

# Understanding and Responding to Islamic Terrorism

Lesson 2: Islamic Reform Movement and Ideology

## Lesson Outline

- *Jahiliyyah* and the Call for Reform
- Al-Wahhab and Wahhabism
- Salafism: The Militant Product of Wahhabism
- Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

## *Jahiliyyah* and the Call for Reform

Global Islam at the beginning of the twentieth century was considered by many to be reprobate, long since deviated from its days of purity and unity.

Traditionalist Muslims like Sayyid Qutb (Egypt) considered Islam in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be like the ignorance and paganism of pre-Islamic Arabia, known as *jahiliyah*.

Islam was no longer a global power. Purity had been replaced with license. Western influence was deteriorating the moral and religious fabric of the Muslim world. There was not a global, unified Islamic republic.

## *Jahiliyyah* and the Call for Reform

The answer to this predicament was thought to be revival and reform.

- Muslims needed to return to the way of Islam and live in obedience to the commandments of Allah and the model of the Muhammad.
- They needed to reject modern influences and restore traditional, conservative principles that foster obedience and moral purity.

## *Jahiliyyah* and the Call for Reform

Three themes that are central to revivalist thought:

- 1) the call for a return to, or a strict application of, the Qur'an and Sunnah;
- 2) assertion of the right to independent analysis of the Qur'an and Sunnah instead of having to accept the views of previous generations;
- 3) reaffirmation of the authenticity of the Qur'anic experience.

## Al-Wahhab and Wahhabism

Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (c. 1744-1787)

- Saudi Arabian religious scholar who studies theology at Medina before moving to Iran
- While in Iran al-Wahhāb converted to Hanbalism, the most conservative of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Named after Ahmad ibn-Hanbal (d.855), the Hanbalite school emphasizes adherence to the literal words of the Qur'an and *Hadith* and the fulfillment of religious duties defined in the Shariah.
- Determined to spread his Hanbalite views, al-Wahhāb returned to Saudi Arabia and began preaching his new doctrine outlined in his book, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* (Book on Unity).

## Al-Wahhab and Wahhabism

Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (c. 1744-1787)

- When many of his hearers rejected him, al-Wahhāb fled his hometown and was accepted by Muhammad ibn Saud, a local chief who converted to Wahhābism.
- Together, the two men formed a structure that would change Saudi Arabia and endure to today: al-Wahhāb became the religious authority (continued today through Wahhābi Sunni Islam) and ibn Saud became the political authority (continued today through the Saudi monarchy).

## Al-Wahhab and Wahhabism

Wahhābi Doctrine

- Excludes all innovation introduced into Islam after its third century of existence.
- Farah notes, “[Wahhābi doctrine] upholds the *Sunnah* and the six canonical books of *Hadīth*. All valid knowledge derives strictly from the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah*.”
- In some ways al-Wahhāb was similar to the Puritans of the seventh and eighteenth centuries. He was zealous to purify Islam of foreign elements that had caused the religion to stray from strict obedience to Allah.

## Al-Wahhab and Wahhabism

### Wahhābi Doctrine

- Not only did al-Wahhāb want to purify Islam of infidelities, but also “corruption in manners and religious practices in Arabia, which [he] attributed to laxity in enforcing religious injunctions.”
- All of these infidelities and “corruptions” were to be driven out of Islam so that the Muslim community might return to true obedience to Allah.

## Salafism: The Militant Product of Wahhabism

### Salafism as an Ideology

- Salafism, or *Salafiyya*, is a religious movement within contemporary Islam that believes that Muslims should “emulate the first three generations of Islam referred to as the pious forefathers (*al-salaf al-salih*) as much as possible in all areas of life.”
- Emphasis upon the first three generations comes from a hadith recorded by Bukhari: “The best of my community [i.e., Muslims] are my generation, then those who come after them and then those who follow them.”
- Salafis, like Wahhābis, are religious reformers seeking to purify modern Islam and establish Muslim communities that adhere to strict interpretations of the Qur’an and hadith, as well as that reject later influences, especially from the Western world.

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## Salafism: The Militant Product of Wahhabism

### Salafism vs. Wahhābism

- The primary difference between Wahhābism and Salafism is doctrinal, but not ideological.
  - Wahhābis reject independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) and are strict followers of the Hanbalite school of jurisprudence.
  - Salafis, on the other hand, reject *ijtihad* and prefer to interact directly with Islamic sources rather than following the judgments of previous scholars.
- So, both groups reject independent reasoning. The difference is when we look at the sources that they use for religious belief.

# Salafism: The Militant Product of Wahhabism

## Salafism vs. Wahhābism

- Salafis make six primary claims that guide their thoughts and actions
  - A return to the thoughts and practices of the first three generations
  - Emphasis on a particular understanding of *tawhid* (God's oneness)
  - Fighting unbelief
  - Only valid sources of authority are the Qur'an and Sunna
  - Ridding Islam of innovations in belief and practice
  - A strict interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna is sufficient to guide all Muslims.

# Salafism: The Militant Product of Wahhabism

## Relationship between Salafism and Wahhābism

- The two groups share many beliefs and practices.
  - Both ideologies desire to see Islam purified and strengthened, that Muslim communities might emerge all over the world and submit (by force, if necessary) all principles of life to Allah.
- Practically, when one examines modern Islamist movements, it appears that Salafism (or a variant thereof) is the ideology most often adopted by Sunni Muslim terrorist groups.

## Salafism: The Militant Product of Wahhabism

### Relationship between Salafism and Wahhābism

- Some might say, then, that Salafism is the militant expression of Wahhābism.
- While the distinction is not that simple, due to some important doctrinal differences, one can at least say that Salafism represents a more “physical” expression of views common to both Salafism and Wahhābism.

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### Beginning Life

- Born in Egypt in 1906
- Qutb grew up in a traditional Muslim manner, studying and memorizing the Qur’an by age ten in school.
- He later moved to Cairo to continue his studies where he graduated from Dar al-Ulum before serving as an inspector of the ministry of education.
- Finding his work unsatisfying, Qutb resigned and began a life devoted to writing. Using his extensive knowledge of the Qur’an, Qutb began to formulate his ideology and publish several texts in which he outlined a reformed and renewed Islam.

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### Visit to the United States and Emerging Islamist Sympathy

- Travelled to the U.S. in the late 1940s to study educational administration.
- Qutb saw “wide and unquestioning support” for the new state of Israel and “injustice of the uprooting of the Palestinians,” both of which caused him to grow bitter toward Western powers in general and the United States in particular.
- He returned to Egypt and promptly joined the Muslim Brotherhood, which he used as a platform to promote his ideology as an alternative to Western influences and cultures.

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### Initial Involvement in the Muslim Brotherhood

- Following the Egyptian revolution of 1952, the Free Officers took control and Qutb believed this was an opportunity to begin instituting an Islamic state in Egypt.
- The Free Officers had supplied arms to the Muslim Brotherhood, and Qutb was even recruited as a consultant by the Free Officers.
- However, they did not share Qutb’s views on an Islamic state led by key members of the Muslim Brotherhood.
- In 1954 Qutb was arrested with several members of the Muslim Brotherhood under suspicion of plotting to kill President Gamal Abdel Nasser and sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor.

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### Release from Prison, Writing Ministry, Arrest and Death

- After serving ten years Qutb was released as a result of personal intercession from the president of Iraq. However, his time in prison and the torture he endured had taken great physical and mental toll on him.
- He quickly began writing texts in which he rejected all forms of government that did not follow his interpretation of “true Islam.”
- As a result Qutb was arrested in 1965, condemned to death on August 22, 1966, executed, and buried in an unmarked grave.
- Despite his death, his writings continued to influence countless Muslims after him. Sayyid Qutb thus stands—in the eyes of many Muslims—as a martyr for Islamic reform.

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### Sayyid Qutb’s Doctrine

- An expansion and continuation of prior Hanbali thought. He taught that it is the responsibility of Muslims to establish Islamic communities and submit all aspects of life to the way of Islam.
- Regardless of whether all people in an Islamic community convert to Islam, the principles of Islam—obedience to the Qur’an and Sunnah of Muhammad—must be implemented in order to honor Allah.

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### Sayyid Qutb's Doctrine

- The way to establish Islamic communities, in the thinking of Qutb, is to preach the Qur'an throughout the entire world. However, Qutb admitted that preaching, in and of itself, was insufficient to establish Islam worldwide. There must be a physical component in addition to preaching.

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### The Physical Component of Establishing Islam

- The physical component necessary to establish Islam is *jihad*, which Qutb defines as "striving" in Arabic, "any form of activity, either personal or community-wide, of Muslims in attempting to strive for the cause of God and for the sake of Islam."
- More practically, *jihad* is a physical movement to oppose any government, system, or person that inhibits anyone's ability to choose Islam.
- Qutb believed that *jihad* was not only the establishment of Islamic principles to all of life, but also the removal of un-Islamic principles.

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### The Physical Component of Establishing Islam

- His belief was that governments, people, or systems that are un-Islamic are not only disobedient to the way of Allah, but they also actively prohibit non-Muslims from choosing Islam, even if an un-Islamic government, for example, allows Islam to be preached and practiced.
- Qutb believed that these institutions or individuals “[prevent] people from reforming their ideas and beliefs [and force] them to obey their erroneous ways and make them serve human lords instead of the Almighty Lord.”

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### Quotes to summarize Qutb’s thought:

“If the actual life of human beings is found to be different from this declaration of freedom, then it becomes incumbent upon Islam to enter the field with preaching as well as the movement, and to strike hard at all those political powers which force people to bow before them and which rule over them, unmindful of the commandments of God, and which prevent people from listening to the preaching and accepting the belief if they wish to do so.”

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### *Jihad* Is Unlimited

- Qutb believed that *jihad* is not limited to the time of Muhammad, but rather is continually in effect as long as there are communities that are not Islamic.
- He writes, “What kind of man is it who, after listening to the commandment of God and the Traditions of the Prophet – peace be on him – and after reading about the events which occurred during the Islamic **Jihaad**, still thinks that it is a temporary injunction related to transient conditions and that it is concerned only with the defense of the borders?”
- He continues, “Thus, this struggle is not a temporary phase but an eternal state – an eternal state, as truth and falsehood cannot co-exist on this earth.”

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

### Qutb’s Call for Revival

- Qutb was certain that he and likeminded Muslims possessed a “new thing which is perfect to the highest degree,” referring to a purified Islam.
- In order to show the beauty of this reformed Islamic society, there must be a revival in Muslim countries.
- Revival can only come, however, if a “vanguard” rises up and “sets out with this determination and then keeps walking on the path, marching through the vast ocean of **Jahiliyyah** which has encompassed the entire world.”

## Sayyid Qutb and *Milestones*

- It is this call for a vanguard that has prompted many Muslims to rise up against institutions they deem un-Islamic. Muslims around the world are adopting Qutb's ideology and are taking it upon themselves to be the "vanguard" for Islamic revival, purifying Islam of un-Islamic influences and establishing new communities submitted to Allah and the way of Islam.

## Questions and Comments