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Iran and the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions

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This paper attempts to expose the full spectrum of Iranian positions regarding the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. These postures, we find, are dominated by the idea of the Sunni Arab people that has been built up in the Iranian Shi`a mentality over centuries.

The ruling conservative party in Iran believes that the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions reflects an Islamic popular rejection of tyranny and of subservience to the United States and Israel; therefore, they could be seen as an extension of the Islamic Iranian Revolution and a mirror-image of its principles and methods.

In their turn, Iranian reformists believe that their protest movement, launched in June 2009, was the inspiration for the Arab citizens who rebelled against despotism. In the same vein, reformists affirm that the current Iranian regime is part and parcel of the despotic pattern in the region; thus, their leaders tend to view their movement as a part of and a prelude for the Arab democratic movement.

These same intellectuals debate why their revolutionary movement failed while the popular movements in Egypt and Tunisia succeeded.

This paper concludes that the conservatives of Iran, in their positions vis-à-vis the Arab revolutions, are expressing their religious outlook on the transformations in the Arab World while the statements of Iranian reformists divulge their view of the Islamic Republic's regime and their differing interpretation of certain religious symbols in Shi`ism.

Introduction:

The Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions are endowed with significant importance on the historic and geo-strategic levels. On the one hand, they represent an event, the effects of which surpass the borders of the two countries involved to the rest of the world; on the other hand, they present a fertile terrain for researchers in all social science fields.

Monitoring the statements and behavior of influential foreign powers in reaction to the two Arab revolts allows us to gain a better understanding of the future context that will frame the emerging new era in both countries. These would, consequently, provide us, to an extent, with the tools for predicting the behavior of international actors. Under this guise we shall track the positions and statements emanating from Iran on the two revolutions; our description will go beyond official Iranian circles, encompassing the main currents of opposition in the Islamic Republic.

The Image of the Arab in the Iranian Mindset

Iranian perspectives on Arabs were, in general, colored with the idea of a large human mass that is incapable of action and subservient to the ruler. These two elements reflect the opinions of those on the Persian side of the Gulf with regard to their Arab neighbors across the water. This view takes root from three main factors: nature, history and politics, and sect.

It does not take much effort to encounter stereotypes of the Arab in Iranian culture, especially in contemporary times. The first marker of this stereotype is that of the lazy, desert man succumbing to his senses and instincts. This idea emanates from the natural setting, and was staunchly propagated by Iranian nationalists during the monarchist period. Even under the regime of the Islamic Revolution, these notions still occupy the minds of many intellectual elite.

The second marker of the Arabs' image in the Iranian mindset, intersecting with the first, is that of history and politics. On this level, the doctors and sources of emulation in Jafari Shi'ism, who are committed to the notion of Wilayat al-Faqeh,¹ believe that the Sunni Arab peoples are lifeless groups of people in the hands of tyrannical rulers. In their view, Sunnis legitimize the injustice and despotism of the ruler because of the Sultanistic literature of Sunni schools, making insurgency against the prince unlawful and sinful. Some Sunni jurists ruled that disobedience to the ruler can be permitted, but under very strict conditions in order to preserve the integrity of the community and the *Umma*.

¹ "The Guardianship of the Jurist," a Shi'a religious concept reinvigorated by Khomeini, calls for the Jurist to fulfill all legal conditions to be the viceroy of the Imam in the leadership of the *Umma* and establish God's rule on earth, as long as Imam Mahdi resides in his *Ghayba* (disappearance) and in wait for his return.

Sunni political history has known some precedents in this field; the community of the religious scholars linked to the Sultan always stood as a unified front against any revolutionary attempt targeting the ruler and his regime's stability, but this did not prevent independent scholars from experimenting and leading revolutionary movements against despotism in Sunni lands.

The third, sectarian, marker appears especially in the perspective of Twelver Shi'ism – with its Safavid vision – on Sunni rulings in doctrine and dogma. The roots of these differences are split over historical and political events during the early Islamic period; additionally, the Safavids'² demarche during their rule exacerbated tensions between the two sides. Based on these factors, it is clear that the Twelver Shi'a sect played an important role in drawing the image of Sunni Arabs in the Iranian mindset, at least in terms of reinforcing the first two markers.

The interplay between these three elements (nature, political history, and sect) in formulating the idea of Arab peoples in the Shi'a Iranian imagery has led to a widely-held, inflexible belief among Iranians that “The Arabs are dead peoples with no capacity to rise and face up to despotism. The Islamic Iranian Revolution should be the hope and the refuge of these peoples who have been entrapped between their tyrannical rulers and the colonialist Western enemy”.

These convictions were first challenged by the success of the first Arab people in imposing their will through a peaceful rebellion against their despotic ruler in Tunisia on January 14th, 2011, when popular will succeeded in forcing Tunisia's 23-year autocratic president, Zein al-Abideen Ben Ali, to flee the country.

Iranians were increasingly fascinated by the eastward spread of the revolutions towards Egypt, where 18 days of popular resilience were sufficient to bring down one of the most corrupt Arab regimes, with Mubarak announcing his resignation after 31 years of rule on February 11, 2011.

These two achievements produced strong reverberations within the full spectrum of the Iranian society, leading to varying positions and interpretations that aim at comprehending this historic Arab surprise, and preparing for the coming regional metamorphosis.

The Tunisian Revolution in Official Iranian Statements

Iranian officials encouraged the revolt of Tunisia's people, stressing the necessity of respecting the will of the people, and called upon Tunisians to beware of American and Israeli interferences. Most officials in Iran expressed their belief that the Tunisian Revolution was among the results and by-products of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

² The Safavid dynasty ruled Iran from 1501-1785; during this period, they imposed the Twelver Shi'a belief and waged wars and conflicts with the Ottomans.

Immediately following the departure of Tunisia's dethroned president, the official spokesperson of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Ramin Mehmanparast, commented: "what matters to us all is the realization of the Tunisian people's will within the best of circumstances, for Tunisia can play an important role in the Muslim World."³

After the Revolution's victory was confirmed, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said that the Tunisian people had felled dictatorship with Islamic slogans that demanded justice. He also called on the West, especially the United States and Israel, not to interfere in Tunisia's affairs. Ahmadinejad affirmed that the Tunisian people were seeking to establish the provisions of Islam and that they will never again surrender to the West. At the end of his statement, the Iranian president addressed the Tunisian people, asking them to rely on God and be faithful, and to not forget divine provisions and sacrifice Islamic principles, for they are the anchor of victory.⁴

Meanwhile, 228 deputies in the Iranian Parliament declared their support for Tunisia's revolution, issuing a statement recalling Tunisia's majestic history of struggle against tyranny and colonialism and calling on other Arab regimes to draw lessons from what took place in Tunisia.⁵

On February 4th, 2011, during his Friday sermon, the Supreme Guide of the Islamic Revolution, Ali al-Khamenei, said that the main driving force behind the Tunisian Revolution was the intense feeling of humiliation among the people, not the economic reasons some tried to claim – despite their importance. He noted that the Tunisian event was but a materialization of Imam Khomeini's predictions many years ago.

The Supreme Guide also said that he is in possession of reports proving that the former Tunisian president was employed by the CIA, adding that "the main driving force behind this revolution is Islam, the proof being that – immediately after the traitor fled the country – female students started wearing their headscarves to college, which is not being reported by the Western media." Al-Khamenei also stated that "the other motivation was the country's links to America, and the Americans do not want this issue mentioned."⁶

On a different front, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, commented on the Tunisian Revolution and the transformations in the Arab region by saying that the era of hegemony of the

³ <http://irna.ir/NewsShow.aspx?NID=30187229>

⁴ http://www.donya-e-eqtesad.com/Default_view.asp?@=240884

⁵ <http://www.inn.ir/newsdetail.aspx?id=66020>

⁶ <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=10955>

American administration and its engineering of the region is over; he added that this also signifies the end of unpopular Arab regimes.⁷

Concurrently, the head of the Radio and Television Establishment, Sayyed Izzat Allah Dirghami, affirmed that the leanings and demands of the revolting peoples in North Africa and the Middle East are all influenced by the Islamic Revolution.⁸

The Egyptian Revolution in Tehran's Official Statements

The position of the Islamic Republic regarding the Egyptian Revolution was similar to the case of Tunisia. The Supreme Guide of the Islamic Revolution, Ali al-Khamenei, described Egypt as a unique example in Islamic history, given its historic, Islamic, and cultural background. In a Friday sermon, he said that Egypt has notable political and cultural figures who lead the Arab World culturally and politically.

Sayyid Ali al-Khamenei claimed that the Egyptians revolted against Mubarak's regime because he was an agent of Israel and subservient to America, that the people's movement began in mosques with "*Allahu Akbar*" as a slogan, and that Westerners are hiding these facts from the world, promoting the argument that the revolution's causes were purely economic.

Al-Khamenei added that the revolutions of peoples are intimately linked to the geographic, historic, cultural, and political specificities of each country, and that what took place in Iran 30 years ago cannot be replicated anywhere else, but that the experiences of any people can benefit another.

At the end of his talk, Ali al-Khamenei, offered advice to the Egyptian people and the Egyptian Army, claiming that adopting his advice would preserve the achievements of the revolution and its independence. He then called on Egyptians to beware of Western media propaganda claiming that Iran is attempting to convert Egypt to Shi'ism or to export the *Wilayat al-Faqeeh* system.⁹

On January 7th, 2011, the chair of the Council of Experts, Akbar Hashimi Rafsanjani,¹⁰ declared that no dictator can stand in opposition to the people's movement, adding that the regime's gruesome and violent handling of the people led to the extremity of popular demands, with the people not being content to see their ruler flee, but also demanding that he be put on trial. He

⁷ <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/fa/163029.html>

⁸ <http://www.irna.ir/NewsShow.aspx?NID=30265056&SRCH=1>

⁹ <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=10955>

¹⁰ After persistent pressures from the extremists, Rafsanjani resigned his post on March 8th, 2011, in favor of Ayatollah Mahdavi Keni.

added that the peoples' movements against tyranny will not stop, but will reach many despotic regimes.¹¹

Regarding the Islamic Revolution as a model for other movements, the head of the cultural committee in the Iranian Parliament, Ghulam Ali Adil, said that "the Islamic Revolution in Iran represents a model for the revolting Arab peoples," adding that "Arab peoples have expressed their anger and wrath at their dictatorial sultans, presidents, sheikhs, agents, and enemies of Islam."¹²

On the spiritual dimension of the revolutions, the Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Sayyid Hassan Fairuz Abadi, proclaimed: "the movement of the Tunisian and Egyptian peoples took place because of their love and longing for prayer, which was evidenced by the fact that they have been holding Friday prayers since the early days of their revolution, because their yearning for prayer had been repressed in their hearts for many decades."¹³

Iran's Parliament Speaker, Ali Larijani, spoke of the Azhar clerics, noting that their revolutionary activism was belated when compared to the rest of the Egyptian people, which Larijani referred to the clerics' lack of independence.¹⁴

Commenting on the changes in the Arab scene, the official Iranian news agency (IRNA) quoted the Iranian Minister of the Interior, Mustapha Muhammad Najjar, as saying: "The Middle East that the United States has dreamt was like a stillbirth fetus."¹⁵

The Conservatives'¹⁶ View of the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolution

The statements of some religious authorities, Friday speakers, and political and intellectual figures linked to the conservative party in Iran confirmed the official positions. Some noted that the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions were among the blessings of the Iranian Revolution, and that they are a historical materialization of the founder of the Islamic Republic's, Imam Khomeini, promise. Others went as far to say that these events were clear signs of the second coming of Imam Mahdi.¹⁷

¹¹ <http://www.fardanews.com/fa/news/136422>

¹² <http://www.irna.ir/NewsShow.aspx?NID=30261572&SRCH=1>

¹³ <http://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news-129838.aspx>

¹⁴ <http://www.irna.ir/NewsShow.aspx?NID=30263429>

¹⁵ <http://www.irna.ir/NewsShow.aspx?NID=30289383>

¹⁶ The conservative movement includes several strands, including "the extremist conservatives," some radical Salafis and scholars, "the traditional or moderate conservatives" – to whom the Speaker of the House Ali Larijani belongs – and the "neo-conservatives," which is the movement leading the present Ahmadinejad government.

¹⁷ The Twelfth Imam for the Jafari Shi'a; he became an occult figure eleven centuries ago, and is believed to be bound to re-appear at the end of times to "fill the land with justice," as Twelver Shi'a believe.

A religious authority, Great Ayatollah Safi al-Gulbakiani, issued a statement congratulating the Tunisian people for their victory against despotism; he said: “the proud Tunisian people were capable of showing the entire world their bravery and Islamic identity, just as the Iranian people did 33 years ago in their great Islamic Revolution.”¹⁸

Another religious authority, Ayatollah Nuri al-Hamdani, described the Tunisian people’s movement as following in the footsteps of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, noting that the people were fed up with twenty years of autocracy that was subservient to America.¹⁹

In the same vein, Experts’ Council member, cleric, and scholar Abbas al-Kabi, accused Washington of presenting the Iranian Revolution to “sedition- sowers”²⁰ in Iran as a model to be replicated. He said that a lot of analysis is being applied to the Tunisian revolution, but the fact was that the Tunisian people faced up to despotism for the sake of establishing justice on an Islamic basis. He explained that Tunisians are now capable of hearing the call to prayer and watching Friday prayers on Tunisian television after a ban that lasted for the better part of half a century. Al-Kabi also noted that the international media, such as CNN, Fox News, Aljazeera, and al-Arabiya, were incapable of featuring these truths that we only see reported on Iranian television because such news frightens them.²¹

The same theme was broached by the General Secretary of the Center for the Rapprochement between Islamic Sects, Ayatollah Muhammad Ali al-Taskheeri, who said: “the Tunisian people did not wage its revolt for the sake of bread and employment, but revolted against their ruler who opposed religion.”²²

Cleric and religious scholar Sheikh Mustapha Baqiri, Panab’s²³ Friday Imam, said that the Tunisian revolt was one of the blessings of the Islamic Revolution, adding that it is a materialization of the prediction of the late Imam Ruhollah al-Khomeini, noting that this historic transformation is one of the preludes for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi.²⁴

The Imam of the Qum mosque, scholar Sayyid Muhammad Saeedi, said: “Since the two peoples in Egypt and Tunisia lack an inspired leader, such as the great Supreme Guide of the Revolution,

¹⁸ <http://www.fardanews.com/fa/news/134055>

¹⁹ <http://parset.com/News/ShowNews.aspx?Code=266342>

²⁰ A reference to the demonstrations of the reformist movement in Tehran in celebration of the victory of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions

²¹ <http://www.irna.ir/NewsShow.aspx?NID=30200992>

²² <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1235246>

²³ Panab city is in the province of Eastern Azerbaijan, in the north of Iran

²⁴ <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8911030890>

they should obey him (Khamenei), for the Imam Khamenei is the Guide of all the world's Muslims."²⁵

Iranian former Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, described Egypt as the first wave in the Middle East's avalanche, saying: "The Egyptian youth was capable of managing the Tahrir Square competently; they also succeeded in dealing with the party and political leaderships."²⁶

The Reformist Movement²⁷ and the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions

Naturally, the Iranian reformist movement also reacted to the two Arab revolutions, but from a different perspective than that of the reformist current. These reactions were expressed through a series of positions and analyses emanating from the leaders of the movement, as well as their cultural and political figures.

Reformist leader Mir Hossein Mousavi issued a statement that appeared on the *Kilma* news site, in which he proclaimed: "The protests of the Iranian people over the elections' results about a year and a half ago were the inspiration of the Arab peoples." He also said that there were multiple parallels between the two events, and that it is enough to compare the results of the 2009 elections in Iran and the 2010 elections in Egypt, and their fallout, to understand the most important of these parallels, an insinuation that both elections were wrought with fraud. Mousavi added that "resemblances between the two cases are also evident in the methods of blocking the Internet, wireless communications, satellite channels, and so on..."

Commenting on what Friday imams in Iran said, to the effect that the movements of the Arab peoples had religious motives, Mousavi announced: "Unfortunately, those yes-men Imams did not see the Pharaoh's corruption of Egypt, the arrests, the torture, the falsifying of charges, the unleashing of thugs, the execution of political opponents, blocking of freedoms, and the spreading of bribery and financial corruption."²⁸

In a statement, reformist leader Mahdi Karrubi announced the solidarity of the Green Movement²⁹ with the Tunisian and Egyptian peoples, while at the same time condemning the Iranian police assaults against peaceful demonstrators in downtown Tehran.³⁰

²⁵ <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8911130263>

²⁶ <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=1268533>

²⁷ "Reformist movement" refers to the full spectrum of Iranian opposition both inside and outside of Iran, as well as the formations of the political opposition within Iran under the leadership of Mir Husain Musawi and Mahdi Karrubi, and the leftist liberals and monarchists outside of Iran. After the June 2009 elections, this current became known in Iran as the Green Movement (Jonbesh Sabz), and the movement adopted the green color as a symbol for the movement.

²⁸ <http://www.daneshjoonews.com/news/politics/5497-1389-11-09-14-21-33.html>

²⁹ A popular movement formed after the 2009 Presidential elections and joining all strands of Iranian opposition at home and abroad

The website of the reformist cleric, Grand Ayatollah Yusef Sanii, published a statement discussing the situation in the region; it warned despots of a dreadful end, affirming that any blood that is spilled unjustly will definitely be a reason for the crumbling of the edifice of tyranny.³¹

Meanwhile, the grandson of Imam Khomeini, Hassan al-Khomeini, who is close to the reformist movement, considered the Egyptian Revolution as an extension of the Iranian revolution led by Ruhollah Khomeini, adding that divinity claims are not exclusive to the Pharaoh alone, but are commonly problematic with anyone who bears authority.³²

Reformist thinker Muhsin Kadivar pointed to the host of oppressive measures taken by the regime against the reformist movement and its figures, while tyrannical Arab regimes were receiving repeated blows from their populations.

Kadivar lamented: “The Shi`a religious establishment has taken a further step towards complete subservience to the ruling regime; it is a calamity that Shi`a jurists have spent centuries criticizing in their Sunni counterparts.”³³

Sayyid Mustapha Taj Zada, a member of the Islamic Revolution Mujahdin organization, who is under arrest in Iran, considered facing up to tyranny as the shared feature between the Green Movement and that of the peoples in the Arab region; he noted that these movements do not deny the peoples’ commitment to Islam, but they do not seek to apply the Iranian model, for they want a system that is democratic, just, and dignified. He added: “Until this point in time, no Arab country has adopted the model that is marketed by the conservatives; even the peoples that are close to us and share many elements with us rejected that model.” He also said that “the popular Arab movements are similar to the movement of the Iranian people a year and a half ago, but the official media did not dare mention this truth.”

Taj Zada closed by affirming that the accomplishments of the region’s peoples will doubtlessly benefit the Iranian people, and reinforce the democratic tide in the region.³⁴

On a different front, reformist writer Muhammad Barqai wondered about the reasons behind the Iranians failure in toppling the regime while the Tunisians and Egyptians succeeded, commenting that “the Iranian people’s movement failed despite the fact that all the conditions of

³⁰ <http://www.kaleme.com/1389/11/27/klm-47795/>

³¹ <http://saanei2.org/?view=01.00.00.00.0#01.01.01.85.0>

³² http://www.jamran.ir/fa/NewsContent-id_16704.aspx

³³ <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/33898/>

³⁴ <http://www.kaleme.com/1389/12/12/klm-50285>

success were available, with million-man marches filling the streets of Tehran, while the Tunisians and Egyptians were successful in bringing down two despotic regimes through an improvised, unorganized, and leaderless movement, a blind movement.”

He went on to state that the Iranian Islamic Revolution was no longer a model for anyone: “The Revolution failed in achieving its major objective: combining religion with modernity, even when compared to secular systems.” He argued: “The biggest evidence of the failure of the Revolution’s message is in the regimes ability to draw on Persian national symbols, such as Qurush and Dariush, to garner popular support, after it used to present itself as a global proselytizer of Islam.”³⁵

In comparing the protest movements of Tunisia and Iran (since 2009), Abu al-Hasan Bani Sadr³⁶ claims that the Tunisian movement is more mature and better fulfills the conditions for a successful revolutionary movement; chiefly, that the said movement should be extraneous to the ruling structure of the regime, and should only rely on its own capacities. He adds that Ben Ali’s immobility and lack of response to the demands of the movement hastened their success.

On the other hand, Bani Sadr believes that the Iranian movement mistook the regime’s resilience and its indifference to the street protests for a sign of strength, which led it to backtrack, painting the Green Movement as surrendering in the face of the repressive methods employed by the regime.³⁷

Writer Abd al-Ali Bazirkan, meanwhile, presented a historic reading that attempts to show the precedence and effects of the Iranian revolutionary sentiment over its Arab counterpart by recalling the moment of Tunisia’s independence in 1956, under the leadership of Lahbeeb Burguiba who said at the time: “we owe this independence to Muhammad Musaddaq³⁸ and the Iranian people’s resistance.” The author adds that “the same story happened years prior to that in Egypt after the victory of the 1952 Revolution under the leadership of Gamal Abd al-Nasser.”

³⁵ <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/33941/>

³⁶ The first elected President of Iran following the 1979 Revolution, born in 1933 and was accused of treason after fleeing to France in the early 1980s

³⁷ <http://www.banisadr.com.fr/Articles/html/ass768.html>

³⁸ Muhammad Musaddaq (1880-1967), former Iranian prime minister between the years 1951-1953, is considered a national hero by Iranians for his rejection of Western Imperialism and his oil nationalization during his premiership, as well as his deposing the Shah. However, the Shah was put again on the throne through a US-British operation code-named Operation Ajax.

He concludes that the nature of Iranian despotism is unique and different than all other forms of authoritarianism in the world because – he argues – it is a deep-rooted religious despotism that is extremely hard to treat.³⁹

Reformist, ex-diplomat Muhammad Sadr pointed at the inconsistency in the Iranian government's behavior towards popular demands, especially because it supported the Arab revolutions but dealt differently with the Iranian people when they came out to protest. "When President Ahmadinejad supports the demands of the Libyan people, and condemns Gaddafi's calling his opponents "rats" and "potheads," he should – in the same vein – refrain from calling his opponents "trash".⁴⁰

Conclusion

Iran interacts with the Arab events in all their details and trends, making sure to track the developments and predict their future course. Putting aside the overlaps between Arabs and Persians on the geographic, historical, and cultural levels, the regime of the Islamic Republic is mainly founded upon a religious belief that aims at preparing for the moment of the re-appearance of Imam Mahdi, the Last Imam and the Imam of the End of Days.⁴¹ This event is chronologically linked – according to Twelver Shi'a beliefs – to pre-told historic events that are to start in Iran and take place in parts of the Arab World, beginning with the appearance of Iranian military commanders⁴² who are delegated by Imam Mahdi, continuing on with the liberation of Jerusalem, culminating in the reappearance of Imam Mahdi and his purification of earth from evil and injustice.

We can understand the conservatives' discourse on the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions (or other main transformations in the Arab World) through this messianic religious/sectarian perspective, which is endowed with a strategic dimension. This also permits us to understand the conservative party's dealing with the popular protests that emerged in Iran in tandem with the Arab revolts, accusing its opponents of treason and of being agents for the United States and Israel.

On the other end, the reformists place themselves within the general context of the demands of the Arab popular movement; they believe that the shared element between them and the Tunisian and Egyptian experiences is the will to surpass the reality of authoritarian regimes and establish a

³⁹ <http://www.bazargan.com/Abdolali/PDF/Tounestan.pdf>

⁴⁰ <http://www.kaleme.com/1389/12/19/klm-51191/>

⁴¹ Sunni sources also share a belief in this event, but differ with Shia sources over some of the details.

⁴² The Twelver Shi'a narrative says that, as the appearance of Imam Mahdi nears, a leader called Shuaib Ben Saleh will emerge in Iran, a general of a Sayyid from Khurasan who is considered to be among the companions of Imam Mahdi and one of the major signs for the nearing of his appearance.

democratic condition allowing countries of the region a great deal of stability and mutual cooperation. This also reflects the reformists' novel interpretation of some of the Shi`a literature, which was extensively re-read and re-interpreted away from the authority of Shi`a political and juristic history.⁴³

⁴³ Most Iranian reformist thinkers and intellectuals base their reading of the Shi`a legacy on the interpretations of Dr. Ali Shariati, who differentiated between "Historical Islam" and "Prophetic Islam".