

## Lebanon: An Iranian Doctrine We Can Do Without

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When Hizbullah's secretary general, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, declared last week that he did not favor the creation of an Islamic state in Lebanon, because Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei didn't approve of such a scheme, he provoked more fears than assurances among Lebanese.

Nor did it reassure anyone that the vice president of Lebanon's Higher Shiite Council, Sheikh Abdel-Amir Qabalan, stepped up soon afterward to say that the principle of wilayat al-faqih, the notion of the guardianship of the jurisconsult, which effectively grants dominant religious and temporal power to Khamenei, "does not work out" in Lebanon anyway.

Every Shiite believer is requested to "emulate" a religious scholar of high status, known as a mujtahid or marjaa. Emulation, or taqlid, can be cross-national, provided that it is restricted to issues of faith only.

However, in his work on Islamic government, the late Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, expanded the jurisdiction of mujtahids over their followers to include, in addition to issues of faith, issues of a political, social and economic nature. Khomeini not only expanded the role of mujtahids, he also centralized them in a hierarchy with the supreme leader at the top. As it stands, Khomeini's centralization was a breach of the fundamental Shiite practice of ijtihaad, under which believers have the liberty of choosing the scholars they wish to follow.

By concentrating all the powers of Shiite scholars in the hands of the supreme leader and expanding them to cover all aspects of the lives of believers, Khomeini, and now Khamenei, became all-powerful. Khomeini thus established himself and his successors as the undisputed leaders of Shiites around the world. The orders of the supreme leader trickle down through the hierarchy in the form of a religious mandate, taklif sharii. Disobeying such orders is tantamount to disobeying Shiite teachings.

Wilayat al-faqih is an absolutist ideology that is supposed to apply to Shiites around the world, albeit with a hidden Persian imperial expansionistic agenda. Nasrallah perhaps had good intentions when he assured the Lebanese that Khamenei did not want to see an Islamic state in Lebanon. But by doing so, Nasrallah signaled that he would follow the orders of the Iranian leader on Lebanese issues. What happens if Khamenei wants something different in Lebanon? What happens if he insists on defeating America in Lebanon, or wiping Israel off the map? Is there a Lebanese consensus on such issues? Or will Nasrallah follow Khamenei's agenda even if it goes against the Lebanese consensus?

As for those Shiite clerics who disagree with Iran's ayatollahs on wilayat al-faqih, such as Qabalan, it is never enough to merely say that Lebanon cannot sustain the doctrine, because what might not be viable today might very well become viable sometime in the future. Qabalan should have expressed his fundamental opposition to wilayat al-faqih, saying that stern diktats sent down from Iran do not apply to the Shiites of Lebanon, who value their Lebanese patriotism and belonging.

Non-Shiite Lebanese have every right to fear that Hizbullah, if Khamenei has a change of heart in accordance with Iran's national interests, might ask Nasrallah to expand Hizbullah's mini-state. After all, a few weeks ago Hizbullah gave the Lebanese a taste of what it was willing to do. And there may not be many Shiites in a position to disagree with Iran. The Lebanese cleric, Grand Ayatollah Mohamed Hussein Fadlallah, who is a mujtahid, also opposes Khamenei's leadership on issues of faith. However, because the financial interests of his philanthropic projects are scattered throughout Hizbullah's mini-state, it is very unlikely that he would stand up against Khamenei when it comes to matters of politics.

If Hizbullah is sincere about accepting Lebanese pluralism and seeks to loosen its grip on the Shiites, then it should start by restoring to his position the mufti of Tyre and Jabal Amel, Ali Amin, who was recently pushed out of office during Hizbullah's attack on its rivals, and whose home was occupied by opposition toughs. Amin opposes the notion of wilayat al-faqih, and has been shunned by many within his community for being critical of Hizbullah. If Hizbullah truly wants pluralism, then the isolation of Amin proves the contrary, and can only further raise the anxieties of those many Lebanese who have every right to be suspicious of the party and of its regional loyalties and agendas.

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