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*To my wife, Elham,
whose support made this book possible.
For an even better future together.*

Preface

One of the main concerns of this work is to see whether the current world situation is entering a new order and if so, what is the role of Islam in it? Where it will ultimately lead to? How will the burning issues of sectarian and religious identity in the current Islamic world especially the Middle East shape the geopolitics of region and beyond and what role will they play in the forthcoming world order? The concept of “world orders” is well known in the field of International Relations, and Social and Political Sciences. World orders collapse from time to time and from the ruins of the old order emerges a new order bearing different features, players and social atmosphere. Before the Second World War, a multipolar world order with several players was dominating the international scene and at the end of the war, proportional to the share of each winner, a bipolar order replaced the previous one and in the new environment, the two superpowers of U.S. and USSR divided the world into two poles of East and West in their complex game; each of them holding their distinct ideology rooted in modernism. The end of Cold War and the dismantlement of the Soviet Union was herald by a new world order and the winner of the war that existed between the two poles, i.e. the United States, claimed to be the sole superpower in the world and the world then entered a unipolar era. This claim used to be theoretically supported by the theories such as “The End of History”.

I believe that the prevalent ‘unipolar’ international order in the second decade of the 21st century is undergoing serious transformations that started at the beginning of this century and manifested themselves in the form of Arab revolutions while current religious–sectarian conflicts, bloodsheds, brutalities and disputes in the Middle-East are one of the serious signs heralding the change in this order. During this process, all players who have emerged in the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s dismantlement are now actively pursuing their interests in order to be able to secure their share in the future world order. New players in the international arena who are mainly Asians, including China, Russia and Iran, are having a direct or indirect participation in the ongoing conflicts of the Middle East in order to try to have their share in the future international order which will be

again a multipolar order as it used to be during the period before the Second World War and this means an end to the global hegemony of the United States.

The major area for recent events and changes in the international order is the Muslim world or better to say the Middle East. This region has long witnessed bloody wars and conflicts and yet again, at the beginning of the 21st century, it has immersed in a full-scale bloody conflict so as to give birth, out of the milieu of these violent tensions, a new order that will perhaps have its novel characteristics and players. The obvious and major division that exists in this region -the Shia-Sunni division, is in itself a product of religious identities as well as provoking factors. Although ethnic conflicts have existed in the region, this division has amplified as the time has passed by over centuries especially in the recent past and has shown itself to be the leading conflict in the current Middle East. The main question posed in this book is about the role played by Shiism which is one of the main Islamic ideological identities in the Middle East. What countries represent the Shiite identity to what extent? How these have undergone various important transformations during different historic periods? The current work has investigated the above questions and tries to answer them by adopting a social, political and anthropological approach.

The efforts put in this book have focused to study the political side of Islam in its two main discourses (Shiite political Islam and Sunni political Islam) and offers a new approach in the studies and researches of political Islam since most scholars who have investigated this field, and who have written books, have defined Shiite political Islam, either in theory or practice and history, as a subcategory to the Sunni discourse. Here, using the method of discourse analysis, these two topics that have their own specific political approaches have been studied by taking into account their respective features and underlying modifying factors. In the same manner while studying the Sunni political Islam, the question being addressed is what caused the genesis of radical Islamists and global jihadists and what are their main ideological, practical and identity-related backgrounds and why Al-Qaeda's radicalism and more recently Takfiri groups in Syria and Iraq have their roots in the Sunni political Islam.

Among the other issues discussed in the first part of this book is the Iran's Islamic Revolution, its ensuing government and the role of this government in the regional and identity-related conflicts in the Middle East as well as the theoretical foundations of the Iranian presence in the international scene besides its style of practical presence. In the second part, we have addressed Iraq as one of the major players in the field of identity-related conflicts in the Middle East. The importance of post-Saddam Iraq relies in the fact that this country is the first Shiite Arab state that has been established despite the will of the Sunni Arabs. This state is also one of the main allies of Iran in the Middle East that has been able to contribute to the creation of the concept of "New Shiite Geopolitics". Just the same as Shiites living in other Arab countries, Iraqi Shiites who are described by Fuller and Francke as "the forgotten Muslims" that have now come into power and along with Iran and Hezbollah of Lebanon are focusing on an effort to build a new regional order. As a result, this is something that has received more privilege in the identity-related conflicts related to Iran and the axis under its political control.

Writing a book about the Middle East is impossible without using the related literature in its original languages. Thus in this book, resources from the two main languages of this region, Persian and Arabic, were used. The resources in English and German were used where it was necessary to do so.

Here, it is necessary to offer my sincere gratitude for friendly collaboration of all those who helped me in writing this book. I am really thankful to my wife, Elham, who helped me during the writing of this book by constantly maintaining a friendly family atmosphere. I offer my utmost appreciation and thankfulness to Dr. Behrooz Abdolvand, PD. Dr. Lutz Mez and Prof. Dr. Hajo Funcke from Freie University of Berlin. My special thanks go to Dr. Muhsin Reza Heyderi, from Tarbiat Modarres University in Tehran, who helped me a lot in editing of the book and also for giving valuable advises. I am also thankful to my colleagues at the Faculty of Social Science in University of Tehran who made a great contribution to this book through their valuable hints.

Ahmad Naderi
May 2015

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