

## **Exegesis and Violence in Messianic Shi'ism**

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Shi'ism, at least in its Twelver form, undoubtedly has a heightened sense of messianism (*mahdawiyya*) when compared to most other Muslim intellectual traditions. Messianism generally is often considered dangerous because of its perceived irrationality; and irrationality is associated with dangerous (and potentially violent) unpredictability in a highly rationalised intellectual environment (such as is supposedly the case with Western academic commentary). At times, messianism can lead to rebellion and political violence, but it strikes me that this is not an inevitably causal linkage. There are examples of feverishly messianic, but intensely quietist, movements within Shi'i history, which should moderate any bold statement. If this so one could ask why do some expressions of Shi'i messianism turn violent, and others do not. I suspect the reasons are complex and specific to individual cases, precluding any sort of comfortable generalised conclusions. Against these theoretical concerns, I aim to examine the ideology of the movement associated with Ahmad al-Hasani al-Yamani in southern Iraq. The movement is clearly messianic, though Ahmad himself does not make a messianic claim for himself: instead he is the messenger or legatee - *rasul* or *wasi* - of the Twelfth hidden *mahdi*. The manner in which violence is justified within the movement, and how this relates to Ahmad al-Hasani's overall ideology, can be understood from al-Hasani's work *Al-Jihad – Bab al-Janna* ("Jihad – the Door to Paradise"). It is the exegetical methods employed in this work (that is, the hermeneutic which enables a legitimisation of violence) which forms the focus of this presentation.