



WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL Volume 21 Number 12 March 25, 2026

Iran in Crisis - Will the Mahdi Still Come?

By Tal Davis

In June of 2025 the United States and Israel conducted massive air, missile, and drone strikes on the Islamic Republic of Iran. The initial attacks were specifically to destroy all of Iran's capability of making atomic weapons. Those attacks were considered highly successful. However, in the early months of 2026, Israeli intelligence learned that Iran's leadership was more determined than ever to do whatever necessary to destroy Israel. For years they funded and trained surrogate terrorist groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and others in Qatar, Yemen, the West Bank, or other locations, to strike at Israel. All the while they were waiting for the opportunity to employ nuclear weapons to ultimately wipe them out in an apocalyptic holy war.

So, beginning on February 28th, 2026, the U.S. and Israel launched far more devastating attacks on Iran's military defense structure, and, more significantly, on its theocratic political system. On that day, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (1939 - 28 February 2026), Minister of Defense Aziz Nasirzadeh (1964 - 28 February 2026), Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRC) commander Mohammad Pakpour (1961 - 28 February 2026), Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Abdolrahim Mousavi (1960 - 28 February 2026), and Head of the Military Office of the Supreme Leader of Iran Mohammad Shirazi (? - 28 February 2026) were all killed by precision bombs while attending a meeting at Khamenei's home compound. This leadership decapitation came as a total shock to the Iranian political and military structure.

Immediately following Khamenei's death, an interim leadership Council of Experts convened to select his successor. On March 1st, it was announced on Iranian state media that Motjtaba Khamenei (b. 1969), Ali Khamenei's 56 year old son, was elected to succeed him as the third Supreme Leader.

Meanwhile, the bombing continues as Israeli and the United States forces blast away at Iranian targets. Iranian missile and drone counter attacks have caused some damage and casualties in Israel and surrounding U.S. military bases. All of this you have heard and seen on television. But what you probably have not heard is the religious nature of the war as far as the Iranians are concerned. On this website, we have written in the past about the history and beliefs of the Shiite Muslims who rule Iran. The media does not say much about it, only occasionally mentioning the "fanatical regime" but not really explaining what they are fanatical about. Maybe it is time to update our readers about the radical doctrines that control the

thought patterns of some extremist "Twelver Shiite Muslims," especially the ones in control of Iran. To do so, we need to review some of the history of Islam itself.

As you may already know, the religion of Islam had its origin about A.D. 622 with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (570-632) in Mecca, Arabia. When Muhammad died, various men made claim to be his successor as the next Caliph, or leader, of his movement. He had not designated anyone to take over.

Eventually, Muhammad's cousin, Abu Bakr, was chosen as the new Caliph. However, he died in 634. So after him was Umar (634-644). The third Caliph was Muhammad's son-in-law, Uthman (644-656). The next Caliph was Ali ibn Abi Talib. He was also Muhammad's son-in-law, the husband of Fatima, Muhammad's daughter by his first wife Khadija. Ali was murdered in 661 and was followed by Mu'awiya (661-680).

During this period, Islam underwent a significant division. Most Muslims wanted to continue with the Caliphate system as it had been practiced in previous years with the head Caliph selected by a consensus of Muslim clerics and scholars. Those who favored this process came to be known as Sunnis or Traditionalists. Over time, as Islam spread and grew in numbers, it became more difficult for a consensus to be agreed on for a single Caliph. Nonetheless, the overall religious tenets and philosophy remained unified.

On the other hand, a minority of Muslims argued that the true leaders of Islam, who they called "Imams," needed to be from a direct line of descendants of Muhammad himself through his first wife Khadija. This meant they rejected the first three Caliphs (see above) and only acknowledged Ali ibn Abi Talib as the first authentic Caliph (Imam) by his marriage to Fatima. Thus they became known as the "Shi'a Ali" or "Party of Ali." This form of Islam became the dominant sect in what was then called Persia (in 1935 it was renamed Iran) and present day Iraq. The second true Imam, therefore, was Ali's oldest son, and Muhammad's grandson, Hasan Abin Ali (d. 669). He was succeeded in 662 by his brother, Husayn. Husayn was killed by Sunnis in the Battle of Karbala in what is now Iraq in 680 while trying to reunite all Muslims under his leadership. Shiites today regard Husayn as a martyr for their faith and second only to Muhammad for spiritual purity. Annually, Shiites, especially in Iran, hold a special day of remembrance in his honor on the 10th of the month of Muharram on the Muslim calendar. Faithful men symbolically

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whip themselves to show their identification with Husayn's suffering.

Today Shiites remain the minority of world Islam. Only about 12% of all Muslims are Shiites, concentrated in Iran and Iraq. Sunni Muslims compose about 85% and are more widely distributed around the world. (According to the Pew Research Center, the current world Muslim population is about 2.3 billion.) The current population of Iran is 90 million.

It is at this point where we can get a grasp as to the source of the fanatical mindset of the Iranian Shiite Muslims and their hatred for Israel, the United States, and all things western.

After Husayn's death the Shiites were followed by nine other "true Imams." In all, they believe there were only twelve legitimate Imams over a span of 268 years. Below is a list of those Twelve Imams with their births and deaths in parentheses.

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-?)

You may note that the date for the death of the last Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, is not given. That is because as a young boy, in 874, as he was preparing to begin his reign as Imam, he suddenly, and without explanation, disappeared from the face of the earth and history, never to be seen or heard from again. No living successor was left who could fill the requirements of being a descendant of Muhammad. Therefore, some Shiites created the myth of the twelfth Imam's "Occultation" (hiddenness). That is, they claimed that he was not dead, but had gone into hiding to await a time when he would return to lead the armies of Islam to a final victory over Allah's enemies. As the years went by and he did not return, the myth grew and the belief developed that the Twelfth Imam would never die. Rather he would remain in hiding somewhere in the world until the last days when he will appear as the "Mahdi" ("The Guided One"). Then, in the midst of a great final conflagration, he would come to save his people from the forces of Satan.

That is one reason Iran could never be allowed to get nuclear weapons. They likely believe it is Allah's will for them to ignite that final conflagration by attacking Israel and the U.S. with atomic bombs. Believers in this myth are called the Twelvers." In modern times, the forces of Satan are Israel

("the Little Satan") and the United States ("the Great Satan"). They also include other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, eastern faiths, and even other forms of Islam. Twelvers believe that when the Mahdi comes, he will bring divine judgment and heap Allah's wrath on the whole world.

Now it is important to understand that they believe the Iranian revolution of 1979, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) brought the radical Twelver Shiite Mullahs (clerics) into power in Iran, was the key event triggering the final countdown to the inevitable return of the Mahdi. The recently killed Supreme Leader (Mullah) Ali Khamenei was a true believer in that myth, as well as his newly installed successor, Motjtaba Khamenei.

The remaining leaders in the government and the military, especially the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRG), are all fanatical believers. Keep in mind, most of this generation of Iranians have been taught this Twelver doctrine dogmatically since they were children for the past 47 years. It has been drilled into their minds in schools, in the media, in their mosques, with nothing else to challenge it. The military elite IRG units are bombarded with that doctrine in all their training. They are taught to die for the cause so they will be martyrs and go directly to Paradise.

So what does all this mean? Iran is being pummeled like no country since World War II Germany and Japan. All around they see their politicians and military forces being crushed. What then do the fanatical Twelver Shiite leaders still clinging to power think? We have to wonder, are they still waiting for the Mahdi to come and save them? Will the new Supreme Leader order the IRG to keep fighting to the last man, promising that their savior will come, or that they will go to Paradise as martyrs? It is hard for us to imagine that kind of fanaticism, but it has been seen before. At the end of World War II, Nazi SS troops in Germany continued to fight to the death for Adolf Hitler even after he had killed himself. Also, Japanese soldiers in the Pacific refused to surrender, preferring death, suicide, or hiding out for years after the end of the war.

What do we as Christians make of all this? First, we should have some compassion on the Iranian people, most of whom did not choose to be ruled by such a radical regime as the Twelver Shiites. When the 1979 revolution took place, most of them did not realize what was coming. Like most revolutions, what is promised is not what is delivered.

Also we need especially to pray for our fellow Christians in Iran. Reports over the past decade have been that, despite some of the harshest persecution in the world, many people are coming to Christ in Iran.

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Of course we should pray for our service men and women who put their lives on the line in this conflict. Already American casualties have been reported in the war and we can expect more. Let's pray the conflict

will come to a quick and peaceful end. In any case, I hope this little review has helped you understand better what the spiritual background is, and what we are up against in the present Iranian conflict.

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