

Middle East Glossary

This glossary was created to accompany my book *The Sunni-Shia Conflict: Understanding Sectarian Violence in the Middle East*. A PDF version can be downloaded by clicking [here](#). Please feel free to send suggested edits/additions to: contact@engagingiran.com

A

Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258): Second Muslim dynasty, established by Caliph Abu al-Abbas

Abu Bakr (d. 634): Close companion of the Prophet Muhammad and first caliph of Sunni Islam

Abu Muslim (d. 755): Freedman and insurgent leader, who galvanized support for the Abbasid movement in opposition to the Umayyad Dynasty.

Abu Talib (d. 619): Prophet Muhammad's uncle and father of Ali, the first Shia Imam

Akhbari: A now-defunct reformist/fundamentalist school within Twelver Shiism that sought to lessen the influence of the clergy; focus on individual interpretation of Islam.

Aisha bint Abi Bakr (d. 678): Wife of the Prophet Muhammad and leading figure in the opposition to the Party of Ali during the first Muslim civil war (*fitna*).

Alawite: A branch of Islam associated with Shia beliefs. It is the faith of the ruling Assad family of Syria.

Ali al-Asghar (679-80): Child of Husayn, killed at the age of six months by Caliph Yazid's troops in the Battle of Karbala (680); mourned yearly, along with his father Husayn, during the commemoration of Ashoura.

Ali ibn Abi Talib (ca. 600-661): Son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the First Imam of Shia Islam.

Amal Movement: Lebanese Shia political faction and militia created by Musa al-Sadr in anticipation to the Lebanese Civil War.

Anatolia: Region of Asia Minor encompassing modern-day Turkey; formerly

associated with the Byzantine, or Eastern Roman, Empire.

Arafat, Yasser (1929-2004): Late president of the Palestinian National Authority and long-time Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Arba'in (Persian: *Chehlom*): lit. "forty"; Ritual mourning ceremony in Shia Islam, coming forty days after a person's death.

Ashoura: Muslim holy day of voluntary fasting on the 10th of the month of Muharram. In Shia Islam, Ashoura marks the martyrdom of Husayn at the Battle of Karbala (680).

Assassins: See Nizari.

Atabat: A reference to the Holy Shia cities of Southern Iraq.

ayatollah: lit. "sign of God." A denotation of high clerical rank in Shia Islam.

Ayyubid Dynasty (1171-1250): Egypt-based anti-Crusader state founded by famed Kurdish leader Salah al-Din (Saladdin).

B

Baath Party: Secular, Syrian-founded political party based on principles of Arab unity.

Badr Organization: Militant wing of the Iranian-founded Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).

Banu Hashim: "Clan of Hashim," the family to which the Prophet Muhammad belonged; see also Hashemites.

Basij ("Mobilization"): An all-volunteer paramilitary force of the Islamic Republic of Iran charged with enforcing strict Islamic codes at home, while serving as a homeland defense militia in times of war.

Basra: Predominantly Shia city of southern Iraq. Also refers to the Ottoman province of southern Iraq prior to the British mandate.

Baybars: Legendary anti-Crusading commander of the Mamluk Empire.

Bell, Gertrude (1868-1926): British colonial administrator, who helped found modern Iraq.

Beqa Valley: Fertile region in East Lebanon.

Bremer, L. Paul III (b. 1941): U.S. administrator of Iraq from June 2003 until June 2004.

Buyid Dynasty (945-1055): Shia Iranian dynasty that ruled much of Iran and Iraq as a result of the weakness of the Abbasid Caliphate.

Byzantine Empire: Also called the Eastern Roman Empire, or Rome, the empire continued Roman rule long after the Western portion of Rome had fallen. Starting in the fourth century, Eastern Rome became an assertive Christian Empire. The empire fell when Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, though the Ottoman Sultan maintained the title of "Caesar of Rome" (Kaysar-i Rum) until the end of the World War I.

Byzantium: Roman city on the Bosphorus, renamed Constantinople after Roman Emperor Constantine. Today, it is Istanbul, Turkey.

C

Caliph: lit. "vicegerent," referring to the political successor of the Prophet Muhammad. With the exception of the **Rightly Guided Caliphs**, caliphs were not considered to be infallible sources of authority, but merely executive leaders who *should* display a level of piety expected of a Muslim leader.

Constantine (I) (272-337): First Christian emperor of the Rome, who established his capital in Byzantium (later named Constantinople, after him).

Ctesiphon: Ancient city in eastern Mesopotamia; former seat of the Parthian and Sasanian Empires of Iran.

Cyrus the Great (d. 530 B.C.): Achaemenid ruler and founding monarch of Iran.

D

dawa: refers to the missionary call in Islam.

Dawa Party (Iraq): Shia political party founded in 1958. During Baath Party rule, it served as part of the Iranian-supported opposition.

Dhu Nuwas (d. 525): Himyarite king (Yemen), infamous for his persecution of Christians following his conversion to Judaism.

Druze: Religion that developed out of Islamili-Shia communities that transformed following the end of the Ismaili Fatimid Empire in the twelfth

century. Not considered Muslim, the Druze are mostly found in Syria, Lebanon and Israel.

F

Fadlallah, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn (b. 1935): High-ranking Shia cleric based in Beirut. Although relatively liberal, he is considered by many to be a "spiritual guide" of the Lebanese Hezbollah.

Faisal I (1883-1933): Deposed king of Syria and first king of Iraq (1920-1933). Placed on the throne by British administrators during the founding of modern Iraq.

Fatima (d. 632): Daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and wife of Ali ibn Abi Talib. Their union became the bloodline of the Shia Imams.

Fatimid Caliphate (909-1171): Powerful, Egypt-based dynasty set up by Ismaili Shias; named after Fatima, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad.

fitna: "time of trial," the word refers to a struggle within the Muslim community. The Great Fitna of 656-661 between the forces that would become "Sunnis" and "Shias" is referred to as the first Muslim civil war.

fatwa: religious ruling by a qualified, high-ranking cleric. In Shia Islam, fatwas are the exclusive right of grand ayatollahs.

Franjieh, Suleiman (1910-1992): Political leader and former Christian president of Lebanon.

Franjieh, Tony (1941-1978): Son and political heir apparent of Suleiman Franjieh. He was killed by the Gemayels, a rival Christian Lebanese family during the 1975-1990 civil war.

G

Gemayel, Bashir (1947-1992): Leader of the Christian Phalanges militia of Lebanon and killer of rival Christian Tony Franjieh. Bashir was himself assassinated by a Christian activist prior to assuming the presidency of Lebanon.

Gemayel, Pierre (1905-1984): Lebanese Christian leader and founder of the Phalanges militia.

al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid (1158-1111): Legendary Islamic philosopher based in the Inner Khorasan region of Iran.

Ghaznavid Dynasty (975-1187): Iranian-based Turkic dynasty of Sunni affiliation.

ghulat: lit. "extremist"; derogatory term given to early, nonorthodox Muslim believers, who revered their leaders as saintly. The term is often associated with revolutionary Muslims from the frontier region of Outer Khorasan (Central Asia), who helped found the Abbasid Dynasty in 750.

Golden Age of Islam: A Medieval flourishing of Muslim arts and sciences, which occurred under the auspices of the Abbasid Dynasty in Baghdad (750-1258).

grand ayatollah (Arabic: *ayatollah al-uzma*): highest rank in Shia Islam; synonymous with a *marjatu al-taqlid*.

Gulf War (1991): A U.S.-led war involving around half a million troops, aimed at removing Iraqi troops from Kuwait following the latter's annexation by the former.

Gulf War (1980-88): Referred to as the "First Gulf War" in academic circles, the Iran-Iraq War resulted in nearly one million fatalities on both sides.

H

Hadith: Oral traditions of the Prophet Muhammad; a source of in Islam second only to the Qur'an.

Haeri, Kazem: Iranian-based Iraqi grand ayatollah. Kazem is a spiritual mentor of Iraqi militia leader Muqtada al-Sadr.

Hajj: Annual pilgrimage to Mecca, considered one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Every able-bodied Muslim who can afford the trip is expected to make pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime.

Hakim, Abdul Aziz (1950-2009): Iraqi Shia cleric, political leader and prominent member of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council). Son of Muhsim al-Hakim and brother of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim.

Hakim, Muhammad Baqir (1939-2003): Iraqi Shia cleric, political leader and prominent member of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council). He was killed in a bomb attack against a Shia mosque, which the U.S. government has attributed to al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia. Son of Muhsin al-Hakim and older brother of Abdul Aziz al-Hakim.

Hakim, Muhsin (1889-1970): Prominent Iraqi grand ayatollah, whose blessing led to the foundation of the Shia opposition Dawa Party in Iraq (1958). His son Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim came to lead the Iranian-funded opposition group Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).

Hamas: Islamist Palestinian organization, currently in control over the Gaza Strip. A hardline, anti-Israeli organization, Hamas began using the tactic of suicide terrorism to attack Israelis following the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a Hamas rival.

Hanafi: One of the four recognized schools of Sunni Islam, named after Abu Hanifa (699-765). Considered one of the most permissive, the Hanafi school is also the oldest of the surviving four schools.

ibn Hanbal, Ahmad (780-855): Traditionalist Muslim jurist, after whom the conservative Hanbali school of Sunni Islam is named. He was a target of the Rationalist inquisition (*mihna*) prosecuted by Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun.

Hanbali: One of the four recognized schools of Sunni Islam, named after Ibn Hanbal. The newest of the four schools, it is considered the most conservative, acting as a source of inspiration for many fundamentalist thinkers today.

Hariri, Rafik (1944-2005): Late Sunni prime minister of Lebanon, victim of a car bomb attributed to the Syrian regime.

Hariri, Saad (b. 1970): Saudi-born son of Sunni Lebanese leader Rafik Hariri and heir to his father's pro-Western, secular political legacy, embodied in Lebanon's anti-Syrian "March 14" coalition.

Hashemite: A term referring to the Banu Hashim tribe, the family line of the Prophet Muhammad. The king of Jordan, as well as the former king of Iraq are of Hashemite lineage.

Hezbollah (generic): lit. "Party of God," Hezbollah is a generic term for pro-government hardliners in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The organization *Ansar-e Hezbollah* ("Helpers of Hezbollah") is a militia-like group affiliated with the Islamic regime in Iran.

Hezbollah (Lebanon): lit. "Party of God," the Lebanese Hezbollah was founded by Iran in 1982 as a way to assert Shia, and by extension Iranian, influence during the Lebanese Civil War. It is currently the strongest, single political/military faction in Lebanon.

Hijaz: Region of western Arabia, home to the two of the three holiest cities in Islam: Mecca and Medina.

Hilla: City in southcentral Iraq.

hujjatu al-Islam (rank): mid-level rank in Shia Islam.

Husayn ibn Ali (626-680): Third Shia Imam; son of Ali ibn Abi Talib and brother of Hasan ibn Ali. His death during the Battle of Karbala (680) is remembered by Shias in the ritual mourning of Ashoura.

I

Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328): Muslim scholar of the Mamluk Empire, alive during the Crusades and Mongol presence in the Middle East. He advocated the use of offensive jihad against occupiers, and as such has been the source of inspiration for contemporary radical Muslims.

ijtihad: Source of Islamic law that utilizes the independent reasoning of a highly qualified individual.

Il-Khan ("Subservient to the Khan"): The title granted to the ruler of Mongol-ruled Iran during the Il-Khanate Empire (1256-1335).

Imam (lit. "leader"): In Shia Islam, an Imam is an infallible leader of the community of the faithful. Different sects of Shiism recognize different Imams, but all are descendants of Ali and his wife Fatima, who was the Prophet Muhammad's daughter. Some early, quasi-Shia sects, such as the Abbasids, did not revere the Imams from the House of Ali, but instead looked to the House of Abbas, the Prophet's uncle.

Iraq (region): A Semitic term, *'iraq* refers to a river shore, and it is one traditional name given to the Tigris-Euphrates River Valley.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC): A praetorian, all-volunteer armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran that serves parallel to the conventional, conscripted military branches. Among its command responsibilities as the Basij and the Qods Force.

Isma'ili: A branch of Shiism that believes in the line of Imams descendant from Ismail, son of Jafar al-Sadiq.

J

Jabal Amil: A hilly region of mostly-Shia south Lebanon.

Jafar al-Sadiq (702-765): An Islamic scholar and Sixth Shia Imam, Jafar al-

Sadiq's is held in high regard across sects.

jihad ("struggle"): Among the most controversial of Islamic terms, jihad refers to a struggle, be it military, juridical, or spiritual. More recently, the term "offensive jihad" has been often used to denote a military struggle against perceived occupiers or apostates.

July 2006 War: A military conflict between Israel and the Lebanese Hezbollah lasting 34 days. It was initiated by a small-scale Hezbollah military incursion into Israel, and followed by Israeli air strikes and Hezbollah rocket attacks. In is perceived by some in the Arab world as the first Arab military victory against Israel, although the conflict ended in a UN-mediated cease-fire.

Justinian I (483-565): Christian Roman Emperor engaged in military conflicts with Zoroastrian Iran and its Jewish proxies.

K

Ka'ba: A cubic sanctuary in Mecca, the Ka'ba is the holiest site in Islam.

kafir: Arabic term for infidel, or apostate.

Karbala: Holy Shia city in southern Iraq and site of the Battle of Karbala of 680, fought between the armies of Sunni caliph Yazid and Shia Imam Husayn. Husayn's martyrdom in that battle is the basis for the Shia commemoration of **Ashoura**.

Kata'ib ("Phalanges"): A working-class Lebanese Christian militia movement, founded by the **Pierre Gemayel**.

Khamene'i , Ali (b. 1939): Iranian ayatollah, former president, and current supreme leader of Iran.

Kharijites: Refers to a now nearly defunct sect of Islam that is known for abandoning Ali ibn Abi Talib's command during the first fitna, or Muslim civil war due to their rejection of Ali's acceptance of arbitration during the Battle of Siffin (657). A Kharijite is believed to have killed Ali for what Kharijites perceived was his abandonment of his claim to undisputed leadership.

Khoei, Abu al-Qasem (1989-1992): Preeminent Iraqi grand ayatollah, whose son Abu al-Majid was killed by Muqtada al-Sadr's followers in April 2003.

Khomeini, Ruhollah (1902-1989): Iranian grand ayatollah, first supreme leader and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Khorasan: Mountainous region of eastern Iran and Central Asia (reaching into

modern-day Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), traditionally acting as a conduit for Turkic and other peoples' migration into the Middle East. During early Islam, Khorasan was a breeding ground for insurgents seeking to overthrow the Umayyad Caliphate. Today, a province of northeastern Iran bears the name Khorasan.

khums ("one fifth"): Pious Shias are expected to donate 20% of their net income toward the maintenance of Islamic institutions and holy sites.

Kirkuk: Traditionally Kurdish city in northern Iraq. Populated by Kurds, Turkomen and Sunni Arabs, this oil-rich city is a source of ethnic contention in Iraq.

Kufa: A Shia holy city in southern Iraq and former seat of Ali ibn Abi Talib's caliphate.

Kurdistan: The name of a historic region encompassing parts of eastern Turkey, northern Syria, northern Iraq, and northwestern Iran. It is the homeland for millions of ethnic Kurds, many of whom support the establishment of an independent state along ethnic lines.

M

madhab (pl. madhahib): A Sunni school of jurisprudence. Today, four such madhabs are accepted: Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, and Hanbali.

madrasa: A generic Arabic term for school, used in the West to denote schools of Islamic learning, particularly Sunni.

Mahdi ("Messiah"): In Twelver Shia Islam, Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi is the Twelfth Imam, and is expected to emerge from his concealment, or Occultation, for the Last Judgment.

Mahdi Army: The Jaish al-Mahdi, or Army of the Messiah, was a Shia Iraqi militia founded by Muqtada al-Sadr.

Mamluk Empire (1250-1517): An Egypt-based Turkic empire run by a slave caste.

Ma'mun (786-833): Abbasid caliph with sympathies to both Shias and the Rationalist schools of Islam in Baghdad. He is known for his establishment of the anti-Traditionalist inquisition (**mihna**), shortly before his death in 833.

Mashhad: Holy Shia city in the province of Khorasan, Iran. Resting place of Eighth Shia Imam Ali al-Rida (see **Reza**).

Mecca: The holiest city in Islam, located in the Hejaz region of Western Arabia (modern-day Saudi Arabia).

Medina: Arabian city, short for "al-Medina al-Munawwara" ("the Enlightened City"), the second holiest city in Islam, found in the Hejaz region of Western Arabia (modern-day Saudi Arabia).

mujtahid ("he who practices ijtihad"): In Shia Islam, a mujtahid is synonymous with a **grand ayatollah** or **marjatu al-taqlid**.

N

Najaf: Holy Shia city in southern Iraq, home to the Imam Ali Shrine.

Nasrallah, Hasan (b. 1960): Lebanese cleric and political leader of Hezbollah.

Nasser, Gamal Abdel (1918-1970): Former president of Egypt and iconic leader of the pan-Arab movement..

Nizari: Ismaili Shia sect, members of which were responsible for assassination operations in the Medieval Middle East. They were often called by the epithet *Hashashyoun* (those who take hashish), a word that gives us the term 'Assassin.'

Nowrooz (lit., "New Day"): the New Year festival of the Iranian calendar, observed in Iran and throughout much of Central Asia.

O

Occultation (*ghayba*): A Shia term referring to the occultation of the Twelfth, or Hidden Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi.

Ottoman Empire (1299-1923): Powerful Turkish dynastic empire that colonized much of the Middle East and North Africa. Throughout much of Ottoman history, the Sultan held both the title of caliph, and that of Caesar of the Roman Empire. The empire was dissolved following its defeat in World War I.

P

Pahlavi: The name of the last imperial dynasty of Iran, which included the dynasty's founder Reza Shah (reigned as king 1925-1941), and his son, Muhammad Reza Shah (reigned 1941-1979). Pahlavi is also the term for the Middle Iranian language written by the priesthood of Parthian and Sasanian Iran.

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO): Secular, leftist Palestinian organization that was led for most of its history by Yasser Arafat.

Pan-Arabism: The largely secular ideology that supported the creation of a single state for all Arabs in the Middle East.

Q

al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia: aka, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), is one name for an al-Qaeda-affiliated fundamentalist Sunni organization founded by Jordanian-born jihadist Abu Musab al-Zarqaqi.

Qasim, Abd al-Karim (1914-1963): Founder and former prime minister of Republican Iraq.

Qizilbash (lit., "red heads"): a Turkic militant order that helped bring to power the Safavid Dynasty in Iran in 1501.

Qods ("Jerusalem") Force: Foreign operations branch of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Qom: A holy Shia city in central Iran, burial site of Fatimeh Masoumeh, the sister of Imam Reza.

Quraysh: Preeminent Meccan tribe to which the Prophet Muhammad belonged.

R

Ramadan: Month of fasting, performance of which embodies one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Reza (Arabic: Ali al-Rida, Persian: Ali-ye Reza, 765-818): Eighth Shia Imam and shortly before his death, heir apparent to the Abbasid caliphate. His shrine in Mashhad, Iran, is one of the holiest sites in Shiism.

S

Sabra and Shatila Massacre (Sept. 16-18, 1982): A wholesale massacre of unarmed Palestinian civilians by the Lebanese Forces, a Christian militia.

Reza (Arabic: Ali al-Rida, Persian: Ali-ye Reza, 765-818): Eighth Shia Imam and shortly before his death, heir apparent to the Abbasid caliphate. His shrine in Mashhad, Iran, is one of the holiest sites in Sh

Sadr City: Shia sector in eastern Baghdad, renamed from "al-Thawra" and "Saddam City," in honor of late Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr.

Sadr, Mousa (1929-1978[?]): Iranian cleric and founder of the Lebanese Amal movement. He disappeared in Libya in 1978.

Sadr, Muqtada (b. 1973): Iraqi cleric and founder of the Mahdi Army of Iraq. He is son of the late Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr.

Sadr, Muhammad Baqir (1935-1980): Politically influential Iraqi ayatollah, father-in-law of Muqtada and cousin of Muhammad Sadiq.

Sadr, Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq (1943-1999): Iraqi ayatollah and prominent Shia activist. His son is Muqtada al-Sadr.

Sadrists: Broad Iraqi Shia political movement marked by Iraqi nationalism and, in principle, independence from Iran. Named after Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr.

Safavid Empire (1501-1736): Iranian dynasty brought to power by a Turkic religious order, the Safavi, named after spiritual founder Safi al-Din (1252-1334). The Safavids undertook the mass conversion of Iran into Twelver Shiism.

Sahl ibn Salama: Ninth-century fundamentalist activist based in Baghdad.

Saladin (1139-1193): Europeanized name for Salah al-Din, a Kurdish general and statesman, best known for his anti-Crusading efforts.

Samarra: Iraqi city, home of shrines for three Shia Imams: Ali al-Hadi (Tenth), Hasan al-Askari (Eleventh), and Muhammad al-Mahdi (Twelfth)

Sasanian Empire (224-651): An Iranian dynasty of Persian lineage that helped codify the Zoroastrian faith and reigned as the last pre-Islamic dynasty of Iran.

Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI): Today known as the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC), SCIRI was founded by Iran in 1982 to serve as an opposition to Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq.

Seljuk Empire (1037-1194): Turkic Sunni dynasty based in Iraq and Iran, responsible for the dissemination of the madrasa (religious seminary) system throughout Muslim lands.

Shafi: School in Sunni Islam, founded by Imam Shafi'i (767-820).

Shatt al-Arab: Fertile waterway claimed by both Iran and Iraq, over which Saddam Hussein launched the Iran-Iraq War in 1980.

Shahrbanu ("Lady of the Land"): Historical Iranian personality of unknown authenticity, said to have been a daughter of Iran's last pre-Islamic king, Yazdegerd III, and said to have handpicked Imam Husayn for marriage. As the mother of the Fourth Imam, she serves as a connection between Iranian ethnic identity and Shia Islam.

Shia Crescent: Coined term by King Abdullah II of Jordan in 2004 when referring to the rise of Shia influence in the Middle East--from Iran, through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon--as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Shi'at 'Ali (lit., "the Party of Ali"): a term of political affiliation, given to supporters of Ali ibn Abi Talib's claims to the caliphate, who later morphed into a unique sect of Islam. The term now used is simply "Shi'a," or "Shia."

Shi'at 'Uthman (lit., "the Party of Uthman"): supporters of the third caliph, Uthman, who accused Ali ibn Abi Talib of having a hand in his assassination. They fought the Shi'at 'Ali during the first *fitna* (Muslim civil war).

Shi'at bani al-Abbas (lit., "the Party of the Clan of Abbas"): a term denoting the political/religious faction of the Abbasid revolution, which toppled the Umayyad Dynasty in 750.

Sistani, Ali (b. 1930): Iranian-born Iraqi grand ayatollah, belonging to the quietist (i.e., nonpolitical) strain of Shia thought.

Sufi: A generic term for mystical Sunni and Shia Muslims, particularly those affiliated with unorthodox religious orders.

Sunni Awakening: A U.S.-backed Sunni movement in western Iraq, aimed at expelling al-Qaeda from the country.

Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916): British-French agreement over the division of Ottoman lands following the empire's dissolution.

Sunni Triangle: Iraqi region, largely populated by Sunni Arabs. It contains the predominantly Sunni cities of Tikrit, Ramadi, and Fallujah, as well as Baghdad and Samarra.

T

ta'ziya: the Shia passion play performed during Ashoura.

Traditionalism: A Islamic juridical movement of ninth century Iraq supporting a literal interpretation of the sources of law, and steering clear of independent judgment.

Twelver Shiism (Arabic: *itha'ashari*): The majority branch of Shia Islam, and the majority religion of Iran. As the name suggests, Twelvers believe in the existence of Twelve Shia Imams.

U

ulama (lit., "scholars"): a generic term for clerical authorities and jurists in Sunni and Shia Islam.

Umar (d. 644): Second Muslim caliph and leader of an unprecedented expansionist campaign, including the conquest of Jerusalem, Syria and much of Iran; killed by an Iranian slave.

Uthman (d. 656): Third Muslim caliph, killed in Egypt due to an internal insurrection.

Umayyad Dynasty (661-750): First hereditary dynasty of the Islamic caliphate, based in Damascus, which came to power following the death of Ali, who served as the Fourth Muslim caliph.

ummah (Arabic: "community"): A reference to the Muslim community of believers; "the Muslim world."

V

velayat-e faqih: see wilayat al-faqih.

W

Wahhabi: A term used to denote a Saudi brand of ultra-conservative Muslims, named as such after **Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab** (1703-92), an Arabian Salafi/fundamentalist, whose fighters helped the House of Saud consolidate power over the Arabian Peninsula.

wilayat al-faqih (Arabic: "Rule by the Jurisprudent"): An ideology developed by Ruhollah Khomeini, under which a qualified jurist is expected to hold religious and political power over the state. It was likely inspired by Plato's philosopher-king concept, and it led to the creation of the office of the Supreme Leader in

postrevolutionary Iran. More commonly seen with the Persian inflection, as ***velayat-e faqih***.

Wilson, Arnold (1884-1940): British colonial administrator in Iraq, proponent of a heavy-handed colonialism over the country.

Y

Yathrib: the pre-Islamic name for the city of Medina.

Yazid I (d. 683): Umayyad Caliph, whose forces squared off against those of Imam Husayn in the Battle of Karbala (680).

Z

zakat: Alms-giving; zakat is one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Zarqawi, Abu Musab (1966-2006): Jordanian-born founder of al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, killed in a U.S. air strike.

Zaydi: Branch of Shiism that believes in the existence of Five Imams.

Zaynu al-Abidin: Fourth Shia Imam and son of Husayn. In Iranian tradition, his mother was an Iranian princess, born from Yazdegird III, the last pre-Islamic Iranian king.

Zoroastrianism: Quasi-monotheistic religion based on the holy Avesta texts, and codified largely by the Sasanian Iranian dynasty. It is the only non-Abrahamic faith recognized in the Islamic Republic of Iran.