



THE DYNAMICS OF SUNNI-SHIA RELATIONSHIPS

DOCTRINE, TRANSNATIONALISM,
INTELLECTUALS AND THE MEDIA

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THE SHIITE PERIL IN PALESTINE

June 2006 between Syria and Iran in the context of the Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's declared nuclear ambitions.

For its part, Palestine has been included in this crescent since the Hamas victory in the legislative elections of January 2006. The Shiite "threat" supposedly posed by Hamas was confirmed and augmented during summer 2007 when security forces affiliated to the Ministry of the Interior and the Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades of Hamas anticipated a putsch fomented by security forces linked to the presidency and to Fatah under American supervision, which Hamas used to gain exclusive control of the Gaza Strip.⁹

In all discourses, Iran is considered to be the power that gives the orders: the Syrian government and Hizbullah are pure proxies of Iran whereas Hamas, which is at a lower echelon on the hierarchical ladder, constitutes an instrument armed by the Islamic Republic on the south side of Israel. The threat is sometimes qualified as "Shiite", sometimes as "Iranian", and often as both. The proponents of this discourse quite frequently use the term "axis" to indicate that these different, threatening Shiite actors are linked together. Such usage, of course, is not innocent even if the clear reference to the axis powers of the Second World War remains largely unmentioned. The notion of the "axis of evil" used by President George W. Bush adds an additional connotation to the language used by those who are anti-Shiite.

Lacking the space to assess each of these discourses in detail, I will merely cite here Mark Langfan, a strategist based in the United States. His "Iran: the fourth Reichastan", a four page text, has the advantage of expressing in a few words, and without any linguistic precaution, the theses underlying most talk on the Iranian threat to the Near East: "The grim reality is that the Hamas/Hezbollah Israel War and the Iranian backed component of the Iraqi insurgency are two sides of the same coin that has its fount the growing Iranian Fourth Reichastan Axis against America and the World". "Iran is in fact using Syria, as Germany used Italy, to facilitate its early strategic moves in the 'Thirties' so that in the 'Forties' Iran will come to rule. In short, the seemingly disparate elements of the emerging Fourth Reichastan supply each other as an axis, defend each other as an axis, and fight for each other as an integrated axis".¹⁰

Religion and politics in mutual instrumentalizations

The distinction previously made in this chapter between phobias and propaganda would be nonsensical should we consider that the religious