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PRUDENTIAL CONCEALMENT IN SHI'ITE ISLAM

A Strategy of Survival or a Principle?

Abdulaziz Sachedina

Minorities have always sought strategies of survival when living, under the political domination of the majority, in a hostile social and religious environment. Historically, Shī'ite leaders and their followers have found themselves employing *taqīya* ("precautionary dissimulation" or "prudential concealment") to avoid confrontation with Sunni majorities and governments. Shī'ite sources point to a number of justificatory traditions in which the Shī'ite imams had encouraged their followers to practice *taqīya* and not press for the overthrow of the illegitimate caliphate and for establishment of the legitimate rule of the imam. In some hazardous circumstances, when one's life or honor was in danger, the imams declared *taqīya* to be actually a duty. Through application of this strategy of survival, moderate elements in the community avoided expressing their true opinions publicly or in such a way as to cause misunderstanding or enmity. The main motivation for prudential concealment seems to have been an eagerness in Shī'ite minorities to identify themselves socially and even in religious practice with majority Sunni communities. However, for those who wished to work for gradual change under unjust and autocratic rule, *taqīya* functioned as a legitimate, if underground, political activity.

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Prudential concealment is morally problematic because it requires hiding one's true feelings or intentions behind a feigned appearance. As such, *taqīya* cannot be treated as a moral principle; yet an equally critical moral responsibility—to protect oneself from destruction when endangered—renders the practice a religious duty when required. The moral imperative against casting yourself "by your own hands into destruction" (*wa lā tulqū bi-aydīkum ila al-tahluka*) is Qur'anic (Qur'an 2:195). But the disapproval of pretense, of feigning an appearance, of giving a false impression about oneself, is Qur'anic as well. Thus conditions were set for the practice of *taqīya*. Listed in most of the standard juridical-theological sources, these conditions include (in descending order of importance): threat to one's life and name, fear of causing sedition and social unrest, and fear leading to chaos in general. Ironically, the Sunnites have often criticized the Shī'ites for practicing *taqīya* (which the Sunni regard as contrary to the Sharī'a), when Sunni governance has so often been intolerable that the Sunni ulema have adopted a strategy not very different in its outcome from *taqīya*. The Sunni ulema invoke the principle of "averting probable harm" (*daf' al-ḍarar al-muḥtamal*) in order to control the outrage that their own people have felt against injustices practiced by their own governments.

Besides these two religious duties, both deriving from the Qur'an but necessitating development of a set of legal conditions to reconcile them, there is a third relevant duty, which makes that reconciliation all the more difficult. This third duty, sanctioned in books of Islamic social ethics, is to uphold justice at all levels of social and political interaction. Adherents must "command the good and forbid the evil" (*al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa nahy 'ani-l-munkar*), which in the context of political tyranny may translate into revolutionary activity against a standing government. Thus can the practice of "prudential concealment" justify the delay of action until the arrival of an opportune time to overthrow an unjust regime. Under unjust regimes, *taqīya* has functioned both as a principle of survival and as a strategy that enables political regrouping. Among minority groups, it counts as an act of resistance to unjust authority, because this kind of political quietism leads incrementally, if not swiftly and overtly, to fulfillment of the obligation to "forbid evil."

Despite the subjectivity, contingency, and context dependence involved in determining whether a regime counts as unjust by any Muslim definition, this doctrine has been an important one in Islamic public theology. According to its practitioners, the "wait and see" activity of *taqīya* is the only legitimate and prudent approach to regime change. In Muslim political culture, participation of the governed in decision making has been virtually nonexistent; only covert acts of opposition, therefore, could intelligibly count as popular participation. *Taqīya*, then, is the constitutive context of legitimate political behavior in Islamic thought, as well as the context in which one finds the guidelines for and instru-

ments of Muslim political culture.[1] It is within that constitutive context, moreover, that one discovers the distinctions between groups of political actors in Muslim societies—groups that negotiate their political space with attention to those religious beliefs that must shape their choices under conditions of political repression. Such choices may well involve activity that sustains a public order that, while neither just nor legitimate, is yet regarded from a religious perspective as necessary for the well-being of the people.

Therefore, my interest in prudential concealment here will go beyond textual discussion to include empirical observation of the incremental political participation that is necessary under the adverse conditions of Muslim autocracies. I will not deal with strategies of minority survival in every historical period, nor with Sunni-Shī'a polemics concerning *taqīya*.[2] Suffice it to say that in the earlier periods, when the Shī'ite imams lived under various Sunni regimes (ending with the occultation of the twelfth and last imam in 973), *taqīya* figured as almost a religious obligation. I will concentrate here on periods, from the sixteenth century onward, in which the Shī'ites had gained political power and *taqīya* not only lost its strategic value but was considered as in abeyance or, by some, as actually forbidden.[3] An exception has existed in these later centuries for Shī'ite minorities living under repressive Sunni governments like that of Saudi Arabia: in such a circumstance, *taqīya* functions as a kind of "political correctness" when conditions are relatively favorable, and otherwise—when Sunni religious authorities engage in systematic demonization of and discrimination against the Shī'ites living among them—as a survival strategy. Still, according to most Shī'ite scholars, particularly since the 1978–79 Iranian revolution, the political gains of Hizballah in Lebanon, and Shī'ite political ascendancy in American-occupied Iraq, *taqīya* is null and void because there is no need to practice prudential concealment of one's true beliefs when the community is not living in fear.[4]

1. Khalid Abou El Fadl, "*Aḥkām al-Bughāt*: Irregular Warfare and the Law of Rebellion in Islam," in *Cross, Crescent, and Sword: The Justification and Limitation of War in Western and Islamic Tradition* (New York: Greenwood, 1990), 162, cites all the relevant juridical sources on the issue.

2. The polemical literature on this topic has been examined by Etan Kohlberg in his studies on the Shī'ite practice during the classical and medieval periods of Shī'ite history. See, for instance, "Some Imāmī-Shī'ī view on *Taqiyya*," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 95 (1975): 395–402.

3. In recent years, particularly after the Iranian revolution of 1978–79, a number of Shī'ite scholars have regarded *taqīya* as obsolete. See Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh, *al-Islam wa mantiq al-quwwa* (Beirut: Dār al-Islāmīya, 1979). It is important to bear in mind the situation of Shī'ites in Iran and Lebanon when the Iranian revolution was at its peak and Israel had invaded south Lebanon. Under the circumstances, an active political response, rather than passive resistance, was prescribed.

4. There is hardly any discussion of *taqīya* at present, especially not under the powerful religious leadership in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. Shī'ite political gains in those countries have translated into open confrontation with Sunni leaders there and elsewhere. Iran's newly established University of Muslim Legal Rites (*madhāhib-e islāmī*) is now inviting Sunni scholars at al-Azhar for intrafaith dialogue.

Taqīya is today part of the religious experience of that sector of the Shī'ite community that continues to cherish victimhood (*mazlūmīya*). This is the sector that maintains ritual practices like self-flagellation during the commemoration of al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī's martyrdom in Karbala', Iraq, during the ten days of Muḥarram. My fieldwork suggests to me that of the three major ethnic groups in Shī'ite communities—South Asian (including Afghani), Persian, and Arab—it is the South Asian Shī'ites who have adhered to *taqīya*, shunning politics and public life. Whereas the Persians and the Arabs, largely because of their political ascendancy, have regarded the practice as no longer relevant. Accordingly, more and more Shī'ite scholars among Iranians and Arabs have advocated abandonment of *taqīya* altogether.[5]

Taqīya-oriented Religious Experience

Before assessing the political implications of prudential concealment as it evolved historically, the actual practice of quietism that *taqīya* generates ought to be explored. Textual depictions of the practice are important in defining relevant terms, but texts do not reveal its dynamics in ways that are fully intelligible to those living in relatively safe and secure cultural environments. There is considerable textual information about the practice, mostly negative when authored by outsiders, and mostly apologetic when insiders do the expounding. Such texts have not advanced or refined our understanding of—for example—the experience of *taqīya* on the part of a Shī'ite performing the *ḥajj* in fear of ill-treatment by Saudi religious police, whose tolerance of "sinful deviation" (*bid'a*) from Wahhabi religious practice is very low. Bearing in mind that *taqīya* teaches accommodation even to unjust authority when one is under threat or when religious and social disorder is possible, the Shī'ite pilgrim in Mecca will behave according to Sunni rather than Shī'a standards. It is important to emphasize that, as a religious phenomenon, *taqīya* is understood as part of the mundane stage of development en route to establishment of a just social order and that, once that order has been achieved, prudential dissimulation will be obsolete. Meanwhile, though, quietism of this kind plays a key role in nurturing attitudes useful when and where cultural accommodation and tolerance may be requisite to social order.

As a religious practice *taqīya* has always been conceived as being part of the attempt to institute a just and good society, though its involvement in the attempt generates tension between the timeless norm and its applicability in his-

5. Faḍl Allāh, *Khatawāt 'alā ṭarīq al-islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf li-Maṭbū'āt, 1982), defines the scope of *taqīya* and critically evaluates the juridical ordinance and the traditions that provide documentation for the submissive stance among the Shī'a.

torical time. That tension has brought the community to constantly reevaluate the extent of its own moral responsibility in the face of repeated failure to develop the just society. The impact of autocratic political systems, while not irrelevant, is secondary in evaluating prudential concealment. What is primary is to understand quietism in relation to its supposed contrary: activism. Both respond to the existence of injustice in the Muslim polity; both are seen as part of the long-term attempt to establish a just polity in historical time; and both are sanctioned in religious texts. However, the exponents of the quietist posture have often, in practice, been supporters of authoritarian politics and have offered unquestioning and immediate obedience to almost any Muslim authority that publicly adhered to the Sharī'a. Gradually, in the course of Muslim political history, a quietist and authoritarian stance came to be associated with the Sunni majority. The Sunni ulema, indeed, played a major role in shaping the quietist posture toward rulers, and in many cases the ulema acted to legitimize de facto Sunni authority.

In contrast, exponents of the activist posture, under the same circumstances, taught that there is no obligation to obey corrupt rulers, thus lending the support of religious authorities to radical politics. Citing the obligation to "command the good and forbid the evil," they insisted on the removal of any unjust authority from power. This activist and even radical stance was for some time characteristic of the Shī'ites. However, following numerous unsuccessful attempts by Shī'ite leaders at different points in their history to overthrow the ruling power (even when that power was itself Shī'ite), the quietist attitude, rather than an activist stance, became standard among them. There is sufficient material for historians to conclude that the quietist attitude was adopted now and again as a survival strategy more than as a principle: Shī'ite life had to be protected from destruction. But even as a strategy, quietist passivity was a religiously sanctioned means of making time to reorganize for future action in the cause of justice.

The "Abode of *Taqīya*" as a Sociopolitical Space

The practitioner of *taqīya* is both religious and (in the least technical sense of the word) realistic. Thus contingent "realities on the ground" render difficult the task of charting the ebb and flow of Shī'ite activism. Under some conditions of politics and society, the activist mentality may be seen as latent within Shī'ite quietism; under other conditions, it may be seen as the dominant tendency of Shi'a (while quietism would be seen as a survival strategy). Shī'ite activism has emerged, in recent times as in the past, after a period of relative quietism, largely because of the central role played by Shī'ite religious leaders in reading the "signs of the times" and discerning what possibilities for action are present. When the times are right for action, the Shī'ite religious leadership may well teach radical

doctrines—which is to say, teachings directed toward swifter achievement of the just social order.

By the end of the third century of their existence (following the Prophet's death in 632), the Shī'ites had developed, in response to living as a minority group under adverse conditions, a religio-legal intellectual mechanism for resolving problems of the community in crisis situations. This mechanism was dialectical in character, gradually incorporating positions that at one time would have seemed untenable but that, through further interpretation of theological and political doctrines, under exigent social and political pressures, came to be declared valid. In our present context, the key doctrines are those in support of *jihād*. The Qur'an had implicitly divided the world into *dār al-īmān* (the sphere of belief) and *dār al-kufr* (the sphere of disbelief) long before Muslim jurists supplied a religious rationale for the historical practice of *jihād*. They did so by developing the Qur'anic distinction of spheres, using political-legal terms such as *dār al-islām* (the sphere of submission [to God]) and *dār al-ḥarb* (the sphere of war). There is, however, a difference in the way Islamic religious law came to define the two spheres and the way the Qur'an represents the realms of belief and disbelief. In the Qur'an, the division between the two realms is made entirely in spiritual and moral terms. Whereas for Islamic law, the division of the world into the sphere of submission to God and the sphere of war was made in spatiotemporal terms and had reference to the extent of Islamic religious hegemony.

The Qur'an, according to Muslim belief, is not only the record of the divine revelation received by the Prophet. Existentially, it also reflects the history of individual and collective Muslim religious endeavor in creating the sphere of belief, which is known also as the sphere of "sound, integral existence." Creating the sphere of belief involves cultivation of the requisite religious outlook prior to its realization, anywhere on earth, as a social order. It is important to bear in mind that there is no concept of eschatological promised land or holy land in the Qur'an to suggest the possibility of a diaspora—the dispersion of adherents—even in the remotest sense of the word. According to the Qur'an, the entire earth belongs to God and was created as the locus for human advancement toward the best moral and spiritual goals. The most advanced efforts may be taken to any region of the world, so long as no injustices are committed, in the process, against fellow humans. The Qur'an in this way posits a universally recognizable ethical order on earth, in which an exclusionary historical claim to any territory must be subjected to the universal litmus test of faith in God. Moreover, any exclusivist claim to monopoly over religious truth must be confirmed by the moral conduct of its adherents, their respect for justice and equity. This interdependence of religious claims and personal morality was supposed to humble human self-righteousness and serve as a foundation for the principles of religious tolerance and religious pluralism.

Still, is it not possible that a human being could become spiritually, morally, or culturally homeless? Could a human being not find him- or herself metaphorically in exile but with hope of an ultimate return home? That question must bring us to consider *dār al-hijra*, the relevant Islamic concept. *Hijra* literally means "cutting oneself off from friendly or loving communion" but technically signifies "emigration from the territory of the unbelievers to the territory of the believers or to any place of safety or refuge on account of religious persecution." To this early signification—of emigration by a person or persons from one place or surrounding to seek protection in another—is added emigration in search of a permanent or even temporary economic advantage. *Hijra* in both these technical senses has been a prominent feature of Muslim experience from the beginning. The Qur'an commands its adherents to depart from places where they are persecuted and to settle anywhere in the earth (8:72, 74, 75). Even to live under the rule of disbelievers is preferable to living under persecution: "Whoso emigrates in the way of God will find in the earth many refuges and plenty" (4:97). Moreover, the Qur'an encourages adherents to "disperse in the land and seek God's bounty" (62:10). *Hijra*, however, is not an act that leads to a permanent state of homelessness; nor does *dār al-hijra* mean "sphere of homelessness." After all, the city of Yathrib became permanently the *madīnat al-nabī* (the city of the Prophet: Medina), demonstrating that the sphere of emigration can be converted to the sphere of belief. Indeed Medina became the building site of the first mosque. The sphere of emigration became the abode of "security and sound, integral existence," as the term *īmān* denotes.

Thus the concept of *dār al-hijra*—which means, narrowly, "the sphere of emigration"—suggests that every corner of the earth is open to such emigration in pursuit of God's comprehensive bounty but also that any part of the earth can potentially provide all the conditions necessary for living in obedience to God. However, the Qur'an warns that both the process of *hijra* and the conversion of *dār al-hijra* to a Muslim "home" involve dangers. Both require perseverance, steadfastness, and tolerance in the face of the inevitable hardships that one encounters on leaving the security of one's family and familiar surroundings. "And those who emigrated and were expelled from their habitations, and those who suffered hurt in My way, and struggled, and were slain," the Qur'an says, "them I shall surely acquit of their evil deeds, and I shall admit them to gardens underneath which flow rivers" (3:195). It is in this sense that the act of "emigration" becomes equated with *jihād*, the "struggle and striving" undertaken to bring God's purpose—creating an ethical order on earth—to successful fruition.

In Shī'ite literature one reads about an additional "abode" or category connected with faith and space; namely, *dār al-taqīya*, which means the "abode of prudential concealment." This space is usually equated with living under the rule of a majority that does not tolerate the minority political theology and does

not recognize its entitlement to just treatment. *Dār al-taqīya* has been treated as morally and spiritually challenging—a realm where adherents must aspire to change a social and political order that prevents the realization of an ideal polity. Unlike *dār al-hijra*, where the tendency is to accommodate with or assimilate to the new environment, *dār al-taqīya* generates only a temporary connection; the adherent's commitment is to change the environment in ways consistent with right faith and morality. Implicit is an activist political agenda (just as soon as conditions become ripe for it).

It was in the context of *dār al-taqīya*, during the ninth and tenth centuries, that the question was first raised of whether a Shī'ite was permitted to work for an unjust government. Having penetrated the Sunni (by definition, unjust) administrations of Arabia, Iraq, central Iran, and Khurasan (today, the Central Asian countries), the Shī'ites there were uncertain if they had behaved properly. Shī'ite jurists resolved that it was permissible for an adherent to accept an official position, as well as remuneration for services rendered, so long as doing so "benefited the brethren in faith" (other Shī'ites). Thus was religious justification provided for engaging in activities that earlier had been deemed forbidden and even harmful to one's spiritual health. And thus did *dar al-taqīya* offer unlimited opportunity to Shī'ite religious scholars to assume a "functional imamate" and lead community affairs on a day-to-day basis. With the disappearance of the last imam in 941, interpreting the civic duties of Shī'ites under *dār al-taqīya* became a task of the functional imam.

By now it should be clear that, contrary to the opinion of many analysts, both Muslim and Western, the political culture of Muslim societies presents anomalies that render it exceedingly difficult to gauge the forms of participation by Shī'ites living under *taqīya*, especially in countries lacking forms of consensual politics. Outsiders seeking to understand the structure of society, the political processes, and the character of the leaders involved in them immediately run up against the subtleties and alien character of the concept and practice of prudential concealment. The outsider is unlikely to comprehend quite what it means in Shī'ite terms to employ precautionary dissimulation while both serving a government understood to be illegitimate and looking for opportunities to overthrow it in favor of the just rule of their own leadership. *Taqīya* signified the will of the Shī'ite community to prepare a way for its own active political participation in the future.

Quietism and Incremental Political Participation

Taqīya is a critical doctrine in the development of the Muslim theology of community-centered salvation. It can work as an activist as well as a quietist strategy. Consider, for instance, the significance of prudential concealment for the

Ḥujjatiye Shī'ites in Iran. Since for them it is the right solely of the messianic Hidden Imam to establish an Islamic government, *taqīya* functions as a quietist strategy with a negative impact on political participation. The main purpose of quietist, *taqīya*-oriented public theology has been to neutralize outrage against corrupt Muslim rulers and shift individual attention from demands for their reform or removal to an autonomous ideal community under the Qur'an and the Muslim tradition. The process was gradual, but it was carefully crafted by the ulema, who, although in agreement with public sentiment against the ruling dynasties, found regime change and the political turmoil that would ensue unacceptably dangerous to community survival. It is here that we find the source for transformation of the Qur'anic emphasis on individual integrity and morality to the deceptive sense of salvation through community membership. This shift from an emphasis on individual salvation to one on collective salvation could not have come about without the ulema first inculcating in adherents an unquestioning submission to an absolute political authority. For according to the Qur'an, the community will enter God's presence with its ruler to be judged collectively (Qur'an 17:72).

Acceptance of community-centered salvation required the ulema to (as it were) centralize redemption by limiting it to only one of the several communities that had sprung up under various political leaders and imams. In the absence of an ecclesiastical body that could speak on behalf of the entire Muslim world, jurists sought to gain the support of the rulers to uphold one school of legal thought as the official theology of all Islamic states; and at the head of all those communities was nominally the caliphate, devoid of actual power. This process centralized disparate groups under the classification "People of Community and Tradition" (*ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā'a*); their main spokespersons were the ulema under the patronage of the rulers. This political leadership depended on the ulema to extend religious legitimacy to their de facto authority. Minority groups, like the Shī'ites, that refused to join the main community were either marginalized or forced to go underground. These developments laid the foundation for internal hostilities and for the intolerance of dissension within the Muslim community. The history of Baghdad in the ninth and tenth centuries is replete with instances of intracommunal hostilities between the followers of different rites and schools of thought. Today, Sunnī-Shī'ite sectarianism and the violence generated by exclusivist claims are very much entrenched in a centralized communal piety that has proven to be intolerant of minority claims to salvation.

The political shift from individual to community-centered rights and responsibilities for creating and maintaining a just order on earth must be understood in terms of both a theoretical creed and a political philosophy. God, his Prophet, and those invested with authority have a right to be obeyed; and if obedience is the rightful expectation of the invested authorities, then individuals

living under their governance have a duty to obey them. The individual can reserve no right to disobedience. As for disagreement, that is a right of the individual as part of a group—one formed around a well-defined creed and specific practice. However, the concepts of obedience and disagreement are applicable to any specific circumstance only in accordance with restrictions, conditions, and prerequisites that have been much discussed and carefully defined.[6]

Thus Islamic society is founded on the assumption that the ruler's restraining power is an inevitable condition for the establishment and maintenance of social order. The great jurist Ghazālī (1058–1111) maintained that religious public order cannot be achieved without secular public order, which in turn requires a leader who is obeyed (*al-imām al-muṭā'*).[7] Even earlier than Ghazālī, this opinion was formulated in the juridical tradition, where the necessity of appointing an imam who is obeyed was well attested. To be sure, the first condition of Islamic society is the assertion of religious order, but without political backing religion was thought to be insufficient on its own. Forceful political power was the guarantor of the state's legitimacy, but the state relied on the religious order to certify its rectitude and secure its success. Naturally, then, political authority had to be exercised according to the Sharī'a, as expounded by Muslim thinkers in their works on the principles of governance.[8] Their political principles were based on the following Qur'anic verse:

> God commands you to deliver trusts back to their owners; and when you judge between the people, that you judge with justice. Good is the admonition God gives you; God is All-hearing, All-seeing. O believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. If you should quarrel on anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day; that is better, and fairer in the issue. (Qur'an 4:58–59)

With respect to this verse, Muslim commentators have raised questions about the identity and obedience to those "invested with authority." Who are they? Entangled with that question is the entire political history of the Muslim empire, but another fundamental question has occupied the jurists as well. What is the extent of the obedience owed to those "invested with authority"? Is it obligatory under all circumstances and at all times? In other words, is there a right for a

6. 'Ali 'Ūmlīl, *Fī shar'ya al-ikhtilāf* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭībā'a, 1993), takes up the issue of permission to disagree with respect to creed and practice in Muslim tradition and demonstrates that while Muslim leaders tolerated interfaith disagreements and gave the right to Jews and Christians, they did not extend that right to Muslims for fear of intercommunal dissension and disunity.

7. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-I'tiqād* (Beirut: Dār al-Amāna, 1969), 214–15.

8. For instance, 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-sulṭānīya wa al-wilāya al-dīnīya* (Kuwait: n.p., 1989), 24, takes up the issue of obedience in several places and argues in favor of its being the right of the ruler to exact obedience from the ruled as long as the ruler fulfills his duty toward God and the community.

Muslim to dissent from and defy those "invested with authority," even if thereby the unity and continuity of the community are endangered? If rejection of obedience is ever legitimate, in what sense it is so?

Anas b. Mālik, one of the early and more prominent associates of the Prophet, relates a tradition in which the Prophet advises Muslims regarding their rulers: "Listen and obey, even if a black slave with shaggy head rules over you!" In another tradition, the Prophet is reported to have said: "The one who obeys me obeys God; and the one who disobeys me disobeys God. The one who obeys the ruler [*amīr*] obeys me, and the one who disobeys the ruler disobeys me."[9] There are numerous traditions like these in which obedience to the ruler is linked to the obedience owed to God and the Prophet, thus providing a religious justification for political obedience.[10] Historically speaking, no limit was applied to the absolute authority of rulers except in the context of civil strife (obedience was always premised on one's ability to obey). Nevertheless, some traditions cautioned against denying a right to dissent and justifying unqualified obedience, for a ruler might demand obedience in matters leading to the disobedience of higher authorities—God and his Prophet. In all traditions, obedience to the ruler was obligatory only so long as he did not command disobedience to the laws of God. Overall, though, the prevailing state of affairs among the Sunnites from early times was for religious leaders, on the one hand, to counsel the secular rulers, and, on the other hand, to discourage armed insurrection and other forms of civil strife. Many Muslim jurists have rejected any right to depose even a wicked ruler.[11]

Silencing the individual in matters of politics is not a tendency limited to the Shī'ite community. Regarding silence in politics as a part of the individual's religious commitment is a trend in all Muslim communities in modern times. Instead of demanding political reform or demanding that the ruler accede to the will of his people, the religious leadership—in the name of communal unity—has ignored its moral responsibility to put a stop to corruption and has generally favored authoritarian politics. A leading Sunni scholar, Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, as recently as 1992 reasserted the classical juridical vision of the relationship of ruler and ruled, with no critical analysis of the moral implications of this political discourse:

9. Major compilations of the Sunni traditions mention this particular report. See, for instance, Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj b. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ muslim* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1972), 6:13; Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-bukhārī* (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1986), 4:6; 'Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad ibn ḥanbal* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1991), 2:253.

10. Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwatta* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Risāla, 1992), 345–46.

11. A number of juridical opinions not only discourage dissension and demand communal unity in obedience to Muslim rulers, they actually forbid any individual to take a stance against injustices in the so-called Islamic public order. However, standing against injustice is a part of the right to freedom of religion, as demonstrated in Rashīd Ghannūshī, *al-Ḥurriyat al-'āmma fī dawlat al-islāmīya* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-'Arabīya, 1993), 42–46. See also al-Būṭī (note 12).

> The imam [political leader] is the guardian over all matters that affect the generality of Muslims. It is for this reason that he is the guardian of all those who do not have a guardian. Therefore, his discretion in their affairs is conditional upon the assessment of the public good [*maṣlaḥa*]; that is, they [his judgments] do not become effective unless it becomes apparent they are in the public interest. However, God has imposed a duty on the people to obey him [the political leader] with a view to his exercising the authority [*wilāya*] that he enjoys through [its] investiture [in him] and that remains valid as long as he bears in mind the good of the people and endeavors to pursue it as required. In other words, obedience to him is not due to the dominion [*siyāda*] he enjoys over them; rather it is due exclusively to his efforts in pursuing the people's general welfare and to the people's enabling him to provide for their good through the investiture [of authority in him].[12]

Under unjust regimes, Sunni public order was functionally similar to the Shī'ite *dār al-taqīya*: in each case the advocacy of obedience to rulers was important as a political strategy and as a means of avoiding immediate social and political turmoil, while awaiting a more opportune moment to bring about a change of regime. In their communal life, Muslims were advised that, as part of their specifically religious obligation (*taklīf shar'ī*), they must accept the existing order even if obedience to the government might lead to disobedience of God.

Still, this officially sanctioned quietism was meant to stave off the impending harm that those in power could inflict, and it did not mean that religious leaders approved of government wickedness, corruption, or abuse. Indeed denying the existence of a right to engage in armed insurrection did not signify that all forms of protest or passive resistance—for instance, those regarded as consistent with *taqīya*—were forbidden. Accounts of Muslim political experience chronicle instances of passive resistance that might be regarded as peaceful acts of civil disobedience. There have been situations of silence or reticence that have publicized the possibility or legitimacy of acts that led incrementally to total disobedience of a political regime. Prudential concealment, in other words, has taken many forms (refusing to work for an unjust government, for example, or paying a visit to someone in power), in addition to more usual acts of perseverance, avoidance, and quiet waiting.

These quietist attitudes and stances were matched by the attitudes and stances of those described by Ghazālī as "relentless in their religion" (*al-mutaṣ allabīn fī al-dīn*). The "relentless" have struggled openly (and sometimes armed) against hostile governments or have formed secret revolutionary organizations.

12. Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *'Ala ṭarīq al-'awda ilā al-islām: Rasm li-manāhij wa ḥall li-mushkilāt* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Risāla, 1992), 64–65.

They have justified insurrection by citing precedents in the traditions of the Prophet—for example, this statement of the ascetic Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728):

> The choicest martyr of my community is the man who will stand up to an unjust ruler, command him to do good and forbid him from doing evil, and is killed by the ruler for doing so. Such a person is [the true] martyr [*al-shahīd*]. His station in paradise will be between Ḥamza and Ja'far [the Prophet's uncles, who were killed in battle].[13]

This kind of dissenting force did not become obsolete at the end of the classical era of Islam. It has of course emerged again in the modern period with militant movements rooted in the widespread Muslim belief that the temporal and spiritual achievements of past centuries had been the result of social institutions and a social ethic geared toward the establishment of a just public order. In this way, the religious culture of Muslim activism reflects the expectations of *dār al-taqīya*, in nurturing new social, political, and cultural attitudes and institutions capable of responding to the demands of modernity. Given this relationship between religious culture and sociopolitical context, it is plausible to describe these militant movements as taking to the extreme the duty of "forbidding evil." They do not confine this duty to tongue and heart. Rather, they have reverted to the early Muslim practice, following this dictum of Ḥasan al-Baṣri: "Anyone among you who sees evil should change it with his hands, that is, by force; if he cannot, then with his tongue; and if still he cannot, then with his heart. This is the weakest expression of the faith."[14] But note that this statement, made in justification of armed insurrection, rejects neither *taqīya* and passive disobedience nor seclusion—and any resort to force will of course foment civil strife, of which the juridical tradition strongly disapproves. Even this dictum does no more than set limits on revolutionary action.

Some Concluding Remarks

The history of Shī'ite adherence to *taqīya* tends to confirm its strategic importance as a survival strategy for Islamic minorities. Although prudential concealment has been criticized as an act hiding one's real intentions under a feigned appearance (which would be sinful), Shī'ite jurists have ruled it not merely permitted but a religious duty when necessary for individual or community survival. The constitutive context of *taqīya*, namely, the absolutist autocracy of most Islamic polities, has over time legitimated it as an underground political activity,

13. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Aḥmad b. al-'Ikhwa, *Kitāb ma'ālim al-qirba fī aḥkām al-ḥisba*, ed. Muḥammad Maḥmūd Sha'bān et al. (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣrīya al-'Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1976), 67–68.

14. al-'Ikhwa, *Kitāb ma'ālim*, 67–68.

one that can effectively prepare the way for political change, however gradual. As such, *taqīya* is not limited to employment among the Shī'ites. Even Sunnites living under their authoritarian governments have resorted to quietism as a survival strategy. One or another form of political quietism can generally be observed in societies, around the globe, where minorities must abide by the unjust will of those in power. Democratic polities, of course, try to protect the rights of minorities who might suffer discrimination because of their beliefs, race, or ethnicity. In Islamic countries, where consensual politics is mostly absent, one's true opinion of the government's shortcomings cannot be expressed in public without causing contention, enmity, and reprisals. Regardless of Sunni criticism of the Shī'ite custom of *taqīya*, the Sunni ulema in practice have encouraged quietism in response to political injustice, on the pretext that the sanctity of Muslim public order must be preserved.

The Qur'anic requirement of obedience to God, the Prophet, and those invested with authority is regarded universally among Muslims as obligatory. There is, however, a difference of opinion on the limits and actual manifestation of this obedience in society *as it presently exists*. This difference of opinion is best seen in traditions seeking to define the legitimacy of government coercion. Any person compelled to submit to this authority is understood in the context of *taqīya* as engaged in a "wait and see" strategy, rather than regarded as a collaborator with injustice. The doctrine of capacity (*al-istiṭā'a*) holds that, while obedience to God, the Prophet, and those invested with authority may be the goal of religious commitment, the goal is attainable only by those who have the capacity to obey. In determining capacity, many factors and many aspects of Islamic religious and ethical thought must be taken into account, among them the condition that those invested with authority are themselves bound to obey God and the Prophet, which is to say the ordinances of the Sharī'a. Lack of commitment on the part of a ruler or government to implement God's rights (*ḥaqq allāh*) and the rights of the people (*ḥaqq ādamī*) is a topic considered in detail by books in the juridical tradition on principles of governance and social management. If the conditions set down on those in authority by such texts are not met, then the repudiation of obedience—even insurrection or armed resistance—becomes legitimate, provided there is no immediate danger to the resistants' lives. In other words, a Muslim life oriented around prudential concealment of one's beliefs and basic commitments is legitimate to the extent that the adherent strives for the transformation of *dar al-taqīya* into the ideal Muslim polity of the future.