Communist dominated countries. That ideology, though still held by many stalwart Marxists around the world, was abandoned by most adherents with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s.

Other recent examples from American history include Jim Jones' People's Temple in Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978. That cultic mania resulted in the deaths of more than 900 of Jones' disciples and their children. Also, in 1993, 83 followers of the Branch Davidians cult died in a self-ignited fire at their armed compound near Waco, Texas.

It is imperative for American and other world leaders to understand that the Iranian Mullahs and political leaders today are just as fanatical (or even more so) in their devotion to Twelver Shiite Islam as were Nazis and Communists in the last century. They believe their victory is inevitable since the hidden Twelfth Imam will come to lead them. They also believe that a world war must precede his revealing. So it is a real cause for concern that the Iranian Islamic regime probably sees itself as the catalyst for that great conflagration. It is likely that if the fanatical Iranian Mullahs finally obtain nuclear weapons they will regard it as a sign from Allah to ignite the final world war in order to bring history to its preordained conclusion.

The Mullahs will do whatever it takes to arrive at their goal. They have no qualms about lying, cheating, hiding, stealing, or doing anything (including mass suicide attacks) that will advance their quest for weapons of mass destruction. In their minds, they are absolutely on Allah's side and, therefore, anything they do or say, no matter how deadly or deceitful, is right in order to further Allah's final plan. For that reason, any agreement we have signed or will sign must be foolproof and not based on trusting the Iranian regime to fulfill its pledges. It must include rigorous and unimpeded inspection regimes to verify the Iranian's adherence to the agreement's terms. Anything less than full disclosure must be rejected. Remember, the Iranians hate us. They hate Israel. Their war cries have not changed. They still chant: "Death to America!" and "Death to Israel!" And they mean it.

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