Understanding Shiite Leadership

In this book, Shaul Mishal and Ori Goldberg explore the ways in which Shiite leaderships in Iran and Lebanon approach themselves and their world. Contrary to the violent and radical image of religious leaderships in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Lebanese Hizballah, the political vision and practice of these leaderships view the world as a “middle ground,” shying away from absolutist and extremist tendencies. The political leadership assumed by Shiite religious scholars in Iran and Lebanon has transformed Shiite Islam from a marginalized minority to a highly politicized avant garde of Muslim presence, revitalized the practice and causes of political Islam in its struggle for legitimacy and authority, and reshaped the politics of both the Middle East and the globe in its image. Utilizing approaches from social theory, history, theology, and literary criticism, the book presents these leaderships as pragmatic, interpretative entities with the potential to form fruitful relationships between Shiite leadership and the non-Shiite world.

Shaul Mishal is Professor of Political Science at Tel Aviv University and at the School of Government, IDC Herzlia. He is a Visiting Professor at Yale University, Visiting Scholar at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard, and Senior Fellow at the Harvard School of Public Health. He has authored and coauthored several books on Palestinian issues, including West Bank/East Bank, The PLO under Arafat, Speaking Stones with R. Aharoni, The Palestinian Hamas with A. Sela, and Investment in Peace with R. Kuperman and D. Boas. Mishal has authored numerous articles, which have appeared in many leading journals. He received his PhD in Political Science from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Ori Goldberg teaches in the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at Tel Aviv University. He is the author of Shi‘i Theology in Iran: The Challenge of Religious Experience and Thinking Shi‘a, a collection of lectures examining Shiite culture, politics, and consciousness from various perspectives. Dr. Goldberg’s research focuses on the comparative study of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish theological thought; Middle East politics and culture; and the critical role of religious thought in social theory and practice. He received his PhD in Middle Eastern History from Tel Aviv University.
PROBLEMS OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Series Editors:
Keith Darden, Yale University
Ian Shapiro, Yale University

The series seeks manuscripts central to the understanding of international politics that will be empirically rich and conceptually innovative. It is interested in works that illuminate the evolving character of nation-states within the international system. It sets out three broad areas for investigation: (1) identity, security, and conflict; (2) democracy; and (3) justice and distribution.

Titles in the Series:
Şener Aktürk, Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia, and Turkey
Donald Horowitz, Constitutional Change and Democracy in Indonesia
Adria K. Lawrence, Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism: Anti-Colonial Protest in the French Empire
Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War
Tarek Masoud, Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt
Harris Mylonas, The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities
For Arnon, Mira, Nazima, and Yehezkel,

Our roots.
Understanding Shiite Leadership

The Art of the Middle Ground in Iran and Lebanon

SHAUL MISHAL
Tel Aviv University

ORI GOLDBERG
Tel Aviv University
Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction 1
Leadership as Interpretation 11
The Quest for Authority 21
Void and Spaces 34
Khomeini’s Middle Ground 43
Forming the Middle Ground: Intra-Shiite Issues 55
Seeking the Middle Ground: Extra-Shiite Issues 71
The Struggle for the Middle Ground: The 2009 (and 2013) Presidential Elections 83
Middle Ground as Resistance: Lebanese Hizballah 99
HB and the Temperate City 116

Epilogue: Shiite Leadership and the Emergence of the Middle Ground Regime 135

Glossary 139
Bibliography 143
Index 153
Our joint endeavor, which has been a while in the making, has benefited from the help of several devoted friends and colleagues. We are indebted to Jim Leitner for his generosity and interest. Ian Shapiro, of Yale University, shepherded this project from its inception. We received invaluable assistance from Raz Zimm, Yair Samban, and Sofi a Weibull. Eliran Bar-El saw us through the final stages of the process, offering both sage advice and tireless dedication.

Without Lewis Bateman, our editor at Cambridge University Press, his assistant, Shaun Vigil, and the three anonymous readers, this book would be completely different: less coherent, more complicated. Each in his or her own way reminded us that dreams require persistence and responsibility.