GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTIONALISM IN THE END TIMES:
A Comparative Study of Islamic Theories

Ali Rod Khadem

Abstract

Theories of apocalyptic government (the global polity that will govern humanity in the End Times) provide an important lens for differentiating political movements and understanding their legal and political ambitions. These theories comprise a range of questions: What is the time span of the final government—i.e., how long will humanity survive before universal annihilation? Will the final government involve separation of powers? Will its form be democratic, autocratic, socialist, or otherwise? Will it preserve the boundaries of nation-states? How will it relate to existing supranational political entities, such as the United Nations? How will the political leadership be constituted, including its mechanisms of succession? How will its administrative and bureaucratic apparatus be organized? This Article considers such questions within the Islamic context by examining four case studies: (1) the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria ("ISIS"), (2) Muḥammad ʻĪsa Dāwūd and his "Awaited Mahdi" political party in Egypt, (3) the Islamic Republic of Iran, as represented by three de facto theorists, and (4) the Ṣadrist movement in Iraq, as represented by the movement's former leader. While these case studies may appear to be superficially similar, their theories of apocalyptic governance and constitutional law differ markedly.

KEYWORDS: constitutional law, Islamic law, human rights, comparative law, ISIS, Iran, Apocalypse

About the Author

Professor of Law, Suffolk University Law School, Boston, Massachusetts.

© 2025 Ali Rod Khadem

Table of Contents

Introduction 106
I. Background 109
A. Conventional (Pre-Apocalyptic) Islamic Constitutional Theory 109
B. Apocalyptic Theories of Government in Islam 112
C. Taxonomy 113
II. Final Government in Sunni Discourses 116
A. Reversionism: The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria ("ISIS") 116
B. Progressivism: Muḥammad ʻĪsa Dāwūd and his "Awaited Mahdi" Political Party 124
III. Final Government in Shiʻi Discourses 129
A. Revanchism: The Islamic Republic of Iran 129
B. Idealism: The Ṣadrist Movement in Iraq 135
1. The First Political Phase: The Mahdi's Personal Rule 144
2. Second Political Phase: The Appointed Righteous Saints 147
3. The Third Political Phase: Election of the "Righteous Saints" 150
Conclusion 151

Introduction

Shortly after the October 7, 2023 attacks, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that "Hamas is ISIS."[1] This statement demonstrates a common tendency among political leaders to group dissimilar movements based on superficial similarities, rather than recognizing their fundamental differences. To be fair, Hamas and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—not to mention numerous other groups, such as Hezbollah and the Ṣadrists—do appear quite similar in some respects. All four of these groups, after all, are Islamic political movements that have operated contemporaneously within a similar geography. All four have operated as non-state actors calling for Islamic government in a manner that has been disruptive not only to their proximate nation-states but also to the broader regional and international geopolitical order.

The differences among these movements however are considerably greater than their similarities. A casual observer may recognize sectarianism: while Hamas and ISIS both self identify as Sunni, Hezbollah and the Ṣadrists are Twelver Shiʻi. Sectarianism, however, is an insufficient lens for differentiating between these movements, for despite their apparently common Sunni affiliation, ISIS has openly communicated that it "despises" Hamas owing to the latter's "ties to Iran,[2] as well as its reliance on politics; it participated in elec-

1. Al Jazeera English, *Netanyahu: The Whole World Must Realise that Hamas is a Terrorist Organisation Like ISIL*, YouTube (Oct. 16, 2023), https://youtu.be/4bLJyodBP0Y?si=K4aJCMQya-cRkUCh

2. Because ISIS considers all Shiʻis to be apostates, the fact that Hamas is sponsored

tions," which ISIS views as a red line.[3] Conversely, Hamas seeks to Islamize an existing nation-state, while ISIS aims to eliminate the nation-state system as such. Similarly, Hezbollah and the Ṣadrists, while both Shi'i, have differing political agendas. Hezbollah functions as an agent of the Iranian regime which enjoys its status as a nation-state and endeavors to maintain this status quo. The Ṣadrists, in contrast, while instrumentally availing themselves of the machinery of the Iraqi nation-state, aspire to establish a global polity that will replace all nation-states, including that of Iraq.

Given their common goal of establishing a post-Westphalian, *supra*-national world order, are ISIS and the Ṣadrists thus more similar to one another than they are to Hamas and Hezbollah, respectively? The answer to this question can only be discerned by way of a detailed contrast of their theories of final government. ISIS, on the one hand, envisions an autocratic world government, resembling a 7th-century desert polity, that will last for up to nineteen years followed by universal annihilation In contrast, the Ṣadrists envision final government that will last for an incalculably long period and undergo gradual democratization. From the perspective of these theories of final government, therefore, ISIS and the Ṣadrists represent opposite ends of the ideological spectrum and significantly different levels of existential threat to humanity.

Although generally unexamined in scholarship, theories of the final government can thus serve as a critical lens through which religious and secular political movements can be better understood. Originating in apocalyptic thought, these theories concern the global polity to be established during the End Times. In Abrahamic religions, this order is believed to emerge after global apocalyptic battles, endure for some time, and then end as part of the annihilation of Judgment Day.[4] In the modern era, apocalyptic theories of final government have permeated a host of secular and materialist ideologies—including the doctrine of Manifest Destiny underpinning the founding of the United States, the salvific millennialism of Nazism, and the chiliastic utopia envisioned in Marxism.[5] Whether religious or secular nature, these theories of final government are teleological and represent utopian visions of humanity's destiny.

---

by Iran (a Shi'i state) means that Hamas itself, in the eyes of ISIS, is flirting with apostacy.

3. *See* Óscar Gutiérrez Garrido & Antonio Pita, *The weak points of Israel's thesis: Why Hamas is not the same as ISIS*, El Pais (Nov. 22, 2023, 6:24 AM), https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-11-22/the-weak-points-of-israels-thesis-why-hamas-is-not-the-same-as-isis.html.

4. For a comparison of apocalyptic traditions across Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, *see generally* Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America (Abbas Amanat & Magnus T. Bernhardsson eds., 2002).

5. *See generally* Richard Landes, Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience (2011); Donald W. Musser & Joseph L. Price, New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology: Revised Edition (1992); Betsy Hartmann, The America Syndrome:

Given this utopian (or often dystopian) quality, theories of final government may, ostensibly, appear to be an esoteric domain of speculation that some might dismiss as irrelevant to immediate legal, political, or social concerns. This dismissal, however, would constitute a grave misunderstanding for two reasons. First, these theories are often espoused by disruptive political movements, such as ISIS and the Ṣadrists. Understanding the apocalypticism of these movements reveals their long-term aims, which can be both constructive and destructive. Second, most theories of the final government not only posit visions of the final order but also address the roadmap or pathway that will lead to it. Within these discourses related to the roadmap, the legitimacy of the contemporary Westphalian order of nation-states is fiercely contested.[6]

Expanding upon my prior scholarship on Islamic apocalyptic jurisprudence,[7] this Article explores conceptions of final government and constitutional law in the Islamic tradition:

Part I summarizes the essential and well-known features of "conventional" (i.e. pre-apocalyptic) Islamic constitutional theory that will be disrupted by the theories of final government, considers why the theories of final government have remained unexamined, and selects the taxonomy that I established previously. Employing this taxonomy, Parts II and III revisit four case studies that I considered previously, focusing now on their theories of final government and constitutional law.[8]

Part II considers the first two case studies (ISIS, and Muḥammad ʻĪsa Dāwūd's manifesto for the "Awaited Mahdi" political party in Egypt), which represent opposite ends of the Sunni discourses on final government. As I discussed in my previous article, Sunni thinkers and movements have generally envisioned the final political order as a restoration of the Prophet's polity rather than a radical break from history. This helps explain why it is rare for Sunni thinkers to explicitly articulate developed theories of apocalyptic governance and why ISIS and Dāwūd have thus been selected as case studies even though both are outliers within the context of mainstream Sunni thought.

Part III considers two further case studies which represent divergent approaches within Shiʻi discourses (the Islamic Republic of Iran, as represented by three individual de facto theorists, and the Ṣadrist movement in Iraq, as represented by Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr, its former leader). While the three

---

Apocalypse, War, and Our Call to Greatness (2017).

6. *See generally* Ali Rod Khadem, *Why Should Law and Policy Makers Understand Extremist Beliefs? The Islamic State (ISIS) as a Case Study: Past, Present, and Future*, 23 Lewis & Clark L. Rev. 101 (2019).

7. *See generally* Ali Rod Khadem, *Islamic Apocalyptic Jurisprudence*, 2024 Islamic L. & Soc'y 1.

8. Unless indicated otherwise, all primary source material (in Arabic and Farsi) referred to herein have been translated into English by the present author.

Iranian theorists analyzed here do not represent an official position of the Islamic Republic of Iran, they each have a meaningful relationship to the Iranian state, whose political and theological outlook—like that of any nation-state—is not monolithic. Their arguments, nonetheless, reflect influential strands of political theology within the Islamic Republic. As for the Ṣadrists, although Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr died more than two decades ago, his intellectual legacy continues to shape Ṣadrist doctrine through his role as the movement's former leader and as the father of its current leader, Muqtada al-Ṣadr. Moreover, since his passing, arguably no one within the movement has matched his stature as a scholar or intellectual figure.

The Conclusion to this Article discusses the overall implications of the case studies, contrasting their constitutional theories, identifying sectarian themes and patterns, and considering the relevance of these findings to international law and policy.

I. Background

A. Conventional (Pre-Apocalyptic) Islamic Constitutional Theory

In the realm of Islamic law, the fundamental aspects of conventional, or pre-apocalyptic, Islamic constitutional theory are generally well understood. Islamic constitutional theory differs from Christian and secular Western jurisprudence in part because Islam has no institutional equivalent to the church, and thus no corresponding concept of church-state separation.[9] Prophet Muhammad, in the last decade of his life, served as both religious and political leader, governing Medina and exercising executive, legislative, and judicial powers. By his death in 632 CE, Islam had unified the Arabian peninsula under monotheism.[10]

With this union of religion and state as its cornerstone, classical Islamic constitutional theory thereafter developed largely along the sectarian lines that divided Sunnism and Shi'ism. While this divide formed only gradually over several centuries after the Prophet's death, its roots can be traced to a disagreement that occurred immediately upon his passing regarding political structure, political authority, and successorship.

The proto-Sunnis,[11] comprising most of the nascent Islamic community, recognized Abu Bakr, an early convert to Islam and a senior companion of the

9. *See generally* Babak Rod Khadem, *The Doctrine of Separation in Classical Islamic Jurisprudence*, 4 UCLA J. Islamic & Near E. L. 95 (2005).

10. *See generally* Hugh Kennedy, The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates (4th ed. 2022).

11. The term "proto-Sunni" is used here to refer to the early supporters of Abu Bakr's leadership following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The use of "proto-" is intended to avoid anachronism by acknowledging that the Sunni sect, as a formalized religious and political identity, did not emerge until centuries later. The term reflects the historical continuity between early political and theological positions and the later development of Sunni Islam.

Prophet, as the first successor, or "caliph", to the Prophet. According to this viewpoint, the caliph could be whoever the influential members of the Muslim community (*ahl al-ḥall wa-l-ʿaqd*)—including tribal leaders and senior companions of the Prophet—deemed to be the most fit and qualified for the task.[12] After Abu Bakr's death, the proto-Sunnis recognized the caliphates of ʻUmar, ʻUthman, and ʻAli, who along with Abu Bakr, were revered as the four "Rightly Guided Caliphs" in Sunni historiography. Over time, as Islam expanded both demographically and politically, caliphates became increasingly imperial, encompassing the entirety of the Near East and expanding into Europe, Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Far East.[13] By the 11th century CE, proto-Sunnism had developed into the clearly defined Sunnism characterizing most Muslims today.[14]

Upon the Prophet's passing in 632 CE, the proto-Shiʻa minority,[15] however, believed that the Prophet had designated his cousin and son-in-law, ʻAli, as the next leader, or "Imam." They argued that leadership must remain within the Prophet's family and that Abu Bakr's caliphate was thus an unjust usurpation. Following ʻAli's assassination in 661 CE, a subset of the proto-Shiʻa recognized a line of succession consisting of eleven more Imams from among ʻAli's descendants. Each of these twelve Imams in turn was disenfranchised and persecuted by the proto-Sunni caliphs or their agents, who viewed them as political threats. The most heinous of these persecutions was the murder and decapitation in 680 CE of the Third Imam, Ḥusayn, who was ʻAli's son and the grandson of the Prophet. His martyrdom holds great religious and symbolic significance in Shiʻism, and is sometimes likened to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in terms of its redemptive and sacrificial meaning.[16] By the 10th century CE, "Twelver" Shiʻism, which characterizes the majority of Shiʻa today, had matured into its current form.[17]

Classical Islamic constitutional theory thus revolves around both the Sunni doctrine of the caliphate and the Shiʻi doctrine of the imamate.[18] After

12. *Id.*

13. *Id.*

14. *See generally* 1 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam: The Classical Age (1977).

15. The term "proto-Shiʻa" is used to describe the early supporters of Ali's claim to leadership after the Prophet's death. The use of "proto-" helps avoid anachronism by recognizing that the Shiʻi sect, as a distinct theological and political tradition, developed only in later centuries. The term highlights the foundational role of this early allegiance in shaping Shiʻi identity.

16. *See generally* Mahmoud Ayoub, Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Ashura (1978); Todd Lawson, The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought (2009).

17. *Id. See also* Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shiʻi Islam (1987); Marshall Hodgson, *How Did the Early Shiʻa Become Sectarian?*, 75 J. Am. Oriental Soc'y 1 (1955).

18. *See* Momen, *supra* note 17. *See generally* Asma Afsaruddin, *Caliphate*, Britannica (Dec. 10, 2022) https://www.britannica.com/place/Caliphate.

their inception in 632 CE, the caliphates enjoyed phenomenal success, becoming the world's foremost geopolitical powers for several centuries, and although their political influence was uneven thereafter—marked by fragmentation after the 900s and later resurgence under the Ottomans—Sunni political thought nonetheless came to conceive of the caliphate as a model of legitimate governance.[19] Although Sunni religious scholars criticized the caliphs for their corruption, Sunni casuistry holds that only the Prophet is free from sin and error. As a result, although Islamic government under caliphate leadership was often regarded as imperfect or even corrupt in practice,[20] the caliphate was understood to remain a religious obligation: and as long as the caliph fulfilled his essential duties, the Muslim community was obliged to refrain from rebellion and sedition.[21] Although the institution of the Sunni caliphate was dissolved after the Ottoman Empire's demise in 1924, the classical theory of the caliphate continued to underpin much of Sunni political theory and remains the north star for many contemporary Sunni movements aiming to establish Islamic nation-states.[22] Animosity between contemporary Sunni movements, such as Hamas and ISIS, largely derives from disagreements over the means of re-establishing the caliphate.

In contrast, the early Twelver Shi'i community, witnessing a series of disenfranchised Imams, responded by developing their theory of the imamate as an expression of aloofness, victimization, and esotericism.[23] According to this perspective, despite political power being usurped from the Shi'i Imams, their moral and spiritual authority remained intact. The Imams were revered for their spiritual leadership and supernatural gifts, and their words and deeds were considered to have authority akin to those of the Prophet.[24] When the Eleventh Imam died in 846 CE, religious scholars claimed that he had left behind a child—Twelfth Imam—who had gone into hiding, known as the "Lesser Occultation." Later, in 941 CE, this claim was further elaborated: the Twelfth Imam, who by now would be elderly by ordinary human standards, had not died but rather had entered a "Greater Occultation" from which he would, at some future point, messianically return to the world to inaugurate a global government and correct the injustices of history.[25] Until that future time of his "Appearance" (*ẓuhūr*), all human government efforts are inherently and unavoidably corrupt, and government is necessary only to a limited extent. While this political doctrine of

19. Hodgson, *supra* note 14.

20. *See generally* Khaled Abou El Fadl, Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law (2001).

21. *Id.* For a classical exposition of the Sunni theory of the caliphate, *see* Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi, The Ordinances of Government (Wafaa H. Wahba trans., 2000).

22. *See generally* Hamid Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought (2005).

23. Momen, *supra* note 17.

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.*

the Imamate has since evolved, giving rise to various schools of thought within Shi'ism, its core principles continue to inform all contemporary Twelver Shi'i political movements, be it the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah, the Iraqi Ṣadrists, or others.[26]

These classical Islamic accounts of the caliphate and the imamate thus define the conventional or "pre-apocalyptic" constitutional norms of Sunnism and Shi'ism, respectively. Both theories, however, are significantly disrupted and modified by apocalyptic theories of final government.

B. Apocalyptic Theories of Government in Islam

Within the Islamic tradition, theories about the apocalyptic era, including the establishment of a final government and the subsequent end of the world, are diverse and varied. In a previous article, I identified six common elements shared by Sunni and Shi'i thinkers. First, the final order will be ushered in by the Mahdi (equated in Shi'ism with the Twelfth Imam)—a prophesied descendant of Prophet Muḥammad who will redeem humanity in the End Times. Second, Jesus Christ will return to support the Mahdi in the apocalyptic battles. Third, the final order will be characterized by universal justice and jurisdiction, as enshrined in an Islamic tradition (*ḥadīth*) stating that the Mahdi will establish a world filled with justice and fairness. Fourth, social harmony and equality will be achieved, which at a minimum will amount to the elimination of racial and ethnic prejudices (though less clear whether other forms of diversity—e.g. religious, gender-related, etc.—will be protected). Fifth, the final order will bring about material prosperity. Sixth, the world will come to an end through the annihilation of Judgment Day after the establishment of the final order.[27]

While these apocalyptic topoi have been recognized by scholars in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Islamic theories of final world order per se, including the legal and political structures thereof, have remained unexamined, for several reasons noted in my previous article. Scholars with a classical or pre-modern focus have not considered the topic because it did not exist as a focused and coherent area of speculation in classical Islamic thought. On the other hand, scholars of Islamic political thought with a modern focus—such as Enayat, Balqaziz, Cook, Filiu, and Amanat—face the challenge of interdisciplinarity, for the topic at hand also lies at the intersection of legal and apocalyptic thought. Finally, scholars of Islamic law—including Schacht, Coulson, Hallaq, and many others—have not addressed the topic, for it amounts to an imagined future of Islamic law and legal theory which, by definition, has not yet been historically actualized.[28]

---

26. *Id.*
27. Khadem, *Islamic Apocalyptic Jurisprudence, supra* note 7.
28. *Id.*

Unsurprisingly, popular and policy-oriented literature on Islamic movements has also overlooked the question of final government. For example, Graeme Wood's article, "What ISIS Really Wants",[29] mentions that ISIS aims to reestablish the caliphate and anticipates an imminent apocalypse but fails to provide insight into the governmental structures ISIS envisions in the apocalyptic era and the intermediate steps between the ISIS caliphate and their ultimate goal. Similarly, Lawrence Wright's article, "The Master Plan", outlines Al-Qaeda's six-stage strategy, culminating in a global caliphate, but does not offer any specific details about the apocalyptic elements or proposed government structures.[30] These crucial questions are also left unaddressed in policy-oriented analyses, such as Mehdi Khalaji's "Apocalyptic Politics: on the Rationality of Iranian Policy", which describes the Mahdi as a savior who will establish a just world government but neglects to explain the proposed government structures.[31] Similarly, Wali Nasr's book, "The Shia Revival", mentions that the return of the Mahdi will usher in a reign of justice and the end of time, but does not elaborate on the details of the theorized government that will inaugurate this reign.[32]

C. Taxonomy

To analyze Islamic theories of apocalyptic government, this Article employs a taxonomy that I established previously, consisting of the four categories of reversionism, progressivism, revanchism, and idealism.[33] The fundamental query grounding this taxonomy is whether the final order will be regressive or progressive. This question, in turn, involves two variables: modality, which concerns the mode or form of the final world order (including its legal, political, economic, and social structures), as well as temporality, which concerns its overall timespan.

Revolving around the concept of the caliphate, Sunni discourses on the final world order span a logical spectrum, at opposite ends of which are reversionism and progressivism. Reversionism, the majority view within the Sunni scholarly tradition, holds that the form of the final order will be a caliphate that restores the structures of the Prophet's polity established during 622–632 CE

29. *See* Graeme Wood, *What ISIS Really Wants*, The Atlantic (Mar. 2015), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980.

30. These six stages are: the Awakening, the Eye-Opening, Arising and Standing, Demise of Arab Governments, Declaration of Caliphate, and Total Confrontation. *See* Lawrence Wright, *The Master Plan*, The New Yorker (Sept. 3, 2006) (citing from Fouad Hussein, Al-Zarqāwī: Al-Jīl Al-Thānī Lil-Qā'idah [Al-Zarqawi: The Second Generation of Al Qaeda] (2005)).

31. Mehdi Khalaji, *Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Policy*, 79 Wash. Inst. for Near E. Pol'y, 2008, at 34.

32. Vali Nasr, The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future 69 (2007).

33. Khadem, *supra* note 9.

(modal conservatism). This is supported by an oft-cited *ḥadīth* suggesting that the final order will be "caliphate, on the Prophetic model."[34] Moreover, just as the Prophet's polity lasted only for the length of his reign (of ten years or so), the period of the final order will be limited to a handful of years comprising the reign of its initial founder, the Mahdi (temporal conservatism), after which the universal annihilation of Judgment Day will occur.

Reversionism thus reflects the classical Sunni doctrine of the caliphate, enshrining the thinking of a ruling majority that enjoyed geopolitical dominance for many centuries and which therefore presumes that the early Islamic polity remains the ideal and that the final world order will, at best, return to that earlier condition. As I noted in my previous article, this focus on restoration rather than transformation helps explain why developed Sunni theories of apocalyptic governance are rare. After all, why engage in speculation about the final order if it is assumed that it will simply replicate the familiar structures of the Prophet's polity and endure only briefly?

In contrast, progressivism is a minority Sunni view within an already limited body of Sunni apocalyptic speculation. While Sunni scholars have largely avoided active theorizing about the final order, progressivist ideas have gained traction among lay authors—particularly those writing in the apocalyptic genre for a popular audience. Unlike mainstream Sunni scholars, these authors argue that the final order is worth exploring because it will represent not merely a return to the past but a meaningful transformation—a political order that will be both different and better than anything before. Progressivism thus holds that the final order will not only last for a relatively longer period than the Prophet's polity (temporal moderatism) but will also be more advanced and progressive in its features (modal moderatism). Progressivism thus reinterprets the doctrine of the caliphate such that the best of times still lies ahead, rather than in the Islamic past.

Within Shi'i discourses, rather than being a fringe view, it is a basic or default assumption that the Mahdi's government will last longer than that of the Prophet (modal moderatism) and will be considerably more progressive in its structures (temporal moderatism). As I noted in my previous article, this difference in theological orientation helps explain why there is more extensive Shi'i literature on the topic compared to Sunni thought. Since Shi'i theology anticipates a fundamentally new and transformative political order under the Mahdi, Shi'i theorists have engaged deeply with questions about the structure, duration, and political character of this final government. This is because Shi'i *ḥadīth*s explicitly emphasize the novelty and progressive nature of the Mahdi's

34. The *ḥādīth* states: "Prophethood will remain with you for as long as Allāh desires . . . then there will be a caliphate, on the Prophetic model [minhāj] . . . then kingship will endure . . . then tyrannical kingship . . . then [again] caliphate, on the Prophetic model." *See* Ahmad bin Hanbal, al-Musnad 17939 (Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ ed. 1993–2001).

government, as evidenced, for instance, by a statement that the Mahdi will bring a new Book and establish a new Command, Sovereignty, Method, and Judgment. Similarly, other *ḥadīths* state that the government of the Mahdi will be the final government, leaving no room for other rulers to claim that they could have ruled in the same manner.[35]

While the presumption of progress is thus commonplace in Shi'i discourses on the final order, the ultimate goal of this progress is often understood to be that of vengeance—which is why the default or majority Shi'i position is labeled as "revanchism." Specifically, the progress of the final order represents the vengeful triumph of the historically disenfranchised Shi'i community, for the Mahdi and his agents will mete out harsh punishment to the historical enemies, particularly the Sunnis.

Finally, idealism, which seems to represent a minority view in the Shi'i discourses, agrees that the final order will be progressive in nature, but presumes that it will last not merely for a longer period than the Prophet's polity, but rather for an incalculably long period (temporal radicalism). Within this extraordinary temporal horizon, the revanchist aspiration of correcting the historical injustices suffered by the Shi'i community pales to a matter of tertiary importance. Rather, the primary purpose of the final world order is to advance humanity and transform the world to such an extent that Islam itself, while being preserved nominally, will become virtually unrecognizable, whether in its Sunni or Shi'i variety.

Employing these four categories, the remainder of this Article considers four case studies that reflect a broad range of perspectives on apocalyptic government within contemporary Islamic thought. The Sunni cases include the Salafi-jihadi outlook of ISIS, an insurgency that lies outside the Sunni mainstream due to its extremist and violent doctrines, along with the anti-Salafi outlook of Dāwūd, a popular apocalyptic writer whose abortive attempts at launching the "Awaited Mahdi Party" relegated him to the margins of Egyptian politics. By contrast, the Shi'i cases represent competing sources of authority that are considerably more embedded within mainstream Twelver Shi'ism—on the one hand, the views of several figures closely tied to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and on the other, the Ṣadrists, a former insurgency that has since become part of the Iraqi political establishment.

Whether rooted in the constitutional doctrines of the caliphate or imamate, several themes and questions will be explored for each case study. These include: how will the political form of the final government compare to other known forms, such as democracy, federalism, monarchy, and autocracy? How will the final government relate to existing supranational political entities, such as the United Nations? Will there be competing political parties within the final

35. 52 Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Chapter 27, hadiths 58 & 83, in* Biḥār al-Anwār [Seas of Lights] (2000).

polity? What will be the geographical scope of the final government, including the location of political capital and other important centers of activity? How will political tasks and functions be administered—and will this involve delegation to subordinates, bureaucrats, and institutions? And what will be the mechanism or method of political successorship after the initial leadership of the final polity?

II. Final Government in Sunni Discourses

A. Reversionism: The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria ("ISIS")

As already noted, detailed speculation on the topic of apocalyptic government is rather uncommon in the Sunni context, making it challenging to select a case study reflecting mainstream Sunni thought. Given the rather paltry landscape of source material, I have chosen ISIS, a militant Salafi-jihadi movement, as a case study because, unlike other Sunni Salafi movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, or Salafi-jihadi movements such as al-Qaeda, ISIS has stated that not only will the apocalyptic era begin imminently, but that ISIS itself will establish its final government.[36] From ISIS's perspective, therefore, its own political structure may be seen as a precursor or proxy to the political structure of the Mahdi's final order, making it a suitable case study.[37]

To begin with, ISIS articulates a negative theory of political structure that rejects many of the political methods known to most of Islamic history—and certainly all of those known to secular, Western political history. The first general form that is rejected is nationalism, defined by ISIS as "a call of heretical ignorance aiming to wage war on Islam and get rid of its rulings and teachings. Nationalists consider the call to religion a call deficient in the realization of the nationalists' ambitions, but also they consider it backward, and that it must be separated from the state as well."[38] Likewise, ISIS rejects socialism, which

36. *See generally* Khadem, *supra* note 9. *See also* William McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State (2015).

37. For sources discussing ISIS's theory of final government and its strategies and goals of governance, *see* 'Uthmān b. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Tamīmī, I'Lām Al-Anām Bi-Milād Dawlat Al-Islām [Informing Humanity of the Birth of the Islamic State] (2006) (an Arabic treatise authored by al-Tamīmī, a member of ISIS's former "Shari'ah Committee"); Abū Ayyūb al-Maṣrī, Al-Dawlat Al-Nabawīya [The Prophetic Government] (2008) (an Arabic treatise authored by al-Maṣrī, ISIS's former Minister of War); Abū Sufyān Turkī b. Mubārak al-Bin`alī, Al-Qiyāfa Fī 'Adam Ishṭirāṭ Al-Tamkīn Al-Kāmil Li-L-Khilāfa [Responding to the Allegation of Inadequate Prerequisites for the Full Establishment of the Caliphate] (2014) (an Arabic book authored by al-Bin`alī, ISIS's former senior scholar); Research and Fatwa Committee of ISIS, *Message of Clarification on the Statement of the Ruling on the Education System in the Nusayri Government*, Middle East Forum (Aymenn Jawad al-Tamīmī trans., 2014) https://www.meforum.org/islamic-state-treatise-syria-education; *see generally* ISIS's English-language periodicals, launched in 2014, entitled Dabiq.

38. Research and Fatwa Committee of ISIS, *supra* note 37, at 9. Patriotism is similarly rejected *id.* at 12.

it describes as "not only an economic school of thought or social movement, but also a comprehensive theory of man, existence, and history, emanating from evil heretical Communism that condemns God's existence, rejecting all heavenly religions and waging war on them, while considering religion an opiate for the masses."[39]

ISIS's rejection of democracy, however, is even more vehement than that of nationalism and socialism, for democracy comprises various features, "every one of which . . . is disbelief in its own right . . . "[40] Among these features is "rule of the people: the meaning being that legislation and law-making are referred to the people, not to God Almighty, so the people rules itself in what it chooses, and that by whoso represents them in the legislative councils of disbelief."[41] Another feature of democracy is "peaceful handover of power: this means annulling the legitimacy of *jihād*[42] against the disbelieving ruler, and that change will only be through peaceful elections, and that the people are to be subjected to whosoever has been elected and are to be led by him, even if he is among the most disbelieving of people, for the priority of power is referred to the choice of the majority of the people with no consideration to religion or law."[43] Yet a further feature of democracy abhorrent to ISIS is "separation of powers: and among the powers is legislative power, executive power, judicial power and the like. And the principle meaning of separation of powers is the separation of religion from the state and politics, and it is the call upon which the support bases of irreligious secularism have arisen, and the meaning from them is the preservation of religion in the mosques and places of worship and the like, and the independence of internal and external politics from the regulations and instructions of the law."[44]

ISIS's rejection of prevailing political structures concerns not only these overarching political systems, ranging from democracy to socialism, but indeed even the more mundane aspects of conventional administrative and bureaucratic practices. ISIS expresses this general view by raising the question, "It might be argued [against us]: among the basic constituents of a government is the existence of well-known, modern institutions, governing apparatus, and government facilities—but the government that you [ISIS] are announcing does not comprise any of these things, and does not enjoy what we recognize as the facets of sovereignty which we perceive in contemporary governments!"[45] ISIS then refutes this hypothetical objection, asserting:

39. *Id.* at 8.
40. *Id.* at 12.
41. *Id.*
42. While *jihād* has a number of meanings in the Islamic context, in this case it refers to holy war. *See generally* Asma Afsaruddin, *jihad*, Britannica (May 12, 2023) https://www.britannica.com/topic/jihad.
43. Research and Fatwa Committee of ISIS, *supra* note 37, at 14.
44. *Id.* at 16.
45. al-Tamīmī, *supra* note 37, at 66.

> To this, we reply that the principle we return to . . . and based on which we plan our actions, is the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*s, and the credible views of past scholars . . . Within these sources, we see no description of Muslim government wherein its basic constituents include specific government apparatus along contemporary lines—and there's no known evidence requiring the existence of apparatus and instruments in the manner of contemporary states . . . which derive from the unbelieving West and its political heritage. This does not mean that we deny the function of these apparatus and the effectiveness of those instruments that organize a government's actions and assist in accomplishing its duties. Rather, our admonition involves conditioning the desired Islamic government on modern descriptions of governments, in terms of their structures and administration . . . And from another perspective, the form in which we have announced the government is not unknown . . . For the initial Prophetic Government was similar in this condition . . . when the Prophet entered Medina and began to regulate the affairs of the people . . . [46]

Considering this ethos of minimalism and rejection of modern methods of governance, it is no surprise that ISIS's positive theory of political structure amounts to a skeletal framework that emphasizes basic elements that are presumed to have defined the Prophet's Medina polity of 622–632 CE. ISIS describes this structure "in a general sense as restoration of the religious and worldly condition of humanity, or it can be said: restoring the conditions of the congregation and its affairs, and foremost among its affairs is their religion. This is at a general level."[47] While the word "restoration" within this general definition already indicates a reversionist vision of political structure, this backward-looking ethos becomes more evident in ISIS's more detailed elaboration of this general definition. More particularly, ISIS explains that the Prophet's government comprises nine essential structures that are replicated within ISIS's own organization:

"1. Safeguarding the religion in its fixed principles and the consensus of the first three generations of the [Islamic] community."[48] This includes the "restoration" of true monotheism in the world, which is anathema to "all forms of innovation, such as Baʿathism,[49] free-will ideology, and Communism . . . "[50] It also means the "restoration" of the "Islamic Sharīʿah to the station which God had designated for it, which is the station of dominion over actions, individuals, organizations, customs, and other structures . . . "[51]

---

46. *Id.*
47. *Id.* at 41–42.
48. *Id.*
49. The Baʿathists were a pan-Arab political party with socialist leanings, prominent throughout Syria and Iraq in particular. *See generally* The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, *Baʿath Party*, Britannica (June 14, 2023) https://www.britannica.com/topic/Baath-Party.
50. al-Tamīmī, *supra* note 37, at 41–42.
51. *Id.*

"2. Implementing adjudication among disputants—in other words, settling disruptive quarrels and contentious disagreements (and this overlaps with the [third function] of establishing judges and mediators)."[52] In describing this, ISIS likens the citizens of the "Islamic government" to those of the Prophet's polity wherein the disparate Bedouin tribes of Aws and Khazraj in Medina reconciled their differences and "melded into a single line, and a single community."[53]

"3. Establishing judges and mediators."[54] In explaining this, ISIS first notes that "the term 'judge' is defined in accordance to the functional definition of Averroes[55]—i.e. informing [disputants] of the required Islamic legal principle that is applicable."[56] This is not limited to the "issuing of *fatwas* . . . for the *muftī*[57] cannot force his *fatwa* on the inquirer,"[58] whereas the judge, in contrast, has the authority to enforce compliance. The judgment itself, as ISIS explains, is a "collective duty", so the ruler must select judges for that purpose. The precedent for this is the Prophet himself, for "he adjudicated among his Companions as the six imāms[59] confirmed by narrating the tradition of Umm Salma,"[60] and the Prophet appointed 'Alī and Mu'adh as judges for Yemen.[61] Likewise, ISIS notes that the Rightly Guided caliphs undertook adjudication themselves, but also appointed judges.

"4. Freeing the captives, safeguarding the territory, and defending the sacred."[62] More particularly, ISIS explains that the duty of "freeing the captives" is understandable considering the *ḥadīth* that gives instructions to "free the captives, feed the hungry, and treat the sick."[63] Likewise, "safeguarding the territory" means securing highways and spreading safety."[64]

---

52. *Id.* at 42.
53. *Id.*
54. *Id.* at 43–44.
55. Ibn Rushd, known in the Latin tradition as "Averroes", was not only a jurist but was also one of the great Aristotelian philosophers of Islam during the classical period. *See generally* Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Averroës*, Britannica (Aug. 2, 2023) https://www.britannica.com/biography/Averroes.
56. al-Tamīmī, *supra* note 37, at 41–42.
57. A *muftī* is an Islamic jurist or jurisconsult who renders legal opinions, known as *fatwas*. *See generally* The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, *mufti*, Britannica (Mar. 29, 2018) https://www.britannica.com/topic/mufti.
58. *Id.*
59. This is a reference to the six authors who compiled the canonical Sunni *ḥadīth* compilations during the early Islamic period. These authors were: Bukhārī, Abū Dāwūd, Muslim, Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah, and Nasā'ī.
60. al-Tamīmī, *supra* note 37, at 41–42.
61. *See generally* Wael B. Hallaq, The Origins and Evolutions of Islamic Law (2005).
62. al-Tamīmī, *supra* note 37, at 44.
63. *Id.*
64. *Id.*

"5. Implementing the Qur'anic legal punishments."[65] This includes "punishing the corrupt to censure and deter great sins and abominations, for implementing the legal punishments is among the greatest causes of blessings . . . for punishments deter people from committing many forbidden things . . . this is why the Prophet said, 'implementing a punishment in the earth is better than seventy days of rain.'"[66] Thus, "implementing the punishments is one of the most important solutions to . . . the land's economic problems."[67] However, "the veiled ones who soil their thinking with the poison of modern heathenism and afflict their hearts with the darts of Westernization consider implementation of the punishments to be savagery and backwardness, and a cause for angering their international community, which would then implement sanctions and boycott on their land—but this is a test which distinguishes the believers from the doubters."[68]

"6. Defense against enemies and reinforcement of breaches."[69] This, according to ISIS, means "protecting the Islamic lands from the greed of enemies among the disbelievers and apostates, and this is the concept of 'guarding the frontiers,' which is one of the greatest forms of worship."[70] More particularly, ISIS explains that this duty means "combatting" a range of opponents, including not only deviants and apostates but indeed even those who claim to be Muslim but who "refrain from some of the Sharī'ah," as the Prophet himself did during the Battle of Khandaq.[71]

"7. Gathering of *zakāt* [taxes],[72] war-booty, charitable contributions, and other such resources within the Public Treasury."[73] This means "gathering wealth in its various resources, the most important of which is *zakāt*, and this is because it is the third pillar of Islam after the two testimonies and prayer"—and ISIS further explains this by emphasizing that the Companions agreed that whoever withholds the *zakāt* should be fought, just as [the first caliph] Abū Bakr did.[74]

"8. Guardianship over the family of martyrs and the helpless, and supporting the army."[75] In explaining this duty, ISIS notes that within the polity, many have "no provider and no protector," and this is one means by which God tests

65. *Id.* at 44–45.
66. *Id.*
67. *Id.*
68. *Id.*
69. *Id.* at 46–47.
70. *Id.*
71. *Id.* The Battle of Khandaq (the "Ditch") was an early Muslim victory after the Prophet migrated to Medina. This battle ultimately forced the Meccans to recognize the political and religious strength of the Muslim community in Medina.
72. *Zakāt* is an obligatory tax imposed upon Muslims. *See* The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, *zakat*, Britannica, (Jan. 26, 2024) https://www.britannica.com/money/topic/zakat-Islamic-tax.
73. *Id.* at 46–48.
74. *Id.*
75. *Id.*

the government, for government must assume the role of "guardianship over the many"—particularly the "many orphans and innocent ones."[76] As for the "military department," ISIS explains that it must be "optimally configured in terms of the number of the army's combatants and casualties, its movements, and so forth—and they are without doubt included among the [recipients of the government's] assistance and guardianship."[77]

"9. Appointment of well-qualified experts."[78] ISIS equates this function with the duty of "employing reliable agents and deferring to advisors" mentioned in Mawardī's classical Sunni treatise on the duties of the caliphate,[79] which depends upon competence and trustworthiness, as suggested in the Qur'ān 28:26.[80] However, "the combination of competence and trustworthiness is rare among people . . . so the leader must select the best for every domain; thus, the domain of warfare lends itself to one who has strength and bravery, even if there be some deficiency in his actions and his piety, while the judiciary domain requires the most knowledgeable and most pious, even if he is not a brave fighter and lacks insight regarding warfare"—and so forth with the other domains of government.[81]

Although ISIS's vision of the final government mirrors the nine structures of the Prophet's polity, it differs in certain aspects that ISIS explicitly mentions through various *ḥadīths* concerning the apocalyptic era. For instance, the nature of leadership and succession is different. Since ISIS views the Mahdi as a caliph rather than a prophet, and Jesus Christ as a supporter of Islamic law rather than an independent, legislating prophet[82] who abrogates Islam, the highest leadership in the final government will be limited to executive power. This differs from Prophet Muḥammad, who, as the revealer of the Qur'ān, was not only the executive but also the source of legislation. Therefore, the leadership in the final government will resemble the Medinan polity under the four Rightly Guided caliphs (632–661 CE) who succeeded the Prophet more than that of the Prophet's polity.

Furthermore, ISIS presumes that the final government will only last through the reign of the Mahdi, after which there will be the universal annihilation of Judgment Day. This is evident in ISIS statements that the final order will merely last "a number of years."[83] More particularly, the Mahdi is understood to be not only a caliph but the last of the twelve just caliphs destined to

76. *Id.*
77. *Id.*
78. *Id.*
79. AL-MAWARDI, *supra* note 21.
80. al-Tamīmī, *supra* note 37, at 47–48.
81. *Id.*
82. al-Bin`alī, *supra* note 37, at 2.
83. DABIQ, no. 3, 2014, at 10 (on file with author).

rule before the end of the world. To this end, ISIS references a *ḥadīth* regarding these twelve caliphs—noting that among these twelve, "some will appear at the beginning of Islam, whereas others will appear at the end of Islam."[84] Indeed, "the promised, Prophetic caliphate . . . will comprise twelve just caliphs . . . but they will not come in succession, but rather some will come in the early period of Islam—and it said that these will be five, six, or seven—then the remainder will come, paving the way for the Mahdi."[85] Therefore, the final world order, which will by definition be inaugurated by the Mahdi, will also only survive through the reign of the Mahdi, who is the last of all twelve caliphs destined to rule before the end of time. This means that there will be no mechanism or need for succession of political leadership—for the Mahdi's reign is succeeded only by the end of the world.

The final government, according to ISIS, will also differ from the Prophet's polity in its geography. Specifically, its expanse will not be limited to Medina as it was during the leadership of the Prophet, for with the advent of the apocalypse, the final government will expand. For instance, ISIS, quoting Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī,[86] states that its efforts have "prepared the path for attacking the Jewish State and retaking [Jerusalem]. It is as if I stand before the ⟦troops] of Iraq that leave from here to give support to the Mahdi whilst he holds on to the curtains of the Ka'bah [in Mecca]."[87] ISIS explains that beyond the conquest of Israel,

> These events all lead up to the final, greatest, and bloodiest battle—Armageddon—between the Muslims and the Romans prior to the appearance of the Antichrist and the descent of Jesus Christ. This battle ends the era of the Roman Christians, as the Muslims will then advance upon Constantinople and thereafter Rome, to conquer the two cities and raise the flag of the Caliphate over them.[88]

ISIS explains that after the conquest of Europe, the final government will eventually encompass the entire earth: "[t]he flag of the Caliphate will rise over Mecca and Medina . . . over Jerusalem and Rome . . . The shade of this blessed flag will expand until it covers all eastern and western extents of the Earth, filling the world with the truth and justice of Islam."[89] In short, the final government will have a global jurisdiction.

Within this global geography, however, the final government will efface all distinctions between nation-states, thereby doing away with the current Westphalian order and excluding any possibility of a global confederation of nation-states, such as that which underlies the United Nations. ISIS emphasizes

84. al-Bin`alī, *supra* note 37, at 3–4.
85. *Id.*
86. The initial leader of ISIS.
87. Dabiq, no. 4, 2014, at 35 (on file with author).
88. *Id.*
89. Dabiq, no. 5, 2014, at 3 (on file with author). *See also id.* at 20–21.

this theme repeatedly and views this as consistent with the unbounded nature of both the Prophet's polity and that of the later Islamic caliphates. ISIS asserts, for instance, that:

> It was the rejection of nationalism that drove the *mujāhidīn*[90] in Nigeria to give [oaths of allegiance] to the Islamic State . . . It was the rejection of nationalism that drove two Tunisian soldiers of the Caliphate to kill crusaders with visas to Tunisia issued by the Tunisian [idols]. . . . It was the rejection of nationalism that drove the Libyan and [migrant] soldiers of the Islamic State to wage war against the newly erected Libyan [idols]: the House of Representatives and the General National Congress. It was the rejection of nationalism that drove the Islamic State to expand from Iraq into Syria and thereafter to other lands: West Africa, Algeria, Libya, Khurāsān, Sinai, Yemen, and the Arabian Peninsula. And it is the rejection of nationalism that will drive the Caliphate to continue expanding until it takes Constantinople and Rome from the Crusaders and their allies by Allah's permission.[91]

According to ISIS, another area in which the final government will differ from that of the Prophet's polity is its conditions of universal peace and security. On the one hand, the Prophet's polity, as described by the initial ISIS leader, was characterized by the severity and starkness of conditions, including fewness of supporters, dearth of food and water, disease, poverty, and perpetual danger and insecurity. In short, "the life of the honorable Companions in the Prophetic government was a life of constant fear, apprehension, expectation of ambush, and vigilance—particularly at the stage of its initial establishment."[92] In contrast, ISIS depicts the final government, specifically after the second coming of Jesus Christ, as shifting from violent to peaceful: "It is clear then that *salām* (peace) is not the basis of the word Islam, although it shares the same consonant root (s-l-m) and is one of the outcomes of the religion's sword, as the sword will continue to be drawn, raised, and swung until Jesus . . . kills the Antichrist and abolishes the religious poll tax. Thereafter, religious disbelief and its tyranny will be destroyed; Islam and its justice will prevail on the entire Earth."[93]

Further elaborating on this peace of the final world order, ISIS associates various *ḥadīths* with the conditions of the final government, including one that states that: "there will be no rivalries, no envy, no hatred, to the point that a man will pass by a lion yet it won't harm him, and step on a snake yet it won't harm him"[94]—and another which states that, "[t]hereafter, swords will rest from war only to be used as sickles."[95]

---

90. *Mujāhidīn* are fighters who engage in *jihād.*
91. Dabiq, no. 8, 2015, at 5 (on file with author).
92. al-Maṣrī, *supra* note 37, at 4.
93. Dabiq, no. 7, 2015, at 23 (on file with author).
94. *Id.*
95. *Id.*

B. Progressivism: Muḥammad ʻĪsa Dāwūd and his "Awaited Mahdi" Political Party

Progressivism, which assumes the final order will be more advanced than the Prophet's polity and will last for multiple generations, appears to be a minority view within Sunni thought. Unlike reversionists, progressivists explicitly describe the structure of the final order, though their focus is often more on the apocalyptic events preceding the establishment of the final order. For this Article, I have selected Muḥammad ʻĪsa Dāwūd, the founder of the abortive "Awaited Mahdī" political party in Egypt, and author of numerous books related to the apocalypse which have attracted a large, popular audience. Born in 1957, Dāwūd received his B.A. in Oriental Languages and Studies at Cairo University and began his career as an editor of the *Akhbār al-Yawm* newspaper. In 1991, he began his career as an apocalyptic writer, and thereafter entered into the political arena, founding the "Awaited Mahdī" party on a platform of opposition both to Salafi extremism (the Muslim Brotherhood in particular), as well as to the dogmatic conservatism represented by the venerable institution of Al-Azhar University in Cairo.[96] Despite his literary popularity, Dāwūd's political ambitions have remained on the fringes of Egyptian political life, and his progressivist views, like the reversionist views of ISIS, stand outside the mainstream of contemporary Sunni thought.

Dāwūd's account of the final political form differs starkly from that of ISIS and is grounded in a fundamental redefinition of the concept of caliphate. To this end, he argues that the final government will be a union of partially self-governing regions under a central government, such that "the term 'confederation' is the most accurate and appropriate appellation"[97] (elsewhere he employs the term "the United Confederation").[98] In justifying these conceptions, Dāwūd argues that "there's no legal or rational reason not to name the united countries something like 'the United Arab Islamic States' or 'the Union of Arab and Islamic Republics, Kingdoms, and Emirates,'" in support of which he cites the example

96. *See* Muḥammad ʻĪsa Dāwūd, Al-Mahdi Al-Muntaẓar ʻalá Al-Abwāb [The Awaited Mahdi is at the Doors] (1997) [hereinafter Al-Mahdi]; Muḥammad ʻĪsa Dāwūd, Al-Mufāja'āt: Bushrāki Yā Quds: Al-Mahdi Yaḥkumu Al-ʻālam Min ʻarsh Al-Quds [The Surprise: Glad Tidings, O Jerusalem: the Mahdi will Rule the World from the Throne of Jerusalem] (2001) [hereinafter Al-Mufāja'āt]; Muḥammad ʻĪsa Dāwūd, Bushrā Al-Samā': Dawlat Āl Al-Bayt Qādimah: Muslimūn Wa-Masīḥīyūn Min Aʻḍā' Ḥizb Al-Mahdi Al-Muntaẓar [Heavenly Glad Tidings: the Government of the Prophetic House is Near: Muslims and Christians are Both members of the Awaited-Mahdi Political Party] (2006) [hereinafter Dawlat]. The last of these three books is of relevance because it constitutes Dāwūd's manifesto for his own (abortive) attempt to create a political party in Egypt—a party that was self-styled as the direct antecedent to the *Mahdi*'s final world order. Because none of these books constitute a monograph on the structures of the final world order, I have culled various statements from them to produce a composite account of Dāwūd's theory.

97. Dāwūd, Al-Mufāja'āt, *supra* note 96, at 418.

98. Dāwūd, Dawlat, *supra* note 96, at 336.

of the unification of Germany in 1871, under the German Federation, headed by Wilhelm I.[99] In short, Dāwūd argues that the Mahdi's government will be a confederation of sorts, and contemporary Arabs and Muslims should be flexible regarding labels, rather than letting their fixation on conventional understandings of the term 'caliphate' detract from their unity and "consensus."[100]

What will be the geographic character of the Mahdi's confederation? In the initial stages, it will bring unity to the Arabs and Muslims, for "the caliphate will unite the Muslims' foreign policy, finances, and general welfare . . . and the purpose of the caliphate is the unity of the Muslims and absence of their division."[101] Over time, however, it will encompass the entire world, for "the Mahdi will rule the entire world; all creation will submit to him, either through conquest or diplomacy."[102] The Mahdi will therefore rule over East and West, and Dāwūd details the process of his conquering of North America, as well as his establishment of "embassies" within Central America.[103]

Although the final government will be global, certain regions will be preeminent: "Jerusalem will be the political capital of the worldwide government, and the Caliph's headquarters will be built close to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem; Mecca and Medina will be the two religious capitals; and the fourth most important place will be Mount Sinai . . . [for] Egypt will be the capital of learning and scholarship."[104]

As to the question of internal borders, Dāwūd leaves this matter unclear. On the one hand, the conception of confederation typically presupposes the maintenance of nation-state borders, for only based on their continuing integrity can nation-states associate with one another as a confederation. On the other hand, Dāwūd states that "[i]n the Mahdi's era, borders between countries and governments will be imaginary: communication and connections will be faster than can be imagined, and the interconnectedness of the world in his era will not be due to formation of economic blocs, but only through borders which are opened by science and human conscience, in its most pure state."[105]

How will this global confederation be administered? The Mahdi, of course, will hold its highest post of leadership, for "the Mahdi will renew Adam's role of being the caliph over the earth . . . and just as Adam was the blood father of all humans, so will the Mahdi be the spiritual father of all humans, and obedience to him will be mandatory, as it was to Adam . . . "[106] As such, the Mahdi may have

99. Dāwūd, Al-Mufāja'āt, *supra* note 96, at 418.
100. *Id.* at 418–419.
101. *Id.*
102. Dāwūd, Al-Mahdi, *supra* note 96, at 120.
103. Dāwūd, Al-Mufāja'āt, *supra* note 96, at 510–516.
104. Dāwūd, Al-Mahdi, *supra* note 96, at 233.
105. *Id.* at 283.
106. Dāwūd, Al-Mufāja'āt, *supra* note 96, at 365.

the title of "the General President of the Union of Worldwide Governments,"[107] or "we [might] name him 'the President of the Union of Arab and Islamic Governments,' or 'the President of the Arab-Islamic Union.'"[108] Once again, Dāwūd emphasizes that we should not be overly concerned regarding the Mahdi's exact title, because "the important thing is the phenomenon being named, rather than the name itself, just as some employ the term 'Caliph of the Prophet,' while others say, 'Commander of the Faithful,' and still others say 'Imam.'"[109]

Despite being the highest authority, the Mahdi, according to Dāwūd, will not single-handedly bear all the burdens of governance, but rather will delegate much of it to an administrative apparatus consisting of his advisors. In describing these advisors, Dāwūd quotes a passage from the classical Sunni philosopher and mystic, Ibn al-'Arabī,[110] stating that the Mahdi's "advisors will be the men who . . . champion him; they will shoulder the weight of the government; the advisors will be like the Companions of the Prophet, true to their promises, yet they will be non-Arabs—though they will speak only Arabic . . . "[111] Notwithstanding, Dāwūd quotes another passage that he attributes to Ibn al-'Arabi, wherein the latter explains that "the advisors will be both Arab and non-Arab; they will speak Arabic, and among them will be notable Egyptians—people of learning, knowledge, and politics—as well as the people of Syria . . . "[112] Amidst the more mundane aspects of the advisors' responsibilities, Dāwūd mentions that their duties include attending to the problems of "tribalism and nationalism" in regions such as Africa.[113]

Although Dāwūd's account is populist in tenor, he does not explicitly address whether democratic or otherwise representative political institutions, such as parliaments, will exist in the final order. His populism is especially evident in his emphasis on consultation as a feature of the final government. To this end, he explains that "although the Mahdi's innate nature makes him able to dispense with consultation, there will nonetheless be consultation due to the reality of human needs."[114] He further equates these human needs to be those of the masses of humanity—i.e. the "millions of humans in the world" whose discontent and "protests" against the policies of their governments are usually unheeded, as evidenced in events such as the American public's opposition to

107. *Id.*

108. *Id.* at 418.

109. *Id.*

110. Ibn al-'Arabī (d.1240) was a Muslim mystic and theologian who strongly influenced the theoretical aspects of Sufism. *See generally* The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, *Ibn al-ʿArabī summary*, Britannica (May 2, 2020) https://www.britannica.com/summary/Ibn-al-Arabi.

111. Dāwūd, Al-Mufāja'āt, *supra* note 96, at 400–402.

112. *Id.*

113. *Id.* at 431–434.

114. *Id.* at 402.

the US government's invasion of Iraq.[115] Dāwūd then attributes this flagrant disregard for the needs of the masses to the "absence of true consultation and democracy," which he then contrasts with the final political structure, noting that "the Government of the Prophetic House is one within which the people will have the first word, and the government will safeguard consultation."[116] This consultation, furthermore, will extend to people of all ages, for "the government of Prophetic House will . . . consider the perspectives of every individual, whether young or old, regarding general matters."[117] Although this championing of the masses might warrant the existence of representative, parliamentary bodies within the final government, Dāwūd seems critical of such institutions, for he associates them, at least in Egypt, with the oppressive tools of the elite rather than with the needs of the common man. As he states, within the Government of the Prophetic House "there is no evidence that the elite will make decisions; and for Egypt, no evidence . . . that the Parliament of Representatives should make the decisions; because there are Egyptian decisions that require seeking counsel of the people as a right, but only after their enlightenment and lifting of the level of culture . . . "[118]

Unlike the ISIS account of the final government, Dāwūd addresses the question of political successorship, for in his progressivism, he presumes that the global government will endure beyond the Mahdi's personal reign (and indeed, according to Dāwūd, "the Government of the House of the Prophet is the Founder of the Single, Unified Global System . . . until the End of the World!").[119] However, Dāwūd's statements regarding the period between the rule of the Mahdi and the end of the world are inconsistent. In one instance, he explains that "the Mahdi will rule between forty and fifty years," and he clarifies that "the question of seven or eight years refers [merely] to the period when Mahdi and Jesus both live, not to mention that seven or eight years is insufficient for him to fill the world with justice, let alone to conquer the whole world and build mosques throughout it."[120] Thus, after these forty to fifty years of the Mahdi's reign, leadership of the global government passes to Jesus Christ.[121] Elsewhere, he quotes another author who argues that the Mahdi will rule for forty years, followed by thirty years of additional caliphs, then eighty-nine years of kings and sultans, resulting in a total of one hundred and fifty-nine years of the global government.[122] Furthermore, Dāwūd emphasizes that such leadership will

115. Dāwūd, Dawlat, *supra* note 96, at 59.
116. *Id.*
117. *Id.* at 63.
118. *Id.* at 59.
119. *Id.* at 30.
120. Dāwūd, Al-Mufāja'āt, *supra* note 96, at 111, 108–109.
121. Dāwūd, Al-Mahdi, *supra* note 96, at 301, 303.
122. Dāwūd, Al-Mufāja'āt, *supra* note 96, at 114–115.

remain strictly within the line of descendants of the Prophet—i.e. the "House of the Prophet"—and suggests that the general title for whoever rules will be "the Guardian-Ruler of the Government of the Prophetic House."[123]

What are the most distinctive features of the global confederation? In particular, what are the balances and checks of power between the central government and the member nations—and what are the specific relationships between the Mahdi (or his successors), the advisors, and the masses? Unfortunately, Dāwūd does not specify such details. Perhaps Dāwūd presumes that such detail is unnecessary given not only the extraordinary and infallible nature of the Mahdi but more importantly, the special nature of his successors, who defy the tendency towards corruption, for "the family of Prophet will consider ruling to be a weighty responsibility and trust; whereas others see ruling as a [selfish] opportunity."[124] Likewise, he states "I swear by God: the House of the Prophet and their descendants have no greed for the world, nor for ruling and thrones; they merely want to spread truth, justice, goodness, and beauty."[125] Lacking such detail, Dāwūd mentions only general relationships between the various structures and elements of the United Confederation, and these in a typically conclusory manner. Respect for human rights, for instance, is summed up in brief statements such as "the Government of the Prophetic House is the Owner of the Single, Unified Global System, which acknowledges and respects others, and strives for the individual and protects his rights . . . "[126] Elsewhere, he delineates five "golden principles of reason and logic" characterizing the government, namely: justice, meritocracy, cooperation, and consultation:[127]

> The first of these principles is justice, and the Europeans have familiarity with the conceptual relation between justice and freedom, and this justice extends even to those who disagree doctrinally; the second principle is refusing favoritism . . . ; the third is cooperation among the nations comprising the Caliphal government and cooperation with the Imam-Caliph, based on an oath of allegiance which will not be forced, but will derive from . . . the love of the Mahdi in the hearts . . . even by adherents of a different religion; fourth is actualizing the relationship between religion and government by way of consultation, in a manner emphasizing that Islam, in its essence, upholds a flexible and pragmatic relationship between religion and government . . . rather than rigidity, radicalism, and ignorance . . . fifth is that Islam is the world religion . . . and the policy of the Caliphal-Government will spread Islam . . . based on a 'dialogue of civilizations' and forbearance.[128]

123. Dāwūd, Dawlat, *supra* note 96, at 65.
124. *Id.* at 66.
125. *Id.* at 336.
126. *Id.* at 30.
127. Dāwūd, Al-Mufāja'āt, *supra* note 96, at 561–562.
128. *Id.*

To this list of general features can be added a world peace that is enduring, yet not absolute, for weapons and military will nonetheless be maintained for purposes of self-defense and deterrence. As Dāwūd explains, "The Government of the Prophetic House is a government of peace wherein weapons aren't carried except for self-defense . . . as a deterrent power, rather than as a force of aggression for infringing on others and violating their property, wealth, or thoughts."[129] Likewise, he states that "the Caliphal-Government will . . . not raise weapons . . . except against invaders . . . "[130]

III. Final Government in Shi'i Discourses

A. Revanchism: The Islamic Republic of Iran

As mentioned in Part I, progressivism, which appears to be fringe within Sunnism, is the default position in Shi'ism, where it is more accurately referred to as revanchism. Nearly all Shi'i accounts of the final government that I have perused assert that its nature will be unprecedented and its timespan lengthy. Given that these assumptions of progress and longevity are standard in Shi'i accounts of the final order, it is not surprising that Shi'i theorists and movements tend to speculate more explicitly and in greater detail on the specifics of the final order than their Sunni counterparts.

To reflect the abundance of Shi'i source material on this topic, I have selected three theorists of Shi'i revanchism: Najmuddīn Tabasī, Ibrāhīm Amīnī, and 'Alī Kūrānī. Tabasī is an Iranian cleric, and member of the Committee for the Mahdi Specialist Center, and his primary occupation appears to be scholarship.[131] Amīnī was a senior cleric-politician who served on the Islamic Republic of Iran's Expediency Discernment Council and within its Assembly of Experts.[132] Kūrānī, a scholar who was closely affiliated with the Islamic Dawa Party, founded the "Center of Fiqhī Lexicon and Muṣṭafā Center for Religious Studies" in the city of Qum, Iran.[133]

While none of these three theorists has officially espoused the Islamic Republic of Iran's conception of final government, they collectively reflect a

---

129. Dāwūd, Dawlat, *supra* note 96, at 68.

130. Dāwūd, Al-Mufāja'āt, *supra* note 96, at 562.

131. *See* Najmuddīn Tabasī, Nishānah Hā'ī Az Dawlat-i Maw'ūd [An Overview of the Mahdi's Government] (online ed. 2004). For biographical details, *see* Tabasī's website, http://velaseddighah.com.

132. *See also* Ibrāhīm Amīnī, Dādgustar-I Jahān Ya Mahdi-Yi Maw'ūd [al-Imam al-Mahdi: The Just Leader of Humanity (online ed. 2023). For biographical details, *see* Amīnī's website, http://www.IbrahimAmini.com/en.

133. Among his various writings, I refer herein to his Arabic book, *Aṣr al-Ẓuhūr* (*Era of the Mahdi's Advent*) which, like Amīnī's book, is not a monograph on structures of the final order *per se*, but addresses the time periods both before and after the *Mahdi*'s Advent. *See* Alī Kūrānī, 'Aṣr Al-Ẓuhūr [Era of the *Mahdi*'s Advent] (1987).

broader political-theological orientation that aligns with the interests and constraints of the Iranian state. This becomes particularly clear in the shared gaps that emerge across their respective visions. All three theorists articulate aspects of the final order but consistently avoid addressing certain politically sensitive details (e.g., mechanisms of succession, the role of political parties, and the fate of nation-state boundaries) that would pose inconvenient contradictions for the Islamic Republic's legitimacy. The fact that these omissions appear across the works of theorists with otherwise distinct backgrounds suggests that these gaps reflect a broader state-oriented orientation rather than individual scholarly discretion. This pattern becomes even more apparent when contrasted with the next case study, drawn from the Ṣadrists, whose vision of apocalyptic governance is less constrained by the political imperatives of a nation-state and therefore engages directly with these very gaps.

The revanchism characterizing the perspective of these theorists is evident in various telling statements. Tabasī, for instance, explains that one of the fundamental policies of the final government will be that of "revenge against the remaining descendants of Imam al-Ḥusayn's murderers."[134] Indeed, the Mahdi's vengeance will be so fierce that "most of the people will say, 'This person is not from the progeny of Muḥammad, for if he were really from the family of the Prophet, he would have been compassionate'."[135] Tabasī makes several references to *ḥadīths* stating that the Mahdi will punish the [Sunni] Arab Muslims in general and will amputate the hands of the keepers of the Ka'ba in Mecca—a tribe described in the *ḥadīths* as the "Banu Shaybah"—which is presumably Tabasī's way of referring to the current Saudi government.[136] Likewise, he emphasizes, in a chapter in his book entitled "The Decisiveness of the Imam in Confronting Enemies", that unlike the first Shi'i Imam, 'Alī, whose policy was leniency and forbearance with his proto-Sunni enemies, the Mahdi's policy will be that of violent subdual of the enemies of the Shi'i community. As evidence, Tabasī cites the following *ḥadīth:*

> [The Sixth Imam . . . was asked:] 'During his advent, will . . . the [Mahdi] act contrary to the approach of [the first Imam] 'Alī in dealing with opponents?' The [Sixth] Imam answered: "Yes. 'Alī adopted leniency and clemency because he knew that after him enemies would prevail over his supporters and the Shi'i community. The policy of the [Mahdi], however, will be rage toward them as well as overpowering and subduing them because he will know that after him no one will ever prevail over the Shi'i community."[137]

The temporal moderatism of these authors—i.e., the view that the final world order endures beyond a mere handful of years, and through several

134. Tabasī, *supra* note 131, at 146.
135. *Id.* at 106 (quoting a *ḥadīth*).
136. Tabasī, *supra* note 131, at 107.
137. *Id.* at 105.

generations of leadership prior to universal annihilation—is indicated directly in their works. Kūrānī, for instance, cites sources suggesting that after the Mahdi dies, leadership will pass to "several previous Prophets and Imams and they will rule after the Mahdi . . . Some say that the Return[138] starts after the rule of the Mahdi and the rule of eleven Mahdis after him."[139] Likewise, Tabasī, after recounting various views on the time span of the Mahdi's government ranging from seven to one thousand years, gives particular credence to the view that it will endure for seventy years, noting that "the late Ayatullāh Tabasī, my honorable father, gives preference to the *ḥadīth* that propounds seven years, but he says: 'It means that by the power of God, every year at that time will be equal to ten of our years.'"[140]

As to the geopolitical supremacy of the final government, all three of these theorists agree that it will be universal and global in scope, though some add further details regarding specific political centers and headquarters. Kūrānī, for instance, states that "the Islamic world government that the Mahdi will upraise is vaster than the political order which the Prophet Solomon . . . erected . . . the Mahdi's government will include all parts of the world, such that nowhere will be left that does not utter the two testimonies of faith."[141] Amīnī, likewise, describes the Mahdi's order as the time when "all of humanity will come under one government and one power . . . a unified world government under the Mahdi,"[142] noting that "when the promised Mahdi appears . . . he will administer the entire world under one Islamic government."[143] Tabasī, similarly, notes that the Mahdi's government "is not confined to the land of [Arabia], the Middle East and Asia; instead, it is global in scope."[144] Additionally, Tabasī concludes, from analysis of a number of *ḥadīth*s, that "the city of Kūfah would be the epicenter of activities and the political capital," and states even more particularly that the Sahlah Mosque will constitute the Mahdi's Headquarters.[145] In addition, he emphasizes the special status of Iran in general, and Qum in particular, during the Mahdi's era.[146]

These authors likewise agree that due to the global scope of the government, the final era will be one of universal peace. Amīnī, for instance, states that in the Mahdi's government, "People will have become kind and will treat each

138. "Return" refers to the common Shī'ite doctrine that in the apocalyptic era, various Prophets, Messengers, and heroes from past Islamic and pre-Islamic history will return to the world.

139. Kūrānī, *supra* note 133, at 271.

140. Tabasī, *supra* note 131, at 165.

141. Kūrānī, *supra* note 133, at 268.

142. Amīnī, *supra* note 132, at 169–172

143. *Id.* at 233.

144. Tabasī, *supra* note 131, at 13.

145. *Id.* at 112–118.

146. *Id.* at 49.

other with honesty and sincerity; there will be security everywhere as no one will wish to cause harm to another," and to this end he quotes from a tradition, saying that "When our [Mahdi] arises, hostility and resentment will be eliminated from the hearts of the people, and general security will be established all over the world."[147]

Tabasī, likewise, explains that at the beginning of the Mahdi's government, there will indeed be an army since this is required to win the apocalyptic wars. The top military commanders, he explains, will include Jesus Christ. The rank and file, on the other hand, "will be composed of various nationalities . . . Some will be present in the primary staff, and some will join the army. A group has been called the security guard corps."[148] However, after the Mahdi's global victories, universal peace will be established, for "by the establishment of the divine system or global government . . . the flames of war will be extinguished and there will be no more powers that would be able to confront the army of the Mahdi . . . As such, there will be no demand for military equipment in the markets and as a result, they will become cheap and remain unsold."[149] Tabasī further elaborates upon the "public security" that derives from this universal peace established by the Mahdi, explaining that "with the implementation of appropriate and accurate programs in his government, within a short period security will be restored in society in all aspects, and the people will live in a safe environment experiencing security that mankind has not experienced so far."[150]

These authors agree, furthermore, that the administration of the government is accomplished not only by the Mahdi but also through his administrative apparatus of viziers or governors. Amīnī, for instance, explains that the Mahdi "will appoint well-qualified individuals as the governors of different regions of the world with clear instructions and programs for the peaceful and just administration of the region under their governance . . . The entire earth will flourish under their administration. The Mahdi will distantly oversee the whole earth himself, with its widespread regions and extensive affairs accessible to him like the palm of his hand. His disciples and helpers also will observe and talk to him from remote distances."[151] Tabasī offers considerably greater detail regarding this administrative apparatus, noting, first of all, that the Mahdi "will establish a powerful and efficient government through the assistance of his capable companions . . . although their roles in overthrowing tyrannical governments cannot be dismissed, their main roles will be in the reconstruction and reformation of the world under the aegis of the universal government . . . "[152]

147. Amīnī, *supra* note 132, at 233, 169–172.
148. Tabasī, *supra* note 131, at 57–58.
149. *Id.* at 85.
150. *Id.* at 130–134.
151. Amīnī, *supra* note 132, at 233.
152. Tabasī, *supra* note 131, at 13.

Who will these administrators be? Tabasī observes that "[i]t would be only natural for the administrative workers and officials in the government which the Mahdi . . . will lead to be the leading figures and best of the Islamic community"—and he further notes that "the heavy burden of governing and administering the vast Islamic territories cannot be shouldered by just anybody—instead, individuals, who have been tested on many occasions and have proven their merit in various trials, must accept this responsibility."[153]

But in Tabasī's view, the standard of conduct for administrators is so high that ordinary human beings are disqualified from the outset, such that the job reverts to great figures from the past, resurrected in the Mahdi's era, and thus fulfilling the prophecies in *ḥadīths* concerning the Mahdi's 313 champions.[154] *"*As such . . . the government of the Mahdi . . . will be comprised of prophets and their successors, the most pious and righteous people of that time as well as of times past, and the towering personalities among the companions of the Prophet."[155] On these grounds, Tabasī argues that "the head of the ministers in the government of the Mahdi . . . is his holiness Jesus, who is one of the leading prophets . . . Similarly, among the outstanding officials of his government will be Salman al-Farsi, Miqdad, Abū Dujanah, and Mālik al-Ashtar, who had shown their merit in handling affairs during both the time of the Prophet and that of the Commander of the Faithful, as well as the tribe of Hamdan."[156] He adds to this list "the seven Companions of the Cave" [157] as well as "Joshua, the executor . . . of Moses' will, the believer in the family of Pharaoh." [158]

As to its underlying political form or structure, these authors echo the Shi'i *ḥadīth* (referenced in Part I) which asserts that the final government will be unlike any prior political systems.[159] Thus, Amīnī notes that "[t]he world community has experimented with different philosophies and ideologies . . . Nationalism, communism, socialism, capitalism, and so on have alternatively divided the nations, united them partially under one or another -ism, brought them to the brink of destructive nuclear warfare, and forced them to work with each other under international organizations like the United Nations . . . Different forms of imperialism and colonization are rampant even in the postcolonial era."[160] Likewise, Tabasī rejects all past political forms, noting that:

153. *Id.* at 161, 163.

154. According to Shi'i *ḥadīths*, the Mahdi will have 313 companions.

155. Tabasī, *supra* note 131, at 161.

156. These individuals were historic figures from the early Islamic period who are considered to be heroes in Shi'i historiography. *See generally* Momen, *supra* note 17.

157. *See generally*, The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, *Seven Sleepers of Ephesus*, Britannica (Aug. 1, 2022) https://www.britannica.com/topic/Seven-Sleepers-of-Ephesus.

158. Tabasī, *supra* note 131, at 163.

159. *See* al-Tamīmī, *supra* note 62.

160. Amīnī, *supra* note 132, at 169–172.

> [T]he people of the world would have witnessed that many governments, parties, and organizations had claimed that if they were given the chance to take charge of things, they could serve the world and its inhabitants, ensuring peace, security, and improvement in economic conditions. In action, however, each of them would have been worse than the other, introducing nothing but corruption, killing and ruin. Leninism collapsed while Maoism was disfavored by its own leaders, and Western democracy, on the other hand, is nothing more than a people-deceiving slogan. The time will finally come when justice and equity would be implemented by the able hand of the man of God on the earth full of tyranny . . . the Imam Mahdi will administer the government and nurture the people in such a manner that the word 'tyranny' will no longer hold a place in one's mind . . . [161]

Yet how, specifically, will the political structure of the final polity differ from those of democracy, fascism, communism, monarchy, and so forth? Unfortunately, beyond the sweeping negations just noted, these Shi'i authors do not offer positive definitions of the final political form. Among the trio of Amīnī, Tabasī, and Kūrānī, Kūrānī is the only one to venture a positive definition—in his case, a monarchy of sorts: "We prefer the view that after [the Mahdi], Mahdis from among his children will rule, and then will be the Return of some of the Prophets and Imams, and they will rule until the end of the world."[162] Unfortunately, Kūrānī offers no elaboration of this concept of monarchy.

Although all three authors agree on the global geography of the final polity, they fail to address questions about political structure and lack positive definitions for the final political form. The concept of the bounded, Westphalian nation-state is not particularly problematized and poses no greater affront to the imamate than any other governmental system, as the Shi'i doctrine of the imamate considers all forms of government to be more or less futile and misguided until the Twelfth Imam returns from Occultation. In contrast, the classical doctrine of the caliphate considers Islamic government, in the form of an unbounded caliphate without internal borders, to be an ongoing religious duty.

Likewise, although these three theorists posit governance through an administrative apparatus, they do not detail its operative mechanisms. Rather, the presumption is that such detail is unnecessary, for the extraordinary virtue of the administrators is the guarantor of success: "to administer lands and territories, the Mahdi will appoint ministers who will have had a record of struggle both in experience and action, and who will have shown their firmness and decisiveness. Governors with strong personalities, who think of nothing but the welfare of the Islamic state and the pleasure of God, will take charge of state affairs. Obviously, a country whose officials possess these qualities will prevail over any difficulty."[163] Similarly, that the existence of parliaments or other representative

161. Tabasī, *supra* note 131, at 112–118.
162. Kūrānī, *supra* note 133, at 268.
163. Tabasī, *supra* note 131, at 112.

bodies is not discussed is presumably due to the presumption of mass, popular support as a result of extraordinary virtue: "Naturally, the government, which in a short period of time would prevail over adversities, eliminate confusion and disorder, and sow the seeds of hope in the hearts of mankind by removing despair from them, will enjoy popular support . . . it will be the government over hearts. The aspiration of mankind is to live under such a government . . . "[164] Finally, these authors generally offer little detail regarding mechanisms for successorship—a feature which is presumably necessary given the temporally moderate presumption that the government will last multiple generations, yet impossible to elucidate in the absence of an explicit theory of overall political form.

B. Idealism: The Ṣadrist Movement in Iraq

Among the Shi'i theorists considered in this article, Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr ("Ṣadr") represents a special case, for although he embraces the default Shi'i presumption that the form and structure of the final order will be unprecedented (modal moderatism), he believes that its time span will be much longer than all of human history thus far, making his perspective temporally radical. This broadens his scope of speculation and allows him to address conceptual contradictions that others leave untouched.

Although he died more than two decades ago, Ṣadr's intellectual influence remains deeply embedded in Ṣadrist doctrine, not only because of his role as a key ideologue but also as the father to Muqtadā al-Ṣadr, the current leader of the movement. Since his death, arguably no other figure within the Ṣadrist movement has emerged with comparable scholarly or intellectual stature. His account of the final government is the most sophisticated and nuanced of all the theories discussed in this Article, although it is less recognized in contemporary academic scholarship.[165]

When examining Ṣadr's theory, it is crucial to inquire regarding the purpose of the final government. According to Ṣadr, the goal of the final government is to bring about 'perfect justice' in the world. Additionally, he argues that achieving 'perfect justice' leads to the state of 'infallibility',[166] where individuals and

164. *Id.*

165. For purposes of this article, I have used the third volume of Ṣadr's four-volume Arabic work, which can be translated as "*The Encyclopedia of the Imam Mahdi*". *See* Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr, *The History of What will Occur After the Mahdi's Advent*, *in* Mawsūʿat Al-Imām Al-Mahdi 458 [The Encyclopedia of the Imam Mahdi] (1978). While the first two volumes are accounts of the Lesser and Greater Occultations, the third volume, which concerns the period after the *Mahd*i's Advent from Occultation, is entitled, *Tārīkh mā ba'd ul-ẓuhūr*, which can be translated as, *"The History of What will Occur After the Mahdi's Advent*." Unexamined to date in Western scholarship, this 670-page monograph is dedicated to the structures of the final world order.

166. Ṣadr clarifies that in using the term 'infallibility' [*'isma*], "I mean that which, in the language of the Muslim philosophers, is called 'contingent infallibility'"—and that "this is that in which there is no possibility for injustice, transgression, error, or forgetfulness." *Id.* at

society are free from error, resulting in a sinless community. Therefore, the government exists as a means to an idealistic end, which is the ethical and spiritual transformation of both the individual and society.[167]

Ṣadr offers a unique perspective on the government's geography by providing nuances that differentiate his account from the majority Shi'i revanchist view. He emphasizes that the government will have global supremacy, with Kufa as its capital,[168] and notes that this includes aspects such as the army, judiciary, post offices, and prisons. Ṣadr agrees with the majority that the final era will bring global peace, but he distinguishes between internal and external peace, which will be achieved in phases over a long temporal arc. In particular, he states:

> [T]he importance of army, police, and prisons will gradually fade . . . [T]he army is perhaps the quickest to disappear, because its existence is based on external defense, against the hostility of other governments. But with the establishment of the world government, there won't be any other government, thus the need for an army . . . disappears. As for police and prisons: they will dissolve gradually following the dissolving of crimes which will be the natural result of humanity attaining a high level of education in perfection. This level, however, won't occur during the life of the Mahdi, but rather following the universal educational foundations that the Mahdi will establish for the perfecting of humanity.[169]

Ṣadr initially adopts the negative definitions of form commonly found in Sunni and Shi'i accounts, but with greater nuance. He questions whether the structure of the Mahdi's government is similar to prior systems, such as capitalism or socialism, and asserts that the Mahdi's system is fundamentally different from any prior system.[170] His categorical negation of pre-Mahdi orders also invalidates both Western and Islamic political systems of the past, including the reversionist idealization of the Prophet's 7th-century polity, let alone those of subsequent Islamic caliphates and empires.

Ṣadr emphasizes this negation by stressing that the "new Sovereignty" mentioned in the traditions is tantamount to the proper methods for running government which were never properly implemented by humanity, neither in the 'Umayyad nor the 'Abbāsid caliphates, nor thereafter in various governments.[171] The primary reason for this negation of all past political systems is their inherent injustice. For instance, the method of individual, dictatorial rule has been exercised throughout history, and it is one of the most important causes

---

647, 102.

167. *Id.* at 93. Ṣadr's account subdivides the infallible society into two stages—the first of which is infallibility among the majority of individuals, and the second is infallibility among the entirety of individuals.

168. *Id.* at 317, 310.

169. *Id.* at 464.

170. *Id.* at 87–93.

171. *Id.* at 450.

of injustice.[172] Another reason is the prevalence of materialism in past systems, for "all these other systems . . . are based upon materialism and the discarding of divine considerations, whether explicitly like in communism and existentialism, or implicitly, as in capitalism, fascism, Nazism, and Roman and German law, and their modern branches . . . [But] the Mahdi's system is based on the relationship of man to his Lord, the training of his body and soul." Therefore, Ṣadr concludes that any man-made system prior to the Mahdi's Advent essentially comprises the most important sources of oppression and deviation, and the principal calling of the Imām Mahdi is to change these systems.[173]

Ṣadr raises a fundamental question about the legitimacy of the Westphalian nation-state, which is a common political form across the 'isms' of capitalism, communism, and fascism. He contemplates the position of the Mahdi and his government in the current world order of nation-states, acknowledging that his rejection of the 'isms' listed thus far was categorical. However, he notes that a nuanced approach is needed when examining the relationship between the Mahdi's government and the present international order. Instead of describing it as the polar opposite of this order, Ṣadr suggests inquiring into the degree to which the current order is acceptable and rejected.[174] For instance, will the United Nations exist in his government? Will ambassadors be exchanged between governments? He emphasizes the importance of international laws and agreements, bilateral and multilateral relationships, and international organizations in understanding the present Westphalian world order:

> [This international order] comprises many matters as expressed in laws about the international community, aimed at upholding the interests of the constituent governments themselves. There are agreements, treaties, pacts, etc., which bind the governments bilaterally or multilaterally, regulating their relationships economically, culturally, militarily, or otherwise. These governments have diplomatic representations, in forms which require ambassadors . . . and if there is no ambassador, then his place is upheld by administrations, or if diplomatic relations are lost between two, then a friendly government represents the interests of another government vis-à-vis the third government . . . .and if two or more governments can't solve a problem independently, there are international organizations responsible for solving it. If the problem is judicial, then the International Court of Justice is responsible, but if the matter is political, then the United Nations has authority over it, for the United Nations is responsible for solving economic, social, and public health problems occurring amongst the governments, by way of UN subsidiaries, such as UNESCO, the World Health Organization, etc. Also, we must not ignore international laws that define the relationships among governments, concerning the security of borders and nationals, mutual respect, the delineation of crimes, and the locus and degrees of punishment (in cases where an individual from one government commits a crime in another government),

172. *Id.* at 88.
173. *Id.* at 87–89.
174. *Id.* at 460.

> along with immunity of diplomatic representatives, rights of political asylum, fixing the extent of bodies of water in the proximity of the government, and other such matters . . . [175]

Ṣadr's analysis of the current world order of nation-states begins with a critique of its strong and weak points.[176] He questions whether these structures have helped solve humanity's problems and concludes that they have not, as they were founded on vested interests rather than ethics.[177] Ṣadr's rejection of the nation-state order differs from that of ISIS (and other Salafi-jihadi groups) which derives from the doctrine of the caliphate, as he rejects it for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons. The absence of effective enforcement mechanisms in the current international order is the foremost among these reasons:

> There is nothing ultimately guaranteeing or requiring a government to implement international laws—so, naturally, any government will be selective about which of these structures it will implement according to what is easiest for it and in its best interests. Due to this, wars have continued, and colonialism endures in its old and new forms, as does the intellectual and doctrinal attack of the weak, defenseless masses. Likewise, we find aggressive alliances, accusations between governments, the breaking of relations, and enmity. Thus, the UN has no enforcement mechanism for implementing its decisions. And it has no truly useful model for handling the disputes of governments or stopping wars, just as the International Court of Justice lacks the power of enforcement for implementing its judgments . . . except in cases where both governments in the dispute, that is the litigant and defendant, happen to be satisfied.[178]

Given the limitations of the Westphalian system that underpins the United Nations, Ṣadr argues that the Mahdi's global government will entirely replace the nation-state system. This is based on both theoretical and practical grounds. Theoretically, the self-interest of nation-states hinders international unity, whereas the Mahdi's government is based on universal welfare and opposes selfish interests. Practically, Ṣadr asserts that the Mahdi will eliminate the current system's inefficiencies and promote true, universal welfare.[179] On the other hand,

> Concerning the practical foundation: [the Mahdi] does not allow the division of humanity by borders and governments. Rather, his government is singular and global under a single leadership and command. The Mahdi will realize this by way of world conquest. With this, all the international laws and institutions will be pointless, because they are merely for ordering the relationships between various governments, but at that time multiple governments will no longer exist. So, this singular state of the world will unlock the door to the best things, the accumulated greed and selfishness steering today's world will be effaced, war

175. *Id.* at 459.
176. *Id.* at 460.
177. *Id.* at 459–462
178. *Id.*
179. *Id.*

> will cease, and this conquest will be the key to happiness, prosperity, peace, and justice for all humanity.[180]

Ṣadr's views align with both Sunni theorists and the Shi'i majority in rejecting prior political systems. However, he presents a more nuanced and sophisticated argument. Ṣadr then moves on to propose a positive theory of political structure and administration within a global government. He starts by critiquing the standard methods of administration used in contemporary governments:

> [Contemporary] governments are . . . abstract legal constructs comprising a populated region with specified borders as well as a governing body. The highest office in the government is held by the king, dictator, or republic president, along with the head of the ministers of the non-presidential domain. Among these ministers, each is responsible for safeguarding one of the important functions of society, such as foreign affairs, defense, finance, economics, culture, education, and other affairs that the government needs to be administered . . . and in all of the governments there exists the parliament responsible for the legislative power . . . and the theoretical basis for this . . . is that the members of the parliament represent the different segments of the population, such that their agreement on the laws is tantamount to the agreement of the people . . . as if it issues from the people themselves. And in governments, there are political parties, some of which are covert and others overt, some of which exercise actual power, either exclusively, or shared with other parties . . . .and most governments assume the authority to permit or prohibit parties, according to the government's own best interests. Each political party represents a specific ideology and particular theory of existence and life. And from this stems the parties' feuds concerning theory, society, and reform . . . If a party in the government exercises power alone, this is what is called the single-party system, and that ruling party implements its own perspective of life and reality. And the ruling party usually limits freedom of opinion and political and social activity to its own confines, and prohibits any other view, party activity, or individual activity . . . The ministries in the government . . . comprise public bureaus or institutions, each of which is responsible for overseeing a particular domain of society, according to the needs. The government is responsible for the general oversight of the institutions, and providing for the general arrangements that would be difficult for individuals to attend to, such as the army, police, prisons, customs, power, the post, mining, distribution of water and electricity, and banking. In this oversight, the government can extend participation to all transactions, companies, banks, import-export activities, large-scale production, etc.[181]

After enumerating these characteristics of contemporary governments, Ṣadr turns to his positive theory of political structure. He ponders which of these aforementioned features will persist and poses the question: "What form will the global government of the Mahdi take?"[182] He responds with five features of the

180. *Id.*
181. *Id.*
182. *Id.*

final polity, starting with the highest leadership not being kingship, presidency, or dictatorship but imamate, occupied by the Mahdi himself while he lives, and after his death by his caliphs from among the Righteous Guardians.[183]

The central leader, however, will not rule single-handedly, but will also establish a bureaucratic system to manage various matters in the world. This is because the Mahdi cannot oversee everything himself. Instead, he will rely on his trusted companions, known as the 'rulers of God on earth,' to lead different regions.[184] The world government, therefore, will be led by a single leader (known as an Imam or Caliph) who delegates to an administrative apparatus. While the distinction between this form of government and monarchy may not be clear, arguably the central leader is expected to follow the rule of law for elsewhere Ṣadr states that "even the Mahdi himself will be obliged to obey all laws."[185]

The second feature is that the imamate will serve as both an executive and legislative power, unlike many contemporary nation-states where the legislative domain is derived from the general population through a representative or parliamentary system. Ṣadr explains that the Mahdi's government, due to its doctrinal composition, will not have a parliament in the legislative sense, as power belongs to God alone, and rather than being "of or for the people."[186] However, he acknowledges the possibility that some secondary legislative functions may be delegated to the people or to assemblies resembling a parliament, although there is no evidence within Islamic sources to support this.[187]

It is important to note that the legislative function of the imamate, as described by Ṣadr, is fundamentally different from the Sunni reversionist view that limits the Mahdi's role to an executive function. This view also differs from conventional Islamic political theories, which consider the Imam or Caliph to be an executive authority who derives the legislative function from the Qur'ān and Sunna. According to Ṣadr, the Mahdi himself is the source of legislation, as he will rule and define the fundamental legislation, including new items that were previously unknown.[188]

The third feature pertains to the nature of relationships between different regions in the proposed global government. Ṣadrist suggests that the system will resemble federalism but with limited autonomy for the members of the federation.[189] Acknowledging that there is no evidence for this in the Islamic traditions

183. *Id.*
184. *Id.*
185. *Id.* at 89.
186. *Id.* at 462–463.
187. *Id.*
188. *Id.*
189. *Id.*

and sources, he speculates.[190] While the various regions or geographic members of the government will have some degree of independence, the rulers within each region will lack independent legislative powers and will be mere extensions of the Mahdi's executive function. According to Ṣadrist, the central rule will be singular, the general ideology will be singular, and the fundamental law will be singular. As a result, the regional ruler will lack full supremacy and will not be legally independent from the central rule.[191] Instead, their status will be comparable to that of a single state in the USA or a single republic in the USSR, despite differences in ideology and legislation.[192]

The fourth feature pertains to further details of the administrative aspects of the government. Ṣadr asserts that the form of administration will be familiar to the people at the time, but with significant reforms.[193] If the Mahdi appears soon, the administration may resemble contemporary governments, with a hierarchy of ministers, general directors, and social institutions. However, some *ḥadīths* suggest the presence of a 'head' of the viziers and a highest leader of the army.[194] Elsewhere, Ṣadr discusses the role of mosques in the administration of the future Islamic government. He explains that mosques will serve as administrative centers, a concept rooted in the Islamic custom.[195] Within the global capital, the Mahdi will use the Kufa mosque as his seat of rule, similar to a modern-day palace.[196] The Sahlah mosque will function as the Public Treasury, akin to the Ministry of Finance in contemporary government.[197]

Fifth is the absence of "political parties in the Mahdi's government."[198] Ṣadr distinguishes between two meanings of political party. The first meaning is based on opposition to the ruling government, believing that individuals have the right to choose their opinions and beliefs and defend them, and to therefore divide into, for instance, right-wing and left-wing parties. This type of political party is banned in the Mahdi's government, and those who pursue it are deserving of death.[199] The second meaning of political party is grouping by shared beliefs without opposing the government. This type of political party might be allowed in the final political structure, as competition and debate are essential for humanity's growth. However, even if it is allowed, it will eventually dissolve

190. *Id.*
191. *Id.*
192. *Id.*
193. *Id.*
194. *Id.*
195. *Id.* at 580–581.
196. *Id.*
197. *Id.*
198. *Id.* at 463–464.
199. *Id.*

during the long-term arc of the final world order as humanity becomes more knowledgeable about what is beneficial and what is corrupting.[200]

Among these five general features of the final political order, Ṣadr elaborates in much greater detail on the third and fourth, which pertain to the relationships between regions within the global government and the administration of the government. He questions the need for a central authority to possess an administrative apparatus, especially when the Mahdi, who embodies the central authority, holds exceptional powers:

> [I]ndividual power, even if it is considerable, still falls short of being able, all by itself, to execute rule throughout the entire world, in the sense of adjudicating all particulars of the individuals and society. This is because these matters amount to millions in a single hour, not to mention in a single day . . . Yes indeed, a miracle could overcome that and could bestow on the individual a limitless ability, except that such miracles can't be assumed concerning the Mahdi, due to their violation of the rules against miracles whenever a clear substitute for the material exists—in this case being the implementation of global rule by way of the many individuals who are his tested companions. So, when, in this manner, there is a natural substitute for a miracle, then no space is allotted for miracles to be fulfilled and actualized.[201]

Because the central authority cannot govern single-handedly, each region requires a well-structured administrative and judicial system that includes rulers, viziers, administrators, judges, and other officials.[202] Ṣadr suggests two theories for organizing this administrative apparatus, with a preference for rule by individual administrators. This theory assumes a global confederation of 120–200 regions, similar to the current composition of Westphalian nation-states, because:

> [T]he regions comprising the inhabited world are numerous . . . the member governments of the United Nations now exceed 120, and there are also regions and governments not participating in this global group, like all the colonies and most of the oceanic islands and the polar regions. Furthermore, some present governments are particularly vast—like China, the USSR, the USA, Canada, Australia, etc. If the best interests of the [Mahdi's] global government are to subdivide these . . . into further regions, then the result will be an even greater number than what was there before, such that the number of regions in the global government might reach 200.[203]

According to Ṣadr, to this aggregate of 120–200 regions will be assigned 313 top administrators, who will rule as individuals, while any remainder would constitute the elite of the elite—namely, the central ruler's vanguard within the central government headquarters.[204] Although the number of 313 administrators may seem insufficient for the administrative needs of the global government, it

200. *Id.*
201. *Id.* at 478.
202. *Id.*
203. *Id.*
204. *Id.* at 478–479.

only refers to the highest administrators in each land, consisting of the highest ruler and highest judge.[205] If the number of lands falls short of 200, the remaining administrators may occupy the functions of the world's central government, working alongside the Mahdi.[206]

The second administrative theory, although not preferred by Ṣadr, suggests governance through administrative committees rather than individuals. According to this theory, the world is divided into four regions—North, South, East, and West, and each region has a committee of 12 men as its highest administrator.[207] The four regions are then subdivided into smaller regions, resulting in a total of 35 lands, including huge regions like all of Africa or the "Andalucian islands."[208] The rulers in the smaller regions are of lesser virtue compared to those in the larger regions, and thus the smaller region rulers derive their responsibilities from the larger region rulers. Each land's ruling committee comprises between 5 and 8 individuals. However, this theory's flaw is that the total number of administrators does not reach the desired 313. The total number of regional administrators is 197, and when added to the 48 rulers of the first-order geographic division, the total is 245, which is 68 short of the desired number of elites.[209]

Ṣadr acknowledges that either theory, or a combination of both, is possible. He then goes on to discuss the importance of the number of administrators. To ensure the success of the global government, there needs to be a sufficient number of judges and rulers. If not, the government would not be stable.[210] Additionally, these administrators must have passed at least the first of three levels of divine testing implemented by the Mahdi, which is designed to perfect humanity. Only those who have passed the first level are qualified to hold the most important positions in the government.[211]

What distinguishes the highest level—that is, those who have passed the third and final level of tests—is comprehensive knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence to a degree similar to what contemporary Islamic law refers to as "*ijtihad*"[212] (independent legal reasoning). However, in the final government, this term will no longer be used. Ṣadr offers the following justification for juridical knowledge as the primary qualification for government administrators and employees:

> Islamic jurisprudence confirms that the head of state must combine certain requirements and attain specified competencies to be fit to occupy this rank, and likewise, the judge must combine certain prerequisites to be able to judge Islamically and be capable of solving cases that arise among people. The most important

205. *Id.*
206. *Id.*
207. *Id.*
208. *Id.*
209. *Id.*
210. *Id.* at 495, 477.
211. *Id.* at 483.
212. *Id.* at 502.

> of these prerequisites, shared by both the ruler and the judge, are justice and possessing knowledge of the law. Justice implies great devotion and readiness to sacrifice which curbs the individual from transgressing or disobeying the teachings of God. By knowledge of the law is meant being broadly apprised of the Islamic legal rulings, which is called *ijtihād* in the language of Islamic jurisprudence during the period before the Mahdi's Advent.[213]

We have reviewed the general political structures of the final government, as described by Ṣadr, which will persist throughout its long temporal arc. These structures include a central autocratic authority called the imamate and a federation of 120–200 regions, each ruled by an administrative apparatus with a high ruler and high judge at the top. Although these general features remain consistent throughout the government's timespan, Ṣadr identifies three distinct phases within this period, each with unique characteristics.

1. The First Political Phase: The Mahdi's Personal Rule

The initial political phase of the final government, lasting up to 20 years, will see the Mahdi as the global ruler, with Jesus Christ (after the Second Coming) as his lieutenant, "akin to a prime minister in contemporary governments."[214] This phase, as described by Ṣadr, focuses on consolidating the global government. Specifically, the Mahdi's personal reign marks the transition from the "prior divine plan," which encompassed the injustices of human history before the Mahdi's arrival, to the "new divine plan," aimed at achieving complete justice and creating an infallible human society. As Ṣadr notes,

> [I]n these two divine plans, the Mahdi himself represents the end of the first divine plan, and the beginning, starting point of the second divine plan . . . this requires sufficient time for attaining the desired goal . . . and we've already explained that this will not be achieved through miracles. Therefore, it is necessary to conclude the Mahdi will live for a sufficient period to implement it in a form that ensures its continuation after him . . . and this is not accomplished merely by conquering the world, for when all the lands come under Muslim rule in the legal sense, there will still be much greater educational requirements for those societies.[215]

After evaluating the various traditions, Ṣadr opines that the Mahdi will accomplish consolidation within a relatively short period, specifically, his reign is estimated to be 5–10 years or 19–20 years, and it is more likely that the first option is closer to the truth.[216]

The success of the first phase of this plan is heavily reliant on the roles played by the Mahdi's 313 companions, who form the first cohort of the global administrative apparatus. Ṣadr emphasizes that these individuals are the 'choicest

213. *Id.* at 478.
214. *Id.* at 604.
215. *Id.* at 432.
216. *Id.* at 437–438.

fruits' of the previous divine plan (i.e. the contemporary, pre-apocalyptic era) and are vital to the success of the subsequent divine plan. They have two functions: firstly, as the military leadership in the global conquests, and secondly, as worldwide leaders and rulers in the regions of the global government.[217] Ṣadr suggests that upon the Mahdi's Advent, those who pass the first level of tests might number "not less than 10,000," while those who pass the second level of tests and are fit for the highest level of rule would number 313. Despite engaging in a lengthy discussion of *ḥadīths* to identify the specific identities of these individuals, Ṣadr acknowledges that the primary textual sources of these traditions contain numerous weaknesses and discrepancies, making any conclusions about their specific identities highly speculative and unreliable.[218]

The Mahdi's exceptional nature makes him fit to rule, but it raises the question of how his 313 companions acquire their *ijtihād*-like qualifications. It is unimaginable that they gained these qualifications through practical experience in ruling or adjudicating, given the inherent injustice and tyranny of the world during the prior divine plan. Instead, their attainments result from righteous reactions against the conditions of darkness and tyranny, which requires distancing themselves from the instruments of ruling and adjudication, and from unjust governments entirely. "If they had participated in them, they would have failed in the divine testing."[219]

Despite their dearth of prior practical experience, Ṣadr believes that theoretical knowledge is sufficient for the task. He argues that a lack of practical experience does not undermine success, so long as there is a solid theoretical understanding.[220] Ṣadr notes that there are many Islamic jurists today who are knowledgeable and unaffiliated with (and therefore undefiled by) government. While he acknowledges that not all of these jurists will pass or succeed in the divine tests, he remains confident that some of them will establish the first cohort of the Mahdi's future administrators.[221] He believes that the weaknesses of today's Islamic jurists, such as their refusal to engage in public affairs, will be lifted after the Advent of the Mahdi.[222]

Ṣadr highlights that the qualification of these jurists requires not only conventional study methods but also direct training from the Mahdi. This training is in fact already in process, for the Mahdi has been educating his devotees clandestinely during the era of his Greater Occultation.[223]

---

217. *Id.* at 477.
218. *Id.*
219. *Id.* at 498.
220. *Id.*
221. *Id.*
222. *Id.* at 502.
223. *Id.* at 504.

After the Mahdi's Advent, of course, the provision of ongoing training to incumbent administrators will be greatly simplified. This will occur in two general ways. First is the general curriculum shared by all administrators, and second, is the specific instruction tailored to each administrator,[224] for:

> [W]henever the Mahdi wants to dispatch an individual as a ruler in a region . . . he will write a contract . . . comprising the plan that such individual must follow during the tenure of his rule . . . But this covenant will not consist of general rules, . . . for it assumes that they are already capable of the general rules and understanding of the new jurisprudence—rather, this covenant provides the necessities when the ruler encounters difficulties in implementing the general rules in the world's particular problems . . . for when [the administrator] goes to his region for the first time . . . he assumes unfathomably monumental responsibilities.[225]

Considering the immense pressures faced by administrators, it is natural to wonder if some might fail in their duties, for despite their virtues, they are not superhuman like the Mahdi. With the slightest greed or neglect, their responsibilities could be compromised.[226] The Mahdi is aware of this and will hold them accountable, scrutinizing their actions.[227] However, does this severity imply that some administrators will fail? Ṣadr discusses a *ḥadīth* which suggests that over time, weaknesses will emerge in their functions, prompting the Mahdi to intervene: only twelve will remain steadfast, while the rest, 313 in total, will falter and become enemies of the Mahdi, deserving of death.[228] Ṣadr, however, rejects this *ḥadīth* not only because he considers it potentially spurious (based on the rules of *ḥadīth* criticism), but also due to its implications. He stresses the significant time period required to raise up such administrators, who are the "choicest fruits of humanity's long history . . . before the appearance of the Mahdi."[229] Therefore, it is unimaginable for the majority of administrators to fail, as it would undermine the Mahdi's ability to summon others for the purpose. Ṣadr concludes that the fact that these administrators are irreplaceable negates the possibility of their ceasing their functions, as it would compromise the government's grand aims.[230] Additionally, these administrators cannot doubt the Mahdi's authority, which will be clear as the sun to all human beings but even more so to those who encountered him during his Greater Occultation.[231] In summary, Ṣadr asserts that these elite individuals will remain steadfast in their administration of power and justice in the just, global government, rendering the notion of their apostasy improbable.

---

224. *Id.* at 504.
225. *Id.* at 505.
226. *Id.* at 522.
227. *Id.* at 521.
228. *Id.* at 523.
229. *Id.* at 525.
230. *Id.*
231. *Id.* at 527.

Ṣadr also emphasizes the importance of frugality and modesty during the first political phase, even to the point of asceticism. This representation should extend to the personal lives of the Mahdi and his administrators, as well as to the governors of the earth, who must materially represent the lowliest individual in their region.[232] However, during the Mahdi's reign, prosperity will rise across the world and regional economies. As a result, the Mahdi and his administrators gradually shifted away from asceticism.[233] However, the central ruler and the administrators should still practice modesty and frugality even after the Mahdi's personal reign until the long-term goal of universal prosperity is realized. This goal will only be achieved some time after the Mahdi's lifetime, as a result of implementing the system he entrusts to the global rulers who come after him.[234]

2. Second Political Phase: The Appointed Righteous Saints

The second phase of the global government's political system commences following the demise of the Mahdi. Ṣadr's discourse on this phase primarily addresses the matter of succession. Successors, not just to the Mahdi but also to the first group of administrators, must possess great faith, devotion, and education, as well as being thoroughly trained through a program of continuous testing to become the righteous and chosen ones capable of assuming the world or regional leadership after the Mahdi or their respective rulers, should they pass away or relocate.[235] It is essential for the continuation of Mahdist rule that these superior qualities be possessed, as otherwise, the system would be dependent on the Mahdi's personality and unable to endure after his departure due to the lack of qualified successors.[236]

Who will be the Mahdi's successors? Ṣadr first rejects two common doctrines in Shi'i apocalyptic expectations. One of these is the notion that Jesus Christ will be the immediate successor of the Mahdi. While the two figures will be contemporaneous during the last ten years of the Mahdi's life, Christ will serve as "something like the capital's prime minister."[237] After the Mahdi's passing, Christ will continue to live for an additional 30 years (which is why he is associated in the *ḥadīths* with the "end" of the Islamic community).[238] However, Ṣadr emphasizes that the highest leadership post in the just, global government after the Mahdi will not pass to the Messiah. This is deduced from a *ḥadīth* that states that Christ will decline to lead the Muslim community in prayers and instead defer to the Mahdi, stating that "you [Muslims] are rulers over one another."[239]

232. *Id.* at 548.
233. *Id.* at 549.
234. *Id.*
235. *Id.* at 481.
236. *Id.*
237. *Id.* at 605.
238. *Id.* at 606.
239. *Id.*

The meaning of this, according to Ṣadr, is that after the Mahdi, all of the Righteous Saints will be Muslim, rather than Christian, in origin; thus, these Saints have precedence over Christ in succeeding to leadership since he is a Prophet of the prior religion (Christianity).[240] Rather than assuming the highest leadership post, Christ will participate in an administrative role or continue in the same manner as he did during the Mahdi's lifetime.[241]

Secondly, Ṣadr refutes the common Shi'i doctrine of Return, which claims that the rule of the Mahdi will be followed by the resurrection of various Islamic figures, especially the first eleven Shi'i Imāms, during the End Times.[242] He argues against this doctrine on three grounds: textual criticism, the principle of not accepting miracles if there is a natural explanation, and common sense. According to him, the return of the dead would render the appearance of the Mahdi pointless and unjust, as it would mean that humanity could have avoided the difficulties of Occultation by simply relying on the resurrection of the dead.[243] Nonetheless, Ṣadr accepts the doctrine of Return specifically with regard to the First Imam, 'Alī, whom he identifies as the Qur'ānic apocalyptic figure of the 'Beast.' According to Ṣadr, 'Alī's return will occur shortly after the Mahdi's death, but the Beast's principal function is not to rule, but rather to distinguish the believer from the disbeliever, the deviant from the pious, and to publicly manifest the moral reality of each person.[244] This is necessary because the global, just government will be vulnerable immediately after the Mahdi's death, as it will have lost its leader. Although the Imām Mahdi will have eradicated the deviants from the earth, there will still be a small portion of humanity that will have submitted to the Mahdi's government out of fear or greed rather than true allegiance. After the Mahdi passes, it is possible that they will seek to gain power over the government or its parts. The Beast of the Earth will emerge to prevent such transgressions and buttress the global, just government.[245] In any event, Ṣadr reemphasizes that Alī's return *qua* Beast is not only "contrary to the general [Shi'i] usage of the term Return," but is also devoid of any implication of succession to rule.[246]

Having excluded the common Shi'i doctrines of successorship to Christ, or successorship by way of Return, Ṣadr posits that the Mahdi's successorship will be established through the rule of the 'Twelve Righteous Saints', who will govern consecutively for approximately 720 years. Ṣadr provides a few reasons to support this idea. Although there is no definitive information regarding the

240. *Id.*
241. *Id.*
242. *See generally* Momen, *supra* note 17.
243. al-Ṣadr, *supra* note 165, at 497.
244. *Id.* at 652.
245. *Id.*
246. *Id.* at 639.

exact number of successors, the *ḥadīth*s suggest that after the Mahdi, there will be "twelve further Mahdis."[247] Similarly, while the 720-year rule is not absolute, Ṣadr argues that if the number of ruling saints is twelve, their average life span in a perfect justice government would be at least 100 years. Consequently, a leader could spend up to 80 years in the seat of leadership. Hence, if their average reign is 60 years, the total reign of the Righteous Saints would be 720 years.[248] Therefore, the 720-year rule is a rough estimate.

The rule of the Righteous Saints, according to Ṣadr, will not be determined through any democratic process such as election, but rather through direct appointment by the Mahdi and each subsequent ruler, who will appoint their successor. This is because society at that time will be inherently flawed and thus unfit to elect a qualified leader: "there's no doubt that the Mahdi, before his death, will have emphasized and stressed, through repeated global announcements, the necessity of obedience to his caliph."[249] The Mahdi will emphasize the importance of obedience to his successor through global announcements prior to his death, and he will designate his successor during his lifetime, making them the first ruler of the era of the Righteous Saints and the highest leader of the global just government after him.[250]

To ensure the highest level of competence in their appointed successors, each ruler provides personalized training, for amidst an imperfect society, it is only through such personalized training that these individuals can achieve their qualifications. The Mahdi therefore personally trains the first of the twelve Righteous Saints, who then trains the next in line.[251] According to Ṣadr, the first successor is superior to the eleven who follow him, as he is the fruit of the Mahdi's personal training and is contemporary to his words, deeds, and ways.[252]

According to Ṣadr, the practical requirements of these mentor-apprentice relationships make it likely that the twelve successors will be the progeny of Imam Mahdi himself, linked through father-son relationships.[253] This conclusion is based on logical rather than textual reasoning, for during this period, "there are many realities, methods, and laws . . . that only the ruler is aware of, which were specifically bequeathed from the Mahdi; disclosing these to the new ruler requires the prior ruler's time and effort, something that is already scarce enough between fathers and sons, and even rarer between, for example, cousins . . . "[254] Ṣadr emphasizes that this theory of successorship via direct descent from the

247. *Id.* at 648.
248. *Id.* at 649.
249. *Id.*
250. *Id.*
251. *Id.* at 645.
252. *Id.* at 646.
253. *Id.* at 650.
254. *Id.* at 651.

Mahdi is independent of the Shi'i doctrine of Occultation and is compatible with the Sunni notion of the Mahdi as a man who will be born for the first time in the future, and who fills the earth with justice.[255] He also notes that the matter of their descent from the Mahdi is not of great importance since what matters most is their essential qualities and just actions, regardless of kinship.[256]

Finally, Ṣadr points out that although the Mahdi's rule and that of his caliphs are infallible and closely connected, there is a qualitative difference between the two in terms of the perfection of leadership. This gap is due to personal, educational, and psychological differences, and it is what the *ḥadīths* refer to when they say that "there will be no good in life after the Mahdi."[257] Despite the relative inferiority of the twelve successors, Ṣadr assures that the Mahdi will ensure the survival of the Islamic community after him by maintaining the foundation of the world order, which the government after the Mahdi will continue to pursue successfully, and by providing detailed rules of training to the first successor.

3. The Third Political Phase: Election of the "Righteous Saints"

In contrast to the autocracy of the first two political phases, the third political phase introduces a form of democracy, which is justified by the belief that society has become mature enough for democracy to succeed. The 720-year reign of the Righteous Saints is seen as a transitional period to deliver humanity to the stage of becoming an 'Infallible Society.' Given this attainment, humanity will be fit to elect qualified leaders, so the need for appointing leaders will be removed. According to Ṣadr, the majority view in this society will be sound because the great majority of its individuals will be righteous and just, making the public consensus infallible.[258]

Compared to his commentary on the first two phases, Ṣadr offers scant detail on this third phase, noting that "the [era of] consultation will proceed under laws that will be enacted at that time, which are impossible for us to know presently."[259] Nonetheless, he offers some basic points of comparison. To begin with, the elected rulers of this third phase will share in the righteous virtues of the appointed rulers of the preceding phase.[260] On the other hand, they not will only differ their mechanisms of appointments, but also in their "methods of education."[261] Ṣadr explains that rather than gaining their education through personal training, enshrined in the master-apprentice relationship of the previous political

255. *Id.*
256. *Id.*
257. *Id.* at 481.
258. *Id.* at 647.
259. *Id.*
260. *Id.*
261. *Id.*

phase, these elected rulers gain their education and training directly and entirely from their natural upbringing within the just and perfect society.[262]

Lastly, Ṣadr considers the question of how society will recognize the advent of infallibility.[263] He explains that it will be through the Mahdi's will and testament, but in one of three possible ways. The first possibility is that society recognizes it through the Mahdi's public will and testament, such as his statement that the Righteous Saints who exercise power will be twelve in number. When this number is reached, the reign of these Saints will have ended, and the advent of the infallible society will be known to have begun.[264] A second possibility, though unlikely, is that the Mahdi will not publicly disclose the number of Righteous Saints. In this case, it's possible for the Mahdi to leave a specific will and testament to the Saints themselves, indicating that "in such-and-such a year, when the ruling Saint dies, he must not designate any person after him as successor," but rather the appointment mechanism transitions to democracy, meaning that the infallible society has been achieved.[265] The third possibility is that the Mahdi will leave a specific will and testament to the Saints, correlating the end of their reign with specific societal events or qualities, such as historical events, the mental and cultural level that humanity will have reached in the future, or otherwise.[266]

Conclusion

International policymakers have long tended to conflate Islamic movements based on superficial similarities, contributing to policy failures that have often undermined international peace and security.[267] The conflation of Hamas and ISIS, referenced in the introduction, illustrates this recurring problem. This myopia can be partially addressed through the lens of apocalypticism which, throughout history, has influenced the thinking and behavior of not only religious but also expressly secular that are nonetheless messianic and salvific in orientation. Indeed, apocalypticism—and specifically theories of final government during the End Times—provides insight into the ultimate social and political goals of movements that may appear to behave similarly, thereby providing a means for their differentiation.

In comparing the theories of apocalyptic government examined in this Article, three variables emerge as the most crucial and decisive for differentiating the case studies from one another—both with respect to their theological and doctrinal content, and their implications for international law and policy. These

262. *Id.*
263. *Id.* at 649.
264. *Id.*
265. *Id.*
266. *Id.*
267. *See, e.g.*, Juan Cole, Engaging the Muslim World (2010).

variables are the following: (1) the anticipated duration of the final government before universal annihilation; (2) the status of nation-states in the final government; and (3) the extent to which the final government will be democratic and inclusive. In light of these variables, ISIS, among the four case studies considered in this Article, presents the most dangerous and troubling vision of the final government, followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Awaited Mahdi Party in Egypt, and the Ṣadrists.

Despite its relative decline in recent years, ISIS experienced tremendous growth and success in a short period, attracting widespread support among its followers. Efforts to revive the movement continue to this day, and the new versions of the movement will almost certainly adopt the same Salafi-jihadi ideology and apocalyptic theory of government. While ISIS is already notorious for its human rights abuses and destabilizing influence on geopolitical stability, what makes the ISIS vision especially troubling is the assumption that the final order will be established imminently and that the world will end shortly thereafter, reinforcing a sense of existential urgency that drives its violent methods. Compounding this threat is ISIS's belief that the final government will abolish the existing nation-state system—an ambition that, if coupled with the acquisition of a nuclear arsenal, would pose an even more alarming danger to humanity.

Since its establishment in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has shown hostility towards Western democratic nations, leading to its designation as a rogue state and the imposition of international sanctions. Despite being a nation-state, Iran's government envisions a future world order centered on Shi'i political authority. However, the fate of nation-states in this final order remains conspicuously unaddressed by the Iranian theorists considered in this article—an omission that likely reflects the tension between the universal claims of Mahdist governance and the practical need to preserve Iran's own political sovereignty. Iran's human rights abuses are well-documented, but its apocalyptic vision of revanchism, whereby the historical enemies of the Shi'i community will suffer violent and final retribution, raises even deeper concerns.

Although Dāwūd's Awaited Mahdi political party was marginal to Egyptian politics and ultimately proved unsuccessful, as a worldview it represented a potential source of unity within Egypt and the broader Sunni world. Its rejection of Salafi extremism, emphasis on Muslim and Christian unity, and willingness to cooperate with other sects, particularly Shi'is, distinguish it from many other Sunni movements. Dāwūd's acceptance of the Westphalian nation-state system as the internal structure of the Mahdi's government reflects a reinterpretation of the classical Sunni theory of caliphate—one that is compatible with modernity and geopolitical stability. Furthermore, Dāwūd's vision includes at least nominal support for democratic principles, setting it apart from the authoritarian vision of both ISIS and the Iranian theorists considered in this Article. Nonetheless,

Dāwūd's claim that humanity will survive for only a few centuries after the establishment of the final government introduces a troubling sense of existential urgency. While this framework is less worrisome than ISIS's belief in an imminent apocalyptic collapse, it nonetheless reflects an inherently limited and fragile vision of humanity's future.

The Ṣadrists, despite originating as a violent insurgency in Iraq, have since evolved into an elected political party that operates within the nation-state system. This evolution reflects the pragmatic political adaptability of the movement, particularly in the aftermath of the US invasions, occupation, and withdrawal. As a rival Shi'i group, the Ṣadrist vision of the future political order presents a more tolerant and hopeful alternative to the Islamic Republic of Iran. What distinguishes it from the Iranian vision is its engagement with precisely those gaps that the Iranian theorists avoid—such as the fate of nation-states, political successorship, and the role of political parties, administrative agencies, and bureaucracies. Critically, the Ṣadrist model anticipates a final government that will ultimately take the form of a democratic system—albeit in the distant future—setting it apart from all the other case studies in this Article, which presume some form of authoritarianism, if not totalitarianism. Equally important, while all the other case studies envision a short-lived future wherein humanity endures only briefly before universal annihilation, the Ṣadrist theory presumes that the final government will last for an incalculably long time span, allowing for long-term aspirations of human progress to be realized.