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## **The importance of conspiracy theory in extremist ideology and propaganda**

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## Chapter 13: Khomeini and the Grand Conspiracy Theory

*“The [Iranian Islamic] revolution is still developing and its ultimate destination is not readily apparent. All that is clear is that the clergy are still on top and will continue to be for some time before gradually returning to their traditional role as spiritual leaders... The view of Khomeini as a moderate blend of radicalism and conservatism does not fit his popular image abroad as the ‘mad mullah’, but his every action since the fall of the Shah’s regime has reinforced that impression. His role as a reluctant revolutionary is central to many of the problems now facing Iran.”<sup>1</sup>*  
- Vahe Petrossian, then a senior staff writer for the *Middle East Economic Digest* specializing in Iran, January 1980.

*“... the Jews and their foreign backers are opposed to the very foundations of Islam and wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world. Since they are a cunning and resourceful group of people, I fear that —God forbid— they may one day achieve their goal, and that the apathy shown by some of us may allow a Jew to rule over us one day. May God never let us see such a day!”<sup>2</sup>* - Ruhollah Khomeini, 1970.

*“The propaganda device television is owned by a hated minority group, and it is supposed to be developed throughout the country. It’s owner, in addition to having taken over the economy of our country, is the Pepsi Cola plant spy center... The Baha’i device and the Pepsi Cola factory are a spying apparatus for Palestinian Jews.”<sup>3</sup>* - Ruhollah Khomeini, 1961.

This chapter is concerned with the thought and some of the deeds of Sayyed Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) the first Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Khomeini was a Shi’a cleric and scholar from central Iran who by the end of his life was the undisputed leader of a Shi’a theocracy, a form of government unprecedented in Iranian history. He was the primary leader of Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution which overthrew the Iranian monarchy and set up the Islamic Republic. This chapter will argue that the idea of a massive conspiracy of Jews and

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<sup>1</sup> Vahe Petrossian, “Dilemmas of the Iranian Revolution,” *The World Today*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Jan., 1980), pp. 19-25.

<sup>2</sup> Imam Khomeini (Ruhollah Khomeini), *Governance of the Jurist (Velayate-e Faqeeh): Islamic Government*, Hamid Algar trans., (The institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works, 2002[?]) p. 79

<sup>3</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, امام صحیفه (Pages of The Imam), Vol. 1, (Tehran: The Institute for the Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeini, Persian year 1383 [2010-2011]), p.123. Available online at <http://ar.lib.eshia.ir/11150/1/123>. Accessed March 1, 2019.

imperialists against Islam, influenced by the European tradition of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, is a crucial part Khomeini's major political work *Velayat-e faqih* (hereafter *Governance of the Jurist*). After Khomeini took power this idea became hard-baked into the ideology of the regime he founded. This chapter will not concern itself with the path that Khomeini took to power and the conspiracies and the political maneuvering that resulted in the success of Khomeini's faction during the Iranian Revolution. Unlike with Lenin, the importance of a version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in Khomeini's thought had become a pillar of his ideology well before the start of the revolution that brought him to power. The main texts for this chapter are Khomeini's written work and his public speeches and statements, which have been carefully curated by the regime he founded. Unlike with Hitler, Lenin, and Osama Bin Laden, unfortunately there has never been any access to Khomeini's private files to get a look at what he "really" believed, assuming there was some deception. Nevertheless, there is more than enough evidence from his public statements about his motivations and beliefs to make a reasonable judgement, including in Khomeini's major work which is still a pillar of the ideology of Iran's government, and also evidence from the activities of Khomeini and his government after he achieved power.

The previous chapter on the importance of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in the ideology of Sunni violent extremists of the Qutubist bent dealt with the "radical Muslim" threat which has overshadowed all others in the imagination of most Westerners. In the 1980s and for much of the 90s, especially before September 11th 2001, a common image of a "Muslim terrorist" was that of a Shi'a militant affiliated with Lebanese Hizballah. As will be demonstrated, Lebanese Hizballah is an explicitly Khomeinist organization, and this chapter briefly analyzes the ideology of Lebanese Hizballah in light of Khomeini's belief in a grand conspiracy against Islam, spearheaded by America. Khomeini and his followers believe in another version of the non-existent enemy posited by the Grand Conspiracy Theory, adapted to Khomeini's context.

In some aspects Khomeini's thought is remarkably close to the conspiracist thought of Sayyed Qutb, especially when it comes to Khomeini's description of ostensibly Muslim rulers as participating in a massive multi-generational Jewish/Western (imperialist) conspiracy against Islam. Both men supported subversive violent jihad against these rulers and their supposed servants. Qutb never seized control of a state and his attempts at subversion failed, but the subversive implications of his ideology are today carried on by his ideological successors, such as the leadership of Al Qaeda. Khomeini, on the other hand, did manage to become the head of a large state and was able to put his vision directly into practice. This vision involves the belief in a massive imperialist (i.e. American) conspiracy against Islam, one that must be countered.

This chapter will not make the argument that there is some inherent Iranian conspiracism or analyze a supposed "paranoid style of Iranian politics"<sup>4 5</sup> or argue that Iran is

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<sup>4</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, (University of California Press, 1993), pp. 111-131.

<sup>5</sup> Abrahamian's excellent chapter on this topic in *Khomeinism* is referencing Richard Hofstadter's seminal essay on the study of conspiracy theories "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." The author of this thesis has avoided citing this essay mainly because Hofstadter's work deals almost exclusively with US examples and is dedicated to examining a "style" - a paranoid state of mind or way of describing the world - rather than a set of ideas that can evoke paranoia, like the Grand Conspiracy Theory, the focus of this thesis. However, the importance of this essay in being one of the first serious scholarly works to deal with the topic of conspiracy theories cannot be overlooked, and it certainly had an influence, perhaps indirect

“the world’s most conspiracy-minded country”<sup>6</sup> as Daniel Pipes suggested. While it would be difficult to deny the conspiracism of many Iranians during the mid-to-late 20th century, the rest of this thesis has shown that other countries have passed through periods where conspiracy theories were widely accepted by a large portion of the educated population. Instead of examining Khomeini’s obviously conspiracist statements as a symptom of some supposed general Iranian preoccupation with conspiracy theories this chapter will place Khomeini’s thought in the tradition of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, examining his beliefs critically and charting the crucial role the belief plays in his ideology.

This chapter will begin with a limited discussion of some strains of Iranian conspiracist traditions, with contributions from other non-Iranian strains of conspiracy theories, that probably influenced Khomeini as evidenced by his later writing. These traditions include narratives of courtly intrigue, conspiracy theories about the activities and motives of foreign agents in Iran, and anti-Bahai conspiracy theories. It will then examine the earliest evidence of Khomeini’s belief in a massive conspiracy against Islam and how this belief was a crucial aspect of his major doctrine of the “governance of the jurist.” Finally, this chapter will examine some of the actions of the Iranian state and other Khomeinists after the Islamic revolution, placing them in the context of a Khomeinist belief in a huge, malign conspiracy that must be combatted.

## Conspiracy theories in Iran

Conspiratorial narratives have an impressive pedigree in Iran, long predating the advent of the European Grand Conspiracy Theory. With a few exceptions, Iranians were ruled by monarchies from ancient times up to the modern era, and Iranian literature reflects this with its many narratives of court conspiracy, which in monarchies is one of the main methods of influencing politics. Chapter 2 discussed the Bishtun inscription, one of the more famous narratives involving a conspiracy at court. Chapter 4 discussed how the sectarian conspiracy theory that the Ismaili leaders, some located within the borders of present-day Iran, were secret atheists bent on seizing power influenced the 19th century diplomat and orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall’s interpretation of revolutionary movements in Europe, and through him, probably also influenced Metternich’s political thought.

The traffic in conspiracy theories has not been one-way. In the late 19th and 20th centuries the Persian educated elite was quite well-connected to European civilization, and European diplomats and spies wielded disproportionate power and influence over Iranian affairs during the era of European imperialism. Along with this contact came European conspiracy theories that mingled with indigenous Iranian suspicions of the activities and motives of the European governments that had such great indirect power. The focus of the suspicion during the first half of the 20th century was Britain. Perfidious Albion was sometimes perceived as possessing near-miraculous powers of deception and manipulation.<sup>7</sup> This tradition has been preserved in one of the best-known Iranian novels *My Uncle Napoleon* (1973) in which the

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but definitely present, on this thesis. See Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 3-40.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Pipes, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 76.

<sup>7</sup> Ahmad Ashraf, “Conspiracy Theories,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. VI, Fasc. 2, pp. 138-147. Available Online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/conspiracy-theories>. Accessed March 1, 2019.

titular character, an aging upper-middle class Iranian, is obsessed with the idea that the British Secret Service is orchestrating an elaborate plot against him personally.<sup>8</sup> These kinds of narratives may have been imported by Iranians returning from travels in Europe and augmented by anti-British propaganda spread by their rivals the Ottomans, Germans, and Russians. These anti-British conspiracy theories were helped along by the fact that the British actually *did* have disproportionate influence in Iran in the 20th century, including through secret channels.<sup>9</sup> During WWII, when the novel *My Uncle Napoleon* is set, Britain and the USSR bombed and then invaded Iran and forced the abdication of the pro-German king Reza Shah Pahlavi in favor of his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.<sup>10</sup> This invasion happened in the open, but some of the tales of secret all-pervasive British influence were seemingly confirmed in 1953 when the British Secret Service in coordination with the American CIA secretly engineered the ouster of the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh and bolstered the autocratic government of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, whom the British had installed in 1941.<sup>11</sup>

Alongside anti-British ideas and the actual conspiratorial activities of foreign powers, some Iranians picked up elements of the Grand Conspiracy Theory that had made their way to Iran before the Nazi, Soviet, or Nasserists propaganda campaigns. During the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906 one prominent Iranian cleric denounced the revolutionaries as secret Freemasons and Babis (an Iranian religious minority) demonstrating his attachment to the anti-Masonic conspiracy theory<sup>12</sup> and mixing this European-origin conspiracy theory with a local sectarian hatred. The mixing currents of strands of different conspiracy theories, local grievances, and actual events in Iran in the 20th century is an excellent example of the flexible nature of conspiracy theories.

This thesis is concerned with political-conspiracy theories that first sprouted after the French Revolution, but at times we have noted how sectarian-conspiracy theories influenced or merged with them, i.e. conspiracy theories primarily concerned with matters of religion instead of politics and power. Of course, the mother of all sectarian conspiracy theories is the anti-Jewish one, and stories of ritual murder, poisoning wells, etc. predate the modern era. In the 20th century a similar strain of influential sectarian homegrown conspiracy theories developed in Persia that similarly merged with the European-origin Grand Conspiracy Theory. These were anti-Baha'i conspiracy theories. This case is of special interest to us in this chapter as it appears to have had an impact on Khomeini's thought.

The Baha'i faith began in Iran in the 1840s. A young Iranian named Sayyid Ali Muhammad Shirazi claimed to be the gate "*Bab*" for the teachings of the Hidden Imam and then later to be the Hidden Imam himself.<sup>13</sup> He and his followers proclaimed a new religious

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<sup>8</sup> See Iraj Pezeshkzad, *My Uncle Napoleon: A Novel*, Dick Davis trans., (Modern Library, Reprint edition, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> For an extensive and well-sourced account of this invasion and occupation see Mohammad Gholi Majd, *August 1941: The Anglo-Russian Occupation of Iran and Change of Shahs*, (University Press of America, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> See Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, The CIA, and The Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*, (The New Press, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>13</sup> "Shirazi, Sayyid Ali Muhammad," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Available via Oxford Islamic Studies Online at <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2194>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

dispensation and the abrogation of Islamic law. (His followers are known as the aforementioned Babis.) After his execution at the hands of the Iranian government in 1850 many of his followers found a new leader in one of his followers Mirza Husayn-Ali Nuri, who took the name “*Baha'u'llah*” (Glory to God). He claimed to receive divine visions. He broke off from the earlier movement and proclaimed himself to be the promised Messiah of all the world’s religions. In 1863 Baha'u'llah was banished and moved to the Ottoman empire. He was eventually imprisoned in the town of ‘Akka by the Ottomans, which today is the town of Acre in Israel. He remained there writing and proselytizing until his death in 1892.<sup>14</sup>

Many Shi’a believers took a dim view of the Baha’i. There were periodic persecutions of Baha’i in Iran and slanders cooked up against the adherents of the new faith. They were accused of being sexually immoral, having too much influence in government, and of being spies for some foreign power. Some anti-Bahai conspiracy theories sprang up that were redolent of European anti-Jewish/Freemason/Jesuit conspiracy theories. The most famous anti-Baha’i text was *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*. It emerged as a handwritten good-luck chain letter in Iran in the 1930s and has been published several times since. The document claims to be the memoirs of Dimitri Ivanovich Dolgorukov, a Russian ambassador to Iran in the mid-19th century, and it details how he supposedly engineered the Baha’i religion as a Russian spy network built to spread disunity in Iran by weakening Islam. The author of the original text may have been inspired by the *Protocols*.<sup>15</sup>

In the early 20th century the Iranian state participated in the periodic persecution of Baha’is, banning Baha’i literature, refusing to recognize Baha’i marriages, and closing Baha’i schools.<sup>16</sup> In the mid-20th century a champion of persecuting the Baha’i was Ayatollah Borujerdi, a renowned Shi’a cleric and scholar. Khomeini was one of the more junior clerics who asked Borujerdi to move to Qom and become a teacher at the Shi’a seminary there. In 1946 Borujerdi was recognized as a *marja-i taqlid* (source of imitation) the highest rank of Shi’a cleric. Then in the early 1950s the other leading Qom *marja* died, leaving Borujerdi as the sole *marja* in Qom.<sup>17</sup> During the fall of Mossadeq, Borujerdi and his followers remained loyal to the Shah. This made them feel entitled to a reward, and the reward they received was a massive anti-Baha’i campaign in 1955.<sup>18</sup> During this time Khomeini was a close deputy of Borujerdi.<sup>19</sup> One of the Shah’s only meetings with Khomeini, his eventual nemesis, occurred in the late 1940s when Khomeini was sent by Ayatollah Borujerdi to ask the Shah to annul the death sentence of a Muslim who had murdered two Baha’is. The Shah did so. Another was when Khomeini was sent again by Ayatollah Borujerdi in 1955 to ask the Shah to repress the Baha’is and keep them

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<sup>14</sup> Wendi Momen, Moojan Momen, *Understanding the Baha’i Faith*, (Dunedin Academic Press, 2006), pp. 138-142.

<sup>15</sup> Mina Yazdani, “The Confessions of Dolgoruki Fiction and Masternarrative in Twentieth Century Iran,” *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 44, Issue 1, 2011, pp. 25-26, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Ronen A. Cohen, *The Hojjatiyeh Society in Iran: Ideology and Practice from the 1950s to the Present*, (Palgrave Macmillan; 2013), p. 65.

<sup>17</sup> Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State, Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran*, (I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> Ronen A. Cohen, pp. 66-67

<sup>19</sup> Ronen A. Cohen, p. 67.



“tied up in the stable” as the Shah’s father had.<sup>20</sup> Again, Borujerdi got his wish. A nationwide campaign of persecution was kicked off with a series of sermons broadcast via the national and army radio stations denouncing the Baha’i and calling for their suppression. Senior government figures personally participated in the demolition of the national headquarters of the Baha’i in Iran, which was followed by a wave of violence, rape, and robbery.<sup>21</sup>

This violence was accompanied by an outpouring of libel in the Iranian press. At least one article from the time claimed there was a link between the Baha’i and Zionism, in addition to making the claim that they had been founded as a British espionage and influence project.<sup>22</sup> During this period and earlier during WWII many Iranians would have heard conspiracy-theory propaganda broadcasts and other media from the Nazis, Soviets, Nasserites, and others denounce the evils of Zionism, and it probably should not surprise one that the idea of a Jewish/Zionist conspiracy made its way into some anti-Baha’i material. There were several factors that would have eased the mixing of anti-Baha’i vitriol with the Grand anti-Jewish Conspiracy Theory. Not only was the center of Baha’i pilgrimage in Israel, where their exiled leader had died while it was still part of the Ottoman empire, but one of the leading Iranian entrepreneurs was a Baha’i of Jewish extraction, Habib Sabet.

A remarkable businessman, Habib Sabet had started selling tobacco and renting bicycles at a young age, and by the 1950s he had built a business empire in Iran of car dealerships, manufacturing, and agricultural machinery, among many other things. In 1955 he had just acquired a prize, the rights to bottle Pepsi in Iran.<sup>23</sup> His marketing of this novelty coincided with the anti-Baha’i campaign, and Pepsi became a major target of attack. In September of 1955 one Iranian politician declared “The income earned from sales of ‘Pepsi Cola’ is spent on the propaganda activities of the Baha’is. Therefore Muslims are not permitted to drink it.”<sup>24</sup> Ayatollah Borujerdi issued a fatwa against consuming Pepsi.<sup>25</sup> The attacks on Pepsi did not stop at just linking it with the Baha’is. It was announced that Pepsi caused cancer,<sup>26</sup> that it was alcoholic and contained cocaine, that the Baha’is were deliberately

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<sup>20</sup> Mina Yazdani, “The Islamic Revolution’s Internal Other: The Case of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Baha’is of Iran,” *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 36, Issue 4, (December 2012), pp. 595-596.

<sup>21</sup> Douglas Martin, *The Persecution of the Baha’is of Iran, 1844-1984*, Baha’i studies, 12/13, 1984, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> “اروزنامه شاهین تهران: بهائیت در برابر کمونیسم ایجاد شد” (The Baha’is were created against Communism!), from the newspaper Shaheen Tehran, May 10, 1955. Available at <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/fa/archive/rwznamh-shahyn-thran-bhayyt-dr-brabr-kmwnysm-ayjad-shd>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Moojan Momen, “SABET, HABIB,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2015. Available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sabet-habib>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> “PEPSI supports Baha’is,” from the newspaper Vaheme, 9 November 1955, Archives of Bahai Persecution in Iran. Available at <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/vaheme-newspaper-pepsi-supports-bahais>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> “Sanction against PEPSI by Ayatollah Boroujerdi,” from the newspaper Arezou, 19 April 1955(? exact date unclear), Archives of Bahai Persecution in Iran. Available at <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/arezou-newspaper-sanction-against-pepsi-ayatollah-boroujerdi>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> “PEPSI causes cancer,” from the newspaper Erade Asia, 20 September 1955, Archives of Bahai Persecution in Iran. Available at <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/erade-asia-newspaper-pepsi-causes-cancer>. Accessed March 2, 2019.



attempting to poison Muslims,<sup>27</sup> perhaps a distant echo of the old stories of Jews deliberately poisoning Gentiles. One newspaper article alleged that the Pepsi factory “houses the hideout of the Baha'is that is a nest of spies.”<sup>28</sup>

This wave of persecution against the Baha'i faith only ended after an international outcry.<sup>29</sup> It is relevant to us because it is another example of the mixing of different conspiracy theories, this time outside of Europe, and because of Khomeini's involvement in the anti-Bahai campaign and his later apparent reference to that will be discussed in a subsequent section.

## Highbrow conspiracism in Iran

Conspiracy theories in Iran were not just for street-rallies against sectarian opponents, they were seriously believed at and spread by the highest echelons of the Iranian clerical establishment. A window into the ideas circulating in Khomeini's clerical circles during the 60s is provided by the journal *Darsha'i az Maktab Islam* or in English “Lessons from the School of Islam” (hereafter just *Maktab Islam*) which was founded as a religious journal to reach the increasingly-literate Iranian people and turn them from falling under the sway of secular ideologies. The journal began publishing in 1958 with the tacit approval of Ayatollah Borujerdi. He eventually gave it his full endorsement and even made financial contributions to the journal.<sup>30</sup> The journal brought a major change to intellectual life among literate Shi'a, publishing articles from important figures in easy-to-read Persian on a variety of topics, all from a religious point of view. Earlier most of the writings emerging from the Qom seminary were in Arabic.<sup>31</sup> The first editorial board included prominent Qom clerics and future leaders in the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic.<sup>32</sup> The influential Iranian-Lebanese cleric Musa Sadr began writing for the journal soon after its establishment.<sup>33</sup> The journal reached a mass audience for

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<sup>27</sup> پیسی کولا - معجون مرگ (Pepsi Cola, Death Potion), from the newspaper *Zelzeleh*, 10 October 1955, Archives of Bahai Persecution in Iran. Available at [https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/sites/default/files/PDF/Persian/004356P\\_0.pdf](https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/sites/default/files/PDF/Persian/004356P_0.pdf). Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> پیسی کولا مشروب الکلی است (Pepsi Cola is an alcoholic drink), from the newspaper *Zelzeleh*, October 10 1955, Archives of Bahai Persecution in Iran. Available at <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/fa/archive/rwznamh-zlzlh-ppsy-kwla-mshrwb-alkly-ast>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Martin, pp. 22-23.

<sup>30</sup> H. E. Chehabi and Majid Tafreshi, “Musa Sadr and Iran,” in *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, H.E. Chehabi ed., (Center for Lebanese Studies in association with I. B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 144-147

<sup>31</sup> Chehabi and Tafreshi, p. 149.

<sup>32</sup> These included Makarem Shirazi, Ja'far Sobhani, Abdul-Karim Mousavi Ardebili, Hossein Noori Hamedani, and Mohammad-Javad Bahonar. See a historical article about the magazine published in the magazine: مهدی پیشوایی (Mehdi Peshwai), “مجله درسهای از مکتب اسلام” (The Magazine Lessons from the School of Islam), *درسهای از مکتب اسلام* (Lessons from the School of Islam, hereafter *Maktab Islam*), Persian date Tir 1384 (Jule-July 2005), pp. 57, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Chehabi and Tafreshi, p. 148.

the time, with sales of about 50,000 copies a month by the late 1970s, far surpassing the 3,000 per month circulation of Iran's leading literary magazine.<sup>34</sup>

Several of the articles published in *Maktab Islam* in the late 1960s reveal that variants of the Grand Conspiracy Theory was taken seriously in Qum during this time. Seyed Hadi Khosroshahi, a future prominent official in the Islamic Republic, wrote in *Maktab Islam* in 1967 of the "Western imperialist" Conspiracy. He wrote about the plot of British imperialists and Jewish leaders to build a Jewish state in the Middle East in order to build a base for espionage and create permanent chaos in Islamic countries, to protect their route to India, and to put a "dagger" in the heart of Islam. To this end "Palestinian Jews, supported by Zionism, international Imperialism, and American, Russian, and English criminals, created Israel." In support of this theory he cited an unidentified French press report about a plot to establish a greater Hebrew empire by expanding "the breadth of its land to the Euphrates and to the valleys of the Nile and the Levant and Lebanon and Medina, and bring in 5 million Jews from Europe and the United States..."<sup>35</sup>

Earlier in 1966 the same Seyed Hadi Khosroshahi had published a glowing obituary of Sayyed Qutb in the journal, writing that he "...had special insight into perceiving and understanding the Quran..." and praised the work of this Sunni extremist. The obituary even pointed readers to a Persian translation of some of Qutb's Quran commentaries, which as shown in the previous chapter, contains several references to the *Protocols* and a great deal of writing about a grand Jewish conspiracy against Islam, working in cahoots with the European imperialists.

In the September-October issue of 1969 *Maktab Islam* a young radical and scholar named Zeenalabedeem Gorbani published a summary of and commentary on the *Protocols*. He referred to it as the "24 Protocols" writing "In this book, clearly, the thoughts of the Jews are revealed and it is shown how the descendants of Israel, through the formation of secret societies and the corruption of society and assassination, are building their own rule in the world!"<sup>36</sup> He followed with a selection of quotes from the *Protocols* demonstrating the Elders' supposed lust for power and determination to get it by any means, including the clandestine control of the press. Gorbani pointed out that the main weapon of the conspiracy mentioned in the *Protocols* are Freemasons, who "advocate non-religious thoughts and are serving the interests of imperialism and Zionism."<sup>37</sup> Here we have a direct import of the classic text of the Grand anti-Jewish Conspiracy Theory into the main journal of Shi'a clerics, during the period when Khomeini was developing what would eventually become his book *Governance of the Jurist*.

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<sup>34</sup> Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, (Syracuse University Press, 1996) p. 89.

<sup>35</sup> سید هادی خسروشاهی (Seyed Hadi Khosroshahi), "جهان اسلام: بیت المقدس و فلسطین را آزاد کنید", *Maktab Islam*, Persian date Aban 1346 (October-November 1967), p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> زین العابدین قربانی (Zeenalabedeem Gorbani), "اسلام و آزادی (11) / دکترین یهود", *Maktab Islam*, Persian date Mehr 1348 (September-October 1969), p. 40.

<sup>37</sup> Gorbani, p. 42.

## First signs of Khomeini's conspiracism

According to the testimony of his students, Khomeini was already taking a revolutionary line in the 1940s and 50s, privately discussing the idea that the Shah should be overthrown and the clergy should rule.<sup>38</sup> Borujerdi had ordered all the Shi'a clergy who followed him to stay well away from politics, and that included Khomeini.<sup>39</sup>

After the death of Borujerdi in 1961 Khomeini took an increasingly confrontational stance against the Shah and the policies of his government. Khomeini showed his new outspokenness in his strong protests against voting rights for women in Iran, a policy which the government backed down from, and against the Shah's massive "White Revolution" reform program, and against other initiatives that strengthened the Shah's autocratic power or those that modernized the country along more Western lines.<sup>40</sup> Khomeini was also evidently angered by the increasingly friendly relationship between Iran and Israel, which had been secretly growing closer during the 1950s. In 1960 the relationship moved into the open when the Shah publicly recognized Israel. The Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion visited Tehran the following year.<sup>41</sup> Also, the Baha'i businessman Habib Sabet was prospering, and he had become a key figure in the emerging Iranian television broadcasting industry.<sup>42</sup>

At this time Khomeini was apparently already anti-Baha'i, anti-Israel, and against many of the proposed changes championed by the Shah. In November 1962 he wrapped many of these grievances together, reached back into the conspiratorial rhetoric of 1955, and accused the government of tolerating Baha'i influence and espionage, and insinuated that the Baha'i were working for Israel:

"The propaganda device television is owned by a hated minority group, and it is supposed to be developed throughout the country. It's owner, in addition to having taken over the economy of our country, is the Pepsi Cola plant spy center... The Baha'i device and the Pepsi Cola factory are a spying apparatus for Palestinian Jews."<sup>43</sup>

This is the first instance in Khomeini's collected works of a theme that will dominate his thought for the rest of his life: that there is an evil conspiracy with some Jewish and/or Israeli connection that was able to disguise itself, sometimes as Baha'is. The protests of Khomeini and his comrades and disciples against the government grew stronger in this period. In response to these increasing protests emanating from Qum in March 1963 the Iranian government raided

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<sup>38</sup> Martin, p. 58.

<sup>39</sup> Martin, p. 53.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, pp. 60-64.

<sup>41</sup> David Menashri, Trita Parsi, "ISRAEL i. RELATIONS WITH IRAN," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, XIV/2, pp. 213-223, 2007. Available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/israel-i-relations-with-iran>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Moojan Momen, "SABET, HABIB," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2015. Available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sabet-habib>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, امام صحیفه, (Pages of The Imam), Vol. 1, (Tehran: The Institute for the Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeini, Persian year 1383 [2010-2011]), p.123. Available online at <http://ar.lib.eshia.ir/11150/1/123>. Accessed March 1, 2019.

the Faiziyya school where Khomeini was teaching, killing one student.<sup>44</sup> A few months after this attack, during the Shi'a commemoration of Ashura, Khomeini accused the government of working in the interests Israel, which he asserted was campaigning against Islam:

"If the tyrannical regime of Iran simply wished to wage war on the *maraji*, to oppose the *'ulama*, what business did it have tearing the Qur'an to shreds on the day it attacked Fayziya Madrasa? Indeed, what business did it have with the madrasa or with its students, like the eighteen year-old *sayyid* who was killed?... We come to the conclusion that this regime also has a more basic aim: they are fundamentally opposed to Islam itself... Israel does not wish the Qur'an to exist in this country. Israel does not wish the *'ulama* to exist in this country. Israel does not wish a single learned man to exist in this country. It was Israel that assaulted Fayziya Madrasa by means of its sinister agents. It is still assaulting us, and assaulting you, the nation; it wishes to seize your economy, to destroy your trade and agriculture, to appropriate your wealth. Israel wishes to remove by means of its agents anything it regards as blocking its path. The Qur'an is blocking its path; it must be removed. The religious scholars are blocking its path; they must be eliminated. Fayziya Madrasa and other centers of knowledge and learning are blocking its path; they must be destroyed. The tullah might later come to block their path; they must be killed, pushed off the roof, have their heads and arms broken. In order for Israel to attain its objectives, the government of Iran has continually affronted us in accordance with the goals and plans conceived in Israel."<sup>45</sup>

Here again, more clearly, we see a conspiracist theme that attacks Israel. The school had been raided by Iranians, but Khomeini alleged that the Israelis were actually the ones who carried out this attack by proxy, as part of their larger campaign against Islam. Present also is the theme of a Jewish conspiracy to dominate the economy.

A more clear-cut early example of Khomeini's evident conspiracism is the speech he gave that finally got him exiled from Iran. In this speech given in October 1964 he railed against the concept of diplomatic immunity and the immunity granted to US advisors in Iran, a common practice wherever US soldiers are deployed in an allied country over the long-term. This speech included an accusation that America was a malign force that was nearly all-powerful (causing "All of our troubles") and that Israel was just an outgrowth of America: "All of our troubles today are caused by America and Israel. Israel itself derives from America; these deputies and ministers that have been imposed upon us derive from America- they are all agents of America, for if they were not, they would rise up in protest."<sup>46</sup> Here we see a common trope from Soviet and later Arab nationalist propaganda, the idea that Israel was an extension of a sinister imperialism, in this case, American.

### ***Governance of the Jurist***

It might be possible to argue that these earlier statements from Khomeini accusing Jews, Americans, and Baha'i of conspiring to harm Islam were hyperbolic, just part of his sharp protests against policies and individuals he opposed. An enraged Khomeini in the heat of the moment could have reached back and used conspiracy theory arguments from the 1955 anti-Baha'i campaign, those similar to Nazi broadcasts, or to Soviet tropes in order to whip up a

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<sup>44</sup> Martin, p. 62.

<sup>45</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution, Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, Hamid Algar trans., (Mizan press, 1981) p. 263-264.

<sup>46</sup> *Islam and Revolution*, p. 278.

crowd, only to discard them the next day after the narrative was no longer needed. However, based on Khomeini's later statements and writings it is plainly evident that at least by 1970 he was a full-fledged believer in the Grand Conspiracy Theory. Unfortunately the specific sources of his belief are unclear. Khomeini was chary about citing sources or explaining his own intellectual influences.<sup>47</sup> He was formulating the ideas expressed in his best-known work, *Governance of the Jurist* (1970) during his time in exile in Najaf, Iraq (1964-1978.) The first four years of his Iraqi exile were an unusually silent period in Khomeini's life. He made few pronouncements, preached few sermons and gave few interviews during this time.<sup>48</sup> One assumes that, as a prominent cleric and public figure, he was involved in private and even secret correspondence with his colleagues in Iran and elsewhere during this time.

This section will discuss in depth the elements of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in Khomeini's main work, *Governance of the Jurist*. It was initially a series of lectures Khomeini gave in Najaf in early 1970 and later published as a book. The concept Khomeini laid out in this book is the ideological foundation of today's Islamic Republic and is mentioned in the Iranian constitution.<sup>49 50</sup>

Before examining the importance of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in this work, we ought to briefly discuss the main theological arguments of the book. In *Governance of the Jurist* Khomeini went against generations of Shi'a teaching and his own earlier writings and stated that all monarchies are un-Islamic and evil.<sup>51</sup> Khomeini argued that religious judges (*fuqaha*) not kings, have the divine right to rule until the return of the Twelfth Imam at the end of history; that they are the successors of the prophet Mohammed and the Shi'a Imams. Khomeini wrote that religious judges have the same authority as Mohammed and the Imams, and that disobedience to them is the same as disobedience to God.<sup>52</sup> The Persian name for this concept is *vilayat-i faqih*, in English - the governance of the jurist, from which the book gets its title. Khomeini had discussed aspects of the idea of the *vilayat-i faqih* earlier, in sections of his previous works, but they were first fully expressed in *Governance of the Jurist*.<sup>53</sup>

*Vilayat-i faqih* was an innovation, a proposed new form of Islamic government unprecedented in the history of Islam. In the *Governance of the Jurist* Khomeini cites the work of a single earlier Shi'a cleric and jurisprudent, Mullah Ahmad Naraqi (1771-1829) in support of his ideas. In his work *'Awa'id al-ayyam* Naraqi supported the juridical authority of the Shi'a *mujtahids* as the representatives of the hidden Imam<sup>54</sup> He wrote that the *mujtahids* are "the

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<sup>47</sup> Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, p. 22.

<sup>49</sup> Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards Is Transforming Iran from Theocracy into Military Dictatorship*, (AEI Press, 2013), Kindle Edition, location 4431.

<sup>50</sup> A full translation of the constitution of the Islamic Republic is available on the website of the Foundation for Iranian Studies at <https://fis-iran.org/en/resources/legaldoc/constitutionislamic>. Accessed March 2, 2019. See Article 5 in particular.

<sup>51</sup> Mosa Zahed, "The Evolution and Ascension of Iran's Terror Apparatus", in *Terrorism Revisited: Islamism, Political Violence and State-Sponsorship*, Paulo Casaca and Siegfried O. Wolf eds., (Springer International, 2017), p. 67

<sup>52</sup> Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>53</sup> Martin, p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, "The State and Khomeini's Islamic Order," in *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1/4, 1980, p. 154.

trustees of the Prophet and will not be tied up with the kings.”<sup>55</sup> However, Naraqī was no revolutionary, and maintained a relationship with the king of Iran, while exercising influence, at times in opposition to the King’s will. Once Naraqī was said to have forced the governor of the Iranian city of Kashan out of office. The King of Iran got angry and called Naraqī to Tehran. When Naraqī arrived he said “O God! This unjust king appointed an unjust governor over the people. I put an end to his oppression; and now this oppressor is angry with me.” The king relented and appointed a different governor. On another occasion, in the lead-up to one of the Russo-Persian wars (1826-1828) Naraqī along with some other clergy came to the camp of the Iranian king when the king was hesitant to declare war on Russia. The clergy were dressed in shrouds to show their preparation for martyrdom, and the King again relented and declared war.<sup>56</sup> These examples show that in contrast to Khomeini, Naraqī was not a revolutionary, and had enough respect for the authority of the Qajar king to remonstrate with him instead of attempting to overthrow him or declare him illegitimate. Naraqī’s arguments were about juridical authority, not temporal rule.<sup>57</sup>

Khomeini, by contrast, argued that all Muslims are obliged to oppose all monarchies and to rise up against them.<sup>58</sup> This is in stark contrast not only to Naraqī, but generations of Shi’a who either embraced quietism and shunned politics or embraced the monarchy. The embrace of monarchy in Iran was made easier after the establishment of the Shi’a Safavid dynasty in Iran in 1501.<sup>59</sup> Khomeini claimed that his radical anti-monarchical stance was rooted in the true interpretation of Islam. He even asserted that Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of Mohammed, the third Shi’a Imam, and a towering figure in Shi’a theology and sacred history, rose up in rebellion against monarchy and hereditary succession, which resulted in his martyrdom. This assertion is especially religiously charged, as the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali at Karbala is one of the key events in Shi’a history and theology. It is commemorated and re-enacted every year in Shi’a communities during the day of *Ashura*.

“Islam proclaims monarchy and hereditary succession wrong and invalid.... Monarchy and hereditary succession represent the same sinister, evil system of government that prompted the Doyen of the Martyrs (‘a) to rise up in revolt and seek martyrdom in an effort to prevent its establishment. He revolted in repudiation of the hereditary succession of Yazīd, to refuse it his recognition.”<sup>60</sup>

How then did Khomeini explain the fact that Shi’a Muslims, including Naraqī and other leading clerics, had obeyed and accepted monarchies for centuries? How did he explain how his vision of a truly Islamic government under the *vilayat-i faqih* was only “re-discovered” in the mid-20th century? - He used the Grand Conspiracy Theory. One can witness this very clearly in the first three paragraphs of the introduction to his *Islamic Government*. All three are reproduced

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<sup>55</sup> Zackery M. Heern, *The Emergence of Modern Shi’ism: Islamic Reform in Iraq and Iran*, (Oneworld Publications, 2015), p. 101.

<sup>56</sup> Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period*, (University of California Press, 1980), p. 89.

<sup>57</sup> Arjomand, p. 154.

<sup>58</sup> Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>60</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, pp. 10-11.

here, without any abridgement, in order to demonstrate how explicit Khomeini was about his belief in a massive Judeo-imperialist conspiracy against Islam. In the first paragraph he insists that the *vilayat-i faqih* is an obvious concept that any thoughtful and honest Muslim should automatically accept. Khomeini then recognizes that because of circumstances at the present time this “self-evident” concept requires “demonstration”:

“The subject of the governance of the jurist (*vilāyat-i faqīh*) provides us with the opportunity to discuss certain related matters and questions. The governance of the *faqīh* is a subject that in itself elicits immediate assent and has little need of demonstration, for anyone who has some general awareness of the beliefs and ordinances of Islam will unhesitatingly give his assent to the principle of the governance of the *faqīh* as soon as he encounters it; he will recognize it as necessary and self-evident. If little attention is paid to this principle today, so that it has come to require demonstration, it is because of the social circumstances prevailing among the Muslims in general, and the teaching institution in particular. These circumstances, in turn, have certain historical roots to which I will now briefly refer.”<sup>61</sup>

Khomeini immediately follows this first paragraph with another that describes the “social circumstances” he referred to in the above paragraph. He states that a vast Jewish conspiracy spreading “anti-Islamic propaganda” and other strategies ruined the purity of Islam and sidelined the “self-evident” idea of *vilayat-i faqih*. He also states that there is another “imperialist” conspiracy (of Europeans) that seeks to destroy Islam in order to weaken Muslims, who would be easier to despoil without a *faqih* in charge:

“From the very beginning, the historical movement of Islam has had to contend with the Jews, for it was they who first established anti-Islamic propaganda and engaged in various stratagems, and as you can see, this activity continues down to the present. Later they were joined by other groups, who were in certain respects, more satanic than they. These new groups began their imperialist penetration of the Muslim countries about three hundred years ago, and they regarded it as necessary to work for the extirpation of Islam in order to attain their ultimate goals. It was not their aim to alienate the people from Islam in order to promote Christianity among them, for the imperialists really have no religious belief, Christian or Islamic. Rather, throughout this long historical period, and going back to the Crusades, they felt that the major obstacle in the path of their materialistic ambitions and the chief threat to their political power was nothing but Islam and its ordinances, and the belief of the people in Islam. They therefore plotted and campaigned against Islam by various means.

The preachers they planted in the religious teaching institution, the agents they employed in the universities, government educational institutions, and publishing houses, and the orientalist who work in the service of the imperialistic states—all these people have pooled their energies in an effort to distort the principles of Islam. As a result, many persons, particularly the educated, have formed misguided and incorrect notions of Islam.”<sup>62</sup>

### **Conspiracies: Jewish and imperialist**

Of the two conspiracies mentioned in *Governance of the Jurist*, the most long-lasting one is the Jewish conspiracy, which Khomeini accuses of having spread “anti-Islamic propaganda and engaged in various stratagems” in order to weaken Islam. Khomeini writes that

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<sup>61</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 7.



this activity dates from the beginning of Islam and “continues down to the present.”<sup>63</sup> This is a clear re-iteration of the version Grand Conspiracy Theory that was spread in Nazi and Nasserist propaganda and also embraced by Sayyed Qutb, described in chapters 11 and 12. Nazi propaganda during the war targeted at Muslims depicted Jews as the perennial enemy of Islam, that had been secretly working to introduce innovations into Islam.<sup>64</sup> Khomeini used this same narrative, only he alleges that the specific thing the Jewish conspiracy had destroyed was the *vilayat-i faqih*.

While there is no endorsement or direct citation of the *Protocols* in Khomeini’s *Islamic Government*, at one point in the text Khomeini is explicit in his belief in the idea of a global Jewish conspiracy not just to distort Islam and deny the guardianship of the Jurist, but also to take over the world:

“... the Jews and their foreign backers are opposed to the very foundations of Islam and wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world. Since they are a cunning and resourceful group of people, I fear that —God forbid— they may one day achieve their goal, and that the apathy shown by some of us may allow a Jew to rule over us one day. May God never let us see such a day!”<sup>65</sup>

If this is not a reference to the *Protocols*, it is certainly a reference to an anti-Jewish strain of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, of which the *Protocols* is the classic text.

Khomeini also wrote of a conspiracy of “imperialists” who had “plans drawn up several centuries ago that are now being implemented and bearing fruit.”<sup>66</sup> In the passage from the introduction Khomeini dated the beginning of this conspiracy to 300 years ago, the late 17th century. This plot mainly involved anti-Islamic propaganda. The “propaganda institutions of imperialism”<sup>67</sup> made people believe that Islam is separate from politics and the plotters installed puppet-rulers in Islamic lands to assist in this propagandizing. Khomeini summed up the message that the imperialist conspirators spread as:

“...that Islam does not have a specific form of government or governmental institutions. They say further that even if Islam does have certain laws, it has no method for enforcing them, so that its function is purely legislative. This kind of propaganda forms part of the overall plan of the imperialists to prevent the Muslims from becoming involved in political activity and establishing an Islamic government.”<sup>68</sup>

As with some of those conspiracy theories discussed earlier in this chapter, Khomeini’s description of a vast imperialist conspiracy derives partly from the actual experience of European imperialism in Iran and much of the rest of the world in the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, Khomeini credits the forces of imperialism with vastly more power and coordination than they ever possessed. There were certainly attempts by imperial rulers to

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<sup>63</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 53.

<sup>65</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 79.

<sup>66</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 88.

<sup>68</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 15.

influence Muslim leaders in their favor. To take an example from Russian history: in the late 19th century the Russian government tried to organize the Muslim clergy of the Caucasus into religious hierarchies and paid them salaries. According to a letter sent by the Imperial Viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich this was done in order to increase state surveillance, get the clergy's material interests in line with the Russian state, keep Muslims divided, and limit Persian and Turkish influence.<sup>69</sup> This activity was only attempted in part of the Russian Empire, and while other imperial powers might have tried something similar from time to time, it was not uniform or coordinated. The conspiracy Khomeini depicts is coordinated, massive, and multi-generational. The imperialists of Khomeini's imagination have more in common with Lenin's view of an all-pervasive and hyper-deceptive conspiracy of finance capital than with the actual European empires. In Lenin's version several conspiracies emerged in the 19th century to dominate the world outside of Europe and prevent revolution inside through bribery and intrigue. Khomeini's version had a clique of Europeans preventing revolution in the Muslim world by deliberately distorting Islam as part of their resource extraction scheme.

While it appears Khomeini usually referred to Western countries like the US, France, and Britain when he discusses imperialism, in at least one passage he complained of imperialism "both Western and communist."<sup>70</sup> According to Khomeini the original ringleader of this imperialist scheme was Britain. This power was joined later by the United States and other powers:

"The British imperialists penetrated the countries of the East more than three hundred years ago. Being knowledgeable about all aspects of these countries, they drew up elaborate plans for assuming control of them. Then came the new imperialists, the Americans and others. They allied themselves with the British and took part in the execution of their plans."<sup>71</sup>

According to Khomeini writing in *Islamic Government*, the primary operatives in this conspiracy to spread anti-Islamic propaganda are the "agents of imperialism" and the "educational and political apparatuses of the anti-national puppet governments they have installed."<sup>72</sup> Khomeini emphasizes that while Zionists, Christians, Baha'is and others might be participating in spreading this propaganda the purpose of this propaganda is not to convert people to Christianity or Judaism or the Baha'i faith, but to enable the imperialist conspiracy:

"...The agents of imperialism are busy in every corner of the Islamic world drawing our youth from us with their evil propaganda. They are not converting them into Jews and Christians; they are corrupting them, making them irreligious and indifferent, which is sufficient for their purposes. In our own city of Tehran now there are centers of evil propaganda run by the churches, the Zionists, and the Bahā'is in order to lead our people astray and make them abandon the ordinances and teachings of Islam"<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Firouzeh Mostashari, *On the Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus*, (I.B. Tauris, 2006), p, 89.

<sup>70</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 71.

<sup>71</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 87.

<sup>72</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, 85.

<sup>73</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 79.

Note here the inclusion of the Baha'is as one of the trio of forces operating "centers of evil propaganda." Khomeini held that the introduction of this propaganda and other western tricks to weaken Islam were done deliberately. He believed that the powers that be in the Islamic world were puppets, installed "for the sake of exploitation..."<sup>74</sup> i.e. as preparation for the plunder of the natural resources of the region. True Islam, under the leadership of a jurist, the deputy of the Imam, would never allow the imperialists to slander Islam, deceive and weaken the Muslims, and thereby economically exploit them. Khomeini asserted that Islam "is the school of those who struggle against imperialism"<sup>75</sup> and therefore it is logical that a far-sighted imperialism would seek to corrupt Islam:

"Foreign experts have studied our country, and have discovered all our mineral reserves—gold, copper, petroleum, and so on. They have also made an assessment of our people's intelligence and came to the conclusion that the only barriers blocking their way are Islam and the religious leadership.

They have known the power of Islam themselves for it once ruled part of Europe, and they know that true Islam is opposed to their activities. They have also realized they cannot make the true religious scholars submit to their influence, nor can they affect their thinking. From the very outset, therefore, they have sought to remove this obstacle from their path by disparaging Islam and besmirching the religious leaders. They have resorted to malicious propaganda so that today, we imagine that Islam simply consists of a handful of legal topics. They have also tried to destroy the reputation of fuqahā and the 'ulamā, who stand at the head of Islam society, by slanderous accusations and other means."<sup>76</sup>

In one passage Khomeini mocks those who still engage in religious practices such as praying, but who neglect the struggle against imperialism, emphasizing that by their quietism they are playing into the hands of the imperialist conspiracy:

"If you pay no attention to the policies of the imperialists, and consider Islam to be simply the few topics you are always studying and never go beyond them, then the imperialists will leave you alone. Pray as much as you like; it is your oil they are after—why should they worry about your prayers? They are after our minerals, and want to turn our country into a market for their goods. That is the reason the puppet governments they have installed prevent us from industrializing, and instead, establish only assembly plants and industry that is dependent on the outside world."<sup>77</sup>

## **Zionism and imperialism**

Like the leaders of Al Qaeda, in *Islamic Government* Khomeini seemed to differentiate between the imperialist conspiracy to dominate the Middle East through distorting Islam and establishing Israel and another Jewish plot from earlier in history that distorted Islam. Unlike the leaders of Al Qaeda, Khomeini did not clearly reference the existence of a secret global Jewish government, though the activities of the Jews in distorting Islam "continues down to the

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<sup>74</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 8.

<sup>76</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>77</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 17.

present.”<sup>78</sup> He described the creation of Israel as being the work of a “...handful of wretched Jews (the agents of America, Britain and other foreign powers)...”<sup>79</sup> a common trope in Soviet propaganda. Khomeini declared that if Muslims had made a unified front against the imperialists and their Israeli servants then Israel would never have existed:

“If the Muslims had acted in accordance with this command, and after forming a government, made the necessary extensive preparations to be in a state of full readiness for war, a handful of Jews would never have dared to occupy our lands and to burn and destroy the Masjid al-Aqsā.”<sup>80</sup>

Khomeini’s reference to plans for a global Jewish government, a possible reference to the *Protocols*, mentions that the “the Jews and their foreign backers” are the ones who wish a global Jewish government.<sup>81</sup> After the revolution, in an August 1979 speech Khomeini first attacked the “imperialist” powers and then threatened Israel by saying “Israel should try to understand its masters don’t have any power any longer.”<sup>82</sup>

This is a vision of Israel likely indirectly imported from the Soviets, as it smacks of Lenin’s theory of imperialism. According to this vision, Israel is not a sovereign state but really a tool in the hands of an imperialist conspiracy. The general shape of Khomeini’s version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory is a combination of older sectarian conspiracy theories about imperial powers meddling in religion to harm Iran, like the anti-Baha’i conspiracy theory discussed earlier in this chapter, combined with the larger structure of Lenin’s theory of imperialism (especially with regards to the role of Israel) and infused with ideas of a global Jewish conspiracy closer to what is described in the *Protocols*. On balance, Khomeini’s ideas about the “Zionist” conspiracy, at least as described in *Governance of the Jurist*, seem to have more in common with Lenin’s idea of Imperialism than Qutb’s view of an age-old global Jewish conspiracy. However, there are many parallels between Qutb’s ideas and Khomeini’s: both Qutb and Khomeini believe there was once an original, much purer, form of Islam that was corrupted by the machinations of a super-influential Jewish plot. This created a malformed, enervated Islam that was easy for European imperialists to control and humiliate, including the humiliation of the establishment of the state of Israel – a state that is ostensibly a tool of imperialist control. Khomeini and Qutb both perceived a sinister imperialist-Jewish alliance, or at least common purpose, behind the continual degradation of Islam, and that the propaganda of this alliance was the main weapon they used against Islam along with pseudo-Islamic puppet governments. Both Khomeini and Qutb believed that Islam’s decay is not the result of an internal process but of an external plot, and that a powerful plot continues to undermine Islam and prevent its rise.

### **Responding to the conspiracy**

Like Qutb and his successors, and like other true believers in an ultra-powerful global conspiracy we have examined in this thesis, Khomeini believed that a response was necessary

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<sup>78</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 22.

<sup>81</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 79.

<sup>82</sup> Khomeini, “Message of Imam Khomeini on the Occasion of the Day of Quds,” in *The Dawn of the Islamic Revolution*, Special Edition of the Echo of Islam, (Ministry of Islamic Guidance, 1982) p. 204.

to fight this conspiracy. In Islamic Government Khomeini's main call to action was for propaganda: "The first activity we must undertake in this respect is the propagation of our case; that is how we must begin."<sup>83</sup> According to what he published in 1970 he wished to create a wave of protest in Iran "against the state of the government; let the people gather, and the preachers and rawzakhwāns firmly fix the issue of government in their minds."<sup>84</sup>

This protest was to be directed against the usurpers secretly in the employ of the imperialist conspiracy (that is, primarily the British and Americans) who Khomeini refers to as *taghut* - unjust usurpers.<sup>85</sup> In *Governance of the Jurist* Khomeini exhorted Muslims to overthrow their illegitimate governments - and according to him all governments in the Muslim world were illegitimate.<sup>86</sup> This was a revolutionary prescription for the entire Islamic world:

"In the Qur'an, God Almighty has forbidden men to obey the tāghūt—illegitimate regimes—and encouraged them to rise up against kings, just as He commanded Moses to rebel. There are a number of traditions encouraging people to fight against oppressors and those who wish to pervert religion."<sup>87</sup>

Khomeini wrote that he had earlier urged other Iranian clerics to overthrow the Iranian government.<sup>88</sup> While he was in exile, Khomeini's network engaged in propaganda against the Shah and against the Saudi monarchy.<sup>89</sup>

This description of what was needed, "unmasking" the evil propaganda of the Grand Conspiracy against Islam and overthrowing the Muslim governments that were actually subservient to the conspiracy, was very similar to what Qutb urged, though Qutb seemed more enamored of armed struggle at the earliest stage. This similarity between Qutb's program and Khomeini's was recognized by the Egyptian intellectual Hassan Hanafi in his introduction to the 1979 Arabic edition of *Governance of the Jurist*, probably published after Khomeini's sudden rise to power in Iran.<sup>90</sup>

Qutb had also prepared for an armed struggle against what he believed to be an illegitimate regime in cahoots with an anti-Islam conspiracy. Khomeini did not, at least not at first, engage in violent subversion. During the 1970s while in exile, Khomeini eschewed armed struggle against the Shah, regarding it as counterproductive.<sup>91</sup> This strategy changed as the position of the Shah deteriorated. According to Nader Uskowi, who met with Khomeini in Paris in November 1978, Khomeini's senior advisors were planning to establish a "people's army" in Iran to engage in a long-term violent struggle and topple the Shah when it was clear his grip on

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<sup>83</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 78.

<sup>84</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 82.

<sup>85</sup> Ali Rahnema, "Ayatollah Khomeini's Rule of the Guardian Jurist: From Theory to Practice," in *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam ed., (Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 92.

<sup>86</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 92.

<sup>87</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 92.

<sup>88</sup> Khomeini, *Governance of the Jurist*, p. 89.

<sup>89</sup> Martin, p. 72.

<sup>90</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *الحكومة الإسلامية* (Islamic Government), Hasan Hanafi trans., (al-Qahira, 1979), from the introduction by Hasan Hanafi, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Martin, p. 70.

the country was weakening. But suddenly the Shah fled the country, saying he had to get treatment for cancer. Khomeini flew to Tehran and began his march to power.<sup>92</sup>

### **Some of the effects of Khomeini's conspiracism on Iran**

This section will examine the activities of Khomeini and his followers after he gained power and illustrate how the idea of powerful conspiracies against Islam contributed to the decisions they made and the policies they pursued. After briefly illustrating how some of the Islamic Republic's religious repression and censorship and much of its propaganda are based on the idea of massive conspiracy against Islam, this section will dwell on the most important consequence of the belief in this idea: Iran's participation in directing and sponsoring violent Islamic extremism.

Upon his return Khomeini was the most powerful man in Iran. He did not grow complacent and continued to preach that hyper-powerful anti-Islamic conspiracies were meddling in Iranian affairs. He took action against them through censorship and repression. An early example is the case of the major Iranian newspaper *Ayandegan*, Iran's first morning daily. It had been nationalist and liberal under the Shah, while operating under the Shah's censorship regime. It was suspected of having connections to the authorities because of its usual anti-communist and pro-establishment stances. However, in the fall of 1978 the paper was taken over by left-leaning revolutionary journalists and during the course of the Iranian revolution *Ayandegan* grew even more in national prominence. It became a place where Iranian writers who were neither communists or left-radicals or Khomeinist radicals could get published.<sup>93</sup> In May 1979 the paper published an interview that Khomeini had given to *Le Monde* in which he had said he wanted to remain just a cleric and stay away from politics.<sup>94</sup> This angered Khomeini.<sup>95</sup> The paper was shut down in August 1979 at the order of the public prosecutor's office. A Voice of the Islamic Republic Radio broadcast alleged that the newspaper still enjoyed the "indirect blessing of the deposed shah."<sup>96</sup> When the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci asked Khomeini about this shut down in an interview published in October 1979 he replied:

"The newspaper *Ayandegan* was part of the plot I mentioned. It had relations with the Zionists; it got ideas from them to do harm to the country. The same goes for all the newspapers that the attorney general of the revolution judged subversive, and then closed: newspapers which, through a phony opposition, tried to restore the old regime

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<sup>92</sup> Nader Uskowi, *Temperature Rising: Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Wars in the Middle East*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018), Kindle Edition, Location 89-97.

<sup>93</sup> L. P. Elwell-Sutton and P. Mohajer, "ĀYANDAGĀN" *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. III, Fasc. 2, pp. 132-133, online edition, 2011. Available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ayandagan-newspaper>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>94</sup> Gholam Khiabany, *Iranian Media: The Paradox of Modernity*, (Routledge, 2010), p. 99.

<sup>95</sup> Annabelle Sreberny and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 168.

<sup>96</sup> Nicholas Cumming-Bruce, "Iranian Rulers Shut Newspaper" *Washington Post*, August 8, 1979. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1979/08/08/iranian-rulers-shut-newspaper/0d7008fb-9ae9-4e50-a943-daf62bf1365d/>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

and to serve foreign interests. We shut them up because we knew who they were, and what they were after.”<sup>97</sup>

This attack on the freedom of the press was not couched in the language of religious fundamentalism, the need to safeguard morals from deterioration etc.. It was defensive, i.e. defensive against the Zionist conspiracy. Khomeini declared that this conspiracy encompassed or co-opted many things, including the concept of human rights itself. After the Revolution Khomeini described “human rights societies and other societies such as these” as fronts that “all have their hands locked together for plundering us Muslims and these who are in Asia, Africa and other places, but regrettably the Muslims are not awakened.”<sup>98</sup>

The Iranian constitution that was adopted in December 1979, after Khomeini had largely consolidated power, calls the new Iranian state an “Islamic Republic.” The constitution includes a presidency and a parliament. Following Khomeini’s principle of *velayat-e faqih*, there is a single Supreme Leader enshrined in the constitution who is above the president and parliament, who ratifies the election of the president, makes decisions of peace and war, controls the internal and external security organs, and appoints members of the Iranian judicial and cultural institutions. The Supreme Leader has the ability to override any other element of the Iranian government. His constitutional power can be potentially checked only by the “Assembly of Experts” a secretive body which can remove him if he is determined to be unfit for office. The Assembly of Experts is an 86 member body of Shi’a clerics who are elected from a list prepared by the “Guardian Council” another body of senior clerics which is in turn appointed by the Supreme Leader.<sup>99</sup> Of course, Khomeini was the first Supreme Leader of Iran. The constitution of Iran has Khomeini’s idea of *velayat-i faqih* at its core, saying that his concept opened up for the Muslim world “...the true path of Islamic ideological struggle, and giving greater intensity to the struggle of militant and committed Muslims both within the country and abroad.”<sup>100</sup>

Along with the idea of *velayat-i faqih* comes the Grand Conspiracy Theory. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, Khomeini’s ideology includes a belief in the existence of massive Jewish and imperialist conspiracies that seek to undermine Islam. This produces an effect in the Iranian government that might seem schizophrenic to an outside observer lacking an understanding of the Khomeinist obsession with conspiracies. While Article 3 of the Iranian constitution includes the goal of “ensuring political and social freedoms within the framework of the law” Article 9 states that no one “has the right to infringe in the slightest way upon the political, cultural, economic, and military independence or the territorial integrity of Iran under the pretext of exercising freedom.”<sup>101</sup> Freedom of the press is granted “except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public.” According to Article 14 of the Iranian constitution all Muslims must treat non-Muslims ethically and respect their

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<sup>97</sup> Oriana Fallaci, “An Interview With KHOMEINI,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 1979. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/10/07/archives/an-interview-with-khomeini.html>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Khomeini, “Excerpts from the Imam’s Address on the Eve of the First Day of Quds:”, from *The Dawn of the Islamic Revolution*, p. 206.

<sup>99</sup> David E. Thaler, Alireza Nader, et. al., Mullahs, *Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, (RAND for the National Defense Research Institute, 2010), pp. 24 - 29.

<sup>100</sup> See the translation of the constitution of the Islamic Republic on the website of the Foundation for Iranian Studies at <https://fis-iran.org/en/resources/legaldoc/constitutionislamic>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.



human rights, but notes that “This principle applies to all who refrain from engaging in conspiracy or activity against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran.”<sup>102</sup>

Among those who are not extended the mantle of human rights for precisely this reason are the Baha’i. The 300,000 Baha’i left in Iran are repressed and treated as part of an evil foreign conspiracy. In 1980 Khomeini’s Revolutionary Guards arrested all the members of the Baha’i National Spiritual assembly of Iran, none of whom were ever seen again.<sup>103</sup> At one point an interviewer asked Khomeini point-blank about the religious freedom of Baha’i. Khomeini replied: “they are a political faction; they are harmful. They will not be accepted.”<sup>104</sup> Khomeini’s hatred of the Baha’i as the tools of a secret alien conspiracy was made into state policy under his rule. One scholar of the persecution of Baha’i in Iran noted that “The connection of Baha’is with Israel and the Jews is so strong in Ayatollah Khomeini’s rhetoric that one wonders which of the two was his primary concern...”<sup>105</sup>

This kind of rhetoric was not just used by Khomeini in a tiff with a foreign journalist, it has become a standard part of the Iranian government’s repertoire in justifying religious repression of the Baha’is. In an interview on a US news program in 1983, Sayed Rajaie Khorassani, then the Islamic Republic’s Ambassador to the UN frankly admitted to the execution of Baha’i leaders as enemy spies. As the interviewer probed him about the persecution of the Baha’is in Iran, he responded with several streams of invective that labeled the Baha’is as a front for various conspiracies, not as a religion:

“Baha’ism is a political movement and not a religion... It has a religious mask, that is all... There is a relation between Israel and Baha’ism. No doubt. We also know that the Baha’i world center is in Haifa. We have also historical evidence which supports the strong relation between the creation of Baha’ism on the one hand and Zionism on the other hand... Their shrine is not considered holy. We take it as a center of conspiracy, very simple, for this there is no protection... It is not a religion... I consider it as a political, - a treacherous political movement, created primarily by the Russians, then supported strongly by the British, and now has the strong support of the American media and foreign policy and everything... they are a threat to the welfare and happiness of the third world countries.”<sup>106</sup>

The persecution of Baha’is in Iran has continued to the present day. The 2017 report of the US Commission on Religious Freedom noted that since the Revolution Iranian “authorities have killed or executed more than 200 Baha’i leaders, and more than 10,000 have been dismissed from government and university jobs.”<sup>107</sup>

As Khomeini had urged in *Governance of the Jurist*, the government he founded has actively spread propaganda to unmask the sinister conspiracies against Islam. An early 1980

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic*, (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 209.

<sup>104</sup> Yazdani, “The Islamic Revolution’s Internal Other,” p. 593.

<sup>105</sup> Yazdani, “The Islamic Revolution’s Internal Other,” p. 603.

<sup>106</sup> Bob Brown, “In the Name of Islam,” ABC News 20/20, July 28, 1983. Available at <https://youtu.be/Mlj0OJvVW9k>. Quote starts at 4:18.

<sup>107</sup> *Annual Report of the United States Commission on Religious Freedom, 2017*, (United States Commission on Religious Freedom, 2017). Available at <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017.USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

CIA assessment noted that “Tehran radio broadcasts a steady stream of propaganda every day into Iran’s neighbors.” This propaganda was revolutionary, urging people in other states to adopt Iranian revolutionary tactics to topple their regimes.<sup>108</sup>

Since the Revolution Iranian propaganda has warned of the danger of a “greater Israel” - the canard that Israel is preparing to conquer much of the Middle East.<sup>109</sup> The Iranian government has also re-published the *Protocols*. While the *Protocols* is not explicitly referenced in Khomeini’s work, the document has been embraced by the propagandists of the Islamic Republic. Editions of the *Protocols* have been published by many arms of the Iranian government since the Revolution and Iranian media is full of references to “Zionist domination” and stories of the global machinations of the Jews.<sup>110</sup> Iranian propaganda about the worldwide Jewish conspiracy has also been international, even intercontinental. An English language publication of the Iranian Embassy in London in the 1980s quoted from the *Protocols* extensively.<sup>111</sup> By 1985 the *Protocols* was being published in English by an arm of the Iranian state.<sup>112</sup>

### **Continuing to fight the imaginary enemy**

The Islamic Republic is not unique in its activities to spread conspiracy theories internationally or in its persecution of religious minorities. It is outstanding in its cultivation of Islamic violent extremist organizations. This activity is directly related to the perception of the Islamic Republic’s leaders, Khomeini and his successors, that they are beset on all sides by a malignant conspiracy against true Islam and therefore against the Islamic Republic.

In the preamble to the constitution of the Islamic Republic the armed forces of Iran are explicitly given the mission of expanding the writ of Islamic law, in addition to defending the country:

“the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps... will be responsible not only for guarding and preserving the frontiers of the country, but also for fulfilling the ideological mission of jihad in God’s way; that is, extending the sovereignty of God’s law throughout the world this is in accordance with the Koranic verse *‘Prepare against them whatever force you are able to muster, and strings of horses, striking fear into the enemy of God and your enemy, and others besides them’*”<sup>113</sup>

However, for Khomeinists who believe in the existence of a massive conspiracy against Islam, “extending the sovereignty of God’s law throughout the world” is not a linear conquest of

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<sup>108</sup> *Iran: Exporting the Revolution*, CIA Intelligence Assessment, National Foreign Assessment Center, March 1980. Approved for Release April 27, 2006, p. 1. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81B00401R000500100001-8.pdf>. March 2, 2019.

<sup>109</sup> Daniel Pipes, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 60.

<sup>110</sup> Orly R. Rahimiyan, “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion In Iranian Political and Cultural Discourse,” in *The Global Impact of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, A Century-Old Myth*, Esther Webman ed., (Routledge, 2011), pp. 231, 236.

<sup>111</sup> Lewis, *Semites and anti-Semites*, p. 210.

<sup>112</sup> Rahimiyan, p. 237.

<sup>113</sup> See the translation of the constitution of the Islamic Republic on the website of the Foundation for Iranian Studies at <https://fis-iran.org/en/resources/legaldoc/constitutionislamic>. Accessed March 2, 2019.

non-Islamic lands, but also necessarily involves overthrowing the faux-Islamic regimes established by the imperialists. Likewise, the defense of the Islamic Republic ought to involve defending against new plots from the Zionists/imperialists/Jews against Islam, which history has shown, Khomeinists believe, to be amazingly effective in subduing and distorting Islam. Opposed by adversaries with such immense power, Iran's Khomeinist leaders behave as an embattled underdog waging a guerilla campaign against the still-reigning conspiracies against Islam.

Khomeini's rhetoric made it clear that the threat of these conspiracies did not dissipate with the establishment of the Islamic Republic. It stands to reason that the powerful Jewish and imperialist conspirators would continue their attempts to interfere with Islam and once again destroy the *velayat-e faqih*, which, according to Khomeini's doctrine, is the most powerful threat to their global domination. Unlike the Salis-Soglio brothers, the Nazis, Sayyed Qutb and Al Qaeda, the primary enemy Khomeini and his followers and successors identify is not totally imaginary. The rhetoric of the Islamic Republic, while anti-Soviet, also made it clear that ringleaders of these conspirators against true Islam were the United States and its Zionist servants. Even in a statement condemning the invasion of Afghanistan by the USSR, the senior cleric and heavyweight in the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Montazeri stated "...we regard America and Zionism as enemy number one of humanity and Islam, and prepare ourselves to wage a struggle against them..."<sup>114</sup> Unlike a cabal of the Elders of Zion or the re-constituted Illuminati, the United States does actually exist, it does have soldiers and spies and has been deeply involved in Iran and the wider Middle East, as has Israel. However, Khomeini's ideas of what the United States and Israel are capable of and what they have done (along with their imperialist predecessors such as Britain, Russia, and France) makes them into enemies that might as well be imaginary, to say nothing of presuming that the US and Israel have deep anti-Islamic motives.

- And when it comes to how to fight back, a statement from early 80s Iranian propaganda hints at a way a regional strategy might be part of a global plan to put a dagger in the heart of "imperialism:"

"After Jerusalem, Mecca will be liberated and the international flag of Islam will be hoisted over the whole of the Middle East. There will be victory for the Third Force based on the Quran. The exploitation of nations will be brought to an end by the lack of oil supply to the superpowers. The human order will be re-established on social justice, based on the doctrine of Islam."<sup>115</sup>

This is the vision of victory, but the Khomeinist conspiracists believe they are usually on the defensive. According to Khomeini, the plot against true Islam went into overdrive against the Islamic Republic less than a year after Iran adopted its constitution based on *velayat-i faqih*. In September 1980 Iraq invaded Iran. Khomeini made it clear that the real culprit in this was the United States, the ringleader of the imperialists, and the Zionists, some of the same conspirators responsible for having earlier distorted Islam:

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<sup>114</sup> Hussein ali Montazeri, "Ayatollah Montazeri's Message on the Occasion of Coup [sic.] in Afghanistan" December 31, 1979, in *The Dawn of the Islamic Revolution*, p. 408.

<sup>115</sup> "An Examination of the Philosophy of the Iranian Nation's Struggle Against the Baathist Invaders," in *The Dawn of the Islamic Revolution*, p. 314.

"The U.S. is the number one enemy of the oppressed and the Mustaza'f nations in the world. The U.S. will not cease from committing any crime in order to maintain its global political, economic, cultural and military domination. It exploits the oppressed people of the world through its extensive propaganda which is being organized by international Zionism. [Together] with its mysterious and treacherous aides, the U.S. sucks the blood of the unprotected people to the extent that no one in the world has the right to live except it and its satellites. Iran which has decided to cut ties with this Great Satan in every respect, is now being faced with this imposed war. The U.S. has forced Iraq to shed the blood of our youths. It has forced the countries under its domination to damage us by imposing an economic siege against us... We are fighting with the U.S. and today she is manipulating the Iraqi government."<sup>116</sup>

Ironically, based on a recorded conversation with his inner circle discovered in the Iraqi archives after the US invasion of 2003, Saddam believed that the Iranian revolution was part of an American plot to justify intervention in the Persian Gulf.<sup>117</sup>

## Lebanese Hizballah

The Khomeinist group most famous for violent extremism against the imaginary enemy is not the government of Iran, but the Lebanon-based extremist group Lebanese Hizballah (hereafter just "Hizballah"). The group was co-founded by Iran's ambassador to Syria Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, and Iranian diplomats and operatives held key posts in Hizballah's hierarchy in its early stages.<sup>118</sup> The leadership of Lebanese Hizballah followed Khomeini's line from Governance of the Jurist, placing themselves under the leadership of Khomeini, the *faqih*.<sup>119</sup>

The group, often operating under the alias Islamic Jihad, carried out a number of high-casualty suicide attacks in Lebanon against the Israelis. As the journal of an arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps has noted: "Although the number of martyrdom operations [of Hizballah] involving car bombs was only twelve, these operations have been widely recognized as an outstanding method of Islamic resistance."<sup>120</sup>

What were they resisting? The obvious answer was the Israeli army occupying parts of Lebanon (which it invaded in 1982), but Hizballah's Iranian Supreme Leader, to which they professed allegiance, did not believe that the ultimate enemy in Lebanon was Israel, but its imperialist boss, the United States. Khomeini had initially stated that America had gotten Israel to attack Lebanon to distract Iran from their war against Iraq: "it was made by America. That is,

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<sup>116</sup> Khomeini, "Imam Khomeini's Message to Hajj Pilgrims," in *The Dawn of the Islamic Revolution*, pp. 293-294.

<sup>117</sup> Williamson Murray, Kevin Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War A Military and Strategic History*, (Cambridge University Press 2014), p. 89.

<sup>118</sup> Daniel Byman, *A High Price: The Triumphs and Failures of Israeli Counterterrorism*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp 210-212.

<sup>119</sup> Jason Wimberly, "Wilayat al-Faqih in Hizballah's Web of Concepts: A Perspective on Ideology," *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 51, Issue 5, 2015, p. 692. Available at [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00263206.2015.1012507?casa\\_token=uHEly5HoYCM AAAA A:zX0bKtmb18xCwaDccwNkIM2R-Y4IDIsziOKjeK67CLHSBI-NtqIL1-hlwpMPz-EeGXzbWKLfGQ](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00263206.2015.1012507?casa_token=uHEly5HoYCM AAAA A:zX0bKtmb18xCwaDccwNkIM2R-Y4IDIsziOKjeK67CLHSBI-NtqIL1-hlwpMPz-EeGXzbWKLfGQ). Accessed March 3, 2019.

<sup>120</sup> "معرفی کتاب: حزب الله لبنان، خط مشی، گذشته و آینده آن" (Book Review: Lebanese Hizballah, Its Policies Past and Future), مطالعات راهبردی بسیج (Basij Strategic Studies) Issue 29, Winter 2005, p. 123

it sent its own lackey to attack Lebanon.”<sup>121</sup> America, as the evident ringleader of the imperialist powers in Lebanon and a close ally of Israel, was the ultimate target of Khomeini’s invective when discussing Lebanon and Palestine:

“From the beginning of the struggle, the cases of Lebanon and Palestine have been our main goals and have not been isolated from Iranian issues... Since the region is at the forefront of the popular Islamic movement, the United States has launched initiatives to cut the helpless people of the region off from their destiny, and unfortunately some governments help them... Even if America would put forward a 100% Islamic-humanitarian plan, we would not believe that they would step it up for our peace and interests. If the US and Israel say ‘There is no God but God’ we will not accept it, because they are after our heads. Those who talk about peace want to bring war to the region...”<sup>122</sup>

In the mid-1980s Hizballah began to grow in numbers and influence, transforming from a small group of militants into a structured military force.<sup>123</sup> Hizballah became the poster child of Islamic terrorism in the 1980s and 90s, carrying out hijackings and bomb attacks in the Middle East, Europe, and beyond. This is not the place to discuss the complex history of Hizballah and its various attacks and extensive propaganda apparatus. Suffice it to say that Hizballah’s activities are diverse and while it is best known for its suicide attacks and guerilla warfare, it is also a political party and a provider of social services in Lebanon.<sup>124</sup> It is now (as of 2019) a major political party in Lebanon. However, it is still not an independent organization. The lion’s share of Hizballah’s financial support is said to come from Iran, supplemented by donations from supporters and revenues from illegal enterprises and other sources.<sup>125</sup> There is also still a theological/ideological chain linking Hizballah to the Iranian leadership. Hizballah is an avowedly Khomeinist organization, believing strongly in the truth of Khomeini’s theory of the *velayat-e faqih*. The current leader of Hizballah Hassan Nasrallah once said “the subject of the *velayat-e faqih* and the Imamate is at the heart of our religious doctrine, and any offense to it is an offense to our religion.”<sup>126</sup> As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, belief in Khomeini’s *velayat-e faqih* requires belief in immensely powerful Jewish/Imperialist conspiracies against Islam which prevented the emergence of the *velayat-e faqih* earlier in Islamic history. Otherwise Khomeini is an upstart innovator inventing new doctrine.

The 1985 Hizballah Manifesto, published when the organization was just emerging from the shadows, demonstrates the organizations loyalty to the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*, its belief, shared by Khomeini, that Lebanon’s travails were the work of an American anti-Islamic conspiracy and that Israel was the cat’s paw of the US. It also contemptuously rejects the label

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<sup>121</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, امام صحیفه, (Pages of The Imam), Vol. 16. p. 351. Available at <https://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahife-imam-khomeini/vol/16/title/116>. Accessed March 3, 2019.

<sup>122</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, امام صحیفه, (Pages of The Imam), Vol. 15. p. 339. Available at <https://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahife-imam-khomeini/vol/15/title/163>. Accessed March 3, 2019.

<sup>123</sup> Lt. Col. Jeffrey O. Goodes, Maj Sharon Tosi Moore, “Hizballah: The Party of God,” *Joint Center for Operational Analysis*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, December 2007, p. 5. Available at [https://archive.org/details/DTIC\\_ADA519817/page/n9](https://archive.org/details/DTIC_ADA519817/page/n9). Accessed March 3, 2019.

<sup>124</sup> Byman, p. 230

<sup>125</sup> Levitt, p. 357.

<sup>126</sup> Levitt, p. 357.

of being merely Islamic fundamentalists concerned with morals and theology. The document is quite clear that Hizballah's main purpose is to combat the US and its allies, and it eschews acts of petty terrorism against bars etc.:

"We obey the orders of one leader, wise and just, that of our tutor and faqih (jurist) who fulfills all the necessary conditions: Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini... when it becomes necessary to carry out the Holy War, each of us takes up his assignment in the fight in accordance with the injunctions of the Law, and that in the framework of the mission carried out under the tutelage of the Commanding Jurist.

The US has tried, through its local agents, to persuade the people that those who crushed their arrogance in Lebanon and frustrated their conspiracy against the oppressed (mustad'afin) were nothing but a bunch of fanatic terrorists whose sole aim is to dynamite bars and destroy slot machines. Such suggestions cannot and will not mislead our umma, for the whole world knows that whoever wishes to oppose the US, that arrogant superpower, cannot indulge in marginal acts which may make it deviate from its major objective. We combat abomination and we shall tear out its very roots, its primary roots, which are the US. All attempts made to drive us into marginal actions will fail, especially as our determination to fight the US is solid.

"We see in Israel the vanguard of the United States in our Islamic world. It is the hated enemy that must be fought until the hated ones get what they deserve. This enemy is the greatest danger to our future generations and to the destiny of our lands, particularly as it glorifies the ideas of settlement and expansion, initiated in Palestine, and yearning outwards to the extension of the Great Israel, from the Euphrates to the Nile."<sup>127</sup>

## After Khomeini

Ruhollah Khomeini died in 1989 and was succeeded by his protege Ali Khamenei. Khomeini's doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* is still the ideological foundation of the regime. As long as the Iranian government is beholden to Khomeini's teaching it will have to be beholden to an essential part of that teaching, a precursor to everything else: the existence of one or two massive multi-generational conspiracies against Islam, which today mainly manifest themselves in the American and Israeli governments. Anyone who claims Khomeini's mantle as a leader of the Islamic Republic must also accept his belief in massive anti-Islamic conspiracies. Under a monarchy, the monarch might be a conspiracy theorist, as Mohammad Reza Pahlavi certainly was,<sup>128</sup> but this official paranoia could pass with the death of the king. The leader of any state could be a conspiracy theorist, but a conspiracy theory is at the foundation of the Islamic Republic's own claim to legitimacy. This belief has and will continue to complicate its relations with foreign powers that it believes are participating in this self-conscious conspiracy against Islam and therefore against the Islamic Republic. If one insists that the conspiracy does not exist, there is always the tried-and-true reply, used by conspiracy theorists for centuries, that

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<sup>127</sup> According to a translation available via the Council on Foreign Relations, this program was originally published on 16 February 1985 and also read by the organization's spokesman at the al-Ouzai Mosque in west Beirut. This is from a "slightly abridged translation" from the Jerusalem Quarterly from 1988. Full translation available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20150924003127/http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/open-letter-hizballah-program/p30967>. Accessed March 3, 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, p. 128.



those denying it are working on behalf of the Grand Conspiracy. As the current Supreme Leader Khamenei said in a 2017 speech:

“Some people deny the existence of the enemy. When we speak about an enemy, such individuals say, ‘You are suffering from an illusion, a conspiracy illusion.’ In my opinion, bringing up this conspiracy illusion is a conspiracy in itself. In order to decrease sensitivities, they say, ‘What is the enemy? Which enmity?’

What we are saying is that America is the enemy of the Revolution. It is in the nature of global imperialism to show enmity towards a system such as the Islamic Republic. Their interests are 180 degrees different from each other. Global imperialism is after showing treachery, waging wars, creating and organizing terrorist groups, suppressing freedom-seeking groups and exerting pressure over the oppressed.

...Who is the enemy? Now, some people will say, ‘It is clear. As soon as he mentions the word “the enemy”, it is clear that he means America, the Zionists and the like. He has a conspiracy illusion.’ But this is not a conspiracy illusion, rather it is seeing and having full knowledge of conspiracy. When I see conspiracy and when I am witness to it, I cannot hide it from you. So, I should discuss it with you.”<sup>129</sup>

## Conclusion

Given Khomeini’s reticence to discuss his sources and influences, it is difficult to trace the influence of specific previous iterations of the Grand Conspiracy Theory on Khomeini’s thought. However, the importance of the Grand Conspiracy Theory is clear in his main work *Government of the Jurist* and in many of his statements about a massive conspiracy against Islam and specifically against his doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*. Not only is the influence of the Grand Conspiracy Theory clear, but Khomeini’s claim to have “re-discovered” the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* rests on the idea that Jewish and “imperialist” conspirators had worked for centuries to distort Islam and lead Muslims away from this “self-evident” doctrine. If one dispenses with the Grand Conspiracy Theory then the innovative nature of Khomeini’s doctrine is undeniable.

Upon achieving power Khomeini and his followers continued to interpret events as being influenced by a massive American-Zionist conspiracy targeting Iran. This belief has continued to the present day, with the Iranian government and its main proxy in the region Lebanese Hizballah militating and fighting against this imaginary conspiracy. The Grand Conspiracy Theory is demonstrably important both in the ideology of the Islamic Republic, but also features in its continuing propaganda.

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<sup>129</sup> “Bringing up ‘illusion of conspiracy’ is a conspiracy in itself: Ayatollah Khamenei” March 27, 2017, Khamenei.ir. Available at <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/4710/Bringing-up-illusion-of-conspiracy-is-a-conspiracy-in-itself>. Accessed March 3, 2019.