



Iran: Muslims Supported by US, UK are Illegitimate

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Republic of Iran has, since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, positioned itself as defender of Shi'ites worldwide. The concept of guardianship of the jurists (*velayat-e faqih*) imposed upon Iran by the late revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, however, imposed a minority interpretation of the role of clergy in the state that placed the Islamic Republic at odds with the majority of Shi'ites worldwide. Many of the most influential Shi'ite theologians oppose *velayat-e faqih* and thereby challenge the legitimacy of Iran's Supreme Leader itself.

It is in this context that the accompanying excerpts of a recent speech by the current Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, which appeared on his website, are interesting. As Western countries focus on listening to if not empowering voices in the theological debate long overshadowed by extremists, Khamenei's dismissal of the legitimacy of any Shi'ite leader maintaining an office in London is a shot across the bow of mainstream practitioners of Shi'ism, most of whom embrace traditional Quietism which eschews any clerical role on everyday governance. After all, while Qom, in Iran, and Najaf in Iraq remain the major centers of Shi'ite scholarly studies, many Shi'ite leaders have established offices in London in order both to take advantage of the freedoms inherent in British society and to remain outside the reach of Iranian intelligence and security services, which control discourse inside Iran and have influence in Iraq. By raising the issue of and dismissing the legitimacy of independent Shi'ites, Khamenei conversely shows that Shi'ite leaders who do not subordinate themselves to his views are an increasing concern to the Iranian leadership and are effectively challenging Khamenei's own legitimacy.

That said, Khamenei's accusations that Shi'ites speaking from or meeting in London are under foreign influence, or that moderate Muslims engaging with the United States or Israel are likewise compromised, signals the future of Iranian influence operations. Talk of Sunnis on whose behalf "Israel advocates" is also a broad swipe at Saudi Arabia, which is undergoing an unprecedented rapprochement with Israel.

The rest of Khamenei's speech was boilerplate: Beseeching the "liberation" of Jerusalem and the destruction of Israel, accusing the United States and Israel of being behind the Islamic State, and praising Iran's own record of "extending the resistance front" from Tehran to Damascus and Lebanon. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Supreme Leader Khamenei greets Mohammed Abdul-Sattar al-Sayed, Syrian Minister of Religious Endowments.
Source: Khamenei.ir, http://farsi.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/39077/C/13961210_0939077.jpg, CC 4.0.

“The Shi'ites that London supports? We don't accept those Shi'ites.”

Source: “Biyanat dar Didar Vazir-e 'Awqaf va Jame'ah az Ulama-ye Suriya” (“Statement in a Meeting with the Minister of Religious Endowments and a group of Syrian Religious Scholars”), *Khamenei.ir*, 1 March 2018. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=39080>

The Shi'ites that London supports? We don't accept those Shi'ites. Those Sunnis for which the United States and Israel advocates? We don't see those Sunnis as Muslim. Islam opposes disbelief and oppression and arrogance. We subscribe to ourselves. Our common thoughts are tawhid [the oneness of God]. Our common thoughts are the Ka'bah [in Mecca]. Our common thoughts are the Holy Prophets. And we share in common our affection for the Ahl al-Bayt [the family of the Prophet Muhammad]....

We have entered the fortieth years of the Islamic Revolution. From the very first day, all the world's leading powers spoke against us: The United States and the Soviet Union, NATO, and Arab and regional states, and yet we did not go away and instead grew. What does this mean? First, what the great powers want does not necessarily come true, that is, everyone decided we should go away but we would not be lost. The survival of Iran's Islamic Revolution proved that whatever America, Europe, and the world's atomic powers want does not necessarily come true. And if all of us and the Resistance Front's elements are decisive in the region, then enemies cannot do a damn thing.”