

**The Rise of Religious Radicalism  
in the Arab World:**  
Significance, Implications  
and Counter-Strategies



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# **The Rise of Religious Radicalism in the Arab World:**

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and Counter-Strategies**

**FRIEDRICH  
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# Foreword

*Anja Wehler-Schoeck*

*Resident Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Jordan & Iraq*

The last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a continuous rise of radical Islam. The year 1979 marked the start of a new era with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which led to Jihadis joining the Mujahideen from many Muslim countries around the world. With the establishment of Al Qaeda at the end of the 1980s, the first terrorist network was created, which no longer limited itself to attacks in specific countries or regions but developed a global aim.

This rise of radical Islam can be attributed to a multitude of factors. Among them are the search for identity and recognition, the feeling or experience of marginalization – both politically and economically, opposition to secular nationalist ideologies, frustration with regimes that are perceived as apostate and corrupt, the weakness of educational systems, only to name a few. Several war-torn countries, where the state has lost control of part of the territory, have served as virtual breeding grounds for terrorists, such as Afghanistan, Somalia, and more recently Iraq and Syria. Terrorist groups have also improved their mechanisms of propaganda and recruitment.

With the recent Arab revolutions, many observers had hoped that Al Qaeda and its affiliates would lose ground. This was mainly based on the assumption that many followers would be diverted from the path of radicalism and violence through the observation that change could be achieved by peaceful means. However, things developed quite to the contrary. Radical Islam has profited from a dramatic increase in popularity the last few years, and Al Qaeda and its affiliates like Jabhat al-Nusra as well as its split-offs, namely ISIS, have witnessed what Mohammad Abu Rumman ably describes as “Al Qaeda Spring”, having undergone a period of adaptation. The terrorist network has moved from a phase of a single Al Qaeda into one of multiple Al Qaedas operating independently on numerous fronts.

With this volume, we are publishing several of the papers, which were presented at our 2014 conference on “The Rise of Religious Radicalism in the Arab World”. The papers present different perspectives on radicalization in the aftermath of the recent Arab revolutions and crises. Mohammad Abu Rumman describes the impact of the Arab Spring on radical Islam and analyzes the transformations, which terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and its affiliated groups have undergone since then. Beshir Abdel Fattah argues that not only did the recent Arab revolution not prove a hindrance to radical Islam but

that, quite the contrary, radical Islamist organizations have grown and diversified since then.

Bissan El Cheikh analyzes the environment for extremism in Lebanon against the backdrop of the Sunni-Shia divide. Hazem al-Amin portrays the case of a young Lebanese man who was involved in the suicide attack against the Iranian Embassy in Beirut in 2014. Murad Batal al-Shishani addresses the different phases of the relationship between the Salafi Jihadi groups and the state in Jordan. Haider Saeed outlines the stages of the rise of ISIS in Iraq.

Amr Hashim Rabie examines the rise of Jihadi movements in Egypt after the fall of President Mohammed Morsi in July 2013. Alaya Allani explains the spread of terrorist groups and activities in Tunisia following the Arab Spring and discusses its economic and security implications. ElHakam Sukhni provides a perspective on Muslim radicalization in Europe by describing the Salafi scene in Europe. The book concludes with a summary of the conference proceedings, highlighting the most relevant questions and answers from the discussions.

FES Amman has created a line of work dedicated to Political Islam to shed light on the various streams and trends, and to promote an educated discourse on Islamist movements. In this context, a publication series was launched in 2007, under which ten books have been published to date. Through these publications, we aspire to provide information on Islamist movements, which both satisfies academic standards and is, at the same time, accessible and understandable to a non-expert readership

We wish you an interesting and insightful read, and thank you for your interest in the events and publications of FES Amman.

# Is It “Al Qaeda Spring”?

*Mohammad Abu Rumman*

## **Introduction**

In contrast to the initial expectations and indications that emerged with the beginning of the democratic Arab Spring revolutions, the recent years have seen an increase and spread of Al Qaeda and other organizations that are linked to it and adopt its beliefs and ideology. These organizations all descend from radical Political Islam, whether they are recognized as part of Al Qaeda or are simply compatible with its foundations based on ideological Islamic rhetoric, within what has become known as the Salafi Jihadi movement.

This movement became remarkably strong in the internal Syrian conflict and regained its power and presence in Iraq, as it entered into a military confrontation with the Iraqi military. Furthermore, it was able to reinforce its presence in other areas, such as Yemen and Somalia, where it enjoys huge capabilities despite the strikes it has received over the past years. A similar increasing role for the organization now seems to be emerging in Libya, as the latter’s political and security situations deteriorate.

The paradox lies in the fact that Al Qaeda itself was seriously concerned when the Arab revolutions erupted, especially after the success of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Al Qaeda’s organizational and intellectual leadership feared that these revolutions could create a huge setback for the group, as Arab societies would be adopting democracy and opting for peaceful change. However, the situation witnessed a complete turnaround. Instead of the fears and concerns of losing popularity that occupied Al Qaeda members, the organization actually found a vast space to operate in Syria, Egypt and Iraq, and managed to attract many new members and supporters.

These indicators on the spread and expansion of Al Qaeda raise two questions that may stand behind this current rise. The first is linked to the factors and reasons that explain this new rise, while the second is linked to future indicators in light of current developments. Namely, are we heading toward the “radicalization” of the arena (i.e. the spread and diffusion of the radical current), or is this rather just a temporary situation and not a hole that Arab societies will be trapped in in the future?

This paper aims to answer the aforementioned questions, as well as any others that might arise along the way, by addressing and investigating the following issues:

1. The situation of Al Qaeda and the Salafi Jihadi current on the eve of the democratic Arab revolutions and the articulated changes and shifts they have gone through since the September 11 events.
2. Al Qaeda immediately after the Tunisian and the Egyptian revolutions.
3. Regaining popularity and geographic spread.
4. People's wagers in the face of tricky options.

### **From Unity and Uniformity to Spread and Pluralism**

If we want to summarize the situation of Al Qaeda on the eve of the Arab revolutions, we must reference two primary shifts:

The first shift is represented in the restructuring of the strategy of Al Qaeda itself following the Afghan war, which led to the death of several of its leaders, the displacement of most of them, and the arrest of others. The war also resulted in Al Qaeda losing its political impunity in Afghanistan, and disrupted ties between the organization's leaders on the one hand, and its followers and supporters outside Afghanistan on the other hand. It forced Al Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden, and his senior assistants to keep almost entirely out of sight, which augured in a new phase in the way this organization operates. We do not know whether this phase unfolded as a result of the circumstances imposed on Al Qaeda at the time, or whether it was pre-planned. However, the important thing is that, since that moment, Al Qaeda began to operate as a decentralized network, after having relied previously on central planning and operation in extremely organized and closed groups.<sup>1</sup>

This crucial shift resulted in various repercussions and a sequence of results that eventually made Al Qaeda more of a "political message" or global brand. At this point, the central leadership settled for playing the role of director and welcomed new groups joining the organization. On some occasions, it also intervened to resolve disputes and focused on the importance of media communication through websites and the internet, which became one of the most important means of

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the centralization of Al Qaeda and its shift to decentralization, please see: Daveed Gartenstein Ross and Kyle Dabruzzi: "Is Al Qaeda's central leadership still relevant?" translated by Sadiq Abu Saud, Jerusalem Centre for Political Studies, on the following link: [http://www.alqudscenter.org/arabic/pages.php?local\\_type=128&local\\_details=2&id1=706&menu\\_id=10&cat\\_id=10](http://www.alqudscenter.org/arabic/pages.php?local_type=128&local_details=2&id1=706&menu_id=10&cat_id=10)

communication that Al Qaeda relied on for attracting and recruiting a new generation of supporters for this movement and ideology.

In practice, we have moved from the phase of a single Al Qaeda into one of multiple Al Qaedas. Although the central leadership was playing a limited symbolic organizational role in supervising and directing these newly descended groups, the latter were, in fact, becoming more independent and began choosing their own leaders and adopting their own ideas and models, as happened in Iraq, Yemen, Somalia and later on in Lebanon.<sup>2</sup>

An increased reliance on the internet and the intensified security pursuits against Al Qaeda activists both enhanced this new decentralized nature and contributed to the emergence of other leading figures, like Anwar Al-Awlaki, who inspired the current's supporters and members. This led to the establishment of new forms of operation connected to the second phase, such as the concept of "individual Jihad," whereby the organization relied on recruiting people to carry out individual operations, or small groups equipped with only simple tools and personal experience. This was the case with figures such as: Nidal Malik, Omar Al-Farouk, Faisal Shahzad and others.<sup>3</sup>

During this period, from 2001 to 2011, the role of the central Al Qaeda organization declined, and more influential and active organizations began to appear on the surface, most prominently Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the branches in the Maghreb region and Somalia. The names of various new leaders appeared in different regions, and there was an increased reliance on figures active behind the scenes even within the central organization itself, including Abu Yahya Al-Libi and Atiyatallah Al-Libi.

The second shift is represented by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi joining Al Qaeda in 2004, after having founded the "Tawhid wal-Jihad" organization in Iraq. The latter became one of the most prominent armed groups, attracting supporters from around the world. Al-Zarqawi did not settle for that alone, but he also strove to expand the scope of his work to include the entire region, as well as other groups around the world. In addition, he took part in establishing the Islamic State of Iraq, which represented a major shift in the way these groups operate. They moved from gang wars and hit-and-run approaches, to the focusing on establishing a state that controls a significant geographical region, where Islamic provisions would be

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<sup>2</sup> In an interview with Al-Sahab media organization owned by central Al Qaeda on 19 April 2014, Al Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahri confirmed that "Al Qaeda is primarily a message before being an organization ... if we distorted that message we will lose, even if we are expanding organizationally and financially." See the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGdGIhI8HJE>

<sup>3</sup> For more on Al Qaeda, the internet and the third generation see Hassan Abu Hanieh "Al Qaeda and electronic Jihad" on the following link: <http://www.assakina.com/center/files/12842.html>

implemented in the manner they are understood by the organization's members. This coincided with the spread of the book entitled "Idarat Al-Tawahush" [Administration of Savagery] by Al Qaeda member Abu Bakr Naji. This book looks at this notion of failed states and regions where a state of security and political chaos prevails, enabling the organization to establish its partial authority on a geographic plot of land.

Despite Al-Zarqawi joining Al Qaeda, some important parts of his approach were in fact different from the vision of the central Al Qaeda organization. Some documents, which were discovered in the possession of Osama Bin Laden when he was killed (in 2011), confirmed that Al Qaeda's leadership was dissatisfied with Al-Zarqawi's behavior and was trying to prevent his actions from affecting the organization's path. These documents also showed that they were carrying out substantial reviews of Al-Zarqawi's practices and errors. However, these differences only recently emerged to the public, after this group became a reality on the ground and had already acquired many supporters for the movement in different parts of the world. These differences would appear later on in Syria between the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), which represents an extension of Zarqawi's approach, and Jabhat Al-Nusra, which represents [the central] Al Qaeda following certain reviews.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Zarqawi's death in mid-2006 in a US raid in his hideout in Iraq did not stop his approach from spreading. It was adopted by the successive leaderships of the Islamic State of Iraq up to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. While we saw the repercussions of the differences between Al-Zarqawi's approach and that of Al Qaeda in various places, they spread in Jordan through the division between supporters of the movement's spiritual teacher Sheikh Abu Mohammad Al-Maqdisi on the one hand and Al-Zarqawi and his followers on the other hand.

Al-Zarqawi's presence in Al Qaeda practically led to the emergence of what we can see today in the world as the new third generation of youth in the Salafi Jihadi current. A high percentage of people are still influenced by Al-Zarqawi and his experience, while others still follow [the traditional approach of] Al Qaeda. We will leave this matter for a later discussion on the third case, but first, in the following chapter we will present the situation of Al Qaeda immediately after the democratic Arab revolutions.

## **The Moment of Fear and Doubt**

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on the roots and escalation of disagreements between Al Qaeda and the Iraqi division ISIS, see Hassan Abu Hanieh "ISIS and Al-Nusra and the conflict over Al Qaeda" on the following link: <http://arabi21.com/Story/747197>

The Arab revolutions came as a shock to official Arab regimes, which began to live in the shadows of fear after the fall of both the Egyptian and the Tunisian regimes, followed by Gaddafi in Libya and Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen. The spread of public movements carried on like a domino effect. However, this era also came as a surprise to Al Qaeda itself, whose leaders were as well concerned by these peaceful public movements that were calling for democracy, pluralism, social justice and fighting corruption.

It is true that Arab regimes have always represented a primary opponent to Al Qaeda, and in Jihadi literature they were even referred to as the “close enemy.” However, the fall of these regimes was not due to the Jihadi groups and their ideological perspective of change, rather it came in complete contradiction to the hypotheses upon which this perspective was established. These hypotheses included the necessity of military action and the futility of peaceful change on one hand, and the rejection of democracy and disregard of social and political concepts like pluralism, freedom and social justice on the other hand. The revolutions were thus a form of harsh historic “realistic criticism” to Al Qaeda’s hypotheses.

While Al Qaeda’s leaders did not directly oppose this new popular current, they quickly worked on “adapting” their ideological rhetoric with concern to a number of perceptions. First, they reconsidered their stance on peaceful action, describing it as a possible means of change and demand. Second, they strove to push people and revolutions to adopt the agenda of establishing an Islamic state instead of a democratic one. Third, they sought to prevent members of this movement from being affected by this tremendous wave, in order for the movement not to lose a large part of its momentum.

Going back to the initial period of the revolutions, particularly following the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, we find a number of important articles, statements and appeals by Al Qaeda leaders like Osama bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahri, Abu Yahya Al-Libi, Anwar Al-Awlaki, and even Abu Mohammad Al-Maqdisi, aiming to achieve the previous goals of the “ideological adaptation” process. These texts also reveal Al Qaeda’s anxiety and confusion in dealing with the new phase in which the historic enemy of the organization — i.e. Arab regimes — had begun to crumble, while developments portended the emergence of new Islamic governments in their place. The latter were closer to Muslim Brotherhood models, and their new proposals on democracy, the state and change that totally contradict Al Qaeda’s ideology. However, these new governments were supported via elections and crowds in the streets, which meant that the idea of a conflict with

the “close enemy” was no longer in line with the new developments. And this is what poses a huge challenge for the movement.<sup>5</sup>

The Arab revolutions were not the only blow to Al Qaeda’s ideology and its political and organizational power; it also received two additional ones:

The first blow was when Islamic and Jihadi groups, as well as some important leaders, carried out revisions to their approaches. This happened with Islamic Jihad and Al-Gama’a Al-Islamiyya in Egypt, the Islamic Fighting Group in Libya, some of the Salafi Jihadi leaders in Morocco, and even with Sayyed Imam Al-Sharif, the former leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad and one of the most prominent figures in Al Qaeda’s top council. The latter have all announced that they are abandoning weapons and adopting a new approach of peaceful and Dawa'-related work.<sup>6</sup>

The second blow was the killing of Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden a few months after the emergence of the Arab revolutions in early May 2011, in a US military operation in a village in Pakistan. Although Ayman Al-Zawahri was declared the leader of Al Qaeda soon after, he did not enjoy the same level of support and popularity as the iconic bin Laden. Effects of this appeared later in the disagreements between Al-Zawahri and Al-Baghdadi when the Salafi Jihadi movement was split between the two of them.

Thus, realistic indicators showed that Al Qaeda was going through a phase of fear and anxiety foreshadowing an even bigger setback, as it was being subjected to successive blows and lost its most prominent leaders in US operations. The organization also suffered a setback in Iraq in 2007 with the death of Al-Zarqawi and the conflicts between his organization and other Sunni Islamic forces. This led to the formation of the Sahwa forces and weakened Al Qaeda in Iraq, after it had previously witnessed a rise. Al Qaeda then passed through a phase of “deep internal suspicion,” first due to the ideological revisions, and later due to the popular revolutions that shook the organization’s ideology to the core and raised serious questions about its efficacy.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See: Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman: “The ideology of Al Qaeda and the attempt to adapt to the Arab revolutions”, International Politics magazine on the following link:

<http://www.siyassa.org.eg/NewsContent>

<sup>6</sup> See: Hani Nasira, “Al Qaeda and Jihadi Salafism: intellectual streams and limits of verifications”, Al-Ahram publications, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> The Arab Spring revolutions and the death of Bin Laden led specialists and researchers to make hasty conclusions promising the end of Al Qaeda. See an example on these writings by Dr. Fawaz Gerges, “The rise and fall of Al Qaeda” dismantling the theory of war on terrorism. Centre of Arab Unity studies, Beirut, 2012.

## **Regaining Certainty and the Birth of a Third Generation**

The main turning point in this era of Arab revolutions emerged with the Syrian revolution. After months of civil and peaceful action, the latter moved to the use of arms to face the regime's violence. Later on, it became evident that the new organization linked to Al Qaeda, namely Jabhat Al-Nusra, was silently growing behind the scenes and sought to avoid declaring its affiliation with Al Qaeda or clashing with other armed groups. This group represents a model that is different from the organization it actually originated from, i.e. ISIS. Jabhat Al-Nusra leader, Abu Mohammed Al-Joulani, did not declare his allegiance to Al-Zawahri until April 2013, after ISIS leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, revealed the history of Jabhat Al-Nusra and declared its merger with his organization. Yet, this was rejected by Jabhat Al-Nusra, which opted for allegiance to the mother organization, the central Al Qaeda.<sup>8</sup>

The disputes evolved and Al-Zawahri took sides with Al-Joulani. The media arguments, intellectual debates and polarization within Salafi Jihadi circles transformed into strong hostility between the parties, which led to intense battles in Syria, assassinations of leaders, and strong accusations which revealed that the gap between the two sides had grown large. Even mediations carried out by some of the closest figures to the movement could not repair the damage.

In any case, we can sum up these disputes by saying that we are now faced with two different approaches. The first is represented by Jabhat Al-Nusra and reflects Al Qaeda's approach after the recent revisions. Dr. Eyad Al-Qunaibi, one of the most prominent theorists in this field, sums up that Jabhat Al-Nusra is the "modernizing faction within Al Qaeda." Meanwhile, the second approach is represented by ISIS. It is an extension of Al-Zarqawi and his ideological method, which constitutes a new approach within Al Qaeda itself. However, ISIS stands to the right of the central Al Qaeda organization and is even more extreme. The group reflects the changes within the new Salafi Jihadi generation, which adopted Al Qaeda's vision in an even stricter and more violent way, while trying to force its authority and dominance. ISIS was incredibly hostile to anyone who differed from its ideology, including those who adopt the Islamic vision. This is clearly evident from the group's actions in Syria and Iraq, as well as from Al-Adnani's message in which he accuses the Al Qaeda central leadership of not having a clear stance on the rule of the Brotherhood in Egypt (which he describes as "misguided") and of concluding a truce with Iran in past years.

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<sup>8</sup> On Jabhat Al-Nusra see Mustafa Al-Hamza "Jabhat Al-Nusra for the people of Sham: from foundation to division", *Siyasat Magazine*, issue 5, on the following link: <http://www.dohainstitute.org/release/331736fa-9bc7-4e05-a232-2ed07f9c1cd2>

Obviously there are very clear differences between the two Jihadi currents today. Following its revisions, Al Qaeda was keener to avoid clashes with the local community and to prevent an expansion in takfir of its opponents. It also focused on the international form of the conflict with both the close enemy and the allied foreign enemy, i.e. the alliance between the Arab regimes and the US. All of this appeared in letters by Al-Zawahri and in an interview that Al-Jazeera conducted with Al-Joulani.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, ISIS believes that it is necessary to rule and dominate the regions under its authority through what it calls “Administration of savagery,” and it seemed more strict and decisive when clashing with its opponents, even the Islamists. This is due to its experience with the Sahwa in Iraq, and most importantly as a result of it being overly immersed in the sectarian dimension of the conflict with Iran and Shiite forces. It also describes the latter as a priority in Arab regions, especially in Iraqi and Syrian regions where the organization is active.

Despite the fact that this dispute fragmented Al Qaeda and weakened its cohesiveness — dividing its supporters from the Salafi Jihadi movement from around the world between these two approaches — it did not really affect the spread of this current and its ideology amongst young Arabs and Islamists. Likewise, it did not affect its power to attract and recruit more members. Their numbers in Iraq and Syria alone reached into the tens of thousands, whether immigrants or Syrians, and whether they belonged to ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra, or to another group not directly associated with Al Qaeda but in reality adopting its thoughts and ideology.

If we took a satellite photograph to illustrate the geographic spread of Al Qaeda and its branches in the Arab world, we would be standing in front of a huge extended map. This is, of course, if we overlook the central Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which is allied with the Taliban, and other movements related to it in Asia and Africa, as well as Salafi Jihadi movements who adopt Salafi Jihad ideology but do not form official groups directly associated with Al Qaeda.

In addition to being active in Iraq and Syria, Al Qaeda has also recently carried out qualitative operations in Lebanon against interests of Hezbollah and Iran, via the Abdullah Azzam Brigades. The latter group was established in 2004 and was supposed to be Al Qaeda’s regional hand. While it executed attacks in Sharm el-Sheikh and south Lebanon years ago, its work has focused primarily on Lebanon in recent years.

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<sup>9</sup> See Al-Joulani’s interview with Al-Jazeera on the following link:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEvikQ6BeZo&feature=kp>

In Jordan, the Salafi Jihadi movement, which supports Al Qaeda, is active. While officially it has not formed an armed organization, its members have been involved with dozens of secret armed groups in the country for the past two decades, and thousands of them joined Al Qaeda in Iraq, Syria and the Arabian Peninsula. Jordan has also produced global leaders for Al Qaeda and Jihadis, such as Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, Abu Mohammad Al-Maqqdisi and Abu Qatada Al-Filistini.

In Palestine and in refugee camps in general, there is a clear spread and rise of groups associated with Salafi Jihadi thought, and with Al Qaeda.

In Yemen, the regional branch of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQIP) has proven, since its foundation, that it poses the greatest danger to the interests of the US, is the most flexible of Al Qaeda's regional branches, and the most capable of adapting, evolving and innovating. The merger of the Yemeni and Saudi branches was announced in January 2009, under the leadership of Yemeni Abu Basir Nasser Al-Wahayshi, while the Saudi national Saeed Al-Shahri (later killed in a drone strike) was appointed the former's deputy. Since this time, the organization has demonstrated superior capabilities to devise fighting means, methods and tools that are very precise and highly lethal. The phenomenon of Ansar Al-Sharia is considered one of its creations. The Ansar Al-Sharia group emerged in Abyan under the leadership of Jalal Blaidy Al-Marqashi, also known as Abu Hamza Al-Zinjibari. It gained control of several areas in Abyan and later left them.<sup>10</sup>

In the Arab Maghreb, the group known as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) emerged in 2007 under the leadership of Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud, as a successor of local organizations. The fall of the Gaddafi regime contributed to the evolution of AQIM and the spread of its branch in the Sahel and Sahara Emirate. The “Signed in Blood Battalion” — under the leadership of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, also known as Khaled Abou El Abbas or Laaouar — was able to carry out a large attack in January 2013 against the In Amenas gas facility in Algeria, which led to the killing of 38 workers. The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO or MUJWA), led by Ahmed Ould Amar (known as Ahmed el-Tilemsi), later appeared. On 22 August 2013, the two groups announced their merger under the name of Al-Mourabitoun Group. The latter is active in northern Mali and Nigeria, and presently uses southern Libya as a base for its activities. In the announcement of the merger, Belmokhtar reiterated that the new group would maintain loyalty to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> On the growth of Al Qaeda's activity in Yemen; see Hassan Abu Hanieh “Will Yemen's war on Al Qaeda succeed?” on the following link: <http://www.m.arabi21.com/Story/746173>

<sup>11</sup> For more on Al Qaeda in North Africa and the Sahel region, see Andrew Lebovitch, “Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and its allies in Mali”, Washington Institute, on the following link:

In Libya, the roots of Salafi Jihadism can be traced back to the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which undertook a jurisprudential review of its violent methods prior to the fall of the regime. Many Salafi Jihadi groups appeared after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, and two main groups gained prominence. Both of the latter use the name “Ansar Al-Sharia”. First is the Ansar al-Sharia Brigade in Benghazi. This group is viewed as the primary suspect in the attack on the American Consulate in Benghazi on 11 September 2012, which resulted in the death of the US Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other diplomats. This attack followed angry protests after the release of clips of a film containing insults to Islam. Both Mohammed Al-Zahawi and Sheikh Nasser Al-Tarshani, two prominent leaders in Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, denied that their organization had any relations with Al Qaeda, yet acknowledged ideological ties. Meanwhile, the second group is Ansar Al-Sharia in Derna, and is led by a former Guantanamo detainee named Abu Sufian Bin Qumu.<sup>12</sup>

In Tunisia, Ansar Al-Sharia emerged after the overthrow of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. In March 2011, a diverse group of prisoners, including both political prisoners and some convicted on terrorism charges, was released via a pardon from the Tunisian transitional government (the released included Saif-Allah Benahssine, nicknamed Abu Iyad al-Tunisi). Since its establishment, the ideology of Ansar Al-Sharia in Tunisia has been marked by ambiguity. On the one hand, it calls on people in Tunisia to adhere to “true” Islam, yet, on the other, it incites individuals to join Jihad abroad. Later on, Ansar Al-Sharia leader Aby Iyad became the number one enemy of the state after he was accused of inciting Friday protests in front of the US Embassy in Tunisia, which developed into riots that killed four people and injured dozens of others. About 60 vehicles within the embassy compound were burned and the American flag was replaced by the caliphate flag.<sup>13</sup>

In Egypt, Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis is one of the most prominent Jihadi groups in the Sinai. It belongs to the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem,

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[www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/view/aqim-and-its-allies-in-mali](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/view/aqim-and-its-allies-in-mali)

<sup>12</sup> On the Libya Fighting group and Ansar Al-Sharia in Libya, see Waseem Nasir “Who are Ansar Al-Sharia in Libya?” on the following link:

<http://www.france24.com/ar/20140530-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AD%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%B1/>

<sup>13</sup> On Ansar Al-Sharia and its shifts in Tunisia, see Aaron Y. Zelin “Shabaab al-Tawhid: The Rebranding of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia?” on the following link:

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/view/shabab-al-tawhid-the-rebranding-of-ansar-al-sharia-in-tunisia>

which was formed by a coalition of Jihadi movements. Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis appeared publicly on 5 February 2011, with its first attack that involved bombing a gas pipeline in the Sinai. The group has grown in a remarkable manner, demonstrating an ability to adapt, develop and carry out complex operations. Since the coup on 3 July 2013, Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis has managed to carry out more than 300 armed attacks on different targets, using a variety of means. The US added it to its list of terrorist organizations on 9 April 2014.<sup>14</sup>

In Somalia, the Mujahideen Youth Movement — known as Al-Shabaab — emerged under the leadership of Mukhar Abu Zubair as one of the solid arms of Al Qaeda in East Africa. The movement flourished in 2005, during the rule of the Islamic Courts in southern Somalia, and it was one of the most prominent components of the Islamic Courts Union. Its members held most of the executive positions in the Islamic Courts Union, yet Al-Shabaab split from the Union in 2007 following the announcement of the “Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia”. The latter was led by former President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, who at the same time was president of the Islamic Courts Union. Al-Shabaab rejected the new alliance's approach of negotiating with the Somali government at the time, as part of an initiative led by the United Nations.

The US added Al-Shabaab to its list of terrorist organizations in February 2008, in light of its alleged links with Al Qaeda. A number of Al-Shabaab leaders were killed in US drone strikes in southern Somalia, most notably Aden Ayro (nicknamed Al-Maa'lam) on 1 May 2008, and Saleh Nabhan on 14 September 2009.

The movement currently controls wide swathes of central and southern Somalia, and is engaged in almost daily confrontations against Somali government forces and the African Union peacekeeping forces. In February 2012, Al-Shabaab announced its affiliation with Al Qaeda and pledged allegiance to Al-Zawahri. It also claimed responsibility for the attacks in the Ugandan capital Kampala on 11 July 2010, which left dozens of people dead and wounded as they were watching a World Cup match. The movement also claimed responsibility for the attacks against the West Gate shopping mall in Nairobi. After Al-Shabaab gunmen took control of the mall, fighting continued for three days until 24 September 2013, and left at least 72 people dead.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> On the group “Supporters of Jerusalem” see Hassan Abu Hanieh, “Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis; the complex of Sinai Jihadists” on the following link:

<http://t.arabi21.com/Story/724684?categoryId=2&category=%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA&section=%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8%20%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%2021&sectionId=299&title=a>

<sup>15</sup> For more on Al-Shabaab in Somalia, see Mohammad Ahmad Abdullah, “Al-Shabaab in Somalia, where is it heading?” Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, on the following link:

The result is: Al Qaeda is still in the process of steady geographical expansion, and this does not contradict with the fact that on certain occasions and at various locations it may in fact be exposed to regression and decline. Yet, in general, it is ascending, and this is what brings us to the fourth part of this paper where we will search for factors and reasons behind this rise and for future expectations.

## **Heading towards Radicalism and People's Wagers**

There are socio-economic factors acting as a variable that helps to explain the rise in the number of radical Islamic groups that revolve around Al Qaeda in terms of both ideology and movement. This faction normally spreads in places and communities that suffer from poverty, unemployment, social deprivation and a lack of social justice, such as rough neighborhoods, slums and remote areas in many countries. This "supportive environment" is enhanced by a lack of security and sectarian and religious polarization.

However, these elements remain secondary, and their influence is strengthened when coupled with other main key factors that explain the rise of the radical movement. First and foremost among these key factors are the feelings of marginalization and exclusion, whether political, religious, social or sectarian. Marginalization facilitates the creation of concrete social leverages for Al Qaeda and for radical rhetoric to be established, and if accompanied by an uneven armed conflict — as well as external occupation and closed routes for peaceful solutions — it creates the perfect environment for such movements to spread, thrive, recruit more people and become more influential. It could even become a center attracting volunteers from the abroad, as has clearly happened in Syria and Iraq.

The ability of the movement to "invest" in such environments has been noticed, especially in areas where civil society is weak and social tribal relations prevail, for instance in northwest Pakistan and Anbar in Iraq. This is also true in the tribal alliances in specific Syrian regions, as well as in Somalia, Yemen, and the Moroccan and Sinai deserts.

Thus, we can say that the growth and rise of such movements does not come out of nowhere, but rather emerges from a supportive social environment, and ideological rhetoric comes to compliment — as well as explain — these existing circumstances. These movements are actually more akin to social protest movements with religious ideology. They are first and foremost the outcome of a social reality, before we can talk about the ideological factor, which can interact

with this environment whether actively or inactively. Herein lies the problem with anti-terrorism strategies and the security solution, as they only deal with outcomes and results, without confronting the conditions, inputs and circumstances that led to these results and contributed to the rise of this radical trend. This trend is a result of the interaction of these existing circumstances, not the one producing them.

Going back to the era of the Arab revolutions, we find that the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions created a state of doubt and anxiety for Al Qaeda leaders. They were concerned about losing their supporters after these two revolutions proved that peaceful change is possible, and that all people demand democracy that enhances human dignity, freedom and rights, especially the right to choose their leader. Since then, there has been an increase in the concept of Ansar Al-Sharia, which represents one of Al Qaeda's attempts to ideologically "adapt" to the new phase and to move from secret cluster operation to public action, as well as reconsidering peaceful action but without entirely giving up on the concept of armed action.

Yet, the next phase of the Arab revolutions was more difficult and lasted longer — such as in Yemen and Libya. These uprisings eventually transformed into armed conflicts that came as international and regional agendas interfering with political settlements. This significantly obstructed the process of this new phase and decreased its initial impact, creating doubts as to whether Arab nations had truly entered the era of democratic revolutions and whether they are capable of producing pluralistic democratic political regimes through peaceful public action.

As mentioned earlier, the major turning point was the Syrian revolution, which turned into an armed conflict wrapped in sectarian dimensions and secular-religious polarization. Meanwhile, the international community dragged its feet and there was a clash of international and regional interests, as Syria was entering a state of security and political chaos. This environment provided fertile soil for Al Qaeda to "grow its seed" in the country, while it did not have a large or noticeable presence there previously. As time passed and the conflict carried on, society surrendered to a state of defeat and despair at the inability of the political opposition to provide a popular leadership model, amid the weakening of the Free Syrian Army. With these developments, it became easier for Al Qaeda to grow and spread in Syria, and its two rival divisions became amongst the most prominent armed groups.

The impact of the Syrian revolution crossed the border to reach Iraq, where the Islamic State became active once again, entering into violent armed confrontations

with the Iraqi Army. The organization was also able to carry out sizeable operations in many provinces. It is clear that the organization was able to regain its ability to attract and recruit new members and to restore its Sunni social base, after the retreat of the Sahwa project and the weakening of the Sunnis who were calling for joining the new political system. Thus, the sectarian crisis prevailed again in the country.

If we look at each of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, we will find three different Sunni communities — demographically and politically speaking — that feel their identity and culture is seriously threatened. Moreover, they do not have a local or regional political cover to balance the forces that support the other parties. This reinforces sectarian tendencies, making Al Qaeda one of the wagers put on the table of Sunni society in light of this state of security and military chaos, as well as hopelessness about finding allies from abroad to regain balance.

The massacres, bloody scenes, and stories coming from Syria on the scale of destruction, killing and torture created feelings of wrath amongst members of the Salafi Jihadi movements and amongst other young Arabs who sympathize with the Syrian people. This motivated large numbers of these sympathizers to travel there. We saw hundreds of young people from Libya, Tunisia and Morocco as well as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and even from Europe and the Balkans; all go to battlefields in Syria. Naturally, most of them would be welcomed there by either ISIS or Jabhat Al-Nusra.

Although Syria became a main attraction for Jihadis and a primary reason behind the strengthening of the radical current and its rise in the region, what happened in Egypt after the Army intervened in the country's political affairs had a bigger impact on strengthening the radical Islamic wager in the Arab region. Moreover, this motivated great numbers of youth to join groups associated with Al Qaeda and the Salafi Jihadi movement.

The danger of the Egyptian events is represented in the elimination of any boundaries between moderate political Islam, which believes in the political game and claims to accept democracy, on the one hand, and the factions that reject all of this from the start. The latter declare that the one and only choice is to establish an Islamic state, even if by force of arms. The elimination of these boundaries pushes enthusiastic youth from the general Islamic trend, as well as those who sympathize with it, to embrace radical ideology.

What proves this conclusion is the message sent by Al Qaeda leader, Ayman Al-Zawahri, immediately after the overthrow of former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi (himself a Brotherhood leader). In this message — entitled: "The Idol of the

Democratic Date” — Zawahri used Morsi’s overthrow to prove that Al Qaeda’s wager on armed action, establishing an Islamic state, and maintaining hostility to the West and military institutions was the right one, not the wager of the Muslim Brotherhood placed on democracy and peaceful change.<sup>16</sup>

This paper does not aim to evaluate or judge what happened in Egypt, but rather to determine its influence on the future spread and activity of radical movements, through raising a key question: As most of the political Islam movements have been banned or eradicated, considered to be terrorist and extremist groups, and thousands of their members have been imprisoned or sentenced to death, what other options are there for hundreds of thousands of religious youth inspired by these movement’s rhetoric but to wager on armed and secretive action, as long as the political horizons for peaceful civil work are absent?

Historically, the rise of armed Islam, secretive work, and establishing radical ideological rhetoric is linked to the phase of detentions, crises and secular-Islamic polarization. However, these circumstances are more dangerous now than ever before, because they came after Islamists saw the results of the democratic method, which ended with military interference. This strengthens the other face of political Islam and motivates attempts for revenge and change through violence when trying to confront the strong Egyptian Army apparatus.

As is the case in Syria, the unfolding of events in Egypt will influence and inspire other societies and countries, and will be seized by Salafi Jihadi ideologues as an opportunity to advocate their political and ideological bids over democracy.

At the end of the day, exceptional social, political and economic circumstances like these all clash to create the perfect supportive environment for the escalation of social radical rhetoric. This goes hand in hand with the state of disappointment and despair, and the inability of Arab regimes to secure basic needs in terms of human dignity and political rights, as well as the inability to face development crises, poverty, unemployment and increasing population growth.

## **Conclusion**

It is difficult to accurately predict the next phase when relying on the current indicators. If we rely on what is happening in the current scene and its prospects — such as the continuation of the internal conflict in Syria, the exclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the growth of security chaos in Libya — it will lead us to the one conclusion, namely that the radical Islamic trend will invade the

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<sup>16</sup> See the speech on the following link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iB4\\_SBGD24A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iB4_SBGD24A)

Arab region in the coming years if it has the right political, social and economic environment. However, this expected turn of events might be obstructed along the way and could be either slowed down or even take an exact opposite turn, just as happened in Iraq when the Sahwa appeared and Al Qaeda clashed with the Sunni community and ended up shrinking after a phase of rise and growth in previous years.

As mentioned previously, Al Qaeda — or Salafi Jihadi thought in general — is in fact the mirror image of the multi-dimensional crisis in the Arab world. It is a choice made out of feelings of despair and disappointment amongst a large number of young Arabs and Muslims, who express these outrageous feelings by joining or adopting this radical trend as they have no other choice. It is also difficult to imagine the possibility of Arab nations living with this ideological and behavioral pattern for long, because it contradicts with all terms of modernity and globalization.

Thus, this ideology or movement will not grow or increase in pluralized democratic regimes where the rule of law and values of good governance prevail, where people enjoy legal justice and equality and where no social group or class is marginalized on a religious or sectarian basis. On the other hand, the radical movement represents one of the supporters of the religiously conservative trend in the Arab world, which adopts Islamist ideology. Successfully controlling and curbing this radical current lies in the strengthening of the moderate trend, by merging it in the political equation and pushing it to commit to the path of democracy and pluralization.

# Popular Revolutions and the Rise of Religious Radicalism in the Arab World

*Beshir Abdel-Fattah*

To many observers, it appeared that the Arab revolutions had created an appropriate atmosphere for the launch of a process to stop the tide of radical Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab states, in particular Al Qaeda and its various branches and affiliates. This is based on the consideration that these peaceful revolutions proved beyond any reasonable doubt the failure of Jihadi and Al Qaeda ideology, after they were able to achieve in a short period of time what radical Islamist movements had failed to do over a period of 30 years from changing some of the Arab regimes, something that had eluded the persistent and enduring efforts of these movements. The likelihood of this proposal's validity is strengthened by the series of powerful blows directed at Al Qaeda before the Arab revolutions, represented in ideological reviews that were carried out by a number of Jihadi currents in the Arab region. They began from Egypt at the hands of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya, followed by reviews from the Egyptian Islamic Jihad movement, and then various other reviews from radical Jihadi organizations and movements in a number of other countries.

It became clear with time, however, that the situation was not as these observers had thought. Following the outbreak of the Arab revolutions, there was a large growth in Al Qaeda's activity in various parts of the Arab world, including: North Africa, through Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen, via Al Qaeda in the Arabia Peninsula (AQAP); and in the Egyptian Sinai, as manifested in Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis, Afnan Misr and other groups.

The rise of radical Islam in the Arab states during the second half of the last century came as a result of a number of chronic factors, most notably: the weakness of political and civil parties, widespread illiteracy, pervasive economic destitution, a flawed understanding of the principles of Islam, and the populace's anxiety at faltering secular ideologies and regimes. Against the backdrop of the Arab revolutions, other factors were added to the aforementioned and contributed, in turn, to a growth in the activity and spread of these radical Islamist organizations and movements. Among the most important such factors are:

- the presence of a favorable environment for terrorism
- developing mechanisms of recruiting fighters in radical organizations
- employing radical Islam politically

- the failure of the process to islamize these revolutions by undermining the experience of moderate Political Islam in governance, which led to fuelling confrontations between the authorities and Political Islam

## **The Presence of a Favorable Environment for Terrorism**

Terrorist groups and organizations are always searching for a so-called “safe environment” or “suitable incubator” to provide them with an appropriate atmosphere for their activities. There was a large structural and institutional link — in addition to structural overlap — between the ruling regimes and the state in the Arab world. Consequently, efforts to overthrow and dismantle these regimes via popular uprisings led to security or political confusion among the Arab countries that witnessed uprisings or revolutions, similar to what happened in Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen. Over time, this helped to provide a suitable environment for the growth of terrorism and extremism. Terrorist groups, which had succeeded prior to the Arab revolutions in creating foundations for themselves in some regional countries, began to spread. This was the case for Al Qaeda, in its various branches in the Arabian Peninsula and countries of the Islamic Maghreb and North Africa. These groups expanded in terms of force and activity in light of the security vacuum that cast a shadow on a number of states in the region, from the Sinai desert to Libya, Tunisia, Syria and Yemen.

The security agencies in these countries collapsed — or nearly did so — under the weight of the revolutionary earthquake, through the cracking of the countries that resulted from the political conflicts and the emergence of an atmosphere of sharp political polarization between parities. Subsequently, extremist Islamist organizations and terrorist groups found in the vast deserts and rugged mountains ideal and supportive environments to expand and proliferate. They found safe havens for their military camps and strongholds, far removed from the grip of the state and the assault of the regimes' armies and security agencies.

Despite the fact that a state like Iraq did not witness a popular revolution as some of its counterparts in the Arab world, it has seen an expansion in the influence of extremist Islamist organizations that were present there even before the outbreak of the Arab revolutions, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS). In June 2014, it was announced that the entire city of Mosul, north of Baghdad, as well as the municipal building in Nineveh and the headquarters of some satellite channels, had fallen into the hands of the organization. ISIS has erased the border between Iraq and Syria at the Yarubia crossing, controls numerous parts of the country, and seeks to expand its circle of influence.

In Libya, the fall of the Gaddafi regime has led to the provision of a suitable environment for Al Qaeda. In addition to the prospects for the expansion of Al Qaeda in the countries of the Islamic Maghreb surrounding the Libyan state, official Libyan sources revealed that Al Qaeda leader, Ayman Al-Zawahri, has sent experienced terrorists to Libya. This was done in order to build a new fighting force, open a new front in North Africa, and organize the so-called Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The source clarified that Al-Zawahri entrusted this task to a veteran terrorist who was previously detained in Britain on charges of terrorism, whom the official described as committed to the principles of the global Al Qaeda organization.

Al-Zawahri intended to exploit the gap that was left by the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, in order to extend Al Qaeda's control over the vast areas that have become unsecured. Through this, Al Qaeda can open new fronts to rebuild additional power in the region, supporting what is known as AQIM. Currently, the latter's activities have become focused on the desert regions of the Sahel states. The Libyan source stressed that the terrorist entrusted by the new Al Qaeda leader to create a new force in Libya has been able to recruit more than 200 members into his ranks, taking part of the eastern border region of Libya with Egypt as a safe haven.

The fall of the Gaddafi regime had huge repercussions, not just for Libya, but for the entire North Africa Region, the Sahel states and the Saharan regions, where both AQIM and Tuareg rebels are active. In February 2012, Tunisia announced the dismantling of a terrorist organization that was training in Libya and sought to establish an Islamic emirate in Tunisia. Furthermore, Tunisia security sources confirmed that a number of Tunisian Jihadis were heading to Libya for training in camps. Some of the latter were affiliated with Ansar Al-Sharia, but under the supervision of the Libyan Ansar Al-Sharia organization that coordinated with Ansar Al-Sharia in Tunisia.

In the same context, fears were stoked in countries such as Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger concerning the return of Tuaregs who had fought in the ranks of Colonel Gaddafi's brigades, estimated at 800 fighters, to their countries. In the era of Gaddafi, the Libyan forces had collectively recruited former Tuareg rebels from Mali and Niger, and used them as mercenaries to fight Libyan rebels. The return of these fighters with their weapons raises fears in the African Sahel region because of the threat they pose to stability through the attacks they could carry out against the governments and the people alike.

As for Egypt, some of its desert and mountain regions became a suitable arena for

the infiltration of Al Qaeda after the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. Al Qaeda emerged in the Sinai under the name Ansar Al-Jihad in the Sinai, which threatens the return of religious violence and the terrorist attacks that Egypt suffered from for a long time, after they had previously been eliminated. The official appearance of Al Qaeda in Egypt became evident through a statement issued by a group calling itself Ansar Al-Jihad in the Sinai. This statement, pledging allegiance to Al Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahri, was issued on 23 January 2012.

Ansar Al-Jihad in the Sinai is one of models of the Al Qaeda organization that has been rampant in recent times, and which is no longer the same organization Al Qaeda was at the time of its establishment. The so-called Al Qaeda that has spread throughout a number of countries in the world is not a single organization under a sole leadership, rather there are three manifestations or forms of Al Qaeda, namely:

- The central Al Qaeda, which is the original organization that was founded under the name of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders. This organization was led by Osama bin Laden, and then Ayman Al-Zawahri.
- Branches of Al Qaeda, the formation of which was ordered directly from Osama bin Laden. The sole example of this is Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQIP), which is an intellectual and ideological extension of the central Al Qaeda organization.
- Models of Al Qaeda, which is the third form of Al Qaeda. Ansar Al-Jihad in the Sinai falls under this heading. This group includes those currents spread throughout a number of Islamic countries that pursue Al Qaeda's approach. While Osama bin Laden serves as a spiritual leader for them, they were not established at his behest and do not have any relations with the mother Al Qaeda organization. The most well-known example of this model is Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The most important operations carried out by Ansar Al-Jihad in the Sinai were the successive bombings of the gas pipeline leading to Israel through the North Sinai Governorate, as well as the bombing of Eilat in which eight Israeli soldiers were killed.

Ansar Al-Jihad in the Sinai seeks to establish an Islamic Emirate there, and called in its statement for Islam to be the sole source of legislation. This would be accomplished through expelling the army and the police from the Sinai, seizing all security headquarters, and putting pressure on the Egyptian government in order to cancel the agreements signed with Israel and to intervene to lift the siege on Gaza.

Ansar Al-Islam in the Sinai has close ties to the Palestinian Army of Islam organization, which is present in Gaza. Investigations by the Egyptian security apparatus established that Ansar Al-Jihad in the Sinai is supported by the Army of Islam in the Gaza Strip, which played an important and essential role in recruiting and training members of Ansar Al-Jihad in the Sinai. These members received high-level combat training in the Gaza Strip with the Army of Islam both before and after the revolution, in two regions of Gaza: Tel Sultan in the Palestinian Rafah and Khan Younis. Prior to the Egyptian Revolution, a small number of the organization's members received training in the Gaza Strip on all forms of fighting, the use of mortars and various kinds of weapons and training, assembling and dismantling explosives, and detonations using electric cables. This was done via bringing them into Gaza through tunnels.

Tunisia, like the rest of the states of the Arab revolutions, witnessed after the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime a clear rise in radical Jihadi Islam, represented by the Jihadi Salafi movement. It has been looming on the horizon of the Tunisian state since the victory of the revolution on 14 January 2011, when hundreds of Salafi Jihadi members linked to Al Qaeda and its branches were released from Tunisian prisons. This came in light of the authority vacuum that has existed in Tunisia throughout the past period, in addition to the fragility of the interim government. The Salafi Jihadi movement imposed itself in numbers and practice on the Tunisian Salafi Islamic spectrum, after the experience in Afghanistan and later the armed confrontations that occurred between this movement and a number of Arab regimes — namely in Egypt, Syria and Algeria — during the 1980s and 1990s.

Experts consider that Tunisian Salafi Jihadis are an integral part of an international network linked to Al Qaeda and its affiliates. The appellation “Ansar Al-Sharia” is the same name under which Al Qaeda Salafis operate in Yemen. Moreover, the strategy of taking control of small cities and expelling the local authorities to declare the application of Sharia is the same method used in both Yemen and Tunisia. The name “Ansar Al-Sharia group” has become almost familiar, and visual media outlets talk about the deadly attacks that are sometimes carried out against American embassies in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen, as the United States is accused in the case of the film offending Islam entitled “The Innocence of Muslims”.

The emergence of the so-called “Ansar Al-Sharia” in multiple Arab countries during the era of the Arab democracy revolutions represents a new phase in Salafi Jihadism and its strategic wagers. After Al Qaeda's ideology (which is based on assumptions of the unification between the near and far enemy, choosing armed action as the sole means to change, and relying on the “globalization of jihad” to

win public opinion) seemed unable to answer the demands of these democratic revolutions whose results were not consistent with their hypotheses, the theorists and leaders of Salafi Jihadism in the Arab world restructured the priorities, wagers and options of the movement. This was done through what could be called an “ideological adaptation” process, to fill in these big gaps and launch a new phase in line with the new facts, yet without relinquishing the “solid structure” of the current’s ideology. The latter is based on the principle of governance, an insistence on implementing Islamic Sharia, and rejecting the democratic game, along with backing down on the consideration that peaceful action is refused or futile. This was reviewed and an interest was restored in local affairs and the arbitration of Sharia, thus implying a retreat from the previous phase (from the second half of the 1990s).

While Salafi Jihadism was present in Tunisia before the revolution, its sudden appearance in this enlarged manner after it can be attributed to several reasons that contributed to its emergence and growth as a phenomenon:

1. *The return of a large segment of the Tunisian people to Islam as a fortified spiritual shelter for moral values, and the growth of a conservative inclination within this segment.*

This is particularly true of the lower-class segments that do not enjoy an advanced level of education, after the Bourguiba model reached its overall structural crisis. Then came Ben Ali, who represented the younger generation of wolves within the same Bourguiba School. Ben Ali restored the Bourguiba regime in the manner of a total authoritarian police regime, yet wrapped in a cloak of Bourguibist modernism/traditionalism.

2. *The growing social injustice, as well as the consecration of extreme disparities domestically between social groups and between coastal and inland provinces stretching from the northwest to the south.*

Ben Ali's police rule was accompanied by a state of severe developmental failure that nearly eliminated human dignity for the overwhelming majority of the Tunisian people. This failure is reflected in a number of negative phenomena, such as the high unemployment among youth who have received university degrees and those who graduated early from high school and did not enroll in universities, as well as the widespread poverty and the resulting exacerbation of injustice in the distribution of income and wealth.

3. *The security fragility and the weakness of the state's presence, especially in lower-class neighborhoods.*

This led to some Salafi parties, especially the Jihadi ones among them, replacing the state and establishing their limited “authority” over regions considered quasi-liberated. In an interview with Al-Arabiyya Channel in November 2012, [former] Prime Minister and [current] Secretary-General of the Ennahda Movement, Hamadi Jebali, spoke about the efforts of some Salafi Jihadis to establish an Islamic Emirate in some lower-class neighborhoods. A few months prior, the Ennahda-affiliated Interior Minister, Ali Larayedh, accused some Salafis of preparing for an Islamic emirate following the events of Bir Ali Ben Khalifa in February 2012. While these Salafi elements had been active in the shadows during the reign of Ben Ali, following the success of the Tunisia Revolution on 14 January 2011, they were liberated and appeared publicly. They began to hold regular meetings at mosques and took control of many mosques.

4. *The presence of a climate of freedom after the fall of the former dictatorial regime.*

The fact that the government of Beji Caid Essebsi, formed in February 2011, took a neutral stance following the outbreak of the civil war in Libya. This allowed armed Islamic groups and Islamist extremists to transfer arms and ammunition of various types to Tunisia, as well as to store a part of these arms and ammunition in numerous areas located within Tunisian territory.

5. *The entry of large quantities of arms and ammunition to Tunisia after the fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya.*

This led to the creation of a security and military vacuum in the northeast African region. Accordingly, it became difficult to govern in the traditional border areas of countries such as Libya, Tunisia and even Algeria, which has a common border with the former two states. The lawlessness in Libya helped these movements establish ties with some Libyan and Algerian terrorist factions, as well as with arms dealers. They were able to bring in weapons without the notice of the security forces, using various tricks and schemes. Security sources pointed out that among these elements are some accused in the storming of the American Embassy who had been recently released from prison.

Salahuddin Al-Jourshi, a Tunisian researcher specializing in Islamist groups, notes: “Those following the development of the Jihadi movement in Tunisia are not surprised by such information which talks about the growing number of Tunisians in the ranks of Jihadi movements spread among the Arab region.” He adds: “A number of Tunisians have been involved in these Jihadi networks for a long time. It

has even gone beyond the level of mere involvement, and some of them now occupy leadership positions in these organizations. The Tunisian presence in the ranks of the Jihadi networks confirms that Tunisia had in fact transformed into a safe haven for Al Qaeda and associated movements. These Jihadi movements that practice violence are able to attract unemployed Tunisian youth who do not have a high level of education, involving them in terrorist operations and severely damaging Tunisia's reputation.”

While the Salafi Jihadi groups in Tunisia — along with those in other Arab countries — did not want to appear as contradictory to the democratic Arab revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, they were keen to confirm Al Qaeda's rhetoric of “ideological adaptation.” The latter brought together the “unity of the battle” waged globally with the United States and the path of the popular revolutions that liberated the peoples' will from the regimes. Thus, the stated goal expressed by Salafi Jihadism in Tunisia lies in “the application of the rule of Allah” (Islamic Sharia), and entering into the democratic Tunisian revolution to undermine its strategic goals — especially building a democratic pluralist state and a state of law, and pursuing a new economic and social option that is based on sustainable development and breaking away from the barbaric liberalist economic approach. The latter are supported by the Islamists, and would result once again in subordination to the West, but this time under an Islamic guise. This would lead to derailing the Tunisian Revolution in its search for an identity — and Islamic character — and break away from the goals of Al Qaeda, which are represented in the presence of regimes that are neither allied with the West nor hostile to extremist Islamist organizations, and which are ideologically closer to Al Qaeda.

Meanwhile, in Syria, Al-Assad allowed his country to be transformed into a hotbed of Jihadi Islam coming from every direction. This was done in an attempt to discredit the popular revolution that was calling for his overthrow, and which in the beginning was neither an Islamic Jihadi revolution nor a sectarian one in any way. Western reports attributed the flow of Jihadis into Syria to various factors; the first factor is the ease of travel to Syria. Most of the fighters travel independently by plane to Turkey, and from there go to Syria by land. Turkey is considered a popular tourist destination and traveling there does not raise suspicions. Thus, most travellers do not need visas to travel. As for the second factor, it lies in the ease of living in a country like Syria. This is an important factor, compared with the mountains and deserts in Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia or Mali. This is in addition to the escalating sectarians' passions resulting from the brutality of the conflict and the provocation caused by the entry of fighters loyal to Al-Assad from Iran, Lebanon (Hezbollah), Iraq and other states.

Third, the emotional resonance of the Syrian conflict contributed to attracting Jihadis from around the world, as a reaction to the excessive brutality and the massacres repeatedly committed by the Al-Assad regime. During recent years, the vicious violence used by the Al-Assad regime against protests that were initially peaceful gave momentum to Al Qaeda in the country. Today, the demonstrations have transformed into a sectarian war, which in some instances places the “Sunni Ummah” in confrontation with what they call the “Nusairi” regime. This comprises a strong factor in attracting Jihadi fighters from Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and other neighboring countries.

However, the other factor is the use of religious fatwas. Months after the outbreak of the Syrian uprising, bloggers on Salafi websites began calling on Jihadi faqihs [Islamic jurisprudence experts] to issue fatwas allowing them to join the protest movement. Sheikh Abu Al-Munzir Al-Shinqiti advised bloggers to join the protests provided that they avoided calls for democracy or any other secular slogan. At the end of 2011, Omar Al-Shehabi, the leader of Fatah Al-Islam in Lebanon, called for an armed struggle in Syria on the Shumoukh Al-Islam online forum. Following this, Sheikh Al-Shinqiti published a fatwa on Minbar Al-Tawhid wal Jihad authorizing the use of violence against the Assad regime.

In February 2012, Al Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahri called on fighters in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to take action in support of those he called “their brothers in Syria”. Around the same time, Salafi Sheikh Abu Mohammed Al-Tahawi issued a fatwa calling for Jihad in Syria.

In January 2012, Al-Manara Al-Bayda Media Institute announced the establishment of a new Jihadi organization called Jabhat Al-Nusra, led by Abu Mohammed Al-Joulani, a Syrian national from the Golan Heights. This organization is especially attractive to Jordanian fighters, who lead many of its brigades, according to Al-Hayat journalist Tamer Al-Samadi. According to Al-Samadi, over 25 Jordanian nationals have been killed while fighting in Syria alongside Jabhat Al-Nusra. While Jabhat Al-Nusra has no public affiliation with Al Qaeda, Al-Joulani has sworn allegiance to Abu Hamza, an emir in Al Qaeda in the Islamic State of Iraq. Jihadis wishing to join Jabhat Al-Nusra must obtain *tazkiyya* — a personal assurance from the organization's leaders ensuring their religious commitment and military skills.

It seems that the majority of Jihadis fighting in Syria are from neighboring countries, such as Jordan, Iraq and — to a lesser extent — Lebanon. According to Lebanese Salafi preacher Omar Bakri, there are also small regiments from Libya and Tunisia, as well as from Belgium, France and Sweden, most of whose members are of North African descent. Jihadis coming from Lebanon belong to a new

generation, according to Salafi sources in Tripoli, which serves as a stronghold for one of the largest Salafi groups in Lebanon. Furthermore, Syrian imams in Tripoli encourage the city's youth to join the conflict.

It seems that this trend is also present in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, especially Ain Al-Hilweh, Burj Al-Barajneh and Shatila. Sources have said that former members of the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, Fatah Al-Islam and Jund Al-Sham — as well as some former members of Osbat Al-Ansar and the Islamic Jihad Movement — have been distributed into five factions, each comprising 25 members.

The circle of Mujahideen in Syria has widened to include Europeans. A report from the British *Independent* claimed that more than 100 Britons have gone to Syria, the French *Le Figaro* estimates between 50 and 80 have traveled from France, the German *Der Spiegel* talks about dozens of Germans, and the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* mentions 45 Danes. As for the Netherlands, it raised its terrorism threat level significantly based on concerns that, of the estimated 100 individuals thought to have traveled to Syria, some of them could return to the Netherlands and get involved in terrorist attacks.

As the Syrian conflict attracts more fighters from across the region, this will help to spread Al Qaeda's regional plans. The organization's goal, which has not been changed by the Arab revolutions, is engaging in Jihad in all “infidel states”. Regardless of whether or not Al Qaeda has the actual means or a sufficient number of followers to achieve this goal, Jihad gaining an increasingly public nature could lead to the destabilization of fragile countries, something that raises concerns throughout the region.

## **Developing Mechanisms of Recruiting Fighters in Radical Organizations**

Despite the diversity of statistics and figures regarding the number of foreign fighters in Syria and their distribution among organizations and armed groups — such as ISIS, Jabhat Al-Nusra, Al Qaeda and others — most Western sources claim that more than 12,000 fighters from 81 countries around the world have been recruited. The international community has even begun to brace for their return to these countries and the prospects of them carrying out violent attacks, or for the effect of violence under which they were fighting in Syria. Several studies show that individuals who received training abroad or have experience in fighting were prominently involved in terrorist attacks on European soil. Furthermore, according to a recently published study by Norwegian academic Thomas

Hegghammer, terrorists who have gained experience abroad are more lethal, dangerous and sophisticated than those belonging to purely local cells.

A report by the Washington Institute for Near East Studies notes that the number of foreign fighters who have entered Syria significantly exceeds the number of those that headed to Iraq and Afghanistan in the past, pointing out that networks for recruiting fighters in Syria benefit from these two experiences. The report stated, “since foreigners flocked to Syria in late 2011 and early 2012, based on more than 1,700 primary and secondary sources in multiple languages that have been collated, one can estimate their numbers at 9,000 individuals who represent more than 80 nations.”<sup>17</sup> Comparing with the two most prominent foreign fighter mobilizations that have occurred in modern history, the report found that the number of fighters who headed to Afghanistan over 13 years — i.e. from 1979-1992 — did not exceed 5,000. Moreover, it claimed that those who travelled to Iraq from 2003-2007 amounted to about 4,000. Meanwhile, the number of those who headed to Syria exceeded 12,000 during a short period not exceeding two years.

Social media has played a pivotal role in recruiting Jihadis to Syria. The presence of established recruiting networks — which obtained significant expertise from past experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, and use social media considering that it is the most secure and widespread recruiting element — has contributed to mobilizing thousands of fighters from various parts of the world. It is now easy to go onto Twitter or Facebook and connect with potential recruits or transmit certain ideas.

It could be argued that the region has entered the era of “cyber terrorism”, which is reflected in several aspects, including the recruitment of terrorist and extremist elements through social media. In Western countries, sources have noted that 700 Europeans have gone to fight in Syria due to the impact of social media. In Tunisia, the prime minister announced that they have created an anti-cyber terrorism cell — and put in place a legal framework for it — pointing to the presence of extremist groups online that try to co-opt people or pass on a culture of death. Second, there are electronic threats and then cyber bombardment such as directing hundreds of thousands of messages to information network sites, thus weakening their ability to receive these messages from clients and leading to the cessation of these sites. Third is the destruction of information systems, such as introducing viruses that harm computers and the information stored in them. Fourth is cyber espionage, including eavesdropping and information theft. There are numerous objectives behind this theft and eavesdropping, ranging from economic information to political and military information, and at times even personal information.

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<sup>17</sup> “Sunni Foreign Fighter in Syria: Background, Facilitating Factors, and Select Responses”, Washington Institute, Background Paper No. 1, May 21, 2014, For more information: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/Zelin20140521-PFPC.pdf>

The escalation of the Syrian conflict and its obstinacy led to inflaming a parallel conflict on social networking sites between resistance factions on the one hand and the Al-Assad regime's electronic brigades on the other hand, in addition to conflicts among the resistance factions themselves. By the end of January 2014, Al-Assad's electronic brigades had succeeded in closing at least 550 Facebook pages belonging to various resistance factions, including Jihadi pages that used Facebook to spread hate speech or broadcast images and video clips of crimes of mass violence.

Jihadi organizations<sup>18</sup> in Syria have increasingly relied on social networks to attract new cadres, exchange field experience and promote Jihadi ideas, as this electronic means lack control to ensure the organization of information flow and the verification of the true identity of users. This boom in recruitment through social networking sites is an unprecedented shift that never before seen in any previous civil conflict, whether in terms of the number of sites and forums speaking in the name of Jihadi organizations and the diversity of messages sent to sympathizers, or in terms of the size and quality of the information provided regarding fighting techniques and their ability to be adapted to the environment of the protracted civil conflict.

Jihadi organizations in Syria aimed to use various social networking sites to recruit fighters around the world and strengthen their military capabilities to confront the Al-Assad regime, by attracting new cadres and exchanging experience among factions of fighters. In addition, they used social media to announce their field victories and the crimes committed by the Al-Assad regime's forces against civilians, in light of the military imbalance in favor of the regime. The latter controls 11 main cities in Syria, compared with only two controlled by the opposition factions, while it is likely that the conflict will continue in the country until it reaches the scope of a protracted civil war.

In this regard, a study issued by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) confirmed that Jihadi groups in Syria were increasingly relying on social networking sites to recruit volunteers. According to the study, these organizations attracted at least 11,000 foreign fighters, including 1,900 volunteers from European states. At the top of the list are French nationals, numbering about 421, followed by the UK at around 366, then Belgium and Germany at approximately 269 and 249 respectively. The study stressed that the civil conflict in Syria is the first of its kind historically in terms of attracting fighters via social networks.

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<sup>18</sup> Mohammad Abdullah Younes, <http://adenalghad.net/printpost/104637/>

The study pointed out that tracking the pages of 190 Western fighters in Syria has revealed a pivotal role played by some preachers in the US, Australia and the UK in promoting Jihadi ideas and motivating young Muslims in Western countries to head to Syria for Jihad. The study found that 61.5% of the most active accounts in recruiting volunteers are affiliated with ISIS, while around 17.5% belong to Jabhat Al-Nusra. Meanwhile, the number of sites linked to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the Tawhid Brigade and Ahrar Al-Sham only account for about 2% of these accounts.

The positive response to the ideas promoted by Jihadi pages to their target sympathizers also varied, whereby it reached 25.4% in the UK, followed by 14% in France, 12.3% in Germany, 8.8% in Sweden, 7% in the Netherlands and 5.3% in Belgium. Meanwhile, Eastern European countries — especially Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia — collectively account for 6.1% of respondents to rhetoric calling for Jihad in Syria.

On another level, a report issued by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) in Washington on 18 April 2014, notes a structural shift in the pattern of rhetoric used by Jihadi currents in order to attract volunteers. There has been an escalating focus on manufacturing a more attractive image of Jihad in Syria, by emphasizing fighters' ability to lead normal lives. This involves things such as using modern technology, taking advantage of features such as spoils of war, facilitations for marriage, food supplies and private cars, as well as a focus on depicting spontaneous moments of enjoyable social activities and posting them on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

In the same context, another study issued by the University of Dublin in January 2014 found that the year 2013 had seen a 75% spike in tweets about the civil conflict in Syria, as well as the creation of 619 YouTube accounts that broadcast video clips of field activities of the FSA and Jihadi factions. Among these, videos related to the Al-Assad regime's crimes against civilians garnered nearly 1.7 million views.

A review of the activities of Jihadi movements on social networking sites reveals a growing momentum in the goals and objectives of this fundamental shift in their use of this online arena. In this framework, Jihadi movements rely on social networking sites and forums to carry out numerous functions, including:

1. Jihadi media: Some of the pages publish news about Jihadi organizations and the attacks they carry out, and respond to accusations of committing war crimes against civilians or crimes of sectarian cleansing. Perhaps the most prominent pages that perform this task are the official accounts of Jabhat Al-Nusra, ISIS and the Ansar Al-Sham group, in addition to the specialized news networks such as

the Islamic News Agency (Haq), the Qadaya website, Islamic Nation News, and sites including the Ibn Taymiyyah Media Foundation, Al-Faruq Media, Reporters Network, the Media Minbar Forum and the Shumoukh Al-Islam workshop.

2. Attracting sympathy: Forums for attracting sympathizers rely on broadcasting images or video clips of the Al-Assad regime's crimes against Sunni civilians, and on using sectarian statements and religious affiliation to push sympathizers to volunteer, whether through financial support or joining the ranks of foreign fighters in Syria. In this regard, an ICSR study noted that some preachers, such as the American preacher of Palestinian descent Ahmed Musa Jibril and Australian preacher Musa Cerantonio, play pivotal roles in pushing sympathizers to volunteer alongside Jihadi organizations, whether through encouraging support for the resistance and confronting the crimes of Al-Assad, or promoting the establishment of a caliphate state starting from Syria.
3. Moral support: The task of activists for Jihadi organizations online includes promoting the morality of the role of these organizations in Syria and their compliance with Sharia precepts. This is done through denying some reports about violations and crimes committed by some members of these groups, or justifying them by reformulating the events and providing supporting grounds for them. In this regard, the directory of Mujahideen Twitter accounts published by the Shumoukh Al-Islam Jihadi network points to the existence of a group of activists called "supporters of Jihad". This group's core mission is to provide moral support and legitimacy to the activities of Jihadi groups, as well as to respond to their opponents and confront the cyber brigades of the Al-Assad regime.
4. Political motivation: The rhetoric of Jihadi organizations on social networking sites focuses on the political and military imbalance in Syria in favor of the Al-Assad regime, in order to mobilize volunteers to go to Syria and join the Jihadi brigades. They use sayings such as: "the Syrian resistance factions are confronting a fully-armed regular army, without possessing sufficient weapons to achieve a military balance", or they show the extent of military and political support the Al-Assad regime receives from Iran, Hezbollah and Russia, compared to the weak political counterpart of the resistance in Syria.
5. Exchange of experiences: Jihadi organizations rely on some online spaces that are untapped and far from the focus of attention for communication among the organizations' cells, to exchange experiences and training on various fighting techniques. In early February of this year, British authorities noted that some British fighters were using Ask.fm to provide tips to new volunteers about

health precautions, border security and language requirements for living in Syria. Those affiliated with Jihadi currents in Syria also take advantage of some closed cyber spaces that are difficult to track for communication among the organizations' branches, to receive directives from intellectual or ideological leaders, or to coordinate between groups of cyber activists.

6. Personal communication: A segment of foreign fighters in Syria, who use social media to spread messages to reassure sympathizers that joining their ranks, will not impose complex restrictions on their lives in terms of basic requirements. This is done through creating an attractive image of Jihad in Syria, by photographing everyday instances or moments of social interaction between members of the fighting brigades. Moreover, there is an emphasis on the availability of food supplies, equipped accommodations, marriage opportunities, and other benefits provided to fighters in Syria, and model fighters are created, which sympathizers seek to imitate. This is in parallel with traditional messages about championing the oppressed, confronting the desecration of holy sites, liberating Syria, and establishing a caliphate state starting from there.

It could be argued that the cyberspace conflict has not been decided in favor of the Al-Assad regime, in light of the continued activity of Jihadi organizations to attract volunteers to join their ranks, and given that they use social networks that are far from the hands of the regime and cannot be shut down. Their activity remains influential, noting that security authorities in European states have arrested a large number of volunteers. Over the past year, British authorities have detained about 30 volunteers in terrorism cases linked to the conflict in Syria, while Spanish authorities arrested members of a network to recruit youth for Jihad in Syria at the end of March 2014. Moreover, on 20 April 2014, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said that about 500 French citizens had joined the ranks of foreign fighters in Syria.

The proliferation of recruiting volunteers via the Internet poses real threats to freedom of opinion and expression around the world, as it has caused fears about the spread of extremist religious ideas among youth on a global scale. There are fears that the effects of the conflict in Syria could spread on an unlimited scope, due to the phenomenon of Mujahideen returning from the fronts of the conflict in Syria. The fears relate to the possibility that these returnees could join Jihadi cells in their home countries, taking advantage of the fighting skills that acquired in military operations. Governments may be forced to adopt some measures aimed at restricting cyberspace, monitoring social networks, and reducing the level of privacy afforded to users in order to confront these threats.

## **Employing Radical Islam Politically**

One of the most important factors that helped the growing presence of radical Islam in the region after the Arab revolutions was the approach of the parties of the political conflict — from both the ruling regimes and the opposition — resorting to the use of the extremist Islamist groups “card” in their heated political conflict. For their part, and based on their confidence in the West's anxiety regarding “radical Islamic terrorism”, some Arab regimes sought in the years following September 11 to instill fear among Western governments and peoples concerning the rise of political Islam. The latter posed a threat to the stability of these regimes, and they warned the West that political Islam was a laboratory for spawning radical Jihadi Islam.

Immediately following the eruption of popular revolutions against them, these regimes rushed to invoke the “Islamist scarecrow”. This was done to discredit these revolutions and seek Western support for their positions, which were faltering amid a sweeping popular wave demanding an end to their rule and the fall of their tyranny. Arab presidents such as Moammar Gaddafi, Bashar Al-Assad and Ali Abdullah Saleh sought to portray these revolutions as malicious attacks by Al Qaeda against their regimes, rather than popular revolutions calling for freedom, democracy, and comprehensive and balanced development. These presidents did this to seek Western support for their survival, and to justify the acts of violence they were carrying out to suppress these revolutions in order to extend their stay in power.

Thus it was no surprise that Egypt's Mubarak warned that his alternative — in the event of his overthrow — would be chaos or radical Islam, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood. Similarly, Gaddafi denied that there was a revolution by the Libyan people against him, and described what his country was witnessing were attacks by Al Qaeda and its supporters to occupy Libya and use it as a base to strike the West. Meanwhile, both Bashar Al-Assad and Ali Abdullah Saleh warned that the fall of their regimes would mean the dominance of terrorism and Islamic extremism, not just for their countries but also for the whole region, paving the way for an invasion of the West and demolishing the latter's fortifications.

In turn, some regional states and powers employed radical Islamic organizations to achieve political goals and aspirations. This was used as a pretext by Iran and Syria using ISIS in order to suppress their nations and the political secular forces in their countries showing the bad image of radical Islam and, for Iran, to maximize Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. As well, ISIS had begun to penetrate in several other Arab countries.

On the other hand, some of the opposition forces in countries such as Syria and Iraq did not hesitate to employ the radical Islam card to undermine the

authoritarian regimes in these two countries, as the case is with ISIS. Just as the ruling regimes in Iran and Syria resorted to using extremist Islamist groups such as ISIS, Al Qaeda and others, some ruling Islamist regimes — which were given a rare historic opportunity by the Arab revolutions to come to power — resorted to working to find a strong radical Islamist partner to confront the alliance comprising the “deep state”, secular political forces and the counter revolution. Accordingly, the atmosphere allowed for an increase in the radical Jihadi tide among ranks of Islamists in a number of Arab countries.

However, Islamic governments allied with extremist Islamist organizations and released some of the latter’s leaders who had been imprisoned in relation to terrorism cases, as happened in Tunisia. Experts believe that Salafi Jihadis, who engage in violence in Tunisia and other parts of the Arab and Islamic world and do not believe in the moderate Islam that has been prevalent in Tunisia for the past quarter century, are protected by the Islamic Ennahda movement. The opposition accuses that the latter sponsors Salafis and protects them before the law, so that they can serve as an electoral card for Ennahda when needed.

Ennahda— which took power in Tunisia following the elections of 23 October 2011, through the leadership of a ruling alliance with two secular parties (the Congress for the Republic and Ettakatol) — is accused of being tacitly allied with extremist Salafi groups. There are claims that Ennahda is not serious about confronting the violence of these groups toward Tunisian society, and that they refuse to specify the relationship differentiating them, as a moderate Islamic movement, from the Jihadi Salafi organizations. Thus, this has resulted in being an impression among many local democratic forces, as well as regional and international forces, that Ennahda and its government that arose from the October 2011 elections are not serious about defining their relationship with radical Islam, in particular their relationship with armed groups representing them. This impression was reinforced after the events at the American Embassy, which was the last straw for the Americans and pushed them to send explicit warnings to Ennahda in Tunisia. These warnings all had the same message: either governance or radicals; i.e. Ennahda must limit its relationship with radicals and show good faith in putting an end to the latter.

In Egypt, as dozens of youth of the January 2011 revolution were languishing behind bars for political reasons, Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated President Mohamed Morsi did not hesitate to abuse his power during the period of his rule that lasted merely a year, from June 2012 to June 2013. Morsi issued presidential pardons for a dangerous group of Islamists who had been sentenced to death for committing terrorist attacks, as well as crimes that harmed the country’s security and disturbed public peace.

While all former rulers of Egypt — whether kings, presidents or military rulers — had issued hundreds of pardons for prisoners on national occasions and Islamic holidays, none of them since the reign of King Farouk I had issued decisions with names like Morsi did. Previously, decisions were issued with the after mentioned preconditions including the legal articles upon which the pardons were based. Subsequently, the General Prosecution and the Ministry of Interior, represented by the Prisons Bureau, would determine who meet these conditions and articles and release them immediately. However, deposed President Mohamed Morsi was the only president who issued five presidential pardon decisions in his short rule naming 810 prisoners. The pardoned included those accused of crimes and of joining a banned group; it is a well-known case in the media regarding the international Brotherhood group. This is in addition to leaders of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad, who were responsible for the assassination of late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981. Moreover, Morsi released 12 leaders of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya who were involved in terrorist attacks, including the assassination attempt against former President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1995, and some leaders of the group who joined Al Qaeda in 2006. The latter are accused in a variety of cases — including killing police officers and a school director in the Suez Province, the bombings of Al-Azhar, the so-called “returnees from Albania” case, the Imbaba incidents and the Al-Iman Mosque events in Suez — which caused chaos and disturbed public peace. Nevertheless, these pardons included the strangest decision issued in the history of presidential pardons in Egypt especially of issuing pardons for fugitive prisoners.

Morsi was keen to benefit from those released prisoners— who headed to the Sinai after their release — as a strong military partner that would support him in confronting his political rival at home when necessary. This is what actually happened following his overthrow on 3 July 2013, when these people rushed to carry out various terrorist attacks against army and police forces, civilians and some vital targets.

### **The Failure of the Process to Islamize These Revolutions by Undermining the Experience of Moderate Political Islam in Governance**

It could be argued that the Arab revolutions created a new era for the Islamists. The forces of political Islam transformed from banned social and political organizations into recognized organizations that carry weight, after they formed political parties that allowed them to run in elections and compete for the seats of government, parliament and municipal councils. This led to the emergence of a new phenomenon in the Arab world, namely the transition of Islamists from the

ranks of the opposition and the darkness of prison, to centers of governance and decision-making.

However, the Islamic parties that reached power after the outbreak of the Arab revolutions faced major challenges that ended their experiences in governance, after they failed to develop alternate policies or counter strategies to increase their immunity and prolong their survival in rule. This can be attributed to several considerations that are represented by the rapid transformation from the opposition to the authorities without having sufficient experience in governance, as well as the widening gap between the theoretical vision they proposed and the actual policies they implemented, in a way that created many “grey areas” in performance. Furthermore, they refused to engage with other political factions on issues of governance. This is in addition to the multiple effects of the “mentality of denial” and repeating the same mistakes of the previous regimes, which strongly supports the notion that faltering is the ruling feature of the performance of these parties when they reach power, just as it was in their path to reach power over many years.

Some moderate Islamist movements in the states of the Arab revolutions tried in vain to seek inspiration from the Turkish experience. The economic successes that achieved by the government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey over the past ten years coincided with both the parliamentary elections — held in June 2011, and during which the AKP renewed its leadership of the Turkish political scene — and the outbreak of the popular Arab revolutions and uprisings that toppled the authoritarian ruling regimes in the Arab Spring countries. This led to the eruption of a debate over what has been termed the “Turkish model”, which these states can take as an example in rebuilding their countries and political systems.

As the democratic and developmental experiences of these countries neared maturity, Turkey became an inspiring model for many of the Arab states that are undergoing immense transformations these days and finding their path toward a better tomorrow. Thus, Arab and Western circles began to discuss the possibility of Arab states drawing inspiration from the political and economic success achieved by Turkey over the past decade, while taking into account the specificity of each country. However, there are many things making the Turkish model attractive and pushed supporters of this notion to think about Turkey as an inspiration. Most notably, it refutes the idea that Islam is incompatible with democracy and it combines democracy and development. In addition, Turkey has sought to promote and market its model in the Arab and Islamic worlds. Following his party's third successive victory in the most recent parliamentary elections, Erdogan announced that the results provide a model for the region and the world.

He considered that the AKP's win was not only a victory for the party and Turkey alone, but also for Arabs and Muslims everywhere — a model to be imitated in the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Balkans and throughout the world.

Yet various obstacles have prevented Arab Islamists from seeking inspiration from the Turkish model. Enthusiasm emanated from Arab, Turkish and Western politicians and intellectuals about the possibility that Arabs could follow the Turkish model and benefit from it in building their emerging democratic and developmental experiences, in light of the many similarities between their situations and the Turkish experience. However, amidst this excitement, another movement emerged and believed that there were many large differences between Turkey and the Arab Spring states which could complicate this issue.

In addition to the existence of differences between each of the Arab states themselves — making the results of drawing inspiration from the Turkish model (if possible) different from one country to another — the specificities and legacy of democracy varies between the Turkish experience and that of the Arab states. There is a huge secular, liberal and westernized segment in Turkey that does not exist in the Arab world with the same breadth and depth. In addition, there are fundamental differences between the Islamic movement in Turkey and the Arab world — despite the fact that the former is influenced by the latter — especially the Muslim Brotherhood at specific stages and regarding certain aspects. This has thus led Turkish and Western analysts to claim that Islamic political movements in the Arab countries can benefit from the transformation process experienced by the Islamic movement in Turkey, but not from the growth of secularism in Turkey.

On one hand, the failure of the moderate Arab Islamists in power, and the difficulty of drawing inspiration from the Turkish model of moderate Islam in governance on the other hand, paved the way for the rise of extremist radical Arab Islam. These radicals consider themselves a defender of the Islamic project in confronting a society that does not seem to welcome or accept any Islamic features at the levels of state or society.

### **Post-Radical Islam**

The rise of radical Islam on the popular Arab revolutions, which led to obstructing the process of integrating moderate political Islam in the political process and undermined the democratic transition that was emerging in the Arab world, encouraged many analysts to begin addressing “post-radical political Islam”.

In the 1990s, the world was full of “post” prefixes — from post-modernism and post-Zionism, to post-colonialism and others. In critical theory, the “post” prefix fundamentally means criticizing a former period and reviewing and critiquing

what comes before the “post”, paving the way for building or establishing a new stage. This is done through searching for different options and features. Accordingly, “post-Islamism” refers to the phase in which Islamist movements have reached a level of intellectual maturity and political tolerance qualifying them to transition from takfir to beginning to think about undertaking an intellectual review and practicing self-criticism. This will allow them to relinquish claims that they possess the absolute truth, therefore authorizing them to renounce violence and accept others who differ from them religiously, intellectually and politically. They can thus comply with the rules and foundations of a democratic civil state, based on the idea of citizenship and belonging and loyalty to the nation state, while abandoning the principles of the global project of political Islam represented in the “mastering” of the world, the caliphate, the Islamic world, etc.

In the same vein, in a 1996 article titled “The Coming of a Post-Islamist Society”, Iranian thinker Asef Bayat discusses the social orientations and the political and religious perspectives in post-Khomeini Iran. He argues that “Post-Islamist” means a transformation of the Islamist current as a whole — on the level of ideology, approaches and practices — from fanaticism and extremism to flexibility and moderateness. In the same context, Arab thinker Sadiq Jalal Al-Azm defines post-Islamism as the stage at which Islamists renounce the most radical and fundamental Islamism and return to the “spontaneous” and “popular” Islam, which is more moderate and tolerant.

In this sense, we should closely contemplate what Algeria is witnessing these days in terms of the relationship between the authorities and radical Islam. After 22 years of being banned, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has begun the process of re-integrating the Islamic Salvation Front into the political process, through involving it in the current debate about planned constitutional reforms in the country. Although this approach may infuriate the families of the victims of violence committed by the Front against their compatriots during the 1990s, it also sends very important and significant message when talking about “post-radical Islam”.



# **The Tension of the Sunni Environment in Lebanon Produces Individual Extremism ... Not Organized Terrorism**

*Bissan Al-Sheikh*

The recent explosions in Lebanon — which targeted in particular the southern suburbs of Beirut (i.e. the social stronghold for Hezbollah), as well as some military checkpoints belonging to Hezbollah or the Lebanese Army in the Bekaa — have raised serious concerns about the transformation of the Lebanese Sunni environment into fertile soil for the production of local extremists and suicide bombers.

While Al Qaeda left the Lebanese arena alone for a substantial period of time to play a functional role — i.e. securing a transit area for Jihadists heading to Iraq from Syria, alongside what resembled a tacit agreement on Lebanon's neutrality — the importance of this arena for Al Qaeda has returned. Lebanon transformed into a direct goal for the organization, and a platform for launching suicide bombers into Lebanon and Syria at the same time. After it emerged that local youth were involved in suicide attacks and preparing car bombs, with sheikhs registered in Dar Al-Fatwa being the ones sending and recruiting them, it is almost certain that Al Qaeda has officially and unequivocally inaugurated its Lebanese branch.

The official Salafi movement in Lebanon was launched in the early 1960s by Sheikh Salem Chahal, the father of Dai Al Islam Chahal. The latter is one of the most prominent Salafi faces in Tripoli and the “godfather” of some of the current pivotal leaders in the movement. This official movement remained restricted to missionary work to a large extent until 2005, when former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated. It then took a more severe and bloody turn in 2013 with the Syrian Revolution.

In May 2013, after Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah announced his party's participation in the fighting in Syria alongside Bashar Al-Assad's regime, Hezbollah's stronghold in the southern suburbs of Beirut was targeted by two rockets. While there were no victims, the rockets sent a clear message. Following this, the messages began to arrive constantly and their pace increased. In the month of June alone, there were three separate bombings targeting Hezbollah convoys in the Bekaa. In July, a car bomb exploded in a parking in Beirut's southern suburbs that left 53 wounded. Then in August, another car bomb exploded in Beirut leaving 20 dead and more than 100 wounded.

The “paradigm shift”, so to speak, came with the first suicide attack carried out

against the Iranian Embassy on 19 November 2013, in which at least 23 people died. This was followed by another suicide attack in early February against the Iranian Cultural Center. Various groups claimed responsibility for these bombings and attacks, including a local group calling itself the “Aisha Brigades”, the “Abdullah Azzam Brigades” and Jabhat Al-Nusra. Thus, the Lebanese had no doubt that Al Qaeda had begun deploying its suicide bombers in their midst.

These bombings came against the backdrop of armed clashes fought by Sunni extremist groups in the cities of Sidon and Tripoli. The first round of clashes ended in a few days after the intervention of the Lebanese Army and the “Resistance Brigade”. The latter, which intervened on behalf of Hezbollah, is a Lebanese-Palestinian Sunni faction that supports Hezbollah. Meanwhile, the second round of clashes carried on as a slow war of attrition until very recently.

What was striking in the two cases — i.e. in both Sidon and Tripoli — is the candor of these militant groups. They are excessively open about their positions and activities, thanks to a legitimacy derived from the public and some traditional leaders, as well as from the security services. The latter had, to a large extent, provided their protection to Sheikh Ahmed Al-Assir in Sidon, until direct armed clashes broke out. Al-Assir succeeded in arranging his escape to somewhere that is — presumably — unknown. Meanwhile, in Tripoli, the security services had established the leaders of the axes as “honorable citizens of the city who were the most virtuous of those defending it”, before returning and launching an arrest campaign against them.

When examining this extremism in Lebanon, it is necessary to place these events in their context, which is directly related to the Syrian Revolution and Hezbollah's participation in suppressing it. The feelings of injustice against Sunnis that began to emerge among a sizable segment of the Lebanese can be traced back to 2005, the year of Hariri's assassination, and the assassinations that followed targeting his political team and Sunni figures who occupied sensitive positions in the government and security services (such as the head of the Information Division of the Internal Security Forces Wissam Al-Hassan, the investigator in the Internal Security Forces following up on the International Tribunal Wissam Eid, and finally former Minister Mohammed Chatah).

Moreover, “adding insult to injury”, as they say, were the events of 7 May 2008, in which armed members of Hezbollah invaded neighborhoods of Beirut. Soon after, the party imposed conditions for a political settlement in its favor in the Doha Agreement.

These feelings of injustice were also fed by three decades of Syrian military and security influence in Lebanon, which marginalized Sunni regions politically, impoverished them economically and emptied them of their leaders — either

through assassination or exclusion from decision-making positions. In contrast, there was a narrow circle of clientelism sponsored by the regime of Hafez Al-Assad, which his son took advantage of after him.

In addition to these local circumstances, feelings of Sunni injustice were also fed by foreign and cross-border factors. Thus, the “Muslim” identity — and later the “Islamist” one — superseded national identities. The level of these feelings fluctuated according to foreign events and how to respond to them locally, whether through representatives of the “Sunni sect”, or the authorities/the government itself. In Iraq, the pro-Iranian government of Nouri Al-Maliki reached power in 2006, and launched Shiite militias to directly target Sunni leaders under the pretext of fighting terrorism. Meanwhile, in neighboring Syria a revolution broke out in 2011, and quickly took on the form of a “Sunni” majority struggling against a minority “Alawite” rule. This immediately struck a sectarian nerve and the feelings of injustice among this Lebanese sect expanded. As they had no local party to save them from it, without much hesitation they turned to their “brothers” in Syria. In Tripoli and other regions the flag of the Syrian Revolution was raised alongside black banners carrying the phrase “There is no God but Allah” [*La Illaha Illa Allah*]. This is in addition to pictures of ousted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein — photos that in fact had not been taken down since his execution in 2010.

The tension reached its peak when Hezbollah officially announced its participation in the battles alongside the Syrian regime and boasted of its direct contribution to suppressing the revolution it described as “terrorism”. This was also accompanied by provocative behavior and an obstruction of political and public life in Lebanon. And since the party justified its participation in Syria as a “Jihadi duty” — making use of a primary foundation of the Sunnis — fighting Hezbollah thus began a “Jihadi” duty that was no less legitimate.

This is the general picture that can be drawn regarding the reality of Sunni radicalism in the past two years, during which Lebanon saw direct attacks against the country that bore the hallmarks of Al Qaeda. Yet the bigger picture cannot be identified in this brief period, and likewise cannot be considered merely a Lebanese slide into the Syrian morass.

Reaching a harmonious narrative on the rise of Sunni radicalism in Lebanon requires considering violent phenomena — whether collective or individual — produced by this environment. This can be built upon when responding to the question: Does the Lebanese Sunni environment produce local “Al Qaeda models” — or in today's terms, “ISIS models”?

This examination will consider group violence — and the most prominent example is Fatah Al-Islam, which appeared in the Nahr el-Bared Palestinian camp in 2007 — as well as models of individual violence. The latter include Ahmed Al-Assir (the

commander of the Abra/Sidon group) and Qutaiba Al-Satem (the most recent Lebanese suicide bomber).

Meanwhile, the examination will disregard the Tawhid Movement, which appeared in Tripoli in the early 1980s as a direct reaction to the Syrian presence, knowing that it was founded as a result of a general temperament accepting of these phenomena. A number of the Tawhid Movement's so-called "orphans" were involved in the "paralysis" of extremism in the Tabbaneh region. Likewise it will disregard the Dinniyeh Group — which was lured into a military confrontation it was not seeking, as a type of "pre-emptive strike" — as well as some figures from the "external Jihad". The latter include figures such as Ziad Al-Jarrah, who was involved in the September 11 attacks, and others that were recruited abroad, particularly in Europe.

### **Fatah Al-Islam**

In the summer of 2007, following a three-month battle in the Nahr el-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in northern Lebanon, the Lebanese Army announced the end of a group linked to Al Qaeda known as Fatah Al-Islam. It later became clear that the organization was merely a tool of the Syrian security forces that was introduced into Lebanon after the Syrian military withdrawal and the collapse of the joint security system. The group's leader, Shaker Al-Absi, was released from Saidnaya Prison in Syria and dispatched to Lebanon, where along with a group of fellow released prisoners he formed a group that took refuge with Fatah Al-Intifada in the camp. The latter group is the Syrian arm of the Palestinian factions. Initially, members of Fatah Al-Islam emerged with their weapons, raised black banners, and rented houses at rates that exceeded normal prices. They married Palestinian girls and invited Arabs from the Gulf and elsewhere to join them, while being welcomed by the on-looking residents of the camp. Finally, they announced their actual identity.

In the past, i.e. under the Syrian presence, training and mobilization camps were established with the knowledge of the agency that oversaw — or at least facilitated — the transfer of recruits to Iraq to fight against the Americans. Thus, when Fatah Al-Islam first emerged, accusations were leveled against the emerging Sunni political team at the time, namely the March 14 movement. Yet when the decision was taken to wage a military campaign against them, Hezbollah raised its voice, claiming that they were fighting a foreign occupier in an Arab country and not causing harm domestically. Hezbollah's secretary general announced that the camp and its residents were a "red line" that the party would not allow to be crossed.

Paradoxically, this is the same strategy adopted today by the Syrian Revolution in terms of facilitating the emergence of Jabhat Al-Nusra.

## **Sheikh Ahmed Al-Assir<sup>19</sup>**

The phenomenon of the “exotic” Sheikh Ahmed Al-Assir , a Sunni, was where the Sunni-Shiite conflict reached its peak. He was a response to a reality he did not create ... Thus, Al-Assir inflamed a problem that Sidonians wanted to deny and revive at the same time. When the issue was resolved in a violent manner, the Sidonian narrative took on two levels: on the surface their was the comfort of ending the predicament Al-Assir represented personally and judicially, yet beneath the surface was bitterness regarding the way Sidon was treated.

This broad divergence that emerged between Al-Assir and the majority of his city is evidenced, for example, by the statements Al-Assir's adversary Sheikh Maher Hammoud made about the sheikh: “Before he blocked the roads, the percent of Sidonians who sympathized with him reached 50 percent.” When Hammoud says 50, we can say the actual percentage is closer to 90.

Various Sidonians concurred that he harmed some of the parties of the existing leaderships, especially the Hariri leadership. A large portion of the worshippers supporting him were pro-Hariri and suffering from their leadership vacuum. And “if he didn't use arms, he would have gathered greater strength.” However, the most significant argument repeated by some people was: “Al-Assir would have become much stronger if he had chosen to fight Hezbollah instead of fighting the Army.”

Sidonian youth, accompanied by destitute Palestinian and Syrian youth, rallied around Al-Assir. They have little education and arrived late to religiosity. But what is crucial, according to Nihad Hashisho, is that dozens of those who were later arrested came from prominent Sidonian families.

Yet Al-Assir, with a few hundred young supporters, was also able to address a small number of wealthy individuals, most of who made their wealth abroad and were known for their intolerance against Shiites.

Al-Assir began his public life as a young man seeking refuge in the Islamic Group. However he left the latter in the early 1990s, because they “operate in politics rather than being concerned with religion alone.” As for his livelihood, Al-Assir first worked as a baker and then a TV and video repairman. Yet in the early 1990s he stopped practicing this profession in order to avoid dealing with any pornographic film he might come across in a TV or video. The early 1990s was the period during which Al-Assir joined the Dawa and Tabligh Association. He began wearing the Pakistani-style robe, which no one in Sidon wore at the time. Of the little that is known about this group is that they spread Dawa and bring those Muslims who have become indifferent toward or abandoned religion back to it.

During this time, the young sheikh studied at the Faculty of Sharia in Dar Al-Fatwa.

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<sup>19</sup> Part of a series of articles co-authored with Hazem Saghieh on Sidon and published in Al-Hayat newspaper.

However, he did not complete his master's degree, claiming that the topic he was supposed to address was “trivial”. And without being known for any *ijtihad* [independent reasoning] or distinctive *ilham* [inspiration], he gradually developed a flexible and selective method with his religious provisions. Thus, many people found that the content of his fatwas made Islam easier for them, and reconciled between their lives and religiosity, at least in terms of what is prohibited and condemned. The most prominent thing he stressed was that Dawa did not require abundant religious knowledge. Rather, according to him, Dawa itself is what makes the one practicing it religiously competent. This loose interpretation is probably what allowed for Al-Assir to gain supporters such as pop singer Fadel Shaker and his followers, who the most orthodox Al-Assir supporters claimed were “mere thugs who have nothing to do with religion, nor any knowledge of it.”

He was busy with bringing those Sunnis who were politically “partisan” and captivated by the resistance back to a Sunni focus, and for this purpose he visited them and their villages near Sidon. Perhaps as a result of the influence the Dawa and Tabligh Association, he believed that fighting Hezbollah was also a religious duty. Thus, the sheikh who accepted the Shiite as one of the “sects of Islam”, cannot accept that “Hassan Nasrallah and Iran speak on behalf of Islam”.

Therefore in 2009, when Al-Assir's statements prohibiting participation in the “situational” elections clashed with everyday political challenges, Al-Assir supporters went out in abundance to vote for Fouad Siniora and Bahia Hariri. Given the pressure of necessity, they ignored his calls for a boycott.

The frustration of the pro-Hariri crowd, through the electoral defeat of their leaders, always further enabled Al-Assir. From his mosque, the latter promised his followers victory, or made them choose between dying on their feet and dying on their knees.

This rhetoric only increased and solidified with the Syrian Revolution and the split surrounding it. While Sidonians, particularly the middle class, were very concerned with the “enchantment” the sheikh had over their fellow residents, they also “understood” the phenomenon of the “enchanted” sheikh.

In the spring of last year the escalation saw yet another shift. After the death of two youth in the Taamir region, the sheikh announced the formation of the “Free Resistance Brigade” and called for Jihad in the city of Qusair in Syria. Al-Assir secured the financial resources needed to militarize his movement by donations provided by millionaires abroad who were enchanted by him, including members of the Alayli family. He also used individual donations from his supporters, as well the money he earned from selling his home for one million dollars, most of which he spent on this cause.

On Laylat Al-Qadr, most worshippers in Sidon gathered in the Bilal Mosque, sparking the envy and hatred of imams from other mosques. Yet when Al-Assir

began a sit-in in the mosque, which was the beginning of his rugged path, there were only a few dozen protesters alongside him, and their numbers began to decrease.

Sidonians had wanted two contradictory things at once. Thus began their journey with him, surrounding him in reserved support, and ending in betrayal.

## **Synopsis and Conclusions**

If there are any conclusions that can be drawn from the above, they are:

1. The Sunni sect does not have a monopoly on religious radicalism in Lebanon. The Shiite Hezbollah, which was a unique model in the Arab world until very recently, is a radical Islamic group that has a combative doctrine and military capabilities that are almost comparable to any local branch of Al Qaeda. This is not to mention its tremendous capabilities in attracting and recruiting supporters, as well as imposing Sharia as a substitute for man-made laws.
2. Nationalist and Nasserist parties, which polarized the public mood and engaged in the Civil War, were a channel for draining violence, which for years was directed at a foreign enemy: Israel.
3. Following the Civil War, the Sunnis emerged with political gains and the sect's social environment appeared too fragile and delicate to produce rigid Al Qaeda models. Sunnis are distributed between two main cities — Sidon and Tripoli — as well as the agricultural countryside, which is religiously mixed to a large extent and cut off from the center. There is no doubt that this is a fertile environment for sprouting individual cases of extremism, but the latter are more akin to crime that is rampant in neglected regions where misery is widespread. A simple comparison between the number of youth arrested for misdemeanors and crimes in an area like Tabbaneh, and these “extremists”, shows that drug offenses and stabbings are more common than calls for Jihad. It appears that the decision of some to fight in Syria is closer to a retaliatory action and individual choice, which should be condemned first by the person's family. For example, the father of Qutaiba Al-Satem went to the security services as soon as he heard that his son had died in a suicide attack to help match DNA evidence.
4. The structure of Lebanese politics, which has not seen a unilateral leader nor a concentrated central authority, plays a role in dispersing any potential target for this tension, unless the target is situational or temporary (Hezbollah/Alawites in Tripoli). Here there is no place for literature on topics such as “fighting tyrants”, rather they go further. The weakness of the state and the authorities in general makes this a popular demand, specifically for the Sunnis. The army is the first refuge for the sect in any external confrontation, and the latest example of this is what happened in Sidon with Sheikh Al-Assir.

# Salafi Jihadism in Lebanon

*Hazem Al-Amin*

There are no Salafi Jihadi traditions rooted in Lebanon, nor well-known sheikhs or preachers that have left significant trace. Salafism is a circumstantial movement and group, which has spread in Lebanese Sunni environments among a few families in the north of the country. Meanwhile, the movement's rhetoric draws on the form of the Ottoman faith and some aspects of Sufism.

Nevertheless, this Lebanese Sunni environment has spawned Salafi Jihadi organizations, or let us say Salafi Jihadi groups, some of which are linked to their brothers beyond the border, while others persevered their Lebanese identity.

I have followed up on this phenomenon in Lebanon since its inception in the mid-1990s in countries such as Jordan, Iraq, Yemen and Egypt. I believe that the sectarian essence and content of the Lebanese Salafi Jihadism override its ideological implications. I believe that in the case of Lebanon, Salafi Jihadism takes the form of conflicts and tension that have always marked the Lebanese situation, regardless of the Jihadi concepts that this phenomenon may hold.

Therefore, I decided instead of highlighting the theological explanations of this phenomenon, to tell the story of a young Lebanese man, who carried out a suicide attack against the Iranian Embassy in Beirut a few months ago. Through this narration, I will try to demonstrate that the Salafi ideology and Jihadi means were only a reflection of the sectarian tension that has always marked the Lebanese situation, under different guises.

This tension used to be masked by the conflict between the left and right wings, Arabism and "Lebanon-ism". Today, it seems it is manifesting through Salafi Jihadism.

I believe young Lebanese men have been affected somehow by this trend of Salafi Jihadism, which broke out and spread among them. The trend is contagious and falls outside of the prevailing system. Like the trend, the system usually appeals to the moods of young men belonging to the same background, through mass and social media, by addressing the collective mood and appealing to people of the same group and inclinations.

Moein Abu Dahr was not even 16 years when his mother Kulthum Ammouri decided to send him to Sweden to join his three brothers there. She was the one behind this decision, not his father, as Moein's siblings in Sweden are her children

from her first marriage to her Shiite cousin from the south, whom she left when she was in her sixties. Kulthum and her sisters and brothers belonged to the Communist Action Organization in Lebanon.

Moein could not stay in Sweden for more than a year and half, according to his father. During this period, he worked in restaurants and construction companies. His father said that he returned to Lebanon, as his siblings “were hostile to him because he was not a Shiite”.

“He fought with them and left the house, and did not return to sleep there”, according to the father. He does not know in which year Moein went to Sweden. He was 16 years old at the time, and he was born in 1992, so it must be in 2008. When he left to Sweden, “he was very religious and used to pray as his uncle had taught him so”. However, his piety was not political, as his uncle who made sure he observed religion did not belong to any political party, according to Moein's father and his father's friend Abu Maaruf.

Moein's father did not pray, and he said that he used to drink from time to time; while his mother did not start wearing the hijab until the day he died.

Moein returned from Sweden as a “failed Sidonian expatriate”. However, this was not the first failure in the young man's life, as his performance at school was not successful, not to mention subsequent failures of other types. Meanwhile, Lebanon was reeling under the weight of its crises, which started with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and continued even after the storming of the mosque of Ahmed Al-Assir, the sheikh Moein was following.

## **Similar Names**

Adnan Abu Dahr — the father of the suicide bomber who targeted the Iranian Embassy in Beirut, Moein — had to make further intercessions before the dignitary of the Abu Dahr family for his son's action. Not only did the attack tarnish the reputation of the man's nuclear and extended family, but it also caused much confusion given the unsurprising coincidence, as the young suicide bomber and the dignitary and the head of the family shared the same name, i.e. Moein Abu Dahr. He is the owner of the famous hospital in the city and the son of Dr. Labib, one of the city's most prominent dignitaries and the representative of one of its biggest families.

According to Adnan, “Mr. Moein” was distressed on the eve his son was identified as one of the suicide bombers who attacked the Iranian Embassy in Beirut on the morning of 19 November 2013. “Mr. Moein has close ties that were harmed due to

the similarity in names.” His hospital receives on a daily basis dozens of Shiite patients from the south, as they prefer it to Hammoud Hospital, whose owner is politically affiliated with the Amal Movement and Hezbollah.

On this day, the Abu Dahr family appeared at the house of the family’s dignitary. The father and uncles of the suicide bomber also showed up and the family issued a statement disowning and condemning the actions of their son.

However, there is a discrepancy between the portrayal of Moein given by those who knew him in the neighborhood, and that provided by his father. According to one of his friends, Moein “used to have fears. But he was curious and did not consider the consequences of his actions. In one neighborhood fight, he broke the hand of a boy his age.”

Nevertheless, according to his father, “he had a fiery temper and wanted his demands to be immediately met. His body was like fire — raging fire.” Yet, his father also recalls his calm and integrity. Accounts about his character are not very consistent, but many agreed that he was lonely, which made people sympathize with him.

According to a man from the neighborhood, Moein was an only child to a man and a woman who both had other children from a previous marriage. He was the half-brother of nine siblings, five from his father’s side and four from his mother’s.

According to another man from the neighborhood, Moein’s childhood was not miserable, despite the modest state of his family. “His father used to win the satisfaction of the boy’s mother by indulging his every whim,” while other men used to warn the father that this would spoil the kid and make him feel that he did not need a job in order to earn spending money.

Moein did not espouse Salafi Jihadism in his religious commitment. Although the video in which he claimed responsibility for the attack against the Iranian Embassy had a background filled with Al Qaeda emblems, Moein was clean-shaven and his Salafi rhetoric seemed to be newly formed and troubled. In the video, each time the bomber stuttered to evoke religious phrases; he would invoke his anger against Hezbollah, which made his speech more cohesive and coherent as he pointed his index finger, making threats.

It was clear that until the day of his suicide bombing, Moein was living under the roof of a non-veiled woman and a religiously uncommitted father, who does not mind admitting in public that he drinks whiskey. He did not even grow his beard the way Salafis do. All of these indications are not signs of Salafism. This is not to

mention that the accounts of Moein's character were not cohesive, suggesting only that the young man had a fiery temper but was neither Salafi nor Takfiri.

Moein was the son of the "outsider" woman, and the brother of the "outsider" siblings, living in the neighborhood of Al-Bustan Al-Kabir in northern Sidon. However, the fact that the mother and the children were outsiders to the city has not been linked to sectarian implications, until recent years. This created some sort of qualitative turbulent, as being from Sidon is more of an attitude than a doctrine.

Moein's mother is Shiite from the southern town of Tuffahta, which is not far from Sidon. She met and married his father after meeting him as a result of jobs she held in the city and its surroundings.

Moein's father describes him as "raging fire". His neighbor says he was "curious", but "gentle and kind-hearted". These descriptions are very common in poor neighborhoods about their young men. However, in the case of Moein, the suicide bomber, the accounts are poor and inconsistent; therefore those following up on his story cannot have a clear image of him.

In the same vein, we should also note that young men who belong to religiously mixed families are prone to extremism in the spur-of-the-moment fueled sectarian sentiments, which is what happens actually on the ground.

In poor environments, mixed marriages can lead to some sort of schizophrenia among their children, which would result in more violence. Ahmed Al-Assir himself is known to have a Shiite mother. Moreover, Mohammed, the nephew of retired Lebanese artist Fadel Shaker, is the son of a Shiite woman from the south of Lebanon. He was one of the most ardent supporters of Al-Assir, and had a role in pushing his uncle to retire from the world of stardom. He fought in Al-Assir's mosque in Abra until he was killed.

The muezzin of the Mosque of Bilal Bin Rabah, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Hariri (Abu Huraira), who was also killed in the fighting in the mosque, grew up with his aunts who are married to Shiite men in the Nabatieh area after his parents separated, not to mention Al-Assir's bodyguard and many others, who fall under this same category.

We should also note that the second suicide bomber of the Iranian Embassy, Adnan Al-Mohammed, was a Palestinian national who grew up in a residential compound for Palestinian refugees in the southern town of Babiliya in the suburbs of Sidon, therefore he and his family lived and co-existed with a more broad Shiite community. According to journalists who visited Mohammed's house, his father displayed on the wall a picture of Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah.

## Violence Deterrents

Meanwhile, one can note that the followers of Al-Assir who belong to unmixed families are more reluctant to take violence to extreme levels.

Those came to follow Al-Assir as a result of traditional practices at mosques in the city, which has always been one of the characteristics of the closed community of Sidon. These ritual practices seek to place the family at the heart of their goals. Thus, fathers leave the house for work from morning to evening, while mothers take care of raising the children, nurturing in them feelings of paternity, femininity and masculinity at the same time, which make them less prone to violence or at least assuage their tendency towards violent actions.

Adnan, the father of the suicide bomber of the Iranian Embassy, comes from a family of farmers. Although Adnan, as his six brothers, is a pickup truck driver, his job is an extension of the family business in the citrus groves.

After picking up citrus fruits, Adnan would transport them in his truck outside the city of Sidon. Thus, by virtue of their job, many of Sidon's farmers were forced to leave the city. They used to stay in remote houses inside the thick orchards located on the outskirts of Sidon. They had ferocious guard dogs and felt as though they were strangers outside their orchards.

Moein was not born in an orchard, as the business in the citrus groves faded away by the time he was born. His father was no longer a farmer. He bought a food trailer and used to sell sandwiches at cheap prices at the entrance of Sidon, and this is how he met Moein's mother.

As the primary professions of the people of Sidon faded away, the people started to mingle with others on the outskirts of the city, which was the case of the "son of Abu Dahr" who met the "outsider" woman at the entrance of Sidon. This mingling, however, caused some turbulence. Sidon is the most mixed city in Lebanon, which came as a result of interests and work relations. However, this mixing generated violence and disorder.

Moein's neighbor, one of the the neighborhood elders named Abu Maarouf, had a hard time believing that Moein was behind the attack, as he was "kind-hearted". His father asked about the remains of his body, which was not given to him. The boy's actions puzzled all the residents of Sidon. However, the account of the father and that of the neighbor are not consistent. According to the father, Moein was "calm" and "had a fiery temper" at the same time.

While the father said that his son did not participate in the battle of the *Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque* in Abra as he remained at home at the time, in the video tape that

was issued less than two weeks ago and was recorded before carrying out the operation, Moein said that he fought in the mosque when the Lebanese Army stormed it. He also stated that he saw with his own eyes, Hezbollah fighters raising their flags with the help of the Lebanese Army.

It seems that the inaccurate account of the father about his son reflects the typical relation between a son and his father, as the latter does not usually know the details of his son's life. After Moein came back from Sweden, he travelled abroad again, but this time to Denmark, where he worked for months in restaurants only to return to Lebanon. This was six months before the attack on the Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque. During this time, Moein used to pray in Al-Bizri Mosque in Al-Bustan Al-Kabir, where young Sheikh Youssef Hunian — who is a follower of Al-Assir and is today in the custody of the Lebanese Army — used to lead the worshipers.

During the six months between Moein's return to Lebanon and the battle of the *Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque*, Sidon had witnessed several sectarian incidents that fueled hatred among the followers of Al-Assir, including Moein of course. During this period, two friends of Moein's, Lubanan Al-Ezzi and Ali Samhoun, were killed in a clash with the Hezbollah-affiliated "Resistance Brigades," as the two young men were trying to remove the flag of the party that was raised at the entrance of the Ain Al-Hilweh Palestinian camp. Moein's father said this was a turning point in his son's transformation into a violent and angry young arm. However, this transformation was more circumstantial than essential, and linked to the outburst of anger during moments of sectarian tension, Moein did not change the way he dressed or his religious mood.

Al-Assir and his group, who made sure to nurture this anger and place it within the framework of their mosque activities, had not by the time reached the level of Salafism, neither in practice nor in ideology. They were radically sectarian but did not espouse Tafikiri ideology, even if they got close to the Salafi preaching.

Moein's father said that the turning point in his son's life was the killing of Ezzi and Samhoun, which was the "minor" tragedy in the "Al-Assir phenomenon"; if we were to consider that the battle of the Mosque of Bilal Bin Rabah was the major one. The father also acknowledged that his son knew better than him and knew how assess things. "He knew better than me in the affairs of life. He had travelled and faced many problems and he certainly knows more than me in religious matters!" This is when the son would feel that his father is a petty man, and thus their roles switch, which is usually the case of many suicide bombers and their families in religious groups.

# Salafi Jihadis in Jordan and the Effects of the Conflict in Syria

*Murad Batal al-Shishani*

## Introduction

The Salafi Jihadi movement in Jordan, the beginnings of which can be traced back to the early 1990s, is a group of disparate entities afforded by a single characteristic. These entities played a key role in shaping the political behavior of this current, as well as in formulating its relationship with the state and security apparatus.

Despite the relatively small size of the country, many of the movement's leaders throughout the world were Jordanian. These include Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdasi, described as the most influential Jihadi theorist in the world,<sup>20</sup> as well as Abu Qatada Al-Filistini, who entered into a judicial battle with the UK and was eventually deported to Jordan based on an agreement between the latter and the UK. Abu Qatada's writings are considered essential literature for the movement. There is also Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, who was leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq until his death in 2005, and currently in Syria, for example, the Sharia theorist for Jabhat Al-Nusra is the Jordanian Sami Al-Aridi. Before all of these were Abdullah Azzam, the spiritual father of the Jihadi movements, who were also Jordanian.

Furthermore, the social nature of the Jordanian state, the presence of Jihadis in areas historically considered close to the head of the movement (such as Salt, Maan, etc.), and the tribal structure of society all contributed to the creation of informal channels of communication between the Salafi Jihadi group and the state, in an attempt to mitigate the intensity of the conflict between the two. The manner in which the state and the security forces dealt with the movement, however, remained unchanged. The relationship between the two sides has gone through various stages, and this paper will address this topic in the form of brief observations. It is part of a larger research project studying the relationship between the Salafi Jihadis in Jordan and the state.

The paper has been divided into three sections, including the rise of the group, the stages of its relationship with the state, and finally the impact of the Syrian crisis as a final stage in this development until now.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> William McCants (Ed.), *Militant Ideology Atlas*, Combating Terrorism Center (West Point NY) November 2006.

<sup>21</sup> This paper is part of a broader research project that has yet to be completed. To cite, please contact the writer via email: [muradbatal@gmail.com](mailto:muradbatal@gmail.com)

## Factors behind Its Rise (the 1990s)

Several factors played a role in the emergence of this movement, with its members who apply Kohl to their eyes and wear Afghan robes taken from the period of the “Afghan Jihad” against the Soviet Union. The return to Jordan from the Gulf of the movement's founder Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdasi — along with many others — played a key role in this rise. He challenged the authorities and was responsible for entering the concepts of “the tyrants”, “neighboring regimes” etc. into the political lexicon in Jordan, which attracted many youth to him.

In that period, the local, regional and international circumstances were changing quickly, which all contributed to providing an infrastructure for this movement. These factors include:

### 1. The Gulf War and the decline of nationalist and leftist ideologies:

The Second Gulf War, following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and which many Arab states entered into, as well as the division of Arabs into various alliances, demolished many of the primary arguments of nationalist and leftist ideologies (especially since the precursors of the Soviet Union's fall had begun to appear). On the other hand, the mobilization against calls for US troops in Saudi Arabia, which occurred for the first time, played a large role in inciting the youth. The victorious Jihadis in Afghanistan were at the front of this scene, and they offered an alternative for the youth.

### 2. The erosion of the middle class and modernization policies, and the decline in the role of the state

Jordan was no exception when it came to proposing market liberalization policies in the early 1990s and keeping up with the global economy, which was heading toward openness. Precursors appeared for privatization policies, which began to shake many segments of society as these policies changed the functional role of the state as a rentier state. With the influx of people fleeing the Gulf War — and their Salafi ideologies — economic pressure played a role in shaking confidence in the safety net provided by the state. Thus, Salafi Jihadis, among others, represented an alternative.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. The strength of the Salafi Jihadis' political rhetoric

As noted previously, the political rhetoric addressed taboos such as criticizing the regime, as well as confronting judges and accusing them of apostasy in the courts. This constituted a new rhetoric that was both striking and attractive.

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<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that the Muslim Brotherhood also used charity groups and associations to win the support of the people. It also offered a security network, thus contributing to the group's expansion in the early 1990s.

#### 4. American intervention and the changing role of security agencies, from the Arab intelligence services to the CIA

Two levels played a role in the US intervention in the region militarily, which incited the feelings of many. This was accompanied by a large mobilization carried out by political movements. Yet, on the other hand, the security factor emerged, and it was associated with “post-Afghan Jihad” armed Islamist groups. The collapse of the Soviet Union pushed the US security agencies, specifically the CIA, to propose a new concept for Arab intelligence agencies in a way that reduced the expenses imposed by the Cold War. This concept involved relying on the intelligence agencies of allied countries with regard to new challenges, including the armed Islamist groups, which were not as prominent as they are now. Jordan was one of the states that were increasingly relied upon.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, the security services in Jordan, specifically the intelligence agency, also witnessed a functional shift. In light of the declining role of Palestinian organizations, which had constituted the primary threat to Jordan's national security since the 1970s, by virtue of the beginnings of the peace processes in the region, the role of Jordanian national security shifted to focus on pursuing Islamist organizations. Thus, the relationship between the two sides was drawn at that time, with periods ranging between tension and calm.

### **Stages of the Relationship between Jordan and the Salafi Jihadi Movement**

The presence of the Salafi Jihadi movement in Jordan, as well as its relationship with the state, has passed through a number of stages. These begin with the establishment stage, up to the September 11 attacks that turned a new page in the relationship between the two sides. The relationship then entered into an open confrontation with the escalation of the role of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi and Al Qaeda in Iraq, followed by the Arab Spring stage and finally the current Syrian crisis stage.

#### 1. The establishment stage, 1990-2001

The movement's establishment stage was characterized by attempts to spread ideology, as well a tense relationship with the state and security services in a limited manner. This was a stage of getting acquainted with one another, and represented a new presence for the current on the Jordanian scene. This stage was characterized by several features, namely:

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<sup>23</sup> Terry McDermott & Josh Meyer, *The Hunt for KSM: Inside the Pursuit and Takedown of the Real 9/11 Mastermind*, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Back Bay Books, 2013.

- a. There were a number of cases before the courts, such as the Bay'at al-Imam, Reform and Challenge, and Millennium cases, etc.
- b. This stage was characterized by ideological theorizing for the movement's pronouncements, as well as an overlap with theory coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- c. Members of the movement began to immigrate to Afghanistan and returned as trainers or loaded with Salafi Jihadi ideology.

## 2. Following the September 11 attacks

This stage imposed the globalization of security, and US dependence on Jordan increased. The confrontation with the movement became international, and the pursuit of the group by security services increased.

## 3. The Iraq War and Al-Zarqawi stage: The open confrontation

With the growing influence of Al-Zarqawi and his organization in Iraq, the relationship developed into an open confrontation between the movement and the state. This resulted in the Amman hotel bombings in 2005, as well as many cases before the courts. There was an increase from 10 cases between 1990 and 2003, to 22 cases between 2003 and 2008. (See Figure 1)

As the confrontation took on a regional and international scope, this stage also saw a demographic-geopolitical shift in the current's activity. The importance of the city of Irbid in northern Jordan increased and weight moved to it, by virtue of its proximity to Syria. It was previously an entry gate for Jihadis going to Iraq to fight the Americans. The paper will address this in detail this when talking about the social incubator for Salafi Jihadis in Jordan.

## 4. The Arab Spring stage

For the first time, Salafi-Jihadis discovered that the youth are capable of changing strong regimes peacefully and more quickly than what was sought by Jihadis for three decades by force of arms. Following reviews by the current's theorists, and in light of attempts to win hearts and minds, the Jihadis found themselves demonstrating in the streets of major Jordanian cities for the first time.

Yet, the authorities did not take advantage of this political tendency and preferred to use the security solution with them. The confrontations in the city of Zarqa (east of the capital Amman) in April 2011 were a pivotal point in relations between the two sides, which exchanged accusations regarding the responsible party. However, the arrest campaign that followed these confrontations was accompanied by an opening a large new Jihadi front in Syria that attracted Jihadis from Jordan and many countries of the world.

## 5. The Syrian crisis stage

Jordanian youth began to travel to Syria, and their numbers are estimated at 700-1,000 fighters. Furthermore, several fatwas were issued calling for Jihad in Syria, the most important of which was by Jordanian Abu Muhammad Al-Tahawi in 2011.<sup>24</sup> The geographical factor has also played a key role in facilitating the recruitment operations.

Based on the nature of the relationship with the state, a division emerged: Those who were wanted by the security forces travelled to Syria illegally via Daraa, and thus mostly joined Jabhat Al-Nusra. As for those who were not wanted by the authorities, they travelled via Turkey and usually joined the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS). Therefore the younger generation was closer to the latter organization, especially in light of the conflict between the two parties that has escalated recently.

### **The Social Incubator for Salafi Jihadis in Jordan**

It is difficult to talk about the social incubator in Jordan, but there is a kind of socio-economic structure that supports this movement, yet it is also variegated. It is necessary to note that the Salafi Jihadi movement in Jordan formed sub-communities within society that include education and mixed marriage, etc.<sup>25</sup>

This social structure, at the economic and educational level, came from poor environments. Most in the Salafi Jihadi community, including its sheikhs, come from poor areas. They work informally due to a lack of support and their tense relationship with the state, and thus work in handicrafts and non-skilled labor. As for education, the vast majority received an average level of education up until general secondary (*tawjihi*).<sup>26</sup>

As for the demographic and geographic dimension, the movement was linked to cities such as Zarqa, Salt and Ma'an in the mid-1990s. However, the majority comprise Jordanians of Palestinian origin (see Figure 2 in the appendices) and are mostly residents of eastern Amman, Zarqa or the governorates. (See Figure 3 in the appendices)

Nevertheless, a large number of Salafi Jihadis, including leading names, have east Jordanian roots. This represented a double-edged sword for the state. While it

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<sup>24</sup> Murad Batal al-Shishani, Jordan's Jihadists Drawn to Syria Conflict, BBC News Online, 30 October 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20127959>.

<sup>25</sup> Murad Batal al-Shishani, Jihadist way of life in Jordan, BBC News Online, 18 February 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-25924689>

<sup>26</sup> Based on the author's analysis of the backgrounds of approximately 75 Salafi Jihadis in Jordan who have been sentenced in various cases since the beginning of the 1990s (the results are preliminary and yet to be completed).

meant there was a security threat from a geographic segment that had always been linked to the regime, at the same time it allowed for mediation between the two parties to alleviate the conflict.

While Zarqa has always maintained its position as the primary stronghold for the movement, and Salt was a powerful refuge for it, the Iraq War in 2003 imposed a new geographic reality. Attention was diverted to the north of the Kingdom, namely the city of Irbid, which was an entry point into Syria. This geographic reality was further instilled with the Syrian crisis, and issues related to Irbid increased.

Moreover, a new development was witnessed among Salafi Jihadis, namely there has been an increase in their influence in Palestinian camps in recent years. It seems that this came as a result of the declining role and influence of Palestinian organizations there. Many recent legal cases have been linked to camps such as the Baqa'a Camp and the Irbid Camp.

### **The Future of the Current in Light of the Syrian Crisis**

While the majority of the movement's supporters are with Jabhat Al-Nusra, the new movement is linked to ISIS, whether as a result of ideology, the strength of ISIS' resources, or by virtue of the conditions of traveling to Syria via Turkey.

Furthermore, although the current has rejected ISIS' practices through its ideological leadership<sup>27</sup>, ISIS has a presence known as "Neo-Zarqawists", who consider themselves part of a campaign following Zarqawi's legacy.<sup>28</sup>

ISIS' expansion in Iraq and Syria, as well as the strength of its resources, poses a challenge to the traditional Salafi Jiahdi current. And if the latter is not able to attract large numbers, there will be a conflict between the "ideological legitimacy" possessed by the traditional Jihadis associated with Al Qaeda and Ayman Al-Zawahri, and the "strength of resources" of ISIS, whether in Iraq or Syria, and with its supporters in a number of states, including Jordan.

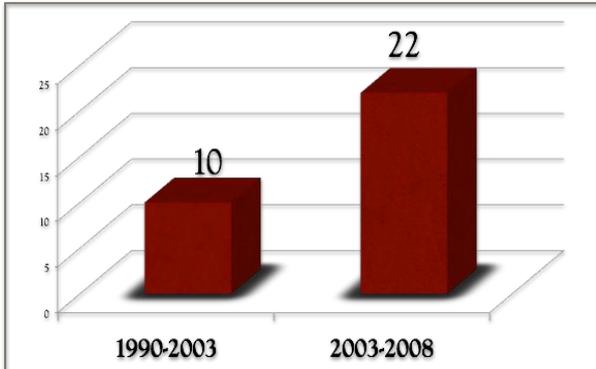
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<sup>27</sup> Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada al-Filistini, and even the current Sharia theorist for Jabhat Al-Nusra the Jordanian national Sami Al-Aridi.

<sup>28</sup> See, Murad Batal al- Shishani, The Neo-Zarqawists: Divisions Emerge between Jordan's Salafist Militants, *Terrorism Focus* (Jamestown Foundation-Washington DC), Vol 5 Issue 39, November 19, 2008. AND Murad Batal al- Shishani, Al-Zarqawi's Legacy Seen in Trial of Jordanian Al Qaeda Cell, *Terrorism Focus*, Vol 6 Issue 4, February 6, 2009. AND Murad Batal al- Shishani, Neo-Zarqawists Target the Arab Christians of Jordan, *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 7 Issue 34, November 13, 2009 AND Murad Batal al-Shishani, The Dangerous Ideas of the Neo-Zarqawist Movement, *CTC Sentinel* (Combating Terrorism Center), Sep 03, 2009.

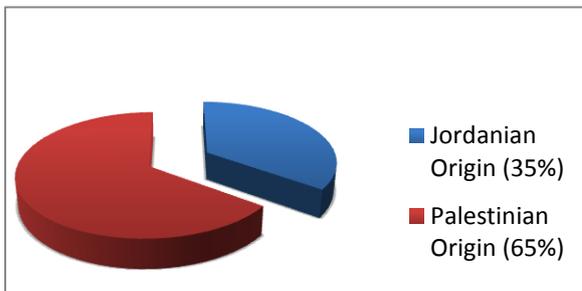
## Appendices

Figure 1: Cases linked to the Salafi Jihadi current in Jordan



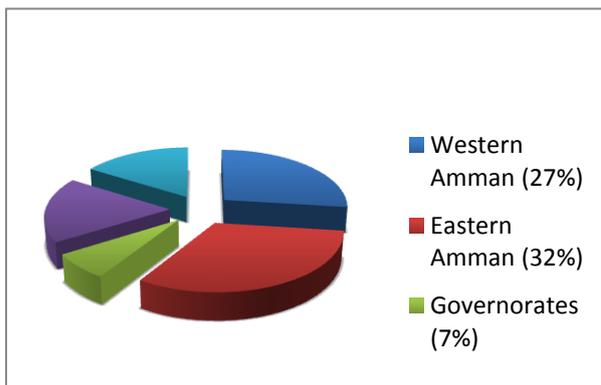
Based on the author's analysis of the backgrounds of approximately 75 Salafi Jihadis in Jordan who have been sentenced in various cases since the beginning of the 1990s (the results are preliminary and yet to be completed)

Figure 2: Division of those convicted in Salafi Jihadi cases in Jordan



Based on the author's analysis of the backgrounds of approximately 75 Salafi Jihadis in Jordan who have been sentenced in various cases since the beginning of the 1990s (the results are preliminary and yet to be completed)

Figure 3: Distribution of Jihadis in Jordan according to area of residence



Based on the author's analysis of the backgrounds of approximately 75 Salafi Jihadis in Jordan who have been sentenced in various cases since the beginning of the 1990s (the results are preliminary and yet to be completed)

# **The Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham: Integrating the Sunni Policy in the Salafist Ideology**

*Haider Saeed*

Following the Sunni Arab tribal militias operations – the Sahwa (Awakening), which was planned and supervised by the US forces in Iraq led by Gen. David Petraeus since the fall of 2007 — the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which was described as the Iraqi branch of Al Qaeda, issued two strategic documents. The first was issued in early 2010, coined “a strategic plan for strengthening ISI’s political position”, consisting of a lengthy text, over 50 pages. The other was titled “The Demolition of Walls”. It was an audio recording by ISI leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi in July 2012. It was his first audio message since he took leadership of the organization in May 2010, following the death of its former leader Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi in April 2010. This audio message highlighted the new strategic visions of ISI and differs greatly from the first document.

This difference between the two documents is not related to the change of leadership inside the organization or to the intellectual accumulation that came as a result of its growth. It was rather linked to the military and political context of the post-Sahwa period.

The first document, “A Strategic Plan”, focused on ISI’s status and its work on the ground. In the document, the organization recognized that it had suffered a major setback with the Sahwa. This was the main point of the document, which tried to put forth a set of strategies and policies to overcome this setback, mainly through military means. ISI suggested that it would be able to fight a full-scale war along the lines of the strategy it had employed from 2004 to 2007. The organization also stated that it would launch qualitative operations, coined “targeting and cracking bones strategy”. These operations were designed to target local opponents [in Iraq], which ISI called “the infidels” instead of targeting what it called the “crusaders”, i.e. the Americans. This strategy is summed up by what the organization coined “nine bullets at the infidels and one at the crusaders”. This meant a full-scale operation targeting the army and police in order to create a state of terror among those who wish to enroll in these two institutions, not to mention the targeting of political figures and most importantly the Sahwa councils and members. In this context, the document called for the establishment of what it

called “the Jihadist Sahwa Councils”, in alliance with the dignitaries of the local community, especially tribal leaders who did not engage in the Sahwa paramilitaries established by the Americans.

As for the “Demolition of Walls” audio message, it coincided with the withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq in late 2010. By the middle of 2012, ISI had started to pick up the pieces, possibly in order to implement what it had declared in the previous document about the need to prepare for the period following the withdrawal of US troops.

Unlike the contents of the previous document, which focused on qualitative operations, Baghdadi declared in the audio recording that ISI would attempt to retake the regions that were under the control of the Islamic State or its predecessors, before the Sahwa from 2004 to 2008.

The Demolition of Walls focused on three main things:

- Regaining control over the regions from which ISI had been removed
- Fighting the Shiite rule, which the organization calls “the Safavid rule”
- Liberating Muslim prisoners<sup>29</sup>

The period following the announcement of the “Demolition of Walls” project had witnessed a series of qualitative operations, which focused on storming prisons where ISI members were incarcerated, in an attempt to smuggle them out. These attempts culminated in the attack of the prisons of *Taji* and *Abu Ghraib* in July 2013, where members affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) had been locked up, leading to the escape of more than 500 members of the organization, including senior leaders who were facing death sentences. ISIS considered this operation to be the end of the “Demolition of Walls” campaign.<sup>30</sup>

These turns of events cannot be viewed in isolation from the acute political crisis suffered by the Iraqi political regime that was established after 2003.

In general, radical political organizations are the outcome of the environment and the political situation that had been plagued with structural imbalances. The growth of these radical organizations, such as Al Qaeda and ISIS, can serve as an important example to illustrate this idea. Indeed, the emergence of these groups reflects the dysfunctional political situation and deep political and social rifts, which served as fertile soil to become independent and for them to expand. Thus,

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<sup>29</sup> See: the text of the Demolition of Walls, which was first coined by Baghdadi “For God has willed to spread his light”, <http://www.dd-sunnah.net/forum/showthread.php?t=153320>.

<sup>30</sup> A statement on “vanquishing the tyrant” in the prisons of Abu Ghraib and Taji, The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sahm, July 23, 2013 <http://m.arahmah.com/arabic/ad-dwlt-al-islamyt-fy-al-raq-walsham-byanun-an-ghzwt-qhr-at-ttwaghyt-fy-sjny-aby-ghryb-waltajy.html>

one cannot argue that the strength of these organizations is derived from their autonomy. They depend on the environments supporting them, starting from the social acceptance within a political context, which would allow the social components to tip the balance of power in their favor, and use these radical groups as an instrument of vengeance or pressure.

### **Iraq's Post 2003 Political Crisis**

The overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime by US military forces in April 2003 represented a watershed in the history of the Iraqi state. The nation has been redefined as a pluralistic state, and the political system was conceived to reflect a partnership between all Iraqi components.

The first design of this pluralistic system was conceived as part of the *Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period*, which was passed in March 2004 and served as a provisional constitution. This governing system was proposed by the US, which means that it was a foreign idea and did not emanate from the Iraqi political elite, who did not envision such a multiple-identity state.

This design incorporated the main pillars of pluralism (decentralization, federalism, proportional representation and mutual veto), which is considered to be the optimal political system for divided societies. Iraq was therefore seen as a divided nation. However, the permanent Constitution of 2005, which was drafted by an elected Iraqi committee, was accompanied by the rise of a majority rule which systemically sought to bring down several pillars in the pluralistic system. In fact, the 2005 Constitution provides two conflicting political tendencies: a pluralistic inclination (as stipulated in the *Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period*), and inclination towards a non-pluralistic system seeking majority rule.

The second inclination seemed to have led the Shiite political elite to oppose the idea of a pluralistic state. This was due to nationalist and traditional considerations, but also to political scenarios that could play out to the [favor of Shiites] given the demographic majority.

Thus, the pillars of the pluralistic system were brought down in favor of a majority rule, which is still locked in a long process to contain the pluralist system.

In any case, the inclination towards a majority rule, which is included in the 2005 Constitution, served as a platform upon which the tyranny of the majority was established during former Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's eight-year reign (2006 – 2014). During this period, the majority took control of every facet of the political

system and the political institutions in general. Moreover, Al-Maliki did not address local parties, especially Sunni politicians, as partners in the political process, but rather as representatives of cross-border alliances and axes.

Generally speaking, Al-Maliki considered the post-Arab spring conflict in Iraq to be part of a regional crisis. In his second term (2010 – 2014), which coincided with the Arab Spring and was marked by ongoing crises, Al-Maliki exercised political harassment against Sunni political figures. This was most clearly reflected in issuing an arrest warrant against Vice President Tarek Al-Hashimi and sentencing him to death in late 2011. This is not to mention the storming the office of Finance Minister Rafie Al-Issawi, a prominent Sunni leader, and arresting his bodyguards in late 2012, arresting MP Ahmed Al-Alwani after raiding his house and killing his brother following the government's declaration of war on ISIS in the desert of Anbar. This is in addition to the dozens of arrest warrants against a broad spectrum of Sunni political elite.

This political abuse constituted the spark that triggered wide protests in Sunni provinces following the arrest of Rafie Al-Issawi's bodyguards. This movement, however, is the product of a growing sense among Iraq's Sunni community that the ruling establishment does not reflect equal partnership in power.

Therefore, the protests quickly shifted from supporting Al-Issawi's cause to raising a set of demands concerning the Sunni community. These demands concerned judicial, legal, political, military and security proceedings, most notably releasing all detainees accused with respect to Article 4 of the Anti-terrorism Act, suspending the actions in virtue of this article, and dropping all cases with regard to this. They also called for abolishing the Accountability and Justice Law, which according to Sunnis was being used to target and practice collective punishment upon their community and had become a politicized tool for blackmail. They also demanded achieving balance in all state institutions, particularly in the military, the security forces and the judiciary.<sup>31</sup>

However, Al-Maliki dealt with the Sunni protest movements as being rebel movements aimed at targeting the [Shiite-led] legitimate government in Baghdad. Al-Maliki argued that these movements are part of the regional conflict and are supported by regional powers, and could not see that they stem from a crisis in the existing political system. Therefore, he did not attempt to launch serious negotiation initiatives with them.

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<sup>31</sup> See the full text of demands in the Kuwaiti al-Watan Newspaper, Issue no. 6 Jan.2013 <http://alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?Id=245801>.

## The Rise of ISIS

However, it seems that the Sunni protest movement [in its headquarters in Anbar at least] was determined to keep the demonstrations peaceful, despite threats made by the government to break up the sit-ins, and despite security incidents caused by protesters [which were the results of provocations on the part of the government]. Efforts to maintain the peaceful nature of the protests were also made despite the Sunni movement was being surrounded by extremist groups such as ISI, which were attempting to take advantage of the situation to launch violent attacks on a broader scale. Indeed, the extremist group succeeded in urging protesters to take up arms against Al-Maliki because “peace and patience” are pointless when dealing with “the Shiite-led government” according to ISI spokesperson Abu Mohammed Al-Adnani. In late January 2013 (one month after the protests broke out), Al-Adnani addressed the protesters in an audio recording: “You have only two options, either you bow and surrender to the *rawāfiḍ* (a derogatory term for Shiites) which is out of the question, or take up arms against them and rise up. Should you decide not to take up arms and be precautious, you shall taste the horrors at the hands of the *rawāfiḍ* who will never stop deceiving you.”<sup>32</sup>

Back then, ISI was still on the ropes, suffering the setbacks as the result of the Sahwa counter-terrorism operations. However, in late 2011, the organization would play a cross-border role, by taking part in the events of Syria. And even though the role the group played in Syria has greatly strengthened its stance among the armed Sunni militant groups in the region, ISI sought, amidst heightened sectarian tension, to reclaim its role locally, in light of the persisting political crisis where the Sunnis supporting the Syrian “Revolution” are countered by Shiite support for the regime. Thus, the Syrian crisis constituted the vital element that helped restore confidence in ISI, which in turn allowed the group to re-recruit fighters it had lost to the Sahwa. This represented a major turning point in favor of ISI.<sup>33</sup>

However, ISI could never have gained ground had not been accepted and supported at the social-local level.

Furthermore, it seemed that the protest movements in various Sunni areas had different goals and ambitions. Though it was determined that protests be kept peaceful in Anbar province, protesters in other areas were seeking to take the

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<sup>32</sup> Quoting Al Qaeda: (Al Qaeda) in Iraq urges people to take up arms against Al-Maliki - Reuters, Feb.1 2013 <http://www.observeme.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=30276>.

<sup>33</sup> See: The Syrian Crisis and Its Repercussions on Iraq, Haider Saeed, Iraq’s Research Center, Baghdad, July, 2012, p. 4-5.

movement to a violent level, in an attempt to break the stalemate the movements have reached. This is not to mention that the political leaders of the movement in those areas held different views from their counterparts in Anbar, and some of them had ambitions to carry out a coup such as members of the Baath Party and former army officers.

In this context, armed clashes were reported between a number of protesters at the sit-in square in Hawijah and a nearby army checkpoint on 19 April 2013. A soldier and a protester died as a result, prompting the army to besiege the square in search of the person who shot the soldier. However, the situation quickly escalated and the army broke up the sit-in on 23 April by force and burned the protesters' tents, injuring and arresting dozens.

The Hawijah clashes were a turning point in the Sunni protests and ISI's stance, in addition the course of political and security events in the country in general.

In light of the government's violent clampdown on protesters to break up the sit-in in Hawijah, it appeared for the Sunni community that the Iraqi authorities would not address the demands of the movement in a peaceful manner, and that they would continue to crack down on it. Thus, the Sunni movement reneged on its peaceful approach and started a series of attacks on the army. This was the opportunity for ISI to tighten its grip on the Sunni community and to trigger extremist acts and behaviors. This effortless social acceptance of ISI without any defenses is, once again, linked to the crisis of the political regime.

This incident coincided with the proclamation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), allowing the organization to restore the quality and size of acts it had used to carry out in Iraq during the period from 2004 to 2007, before the establishment of the Sahwa.

One of the most important pieces of evidence demonstrating the rise of ISIS following the Hawijah protests is the rising number of civilian casualties.

Those who follow up on the Iraq Body Count website — which is dedicated to counting the number of civilian victims killed in military and political violent acts since the start of the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003 — would notice that during the months following the protests of Hawijah (in May 2013 and during the subsequent events) that there had been a sharp rise and a record number of Iraqi civilian casualties since mid-2008, when the numbers of civilian casualties began to decline gradually, following the battles of the Sawlat Al Fursan campaign (Attack of the Knights) against Shiite militias in the south and the Sahwa, which almost managed to eliminate Al Qaeda. In April 2008, civilian deaths numbered 1,309. In May of the same year this number decreased to reach 902, and 748 in June, and so

on. On average, the number of civilian deaths ranged between 218-682 people per month, during the period from July 2008 to April 2013.

Following the Hawijah protests, the number of civilian casualties during the month of May 2013 (i.e. the first month after the break-up of sit-ins) amounted to 888 people, which is the highest since May 2008. In July 2013, a new record was set, which was the highest since April 2008, with 1,145 victims. Furthermore, in September of the same year, civilian deaths numbered 1,306 — which was another new record. In June 2014, when Mosul fell [to ISIS], the number of civilian casualties totaled 1,934, which is the highest since August 2007 — the peak of the civil war in Iraq before the launching of the Sahwa campaigns.

In general, the number of civilian victims returned in 2013 to its previous level in 2008, with an approximate total of 10,000 deaths per year. While from 2009-2012, this number ranged between 4,000 and 5,000 deaths per year<sup>34</sup>. It is estimated that the number of deaths in 2014 would exceed the figures of the years 2008 and 2013 and would be close to the numbers recorded in 2006 and 2007.

During the period between 2009 and 2013, the violent acts had a specific pace, as ISI did not manage to carry out its qualitative operations, which occurred once every few months. However, since the outbreak of clashes in Hawijah, the organization had managed to implement a series of qualitative operations, targeting government institutions.

According to Michael Knights, “In 2010, the low point for the Al Qaeda effort in Iraq, the movement’s signature attacks like car bombings declined to an average of 10 a month and multiple-city coordinated attacks occurred only two or three times a year. Suicide operations are on the increase too: in 2010 these had dropped to an average of six per month, and this average was maintained throughout 2012. In 2013, there has been so far an average of 22 per month. At the low point of violence in Iraq in early 2011, the country suffered about 300 major security incidents a month. Throughout 2013, the monthly total of incidents has regularly topped 1,200.”<sup>35</sup>

In fact, the upward curve of ISI qualitative operations started with the announcement of the Demolition of Walls project. However, these operations focused mainly on the attacks on prisons and detention centers to liberate ISI-affiliated prisoners. It appears that freeing the prisoners was the main goal of the

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database>.

<sup>35</sup> The Resurgence of Al Qaeda in Iraq, Michael Knights, The Washington Institute For Near East Policy, Washington D. C., Dec. 2013, p. 3.

Demolition of Walls operation, besides the attempt to retake the areas that were under the control of ISI and its predecessors during the period from 2004 to 2008.

As for ISI's military operations after the Hawijah clashes, they were different in terms of quality and quantity. The analogy can be summed up in the following points:

- The post-Hawijah clashes were more intensive, suggesting that ISIS had managed to restore some of the power it lost during the Sahwa.
- The operations targeted official, civil and military institutions.
- The operations could be an extension of the Demolition of Wars project, in which Al-Baghdadi declared that his organization would regain control of the areas it had lost to the Sahwa.
- These operations were highly intensive in Sunni provinces, targeting the state's institutions there. Thus, it was possible to extrapolate the upcoming map of ISIS from the Hawijah clashes, and the start of what was known as the crisis of Anbar in late 2013 and early 2014.

## **ISIS and the Sunni Framework**

The relationship between the Sunnis of Iraq and ISIS remains ambiguous. On the one hand, the vast majority of Sunnis view ISIS as a retaliatory tool in the face of the harassment and marginalization on the part of the Baghdad-based Iraqi central government, which did not yield to their demands. On the other hand, they felt a sense of embarrassment, as they believed that their political initiative had been hijacked by ISIS. Thus, following the events in Mosul on 9 June 2014 [the fall of Mosul], the Sunnis' narrative of events has changed, as they denounced ISIS and reduced what has happened to a (popular uprising), carried out and led by (rebel clans).

This narrative, however, was slightly confusing, especially with the proclamation of the caliphate on 29 June 2014, and when thousands of young men from Sunni areas joined the ranks of the so-called popular uprising, not to mention that the crucial role played by members of the previous army. This narrative summarizes the confusion that prevails among Iraq's Sunnis.

The truth of the matter is that ISIS and the Sunni issue are intertwined, especially since many of the organization's leaders, including Al-Baghdadi (originally known as Ibrahim Awad Al-Badri Al-Samarrai), are Iraqi Sunnis and share the same general sentiments of Iraqi Sunnis.

Furthermore, ISIS is the political organization that is closest to the general Sunni ideology in the Middle East, since Sunnis view it as an efficient means in the face of the rising Shiite tide, in the context of the sectarian conflict plaguing the region.

In this context, it should be noted that the term “Safavids” to refer to Shiites is very common in Al-Baghdadi's rhetoric and speeches. This term was not commonly used among ISIS' previous leaders. For instance, Al-Zarqawi — who used to take a tough stance against Shiites and did not consider them to be Muslims, calling for killing them — used to refer to them as “*rawāfiḍ*”, which was used by Omar Al-Baghdadi. Al-Zarqawi also called them “*rawāfiḍ al-Majous*” in reference to Iranian Shiites. And while Omar Al-Baghdadi labeled Iraq's Shiites “the collaborating Iraqi police”, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi referred to them as “the Safavid Army”, and the “Safavid Police”, etc. Besides the sectarian implication of the term “Safavids”, it also has an ethnic allusion, as it refers to the Safavid State, which is the Iranian state that changed Iran's denomination from the Sunni schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi and Shaf'i) to the Jaafari doctrine.

It seems to me that Al-Baghdadi's use of the term “Safavids” is linked to two factors:

- Al-Baghdadi is Iraqi, thus the common use of this term is linked to his Iraqi background. The term is an Iraqi expression that has been used in political and cultural debates since the founding of the modern Iraqi state to refer to Iraqi Shiites who are said to be of Iranian origins and that their political allegiance to Iran is far greater than their loyalty to Iraq. It is also derived from the literature of the conflict over Iraq between Iranians (the Safavids and then the Qajars) and the Ottomans.
- The term is linked to the rise of sectarian axes in the region following the Arab Spring, which underlines the fact that Al-Baghdadi's acts are based on his Sunni identity rather than on his Salafist ideology.

Nevertheless, all political actors inside Iraq or abroad ought to endeavor to detach and distance ISIS from the Sunni issue in Iraq. One should not deny the existence and heavy presence of ISIS. Yet, ISIS and Iraq's Sunnis have two different paths to travel. While ISIS seeks to establish an ideological project by proclaiming the caliphate, whose boundaries go beyond Iraq's borders, Sunnis demand a [more balanced] political status in the Baghdad-based central government.

They should also take into consideration the possibility of the development of ISIS' relationship with the Sunni community in Iraq along the lines of what happened in Syria, where the organization has been engaged in an armed conflict with Sunni factions over influence and control (despite the fact that the latter do not seem to

be able to be up to the level of such a conflict. Yet, the situation in Syria is different from that in Iraq, where ISIS has almost full control over the space of the armed Sunni factions). This is not to mention the possibility of ISIS' greater ideological influence over the local community, particularly after the proclamation of the caliphate.

ISIS bombed shrines of prophets in the city of Mosul in late July 2014, namely the shrine of the Prophet Jonah, which represents an essential part of the city's identity. This was a turning point in the relationship between the local community and ISIS, as the latter failed to preserve this difficult balance, between gaining the trust of the local community and implementing its Salafist project.

Subsequently, the former parliament speaker, Osama Al-Nujaifi — who is one of the most prominent Sunni figures in Iraq and hails from Mosul — declared the formation of local armed factions to confront ISIS. However, this task seemed complicated as ISIS controls most of the weapons in the possession of civilians, not to mention that the line of military support to Mosul had been disrupted. Thus, these factions (if ever formed) would have no military or logistic support.

### **ISIS: The Issue of Sunnis and Regional Developments**

The post-Arab Spring regional developments, especially the Syrian Revolution, did not only play a major role in re-defining the conflict in Iraq, but they also affected the growth of ISIS. The organization has managed through the Syrian Revolution to restore its power in Syria, which has witnessed the biggest Jihadi uprising that was even greater than that of Afghanistan and Iraq combined. This is especially true in terms of the number of fighters, factions and size of armament. Before the Arab Spring, ISI was dead on its feet.

ISI joined the Syrian Revolution the moment it was militarized. This was its first cross-border role towards assuming a much more crucial position and control over regions under Sunni armed forces, as is happening now.

In late 2011, ISI established Jabhat Al-Nusra led by Abu Mohammed Al-Joulani. In January 2012, for the first time, Jabhat Al-Nusra claimed responsibility for a suicide attack in Syria. ISIS continued to manage and supervise Jabhat Al-Nusra, until in April 2013, when Al-Baghdadi declared that Jabhat Al-Nusra and ISIS are to operate under the same banner of the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS). This is when Al-Joulani announced Jabhat Al-Nusra's commitment to the line of Al-Zawahri, which according to researchers was the first formal correlation between Jabhat Al-Nusra and Al Qaeda.

In fact, the fall of Mosul into the hand of ISIS can be explained not only in light of the injustice towards Sunnis, but in light of two parallel events, which are the growth of ISIS on the one hand, and the regional developments, namely the Syrian Revolution and its repercussions, on the other.

Indeed, the growth of ISIS, the injustice towards Sunnis and the regional developments, culminated in the fall of Mosul.

The following timetable is an example to give a clearer view of this synchronization of events:

	<b>The Issue of Sunnis in Iraq</b>	<b>The Growth of ISIS</b>	<b>Regional Developments</b>
<i>June 2014</i>	The fall of Mosul into the hands of ISIS and the proclamation of the caliphate		
<i>May 2014</i>		Al-Zawahri demands Al-Baghdadi to obey, but the latter refuses	
<i>Late 2013</i>	The Anbar crisis and ISIS gains control of its two largest cities, Al-Ramadi and Fallujah	Targeting ISIS in Syria	
<i>July 2013</i>	ISIS Storms the prisons of Abu Gharib and Taji		
<i>June 2013</i>		Al-Zawahri declares the end of the merger between the branches of Al Qaeda in Iraq (the Islamic State in Iraq) and in Syria (Jabhat Al-Nusra) that was previously announced by Al-Baghdadi. A few days later, Al-Baghdadi retaliates in an audio recording coined "ISIS is here to stay".	
<i>After May 2013</i>	Talk about Al Qaeda re-insurgency		
<i>April 2013</i>	The Hawijah clashes	Al-Baghdadi declares that Jabhat Al-Nusra and ISIS are to operate under the same banner of the Islamic State of Iraq	

	<b>The Issue of Sunnis in Iraq</b>	<b>The Growth of ISIS</b>	<b>Regional Developments</b>
		and Al-Sham (ISIS). The next day, Jabhat Al-Nusra leader Al-Joulani denounced Al-Baghdadi and pledges allegiance to Al-Zawahri, Al Qaeda's leader	
<i>Late 2012</i>	The outbreak of protests in Iraq's Sunni provinces		
<i>July 2012</i>	Al-Baghdadi announces the "Demolition of Wall" campaign		
<i>Early 2012</i>		For the first time, Jabhat Al-Nusra claims responsibility for a suicide operation in Syria	
<i>Late 2011</i>	The completion of the US troops withdrawal from Iraq  The crisis of accusing the vice president Al-Hashemi of supporting terrorism	ISI declares its first cross-border operation and oversees the formation of Jabhat Al-Nusra in Syria	
<i>March 2011</i>			The outbreak of the Syrian Revolution
<i>December 2010</i>	The formation of Al-Maliki's second government		The outbreak of the Arab Spring
<i>April / May 2010</i>		Proclaiming Abu Bakr Al-Baghdad as emir of ISI following the death of Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi in a joint Iraqi-American military	

	<b>The Issue of Sunnis in Iraq</b>	<b>The Growth of ISIS</b>	<b>Regional Developments</b>
		operation	
<i>Early 2010</i>		ISI issues its strategic document coined (A strategic plan for strengthening ISI's political position)	

This timetable demonstrates the synchronization of watershed events, which allowed ISIS to take over the second largest city in Iraq, starting from the formation of Al-Maliki's second government and the start of the Arab Spring, which allowed Al-Maliki to tighten his grip on power and fight against Sunnis. This is not to mention that these events redefined the conflict in Iraq as part of a cross-border conflict between ethno-sectarian axes, which also coincided with the withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq, and the crisis of accusing the vice president Tarkek Al-Hashemi of supporting terrorism. Also, ISI started around the same time its first cross-border mission by overseeing the formation of Jabhat Al-Nusra in Syria, in addition the Hawijah clashes and the inception of ISIS, and its subsequent unprecedented uptick since 2008, following the Sahwa, and finally the crisis in Anbar and the targeting of ISIS in Syria.

The Sunni pragmatic approach remained steadfast in light of these events and the expansion of ISIS following the Hawijah clashes and the outbreak of the Anbar crisis, setting a limit for ISIS, in the hope of making a peaceful change in the ruling establishment through elections. Yet, the election results ripped the last hope for pragmatism among Sunnis, who finally gave in to extremism. This is of course one of the factors that led to the fall of Mosul.

In October 2013, during the height of the crisis, Gen. Petraeus wrote an article titled "How We Won in Iraq" in which he recalled the Sahwa and the factors that led to its success. Through his text, Petraeus wanted to convey a message to Iraqi leaders on how to overcome the crisis and counter Al Qaeda's re-insurgency.

Thus, he focused on two main points: Al Qaeda's growth is directly linked to the demands and grievances among the Sunni community; the Sahwa cannot be

reduced to a mere a political project but it is also a civil and political one, which was based on many factors, mainly the comprehensive national reconciliation.<sup>36</sup>

“The different future was possible only if Iraqi political leaders capitalized on the opportunities that were present. Sadly, it appears that a number of those opportunities were squandered, as political infighting and ethno-sectarian actions reawakened the fears of Iraq's Sunni Arab population and, until recently, also injected enormous difficulty into the relationship between the government in Baghdad and the leaders of the Kurdish Regional Government”,<sup>37</sup> Petraeus wrote.

“And various actions by the Iraqi government have undermined the reconciliation initiatives of the surge that enabled the sense of Sunni Arab inclusion and contributed to the success of the venture. Moreover, those Iraqi government actions have also prompted prominent Sunnis to withdraw from the government and led the Sunni population to take to the streets in protest. As a result of all this, Iraqi politics are now mired in mistrust and dysfunction. This is not a road that Iraqis had to reach. Once again, it is important to note that the surge was all of the above, a *comprehensive* civil-military campaign, not just a substantial number of additional forces”,<sup>38</sup> he added.

## **The Composition of Armed Factions in Mosul**

It may not be easy to talk about the varieties and structures of the armed factions in Mosul and other Sunni areas. In general, however, the discussion can be divided on two levels:

The first is the nature of the main factions, which are three: The Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), the Baath Party along with a group of pre-2003 Iraqi Army officers, and the Sunni militias that were active within the former (Iraqi resistance).

These factions shared the same goal, which is confronting the incumbent regime in Baghdad. However, each has different ambitions. ISIS wants to establish a caliphate, which the group announced on 29 June. The Baath Party seeks to carry out a coup against the current regime in Baghdad, which would take things back to square one. On the other hand, the Sunni militias and those mobilized under the “Sunni revolution” narrative — I will talk about those later, as they can be classified as a fourth type of armed factions — aim to address the imbalances in

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<sup>36</sup>.[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/10/29/david\\_petraeus\\_how\\_we\\_won\\_the\\_surge\\_in\\_iraq](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/10/29/david_petraeus_how_we_won_the_surge_in_iraq).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

the ruling establishment in Baghdad. It seems that this goal is gradually shifting toward the idea of establishing a federal region that includes the Sunni provinces, or at least securing further decentralized powers. For this party, there is no return to the pre-9 June 2014 times, without at least achieving this goal as the fruit of the (Sunni uprising).

Certainly, ISIS is the chief party and striking power among these parties. The group established control over Mosul on the evening of 9 June 2014. The operation was carried out by hundreds of fighters, who set out from the Syrian province of Raqqa — which is fully controlled by ISIS — and crossed the Iraqi-Syrian border in the north — where Iraqi military control is weak — to Mosul.

The parties that were most disconcerted with the events that took place in Mosul are the Sunni elite in general, as ISIS became a tool to avenge what they describe as “the tyranny of the Shiite government.” ISIS later practically became the political and military representative of the Iraqi Sunnis, which, I believe, is something they will not accept. Therefore, I expected the Sunni narrative of the events to move in the following direction: ISIS is not the leading party in the events, but is a specific and limited party; [these acts] are being carried out by rebellious tribesmen, former army officers, and former resistance factions; and what is happening is a comprehensive Sunni uprising or revolt against the central government in Baghdad.

This version of events is exactly what has happened in Anbar province since early 2014. At the time, it raised wide hopes that the developments in Anbar would lead to a comprehensive Sunni uprising, as well as in other provinces and Sunni areas. However, this did not happen for technical and political reasons. ISIS did not have the technical and logistical support to take the battle outside Anbar, even during periods where the battle had become stagnant, and the solution was to transfer it outside of Anbar, particularly to Mosul. But ISIS was only able to open limited fronts in limited areas, from which it quickly withdrew, as was the case in Sulayman Bek, Buhriz and Samarra. The group’s entry to Mosul was expected to be a small-scale raid for political reasons, since Sunni pragmatism at the time did not allow ISIS to operate outside the borders drawn for it.

After 9 June 2014, tens of thousands of fighters were mobilized under the “Sunni uprising” narrative. These may be considered as the fourth category of armed factions, even if they were not as clearly organized as other factions.

ISIS seems to be aware of this dynamic. Therefore, I assume that its main strategy is to control both society and the armed factions, relying on several means:

- ISIS is trying to avoid the mistakes made by its predecessors (Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn, and the Islamic State of Iraq) while they controlled Anbar province or parts of it during 2004-2008, particularly the forced Islamization of all aspects of life and abuse of local dignitaries, which is one of the factors that led to a conflict of interest between the Islamic State of Iraq and the community, and consequently the armed clashes. Despite the scarcity and ambiguity of news coming from Mosul, it appears that ISIS' cruelty is not being directed at the Sunnis, but at followers of other religions and sects (Christians, Shiites, Yezidis, the Shabak...). ISIS is trying to look like a pragmatic political party, rather than an insular ideological group in order to win the support of local communities, or at least not to lose their support.
- This double-faced approach may be one of the strategies adopted by ISIS to establish authority: the pragmatic political face with the Sunnis, while applying its ideological doctrine with people of other religions and sects (exerting Jizya (fines), rulings against apostates...).
- ISIS is also trying to accept some of the choices of the local communities with regards to the formation of local administrations during times of power vacuum and the collapse of the existing departments, as has happened in Mosul.
- ISIS has adopted a strict approach with the other armed factions, prohibiting the display of any flags in Mosul other than that of ISIS. It seems that one of the main goals behind the announcement of the Islamic caliphate on 29 June is to establish its authority and control the movement of the armed factions, rather to completely silence them. The announcement primarily targets the Sunni political and military parties, since it was made at a time when there was increased talk about the role of the rebel clans and the obliteration of ISIS. However, it may also be related to internal dynamics that eventually led ISIS to make this announcement, such as popular support of its ideology, the group's expansion (which, after controlling Mosul and the branch of the Iraqi Central Bank there, acquired \$1-1.5 billion, seized weapons of the Iraqi Army, and managed to recruit large numbers of fighters), the ambition of global expansion, and competition from Al Qaeda led by Al-Zawahri.
- Another point worth mentioning is the group's structure. ISIS is composed of three types of fighters:

- The ideological component at the leadership level, which is a continuation of the line adopted by Zarqawi and ISIS' ancestors, as well as those who have been recruited from the "Arab Jihadis Group". We do not have accurate figures or statistics on the number and percentage of these fighters.
- Fighters who have been recruited after the re-emergence of Al Qaeda following the clashes in Hawijah: These fighters are estimated to number in the thousands or more, and were recruited by various means, such as the provision of financial incentives as ISIS acquired wealth, ideological means, political means (employing the "Sunni injustice" narrative), or sectarian means (use of the phobia against Shiites and the existing sectarian alignments). ISIS, which occupied Fallujah in early 2014 by scores of fighters is now said to comprise thousands of fighters, who have been recruited or mobilized in this way.
- Members of the former Iraqi Army, which the government failed to contain after 2003, now provide their expertise to many armed factions that oppose the current regime.
- In fact, they are affiliated with all the current armed factions: ISIS, groups associated with the Baath Party and Sunni militias that fought under the "Iraqi resistance", in addition to thousands who were recruited within the framework of the "Sunni uprising".

### **Towards a New Awakening?**

In any case, only the Sunni community can fight and defuse the battle with ISIS. The two months that preceded the fall of Mosul have proved that the Iraqi Army is incapable of fighting the battle against ISIS. Since it is a guerrilla war, it was not trained to fight, and given that ISIS' supportive environment is one that is hostile to the army, which they see as a product and tool of a political regime that has marginalized and persecuted them, not to mention the structural problems in the composition of the army.

We have learned from our experience in fighting Al Qaeda through the Sahwa in the years 2007 and 2008 that the US military itself was unable to counter Al Qaeda. It was confronted by the local communities through the creation of conflicting interests between the radical ideological groups and the local community, then supporting the community in the confrontation.

However, the Sunni community will not fight this battle, unless it leads to the modification of the political system, which would allow the Sunnis more effective

participation in the decision-making process. These modifications would include granting Sunni areas broader decentralized powers, including security independence. Moreover, they should recognize the Sunni uprising, as this would imply that they were not granted but are the product of long years by the Sunnis. It is noteworthy that the conditions that produced the Sahwa project are not present today.

The first step should stem from a conviction by internal and external actors of the need to launch a radical political course that would address the imbalances in the ruling establishment over the past years. At the heart of these ideas, this course should be committed to launching a serious political initiative towards the Sunni community in Iraq, part of which has succumbed to extremism in the context of political injustice.

Launching a reformist political course and the belief that the battle against ISIS can only be fought by the local community is the only guarantor to creating a context of conflicting interests between ISIS and the local community, which would be followed by providing logistical, military, financial and intelligence support to armed groups like Sahwa. There should also be a well-defined plan regarding the future of these groups to avoid a repeat of previous mistakes in dealing with Sahwa committed by the former Prime Minister Al-Maliki's government, which resulted in weakening and dismantling the group, and a large number of its members rejoining the radical groups.

This path to a solution is the last chance for Iraq to remain united, if it succeeds in addressing a century-long legacy of a deficient political system. Above all, this path is a test of the ability of the region to build a new, more just, efficient, and flexible model of management for diverse and divided communities.

# Radical Islamist movements in Egypt

*Amr Hashim Rabie*

It was widely believed that the fall of President Mohamed Morsi on 3 July 2013 constituted an important stop in the history of the re-emergence of radical Islam in Egypt. In fact, this date takes us back to the January 2011 revolution, and it can be linked to the fall of former President Hosni Mubarak's rule on 11 February 2011 more than to the fall of Morsi's rule.

When terrorist operations escalated in Egypt following the fall of Morsi, Dr. Mohamed Beltagy stated that these acts would immediately stop as soon as Morsi returns a decision-maker in Egypt. Beltagy denied dozens of times that what he meant by his statement was for the Muslim Brotherhood to assume responsibility for the acts of violence.

His words went viral due to the media, which remained at odds with the Brotherhood, and they were unstoppable. However, despite this accusation directed at Beltagy, it seems naïve to believe that radical groups emerged overnight after the fall of Morsi's rule, even if their operations on the ground witnessed a huge shift in its wake.

This paper tackles radical Islam movements in Egypt through an attempt to answer three main questions:

- Why did radical Jihadi movements resume work in Egypt, after having stopped for years and having made huge historical and ideological reviews?
- How can the rise of some political violence movements and their spread from the Sinai to other Egyptian suburbs be explained?
- What are the future prospects of radical movements appearing on the Egyptian scene?

## **The Return of Radical Islam**

The return of radical Islam to any region of the world is related to the nature of the political system, which means its stability, its firmness and the sustainability of its institutions. In other words, the political regimes whose institutions are stable, permanent, organized, complex and long-standing, according to Samuel Huntington's model, have more resistance to political Islam movements, even if these systems exist in totalitarian countries or dictatorships. Here, we notice that

organizations like Al Qaeda did not have the chance to exist in Mubarak's Egypt, Saddam's Iraq or Hafez al-Assad's Syria. Despite their structural problems, these regimes had institutions that enjoyed symbolic presence, which made them resistant to infiltration, given the security and police hegemony.

Following the 25 January 2011 revolution and as soon as the institutions of Mubarak's regime collapsed, a state of chaos reigned over the country, thus creating a favorable environment and possible start for the re-emergence of Jihadi movements in Egypt.

After Mubarak's regime collapsed, there was confusion as to whether political life would return to normal. Many questions were posed about the return of political Islam to the forefront of events, after the Muslim Brotherhood joined the revolution and was followed by the Salafi currents. They — especially the Brotherhood— managed to leap to the youth revolution after they had refused to participate in it since day one. At the time, questions were also raised about the priorities of the transitional phase (e.g. the constitution, parliamentary elections, and presidential elections). Meanwhile, the streets were filled with revolutionary and sectarian demands and increased protests staged by rebels in public squares and others carried out by supporters of Salah Abu Ismail in front of the Ministry of Defense. Ismail raised radical Islamist slogans holding expiation and exclusion significances. For the first time, radical forces took to the streets on what was dubbed as Kandahar Friday in Tahrir Square in summer 2011 and raised Al Qaeda's black flags.

All the previous events were related to the attempts of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to appease the situation at times and obey the US whims at other times with the return of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is the party that is supposed to play a role in the future setting. So, they had their own rules for the parliamentary and presidential elections, which organized their leap to power.

During the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, which lasted from 30 June 2012 until 3 July 2013, there was looseness in dealing with political players and forces, including the radical Islamist forces and currents, which manipulated the Brotherhood intellectually and competed with the movement's ideological inclinations to enroot their presence. However, the Brotherhood tried to appeal to the aspirations of the Salafi Jihadi Ismail by colluding with him on clearly threatening acts to practice violence like the besieging of the Constitutional Court and the constant protests in front of the state council, as well as the recurring blockade on the media production city.

What's more, Ismail was used as a scarecrow or person terrorizing the civil forces that do not agree with the inclinations of the Brotherhood's rule. The international call for the Brotherhood to take off the Egyptian national disguise and move from being local to global constituted the biggest internal threat for Egyptian national security since the modern Egyptian state was first established during Mohammad Ali Pasha's era. This contributed to making the Sinai a region packed with Jihadi organizations directly affiliated with Hamas and to ignoring the attempts to infiltrate into the national security on the western and southern borders of Egypt.

All the aforementioned were catastrophes that constituted heavy blows to the national security with the assassination of Egyptian soldiers in Sinai in July 2012, the abduction of seven Egyptian soldiers and the negotiations with the abductors in a way that showed pathetic sympathy towards them months later.

The fall of the Brotherhood's rule was followed after ten days with the sit-ins in Rabia al-Adawiya and Ennahda squares, then the incitement of many people with Takfiri speeches from Rabia's pulpit and the escalation of the Takfiri tone through forcibly breaking up both sit-ins. Due to the tapes distributed by the Muslim brotherhood showing images of the victims of Rabia and Ennahda squares, the Muslim Brotherhood seemed to turn to the steps of violent organizations that labelled society partially and professionally as infidel by considering the army members and police as such and blaming them not only for the Rabia and Ennahda incidents, but also for protecting the post-June 2013 regime. Moreover, Egypt witnessed dozens of terrorist operations that claimed the lives of dozens of security men, soldiers and some civilians. The operations broke out in north Sinai, and then spread to Delta and al-Wadi, and they were the result of direct sniping activities, remote explosions and the planting of mines. This constituted a sort of open violence with the new authority.

## **The Rise and Expansion of Radical Islamist Movements**

We have already mentioned that the radical Islam movements and groups have lately been escalating quickly in Egypt. Undoubtedly, these groups do not have fixed and final names that are accurate, as they are intertwined in a way that keeps their followers shadowy. Organizations like Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis and Ajnad al-Ared started to take over geographically to move their operations from east of the Suez Canal to the west, for several reasons:

The radical groups lost the Brotherhood's support after the fall of Morsi's regime, which constituted a resonating surprise for them and made them worried. Perhaps the strange thing is that these radical groups formed their first cell last century,

despite their ideological and core differences with the Brotherhood like the Saleh Sariyeh group at the beginning of the 1970s, the Al-Takfir and Al-Hijra in the mid-1970s, Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya and Islamic Jihad in the late 1970s, Al-Najoon Min al-Nar in the mid-1980s and Al Qaeda in the early 1990s, etc. — the parties present on the field, whether old like Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya or new like Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis and Ajnad al-Ared, walked in the steps of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is noteworthy that the Brotherhood is at the base of all radical organizations, some of which played the role of its military wing after June 2013. In other words, the groups had to apply for the first time since their establishment the policy of interest and pragmatism by simulating the Brotherhood. This happened after the radical groups compared their situation on the ground during the Brotherhood's rule to their situation after the Brotherhood's light died out.

The radical groups sought to retaliate against the July 2013 regime, which ended the Brotherhood's rule — the same rule that fuelled their existence. This retaliation was embodied by realistic policies related to violence acts. Moreover, these groups managed to revive the freedom of the movement through the huge amount of weapons and to get the support from the eastern, western and southern gates of Egypt. During and after the fall of the Brotherhood's rule, the groups sought to obtain light personal weapons like rifles and guns; heavy weapons like rockets, which hit their targets and resulted in the downing of a helicopter; and explosives, etc.

The slackened security on the Egyptian scene at a certain point constituted a factor that helped to spread the activities of these groups from the Sinai to other areas throughout Egypt. After the groups left the northern Sinai, their activity expanded and targeted the tourism sector and the security symbols in south Sinai. Then, they turned their focus to security symbols represented by the police in Cairo, Giza, Ismailiya, Dakahliya, al-Fayoum, Bani Sweif, al-Minya and the New Valley.

Although these groups did not receive any Egyptian social support, poverty and unemployment, especially in that Bedouin lands in the Sinai, which is usually described as the most marginalized region on the Egyptian development map, constituted a main factor behind the emergence of these groups and made them attractive for youth under 30 years of age.

Furthermore, illiteracy still constitutes the main source of human mobilization for these groups. It is certain that the overall illiteracy rate in Egypt, which reaches 29%, grows and spreads in marginalized regions like the Sinai and breeds extremism and narrow-mindedness in terms of understanding Islam. It is noteworthy that many Jihadis and Takfiris do not have the grounds and legal proof

to accuse others of atheism, infidelity, residing in the “house of war” [dar al-harb] and alliance with tyrants, etc. In addition to these terms, they use a jargon of Islam to wreak havoc, shed the blood of innocent people, widow women, bereave mothers, orphan children and inflict self-flagellation. It is no wonder that the people who usually raise Takfiri slogans in general and Jihadi ones in particular are unskilled workers, and, in the best case scenario, hold industrial or commercial diplomas.

The foreign support, that some countries and organizations provide, constituted a main factor for these radical groups to continue their activities. Here, we note that this foreign support takes different forms, including logistics to facilitate movement for individuals and weapons across the borders, financial support through the laundered funds that reach the groups or the weapons supplied to them from some countries and organizations. It was said that the groups are receiving support from Turkey, Qatar, Hamas and the international Muslim Brotherhood organization. These are all countries and organizations that openly sympathized with the Muslim Brotherhood and offered it media coverage and propaganda that is directed against the Egyptian state and its stability.

### **Prospects of Radical Movements’ Role in Egypt**

In the future Egyptian scene, the picture seems vague but predictable due to the status quo on several aspects. Two scenarios can summarize the possible situation:

According to the first scenario, the violence acts risk escalation in the short, medium and perhaps the long term. This scenario is based on different evidence that can be summarized in the persisting economic and social deterioration in the faltering development, the regressing educational level, the rise in illiteracy, the worsening of women’s situation and the increase in unemployment. At the security level, there is security vacuum resulting from the widening desert space in the Sinai. The scattering of security across Egypt and the security services’ ignorance of the topographic nature of the regions accommodate acts of violence. Each of the above factors constitutes an additional element that strengthens this scenario.

At the external level, if the situation persists without national reconciliation with the political forces and key players in society, the door might be open wide to foreign forces to wreak havoc on Egypt’s security by supplying political violence groups with sufficient funds and weapons to stand their ground. Then, there is an environment that offers more freedom. But, what is more important for the external environment is the hope that was rekindled in the hearts of violent groups

— Jihadis and Takfiris alike — due to the victories of these groups in some countries.

In Syria, the Islamic State (IS) has maintained a reality for months. In Iraq, IS tightened its noose on an entire province, namely Nineveh. Meanwhile, Jabhat Al-Nusra and other radical organizations emerged in Libya as a result of Gaddafi's oppression into the resistance operations led by one of the former army commanders and still haven't achieved a clear victory on the ground.

According to the second scenario, such movements have no place in reality, especially Egypt, because of different striking aspects that are more likely to happen. First, the Egyptian people are among those who hate mixing religion with politics. After a year had passed under the Brotherhood's rule, the people of Egypt felt their contempt rise for the hegemony of political Islam on the façade of the decision making process in their country. The same people reaped what the Brotherhood's rule had sown throughout that year, starting with the schism between the constituents of society, the Brotherhood's attempt to brotherhoodize positions and meddle with every Egyptian's pride and mess with the army, the journalists, the legal system and the police, not to mention the violence and terrorism that the Brotherhood cheered for everyday and sometimes mastered with the right foreign support.

All the preceding circumstances created a general atmosphere refusing the presence of such groups inside the country, even when these groups raise the flags of vulnerability, oppression and social justice to lure the youth through Islamic verse.

Yet, from a different perspective, especially the security one, the Egyptian Army is standing as a barrier in the face of any attempt to breach national security. The Egyptian army is one of the most solid armies of the region and the world because it is not built on confessional, political or militia ideas. This makes the balance tip towards the Egyptian Army in any confrontation happening in the field; it is a well-equipped army with increasing expertise in fighting violence and terrorism over the last four years.

Moreover, the large security control of the police, even in terms of recurring human rights' violations, which it has become labelled for, seems to be a strong tool to oppress and deter the religious violent movements. This is favored by the wide expertise of security men who have dealt with radical groups for decades.

Moreover, the violent movements in Egypt are divided into several groups with different ideologies. Some of them are on the ground, while others are in Egyptian prisons. A third group is situated outside the Egyptian territories. As a result, there

is miscommunication between the members of these organizations, unlike in Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and they lack good organization and wide moves on the ground.

Inside the Islamic Egyptian scene, Al-Azhar, which is revered by all Egyptians, creates a sort of automatic defense mechanism for Islam and leads to a rejection of any Takfiri or Jihadi thoughts. Moreover, the moderate Salafi movements those have surfaced in the past few years and have criticized many Takfiri and Jihadi sayings weaken the chances of political violence groups' survival and eliminate their chances to be heard, obeyed or followed blindly.

Undoubtedly, the presence of some former radical figures, such as Najeh Ibrahim, Kamal Habib, Nabil Naim, Aboud al-Zumr and others, who still cling to intellectual considerations, constantly enfeebles the rhetoric of radical groups.

If we take the external dimension of the confrontation, which is based on the presence of two aspects, into consideration, we realize that everything favors the disappearance of radical groups. The first aspect is represented by the foreign support that the Egyptian state is receiving from some Gulf States to fight Brotherhood thought and the extremist ideas that it bred. These ideas sought to move from Egypt and seep into Gulf countries as a second stop, with the encouragement of some Gulf states for moderate Islamist movements, spearheaded by the Salafi one.

The second aspect is the security blockade on the foreign financial support of radical groups through money laundering operations, which had a wide span in the wake of the fall of the Brotherhood's rule.

# **Ansar Al-Sharia in Tunisia and the Cost of Terrorism**

*Alaya Allani*

After the Tunisian Revolution (17 December 2010 - 14 January 2011), the issue of a general legislative amnesty was proposed, which was welcomed by all political groups. The application of this measure was not accompanied by mechanisms to monitor members of the radical religious faction who were released. This later led to tensions between this group, which came to be known as Ansar al-Sharia,<sup>39</sup> and the Troika government,<sup>40</sup> ending in a rift and confrontation. How has terrorism developed in Tunisia following the Arab Spring? And what are its security and economic implications?

First, we should mention that Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia was founded in April 2012. This came after the organization's founder, Saif-Allah Benhassine, known as Abu Iyad,<sup>41</sup> was released in March 2011.

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<sup>39</sup> Ansar al-Sharia organization exists in seven Arab countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Mali and Morocco. All of them were established after the Arab Spring.

<sup>40</sup> This government comprises three parties: the Ennahda movement, part of the Muslim Brotherhood current; the Congress for the Republic (CPR) party, formed by Moncef Marzouki before he became president; and the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (Ettakatol) party, founded by President of the Constituent Assembly Mustapha Ben Jafar.

<sup>41</sup> Abu Iyad was born in 1965 in the Menzel Bourguiba district of the Bizerte Governorate in northern Tunisia. Some accounts say that he was initially affiliated with Brotherhood ideology and, in the early 1980s, joined the ranks of the Movement of Islamic Tendency that was founded by Rachid Ghannouchi (known today as Ennahda), yet quickly split from it. He later moved to Morocco to complete his studies in law, yet stopped this and headed to the UK to try to obtain residency. However, after his request was denied, he travelled to Afghanistan where he met with Osama bin Laden in 2000 in Kandahar. Along with Tarek Al-Maaroufi, he founded an organization called the "Tunisian Fighting Group" in Jalalabad. This group was accused of organizing the assassination of Afghan leader Ahmad Shah Massoud in 2001. The same year, the UN classified the Tunisian Fighting Group as being an affiliate of Al Qaeda. He then moved to Turkey, where he was arrested and handed over to the Tunisian authorities in 2003, during the reign of former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and was sentenced to forty years in prison. He was released in March 2011 following the Tunisian Revolution, part of what became known as the Arab Spring revolutions. In record time, Abu Iyad was able to build a formidable network of charity and Dawa structures supporting his organization. This came in light of a notable absence of monitoring by the Troika government, led by the Brotherhood-oriented Ennahda movement. At the time, some newspapers even spoke about the involvement of some Ennahda lobbies to support the Ansar al-Sharia current. Abu Iyad carried out his work with ease for a number of months, holding massive gatherings and summoning his supporters with slogans in general meetings that glorified Al Qaeda and its men. Meanwhile, the government disregarded his movements, and was even accused of establishing Salafi police in some areas of the country. Yet a change in the government's stance toward Ansar al-Sharia did not come until after the attack on the US Embassy in Tunis on 14 September 2012 (two days after the killing of the US ambassador in Benghazi). It is well-known that the confrontation between the authorities and this current did not actually begin until the end of the Islamist government's reign. The confrontation against Ansar al-Sharia and terrorist currents became more effective after the Islamists left power in January 2014. One of the accusations directed against the

It should also be noted that some of the major figures of this organization had formerly joined the Islamic movement that was founded by Rachid Ghannouchi. These figures include Abu Iyad, who joined the Movement of Islamic Tendency (now the Ennahda Movement) in the early 1980s. While Abu Iyad's supporters numbered in the hundreds in 2011, they increased to between 5 and 6 thousand in 2012.

Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia began its activities early on when it strongly participated in the protests against the film “Persepolis”, just before the 23 October 2011 elections. It also participated in the campaign against the film “Innocence of Muslims”, which has been associated with the attack on the US Embassy in Tunis on 14 September 2012.

Ansar al-Sharia took advantage of the openness of the Tunisian government that was led by the Islamists after the revolution — whether the government of Jebali or that of Laarayedh — to strengthen their organizational structures and support their network of associations. The latter mostly worked under multiple names and some of them operated without legal authorization.<sup>42</sup>

### **Ansar al-Sharia in 2011 and Preparations to Grow Stronger**

Ansar al-Sharia's movements in a number of cities were limited to strengthening the group's structures, and it had a strong presence in the southern governorates (which are the areas from which most of Ennahda's historical leaders hail, such as Rachid Ghannouchi, Ali Laarayedh and Habib al-Loz, among others) and the midwestern ones (Kairouan - Kasserine, and the northwest, such as Jendouba).

A number of events occurred in 2011:

- An Arab Salafi conference was held for the first time in the history of modern Tunisia in September 2011.
- In July 2011, a conference was held in the Soukra district in one of Tunis' suburbs. During the Soukra meeting, an agreement was reached on a road map

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Troika government is that they were not resolute in arresting Abu Iyad, who fled to Libya and now — according to a number of reports — lives under the protection of Abu Sufian Bin Qumu, a leader of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya. The Tunisian government classified Ansar al-Sharia as a terrorist organization on 17 August 2013, and the same position was taken by the US a few months later against the group's branches in both Tunisia and Libya. This explains why the US resorted to arresting figures from the Jihadi current in Libya, such as Abu Anas al-Libi, who was captured in Tripoli in October 2013; and Ahmed Abu Khatalla, who was arrested on 16 June 2014 by US commandos in Libya on the grounds of his involvement in the assassination of the US ambassador in Benghazi on 12 September 2012.

<sup>42</sup> This was the fault of the government, which during that period was headed by Ennahda, as it gave free rein to Salafi associations, including the Jihadi ones among them, to carry out their work. The interior minister in the independent government of Mehdi Jomaa spoke about significant violations that had been recorded in the ranks of religious associations accused of financing terrorism (see Al-Sabah News, 5 June 2014).

ostensibly based on unifying Islamist action in Tunisia. Some analysts believe that the meeting — which was attended by major figures from both Ennahda and the Salafi current, including both its scholarly and Jihadi branches — was aimed at discussing a division of roles in order to enable the Islamists to reach power. The main recommendations of this meeting, as reported in some newspapers, include:

- An agreement on common denominators of Islamist action.
- Accepting the right of Islamist groups to maintain and adhere to some of their individual characteristics.

This step goes along with the statement that was repeated by Ghannouchi: “Let's work together on what we agree upon, and excuse one another when it comes to our differences.” However, some accounts spoke about coordination between members of Ennahda and members of Ansar al-Sharia to support the former in the 23 October 2011 elections.<sup>43</sup>

Abu Iyad proudly repeated his claim that Tunisia is a land of Dawa [Missionary work], not a land of Jihad. Yet some analysts considered this a ploy to enable Ansar al-Sharia to strengthen its organizational structures. In their view, Abu Iyad, who was previously affiliated with Ghannouchi's group, realized that about half of Ennahda's support base was ideologically close to the Salafis,<sup>44</sup> and thus supporting Ennahda in the elections was something acceptable.

Ennahda's success in the October 2011 elections opened the door for Ansar al-Sharia to move about comfortably. It is worth noting that Ansar al-Sharia was carrying out its activities without having obtained legal authorization for its work. Some officials within Ennahda had requested that Ansar al-Sharia inquired authorization to form an association, similar to the Salafi associations. However, Abu Iyad always rejected this request, under the pretext that he cannot make a request for activities from a government that does not implement Sharia law. In fact, Ansar al-Sharia was opposed to legally authorized work for a number of reasons, including:

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<sup>43</sup> This was reported to me by a foreign journalist who met Abu Iyad in the summer of 2012. Abu Iyad confirmed to her that Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia actively contributed to mobilizing Tunisians to vote for Ennahda in the Constituent Assembly elections held on 23 October 2011.

<sup>44</sup> It is worth noting that, in its most recent conference held in July 2012, Ennahda modified its political rhetoric that adopts the democratic approach. Meanwhile, it maintained its ideological basis that was issued at the end of the 1980s. It even reprinted and published it, dated 2012, claiming that it may be modified in the movement's next conference. Some researchers explain Ennahda's decision to maintain this ideological basis as part of a desire not to provoke the Salafi current and an attempt to gain them as an electoral bloc. The movement's ideological basis is very close to Salafi thought, which makes it contradictory to its political rhetoric.

1. The group has found that work and activity outside of a legal framework provides it more flexibility and doesn't come with any moral or political responsibility.
2. Working under a legal framework would put the organization under the microscope in terms of its activity, funding, programs and mechanisms of action.
3. It considers itself to be above political parties and associations and believes that the existing governments do not apply the principle of governance that leads to the establishment of an Islamic state. Thus, in Ansar al-Sharia's view, these governments are not qualified to decide on the legitimacy of existing organizations. Abu Iyad believes that Jihad against the West and what he calls "the Jews and the Crusaders throughout the world" is what will allow for the establishment of an Islamic state.

When Ennahda was in power, it did not oppose Ansar al-Sharia carrying out its missionary work and political demonstrations without obtaining a legal permit. It allowed the organization to operate in a framework of "tolerated but not officially recognized" (*Toléré non reconnu*). This allowed the group to vastly increase the number of its supporters from several hundred at the end of 2011, to several thousand at the beginning of 2012. The radical rhetoric used by Ansar al-Sharia was reminiscent of that used by the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria in the 1990s, which challenged the ruling authorities and adopted enthusiastic slogans on the issues of Jihad, takfir and resisting secularism.

### **Ansar al-Sharia in 2012 and the Localization of Terrorism**

The first six months of 2012 saw violent attacks against civil society figures, intellectuals and politicians. Ansar al-Sharia is accused of being behind these operations to censure these figures. Some newspapers talked about the aspiration of Ansar al-Sharia supporters to establish Jihadi emirates and said that these include the Emirate of Sejenane (belonging to the Bizerte Governorate in northern Tunisia, where Abu Iyad hails from). It is worth mentioning that the attacks carried out by Ansar al-Sharia followers usually ended with them escaping punishment, which some believed that official parties in the Ennahda-led government showed complicity toward this group.<sup>45</sup>

In 2012, many Tunisian Jihadis traveled to Syria, and Ansar al-Sharia is considered one of the active players in this recruitment. In addition, many reports claimed that

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<sup>45</sup> Such practices also occurred in Egypt during the reign of the Morsi government.

Ansar al-Sharia greatly benefited in 2012 from working with a network of smugglers.

In an interview with Ettounsiya TV on 24 June 2013, former chief of staff of the Tunisian Armed Forces Rachid Ammar<sup>46</sup> spoke about fears of the Somalization of Tunisia, after Jihadis had gained a solid foot in the country in a specific period through stockpiling weapons, organizing training and planning to attack the government.<sup>47</sup> During this interview, Ammar noted that Jihadis were carrying out training in the mountains for an entire year — i.e. during 2012-2013 — and this coincided with the assassinations of Chokri Belaid, in February 2013, and Mohamed Brahmi, on 25 July 2013. While Gen. Ammar did not mention the names of the Jihadi organizations, the public opinion and the cultural elite in Tunisia know that the perpetrators belong to two movements: Ansar al-Sharia and Al Qaeda sleeper cells. These movements comprise Tunisians (who constitute a majority), in addition to members from other Maghreb and African countries (representing the minority).

The question is: Were the governments of Jebali and Laarayedh aware of this training or not? Government officials had previously refuted this when they said that rumors of Jihadi training centers in the el-Chambi Mountains and elsewhere were not true, and that the matter was nothing more than some Islamists carrying out sports training.<sup>48</sup> This official position denying the presence of training centers contradicts what was suggested by the former chief of staff, thus raising question about the reason for this lack of harmony between the ruling political institution and the military. Is the lack of intelligence about the training centers due to a fatal weakness among the intelligence services? Or does it indicate the complicity of some lobbies within the authorities to cover up this training? Who bears responsibility for the existence of these centers? Is it the entire government, i.e. the Troika, or is it the interior minister, the prime minister, or the two together, knowing that both are from Ennahda movement?

Likewise, 2012 was an important year for Ansar al-Sharia, and especially for Abu Iyad. On 20 May 2012, Ansar al-Sharia held a large general meeting, in which Abu Iyad mobilized between 5 and 6 thousand participants. The participants included

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<sup>46</sup> Rachid Ammar was supreme commander of the army that accompanied all phases of the Tunisian Revolution. He remained in this position until June 2013, when he announced during this televised interview that he had submitted a request to retire. The interview provided him an opportunity to implicitly express his reservations about the Ennahda government's security policy, especially toward Ansar al-Sharia.

<sup>47</sup> See our article on Al-Sabah News dated 25 June 2013.

<sup>48</sup> The French newspaper Marianne, in its 19 October 2012 issue, was the first to note the presence of Jihadi training centers in Tunisia. While the official authorities denied this, it became clear from the statements by the chief of staff of the Tunisian Armed Forces that the news was true.

members of the Salafi Jihadi group — who had the greatest showing, with their numbers reaching four thousand — and the scholarly Salafi movement. Furthermore, some representatives of the regional movement of political Islam, belonging to Ennahda, were at this celebration.

During the meeting, radical slogans such as “We are all Osama bin Laden” were chanted, prompting an Ennahda minister to criticize what happened at the gathering. The government, however, did not take any action against the meeting's organizers, which Ansar al-Sharia considered a green light to proceed with its activity.

Abu Iyad's speech to this large crowd in Kairouan on 20 May 2012 included an approach for a political project to establish a religious state. He emphasized the following ideas:

- Tunisia is a land of Dawa [missionary work], not a land of Jihad.
- Many researchers believe that this position is consistent with the instructions given by Ayman al-Zawahri following the Arab Spring revolutions, whereby he said it is necessary to help the Islamist ruling regimes that reached power, despite his differences with them regarding certain principles.
- He said that no one can differentiate between his group and Ennahda.
- Abu Iyad also spoke about Islamic education, which forbids the mixing of the sexes, and Islamic tourism, which attracts members of the Muslim community in Europe and prevents the [morally] deficient manifestations that come with foreign tourists.
- Abu Iyad also spoke at the Kairouan meeting about the necessity of establishing Islamic banks to replace the banks that take interest. He called for reforms in the health sector to establish clinics that forbid the mixing of men and women.

These demands are in fact the beginning of a project to politicize Salafi Jihadism and give it a civil nature.

Yet what Abu Iyad did not speak about in the meeting was how these demands will be implemented. Will they be achieved through peaceful means or imposed by force? Many researchers believe that Abu Iyad's failure to clarify the mechanisms for implementing the programs appearing in his 20 May 2012 Kairouan speech indicate that Ansar al-Sharia believes that the application of these ideas will not come through democratic mechanisms, because:

First, Ansar al-Sharia does not believe in the democratic option in the first place,

considering it contradictory to Sharia law. This is because democracy, in their opinion, represents an aggression on the rule of Allah.

Second, they are thinking of other ways to force their ideas, through the imposition of *a fait accompli*. Here we note that the means of action of these associations, which do not have legal licenses, are means dependent on a type of coercion. Thus, they set up in 2012 Dawa tents<sup>49</sup> and carried out charitable relief work.

The authorities did not ban these Dawa tents, despite the calls of many political parties. They were erected in front of educational institutions and weekly markets. While they ostensibly carried out religious missionary work, their true goal was to select members willing to join their organizational structures.

Meanwhile, the authorities did not initially ban these tents, after the proliferation of accompanying acts of violence, the government was pushed to forbid any tent that did not obtain prior authorization. This was announced in 2013, before the el-Chambi events in April 2013.

For Ansar al-Sharia, 2012 is considered an important year because it enabled the group to:

1. Mobilize thousands of supporters and begin to establish their organizational framework.
2. Bring in weapons through the Libyan border and store them.
3. Carry out training in the el-Chambi Mountains and other places. Some newspapers spoke about training that was held in sports halls (*Salle de Sport*).

The year 2012 also witnessed the attack on the US Embassy in Tunis on 14 September, i.e. two days after the killing of the US Ambassador in Benghazi. Subsequent investigations showed that two Tunisians from Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia were involved in the assassination. Court rulings were later issued proving their involvement. Perhaps, this is one of the main reasons why the US classified Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia and Libya as terrorist organizations in December 2013.

While the attack on the US Embassy in Tunis was a defining moment in the shift of the government's position on Ansar al-Sharia, it was not a significant shift. This is evidenced by the lenient sentences handed out to those involved in the attack on

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<sup>49</sup> Followers of Ansar al-Sharia periodically erect small tents in front of secondary institutes and weekly markets in order to introduce people to the organization's ideas and at the same time provide subsidies for the poor. Ansar al-Sharia also operates medical convoys in poor regions and neighborhoods to provide some health services free of charge. Many members of the elite question which force is supporting Ansar al-Sharia financially and standing behind the group politically, whether within the authorities or outside.

the embassy, which the US State Department demanded be reviewed.<sup>50</sup>

One month after the embassy attack (in October 2012), a video was published online showing Rachid Ghannouchi with members of the Salafi current. In the video, he urged them to quickly establish schools, universities and institutions before it was too late, because his movement had yet to gain control of the security forces and the army. Analysts interpreted Ghannouchi's call as an open invitation to the Salafi movement to build strength and impose *a fait accompli* that would be difficult to undo.

And we should not forget the facilities provided by the government in 2012 to welcome Levantine preachers. The latter were arriving to Tunisia at the invitation of religious associations, including Ansar al-Sharia, to take lessons that human rights organizations encouraged *takfir* and hatred. Thus, the people of a single nation were divided into believers and infidels.

The end of 2012 marked the modest beginning of the emergence of disagreements between the Jebali government and Ansar al-Sharia, especially after the attack on the US Embassy in Tunis on 14 September 2012, which was later attributed to Ansar al-Sharia.<sup>51</sup> The rift between the government and the group began to widen more and more in 2013, which was considered the beginning of the countdown for this current.

## **The Open Confrontation between the Authorities and Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia: 2013-2014**

The year 2013 was considered to be a difficult one on more than one level, characterized by repeated political assassinations in Tunisia as well as important regional shifts. The latter began with the expulsion of Al Qaeda from northern Mali and ended with the fall of Morsi in Egypt. The assassinations of two human rights activists — Chokri Belaid in February 2013 and Mohamed Brahmi in July 2013 —

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<sup>50</sup> After the case was appealed, rulings were issued on 23 June 2014 of between two years and a decision not to hear on a religious basis, while the rulings in the first phase of the trial did not exceed two years with suspended sentences. See the following article on Tunivisions website from 06/24/2014: <http://ar.tunivisions.net/47570/566/149/%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%B6%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%82-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9-.html>

<sup>51</sup> The attack on the US Embassy by Ansar al-Sharia was to protest the screening of a clip from "Innocence of Muslims". The attack occurred on 14 September 2012, two days after the killing of the US ambassador in Benghazi. This marks the organization's transition to the stage of systematic violence.

marked the end of the truce between the authorities and Ansar al-Sharia, after judicial investigations proved the latter's involvement in the two killings. Some Tunisian newspapers spoke of Tunisian groups affiliated with Ansar al-Sharia carrying out training in Libya, in order to conduct terrorist attacks in Tunisia and abroad (for example in Iraq, Syria, Algeria, and Afghanistan). The arms market and weapons training prospered in Libya, and the presence of Al Qaeda and Ansar al-Sharia grew, especially in Benghazi, Derna, Sirte, and Sabratha.

A number of analysts and Western reports claimed that the four training centers in Libya were made up of Tunisians, Algerians, and others from Mali. Moreover, 2013 saw the continuation of the wave of Jihadis traveling to Syria that began in 2012 and subsequently carried on. Mehdi Jomaa, the prime minister of the independent government, announced that — based on a report from the interior minister — the government had prevented more than 8,000 Tunisian Jihadis from heading to Syria.<sup>52</sup> Based on numbers from various Jihadis and their sympathizers, we find that approximately 10 thousand Tunisians have been influenced by Jihadi ideas and are prepared to engage in Jihad outside their country. These people were psychologically and ideologically prepared in mosques under the control of Ansar al-Sharia and radical religious movements. If we divide the number of Jihadi sympathizers with the total population of the country, we see that one out of every one thousand Tunisian sympathized with or was influenced by Jihadi thought at the beginning of 2014. And this ratio was even higher in the past, during the reign of the Islamists. However, after the new government took control of most mosques,<sup>53</sup> the number of those traveling to Syria began to decrease.

We can summarize all the events related to the development of Ansar al-Sharia's activity in 2013 as follows:

- In 2013, Ansar al-Sharia abandoned the idea that Tunisia was a land of Dawa, not of Jihad, without officially announcing this.
- Security and arms coordination between Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia and Ansar al-Sharia in Libya grew stronger in 2013.
- 2013 saw the killing of Mohamed Sboui, an officer in the security services. This terrorist act came within the context of what terrorists call "resisting *taghut*".
- On 29 April 2013, the el-Chambi events began.
- On 19 May 2013, Ansar al-Sharia was banned from holding a general meeting

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<sup>52</sup> The statement appeared on the Breaking News website on 04 March 2014. See: <http://breakingnews.sy/ar/article/34827.html>

<sup>53</sup> At the beginning of June 2014, the minister of religious affairs said that the number of mosques outside the government's control did not exceed 90 out of 5,100.

in Kairouan. A few weeks prior, Abu Iyad went into hiding.

- The detentions that occurred in the ranks of Ansar al-Sharia from May to August 2013 revealed that this organization had plans for assassinations and other terrorist attacks. There were many detentions among its ranks.
- In August 2013, the Interior Ministry and the government announced that Ansar al-Sharia was a terrorist organization.
- The stance of Ennahda and other Islamist parties was not consistent with that of the government. Some leading members of Ennahda, such as Ajmi Lourimi and Habib al-Loz, even rejected Ansar al-Sharia's classification as a terrorist organization.
- 2013 saw an intensification of Ansar al-Sharia's violent reactions, through terrorist attacks in various governorates and regions (Jendouba, Sidi Bouzid, Goubellat, Sousse, Monastir) and threats of more attacks at the end of the year.
- These reactions were linked to the discovery of the armed wing of Ansar al-Sharia and to detailed plans for political assassinations. According to some analysts, these plans were aimed at confusing the national dialogue that launched in 2013. Ansar al-Sharia had tried to prevent the issuance of the constitution, which does not comply with their ideas, especially after politicians agreed not to include a clause stipulating that Sharia law is the source of legislation.
- 2013 saw the resignation of the Jebali government and an agreement for the resignation of the Laarayedh government, as a result of the repercussions of the terrorist attacks attributed to Ansar al-Sharia.

The question posed by many analysts: Was the terrorism that took place in Tunisia — whether political assassinations, other terrorist attacks or the entry of arms into the country — confined? Can it be attributed wholly or partially to Ansar al-Sharia and Al Qaeda cells, or are there other parties involved in these acts?

It seems likely that Ansar al-Sharia had a hand in some of the terrorist attacks, but there are theories that talk about the recruitment of terrorists by former Libyan officials from the Gaddafi regime to carry out attacks in Tunisia. According to supporters of such theories, this was done as a reaction to the role played by Tunisian parties following the revolution in ousting the Gaddafi regime, through providing arms to Gaddafi's opponents.

The theory that terrorists from outside Ansar al-Sharia participated in attacks is likely valid, and some newspapers spoke about it. Thus, judicial investigations have focused on gaining thorough knowledge concerning the organizational path and

biographies of those involved in the assassinations of Belaid and Brahmi, as this will help to understand the motives, justifications and parties that have an interest in such attacks, whether in Tunisia or abroad. This can only be achieved through linking the two assassinations with the political and social conditions from which they emerged, as well as considering the impact of regional shifts.

It is almost certain that terrorist attacks in Tunisia cannot be attributed to Ansar al-Sharia alone. This organization may be responsible for 60% of terrorist attacks, and this call for greater research into the remaining percentage, which it seems, can be attributed to officials from the former Libyan regime in the era of Gaddafi. Yet, this theory calls for greater intelligence coordination, and I imagine that the truth may become clearer in the coming days. There are political and security shifts related to Operation Dignity, led by retired Libyan General Khalifa Hifter. This operation could put an end to dominance of the political Islam and Salafi movements in Libya and these movements could become a part of the campaign, thus limiting the influence of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya and expelling foreign Jihadis — including Tunisian ones — from the country.

## **The Hierarchical Structure of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia**

Ansar al-Sharia has a central structure and regional structures.

The central structure: This includes the Legitimacy Council, comprising prominent leaders from the organization. Its number is limited, usually not exceeding 11 members.

National Offices: These are a part of its central structure. There are four of them:

- the Political Office
- the Dawa Office
- the Social Office
- the Media Office

There is a security office including the group's armed wing, which has not been publicly announced. Its presence was revealed through judicial investigations.

There are central leaders who have been announced, as well as others who are undisclosed, and they are included within the category of alternative leaders.

There is a central emir of the organization, namely Abu Iyad.

The regional structures:

- Cells in each region (an emirate in one or several governorates), with each cell comprising between 5 and 12 members.
- There are local and regional emirs.

Regarding the members of the Legitimacy Council, those informed about the organization said that it includes 12 members (11 + Emir Abu Iyad), yet only the names of five are known, namely: Abu Iyad, Hassan Ben Brik, Sami Essid, Abu Khaled al-Khateeb, and Saifuddin Al-Rais.

It is likely that the undisclosed members represent that alternative leadership and the organization's armed wing. The latter's existence was revealed by then Ministry of Interior in August 2013, after it became clear that there was a relationship between Ansar al-Sharia and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which was funding Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia.

Moreover, it is likely that Ansar al-Sharia's funding comes from multiple sources:

- A part comes from AQIM, and this is a significant part. It is known that AQIM has a budget in excess of \$300 million, according to several reports.
- A part comes from the smuggling trade.
- A part comes from money laundering.
- A small part comes from contributions made by some religious Tunisians, including small merchants and others.<sup>54</sup>
- This organizational form of Ansar al-Sharia strongly resembles the Taliban's organizational method.

## **The Increase in the Cost of Terrorism and Its Repercussions on the Political and Religious Landscape in Tunisia**

Prior to the revolution, Tunisia had an economic growth rate of nearly 5 percent. Yet following the revolution, this rate began to fall. This was not only due to terrorism, but was also caused by the sit-ins and strikes, as well as the desire of some political groups to control the administration. Thus, there was a negative growth rate in 2011 (at -1 percent), and this is somewhat justified by the impositions of moving from a state of chaos to one of gradual stability. Thus, as soon as the elections took place — which was held under better conditions than the previous ones — the economic growth rate increased in 2012, reaching 3.5 percent.

Yet, it did not maintain this rate in 2013, as growth fell to 2.7 percent. This was due to terrorism — which delivered a strong blow to the most important sectors,

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<sup>54</sup> According to the latest reports, the financing of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is down significantly in 2014, to the extent that figures from this group have requested their followers to fund some activities at their own expense. See the statement by Gen. Mukhtar Ben Nasr to *Al-Sharouk* newspaper on 30 June 2014.

including the export and services sectors — along with 22% decline in investments in 2013 and the first quarter of 2014. Since 2012, the Troika government had tacitly supported the scholarly and Jihadi Salafi movements through legislating a number of charitable and Dawa associations, parts of which were revealed in 2014 to be linked to supporting terrorism and money laundering, according to reports from the Ministry of Interior. But the wave of terrorism was strongest in 2013, with the assassinations of two influential politicians, as mentioned above, and the attack on the US Embassy.

This had negative repercussions on the country's economic growth, since terrorism is linked with the general atmosphere. And this general atmosphere influences the economic cycle, since when the consumer becomes preoccupied it negatively affects the production sector, i.e. production institutions. Furthermore, when the state is forced to engage in a war against terrorism, this comes at the expense of regional development and activity. With the intensification in the wave of terrorism, banks decreased their lending due to poor liquidity, which was reflected on the financing of a number of projects, and there was continued weakness in profits in the services sector.

In addition to the terrorism, the government was unable to curb smuggling. To some extent, this fueled the parallel economy, which accounted for 45-50 percent of total economic activity. This sector harmed the state's tax revenues and contributed to supporting some terrorist groups that greatly benefited from the parallel economic sector.

Financial experts estimate that terrorism costs Tunisia nearly 1 billion dinar annually. This is in addition to a marked contraction in the tourism sector and the flight of many domestic and foreign investors, making the cost sometimes reach 1 billion USD per year.<sup>55</sup>

## **Notes and Conclusions**

I think that it is likely that Ansar al-Sharia is involved in the political assassinations, but there is a need for research into who is behind these assassinations. Is it a single party or multiple ones?

The classification of Ansar al-Sharia as a terrorist organization in Tunisia and Libya may be a prelude for removing the training centers from Libya, paving the way for political changes in the future, most notably a re-positioning of the liberal current

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<sup>55</sup> From an interview I conducted with experts and university professors in Tunis on 18 May 2014, namely Radi Al-Madab, Fathi Al-Nouri and Moaz Al-Joudi.

and a decrease in the influence of the religious groups. In this framework, the three attempts of Khalifa Hifter (the first in August 2013, the second in February 2014, and the third on 17 May 2014) could pave the way for a change in the current political map, through the demand to dissolve the National Congress (Parliament) and the organization of early elections on 25 June 2014. It was difficult for the political Islam and Jihadi currents to gain significant influence in these elections, and they were marked by weak voter turnout not exceeding 27%.

Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia is still present in rural areas, and some credible reports talk about the presence of many members of this current in the rural Kairouan, Jendouba, and some areas of the south.

It is likely that the number of members of Ansar al-Sharia has shrunk by half since its classification as a terrorist organization. Its current numbers probably do not exceed 2,000 members. And we should not forget that Ansar al-Sharia seeks to take advantage of the return of Tunisian Jihadis from Syria and Libya. They are estimated to number about 2,000, and most of them belong to Ansar al-Sharia. This means that the government of Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa must put in place an urgent rehabilitation program for Jihadis that adopts an approach including security, ideological and social aspects.

I imagine that the risk of Ansar al-Sharia will not end, but it will decrease after Tunisia has succeeded in issuing the constitution, passing the electoral law, and forming a government of technocrats.

In conclusion, I think that the risk of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia is decreasing more and more, and some analysts link this to the absence of moral support that it gained from some of its lobbies in the government. But what has fundamentally led to the weakening of Ansar al-Sharia is the absence of a broad social base in Tunisia that adopts Jihadi ideology. The next government is determined to resist terrorism and prevent the political Islam movement from entering into the structural crisis in a number of Arab Spring countries.

Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia is accused of coordinating with AQIM and Jabhat Al-Nusra in Syria, both of which are internationally banned organizations. Thus, for some time the number of resignations in the ranks this organization has increased in Tunisia. Ansar al-Sharia will not vanish altogether from Tunisia, rather it may in the future regroup under new structures, since ideological currents weaken but don't die out. Therefore, the stability of the political, security and economic situation is the only solution to avert the danger of this organization.

The emergence of the phenomenon of "marriage Jihad", which the minister of interior spoke about and involved about 155 girls, provoked a strong reaction

within civil society, especially among women's associations. Ansar al-Sharia was accused of sending these girls.

The radical Islam movements were reinvigorated by the Arab Spring, which raises questions about the forces that have an interest in this spring.

The fact that many Tunisian Jihadis from Ansar al-Sharia traveled to Syria and fought in the ranks of ISIS raises many questions about the role they may play when they return home. Will ISIS, which gained notoriety when it occupied the city of Mosul and other provinces in Iraq on 10 June 2014, serve as an example to be imitated by Ansar al-Sharia in the seven Arab countries where it is present?

The average age of Ansar al-Sharia members in Tunisia ranges from 18 to 25, and most of them come from the governorates that face economic and social difficulties, namely the internal governorates (such as Jendouba, Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, Siliana, and some cities in southern Tunisia like Medenine and Kebili) .<sup>56</sup> However, this group's followers also include members of educated and well-off social classes from some coastal regions such as Sousse, Monastir, and Mahdia, in particular unemployed graduates.

Finally, I believe that removing the risk of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia is also linked to developing religious discourse to adopt an enlightened approach, as well as preventing all mosques from taking on political or partisan functions. This is in addition to improving economic and social indicators, such as combatting smuggling and the parallel economy, supporting the independence of the judiciary system and advancing development in marginalized regions, whether they are border regions or those in the interior.

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<sup>56</sup> From an exclusive interview I conducted on 2 June 2014 in Tunisia with a leader in one of the Tunisian Security Syndicates. He told me that 20 individuals from Al-Warsinia, a small village in Ben Guerdane on the Libyan border, traveled to engage in Jihad in Syria and Iraq.

# Reasons for and Forms of Radicalization of Young Muslims in Germany<sup>57</sup>

*ElHakam Sukhni*

In the context of radicalization of Muslims in Europe, Salafism plays a crucial role. Thus, the focus of our research is on the Salafi scene. In the following text, the general demographic and organizational situation of Muslims in Germany, as well as the development of the Salafi scene and its various manifestations, will be outlined. The Salafi movement in Germany is typically only seen superficially as a religious phenomenon. The contents of this relevant Salafi expression are primarily socio-political, therefore Salafism must be understood and treated in Germany as a socio-political phenomenon.

## **Muslims in Germany**

An estimated 4.3 million Muslims live in Germany, representing 5.4% of the population. Of these, approximately 64% are of Turkish origin. Many Turks came to Germany in the course of labor migration during the 1960s, and Germans of Turkish descent now include third and fourth generation immigrants. The religious part of the Turkish community was very interested in preserving the culture of their home country, and thus various Islamic-Turkish cultural associations have emerged over time. The latter are organized today under various umbrella organizations. In Germany, only 8.1% of Muslims are from the Arab Middle East, while approximately 6.9% are from North Africa. Muslims hailing from the Arab states constitute a minority in Europe.

The largest and most important Islamic Association is the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği - DİTİB), which is a branch of the Republic of Turkey's office for Religious Affairs in Ankara, Turkey. With almost 900 member clubs, DİTİB is the largest Muslim umbrella organization in Germany. All other important Islamic umbrella organizations in Germany also have a Turkish influence. Mentioning the Turkish nature of these organizations is relevant for the following reasons: Due to the organization of the Turkish Muslims, which was accompanied by a preservation of cultural and religious practices, the Turkish-Muslim community managed to prevent foreign influences. Furthermore, as Turks

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<sup>57</sup> This paper draws on an ongoing research on reasons and forms of radicalization of young Muslims in Germany.

belong to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence and follow Maturidiyya theology in their basic beliefs, this defines the Turkish identity. The Arab-Muslim community is not as well organized as the Turkish community. Upon further comparison, it is worth noting that Arab Muslims made no effort to preserve their identity by belonging to a distinct Islamic orientation. Accordingly, among Arab Muslims, affiliation with a certain school of jurisprudence plays a minor role and thus a more open position for other Islamic views and influences exists.

After the attacks of September 11, young Muslims, especially those who enjoyed no clear socialization in Mosques, suddenly felt a high pressure in society and had no clear answers to the questions and allegations of non-Muslims. The feeling of being misunderstood and constantly having to justify Muslim behavior pushed many young Muslims into a defensive position. With the beginning of the Salafi activities in Germany, new doors opened. Salafi preachers spoke in a simple German language and gave clear answers to religious questions. The main message of these preachers was: "Islam is the only truth. You don't need to feel ashamed! Be proud to be Muslims!" With the start of these Salafi activities, many young Muslims suddenly felt self-conscious. They were no longer justifying Islam against the accusations of non-Muslims. Muslims now felt that they were morally superior, reproached non-Muslims for living in a corrupt society, and demanded justification for why they do not follow the true faith.

## **Salafi Movements in Germany**

In general, Salafism in Germany is distributed among at least three groups:

- Purist Salafism
- Political and missionary Salafism
- Jihadist Salafism

The first group, while large, is not a prominent group. It is characterized by an apolitical stance and its members want to live within a private sphere. They are strictly religious, according to the Salafi interpretation of Islam. This group considers it an obligation not to question public order and the state, thus allowing them this way of life. The Islamic interpretation of the purists is based on the views of Wahhabi scholars in Saudi Arabia, who do not question the Saudi royal family and even support it.

Salafists try to establish a "better society" through personal speeches, street da'wa (missionary work on the street), information booths, seminars and other propaganda activities in which they try to lead Muslims "back on track", or to bring

non-Muslims to convert to Salafi Islam. The most famous person in this circle is the preacher Pierre Vogel, also known as Abu Hamza, who himself is a convert to Islam. According to the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, there are currently 4,500 followers of political Salafism in Germany. This group generally does not advocate violence, but rather comments on political and social circumstances, constructing a dichotomy between disadvantaged or oppressed Muslims on the one hand and the non-Muslim majority on the other.

The Jihadi groups, which represent an absolute minority within the Salafi scene, are ultimately those to whom the methods of political and missionary Salafis are no longer sufficient and who have decided to eliminate the “injustice” against Islam via an armed struggle.

Within the Salafi spectrum, there are the non-violent missionary groups — especially the purists — that arise most strongly against the Jihadi propaganda. Therefore, the actors and currents should be clearly named and blanket descriptions should be omitted.

### **Political Salafism as a Youth Subculture**

In Germany, Islam is still not universally acknowledged and equal to other religions. Thus, many Muslims feel that they do not really belong to society because of their religion. Experiences with exclusion and discrimination can result in inferiority complexes and nourish feelings of being an outsider. In Salafi groups, these young people will not only find acceptance due to their origin and identity as a Muslim, but also experience a revaluation. All members are brothers and sisters and the head of the group shall be the authority for the sole reason that he or she has more religious knowledge than the ordinary members. Each member of the community may, however, seek to gain this knowledge and therefore can also reach the status of role model. The Salafis not only identify themselves by talking about differences to other groups and non-Muslims. Identity can also be clearly demonstrated through their clothing, which makes them visible. The victimhood that is experienced by the Salafists in an extreme way, confirms this sense of collective feeling. Particularly violent groups promote the idea that there is a global struggle waged by the non-believers (kuffaar) against “Islam and the Muslims”.

### **Al Qaeda and Jihadist Movements**

Germany is dealing with a phenomenon of “self-radicalization”. Young Muslims who are emotionally charged by YouTube clips and who follow discussions on

various Internet forums about the injustices against Muslims are particularly vulnerable. Such was the case of 22-year-old Arid Uka, who killed two US soldiers with shots to the head and seriously injured two others at Frankfurt Airport in Germany. He claimed to have been mainly driven by YouTube videos that broach the issue of the US' crimes against Muslims. The banned group "Millatu Ibrahim" played another key role in radicalization. This group was primarily responsible for the clashes that took place with the police in May 2012 in Solingen and Bonn, during demonstrations against the "Muhammad cartoons". The group was led by Mohammad Mahmoud (Abu Usama al Gharieb), Abu Ibrahim (Hasan Keskin) and Abu Talha al Almani (Mamadou Cuspert, or "Deso Dogg"). "Deso Dogg", who already enjoyed popularity among many adolescents as a former rapper, repeatedly emphasized in his lectures the injustice against Muslims worldwide, and called in his "Anasheed" for Jihad against the enemies of Islam. Deso Dogg is now in Syria and joined the terror group the "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – ISIL" (ad-Dawla al- Islamiyya fil-ʿ Irāq Wash-Sham, also known as *da'ish*). From there, he openly calls — via YouTube videos in German — for participating in the struggle in Syria.

Abu Usama al Gharieb also tried to settle in Syria, but was arrested and has been in Turkish custody since his capture on the Turkish-Syrian border. Of course, his captivity plays an important role for the Jihadi propaganda.

Throughout the course of the Syrian conflict, there has been a high proportion of European "converts". Many of the converts, who feel elevated within radical groups, stood on the edge of society prior to their conversion to Islam. Many people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as young people with a criminal past, discovered the social cohesion in the radical Salafi scene. The feeling of equality and brotherhood, without regard to social class, is absolutely essential.

## **Anti-Shiite Propaganda**

Why is Syria experiencing such a strong wave of volunteer fighters from Europe? The Salafi scene is characterized in particular by the fact that it sees itself as the herald of the true Islam. Thus, the fight against Sufism, Shiism or against a so-called effete Euro-Islam is a major concern of the Salafi movement. One of the biggest problems of the Syria conflict was the claim that it was a struggle between Shiites and Sunnis. This propaganda was spread not only by Assad supporters, but also by Sunni forces. Similarly, the rhetoric of some Islamic governments towards Iran and Hezbollah has worsened the situation and encourages the propaganda. The widespread propaganda against Shiites mobilized volunteer fighters throughout the Islamic world (and in Europe) who believe Iran, Hezbollah and the Syrian Alawites together want to take control over the Middle East and fight the Sunnis. This factor is of course not sufficient for a final analysis; however, it constitutes one of the most important means of propaganda in mobilizing young fighters.

# Report on the Conference Proceedings

*Manar Rachwani*

The conference entitled “The Rise of Religious Radicalism in the Arab World: Significance, Implications and Counter-Strategies” was held in Amman on 23 June 2014, to discuss the challenges facing the region, including the emergence of religious radicalism.

As noted by the Resident Director of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) in Jordan and Iraq Anja Wehler-Schoeck in her opening remarks at the conference, FES has for years undertaken to publish research series that aim to address various important features of political Islam, including Salafism, Jihadism and other currents. Furthermore, a few years ago FES launched a series of conferences designed to bring together experts from the region to discuss these issues and present their ideas on them.

## **Evaluating the Current Situation: Is Radicalism in Retreat?**

Speakers: Mohammed Abu Rumman (Jordan), Bashir Abdel-Fattah (Egypt)

**Question:** After the failure of democracy revolutions to transmit the democratic ideologies, would you say that these revolutions have retreated or failed? Is there a possibility of counter-revolutions given the increasing strength of Al Qaeda?

**Mohammed Abu Rumman:** With respect to the first question, responding to it would require a full lecture. This is not to mention the second part, which is linked to what Bashir Abdel-Fattah noted in the conclusion of the presentation of his paper, when he spoke about “post-radical Islam” and his optimism regarding a transition from *takfir* to thinking [about undertaking an intellectual review]. However, I am inclined to pessimism, fearing a transition from *takfir* to dual *takfir*. Here I'll quote a phrase by Mr. Hazem al-Amin which was the title of an article by him: “searching for sociology, not ideology.” Al Qaeda did neither come out of a vacuum or fall from the sky, nor is something imported. Rather, it is the natural result of the real and objective conditions in Arab societies. While I don't deny the existence of the ideological factor, it remains a secondary factor in explaining the rise of radical Islam groups when comparing to the sociological factor. This is evident in Iraq and Syria in particular. Who had heard of Al Qaeda in Syria in the past? The same is true for Iraq. After Al Qaeda had severely declined and broke apart in 2008, with the dissolution of its supportive social environment, the organization returned from 2011 to 2013 due to the sectarian policies of the Iraqi

government. The conflict for identity in the region — which is an existential conflict — explains this clear rise of Al Qaeda in the recent period. Therefore, I am inclined to believe that radical religious movements are more akin to social protest movements challenging the current situation, as a result of the political, economic and social circumstances, yet they carry a religious ideology. This appears in Jordan as well, whereby the collapse of the middle class led to the emergence of radical Islam groups. On the other hand, it also led to the emergence of collective and societal violence and drug abuse.

**Question:** Commenting on the statement that ISIS and similar groups are social movements carrying a religious ideology, is it not true that political Islam in general (the Muslim Brotherhood, under the leadership of Hassan al-Banna) appeared opposite reformist Islam (Allal El Fassi, Khair al-Din al-Tusi, Abdelkader El Djezairi, and others), and the latter disappeared with the appearance of the former? And let us not forget that the radical movements emerged from the cloak of the Muslim Brotherhood. The central question is: Is this religious character surrounding these groups? What must be studied in depth since we do not know the true concept of *takfir* and Jihad and the relationship between religion and the state? If this ideology is not studied, we might be surprised in the coming years with other factors (aside from social protest) from these radical movements.

**Question:** The first part of my question relates to what I call “awareness and interest”. It is obvious that those who belong to these radical movements are characterized by high levels of education and awareness, yet they are led by a person less educated and less aware than them! As for the second aspect, it relates to talk about an existential conflict: Why is it an existential conflict among us and not an existential conflict with Israel?

**Question:** I think that the media has a significant role in the growth of radical Islam movements. As it is known, the Arab reactionaryism in collaboration with the imperialists brought us Al Qaeda to fight communism in Afghanistan. And when communist rule ended in Afghanistan, these countries refused for these people to return, which led to the growth of these groups. They became terrorist groups, and the largest movements harming Islam. What is happening now in Iraq and Syria is the result of the growth of these ideas, and the goal of these terrorist groups is to eradicate Islam.

**Beshir Abdel-Fattah:** There are many questions raised regarding the reasons for the rise of radical Islam. Economic and social reasons, as well as the distorted understanding of religion, all of these are factors that existed before the Arab revolutions. Yet there is the failure and the inability of secular ideologies — socialism and liberalism — to provide an explanatory model and solutions to Arab

citizens. Thus, there was a return to religion, which represents the last line of defense for citizens. Religious rhetoric will be accepted in light of the failure of other models, especially in a society that has yet to specify its position on many issues — such as liberalism for example, which is viewed today as being contradictory to religion and morals — as well as the relationship between religion and the state in Islam.

**Mohammed Abu Rumman:** We are not talking about a single reason for the rise of radical Islam movements. Also, the relative weights of these reasons vary from one place to another. For example, in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon there is exclusion and marginalization of the Sunni community, and a sectarian conflict of identity has emerged as the primary factor that explains the rise of radical movements. And in other societies, a prominent reason is the collapse of the middle class and the obstruction of politics as a means for peaceful change, as well as the exclusion of moderate Islam. While we may disagree on a comprehensive definition of the latter, in general we mean Islam that accepts the democratic game and does not adopt armed action as a foundation. Perhaps Tunisia is an example. Despite the presence of the Ansar Al-Sharia movement in Tunisia, the one confronting it is the Ennahda Movement, which tried to contain Ansar Al-Sharia but then had no choice but to collide with it later on. Ansar Al-Sharia does not have an effective or large presence [in Tunisia], because of the presence of democracy that forces moderate Islam to confront the movement. Otherwise, the alternative would have been pulling the rug of legitimacy from under the feet of moderate Islam.

Likewise, there is what Bashir Abdel-Fattah referred to regarding Arab regimes — especially in Syria and Iraq — using radical movements in order to present themselves as part of the global war on terrorism. Perhaps here we can recall the striking statement made by the Iraqi justice minister, whereby he accused parties in the Iraqi government of collusion in the operation to release hundreds of Al Qaeda members from Abu Ghraib prison, in order for the Iraqi government to take advantage of the presence of Al Qaeda. Our colleague Hassan Abu Hanieh commented on this statement at the time, noting that the minister had said half of the truth. As for the second half, it is that Al Qaeda has been in a stage of building and growth since 2011, as a result of objective circumstances; in other words, there are many factors.

As for the existential conflict among ourselves and not against Israel, this matter calls for an in-depth discussion regarding the current Arab situation. It seems that what represents the latter most — and is a reason for the rise of Al Qaeda — is the sectarian conflict, which threatens social peace and the future, and divides the already divided. Although we are talking here about Sunni radicalism, there is Shiite radicalism that is more intense and aggressive. Examples of the latter

include the Mahdi Army and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq in Iraq, which displayed their strength with official sponsorship.

## **Radical Movements in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan**

Speakers: Bissan Al-Sheikh (Lebanon), Hassan Abu Hanieh (Jordan/Syria), Murad al-Shishani (Jordan)

**Question:** What is the official approach to dealing with the spread of radical extremism in Lebanon? What are the repercussions of the events in Iraq and the emergence of ISIS there on Lebanon? Is it possible that Lebanon will be the organization's next target?

**Question:** In light of the current situation in Iraq and the US administration's warnings about the ISIS reaching Jordan, how likely is it that the organization will really reach Jordan, taking into account the factors noted by Murad al-Shishani for the rise of radicalism, the distribution of Jihadis in Jordan, and the situation in the city of Ma'an in particular?

**Bissan Al-Sheikh:** Regarding the security approach, in the past — and particularly before the withdrawal of the Syrian Army [from Lebanon] — it was represented by taking advantage of the centers that produced cases of extremism. And as we mentioned, these were cases of individual extremism, not organized collective extremism. These centers were under the joint surveillance of the Lebanese and Syrian security services, and they were disregarded, or even nourished in some cases so that they could be taken advantage of later.

After the withdrawal of the Syrian Army, when control shifted to the Lebanese forces alone, a dual security approach was adopted under the influence of two factors:

- These cases of extremism were considered a means of venting the frustration of the public, and thus they were overlooked or protected, or their leaders were protected.
- In the event that these cases became out of control, they were dealt with by the security [forces]. Unfortunately, the security approach was not accompanied by development of these regions, creating jobs for their residents or providing a good education for them.

Regarding ISIS' announcement that its next target is Lebanon and Jordan, I do not think that [coming to] a country like Lebanon is in the organization's interest. Lebanon does not have the ability to produce a situation like that of ISIS, because of the weakness of the Sunni environment. If the external organization is the one seeking to target Lebanon, then the Syrian arena provides it the opportunity to

fight Lebanese elements there without the need to come to Lebanon.

**Murad al-Shishani:** With respect to ISIS coming to Jordan [from Iraq], the issue is not as simple as some claim. This is because of the desert between Iraq and Jordan, which makes the organization vulnerable to targeting by the air force, whether the Jordanian one or others. Despite the historical state of animosity between the Jordanian state and ISIS, talk about the organization coming to Jordan from abroad remains a simplification.

But the real risk is an internal one. What happens in Iraq will have repercussions on the structure of the internal (Jihadi) current in Jordan.

**Question:** Are Jabhat Al-Nusra and ISIS fundamentally offspring of Al Qaeda? What are the reasons that allowed for these organizations to grow, i.e. who is supporting them? Are there regimes doing this? And what are these organizations' strategies? What actions do we expect them to undertake in the future?

**Question:** Murad al-Shishani noted that the city of Zarqa is the stronghold of the Salafi current. Is ISIS taking advantage of the situation in Ma'an to gain the support of its residents, especially as the leaders of the Jordanian Salafi currents are in prison? I'd like to add that ISIS wants to establish a state that no one wants in Jordan.

**Question:** There is a problem in the Arab world related to terminology. The goal of this conference is to talk about religious radicalism, but the approach was limited to ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra. I had hoped we would talk about radicalism among Shiites, through the Iraqi factions.

My second observation is that Bissan Al-Sheikh described the Hariri family as representative of moderate Islam. Is this segment the one that represents moderate Islam? Is there no moderate Islam on the Shiite side? Furthermore, the issue of resistance to liberate Palestine is absent from Al Qaeda's rhetoric, while the liberation of Palestine is a top priority for Hezbollah.

**Question:** What is the role of multinational companies in supporting extremist groups? And is there a link between Turkey and these groups?

**Question:** We are forgetting an important issue, which is that the foundation for this stage was laid in a systematic manner by the Muslim Brotherhood, through educational curricula. This is evident in Jordan and Egypt. These curricula are what created the current Jihadi generations.

Also, there was no reference to the international (American and European) and regional support for ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra, and the use of these groups to implement the agendas of these powers.

**Bissan Al-Sheikh:** We are talking about the Sunni leadership of the Hariri family

compared to extremist phenomena. Of course there are moderate Shiite political figures, but the political platform available to them is very limited.

As for Hezbollah's position on Palestine, since the 2006 War, Palestine has not been a priority for the party, rather domestic [issues] became the priority. What we are talking about today in terms of the Sunni-Shiite conflict in the region has not been spoken of in Lebanon since 2005, with the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

**Murad al-Shishani:** I'd first like to point out that it is not true that Palestine is not a priority for Jihadis, whether or not we agree with them. This claim is used against these Jihadis to weaken them. Years ago, the Al-Ahram Center carried out a study on the speeches of [Osama] bin Laden. It was found that Palestine was mentioned in between 70-80% of these speeches. Thus, the question is: Is this a reason that Al Qaeda should be garner Arab/popular support?

With regard to ISIS' strategies, such organizations oscillate between two strategies:

- Geographic expansion: This is a modern strategy that emerged after 2008. We see that it is being implemented in Syria and Iraq, where ISIS wants to establish a strip of land [it controls] from Aleppo in Syria to Anbar in Iraq.
- Non-traditional operations, or what is referred to in specialized literature as "terrorism in peacetime", through suicide bombings, assassinations, etc.

As for an ISIS state, there are many indications confirming that the people want a different state.

Regarding the Ma'an governorate, there is a truth that must be acknowledged: Ma'an is Jordan's weak point as a result of local grievances. There must be a comprehensive development-based solution, which has not been proposed to date. This reality produces radical thought, because of the absence of a cover that contains existing frustrations.

Concerning multinational companies, this can be addressed through the issue of funding in general. It is worth noting here that ISIS, according to confirmed reports, obtained half a billion dollars from Mosul's banks. And certainly there are individual donors supporting these armed organizations. On the other hand, the entirety of the September 11 attacks cost no more than 300 thousand dollars over the span of seven years [of planning and implementation]. In other words, the attacks of these armed organizations are relatively cheap compared to the expenses of regular armies.

Of course there is an overlap between these organizations and weapons dealers. But it is a relationship that cannot be understood in the context of a conspiracy theory; rather it is the natural result of the objective reality.

Regarding Turkey's relationship with these organizations, Turkey today resembles Syria when the latter was a conduit for Jihadis traveling to Iraq. Turkey has tried to forge a relationship with Jabhat Al-Nusra, but it did not succeed in this. Yet it did succeed in forging relations with local (Syrian) groups. While the latter are launched based on Jihadi statements, their goal is toppling the regime of Bashar Al-Assad.

Yet, allowing Jihadis to enter Syria via its territory has caused a headache for Turkey. This led to Ankara declaring Jabhat Al-Nusra a terrorist group, alongside an attempt to control some of the border regions.

**Question:** Is what is happening in Iraq today a prelude to drawing a new map of the Middle East? Who is benefiting from the military moves in Iraq? Are the Sunnis the true beneficiaries, in exchange for significant gains for the Kurds? Will Iraq be partitioned? Will Al-Assad be able to stay in power for a long time in light of the inability of the liberal current and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to change the balance of power? Will the Syrian wound remain open for a long time, or will it remain subject to US-Russian-Iranian agreements?

**Hassan Abu Hanieh:** As a result of the failure of US policy since September 11, as well as the failure of neoconservatives' ideology regarding the establishment of a new era of globalization — which includes dismantling the Iraqi state and society to rebuild it on the basis of sect and identity — it seems that there is a return to the option of dismantling and assembly.

The Arab Spring proved that there is no escaping a return to traditional polices based on military force to ensure stability. There is a debate in the US on the military's ability to ensure stability in the future, with the fall of Mosul expressing this lesson. It seems that fighting terrorism will be the only point of consensus in US foreign policy.

As noted by the European Council on Foreign Relations, Syria has entered the “club” of crises that have no solution. The same is true for Iraq and Libya. Within a year we will see the collapse of the state in Yemen and Libya, and there are fears about Egypt. The question is: Will the US bear the cost of disintegration? Everyone had their own plans, and let's not forget this is true for Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, who manipulated everyone. He was not a piece manipulated on a chessboard.

The region is heading toward further fragmentation. The obstruction of the path of the Arab Revolutions in this crude manner foretells a difficult result. Society cannot accept ISIS, but what is the alternative? Harassment? Here, Al Qaeda's violence becomes acceptable in order to provide security in the absence of a state authority. And I don't think that anyone will gain from this. The West will not gain anything, nor will Iran. Al Qaeda is the one who will gain. A return to an

authoritarian structure cannot succeed. ISIS has discovered that the state does not exist in the minds of the people.

**Question:** As we eagerly look at the near future of the Arab world, we must not forget the recent past. The Arab revolutions were produced by the people, but the West took advantage of these revolutions. What is happening is the embodiment of an international strategy toward the region. It is outwardly led by the US, but the interests of Israel lie at its heart. This is in order to divide the region into warring sects, especially after the blows sustained by Israel from “Sunni” Hamas and Shiite Hezbollah.

**Question:** It does not suffice to merely highlight the emerging radical movements that use violence, as there are reasons for the presence of these movements in the first place and their rise. The problem is not in these groups, rather there is an ummah [Islamic nation] with a message, culture and thought. The ummah's states lasted for many centuries and then were destroyed by self-action, represented by a decline in the level of reflection and an exclusion of independent thinking. This also resulted from powerful external action, namely European colonialism, which was keen to fragment these states into dozens of small entities. The central point that should be highlighted is what the Islamic ummah was subjected to by its enemies, the Americans and before them the Europeans.

**Hassan Abu Hanieh:** We will inevitably disagree on the reasons, for there is no single reason or theory that alone explains human actions. But there is a near reason and a far-off reason.

## **Radical Movements in Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia and Europe**

Speakers: Haider Saeed (Iraq), Amr Hashim Rabie (Egypt), Alaya Alani (Tunisia), El Hakam Sukhni (Germany)

**Question:** It is very difficult to convince someone of the status of the Muslim Brotherhood among the radical current, and to accuse it of terrorism. Likewise, the statement that “terrorist movements spawned from the mother movement, the Muslim Brotherhood”, falls in the same context of the orientalist statement that leads to the idea that Islam itself has a “terrorist” nature, and thus all political Islam movements are terrorist movements, of varying degrees. This is a problem that does not help analysis.

Moreover, the Brotherhood's reference was not based on a single authority. Even the group of [Sayyid] Qutb did not appoint a reference. Abdullah Azzam relied on Sayyid Qutb and Abul Ala Maududi, while the reference for Al-Maqdisi was Salafi Wahhabism, and Abu Qatada expanded and included Maliki [Salafism].

Even Salafism itself cannot be placed within a single context. Western studies indicate that whenever moderation is discussed, there is talk of the Muslim Brotherhood. Even Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and Mohammed Al-Adnani accused [Mohamed] Morsi of blasphemy for entering the political process.

**Question:** Amr Hashim Rabie said that the Muslim Brotherhood (in Egypt) were exclusionists. However, I think that the opposite is true, and that the fact that they were not exclusionists led to the demise of their rule.

Moreover, Alaya Alani said that if there were a high proportion of liberals in Tunisia, the country would be safe from terrorism. This means that if the Islamists had the highest rate [of representation] then Tunisia would be threatened with terrorism, thus implying Islam is the source of terrorism. With regard to Haider Saeed's paper, I would like clarification on the relationship between pluralism and radicalism, particularly regarding the reference to the project to establish regions in Jordan.

**Question:** What is the difference between ISIS in Iraq — where Haider Saeed said that it has achieved the people's demands — and ISIS in Syria? With regard to the situation in Egypt, Amr Hashim Rabie noted the Muslim Brotherhood and what they had undertaken in terms of besieging the Constitutional Court. On the other hand, he did not refer to what the other side carried out against the Brotherhood members who are now in prison or dead, and the fact that it was banned and deemed a terrorist group. Moreover, Rabie referenced Qatar's support for the Brotherhood, but did not mention Saudi Arabia's support for the coup.

**Question:** The papers are filled with presuppositions that have not been proven. What is the evidence and proof? Is Islam, in the eyes of the researchers, the source of terrorism?

**Amal Abu-Jiries:** The Friedrich Ebert Foundation deals with political Islam, i.e. political groups that speak in the name of religion to achieve their own political agendas. As for religion, it concerns the relationship between a person and God — this is not being addressed. The papers presented at the conference express the views of the researchers, and do not encroach upon any religion.

**Haider Saeed:** There is a direct relationship between the rise of radicalism and the failure of the political project in Iraq. With regard to pluralism, and the project to establish regions in particular, what I mean is the increase in talk about pluralism as a model for state building after the Arab Spring. Even in a country like Jordan, where there are no sectarian or ethnic societal divisions, there is talk about establishing regions. The region has moved from a nationalist “nation-state” model to a decentralized model.

As for ISIS in Syria and Iraq, there is a difference between the two. ISIS is more linked to the Iraqi issue and its leaders are Iraqi. Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi is from the city of Samarra. And while ISIS competes with other armed factions in Syria, in Iraq it is the main armed faction and represents the Sunni tool to confront the Shiite government in Baghdad.

**Amr Hashim Rabie:** We are talking about a political faction, not about religion. There is no religious politician. As soon as religion enters the debate, the latter ends.

**Alaya Alani:** Perhaps there is a misunderstanding, and we must distinguish between Islam and Islamists. Islam has lasted for 14 centuries because it did not mix between the sacred and the human. We have not studied doctrinal Islam and historical Islam, so sometimes we confuse the two. Therefore it is necessary to reform religious thought, not through the current jurisprudential societies, but rather through societies that include the religious world, the economic world and the world of consensus. Because [currently] fatwas are linked to economic, social and religious conditions. Europe settled its ideological conflicts regarding the citizenship state, unlike the situation in the Arab world. It is not important what each party believes in, whether Shiite, Sunni or something else. Rather, what is important is that anyone who lives in the state, pays taxes and commits to not using violence has the right to express his or her opinion and participate in the societal model.

We recently called for a national conference in Tunisia — which may evolve into a Maghreb, Arab or international conference — against terrorism, through rehabilitation of Jihadis using two approaches:

- The security approach: Investigating Jihadis returning from Syria and Iraq and subjecting them to monitoring by the security forces, with a full commitment to human rights in dealing with them.
- The social and ideological approach: This is completed through holding dialogue with them using ideological references, while providing social assistance to them.

Arabs should not be ashamed to draw lessons from their defeats, as was done by Germany and Japan.

**Mohammed Abu Rumman:** Although Haider Saeed said that what is happening in Iraq, regarding the relationship between ISIS and other Sunni factions, differs from what is happening in Syria, I think that what is happening in Iraq will copy the experience in Syria.

According to Amr Hashim Rabie, the question involves how to deal with the

political Islam current in general, as it is a current that exists. We face a dilemma: if we exclude this current we have a problem, yet if we include it — according to Rabie — we also have a problem.

It is worth noting that this is the third conference conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on this subject. Last year's conference was on the Salafis, and it was attended by Salafis. There is no bias against any party.

## **The Road to the Future**

Speakers: Matenia Sirseloudi (Germany), Hazem Al-Amin (Lebanon)

**Question:** What are the indicators that can be relied upon in an attempt to extrapolate the future of radical Islamic movements, and the relationship between them and Arab regimes?

**Hazem Al-Amin:** All regimes are experiencing a state of severe disruption. I believe that the entire region is witnessing a re-composition. The radical Salafi movements are a phenomenon that will not last, because these movements have nothing to do with the future, nor with politics. It is impossible for ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra to transform into political parties, in reality they are fuel for a large change that will happen.

It is not possible to predict the future, because it is linked to very complex elements. However, there is a new map that will emerge, although its form is yet to be known. This map is linked to the stumbling US role, as well as that of Iran, and to the Turkish ambiguity that has persisted thus far, and which must be clarified. The region may be heading toward division, or it may be heading toward unity (truncation and integration between some areas).

**Question:** Maybe we touched on the issue briefly, but there is a need to study individual radicalism, not [just] the radicalism of groups. What regions do these individuals come from? And do radicals come from the middle class? I suggest that the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's next conference be on this topic.

**Mohammed Abu Rumman:** This subject was covered in last year's conference. Also, my next book "I Am a Salafi", to be published after Ramadan, will address this subject.

**Question:** Islamist movements have projects they have proposed. Yet if these movements succeed in creating their own model — whether in the manner used by Mohamed Morsi through the ballot box, or that of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi — will the Western world accept the existence of another model outside the capitalist system? Because any renaissance project must collide with capitalist interests. A political system is the people's choice and thus it should reflect this choice. There is

a system to Islamic culture and Islamic civilization. The Islamists have the right to dream of this model, even though the ballot box brought Adolph Hitler to power.

**Hazem Al-Amin:** Why do you assume that Islamist movements are against capitalism? Islamists have never been against capitalism; rather their problem is with Western culture.

**Matenia Sirseldoudi:** Examples were presented today of the integration of Islamists who had long called for applying Islamic law, so an agreement must [have been reached] with Islamists. The relationship is not about picking one or the other. In Germany — a capitalist system — there are also socialists.

In my opinion, people choose the way of life and their form of rule. Thus I support including anyone who wants to participate, and not excluding them from the political process in their country. I am impressed that two kingdoms — namely Jordan and Morocco — have managed to adapt to the Arab Spring. While I don't know the exact reason for this, maybe it has to do with the legitimacy of the political system. Yet exclusion and the absence of any legitimate channel for participation; this is what drives people to extremism and violence.

## **Concluding Remarks**

**Mohammed Abu Rumman:** Today's discussion can be summarized by a set of conclusions that do not reflect final positions; rather they take the form of open-ended questions that call for more in-depth discussion, namely:

- Radicalism and moderation are two relative terms, and there is no consensus on their meaning. While this conference addresses “The rise of religious radicalism”, it was not intended to address all radical Islam movements, rather the Sunni movements in particular. This was not done to show bias toward one side, and perhaps there will be other conferences on Shiite, Jewish or Christian radicalism in the Arab region.
- As most of the conference speakers noted, the real problem lies in the collapse of moral values in Arab and Islamic societies, and the latter's entrance into a stage of “savagery”. We have witnessed a state of collapse in terms of the value of the state, moral authority and the middle class, and this has been expressed through sexual harassment, collective rape, societal violence and drug abuse. As most speakers also pointed out, the rise of religious radicalism is linked to these collapses (and the absence of the political horizon), and is not fundamentally connected to ideology.
- It has been said that in the Arab world we spend a lot of time diagnosing phenomena at the expense of discussing solutions. While this observation is

correct, the fact is that the problem lies in the absence of precise and accurate diagnoses for the phenomena in the Arab world. And this explains the absence of real and effective solutions. Based on the papers presented at the conference, the question appears: Can the rise of radical Sunni Islam (Al Qaeda) be attributed to religious and ideological reasons that produce these movements, as some suggested? But this question calls for another question, which is: How do we explain the historical line of regression from the rise of reformist Islam, to revivalist Islam (represented by the Muslim Brotherhood), and finally reaching Jihadi Islam? Is the reason for this purely socioeconomic, whereby socioeconomic problems produce religious violence just as they produce other forms of societal violence? However, there are individual cases to which this socioeconomic standard does not apply, in terms of radicals who have a high level of education and income, and who graduated from prominent Western universities, and so on. Is one of the reasons political exclusion, including the exclusion of moderate Islam? But some argue that the opposite is true, i.e. that the presence of political Islam in the political game led to disastrous results. Here, too, an opposing question arises: How do we explain — based on this view — the fact that the situation in Tunisia was a success, whereas the Egyptian experience was a failure? Alaya Alani argues that the reason is the presence of a strong civil society, which regulated the moderate political Islam movements.

- Another question emerges: Are radical religious movements on the rise? There is a consensus that these movements (Al Qaeda and similar ones) are on the rise in the current stage. But the important question is: Is this rise temporary or will it continue? In other words, is it a rise linked to the current circumstances or will it continue for years? If the relationship between Al Qaeda (including its branches) and the social environment was fragile, how do we explain the fact that these organizations have remained in Raqqa and Fallujah?
- Concerning the approach adopted to face the rise of Al Qaeda, some have returned to emphasize the security approach, through calls to strengthen the state, laws, and the security services in the face of Al Qaeda. However, is it not true that this was the “solution” adopted in previous decades in the countries that produced Al Qaeda, and therefore the latter group is the result of adopting a security approach? Hence, the question is: Is the alternative to the security solution what was mentioned by Matenia Sirseloudi, i.e. containing political Islam, alongside the presence of a strong civil society and a strong state that prevent political Islam movements from dominating power?



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