opposition. This is followed by the invasion of Kuwait, the first show-down with the coalition forces led by the United States (his former ally), which were also supported by fellow Arab nations Egypt and Syria, and the fall of the Ba’thist regime as one of the results of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Chapter 7 ends this book with an account of the US-led occupation of the country and the first years of the new democratic republic which were marred by bloody sectarian strife and an insurgency that brought Iraq to the brink of a civil war.

_A History of Iraq_ is a well-researched, highly readable, unemotional and balanced study – which is quite remarkable in light of the circumstance that its author happens to come from a country (Britain) which like no other (the late Ottomans included) has shaped the fate of Iraq in the course of the twentieth century before being replaced by the United States in the twenty-first. To the taste of this reviewer, who for the last two decades or so has studied major developments in the world of Middle Eastern Shi’ism, Tripp could have put somewhat stronger emphasis on that crucial feature – in particular within the Iraqi setting. Aside from this, however, his work is a major achievement. It will certainly see further updated editions in times to come as Iraq’s future is far from being settled.

Nicholas Pelham, _A New Muslim Order: The Shia and the Middle East Sectarian Crisis_ (Cambridge: I.B. Tauris, 2008), xvi+272 pp. ISBN: 978-1845111397. £11.70

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Nicholas Pelham’s _A New Muslim Order_, written by a senior journalist of international standing, tries to make sense of the current phenomenon of a multi-faceted Shi’ite ‘revival’ in the Arab world, a phenomenon which has been termed by others – wrongly, to the mind of this reviewer – as the emergence of a ‘Shi’ite Crescent’ (apparently in analogy to the ‘Fertile Crescent’ of Antiquity, spanning from Mesopotamia/Iraq over Syria to what is now Lebanon).

Pelham has spent two decades writing and broadcasting in the Middle East and North Africa. In 2003, he covered the Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq as a correspondent for the _Economist_ and the _Financial Times_. He is currently a Senior Analyst for the Brussels-based think-tank, International Crisis Group.

While focussing on Iraq, in his book Pelham tries to show how the centre of Shi’ite political power has (supposedly) moved from Iranian Qom to Najaf in Iraq. He argues (correctly, in this writer’s view) throughout his account that Sunnite anxieties in this respect have been exploited by several of their contemporary political leaders.
in the region who seek to ‘contain’ an increasingly assertive Iran – a scenario, which has resulted in a potentially highly explosive setting.

This reviewer, however, has argued elsewhere that the fears of a ‘Shi’ite Crescent’ are, for the most part, chimerical as the current assertiveness of the Arab Shi’ites in Iraq cannot be considered to be quasi ‘remote-controlled’ from Tehran, aiming at the establishment of a theocracy à la khomeinienne. Senior Iraq-based Shi’ite clerics – among them ‘Grand Ayatollahs’ Sayyid ‘Ali al-Sīstānī and the late Sayyid Abū’l-Qāsim al-Khū’ī (d. 1992) – have always kept a distance from Iran-inspired ‘Khomeinist’ ideas as to a supposed leading role for the Shi’ite ‘ulamā’ in government (wilāyat al-faqīh). What is going to happen with Iraq when firebrand cleric Muqtadā’ al-Ṣadr has finished and completed his further studies in neighbouring Iran (which, eventually, could make him an ayatollah) is another story. Moreover, one could well argue that the currently rather strong entrenchment of the Shi’ite Hizb-Allāh movement in Lebanese politics and social life does not make them (automatically) satellites of Tehran. Arabs – including Shi’ites among them – seem to know too well that Iran’s strategic interests in the region are merely based on that country’s own national(istic) interests according to which the Arab Shi’ites serve just as useful tools to achieve Iranian hegemony over its Arab neighbours – to wit the recent WikiLeaks ‘revelations’ which quote King ‘Abd-Allāh of Saudi Arabia as inciting the Americans to “cut off the head [i.e. Iran] of the snake [i.e. the Shi’ites].” Whether a secular, say even more nationalistic, Iran would be the better bargain could be doubted as already in 1971 Iran had forcibly seized control of the Tunb Islands and Abū Mūsā in the Gulf against Arab resistance. This happened under the last Shah of Iran and not under his ‘successor’ Khomeini.

Returning to Pelham’s narrative, he has arranged his book into four ‘sections’, adding to it (on p. 224) a ‘Map of Shi’ites in Selected Countries’ and (on p. 255) a ‘Table of Muslim Population in the Middle East by State and Sect’.

‘Section 1’ (“Before the Fall”) ‘makes up’ in good journalistic (but nevertheless quite appropriate) fashion a truly remarkable characterisation of the basic features of Saddām Ḥusayn’s inhumane and brutal regime, a characterisation which should bring even the last supporter of this (supposedly ‘Muslim’) leader – also and especially here in faraway Malaysia – back to their senses. Pelham (p. 3) states:

Saddam Husain was nothing if not a good Mesopotamian. He followed loyally in the footsteps of Sargon the Akkadian, Nebuchadnezzar and the Assyrian tyrant who, in the words of a 3,200 year-old stele which until the US invasion sat on a plinth in the Baghdad museum, “trod on necks with my feet, as if they were footstools.” For 35 years, he trampled over Iraq’s composite identities, making footstools of the country’s kaleidoscope of cultures. He had a name to match. Derived from the Arabic trilateral root s-d'-m – to go crushing – Saddam is perhaps best translated as Bruiser. And over the course of a
generation of cultural brutalism, he decked the country in Bruiser monuments. There were Bruiser schools, Bruiser hospitals and Bruiser cities. And Bruiser’s likeness hung from every lamp-post, school wall, bridge, home and railway carriage [and even in mosques and religious shrines, as this reviewer could see with his own eyes during one of his visits to Iraq in 1989].

The rest of this section of the book consists of gripping accounts by the author of the weeks leading to the 2003 US-led invasion.

Sections 2 (“Unravelling Iraq”) and 3 (“Balkanization of the Broken State”) deal with the aftermath of the 2003 invasion, dissolution, and fragmentation of Iraq as a unified state. Pelham criticises in particular the United States for what he refers to as the “reconstruction myth” (pp. 77ff.).

The final Section 4 (“The Regional Wars of Religion”) tries to look beyond Iraq and discusses in a – to this reviewer’s taste – rather sensationalist fashion the issue of a possible spill-over effect of the events in Iraq – the coming to power of the once down-trodden Shi’ite majority – to other Arab countries. For example, on page 204 he states:

In Bahrain, they [the Shi’ites] formed 60 to 70 per cent [sic!] of the population, and elsewhere sizable minorities: 42 [sic!] per cent in Yemen, 35 per cent in Kuwait, 15 per cent in the United Arab Emirates and 11 per cent in Saudi Arabia. Zoom out, and Shias comprised 140 million people, or half the population in the arc stretching from the eastern Mediterranean through Iran and Azerbaijan to the borders of Afghanistan. In Lebanon they were the largest single confessional group, official estimated at 38 per cent, and there were substantial constituencies in Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and East and South Africa. If Iraq’s Shias could shrug off Saddam, the most brutal of Arab dictators, what more could they achieve with the effete corrupt royals in neighboring states?

Looking at statements like the one above, the reader would get the rather frightening impression that perhaps tomorrow some Shi’ite could knock at his door to ‘take over’ his home. On the other hand, Pelham – a layman in terms of Shi’ite studies – observes quite accurately the difference between Khomeini’s idea of the ‘vicegerency of the Islamic jurist’ (wilāyat al-faqīh) and that of ‘popular sovereignty’ (wilāyat al-ummah), conceptualised by the Iraqi ayatollah Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr who was gruesomely murdered by Ṣaddām Ḥusayn in person.

At the beginning of this review, it has been said that Pelham “tries to make sense” of the current assertiveness of Arab Shi’ism. However, the uninitiated reader might close this book after having read its final page somewhat more confused than before. Surely, Pelham’s book is somewhat better researched than the myriads of other ‘I-have-been-in-Iraq’ books written by other members of his guild. Unfortunately,
however, Pelham, who might not have access to the Arabic language, arranged his material in a rather haphazard manner, making it appear like a puzzle to which the clue is missing. A better bargain is Vali Nasr’s *The Shi’a Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*.

Notes


2. On p. 205, Pelham quotes from al-Sadr’s *Lamḥah fiqhiyyah*: “Islamic theory rejects monarchy as well as the various forms of dictatorial government; it also rejects aristocratic regimes and proposes a form of government, which contains all the positive aspects of the democratic system,” a translated passage, which, according to Pelham, is found in Sama Haddad, *The Development of Shi’ite Islamic Political Theory*, for which no complete bibliographical reference has been provided by him and which couldn’t be traced by this reviewer otherwise.

3. In relation to this, I am refraining here from pointing out all of the countless errors in terms of transliteration, referring here only to “al-Qaddisiyah” instead of “al-Qādisiyyah” (p. 6), “Saladin al-Ayyubbi” instead of “Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī” (p. 8), and “Nidhamiya” instead of “Niẓāmiyyah”, while on the same page referring to Nizām al-Mulk (the founder of the *Niẓāmiyyah* colleges) (p. xi).


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This book, which contains a foreword by Tan Sri Sheikh Ghazali Haji Abdul Rahman, the Chairman of the *Shari’ah* Advisory Council of the Securities Commission of Malaysia, has been introduced by the Securities Commission of Malaysia under the Islamic Capital Market series. It is the first of six volumes. It consists of 16 chapters and several case studies, figures, tables and a list of abbreviations. The objective of the book – published before the effects of the recent global financial and economic crisis were felt in the Islamic capital markets – is to introduce *ṣukūk* to the general reader.

In the preface (“Foundation and Framework”) Iqbal A. Khan writes that the “distinguishing feature of sukuk and Islamic finance […] is that its tenets are based on the principles of fairness”. He emphasises “certainty” and “transparency” in contracts, the sharing of “business risks and returns” (losses are not mentioned), and “direct participation in real asset performance”. He adds that, *ṣukūk* are “deemed equivalent in structure to asset-backed trust certificates rather than bonds”, which