

The Challenge of Deviant Sects in the Face of the Islamic Revolution with a Focus on the Opposition to the Teachings of the Vilayat-e Faqih and Its Solution

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(Received: 24 January 2024 - Accepted: 8 December 2024)

Abstract

The concept of Mahdism is one of the most significant Islamic and Shia teachings, holding the potential to foster unity, cohesion, and security both domestically and internationally. The Islamic Revolution is also based on the theological and philosophical foundations of Mahdism. Various deviant movements and sects attempt to distort this teaching through different means; sometimes subtly, by fabricating and creating deviations in the defensive and security culture of Mahdism, and other times more violently, by instigating chaos and conflicts in the name of Shiism and Mahdism. These activities not only tarnish this exalted culture but can also create multiple security issues, with the trajectory of these sects showing a trajectory of conflict and destruction. Therefore, the main question is: 'What are the current and future challenges posed by these deviant sects and movements, especially in opposition to the Vilayat-e Faqih?' The present study uses a descriptive-analytical examination of written sources and the results of field research conducted by the Center for Mahdism. The results indicated that against these challenges, utilizing the rich Mahdism culture, appropriate education, and research on sects, as well as precise and organized planning and execution, can create resilience against these threats. Additionally, we must prepare both scientifically and practically against the ideologies that attack the teaching of the Vilayat-e Faqih and its resultant deviations.

Keywords: Challenge, Deviant Sects, Vilayat-e Faqih, Islamic Revolution, Mahdism Culture, Islamic System.

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Introduction

Achieving national security is one of the most significant concerns for individuals and governments alike. Various elements and capacities exist for ensuring security; the defensive security policies in the Islamic Revolution and system of Iran are based on religious and Mahdism thought, with the guidelines and policies of the late Imam Khomeini and the Supreme Leader anchored in these principles.

Thus, the Islamic system's initiation and continuation depend on this matter. Conversely, deviant sects and movements have their own specific methods and tactics for challenging this culture and undermining national security. Since these activities gradually manifest an anti-security trend, it is necessary to examine the challenges and confrontations of these sects with the fundamental teachings and principles of the Islamic Revolution, as well as the security of the Islamic system, to enhance resilience against security threats. On the other hand, creating resilience will only be successful if various forms of insecurity are identified.

To achieve sustainable security based on Mahdism policies, it is essential to recognize these movements and their tactics and respond accordingly, elucidating both their overt and covert issues to prevent the loss of human and material resources in this context. Sects distort the beliefs of Mahdism and create counterfeit versions against true Mahdism, leading to misrepresentation and transforming security-enhancing capacities into anti-security ones.

As an example, in opposition to the Vilayat-e Faqih (influenced by Mahdism), a type of general Vilayat is presented by deviant groups. Additionally, some factions, in contrast to the idea of waiting for the Imam, express teachings such as sensing or feeling the presence of the Imam of Time, or resorting to Sufi poles or connecting to cosmic energy and human-centric ideologies (cf. Specialized Archives of the Mahdism Center, section for criticism of deviant sects, 2000: 1)

1. Statement of the Problem

The idea of Mahdism serves as an important foundation in the cultural development of the Islamic community, particularly within the Iranian Shia society and the Islamic Revolution. On the other hand, cohesion in public culture is the most critical indicator of comprehensive security in the country. The deviation from Mahdism culture challenges this cohesion and security. In this context, sects and claimants exploit the foundations of Mahdism culture to pursue

their own goals and interests. These deviations harm the power of unity and solidarity among the nation.

These groups and movements take various forms; some openly claim authority pertaining to Mahdism and deputyship, performing illicit interpretations of religious texts. Others do not have explicit claims related to Mahdism but enter the public culture and intellectual domain in a way that generates little sensitivity against them.

However, ultimately, their actions result in the destruction of Mahdism discussions, which also creates damage and division in the unity based on Mahdism. Deviant sects and claimants pose threats both positively and negatively. Negatively, they lead to hard and violent threats, while positively; they embed deviant teachings within the public culture of Mahdism, causing distortions.

2. Necessity of the Discussion

While Mahdism possesses significant strength and capacity to foster unity and cohesion among the Islamic community, particularly related to the Vilayat-e Faqih and Islamic governance, it has been a focal point and a key advantage for the successes of the Islamic community. However, if it becomes marginalized or drawn toward deviations, it poses serious risks. Given the interference of various factors in disrupting security, it is necessary to implement cultural resilience regarding potential and actual threats related to Mahdism in developing countries, especially Iran (Khoshfar, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 3).

Therefore, by identifying potential and actual threats posed by sects and movements within the country and offering strategic proposals, we can mitigate the dangers posed by their existing or imminent actions in the future. Through organized and practical policymaking, we can minimize the destructive effects of sects to the lowest possible level (cf. Javadi Amoli, 2018: 11)

3. Background

This section presents the background of the article in terms of research conducted on the harms and deviant sects.

Regarding the fundamental harms and threats of religious sectarianism, there are several existing articles, such as "The Security Pathology of Religious Sectarianism in the Muslim World" by Abdolhossein Khosrowpanah, which focuses more on the contexts and factors of sectarianism and its various social harms. Some sources examine the capacities of Mahdism culture in

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countering these harms, such as "Cultural Strategies of Mahdism for Society and Government Based on the SWOT Model" by Mr. Mohsen Poursayyid Aghaei, which results from field research in various scientific centers to present a model based on this framework against threats and harms.

In the context of defense security, there are resources like "Smart Defense in the Thought of Imam Khamenei" by Rahman Lotfi Marznaki, which discusses some spiritual and social elements that contribute to security. Another work, "Cultural Strategy," by Mir Ali Mohammadi Nejad and Mohammad Taqi Norouzi, analyzes concepts related to strategy, defense, and security. In the realm of deviant sects, works such as "False Mahdis" by Rasul Jafariyan discuss the actions and behaviors of claimants throughout different periods of Islamic history.

Sources related specifically to the critique of sects and claimants include the book "Identifying and Theologically Examining Deviant Mahdism Movements," supervised by the Institute for Mahdism Research and Future Studies (2015 AD/1395 SH), and the Research Center for Islamic Sciences and Culture, which broadly examines these topics. Additionally, the book "Towards Deviation" critiques the Ali Ya'qoubi movement, published by the Islamic Propagation Office of Qom Seminary; and a research piece titled "Silent Invasion," which addresses the security threats and harms of contemporary sects, is authored by multiple writers: Hassan Mojani, Hojjat Heydari Cherati, and Javad Eshahqian Darcheh. Another work, "The Tribe of Deception" by Mr. Amir Mohsen Erfan, examines contemporary sects and their methods.

The novelty of this research lies in identifying the mechanisms of influence of sects and deviant movements on the public culture of Mahdism, as well as proposing strategies to protect the Islamic community and safeguard it against these harms.

4. Concepts and Terms

Nihla: Refers to a false religion (Dehkhoda, 1935: Under the word Nihlah or Religion).

Sect: In general terms, it refers to a religious group that arises in opposition to another religious group and usually separates from the main religious group (Rasekh, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 627).

Sectarianism: Equivalent to "al-Ta'ifah" in Arabic and "Sectarianism" in English, it denotes the biased partisan beliefs or the narrow-minded thoughts limited to a particular sect, often stubborn in their beliefs (Arianpour, 1990 AD/1369 SH).

Futures Study: It involves the depiction of future events and constitutes descriptive research that explores the unseen and unheard aspects of the future. It encompasses hundreds of processes related to the future world (<http://ayandehpajoohi.blog.ir/post/1>. Center for Futures Studies).

Mahdism Culture: The term culture has diverse meanings and concepts, including etiquette, education, knowledge, awareness, and a collection of customs and practices (Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 2005: 60). It refers to any abilities and habits that an individual acquires from society (ibid). Given that Mahdism is based on Quranic texts, narrations, and the conduct of the impeccable Imams (AS), it can be stated that Mahdism culture is a collection of beliefs, thoughts, behaviors, lifestyles, motivations, and stimuli that lead individuals and communities to await the Imam of the Age (AJ), thereby facilitating the realization of an ideal society and a global government of justice under Mahdism. Religious culture forms a part of religious identity (Raoufi, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 105; Giddens, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 81).

Security: Security means being safe and free from fear (Mo'in, 1994 AD/1363 SH: 352); assurance and tranquility (al-Munjid, 1973: 18); being free from fear of threats to life, property, honor, and dignity; safety and peace of mind (Amid, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 233 and 271); the existence of confidence in personal and societal well-being, property, and family honor (Aghabakhshi and Afshari Rad, 1999 AD/1378 SH).

Security means a state of freedom from threats or attacks and preparedness to confront any threat. This encompasses personal security, social security, national security, and international security (Ashouri, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 38).

The discussion of public security includes all risks, such as the threats and confrontations posed by sectarian terrorism (Navidnia, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 64-65).

In this research, "Deviant Sects" refer to groups that deviate from the official religion. Our focus includes all movements and groups that based on forged sources and innovative methods, have attempted to create illegitimate organizations among Muslims and Shias. The concept of security also refers to various types of psychological, religious, social, and military security (both positive and negative).

According to some interpreters, positive security is the foundational security rooted in faith (Tabatabai: 7, 200).

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However, sects create a barrier against others through a non-faith-based (negative) approach, along with specific leadership, security, and economic financial systems.

5. Status of the Spread of Sects and Pseudo-Mystical Trends in Iran and the World

The situation regarding the growth of sects is such that some have termed the current era as an "Explosion of Sects." (Javaheri, 2014) More than 10,766 sects and emerging movements are active globally (Islamic Republic News, 2012), earnestly pursuing their harmful cultural objectives. According to available statistics, over 70 of these deviant ideological and cultural sects are active within Iran, in addition to a significant number of false claimants of Mahdism.

Introduction to Some Sects:

1. Bahá'ism: In the last two centuries, Bahá'ism has been active in certain regions of Iran, such as some northern cities, Tehran, Fars, Isfahan, etc. Currently, according to Bahá'í sources, it claims to have 300,000 members in the country.¹

2. Sufi Sects: There is a great diversity and multiplicity among Sufi groups, but it can be said that Sufi factions are concentrated in cities like Tehran, some cities in Isfahan, parts of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, and counties in Khuzestan and Kermanshah, along with some areas in Khorasan.

3. The Circle Mysticism Movement: Initially, the activities of the Circle Mysticism group were more focused in Tehran and some universities and academic centers, but it gained more visibility from the 80s onward, and subsequently became popular under titles such as "Transcendental Healing Classes" in some provincial branches.

4. Ali Ya'qoubi Movement: This movement has been active in Tehran and some cities in Isfahan, such as Najafabad, as well as in other areas of the country by his students and followers.

5. Ahmed al-Hasan Movement: Another example is the Ahmed al-Hasan movement, which has been observed in southern and western

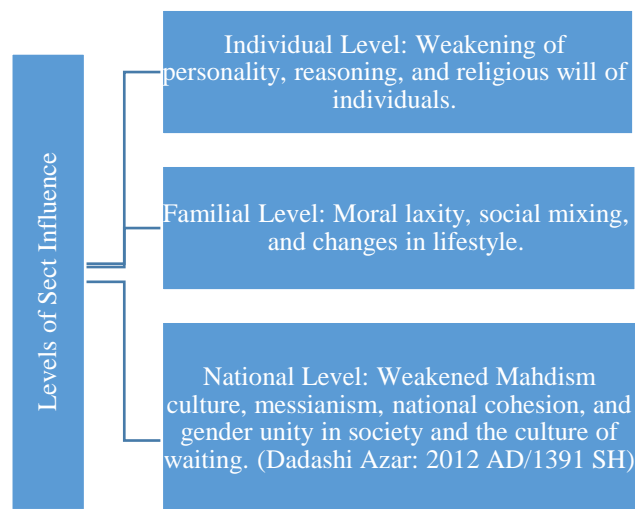
1. Information Database of the Statistical Center of Iran: Baha'iism originated from the Babis, and the Babis also formed by claiming the nearness of the appearance and the claim of the position of the Bab, the vicar of the Imam Zamani, and then Mahdism, and the Babis themselves also originated from the deviations of the Kermani Shaykhiyya; Baha'iism currently has a global organization and alleged revelation books and various temples in different countries of the world. This sect considers Islam to be obsolete and believes in the continuation of the mission and prophethood, the heavenly books, and the new Sharia.

regions such as Khuzestan, as well as in areas like Qom, Semnan, Yazd, and Torbat-e Heydariyyeh. It has even penetrated into some seminaries, educational institutions, and public recreational and religious places. According to some statistics, around 5,000 followers of this movement have been active in Iran.

Other various movements, such as "English Shi'ism" and the "Hojjatieh Society," also have followers in academic centers, as evidenced in research sources (Archive of the Specialized Center for Mahdism Studies, 1397, section on Critique of Deviant Sects).

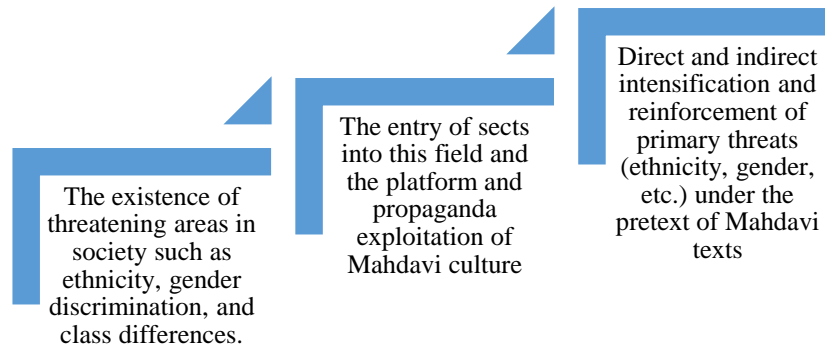
6. Analysis of the Overall Mechanism by Which Sects Weaken the Cohesion of the Islamic and Mahdism Community

6.1. In this discussion, the term "challenges" refers to deviations and deviant activities within sects that pose a threat. There are various levels that can be examined (cf. Protection and Security Research, 2015 AD/1394 SH: No. 14, 92).



6.2. In the current situation, the harms posed by sects can also be analyzed. Based on the diagram below, we can illustrate the trajectory of threats and general harms from certain sects.

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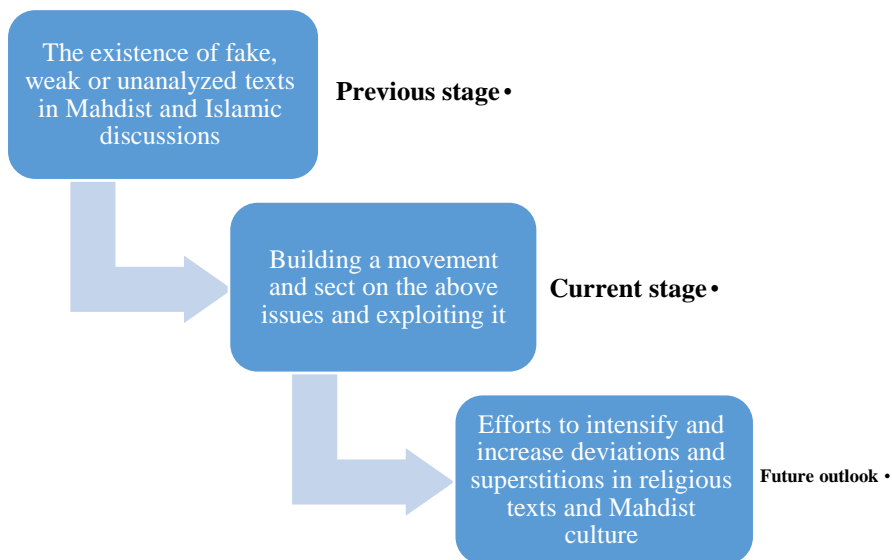
According to this diagram, it is predicted that the sects themselves amplify the threat factors. For instance, Bahá'ism can be analyzed through this lens: Bahá'ism emerges under the pretext of establishing justice, the appearance of a savior, and providing salvation while addressing discrimination. Gradually, it introduces teachings that favor certain social classes or groups over others. This process leads to conflicts and disagreements among the classes under the guise of Mahdism discussions, resulting in increased tensions. At this stage, although sects play a role, the situation becomes uncontrollable, and society moves toward greater unrest and insecurity.

Another instance of this issue is the attempts by Wahhabi sects to create division within the Islamic community. They execute this under the pretext of Mahdism teachings in Shi'ism, aiming to highlight ethnic and racial prejudices. These biases and trends are then attributed to Shi'ite teachings, causing other Muslims to feel threatened. For example, they claim that the Mahdi of Shia will focus solely on killing and massacring Arabs and will attack Arabs (al-Khamis, 2008 AD/1429 AH: 141).

With this tactic, many Arabs among Muslims may be provoked against non-Arabs in Iran and the Islamic Revolution within the Iranian context, leading them to engage in anti-security and divisive actions. This includes the promotion of pan-Arabism and pan-

Turkism² and the formation of various Mahdism movements, such as the Allahverdikhani group in Tabriz.³

6.3. Futures study on the threats of deviant sect beliefs can be illustrated by the following diagram. The difference between this section and the previous one is that here, we analyze the forward trajectory of deviant movements based on library research and field encounters we have conducted through Mahdism centers. We are not discussing a future that has yet to materialize; rather, we are referring to trends that the various sects are currently following toward the future. It is possible that a movement like Ahmed al-Hasan has made some progress, while some opposing movements to the revolution in the period of occultation and similar trends are still at the beginning of their path. However, ultimately, they will leverage Mahdism teachings according to their specific interpretations to foster division and security-related conflicts.



2. Various currents fuel extreme ethnicism, including Arab or Turkish nationalists who believe that independent countries should be formed with these ethnicities and do not accept unity with other Iranian peoples and do not accept Iranian nationality or the religion of Islam as a factor of cohesion.

3. Cf. Javad Eshaqian Darche, Deviation Ivy. In this current, a kind of claim of special vicariousness is raised during the occultation period, and the leaders of this current present a specific reading of Mahdism that is different and opposed to general vicariousness and imitation of jurists.

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For example, a group like the Hojjatieh Society initially capitalizes on certain unexamined and weak Mahdism narratives and texts in the name of combating Bahá'ism. Based on these interpretations, they structure and carry out their activities while maintaining a unique perspective on reason, philosophy, and rational analysis of religion (Ershadinia, 2015: Chapter 1)

Accordingly, they shape their own view of waiting (the concept of "Intizar"). Today, it is easy to project the future outlook of this movement, which, to strengthen its position among different social classes and the pious, will present views and theories that fundamentally question the Islamic Revolution and the system of the Vilayat-e Faqih (Olianasab, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 87).

Our analysis is that in the future, they will attribute a different notion of waiting and Mahdism leadership to religious texts. This issue will give rise to superstitions and exacerbate tensions and security threats. Thus, sects inherently undermine security, even if they present themselves under the guise of passionate and unifying Mahdism movements.

Another example is the activities of movements such as Mansour Hashemi Khorasani, which outwardly use arguments asserting that one should obey no one other than the Mahdi and that Jihad is only permissible in his presence.(ibid) Generally, in sects, the concepts of Islamic and Mahdism Jihad are distorted from their original meaning (Khorasani's Works, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 275-276; Heywood, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 495; Zolfaqari, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 226).

Accordingly, the common mechanism involves distorting doctrinal teachings, followed by the emergence and spread of deviant sects and new mystical movements.

6.4. The Process of Threat Creation and the Progression of Anti-Security Activities of the Sect: A Case Study of the Ahmad Ismail Basri Movement:

Stage	Title	Description	Progression of the Movement's Activities	Level of Anti-Security Threat
First	Emergence of Yamani	The emergence of the claimant in 1999 and the claim of being appointed by the Mahdi for reforming the Hawzah	Opposing established religious authority	Subtle
Second	Recruitment of Supporters	From the late 1990s to 2008, focusing on the people of Iraq	Building forces and appealing to public	Weak

	focusing on the students of Hawzah and some people	and likening the movement to the Prophet's secret invitation	opinion	
Third	Official Declaration of Emergence and Uprising	In 2008, declaration of an armed uprising and the killing of some supporters leading to his disappearance	Victimization narrative	Noticeable and public
Fourth	Yamani's Occultation	Claiming the start of Ahmed Basri's occultation lasting six years, followed by a lack of clarity and increasing years of disappearance	Pseudo-scientific justification and interpretation	Temporary silencing of threats
Fifth	Expansion to Countries like Iran	Developing and recruiting forces in countries such as Iran	Formation of a 12,000-member army of supporters (Basri, n.d: 173)	Resurgence of threats
Sixth	Military Readiness	End of invitations and beginning of physical and military strengthening, particularly in Iran	Direct propaganda and recruitment	Informal threat appearing scientific
Seventh	Initiation of Military Actions	Call for military actions in Iran	Formation and networking	Official threat
Eighth	Emergence and Uprising of Yamani Supporters from Iran	During the formation of a 12,000member army for a nationwide uprising in Iran	Open confrontation with the Islamic Revolution and the Vilayat-e Faqi (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lSpdxTn2S4)	Clear governmental threat and move towards disorder(cherati, 2015)

In other sects, a move towards authoritarianism and confrontation with the Islamic community is also evident (Shirazi, n.d: 15), and within this framework, they are willing to sacrifice national interests (www.farsnews.com/news/8705120154/).

7. Creation of Domestic and International Legal Challenges Against the Regime

One of the other harmful aspects of claimants and sects is that despite being deviant and anti-security, they convey the impression that they are somehow claiming the rights of religions and cultural and ideological associations. They assert that if they are opposed, it constitutes a violation of human rights and legal standards, and they try to provoke legal activists or prominent domestic figures to take a stand against the revolution and the regime. They aim to guide this into a kind of popular confrontation with the regime, while also using this tactic internationally to condemn the Islamic Republic in any given situation.

For instance, the movement led by Kazemini Boroujerdi, which claims a special kind of authority, gradually led to confrontation with the regime. With the news of Kazemini's arrest, human rights

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organizations, news agencies, and international radio and television networks expressed their protests, creating a very negative atmosphere against the regime. Consequently, under severe international pressure, his judicial verdicts remained unresolved and notable figures, including Shirin Ebadi (Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2003) and prominent Iranian lawyer Ne'mat Ahmadi, took on his legal case (Noori, 1953: 110).

In these mentioned examples, the surface issues appear to be related to human rights, women's rights, etc., but a deeper analysis reveals a focus on confronting the Vilayat-e Faqih and the governance during the occultation. This is because these individuals not only lack opposition or a stance against similar legal challenges in other parts of the world, but at times actively align with or support them.

8. Hard Threats

Sects typically resort to threats and violence as they evolve, and this phenomenon even includes spiritual sects such as the Sufis (Ishaqiyani, Cherati, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 127). Violent reactions are always evident among sects (Poursaeid, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 47).

Various historical examples of sects applying violence and hard threats exist. (mazinani, 2015, 28) For instance, in the Shia context, the Qaramita, inspired by the promotion of Mahdism, conducted attacks on Islamic regions over the years. At one point, they attacked Mecca, killing several pilgrims and looting the Black Stone (Hajar al-Aswad) (Sari, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 154).

It is important to note that these actions were carried out in the name of events heralding the end of times and were based on prevailing Mahdism culture (ibid.).

An example from the Sunni context is the emergence of a claimant to Mahdism in Muharram 1400 AH at the Grand Mosque (Masjid al-Haram). A person named Jahmian Atibi initiated this movement, introducing Muhammad ibn Abdullah Qahtani as the first Mahdi and causing chaos in Mecca for a time. Jahmian viewed the end of the Hajj in 1399 AH and the beginning of the 15th century AH as an opportune moment for this claim, as it marked the start of a new century and a new lunar year, aligning with predictions of re-emergence at the beginning of centuries.

The outcome of this movement led to severe turmoil and chaos in the sacred sanctuary, resulting in significant bloodshed. Another notable point is that this movement emerged from within a Salafi

group that had distanced itself from the government and did not recognize its legitimacy (Jafarian, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 241-256).

9. Methods of Sects Regarding Power Relations and Defensive Politics

Sects and claimants create various distortions and misrepresentations in the content of Mahdism culture, which can undermine the foundations of national security and the Islamic system. In this section, we will outline some examples of this phenomenon.

9.1. Distortion of the Defensive Capacities of the Islamic System

It is evident that the fundamental concepts of the revolution encompass multiple defensive capacities and the establishment of security within the framework of the Islamic system. However, the claimants introduce deviations by narrowing or expanding these concepts.

In Yaqoubi's discourse, a specific analysis of the relationship between the earthly realm and the spiritual realm is presented. He asserts that concerning the defensive power of the revolution and the Islamic system, we do not need missiles and similar weaponry; rather, we require spiritual and celestial power (Mahdism forces).

He claims that during this period of occultation, only specific individuals benefit from this power. Yaqoubi identifies these individuals as Khidr and himself, suggesting that others should utilize his spiritual capacities (Yaqoubi, *Towards Emergence*, Session 8, pp. 26-28).

9.2. Claim of a Change in the Theological and Juridical Basis for the Legitimacy of the Islamic Revolution and System

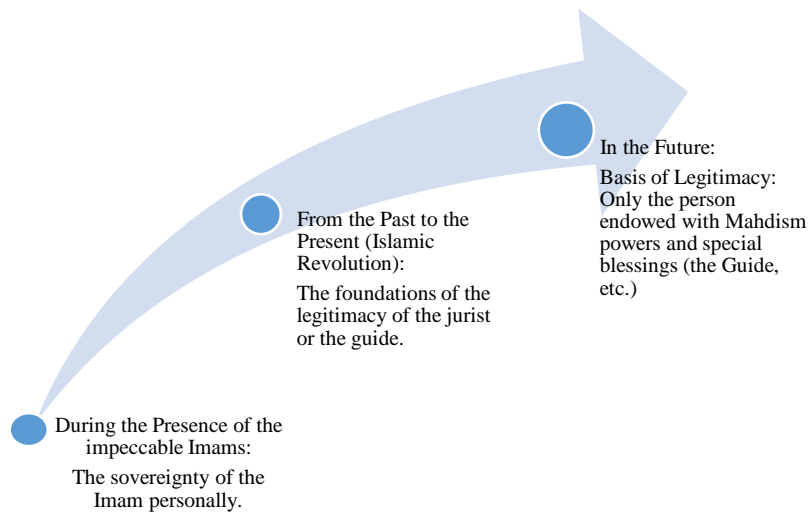
One of the crucial doctrinal foundations for the legitimacy of the Islamic Revolution and system is the continuity of Imamate and leadership, which in the period of occultation is interpreted as the Vilayat-e Faqih.

All laws and subjects within the Islamic system are governed by the principle of the Vilayat-e Faqih, which is considered a basis for authority within the Islamic system and the Islamic community.

Yaqoubi questions this foundation in his discussions on Mahdism, suggesting that the Vilayat-e Faqih was only temporarily accepted by the Imam of the Time and will no longer have legitimacy in the future. Instead, he argues that one should refer to the celestial rulers or guides during the occultation (Yaqoubi, *Forty Nights with the Husseini Caravan*: 149).

This type of analysis and vision can be illustrated in the following diagram:

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Another form of change and distortion in the foundations of the Islamic system is the view that considers uprisings prior to the emergence of the Mahdi to be invalid, deeming the actions of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic government during the period of occultation as invalid and lacking legitimacy. It is important to note that there are two different viewpoints regarding uprisings during the occultation:

A) A group that does not academically see the establishment of an Islamic government during the occultation as necessary and does not regard the efforts of the jurist in this regard as obligatory.

B) A group that fundamentally opposes any form of uprising or political action during the occultation, believing that all political and social matters should be postponed until the time of emergence. In this case, the practical and true implementation of Islamic rulings is obstructed, allowing for the infiltration and dominance of deviants and enemies.

In this group, opposition to the ruling jurist is evident, whereas in the first viewpoint, although they may not believe in the establishment of an Islamic government during the occultation, they support and obey the ruling jurist and the Islamic system. Ayatollah Khamenei has stated in this regard: "The Vilayat-e Faqih and leading the community and managing social affairs in every era and time are fundamental elements of the true Twelver sect and have their roots in the principle of Imamate. Therefore, if anyone believes otherwise based on evidence, they may be excused; but it is not permissible for

them to create division and discord." (Khamenei, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 18)

The type of scholars and sources of religious authority, even if they do not believe in establishing an Islamic government, practically fall into this category. The result of the first theory gradually leads to the point where even opposing this uprising is deemed necessary, relying on some narrations as a basis.

"Every flag raised before the rise of the Mahdi is that of a tyrant to be worshipped besides God, the Almighty." (Kulayni: 8, 295; Hurr Amili: 15, 52; Noori Tabrisi: 11, 34)

However, the emphases and strong principles of Islamic issues stress the establishment of justice, standing up for what is right, commanding good and forbidding bad, and maintaining a dynamic and active anticipation during the occultation. Such an approach undoubtedly weakens the revolutionary and Mahdism spirit among the revolutionary forces (Oliyanasab, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 49-54). They believe that pure governance can only occur during the time of Imam Mahdi (AJ). In recent years, they have also used some inefficiencies, corruptions, and problems to substantiate their theory.

9.3. Instrumental Use of Mahdism and Moving Beyond It

Some sects waste a portion of the resources and capabilities that could serve the culture of Mahdism and anticipation, turning them into something contrary, which carries specific security risks. This is particularly evident in the Bahá'í sect, which was initially founded in Babism.

This means that at first, it established itself in the name of the imminent arrival of the promised Mahdi of Islam, employing a number of followers who formed around the Bab. However, as Bahá'ism developed and the claim emerged to abrogate Islam and herald the day of resurrection, it began to align its resources and capabilities with the interests of Zionist powers (Amri News, 1960 AD/1340 SH: No. 10, p. 601).

The instrumental use of Mahdism by rigid and superficial groups occurs in a similar manner; they exploit the emotions of people regarding Mahdism and, after recruiting and consolidating power, suppress Mahdism itself, focusing instead on their rise to positions of authority and acquiring material benefits. The activities of groups like the Hojjatieh society against the Islamic system after the revolution serve as an example of this issue. Additionally, movements like that of Ahmad al-Hassan initially act in the name of Mahdism and the preparation for the establishment of the

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government of the Imam of the Time, but ultimately they only seek to promote their own leaders and agendas.

9.4. Denial of the Supremacy and Globalization of Mahdism

One of the common elements among most sects is the promotion of pluralism as a means to project their legitimacy and truthfulness. They claim that no religion or ideology possesses complete legitimacy in terms of power and supremacy, and that each has its own form of truth. Therefore, none should seek total globalization or dominance. Generally, emerging mystical movements propagate these ideas. For instance, Sai Baba explicitly states that all religions belong to a single God and guide towards a common destination, asserting that fundamentally, religions have no differences among them (Sai Baba, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 167). This stands in contrast to Quranic teachings, which affirm that the global supremacy of Islam, based on Mahdism, is a definitive doctrine. "He is the one who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religions, even if the polytheists dislike it." (Surah al-Tawbah/33) The traditions also indicate the realization of this global governance (Taheri, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 200).

10. Strategies for Addressing Challenges

10.1. Utilizing Soft Power

One of the primary sources of authority in confronting threats, particularly regarding deviant sects, is soft power. The Mahdism culture serves as a significant tool that possesses cross-national qualities, promotes cohesion, and strengthens the overarching culture of compassion, which is rich within Mahdism.⁴

10.2. Strengthening Religious and National Identity

One of the issues pertains to the relationship of collective identities in Iran, particularly the national identity and religious (and Mahdism) identity, and their connection to sustainable security. It can be said that the relationship between the diverse identities present in Iranian society is a key factor in achieving sustainable security.

According to some studies, the relationship between Iranian and Islamic identity is of a composite and coexisting nature, characterized by non-interference. There is a need to enhance the technical capacities and communication skills to increase

4. Cf. Mortazavi Emami, Sayyid Ali et al., Sources of Soft Power of the Islamic Republic of Iran with Emphasis on the Verses of the Quran: Islamic Revolution Research, Fall 1394, vol. 4, no. 14.

intercultural interactions. The concept of messianism provides a great capacity in this area (Hajiani, 2010 AD/1390 SH: 129-150).

In this context, it is essential to carefully examine the type and function of sects and engage with individuals open to change within those sects so that, through a shared culture, they turn toward an Iranian-Islamic identity. At the same time, it is necessary to guard against the mechanisms of identity change that leaders and thinkers of these sects pursue (such as the promotion of statelessness in Bahá'ism or a type of Arabism in the Yemeni claimant, etc.) and consider necessary counter-measures.

10.3. Providing a Strategic and Structured Plan

It is important to note that actions against sects should not be arbitrary or faction-driven. Instead, they should be studied and coordinated with diligence. The Fifth Development Plan, particularly in the first section addressing political, defensive, and security affairs, should focus on coordinating and integrating police, judicial, and security centers in countering soft threats and social deviations, emphasizing the strengthening of religious and national identity against these threats (Iran Islamic Republic of Iran, 2010: Part 1, Chapter 2).

10.4. Comprehensive Security

Given that social security emphasizes the importance of cultural and educational values and communication, achieving such security requires more active engagement in this area. Although maintaining public security is a priority, when public safety and overall faith-based security are even threatened by sects, merely focusing on basic and superficial security will not solve the problem. Promoting the correct culture of Mahdism is effective in fostering empathy and public unity.

10.5. Attention to External Threats

Authentic Islam and Mahdism have caused these colonial and imperial centers to suffer losses, which is why they insist on combating and eliminating authentic Islam and Mahdism. Imam Khomeini stated regarding this imperial behavior: "They have been harmed by Islam and have no personal vendetta against anyone." (Khomeini, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 7, 46: 11/3/1358) On the other hand, the teachings of the sects induce a kind of permanent animosity towards the political system, which in turn creates a certain degree of cohesion and internal unity among the diverse sects around common issues (Hofer, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 99).

Therefore, in response to this deviant consensus, political elites and decision-makers in society must formulate measures against such

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threats based on a form of national consensus (Sadeghi, 2010, 48). This issue is particularly significant in regards to security risks posed by sects on a global level.

Conclusion

1. Sects and deviant movements have a continuous path toward the future and exploit Mahdism and its culture for their success and establishment of their government.
2. Violence, chaos, and civil disobedience are among the main components of this trajectory in these movements.
3. The major future threats posed by sects include: Organizing and mobilizing devoted human resources ready for sacrifice and paving the way for uprisings similar to that of the Yemeni claimant against the Islamic regime. Creating divisions and discord among Iranian ethnicities under the guise of defending religious beliefs. Causing chaos in economic and legal domains in the name of advocating Mahdism teachings. Increasing security costs for genuine Mahdism activities and tarnishing their reputation domestically and internationally.
4. Addressing and countering sects and protecting against their future challenges require thorough research, planning, and utilization of all available resources.
5. Movements are the issue of the authority of the jurist and Islamic governance during the occultation. Thus, they focus on this topic to create distortions in beliefs and generate confrontations under the pretexts of human rights, drawing society into opposition and security threats in this realm.

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