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Middle East Brief

The Present Shia-Sunna Divide: Remaking Historical Memory

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As Marshall Sahlins has demonstrated in his *Islands of History*, culture is deeply ingrained yet constantly changes when faced with new circumstances. Its ingredients, shaped by history, may be stored in private and public memory; but whenever a new set of events takes place we tend to rearrange these seemingly ingrained components and reformulate our picture of the world.¹ Shiites and Sunnis in the Middle East and beyond are now engaged in precisely such a process. Confused and uncertain, they try to grapple with a confounding new reality. Current events conjure both negative and positive faces of the other, and reformulation of culture is in full swing.

Religious Differences

Shia and Sunna are separated by a relatively small number of theological and legal differences. The breach between them concerns a very early chapter in Islamic history. While most of the community acquiesced to the assumption of power by the Umayya family about three decades after the Prophet passed away, supporters of Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali, believed that the caliphate should have gone to his offspring. Ali's supporters, known as *shi at Ali* (Ali's party), sided with his sons, Hasan and Husayn, in their hopeless battle against the Umayyads. Since then the Sunnis have regarded the way events actually unfolded as constituting the legitimate course of history, while the Shiites regard Sunni Islamic history in its entirety as amounting to a usurpation of the Prophetic family's right to rule the community, and believe in a line of Imams descended from the Prophet. Most Shiites believe that it was the Twelfth Imam who disappeared, or went into occultation, at the end of the ninth century, and that he will soon reappear as the rightly guided messiah, or *mahdi*, to redeem his believers.

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Apart from their claims regarding history and redemption, there is surprisingly little difference between the sects in terms of their legal traditions—with respect, for example, to the sources of lawmaking or specific legal rulings. One important difference, however, is the organization of the clerical institution in the two sects. While the Sunni clerical institution is completely diffused—there is no internal hierarchy whatsoever, although one is often imposed from the outside by states—the Shia delineate a clear hierarchy of clerics, from humble preachers to grand ayatollahs.

A modern bone of contention is the Shiite theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*, or “Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist,” according to which, in the absence of a holy Imam, the ones chosen to lead society are the jurists—those who are most familiar with the sacred law. This theory was further developed by Ayatollah Khomeini before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and became the main legal basis for the rule of Iran’s supreme leader. It was rejected by Sunnis, who do not see a necessary connection between clerics and government.

History, Memory, and the Present

Contrary to common belief, the political lines of demarcation separating the Shia and Sunna camps are not ancient; they have only been set in the last four or five centuries, and have become crucial only in the twentieth century. Until the sixteenth century a majority of Iran’s population was Sunni, and much of Anatolia’s population was Shiite. But when the powerful Ottoman Empire engaged in a battle for regional supremacy with its enemy, the Shiite Safavid dynasty of Iran, it sought to distinguish itself from its rival by proclaiming itself the champion of Sunni orthodoxy. A series of massacres and forced conversions on both sides of the border largely reduced the Shiite population in the Ottoman Empire and the Sunni in Iran, and drove the rest underground. By the end of the sixteenth century most of Iran’s population had become Shiite and most of Anatolia’s, and the Fertile Crescent’s, Sunni.

In the area now known as Iraq, which during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries changed hands many times, the religious cleansing and intimidation were not as thorough, and both parties managed to coexist under Safavid and Ottoman rule. Other small Shiite enclaves remained in the Sunni world through the ages—in the Gulf region, in Lebanon, and in Yemen. A largely ignored Shia minority, the Alevi, gradually resurfaced in Anatolia, and according to some estimates now constitutes 20 to 30 percent of the country’s population.

Over the last two centuries there were relatively few conflagrations between Sunna and Shia. In fact, relations between Qajar Iran (1796–1925) and its former Sunni nemesis, the Ottoman Empire, were on the whole peaceful, and even improved when both imperial centers were taken over by secularizing regimes—republican Kemalist in Turkey and monarchical Pahlavi in Iran. It is also notable that most people in the region did not see the Iran-Iraq war of 1980–1988 as a struggle of Shia against Sunna, even though both governments tried to portray it as such—nor did they see the 1991 uprising of Iraq’s Shia against Saddam as a religious conflict. In Baghdad and other mixed cities, interfaith marriage was a very common and unremarkable occurrence until recently.

In recent decades, attempts have been made to anchor Shia-Sunna reconciliation in legal terms. One of the major steps was taken by al-Azhar mufti Sheikh Mahmud Shaltut, who in 1959 declared the Imami Shia a fifth school of law, alongside the

four recognized schools of the Sunna.² Bypassing issues of historical contention and framing the question as one of legal traditions, Shaltut, leader of the foremost Sunni religious center in the world, thereby granted the Shia formal recognition. He also introduced Shia law and theology as study material at al-Azhar University. This recognition was recently endorsed by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, perhaps the best-known contemporary Sunni cleric, who declared that although Sunnis had serious differences with the Shia, there was no doubt that Shiites were a legitimate part of Islam. al-Qaradawi changed his tune slightly, however, at the January 2007 Shiite-Sunni dialogue that took place in Qatar, when he blamed the Shia for actively seeking to convert Sunnis and accused Iran of meddling in Iraqi affairs.³

The conflict does continue to have a public presence. Each year, during the Ashura festival, Shiites recreate the battle of Karbala (680 C.E.), fought by forces of Sunni caliph Yazid I against the largely outnumbered forces of Imam Husayn, grandson of the Prophet and emblem of the Shia. The most crucial formative myth of the Shia, therefore, is one of Sunni aggression. For the Sunnis, on the other hand, the oft-evoked memory is that of the Mongol sacking of Baghdad in 1258, which is forever seared in their historical memory as the ultimate catastrophe to have befallen Islamic civilization. According to some Sunni sources, two Shiite dignitaries—the great philosopher and astronomer Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and the Abbasid vizier Ibn al-Alqami—were implicated in turning the city over to the invaders.⁴ Although Sunni and Shiite populations have lived alongside each other for centuries and these allegations were often regarded as merely vestiges of past conflict, now that the two communities are once again locked in confrontation they reappear to haunt believers on both sides.

Enter the Shi`a

Three elements combined to radically alter the situation and bring about a resurgence of the Shia and the current challenge to Shiite-Sunni coexistence: the changing demography of the Middle East, which in recent years largely increased the visibility of Shiites in Sunni lands; the impact of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, which for many Sunnis highlighted the perceived danger of a resurgent Shia; and the Salafi ideology of political Islam, which reacted violently to the real or imagined Shi'a threat in the wake of the last Gulf War.

Demographically, the twentieth century has seen a great rise in the absolute number of Shia residing in the Sunni part of the Middle East, and also of their proportion in the general population. In Iraq, the process of conversion of the great Bedouin tribes in the South began in the late eighteenth century, but became significant only when the nominal conversion of sheikhs permeated the masses, and when

census operations became meaningful under the British Mandate. From relatively small numbers at the beginning of the century, the Shia population thereby grew mainly through conversion of settled tribes in the southern part of the country, aided by migration and by a higher birthrate among the less affluent Shia population. A predominantly Sunni country has thus turned predominantly Shiite in a matter of a few decades.⁵

In Lebanon, a country dominated by Maronites and other Christians, the Shia were perceived as a relatively small and politically invisible group until the 1980s. But falling birthrates and migration among Christians, coupled with the fast growth of the Shia, resulted in its becoming the largest minority group, outweighing other sects and denominations. As there has been no official census in Lebanon since 1932, it is even possible for Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah to claim that they are today a majority in the country.⁶ Empowered by the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and by their pivotal role in fighting Israel from 1982 to the present, the Lebanese Shiites have emerged as an emblem of Shia unity and resilience in the Middle East.

In Syria there are relatively few undisputedly Shia communities, but even though it makes up only 10 to 15 percent of the population, the Alawi sect that dominates the country through the Assad family is identified as an offshoot of the Shia. In 1973 the Alawis, desperately trying to legitimate their rule over a Sunni majority, received recognition from the leading Iranian-born Lebanese cleric, Musa Sadr, who declared them a branch of the Imami Shia.⁷ Since then, based on their common political interests with Iran, the Alawis promote this identification. For most of the Sunni world, the Alawis have been almost conflated with the Shia.

Other Shia concentrations have also grown, with the result that Shiites have recently become visible in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf area. Under previous autocratic Sunni regimes, the Shiites in these countries were hardly ever mentioned and were largely ignored as a group; but with the appearance of less restricted media and more open regimes in some Gulf countries, the Shia residents of the Gulf have increased their visibility. Programs on Al Jazeera and other TV stations have hammered home the message of a Shia resurgence.

In Turkey, the Alevis (not to be confused with the Syrian Alawis), kept under a tight lid by both the Ottomans and the Kemalist governments of Turkey, have begun to assert their existence, and their differences from the rest of the population. So far the Alevis have not tried to set themselves politically apart from the Turkish Sunni majority, but aficionados of conspiracy theories see them as part of an

emerging Shi'a power structure intent on changing the religious face of the Middle East.

The Iranian Revolution

The increased visibility of Shia groups is also a reflection of the rise to power of the Islamic Republic in Iran since 1979. In its early years the Revolutionary regime had hoped to export the Revolution by encouraging and financing Shi'ite leaderships in the Arab world and elsewhere. When other governments in the region woke up to this strategy, their efforts to resist it were only partially successful. It was mainly the Saudi government, with its vast reserves of money, that was able to counter Iranian influence by promoting its own version of Sunni Islam. Since then the regime in Iran has dampened its own revolutionary zeal somewhat, and has replaced the idea of propagating a revolution with less visible support of Shia communities outside its borders. In some cases it still maintains close and active ties to extraterritorial groups, notably to Hezbollah in Lebanon and to the Syrian Alawi regime. In other regions, notably the Gulf, it is the increased visibility of Iranians engaged in other pursuits—business, pleasure, or family—that alerts Sunnis to the perceived danger of a resurgent Shia community.

Awareness of this change in demography and its possible implications reached a new level with the fall of Saddam in 2003. Iraq, a major contender for leadership of the Arab world and the true crucible of Islamic culture and religion, was taken over by Shi'ites—which, for many radical Sunnis, completely upset the balance of power in the region. As a result, the old fears of an Iranian/Shia takeover were rekindled, and stories began to circulate about Iranian attempts to foster revolutions and to convert Sunnis in other countries. The idea of a Shia arc stretching from Iran to Lebanon, suggested by King Abdullah of Jordan last year, is an example of growing Sunni apprehensions even among the more moderate. Such grand theories have emerged in recent months with renewed vigor, following events in Iraq and Hezbollah-Israel war.

The Salafi Grudge

Such apprehensions might have remained in the political and diplomatic spheres, with governments prepared to deal with them behind the scenes, had it not been for the rise of *jihadi/takfiri* groups and the second Gulf War in 2003. The main reason for the violent turn the conflict has taken is the militant political ideology of al-Qaeda, its offshoots, and its Baathist fellow travelers in Iraq. It was the plan hatched by the recently killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the jihadi groups in 2005 to stir up problems in Iraq by pitching Sunna against Shia and avenging the fall of Saddam's regime via acts of violence against the Shi'ites.

Abu Musab's strategy was not just a ruthless anti-American ploy. Nor is it a coincidence that the jihadis see the Shia as a likely enemy and have no compunctions about attacking its adherents. A mainstay of *jihadi/takfiri* (and Wahhabi) ideology is Salafiyya, which literally means "a return to the way of the forefathers (*aslaf*).” In this case the forefathers are primarily the first four caliphs to succeed the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century—also known as “the rightly guided ones” or *rashidun*. Only by a return to the way of the *rashidun*, claim the Salafis, will the world of Islam regain its rightful place in the world.

Yet it is precisely this period of the *rashidun* that is contested by the Shia. As discussed above, an argument about succession to the Prophet stands at the core of the Shi'ite-Sunni historical divide. While Sunnis accept the first four caliphs as legitimate, Shi'ites view them (except the fourth caliph, Ali bin Abi Taleb) as usurpers. The elaboration of Shia ideology from that point on hinges on the right of the Prophet's family to succeed him, and on the illegitimacy of Sunni caliphal lines. Those beliefs present an almost insurmountable obstacle to reconciliation with hard-nosed Salafis.

Another important element in Salafi thought is the primacy of Arabs in Islam. Once again harking back to the early period, the Salafis see the entry of non-Arabs, mainly Persians, into Islam as marking the beginning of the decline of Islam as a religion. Only a return of Islam to the hands of its originators and best interpreters, it is believed, will make it thrive again. And as Shia Islam is increasingly conflated with Iran and the Persians, the animosity between the sects becomes an ethnic/racial issue.

In *jihadi/takfiri* minds, the perceived recent collaboration of Shi'ites in Iraq with United States forces evokes memories of Shi'ite rebellion and betrayal. Once again the perfidious Shi'ite “Persians” have delivered the great city of Baghdad to the Mongols. Once again it is the Shi'ites who have opened the gates of Dar al-Islam to infidels.

The Genie Out of the Bottle?

For quite a long time, most Shi'ite militias, heeding the call of the foremost cleric in Iraq and perhaps in the entire Shia world, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, resisted the temptation to respond in kind to attacks on Shi'ite civilians, and those attacks continued unabated. Indeed, Shi'ite groups endured such attacks with little response until the major attack on the sacred shrine, Al-Askari mosque in Samarra, on February 22, 2006. In many respects this was the watershed date with respect to sectarian violence, and the most significant point on the way to a total breakdown of conciliation mechanisms. The attack unleashed the rage on both sides,

and the situation has escalated ever since; both sides are now engaged in massive sectarian bloodshed.

For Sunnis in the region, the bigger picture was further obscured this summer by Hezbollah-Israel war. Following Israel's checkered performance and Hezbollah's success in launching rockets into the Galilee and Haifa, many Sunnis in the Arab world cheered the Shiite organization, and posters of Nasrallah were extremely popular in Damascus, Amman, and Cairo.⁸ Although this seemed to be reason enough to put aside historical Shia-Sunna differences and concentrate on the fight against the common enemy, it soon led to rumors that many Sunnis, disappointed with their governments' incompetence and impotence, had decided to convert to Shiism. Such rumors spread quickly against the background of Shia resurgence, and with the tacit consent of local governments reluctant to give Hezbollah any credit for success. Soon other stories began to circulate, once more insinuating that Iran and its Shia proxies were spreading leaflets and propaganda in majority Sunni countries in an attempt to encourage this wave of conversion. Although none of these rumors could be verified, anti-Shia sentiments were again rekindled.

Different motivations with respect to this renewal of conflict can be ascribed to the politics of governments, to the new belligerency on the part of clerics, and to the feelings of the public. Governments in Iran and the Arab world still understand the conflict as a struggle for power and domination that is to be resolved by political means, and assume that that requires the usual give-and-take. Thus, for example, when Nasrallah's supporters in Lebanon seemed to be on the verge of toppling the Lebanese government in January of 2007, an urgent call from Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia led the king to contact the Iranian authorities and persuade them to control their allies in Lebanon.⁹ The Iranian government, for its part, is doing its best to allay Sunni fears. Recently the Iranians requested Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia to prevent ulama from issuing fatwas against the Shia; Bandar promised to do so. Even Nasrallah tried to calm things down, by assuring his audience in a local TV interview on February 2, 2007, that Lebanon's Shia had no interest in converting Sunnis or in changing the demographic balance in the region.¹⁰

Their way of contextualizing the situation notwithstanding, Sunni governments in the region reinforce the rumor of a Shia threat in order to intimidate the Iranians, to downplay Hezbollah's success in the last war, to allay Sunni fears in Iraq and elsewhere, and to deflect anti-regime pressure. Such actions are also sending a message to the Iranians that Sunni governments will not tolerate Iran's attempts to position itself as a regional power—a message that is amplified by not

censoring media rumors of a Shia conspiracy (and perhaps planting some of these rumors), and by allowing the local clergy to publish inflammatory fatwas.

In their attempt to highlight the Shia threat, local governments have found an unexpected ally in independent (and often hostile) Sunni clerics who, riled by recent occurrences and by what they see as Shiite collaboration with American forces, have denounced the Shia in unequivocal terms. Furthermore, having had to put up with previous fatwas accepting the Shia into the fold, pro-Salafi ulama have an opportunity in the new, governmentally encouraged anti-Shia climate to make their opinions heard—via fatwas, for example, that angrily recount how Sunnis are trying to reconfigure their Shia memory. Thus, on December 20, 2006, a fatwa was issued by Saudi sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Barak, a senior member of the kingdom's clergy, against the Shia, in which he observes: "The rejectionists [Shiites] in their entirety are the worst of the Islamic nation's sects. They bear all the characteristics of infidels."¹¹ One of the main themes in such fatwas, however, is that it is not Shia *per se* that is dangerous, but rather the Iranian "Safavid" militant version that is a threat to the Sunni world.¹² In recent months, Egyptian media have repeatedly quoted warnings by al-Azhar clerics against an attempt by Iran and the Shiites to circulate anti-Sunni defamation and to convert Egyptian youth.¹³ Governments and clerics have thus created a synergistic alliance around this topic, the likes of which are seldom seen in the Middle East.

Iran is responding in much the same way as the Sunni governments mentioned above. Publicly encouraging dialogue and coexistence, it nonetheless supports Hezbollah's efforts to unsettle the government in Lebanon, attempts to convert its own Sunni population in the Gulf region to Shiism, and supports militant Shiite groups and clerics in Iraq. The political actors in the region are thus playing a dangerous game—publicly denouncing sectarian strife, while clandestinely encouraging it.

For the public at large, this information is very confusing and contradictory: On the one hand, Shiite Hezbollah conducts a heroic war against Israel, Ahmadinejad denounces Zionism in harsh terms, and Iran supports the militantly Sunni Hamas government—all very popular stances in Sunni Arab countries. On the other hand, fatwas by their religious leaders declare the Shia infidels; a major bastion of Sunni Islam—Iraq—is perceived to have been taken over by Shiites; Shia communities have become more visible in the Sunni world; and Iran is presented as a potential nuclear and conventional threat. These contradictory data have left Sunni publics in the Middle East perplexed, and shifting between pro- and anti-Shia sentiments. At this point most of the public could still be swayed either way, but the free

rein given to the clerics and the radicals, the ongoing civil war in Iraq, and the fear of a Shia takeover will lead the Sunni public more and more in an anti-Shia direction.

Conclusion

The strategies deployed by Middle Eastern governments such as those of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan with respect to the Shia-Sunna divide seem to be shortsighted. In order to achieve immediate political goals, they have unleashed a power that might prove impossible to rein in. Current dynamics may lead Sunni publics to adopt more anti-Shia positions, and that sentiment may be reciprocated by the Shiites of Iraq and by other Shiite groups around the region. In Marshall Sahlins's terms, both cultures are now recasting their historical traditions in order to place their militant attitudes in context.

If these circumstances persist, and if Sunni and Shiite governments alike do not curb the belligerent voices in their midst, it will not be long before both Sunni and Shiite publics have recast their narratives as sagas of eternal conflict—in which case the struggle might break out of the boundaries of Iraq and engulf other parts of the region. Encouraged by pinpoint al-Qaeda operations, tensions will likely mount in the Gulf area and in Lebanon. If and when the U.S. decides to recall its forces from Iraq, Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states will probably get embroiled in the bloody struggle in order to prevent its extension into their own territories, making it necessary for Iran to increase its own involvement. What is now a fundamentally political struggle might thus become another set of religious wars within Dar al-Islam.

Yet this process of cultural reformulation could still be held in check if Middle East governments recognize that their interests will be better served by attempts at mediation between Shia and Sunna. Promoting ideas of reconciliation in the (typically government-overseen) public sphere, highlighting in the media epochs of peaceful coexistence, encouraging ulama to speak in favor of mutual acceptance, and offering a broader, more ecumenical view of religion might make a difference.

A wider regional struggle between Shia and Sunna could only damage American interests in Iraq and elsewhere, as Middle East Shiite minorities are mainly concentrated in oil-rich regions. Yet the U.S. should refrain as much as possible from public pronouncements on the subject, as at this point it is mistrusted by both sides: Many Sunnis see it as the power behind the Shiite resurgence, while Shiites suspect it of secretly trying to sustain Sunni forces in Iraq, in Lebanon, and in the Arabian Peninsula. Any American proclamation on these issues, therefore, is bound to be interpreted as part of a conspiracy. Behind the scenes, American diplomacy would do well to encourage dialogue between Shiites and Sunnis.

Endnotes

1 As summed up succinctly by Sahlins: "Fundamentally, [cultures] are atemporal, being for the people conditions of their form of life as constituted and considered coeval with it. It follows that if such traditions are authoritatively narrativized, or when they contingently rise to consciousness, they will be aetiologized: that is, as charter myths. But then, analytically to fix their historic appearance at some time short of the origin of things is always possible and always falls short of understanding them, even as reducing them to current interests is likewise comprehension by subtraction." Marshall Sahlins, "Two or Three Things That I Know about Culture," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, no. 3 (September 1999), 409.

2 Imami Shi'a, also known as "Twelver" Shi'a (ithna `ashariyya), is based on the premise that the Twelfth Imam in a line going back to the Prophet Muhammad went into occultation in the ninth century and is to return as the *mahdi*. Other Shi'a sects believe that it was the Fifth Imam (Zaydis) or the Seventh Imam (Isma'ilis) that disappeared.

3 Cf. http://www.qaradawi.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=4725&version=1&template_id=116&parent_id=114 (Arabic); <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/F7C61E25-1BB7-424F-9785-0582F3ACCF29.htm> (Arabic); and http://www.thememriblog.org/blog_personal/en/551.htm (English).*

4 This allegation is now a popular theme on many Sunni websites and blogs. See, for example, <http://www.amirbutler.com/archives/2004/03/01/28> and http://forum.atimes.com/topic.asp?ARCHIVE=true&TOPIC_ID=734.*

5 Yitzhak Nakash, "The Conversion of Iraq's Tribes to Shiism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 3 (August 1994), 443–63.

6 On claims regarding a Shi'a majority, see <http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:pWdSIKd0k8UJ:www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2207/stories/20050408000206100.htm+nasrallah+%22shia+majority%22+lebanon&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=6&gl=il>. As is well documented by now, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 coincided with this rising power of the Shiites and gave them further impetus.*

7 <http://www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/Alawis.htm>. While Sunnis may regard the Shi'a as an Islamic rival, they perceive the 'Alawis as complete heretics, beyond the pale. Recognition as part of the Shi'a was therefore an important achievement for the 'Alawis.*

8 A recent poll (taken shortly after the recent Israel-Hezbollah war) has indicated that support for Hezbollah has skyrocketed since that war: <http://brookings.edu/views/speeches/telhami20070208.pdf>. (See. pp. 65–66.)*

9 See “The Tehran-Riyadh Line,” *Asharq Alawsat*, January 30, 2007, available at <http://aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=2&id=7838>; Michael Slackman, “Iran and Saudi Arabia Mediating in Lebanon Crisis,” *International Herald Tribune*, January 30, 2007, available at <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/01/30/news/lebanon.php>; Free Muslims Coalition, “Press Corner: Recent Saudi-Iranian Contacts to Resolve the Lebanon Crisis,” January 26, 2007, available at <http://www.freemuslims.org/news/article.php?article=1863>; and *Ukaz*, Saudi Arabia, January 30, 2007.*

10 See “Nasrallah: ‘No Plan for Sunni Conversions,’” *syriacomment.com* (translated by Mideastwire.com), available at <http://joshualandis.com/blog/?p=45>.*

11 *Christian Science Monitor*, January 18, 2007.

12 See http://www.e-prism.org/images/Hamed_al-Ali_-_fatwa_against_Hizballah_-_6-8-06.pdf (in Arabic).*

13 *Al-Hayat*, January 7, 2007, available at http://www.daralhayat.com/arab_news/01-2007/Item-20070121-46330ade-c0a8-10ed-009d-421b1b652f38/story.html: al-Azhar Criticizes Attempts to Spread Shiism (*tashayyu'*) in Egypt (in Arabic) and <http://www.daralhayat.com/opinion/02-2007/Item-20070203-87e218eb-c0a8-10ed-0133-5b862d75d26b/story.html>: Arabism is the (only) Steadfast Connection Between the Arabs at a time of Sectarian Strife (in Arabic).*

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