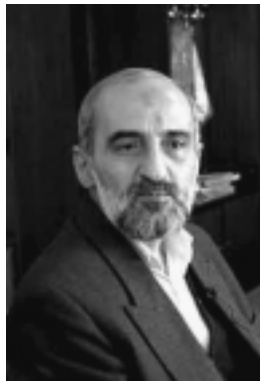


‘The Sunni vs. Shi’ite Scheme Is Meaningless’

Hossein Shariatmadari is the Representative of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and is president of the Kayhan Group of Newspapers and Publications. Kayhan is considered to reflect the views of the government. Muriel Mirak-Weissbach interviewed him on Dec. 4, 2006, in his Tehran office. He spoke through an interpreter.



EIR: How do you evaluate the war danger?

Shariatmadari: First of all, thank you for coming here. I hope you will have good memories of Iran. We are also following this news, monitoring it, and are well informed about Cheney’s recent trip to Saudi Arabia, and we have said that the main concept he was talking about was the question of the war between Sunnis and Shias. He asked the Saudis to help the Americans solve the Iraq issue.

In the recent explosions in Iraq we have found the hands of the Saudis. Last week two car bombs were prepared for an attack in a protected area. But these two cars were stopped by the Iraqi police in Baghdad, and the people in it were Saudis. The Americans had them released by the Iraqi police.

I believe the Americans are not in a position to be able to attack us. The Americans in Iraq are being drowned in a sea. What has President Mr. Bush gained from the invasion? The greatest benefit for the invasion was to Iran and the Islamic world. Saddam Hussein was a great enemy of ours; he attacked us on American orders. So the invasion was to our benefit.

The Iraqi people have a good potential as Muslims, but they were under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Now their potential has been freed up for the Islamic world. Now the Iraqi people are seeking a government based on Islam, so this is also to our benefit and the benefit of the Islamic world. The Americans made a big effort in recent years, and had many parties supporting them; they had a good position in the region. With what Mr. Bush did, he disgraced the word “democracy” and democratic parties and groups. Now the pro-American groups are afraid of saying that they are pro-American, because of this invasion. Before the invasion, the

democratic supporters of the U.S. claimed they would bring democracy to the region, and that American democracy was the best. Now they don’t dare to make such claims, because they see that the people are supporting the martyrs.

The American invasion did not bring the U.S. benefits; they lost a lot. What we hear here is that there are on average four U.S. and U.K. soldiers killed each day. The American population has the right to ask why. We believe the American population is more pious than the system, and does not want these crimes. Remember that, after Sept. 11, 2001, Mr. Bush spoke of a religious war, and accused some Muslim countries of being behind that event. I think he was very proud of what he was claiming. From that time, he had this plan to attack Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, and to draw a new map of the Middle East. In Afghanistan, they somehow felt successful, because really the Afghanis were fed up with the Taliban. But when they invaded Iraq, gradually they are now seeing the signs of defeat.

These days, they are bringing up the nuclear issue of Iran. You saw that Iran stood firm against the American claims. Even now, Iran has not given up on the 5-plus-1 group [the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany, who have been negotiating with Iran about its nuclear energy program]. Last night, the 5-plus-1 meeting in France was again unsuccessful [in finding agreement on sanctions against Iran].

In between, there was the war in Lebanon, which lasted 33 days. Nobody could believe that Israel, the fifth strongest army in the world and America’s ally, could be defeated by a military group [Hezbollah]. On the 20th day into the war, Mr. Bush said that the Israeli war against Lebanon was a war of the United States against Iran. He said Hezbollah was fighting on behalf of Iran and that Israel was fighting on behalf of the U.S.—and I accept what he said!

Now, I want to talk about the Middle East. In the Middle East, Mr. Bush claims that he wants to change the map. The Middle East is really changing, but the main axis is Islam, and this is a great defeat for the Bush Administration.

With all this, I do not believe that the Israelis and the Americans dare attack Iran. Hezbollah was a small sample. If Israel tries something [against Iran], within one minute, Israel will be covered by our missiles. We are not afraid of a war, but we are never *after* a war. I do not think Mr. Bush will make such a stupid move.

Now, regarding the Saudis: I believe the Arab countries are in for a great shock coming from their people very soon. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the government is a hereditary monarchy. There is only one family controlling the state, all of the benefits of the country are in the hands of one family. This is unacceptable.

The Saudi people, especially the youth, are well informed and well educated. In the age of communications, youth are aware of everything going on. Can we imagine that these young people will continue to accept this government? For

sure, it will not last. We are now seeing all the signs of this great change. The Saudi royal family does not have the power to deploy manpower, the army, in any war against Iran.

But the new American plan, as you said, is war between Sunnis and Shi'ites. This plan has not shown any success up to the present. The reason is that people have eyes, and they can see. Everybody sees that Hezbollah is Shi'ite, but it helped break the siege [by Israel] against Hamas, which is Sunni. You can see that the most support for Hezbollah comes from Arab Sunni people in the region. Two days ago, Mr. Ben Bella in Algeria had an interview with our ambassador there, and there is a report in our paper today. Let me just cite one phrase: Ben Bella said, it is my honor to be the soldier of Seyyed Hassan Nasrullah [leader of Hezbollah].

From the other side, if you look at the Iranian Revolution, for the last 27 years, you see we have had problems and a struggle with America and Israel—but we never had any problem with the Sunnis. The Sunni people in the region see Iran as a Shi'ite state fighting the common enemies of the Muslims, the United States and Israel. So the Sunni vs. Shi'ite scenario is meaningless.

EIR: What do you think of the scenario for regime change in Iran, through activation of ethnic groups—Kurds, Arabs, Azeris—in order to break up the country?

Shariatmadari: This is a plot that has been in the making for 20 years; it's nothing new. Just as the Islamic Revolution was victorious, some weeks later, there was a big war in Kurdistan. What the Kurds were claiming was that there was oppression against them. The Islamic Republic said, we just took power two weeks ago. How could we be oppressing you? And the Kurds comprehended what we said; the Kurdish people had not forgotten the pressure they were under from the Shah. And they could see the pressure put on the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, and could compare their situation.

The Americans at that time insisted that the Kurds were fighting, but the Kurdish people told us, we are not fighting, these are American groups fighting. The Kumelah Party belongs to the Mossad. Another party called the Kurdish Democratic Party was originally a Marxist party, and everyone found out after the war what their role had been.

I want to give you an example for the contemporary situation. One month ago, Iranian President Ahmadinejad went to Kurdistan. Everyone saw, and all the news agencies reported, on how people welcomed him in Kurdistan: The Kurds realize who is their friend and who is their enemy. . . .

Now about the Azeris: We don't have such a thing as a Persian, Pars, or Turks in Iran. You cannot find a family who does not have a Turk as a relative. We are so mixed through intermarriage, that the Turks and Persians are together. I think that the mistake Mr. Bush made, was that he took a map and said, this is where the Azeris are, this is where the Kurds are, and thought he could foment a war. But he doesn't understand the people. The Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei]

is a Turk, he's Azeri. Many Iranian ministers and officials are Azeris, Turks. So Mr. Bush is asking them to split power? They have power already! So, I don't think this ethnic plot will work. But, of course, they may put a bomb somewhere and explode something.

EIR: Do you think a real peace is achievable in Iraq? You know that the Iraq Study Group is to present its report in two days; they are expected to ask for a withdrawal of 15 brigades, with no set timetable, as well as talks with Iran and Syria. What we are proposing is that a regional security arrangement be established, with the nations of the region, particularly, Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Egypt, because of its role in the Arab world. That this security arrangement, anchored on a regional infrastructure development program endorsed by the U.S. government. In that context, it would be possible to organize an orderly withdrawal of U.S. and British troops.

Mr. LaRouche has proposed this again, insisting that therefore the U.S. government must immediately establish full diplomatic relations with Iran, with no conditions, and revive normal relations with Syria. What is your view? How do you think the Iraqi situation can be stabilized? What would Iran's role be? Would Iran speak to the United States?

Shariatmadari: When James Baker started his studies, it was just before the U.S. elections, and Mr. Bush had to accept the idea of listening to their conclusions. But just as their conclusions were to be published, with their recommendations for troop withdrawal, Mr. Bush said no, he would not listen. Mr. Bush is a liar. He lies all the time. It reminds me of the story of the liar, who was asked, do you ever tell the truth? And he answered, if I say yes, I will be telling another lie.

I think security in Iraq is good for everybody, it is to the benefit of all states, except for Mr. Bush. If there is security established in Iraq, it means that Mr. Bush has lost everything. Not only Mr. Bush, but the neo-cons and the Republican Party will lose.

Because the first question is: Why did Mr. Bush invade Iraq? He has killed American soldiers and a lot of innocent Iraqis, and has spent billion of dollars of American taxpayers' money, and discredited the image of America's liberal democracy in the world. So if he withdraws, everyone will ask: Why did you invade in the first place? He has no way out; he has to stay in Iraq.

I was following the news about the elections and studying what Mr. Bush said. I was very sensitive to what Mr. Bush said. I wanted to find out what he had to say to the American people. During the elections, I realized that Mr. Bush changed his propaganda strategy very slowly. Very delicately, he changed his position, and the rest of the Republicans followed him. This is an important point, and I will tell you how he changed: Right before the elections, Mr. Bush was saying all the time, "We invaded Iraq to bring democracy to the Iraqi people." Right near the election, he said, "We need the Iraqi

oil.” So in a way he was telling the American people, although we did not bring democracy for the Iraqis, if we withdraw you’ll lose your benefits.

We believe the main reason for the insurgency in Iraq is the presence of American and British troops. If they withdraw, the Iraqi people will have no problem living together. So I said that Iraqi security is good for everyone except Mr. Bush. And Turkey, Syria, and Iran are Iraq’s neighbors, so the insurgency in Iraq would cause insurgencies in these countries too. And we are very happy to sit together to solve this problem. Some steps have already been taken, but the Americans don’t want it. We had suggested recently that Tehran host a summit among [Syrian President Bashar] al-Assad, Ahmadinejad and [Iraqi President Jalal] Talabani. Suddenly, the Americans said this was against their interests. Right at that time, Ms. Rice made a trip to the Arab countries and Mr. Cheney went to Saudi Arabia.

I know Mr. Bush will not withdraw, but I do not know what the next American government will do. Then, anything is possible.

EIR: If Iran were not harassed by this U.S. government, you would have many challenges to face. It’s a big country, with a big population, especially a big youth population. What do you see as the priorities for government action?

Shariatmadari: There are many things that others would see as threats, but we see them as opportunities. For example, our youth represent an opportunity. We have a lot of young educated people, who have studied in universities, and you see the nuclear achievement that has been made by these young people. We have had great success in nanotechnology. We will make announcements on the anniversary of the revolution [in February 2007], and everyone will be surprised. In the medical field we have had great successes, that only a few countries can match.

We are a big, a great country, and have a lot of unused resources. One of our great problems was that we were leaning on our oil income all the time. Yesterday, it was announced that our non-oil imports increased 48% over last year. We are gradually establishing infrastructure and think we will be successful in utilizing these resources. Take unemployment, which creates problems for young people, in particular; we know we have to solve this problem. We don’t say that we don’t have problems, but we say that we can solve them.

Some years ago, I had a journalist from the first channel of the German television network, ARD. The journalist told me that after World War II, the Germans rebuilt their country very fast. I told him, the whole world helped you. But after our war with Iraq [1980-88], the whole world hindered our recovery.

I don’t want to say that the only problem is American pressure. I know we have to do more, and work harder and have good planning. I think the new government is doing well. So, I’m very optimistic and hope we can solve these problems.