

# **Processes of error, deviation, correction and convergence in Muslim political thought**

**Kalim Siddiqui**

With introduction by

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## Introduction

There is near unanimity among Muslims that the *Ummah* today is experiencing great difficulties; it is also widely understood that the roots of these difficulties can be found in our history, particularly our early history. On the question of corrective measures, however, there is little consensus. Some Muslims believe that Islamic political parties, participating in elections organized under the secular systems that now dominate in Muslim countries, can bring about an Islamic socio-political order. Others argue for revolutionary change but are unclear about how this can be brought about. A proper understanding of the past and the mistakes that have contributed to our present condition is a prerequisite for corrective action for the future.

In this paper, *Processes of error, deviation, correction and convergence in Muslim political thought*, first published in 1989,<sup>1</sup> Dr Kalim Siddiqui takes a historical approach to understanding the fundamental intellectual problem facing Muslims. He was among the few Muslims scholars of the modern era who have been able to see through the fog of confusion and offer insights that help us to understand our past and suggest ways forward. He starts by stating that deviation within Islam is mostly error accumulated over a long period of time that has led to unacceptable results. Since Islam represents the whole truth, it is powerful enough to produce its own answers to the ills afflicting society. In the past this function was

performed by the succession of Prophets sent by Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* to the various peoples on earth; with the end of the Prophetic mission with the last and final Messenger of Allah, responsibility for this task rest with individuals and movements guided by Islam. The 'act' of establishing the Islamic state comes at the end of a long process of corrective action among those 'lost' within Islam. This point is crucial for understanding the process of error, deviation and correction among Muslims. Those who have accepted values outside Islam cannot be expected to be able to lead the *Ummah* out of the social and political problems created by deviation from Islam; hence, in Dr Siddiqui's view, they are unfit to offer any solutions or govern Muslims.

Having outlined a theoretical framework, he goes on to examine the very different historical experiences of the two major theological and intellectual traditions in Islam from its early days, the Sunnis and the Shi'i. While the Sunnis have remained mentally frozen because of their failure to embark on the corrective process, and the results of this can be seen in most Muslim countries, the Shi'is of Iran have succeeded in bringing about an Islamic Revolution led by *ulama* and aimed at re-establishing an Islamic socio-political order in the country. Dr Siddiqui views the Islamic Revolution not through the narrow prism of sectarianism but on the broad canvas of history. He is among the few scholars to transcend the sectarian barrier by not relying on the sources of only one side; he is equally at ease with Shi'i and Sunni literature, considering both to be equally valid. This is a refreshing change from the approach of so many otherwise learned scholars who are unable to rise above the particular perspective of their own school of thought. The mistake made by most Muslims – of all schools of thought – is to assume that their own understanding represents the totality of Islam; it is this blinkered approach this is the biggest cause of disunity and conflict in the *Ummah*.

Dr Siddiqui suggests that the origins of the Islamic revolution must be sought not in contemporary Iran, but in the initial rejection by the Shi'is of the political legitimacy of the Banu Umayya who turned the *khilafah* into *mulukiyyah*. The Sunnis, instead of recognising this as a loss of legitimacy, regarded it as merely a decline in the quality of leadership which would be rectified over time. This was a fundamental error that they repeated and compounded through Muslim history, resulting in the fatal weakness of the Muslim polities and the subsequent political decline of the *Ummah*. The results can be seen in the political and moral decay in Muslim societies and the emergence of colonial powers to dominate the world of Islam. The post-colonial emergence of Muslim nation-States is merely the same domination in another form.

Having rejected *mulukiyyah*, the Shi'is also remained in the political wilderness until the victory of the *usuli ulama* over the *akhbaris* in the mid-eighteenth century. Their argument was over a technical point, but it had profound implications for Shi'i political thought. The *akhbaris* maintained that during the *ghaibah* (occultation) of the Twelfth Imam, it was not permissible for religious scholars to engage in the use of reason to enact a certain judgement; all that could be done was to have recourse to hadith literature and to derive answers from it. The *usulis* argued in favour of independent reasoning, holding that this function could be performed by qualified religious scholars called *marja'e taqlid*. It was after the victory of the *usulis* that *maraje* emerged and the doors to *ijtihad* were opened. Dr Siddiqui considers this to be the first corrective step in the political thought of the Shi'is. As long as the *maraje* did not exercise direct political authority, there was no need for a single *marja* to emerge as leader. While exercising enormous influence over the masses, they considered their function to be merely to limit the illegitimacy of the rulers in the absence of the Twelfth Imam. This, however, again led to an accumulation of

unacceptable results, and forced a second corrective measure: the establishment of the Islamic state even in the absence of the Twelfth Imam. The process through which the state was established was the Islamic Revolution.

Dr Siddiqui argues that the act of establishing the Islamic state appears to be necessary for the successful transition to the role of the 'central corrective agent' to end error and deviation. He finds proof for this in the Seerah of the Prophet (*saw*) itself. During his life in Makkah, the Prophet brought relatively few people to Islam; after the establishment of the Islamic state in Madinah, Islam spread rapidly throughout the Arabian peninsula. Dr Siddiqui stresses that 'Islam is incomplete without the Islamic state,' and that Islam is not only a 'message' but also a 'method' – a point, unfortunately, lost on most Islamic political parties.

Returning to his central thesis, that even a small error leads to unacceptable results, Dr Siddiqui then examines the implications of Imam Khomeini's *fatwa* of January 1988, which stipulates that the powers of the Islamic state take precedence over the secondary precepts of Islam. This *fatwa* was necessitated by the limitations imposed on the powers of the Islamic state in the absence of a direct conceptual link with the Prophet's state in Madinah. Unless the Islamic state in Iran was a continuation of that original Islamic state in Madinah, it would not be able to exercise authority in many vital matters. With this *fatwa*, the Imam brought Shi'i political thought to within a few decades of the Prophet's state in Madinah, freeing Muslims of the burden of the accumulated errors of their history. It also brought the Imam's understanding of the Islamic state based on the Shi'i historic experience – very close to the classical Sunni understanding of the *khilafah*. Unfortunately, most Sunni *ulama*, having lost sight of that understanding themselves through centuries wandering in the wilderness as a result of their deviation from it, fail to grasp this point. The Islamic state can neither be Shi'i nor Sunni; it

is either Islamic or it is not, according to Dr Siddiqui. This is the important lesson that emerges from Imam Khomeini's *fatwa* of 1988, as Dr Siddiqui sees it.

While lamenting the lack of understanding among Sunni *ulama* and their ready acceptance of patronage from rulers of dubious credentials, Dr Siddiqui cautions against any group falling prey to the claim of holding the whole truth, as well as calling upon both Shi'i and Sunni *ulama* to grasp the opportunity offered by the Islamic Revolution to bring about similar changes in other parts of the world. He warns that if no revolutions occur elsewhere within the next 50 to 100 years, then the Islamic Revolution must also be considered only a partial success, and that the errors within it would have to be rectified in order to repeat its achievement elsewhere. For him, history is the real test of any postulate; it spares no one, and even a small error can lead, over a prolonged period of time, to major deviation producing unacceptable results. By compromising with *mulukiyyah*, the Sunnis allowed an error to lead to major deviations in Muslim political thought. Its devastating consequences can be seen in the Muslim nation-States that litter the landscape of the Muslim world.

These ideas are as fresh today as when they were first articulated in 1989. A clear understanding of the reality is essential to initiate corrective action. Our understanding of the world must be rooted in divine knowledge, exemplified by the Sunnah and Seerah of the noble Messenger of Allah. His method is the only way to implement his message. Dr Siddiqui calls for us to evaluate our actions in light of the Prophet's Seerah.<sup>2</sup> Our success will depend on our proximity to the Prophet's Seerah; those who deviate from it invite disaster. The Muslim *Ummah*, with the exception of the Islamic state in Iran, appears to be guilty of dereliction of its Islamic and historical obligations; but even the Islamic revolution will remain

only a partial success unless the processes of correction and convergence are repeated in other parts of the *Ummah*.

This paper outlines Dr Siddiqui's understanding of Muslim history, developed over several decades, which are the essence of his political ideas. For Muslims struggling everywhere to change the political and social problems confronting us, this paper offers exciting insights and ideas, and suggestions for conceptualizing the problems facing us. It is especially useful for those in the 'Sunni' part of the *Ummah*, as it places the Islamic Revolution in Iran in the broader context of Islamic history and enables its essence to be understood outside the Shi'i context of Iran's particular experience. Only by doing this will Sunnis be able to apply similar correctives to their own historic and political understanding. Dr Siddiqui's thought – as outlined in this paper, but also in his other writings – is like a road map showing them the way out of the cul-de-sac that is our contemporary historical plight. We can use it to change our future, or ignore it and remain in our present state of indignity and ignominy for the foreseeable future.

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### **Notes**

1. Kalim Siddiqui, *Processes of error, deviation, correction and convergence in Muslim political thought*, London: The Muslim Institute, 1989. Reprinted in Zafar Bangash (ed), *In Pursuit of the Power of Islam: Major writings of Kalim Siddiqui*, London: The Open Press, 1996. Also available online at [www.kalimsiddiqui.com](http://www.kalimsiddiqui.com).



2. On Dr Siddiqui's understanding of the Seerah, see his paper *Political Dimensions of the Seerah* (London: The Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought, 1998). This paper is available online at [www.kalimsiddiqui.com](http://www.kalimsiddiqui.com).

## **Processes of error, deviation, correction and convergence in Muslim political thought**

Bahira was a Christian monk living in Basra. Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle, had taken Muhammad, then 12 years old, to Al-Sham with a trading caravan. There Bahira recognized the signs of future prophethood in Muhammad, as told in Christian sources. Bahira advised the Prophet's uncle not to take Muhammad too far into al-Sham, for fear that the Jews might recognize the signs and try to harm the boy. Many years later in Makkah, another Christian, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a cousin of the Prophet's wife Khadija, also recognized the signs of impending prophethood in Muhammad's early experiences in the cave of Hira, and delivered a similar warning.

Neither Bahira nor Waraqa knew that Muhammad was the promised prophet, but both shared a sense of history derived from their religion, Christianity. They knew that a prophet would come; they did not know when or where or who he might be. Each recognized that the condition of jahiliyyah that prevailed in their time required the coming of a prophet. Bahira and Waraqa were relying on Christian sources that were, even in their time, unreliable. Today, 14 centuries after the completion of the Qur'an, the final message of Allah, about which there is no doubt, and after the coming

of the last Prophet, it should be easier to recognize signs foreshadowing current and future events.

How accurately we can do so depends on our understanding of the Islamic framework of history. For example, we do not know when Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* created the first man, Adam, who was also a prophet. But what we do know is that between Adam, the first Prophet, and Muhammad, the last Prophet, there were perhaps as many as 124,000 other prophets, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon them all. The point is that Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* clearly took great care and a very long time preparing the world for the coming of the last Prophet and for the completion of His message to mankind. All this cannot have been for a matter of about 1,400 years or thereabouts before the end of the world.

The view of history that we Muslims must take is that of course the end of the world will come, but its timing is known to Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* alone. He has not shared this knowledge with anyone, not even the prophets. It is therefore idle to speculate about it. In the meantime we must remember that, 1,400 years after the completion of prophethood and revelation, Islam has yet to create a world in the image of itself, according to the Creator's own prescription for the world and everything in it. Perhaps a more realistic view is that though Islam as a message and a model was completed 1,400 years ago, the main business of history, that is, bringing all mankind to Islam, is incomplete.

This raises another question: if the very long time before the completion of Islam was merely a 'preparatory period', how do we explain the last 1,400 years? The *jahiliyyah* before Islam was perhaps an insufficient experience for man to realize the consequences of deviating from Islam. It may be useful to view these 1,400 years as a practical demonstration of what happens to mankind, especially Muslims, when they deviate from the *sirat al-mustaqeem*. This could only be demonstrated *after* Islam had been completed, not before.

Perhaps the neo-*jahiliyyah* that prevails in the world today is just such a demonstration.

The deviation from Islam is of two sorts. There are those who never entered Islam, chose to fight it, and built for themselves a civilization and culture of *kufr* and *jahiliyyah*. Today this civilization of *kufr* and *jahiliyyah* is represented by the western civilization. This civilization is global and includes many non-western sub-cultures, such as the Chinese, Japanese and Indian sub-cultures. It also includes some residual religious traditions, for example post-Renaissance Christianity, zionist-Judaism and militant Hinduism, all of which insist upon repudiating and rejecting Islam. Lastly, the western civilization also includes those Muslims who have, under the influence of colonial domination, accepted the validity of secularism as a way of life. These Muslims comprise all the ruling classes in Muslim societies today, except in post-Revolutionary Iran. The second type of deviation is within Islam. Such deviation is spearheaded by those *ulama*, of all schools of thought, who, for whatever reason, have accepted and legitimized political, social, cultural and other systems that do not conform with the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, upon whom be peace. Examples of such deviation, including deviant theology, can be found everywhere.

However, deviation within Islam is mostly error that has accumulated with the passage of time. Such error is relatively easy to correct because the overall framework of Islam that binds the *Ummah* has not been breached.<sup>1</sup> The corrective power of Islam is represented by the inherent *taqwa* of even those who have erred. There have always existed *ulama*, of all schools of thought, who were willing and able to eliminate error and to bind the *Ummah* together.

The number of the so-called *ulama* committed to *fitnah* and permanent divisions in the *Ummah* has always been small, though vocal because they have also enjoyed the political patronage of rulers bent upon transforming error into long-term, even permanent,

deviation. This process of deviation began with Banu Umaiyyah and continues today under the Saudi regime. The nation-States established in the Muslim world by the colonial powers and their 'Muslim' agents are also designed to make our political deviation permanent.

Some 15 years ago we in the Muslim Institute set out to discover those in the *Ummah*, both *ulama* and ordinary Muslims, who would be prepared to participate in the task of research to determine the area within Islam where those suffering from internal error and deviation would be prepared to converge. Our instinct told us that the one single *Ummah*<sup>2</sup> could only be superficially and temporarily divided. Another instinctive hypothesis that guided us was that the error and subsequent divisions in the *Ummah* were primarily political and, therefore, temporary. This meant that the process of correction and convergence would have to be led either by the rewriting of Muslim political thought or by the 'big bang' effect of a major political event. We were naive enough to postulate that we could rewrite Muslim political thought and to hope that, some day, our formulations might generate a major political event.<sup>3</sup>

History, as we now know, had other ideas. Islam, despite error and deviations within it, is such a powerful system of beliefs and ideas that it was bound to produce its own answer to the ills of the *Ummah*. We should have known all along that Islam, if it was the Whole Truth from Allah, would also include within it the capacity to generate corrective processes at crucial moments in history. Before the coming of the last Prophet, upon whom be peace, this was done by successive prophets who appeared at intervals. Now the role of correction and convergence is performed by non-prophetic agents, such as individuals, movements and revolutions. Once motivated and activated by the historical situation, the corrective agents must have the power to move the entire body of Muslims, the *Ummah*, towards convergence at a central point within Islam. In recent times a number

of individuals, and the movements they inspired, have tried unsuccessfully to emerge in the role of the central corrective agents, but failed. Among these were Hasan al-Banna (founder of al-Ikhwan al-Muslimoon) and Maulana Abul Ala Maudoodi (founder of the Jama'at-e Islami). It would seem that the role of the central corrective agent can only be performed by the Islamic State. Those who failed, failed precisely because they could not establish the Islamic State. The act of establishing the Islamic State would appear to be necessary for a successful transition to the role of the central corrective agent to end error and deviation within the *Ummah*.

Support for this view is found in the *Seerah* of Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace. As an individual in Makkah the role of the Prophet was limited to bringing a handful of individuals to Islam. Yet even while in Makkah the Prophet sought and found State protection for his small band of followers. This is the significance of the migration of many early Muslims from Makkah to Abyssinia. Once, after the *hijrah* to Madinah, Islam had undergone transition to Statehood, the spread of Islam to the peninsula was rapid and total. Islam is incomplete without the Islamic State; there is no room for dispute on this point. It has far-reaching implications for the *da'wah* work undertaken by well-meaning Muslims, as well as for the *da'wah* work into which the energies of Muslims are being diverted today by those committed to the *status quo*. The Saudi regime in particular spends vast amounts of money on *da'wah* in order to absorb the energies of many Muslims throughout the world and to divert them into dead-end activity. But the chief instrument of *da'wah* is the Islamic State; *da'wah* without the Islamic State is like an invitation without an address.

The political nature of Islam and the Prophethood of Muhammad, upon whom be peace, was clearly understood by the Quraish of Makkah from the beginning. When the Quraish approached him with a 'deal' they also offered him kingship. The

delegation of the Quraish was led by Utbah ibn Rabiah. The incident is documented in all books of *Seerah*. The goal of Muhammad's Prophethood was not his personal power or kingship, but the transformation of the area into an Islamic State. Many years later Makkah fell to Islam as the result of a military expedition mounted by the Prophet from the Islamic State that had been consolidated around Madinah. It is the Islamic State that bears the main responsibility for *da'wah*.

The point that is obscured in modern, apologetic literature of Islam, and neatly side-stepped by the orientalist, is that Islam is not only a message, Islam is also a method. The message of Islam carried by the methods of pacifist Christian missionaries is unlikely to yield the desired results. Such an approach may help to turn Islam into a ritualized religion, but it cannot achieve the goals of Islam. The complete message of Islam includes the method of Islam. This is why there is so much emphasis in Islam on the *Sunnah* and the *Seerah* of the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace. And this is why the procedures and the historical processes required to establish the Islamic State are inseparable parts of Islam. Islam is incomplete without the Islamic State.

The 'Islamic parties' that emerged during the colonial period often did not grasp this essential point. They understood and presented Islam within the framework of European-style social democracy. For them the Islamic State was only a slightly updated and 'Islamized' version of the post-colonial nation-State. It only required them to win an election and 'come to power'. These 'Islamic' political parties did not realize that there was a colonial legacy to be undone and dismantled. In their simplistic thinking the 'Islamic State' of their conception would be built on the secular and nationalist foundations of the colonial independent State. What is undoubtedly true is that some of these political parties had – perhaps unwittingly – borrowed many of their ideas from sources outside Islam.<sup>4</sup>

The 'act' of establishing the Islamic State itself comes at the end of a prolonged process of corrective action amongst those 'lost' within Islam. In the Sunni tradition, one must admit, this corrective process has still hardly begun. Political thought in the Sunni tradition is still lost in the diversions caused by the 'Islamic parties', Arab nationalism, the Khilafat movement in India, and the easy availability of political patronage for most of the last 1,400 years.

In the Shi'i tradition, on the other hand, the first significant step in the right direction was taken early in their history, as rejection of compromise with existing political systems. Its roots go back to the rejection of Yazid's authority by Imam Husain and his subsequent *shahadah* at Karbala. The next major corrective step came many centuries later, after Iran had been converted to the Shi'i school of thought in the early part of the sixteenth century. It appeared as a debate among the Shi'i *ulama* on what seemed to be a technical matter. This debate, in the second half of the eighteenth century, was between two groups of *ulama* known as *usuli* and *akhbari*. The *akhbari* (or communicators) held the view that, during the *gha'ibah* (occultation) of the Twelfth Imam, it is not permissible for religious scholars to engage in the use of reason to enact a certain judgement, to apply the principles of the law to a specific problem or situation. All that could be done was merely to have recourse to *hadith* (hence the name *akhbari*), and by sifting *hadith* reach a conclusion about any particular issue. This school tended towards a total abolition of the discipline of jurisprudence. The *usuli ulama*, on the other hand, held that, during the absence of the Twelfth Imam, it was permissible to engage in independent reasoning. One qualified to do so was the *mujtahid*: he who uses his reason guided by principles of the *shari'ah* to make decisions acting upon which the general body of Muslims could solve their problems. All Muslims who are not *mujtahids* must follow the guidance of one who is. This is known as *taqleed*. The senior *mujtahids*, who came to be followed by large



numbers of Shi'i Muslims, were called *maraje* (singular *marja* or *marja'-i taqleed*). The argument was won by *usuli ulama* and the *akhbari* position was abandoned. Hamid Algar points out that 'the Revolution in Iran, at least the particular shape that it has taken, the form of leadership that it has enjoyed and continues to enjoy, would also be unthinkable without the triumph of the *usuli* position... in the eighteenth century.'<sup>5</sup>

The emergence of the *usuli ulama* can be described as the development of a self-correcting mechanism within the Shi'i tradition. How important this was for the world of Islam as a whole is only just beginning to become apparent. In the first phase of this self-correcting process, two things have happened: first the doors of *ijtihad* were thrown open; and second, there emerged *ulama*, the *maraje'-i taqleed*, who often exercised greater influence, even power, than many rulers. For all practical purposes the *maraje* came to represent an 'Islamic State' within the larger territorial State. The traditional Shi'i position, that all political power in the absence of the Twelfth Imam was illegitimate and should not be sought, was deep-rooted and the *maraje* functioned within the umbrella of the Qajar dynasty that had replaced the Safavids in 1795. Throughout this period, from 1795 to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the primary concern of the *ulama* of Iran was to limit the inevitable illegitimacy of the existing government. It was in this framework that Mirza Hasan Shirazi gave his famous *fatwa* in 1892 on the consumption of tobacco in Iran being *haram* if its production and marketing were undertaken by a British monopoly. The *ulama's* participation in the Constitutional Revolution in Iran (1905-1909) was also made possible by the wider concerns of the *usuli* school.

The otherwise powerful *usuli* establishment suffered from two weaknesses. The first was the senior *ulama's* self-imposed abstinence from seeking ultimate political authority; and the second was the multiplicity of the *maraje*. At any one time a number of Grand

Ayatullahs claimed large followings, and often competed among themselves for followers (*muqallideen*). The two handicaps are closely linked. So long as the *ulama* did not contemplate the exercise of supreme political power there was no need for a single leader, and so long as there was no single leader, a kind of *marja* of the *maraje*, the exercise of ultimate political authority could not be contemplated. These self-inflicted disabilities appeared so entrenched in Shi'i theology that the ruling classes, the dynasties (the Pahlavi since 1926) and their British and American backers, did not feel threatened from Qum. But the *usuli* revolution had also opened the doors of *ijtihad*. It was only a matter of time before the process of *ijtihad*, begun by *usuli ulama*, led to the ultimate step, in terms of Shi'i theology, of setting up the Islamic State in the absence of the Twelfth Imam. This is what we have come to call the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

The Sunni *ulama*, equally 'lost' within Islam, have still not begun the long and painful task of clearing away the debris of their failures, recovering from their self-inflicted disabilities, and breaking the habit of supine obedience to patronizing rulers. At the moment the worldwide network of 'court *ulama*' who serve the Saudi regime (and other secular governments) are the most error-ridden and deviant body of people lost within Islam. If the Sunni *ulama* would only lift the veil of their prejudice, they should see that Imam Khomeini has brought the Shi'i caravan back to the point where we all started in the first place. In a *fatwa* issued on January 6, 1988, Imam Khomeini said that Islamic government represents 'absolute sovereign power as delegated by Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* to the Prophet, upon whom be peace'.<sup>6</sup> This, said Imam Khomeini, 'is the most important of Divine precepts (*ahkam*) and takes precedence over all the other secondary Divine precepts'. Imam Khomeini added: 'If the powers of Islamic government are to be confined within the framework of secondary Divine precepts, then the form of Divine rule

and absolute sovereignty as delegated to the Prophet, upon whom be peace, would be a senseless and hollow phenomenon.' If this was so, he added, the legislative and administrative powers of Islamic government would be severely restricted. Imam Khomeini went on to give several examples of legislative, administrative, military and economic policies that would be impossible to implement if the Islamic government was bound by secondary Divine precepts. These included the acquisition of private property for major public works, such as new roads, compulsory military service, foreign trade, prohibition of hoarding, customs and excise, taxation and fair pricing of goods and services. Imam Khomeini then argued that 'Islamic government, which is part of the absolute sovereign power of Allah, Prophet, upon whom be peace, is one of the primary precepts of Islam and takes precedence over all the secondary precepts'. The concept that the political power exercised by the Prophet must be inherited in full by rulers who follow him has always been clear in Sunni thought. This is exactly how the *khulafa al-rashidoon* understood the source of their authority. The Islamic State is only an extension of the authority of the leader, who is a *khalifah* (*na'ib* or vicegerent) of the Prophet.

This *fatwa* from Imam Khomeini has completed the long process of corrective action within the Shi'i school that had been at the very heart of the *akhbari/usuli* controversy. It should be noted that some residual influence of the *akhbari* position still persists not only in Iran but to a much greater degree among the Shi'i *ulama* of Iraq, India, Pakistan and Bahrain and among their followers. The leading edge of Shi'i political thought, that of Imam Khomeini and his close associates, has emerged only since the death of Ayatullah Burujirdi in March 1962. It was only then that Ayatullah Khomeini began to give lectures on political issues critical of the Shah and exploring the possibility of government by *mujtahids*. He was repeatedly arrested during 1963 and exiled to Turkey the following

year. In 1965 he moved to Najaf, the great centre of Shi'i learning in Iraq. It was during a course of lectures on Islamic government delivered there in 1970 that he developed the concept of *vilayat-i faqih*. With his *fatwa* of January 6, 1988, it is probably no exaggeration to say that Imam Khomeini corrected the political deviation of the entire *Ummah* that began with the advent of the Umayyad rule. In terms of the legitimacy of the leadership of the Islamic State, Imam Khomeini restored the situation as it existed during the rule of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth of the *khulafa al-rashidoon*. This means that, for all practical purposes, in terms of State and politics in Islam, the *Ummah* has been returned to a point very close to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace.

During this very short period, from 1962 to 1990, history has moved at an extraordinary pace. Students of history are familiar with the leapfrogging relationship that exists between political ideas and political events. At times ideas run far ahead of events, and at other times events shape ideas. For example, the great *usuli* school that challenged and eventually defeated the *akhhbari* orthodoxy in Shi'i thought can be traced back to Allama Hilli (Jamaluddin Abu Mansur Hasan ibn Yusuf) in the fourteenth century. From the time of his death in 1325 to the triumph of the *usuli* ideas in Iran in the eighteenth century the pace of change was slow. In the nineteenth century in Iran the *usuli ulama*, especially the *maraje*, began to influence political events.<sup>7</sup> From 1978-79 until now virtually all political thought, Shi'i and Sunni, has been shaped by the events in Iran. The ideas and followers of Imam Khomeini are pushing the frontiers of *usuli* thought towards a total convergence of all political thought in Islam. It is possible that Imam Khomeini, like Allama Hilli before him, was himself not aware of all the wider implications of his ideas and *ijtihad*. It is almost certainly the case that the interpretation

of the Imam's *fatwa* on January 6, 1988, will be long debated by Shi'i and Sunni *ulama*, both inside and outside Iran.

However, at present and for the limited purpose of the argument developed in this paper, the realization that politically one part of the *Ummah* at least has achieved a position that puts it within two or three decades of the Prophet is an exhilarating experience. We are liberated from responsibility for at least some parts of our history. We can shed the guilt that haunts us for belonging to a tradition of continuous error and deviation. We can stop having to defend or justify what goes by the name of 'Islamic history' and dynastic *malukiyyah*. We can also 'black box' a great deal of the divisive theology written and promoted during this period.<sup>8</sup> This would allow a new kind of *usuli* revolution to spread to all schools of thought in Islam and to open up the doors of *ijtihad* in all traditions of thought. We can once again begin to feel historically closer to the Prophet, upon whom be peace. This newly achieved proximity, though largely a matter of perception, establishes new spiritual and intellectual links with the *Seerah* and the *Sunnah* of Muhammad, upon whom be peace.

Once we place ourselves within this time-frame close to the Prophet, virtually all subsequent sources of error and deviation in the *Ummah* disappear. The disabilities imposed by our long fruitless commitment to essentially indefensible positions also fade away; or at least the option of liberating ourselves from such historical handicaps is now available. Imam Khomeini had to endure resistance from conservative Shi'i *ulama* on his original *ijtihad* of the *vali-i faqih's* rulership in the absence of the Twelfth Imam. His decree that the *vali-i faqih* is the *khalifah (na'ib)* of the Prophet, and that the Islamic State, too, enjoys the same powers as conferred upon the Prophet by Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala*, wipes the slate clean for all Muslims, especially the *ulama*. Once this position is taken up, it does not matter whether one is Sunni or Shi'i. All positions within Islam

are valid and true, but none more so than the position that takes us closest to the Prophet's time, especially a position that enables us to establish a Leadership (and a State) that derives its authority as the *khalifah* (vicegerent) of the Prophet, upon whom be peace. Such is the capacity to generate self-corrective processes that exists within Islam.

But the process that leads to corrective action needs better understanding. Error and deviation within Islam soon begin to accumulate unacceptable results. It was this accumulation of unacceptable results that must have sparked off the *akhbari/usuli* controversy among the Shi'i *ulama* more than two centuries ago. The triumph of the *usuli* position clearly corrected most errors of earlier *ijtihad*, but not all. However, the opening of the doors to further and more fundamental *ijtihad* led to the emergence of *maraje* who filled the vacuum of leadership caused by the occultation of the Twelfth Imam. Once the role of leadership had been taken up by a small number of *maraje*, they were set on a course that would eventually produce a single leader. But a single leader in Islam is only possible within the framework of the political power of Islam established in the Islamic State. If the corrective process begun by the *usuli ulama* was to continue, then the eventual emergence of a single *marja* as the *marja* of the *maraje* was inevitable. And this could happen only within the framework of what we now call the Islamic Revolution in Iran, or the act of establishing the Islamic State. The process of *ijtihad* that preceded the Islamic Revolution, and the emergence of an Islamic State led by a *vali-i faqih*, produced, within ten years, a *fatwa* from Imam Khomeini to the effect that he, as *vali-i faqih*, and the Islamic State exercise authority as *khalifah* or *na'ib* of the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace.

The Imam's *fatwa* of January 6, 1988, could only come after the new Islamic State had experienced the difficulty, indeed the impossibility, of performing its proper executive, legislative and

judicial functions without the ultimate source of authority and power in Islam as *khalifah* of the Prophet. The absence of such authority from the *vali-i faqih* and the Islamic State was clearly an error, and the results of such error soon accumulated and were found to be unacceptable. In a sense the authority as *khalifah* already existed but had not been claimed or clearly understood. The Imam then made the authority explicit and unambiguous. Imam Khomeini did not, for reasons that can be guessed, put it in so many words, but the fact is that he then became *khalifah al-Rasool*, or vicegerent of the Prophet, upon whom be peace. We can now safely assume that the demise of what Dr Ali Shari'ati called Safavid Shi'ism is now all but complete, though some irritant traces of it in Shi'i rituals and culture will persist for some time. We have also seen that the act of establishing the Islamic State is the most powerful corrective agent in Islam. This is because, in the political process, even small errors soon lead to large and visible results that are clearly unacceptable. What this means is that error in matter of theology affects rituals and *ibadah* and can persist for a long time, or even for ever, without causing harm to Islam or the *Ummah*. Perhaps it is also true that within Islam a wide range of variations is possible in peripheral areas of *fiqh*. These variations do not amount to error or deviation. In actual error are those who allow such peripheral areas of *fiqh* to cause heated debate and controversy among Muslims.

In itself this diversity in Islamic practices does not usually lead to cumulative results that reach unacceptable levels. But this may happen in conditions where error and deviation on larger issues of leadership, State and politics in Islam reach dangerous levels, leading in turn to the disintegration of the *Ummah*. In conditions of extreme disintegration, such as those prevailing in parts of the *Ummah* today, these peripheral issues may also cause bloodshed. This is why the existence of any kind of Muslim rule, including *malukiyah* for the greater part of our history, did not allow peripheral issues to cause

bloodshed on a large scale. In India, for instance, open and bloody conflict between Shi'i and Sunni Muslims was unknown during Mughal rule. In recent years the disintegration of the polity in Pakistan has reached a similar stage, causing bloody conflicts among Muslims. It is widely suspected that the post-colonial secular rulers in Muslim nation-States deliberately create such conflicts in order to divert attention from the convergence of Islamic thought in matters of leadership, State and politics. This also explains the relentless propaganda against the Shi'i school of thought that has been unleashed by the West generally and by the secular Muslim rulers in particular. They know that their only chance of survival lies in their ability to obstruct and abort Islam's processes of corrective action, preventing them from reaching the Sunni areas of the *Ummah*.

The fact is that the process of correction of error and deviation within the Shi'i tradition is now almost complete, at least so far as Iran is concerned. Some parts of Shi'i opinion outside Iran are suspicious of the changes that Imam Khomeini's *ijtihad* has achieved. It is also known that within Iran there are *ulama* who have deep reservations. However, these are unlikely to halt the powerful forces of internally-generated corrective action. We must now outline in brief the degree of error and deviation within Islam that is found in the Sunni tradition.

The Sunni political experience is, of course, very different. For the Sunni Muslims there was no vacuum of leadership, only a gradual decline in its quality. The Sunni school recognizes the pre-eminence of the first four *khulafa*, the *khulafa al-rashidoon*. The qualitative change that occurred when Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan became, in his own words, the first *malik* (king) of the Muslims, is also known and recognized. There is no difference between the Shi'i and Sunni understanding of the events and issues that led to Imam Husain's *shahadah* at Karbala. The root of political error and subsequent deviation in the Sunni school lies in the easy acceptance and almost



automatic *bai'ah* that was given to rulers of known political deficiency and moral corruption. This happened because opposition to the established ruler came to be regarded a greater *fitnah* than the ruler's known deviation from the classical standards of private and moral excellence laid down in Islam. This gave many Sunni activists easy access to the courts of the rulers and to political patronage. Under these circumstances, and so long as Muslim rulers wielded considerable power and presided over vast empires, there was little pressure to re-examine established positions. The vastness of the Islamic empire and civilization, the emergence of large cities and seats of learning, and the political dominance of the world of Islam over all else, lulled Sunni Muslims into a false sense of security and self-righteousness. The initial error and deviation from Islam that *malukiyyah* represented was hidden by the rapid expansion and success of the political power of the Muslim States. The initial thrust that was given to the political history of the Muslims by the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and the *khulafa al-rashidoon* was used by subsequent rulers to hide their own error and deviation. It was inevitable, therefore, that eventually the error and deviation heralded by *malukiyyah* would multiply and lead Muslim society inexorably towards moral decay and political and military decline. This decline was not obvious so long as Muslim armies kept the enemies of Islam at bay or recovered any ground that was lost, such as the recapture of Jerusalem from the Christians by Salah al-Din Ayyubi.

The full extent of the cumulative damage that had been caused to *dar al-Islam* during hundreds of years of progressive decline and decay under *malukiyyah* became obvious when the European powers began to emerge in their imperialist role. In a hundred years or so before the defeat of the Uthmaniyyah State in the 1914-18 war, virtually the whole of the world of Islam had passed into European hands. After 1919 the European powers consolidated their hold on the Arab heartland of Islam by dividing it up into client States.

Mustafa Kamal completed the demolition of the last political remnant of *dar al-Islam* by formally abolishing the *khilafah* in 1924. The cumulative effect of initial error and deviation had reached its logical conclusion and Islam had lost all semblance of political and military presence in the affairs of mankind. No result could be more unacceptable. But the habit of supine obedience that the Sunni *ulama* had cultivated during several centuries was not to be abandoned at once. Even the realization that a catastrophe had overtaken them has been slow to emerge. Apart from the popular emotions stirred by the Khilafat Movement in India during 1919-22, there was little reaction among the Sunni *ulama*. Their immediate response appears to have been in line with their traditional role. They busied themselves with trying to seek political patronage from the new political order from the new Saudi 'kingdom' in the tradition of *malukiyyah*, and from the new nation-States, and even from the colonial States of the infidels. These rulers were only too anxious to provide these *ulama* with a sense of security and political patronage in return for political subservience. The two men who made valiant but futile attempts to revive the political fortunes of Islam were Hasan al-Banna and Abul Ala Maudoodi. We should note, however, that neither was a traditional *alim*.

They and their parties, al-Ikhwan al-Muslimoon and the Jama'at-e Islami, also ended up on the side of the *status quo*, enjoying extensive and lucrative patronage from Saudi Arabia. Even the 'Islamic State' of their conception differed little from the welfare-oriented, liberal and democratic States of Europe. With little or no support from the Sunni *ulama*, such attempts did not amount to much. We have to admit that the kind of corrective action that began with the success of the *usuli* school among the Shi'i *ulama* has yet to begin in the Sunni tradition. It can be argued that the nature and degree of error and deviation in the Shi'i school was different from those in the Sunni school. There is weight in this argument. But there

are three common features that should be noted without attempting to find their sources in theological formulations. These are:

1. The *akhbari ulama* during the Safavid dynasty in Iran (1502-1747) were as open to political manipulation by the rulers as Sunni *ulama* at any time in history, including the modern period.
2. The error and deviance in the Shi'i school had left Shi'i *ulama* politically as ineffective as the Sunni *ulama* of today.
3. The Shi'i *ulama*, before the *usuli* revolution, had closed the doors on *ijtihad* as firmly as the Sunni *ulama* have done up to the present time.

The revolution in Iran would not have been possible without the prior clearing up, through *ijtihad*, of a number of issues peculiar to Shi'i theology. It is beyond the scope of this paper to list the issues awaiting *ijtihad* by Sunni *ulama*. Nor is it possible to speculate about what it would take for an intellectual movement to emerge in the Sunni school comparable in scope and extent to the *usuli* movement in the Shi'i school. Many in the Sunni school would argue that their deviation was only an error of judgement that led to compromise with *malukiyyah*. Be that as it may, the fact is that the effect of that compromise on Sunni political thought and behaviour has been devastating. The result is that most Sunni *ulama* today suffer from all the failures of understanding of political issues that were common among *akhbari* Shi'i *ulama* before the *usuli* revolution.

The modern *malukiyyah*, represented by the Saudi 'royal family', and all the other secular, nationalist regimes that rule over colonial-style nation-States in Sunni areas, would dearly like the Sunni *ulama* to wait for an *usuli* revolution of their own. This would give the rulers a comfortable breathing-space of at least two hundred years; long enough, in their view, for the secular culture and civilization of their choice to take root and to destroy the influence of

Islam on succeeding generations. The Sunni *ulama* must avoid this trap at all costs. There are several good reasons for not waiting for an *usuli* revolution in the Sunni school. There is no reason to believe that every part of the *Ummah* has to undergo a similar experience before error and deviation can be corrected. The Shi'i *ulama* of two hundred years ago did not have the advantage of having seen and experienced an Islamic Revolution in another part of the *Ummah*. They had to generate corrective action from within the Shi'i school; hence the *usuli* commitment to *ijtihad*. In addition, two hundred years ago, while the Shi'i *ulama* had experienced the total absence of political power, the Sunni *ulama* had not yet experienced the total collapse of what they regarded as the Islamic State. Today the Sunni school has not only experienced the total absence of the centralized power of Islam, it has also experienced prolonged political subservience of all parts of the *Ummah* to *kufir*. The business of terminating the dominance of *kufir* over Islam and the *Ummah* is too urgent to require an intellectual revolution to precede it. Finally, perhaps one *usuli* revolution in any one part of the *Ummah* is enough for all parts of the *Ummah*. This is because the corrective process within Islam, once started, must lead those engaged in it to common ground in Islam acceptable to all Muslims. It would not be a corrective process in Islam if it were to stop at the boundaries of a particular school of thought.

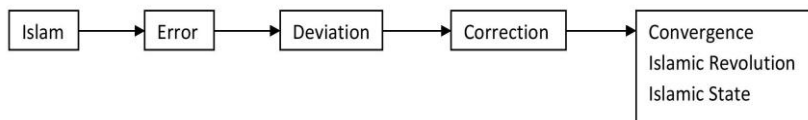
In the case of Iran we have seen that, for a long time, *ijtihad* by *usuli ulama* only affected issues most commonly identified with the Shi'i school. Later the same process became Islamic rather than Shi'i. When the Islamic movement in Iran mounted its assault to bring down *malukiyah*, the final act of establishing the Islamic State had begun. The final stages of transition from the Islamic movement to the Islamic State have been called the Islamic Revolution. The demands of the Islamic movement and the Islamic State are such that these stages cannot be negotiated successfully by those adhering to a

single school of thought. The act of establishing the Islamic State is such a liberating experience that all other boundaries within Islam become irrelevant and insignificant. At first this realization comes only to the senior leadership, while the rank and file celebrate the victory of their own school of thought. The Islamic State, therefore, cannot be a 'Shi'i' or a 'Sunni' State. Either it is an Islamic State or it is not. To be an Islamic State it must be acceptable as such to all Muslims; and, to be acceptable to all Muslims, the leader of the State must rule as the *khalifah* or *na'ib* (vicegerent) of the Prophet, upon whom be peace. That was the point of the *fatwa* of Imam Khomeini on January 6, 1988.

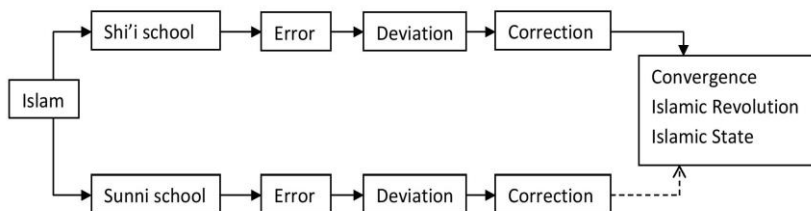
With this *fatwa*, Imam Khomeini has sent a clear message to the *Ummah* at large that, whatever the Shi'i origins of the long process leading to the Islamic Revolution, the State that has been established in Iran is 'Islamic' within the meaning of the term as it is understood by Muslims of all schools of thought in Islam. This *fatwa* of the Imam represents another Revolution within the Shi'i school. Imam Khomeini's *fatwa* also confirmed the view of the Islamic Revolution that we in the Muslim Institute have held from the beginning. It was our view in 1980 that the first Islamic State, established after such a long gap in history, would be a 'primitive model' of the ideal.<sup>9</sup> And so it has proved. The corrective process within Islam has continued during the early years of the new Islamic State. In the next phase one would expect the Islamic State of Iran to begin to take a broader view of the historical situation from the point of view of the *Ummah* and the global Islamic movement. In the first decade after the Revolution, the bureaucracy of the Islamic State has remained largely 'Iranian' and 'national' in outlook, and the *ulama* have concentrated their attention on cultivating the traditional Shi'i connections outside Iran. But the senior leadership, especially Imam Khomeini and Ayatullah Montazeri, have spoken of the *Ummah*, the global Islamic movement and the need for world Islamic Revolution

in ringing terms. This was a constant theme of Imam Khomeini's speeches and messages. His message on the occasion of Hajj in 1407AH, deals with this subject in great detail and runs to more than 20,000 words. The English text was published in *Kayhan International*, August 1, 1987. In the decade that lies ahead, State policy should increasingly begin to reflect the vision of the senior leadership.

History has now reached a point where it is possible to draw a simple diagram to represent it:



For slightly greater detail, the same diagram may be drawn to show the separate progressions of the Shi'i and Sunni schools:



It would be futile, indeed quite wrong, to attempt to identify actual points of error or degrees of deviation in the two great schools of thought in Islam. What is obvious, however, is that in the Shi'i school the corrective process began with the *usuli* revolution and the result is not only the convergence of thought but also the emergence of the Islamic State. In the Sunni school there have been numerous attempts at correction. The most recent of these were by the two

best-known 'Islamic parties', al-Ikhwan al-Muslimoon and the Jama'at-e Islami. Neither represented the kind of *usuli* rethinking of fundamental issues achieved by the Shi'i *ulama*. The Ikhwan and the Jama'at were purely political responses; they failed to break out of the stranglehold of modern political thought. The Shi'i *ulama*, leading the Muslim *Ummah* in Iran, have also established a living, dynamic, versatile, powerful and *muttaqi* Islamic State through an Islamic Revolution. The area of convergence, defined and developed into an Islamic State, is now acting like a magnet on the political thought and action of all Muslims. It is now impossible for anyone to think of politics and political issues in Islam without reference to the Islamic State of Iran. On the political compass of Islam the needle now points firmly towards Iran. Every Muslim has to read his position with respect to the Islamic Revolution. No part of the *Ummah* is outside the influence of the Islamic Revolution and the new Islamic State.

The situation affects Iran as well as the entire *Ummah*. Neither Iran nor the *Ummah* can escape from this relationship. Its implications are profound and should be discussed at length. But first we must return to Bahira, the Christian monk of Basra, and Waraqa, the Makkan Christian. Because of their knowledge of the Christian scripture, and their observation of the historical situation, they were expecting a new prophet. Clearly a long-term commitment to history and historical trends is a major source of knowledge. The totality of knowledge available to mankind at any one point in time is a historical phenomenon. For instance, it would not be possible to write about error, deviation, correction and convergence without the advantage of history we now enjoy. Similarly, it was not possible for Imam Khomeini to give the *fatwa* of January 6, 1988, without the accumulation of unacceptable results through nine years of experience of Islamic government. It is only now possible for us to postulate that the experience of convergence, described above, has made it possible for the *Ummah* to place itself within two or three

decades of the era of the Prophet, upon whom be peace. The *akhbari* school in the Shi'i tradition did not realize that they were 'wrong' until the accumulation of unacceptable results gave rise to the *usuli ulama*. Once the *usuli ulama* had taken over the leadership of the Shi'i school of thought, it was also inevitable that they would eventually claim the Prophet's *khilafah* and the right to set up an Islamic State in the absence of the Twelfth Imam. It is now obvious that the 'correct' or 'right' position in Islam should always take the *Ummah* close to the Prophet and the *khulafa al-rashidoon*. In history time is not static; nor is human experience. A combination of the two, the passage of time and human experience over time, enriches our knowledge and understanding of Islam and of history, past and future.

Once a cycle of error, deviation, correction and convergence has been completed in any one part of the *Ummah*, or in any one school of thought in Islam, the knowledge thus generated should be acceptable to all schools of thought in Islam and to the entire *Ummah*. The validity of the newly expanded base of our knowledge will remain uncertain and problematic unless it is demonstrated that the historical sequence from which it is derived is repeatable. Historical sequences are repeatable over long periods of time. Thus, if the Islamic Revolution in Iran has not been followed by another revolution within a decade or two in any other part of the *Ummah*, it may not necessarily mean that the first Islamic Revolution's validity is in doubt. However, if another fifty or a hundred years pass without evidence of repeatability, then the validity of the historical sequence achieved in Iran would begin to lose its wider relevance. Similarly, if the accretion of new knowledge from the process of correction and convergence remains confined to the Shi'i school and does not become relevant to all schools of thought in Islam, then the process may also lose its wider relevance. The failure to repeat itself outside Iran, or failure to attract wider acceptance in the other schools of thought in Islam, may also suggest that the process of correction and



convergence is in some respects incomplete. Should this be the case, new evidence of unacceptable results will accumulate. However, if predictable and desirable results begin to emerge in other parts of the *Ummah*, then the validity of the process of correction and convergence will have been established.

It is clear that, just as error and deviation accumulate unacceptable results, so the successful completion of a process of correction and convergence must be identifiable with reference to the original historical experience of Islam. For instance, in the original historical experience of Islam the Quraish of Makkah repeatedly invaded the fledgling Islamic State in Madinah. It can even be argued that the Quraish invaded Madinah to prevent it from becoming established as an Islamic State, and that this high level of persistent conflict with a hostile environment helped greatly in the consolidation of the political and military power of Islam in Madinah, and subsequently all over the Arab Peninsula. This would indicate that a high level of persistent conflict with its external enemies for a long time is an indispensable part of the experience of the Islamic State. Should the traditional enemies of Islam fail to react as the Quraish of Makkah did, it can safely be assumed that no Islamic State is in fact being set up. This would fit in with our view of the Muslim nation-States that not only were they not invaded by *kufir*, but were actively helped to become established. This failure of the 'independent' post-colonial States to provoke the enemies of Islam into belligerence is clearly because these Muslim nation-States were in fact created to serve the global purposes of *kufir*. All subsequent events were equally predictable. The Arab States' open complicity with the United States and the Soviet Union in the invasion of Iran falls into this category of predictable and desirable events that must follow the establishment of an Islamic State. We can also predict that the vast military superiority of *kufir* and its allies, the *munafiqeen*, will eventually be defeated, just as the Quraish were defeated in the

original historical experience of Islam. If Iran had not been invaded and subjected to a concerted attempt to destabilize it by the superpowers of *kufr* and their allies, then we would have to doubt whether the Revolution and the State there were in fact 'Islamic'.

Thus history provides us with a set of criteria by which to judge the true nature of historical events. It is clear that States set up by colonial powers, or otherwise protected and 'guaranteed' by the superpowers of *kufr*, cannot be 'Islamic' as well. This also applies to States whose rulers are attempting to duplicate, imitate or simulate the European nationalist, democratic, capitalist or communist models of 'progress' and 'development'. Most of these States also receive economic and military 'aid' from *kafir* patrons. All these States, which at present means all States in the Muslim areas of the world except Iran, are not only un-Islamic but also in fact actively opposed to Islam. What this tells us is that the political map of the *Ummah* today represents extremes of error and grossly compounded deviation from the political norms of Islam. In other words, the political map of the *Ummah* today represents the grand total of unacceptable results accumulated over many hundreds of years of political error and deviation. Perhaps we should not hesitate to admit further that this grand total of unacceptable results of history represents the Sunni school's initial error and its grossly compounded deviation over nearly 1,400 years. The Sunni school's compromise with *malukiyyah* and political corruption represents the greatest single instance of error and deviation within Islam. Some Sunni Muslims would argue that the Shi'i error in effectively suspending major precepts of Islam concerning State, politics and leadership in the absence (*gha'ibah*) of the Twelfth Imam was a greater error. Perhaps, but the impact of the Shi'i error on the *Ummah* was limited and has proved relatively easy to correct; the Sunni school's compromise with *malukiyyah*, and more recently with western political thought, has played havoc with the political fortunes of the entire *Ummah*. This error and its

compounded deviation have led the *Ummah* to worldwide political and military defeat. It is the failure of the Sunnis to respond to history's devastating verdict on their political record that has made the entire *Ummah* subservient to *kufr*. Almost none of this blame can be put at the door of Shi'i error and deviation. Yet, despite this overwhelming evidence of unacceptable results in all parts of the *Ummah*, large numbers of Sunni *ulama* remain attached to the Saudi *malukiyyah* even today. Other Sunni groups, especially those who tried to form political parties, remain close to nationalist and secular democratic 'ideals' of the colonial period.

Be that as it may, it is not desirable to compare the relative qualities of error and deviation and their impact. All that is important is what we have already noted: that the 'correct' or 'right' position in Islam will always be close to the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and close to the *khulafa al-rashidoon*. The completed cycle of error, deviation, correction and convergence has already brought the Shi'i school to the 'correct' or 'right' position in Islam. However, for the validity of their achievement the Shi'i school must now persuade the Sunni school to accept their results as desirable and repeatable. For this to happen, a group of *ulama*, drawn from both the principal schools of thought in Islam, must come together. In the Shi'i school this means that some of the *ulama* closest to the Islamic State of Iran, especially those who were closest to Imam Khomeini, must come forward to explain their new position to the Sunni *ulama*. From the Sunni school we need those *ulama* who have little or no contact with the current deviant and corrupt systems. The first step must be the coming together of a group of Sunni *ulama* who understand the need to learn from the Shi'i experience of correction and convergence. These Sunni *ulama* must be those who accept that the Shi'i position after the Islamic Revolution in Iran is now substantially no different from what the classical Sunni position was before their own error and deviation into *malukiyyah*. Such Sunni *ulama* will help to transfer

the new knowledge and experience developed in the Shi'i school to all parts of the *Ummah*. The great advantage the Shi'i school now enjoys is not theological. Indeed, the argument presented here is entirely non-theological. Its root and source is history, the movement and direction of history, the impact of history, the Muslims' response to history, and above all the expectation of future historical events. This is why we began with Bahira and Waraqa.

History is a crucible. It is relentless and impartial in dealing with error and deviation. History is intolerant of all degrees of perversion of the truth, however well-meaning and sincere the human motive behind it. All kinds of religious traditions have fallen into the trap of exaggerated self-righteousness and absurd claims of having discovered the whole truth to the exclusion of all others. A failure to check actual results against the promised and desired goals leads to the degeneration of behaviour and the erosion of morality. This in turn leads to a garrison mentality, with fragmentary groups claiming that the whole truth lies on their side of the barricade. History is contemptuous of those who indulge in this type of puerility. With time, history develops a profile of deviation and half-truths and contrasts it with the whole truth. History converts mental, spiritual, moral, political and theological half-truths into hard facts. These historical facts in time lead to the accumulation of results that are not only unacceptable, but also ugly and deeply humiliating.

The crucible of history has reduced every part of the *Ummah* to our present condition of dismemberment and subservience to *kufir*. The ugly and humiliating facts that stare us in the face are the nation-States created by western colonial powers in Muslim areas of the world. Even more ugly and humiliating is the political, economic and cultural domination that the western civilization has acquired over the lands and peoples of Islam. The ugliest of all spectacles is the corruption of the present rulers and ruling classes in the world of Islam. Perhaps the deepest cut of all is the inability of Sunni *ulama* to

challenge the *status quo*. The correction and convergence that the Shi'i *ulama* of Iran have achieved is still a partial and incomplete historical movement. History will respond and deliver the goods only if the sequence of correction and convergence is repeated in all parts of the *Ummah*.

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### Notes

1. Except by such minor groups as the Bahais of Iran and the Ahmadiyyahs of India and Pakistan, regarded by all Muslims as *kuffar*.
2. Al-Qur'an 21:92.
3. See *The Draft Prospectus of the Muslim Institute*, Slough: The Muslim Institute, 1974. [This document is available online at <http://www.kalimsiddiqui.com/draft-prospectus/>]
4. Maryam Jameelah has reached a similar conclusion on Maulana Maudoodi. See her article in the *Islamic Quarterly, London: Journal of the Islamic Cultural Centre*, Vol 31, No 2, Second Quarter, 1987.
5. Hamid Algar, *Roots of the Islamic Revolution*, London: The Open Press, 1983.
6. For the Farsi text of the Imam's *fatwa*, see *Kayhan*, January 6, 1988. It was translated for me by Mr A. Rafiee.
7. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 130-145.
8. 'Black boxing' is a method in scientific inquiry, by which phenomena that cannot be explained in terms of a preferred theory or experiment are set aside in a 'black box' for later treatment. This allows theory and experimentation to proceed to the next stage. The 'black boxed' area is often resolved by subsequent progress in the discipline.
9. Kalim Siddiqui, "The Islamic Revolution: achievements, obstacles and goals" in Kalim Siddiqui *et al*, *The Islamic Revolution: Achievements, Obstacles and Goals*, London: The Open Press, 1980, p. 14. [This paper is available online at <http://www.kalimsiddiqui.com/>]