

Current Trends IN ISLAMIST IDEOLOGY

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Hudson Institute

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In Search of the Vanished Caliphate

By Alexander Orwin

THE CALIPHATE HAS LONG BEEN VIEWED BY MUSLIMS AS THE legitimate representative of God and Islam on earth, heir to a chain of uninterrupted succession reaching back to the prophet Muhammad. Terse Qur'anic verses such as 2.30, 10.14, 10.73, and 38.26 already contain the general meaning of the term, without explaining its specific implications. By means of a long and murky historical process that we cannot begin to explore here, the requirements of divinely ordained rule and succession expressed in these verses came to be embodied in a concrete institution. In the 8th and 9th centuries, the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates ruled the entire Muslim world. Long after these mighty empires went the way of all powers on earth, the sacred aura surrounding the Caliphate refused to dissipate. Deprived of all real political power by the 10th century, the Caliphate managed to subsist more or less continuously for another millennium, outliving countless empires and dynasties. It succumbed to the powers-that-be only in 1924, when Ataturk sought to usher in a new republican age by putting the old imperial Caliphate to rest. Its last figurehead, Abdulmecid II, was bundled ignominiously onto a train bound for Europe.

Nearly a century later, it is safe to say that the Caliphate is not yet dead. Not only has it been resurrected, for a short time at least, by Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, but a broad spectrum of Islamist movements supports, with varying degrees of urgency, its restoration. The resilience of the idea of the Caliphate in modern times

prompts us to consider what major classical authors said about this institution, and its integral role in Islam. The leading historian Ibn Khaldun (1338–1406) remains particularly interesting on this point. He was well aware of the centuries-old impotence of the Caliphate, but nonetheless saw only danger in abolishing it. Ibn Khaldun’s influence lasted into modern times, so that even those writers who justified the abolition of the Caliphate in the twentieth century cited his views. After discussing one of the most significant of these writers, Muhammad Iqbal, and comparing his view of the Caliphate to Ibn Khaldun’s, we will then return to the modern history of Caliphal revivalism, in light of what we learn from Ibn Khaldun and Iqbal.

Reconciling Theory and History: Ibn Khaldun’s Symbolic Caliphate

IBN KHALDUN’S UNIQUE APPROACH TO THE CALIPHATE STEMS FROM HIS STATURE as both a scholar of Islam and a historian. In the former capacity, he understands the great power that the Caliphate is supposed to wield over the Muslim community. Its sweeping authority is reflected in Ibn Khaldun’s initial definition: the Caliphate succeeds the prophets in enforcing the dictates of *shari‘a*, and “forces everyone to act as required by legal (*shar‘i*) reflection with regard to their well-being in the next world and in this one.”¹ A Caliphate exercising such overwhelming material and spiritual power might possibly have existed in the time of the Umayyads and Abbasids, but certainly not in Ibn Khaldun’s day, when kings generally did what they pleased without consulting the Abbasid Caliph, who had been reduced to a mere puppet of the Mamluk dynasty in Cairo. As a historian, Ibn Khaldun does not hesitate to acknowledge the actual fate of the Caliphate: “its significance has vanished, and only its name remains,” while every single one of “its honors and offices have been absorbed into royal and political authority in all the dynasties of this era.”² Ibn Khaldun bears witness to the chasm that separated the historical Caliphate, as it was in the 14th century, from the Muslim Caliphate as it ought to be.

Ibn Khaldun might have concluded that the gap between traditional expectations and reality could be closed only by restoring the Caliphate to its former glory.

Yet he dismissed any such project as dangerously impractical. The original, unified Caliphate was a one-time historical phenomenon, built around the uniquely powerful group feeling (*‘asabiyya*) of Muhammad’s Quraysh tribe and the new religion they propagated, which was for a brief moment strong enough to encompass the entire Islamic world. Following the gradual erosion of Qurayshi power and the dynasties built by it, the Islamic world has become permanently divided into multiple group feelings and therefore multiple dynasties, few of which are inclined to subject themselves to a single Caliph in any given place.³ In the aftermath of the decline of the Quraysh, the hope for the reunification of Islam through the appearance of a member of the Prophet’s family or tribe has gradually passed from the historic into the Messianic realm, as reflected in numerous *hadith*. Ibn Khaldun fears that such eschatological longings could have a disruptive effect on actual history, so he does his best to cast doubt on these *hadith*, pointing to both their unreliable chains of transmission and political implausibility.⁴

Alternatively, Ibn Khaldun could have dismissed the Caliphate as a dinosaur that ought to be mercifully laid to rest. If Qurayshi power has vanished, should not the institution dependent on it disappear as well? Such an idea had already been proposed by certain rebellious Kharijite groups and rationalist Mutazilite theologians. Ibn Khaldun responds that these critics are decisively refuted not by reason, or even by divine law, but by Muslim consensus (*ijma’*).⁵ Contemporary scholar and Hizb al-Tahrir sympathizer Reza Pankhurst echoes Ibn Khaldun’s view, marshalling an impressive list of medieval authorities who defended the necessity of the Caliphate.⁶

The institution built by Qurayshi power had become more firmly rooted in Muslim consciousness than that power itself, and therefore outlived its creator. Abolishing the Caliphate would shock Muslim opinion so severely that it might provoke more disputes than it would resolve. Still, one could ask how unconditional Ibn Khaldun’s support of the Caliphate really is, since Muslim consensus, unlike reason or divine law, might change over time. However, Ibn Khaldun suggests that this consensus is grounded on a fundamental and unique feature of Islam, setting it apart from all other religions—namely, its bringing together of religious and political authority, and therefore of royal authority and Caliphate, for the sake of the broadest possible propagation of the religion.⁷ Ibn Khaldun justifies this combination with a political argument of his own. Since even the best royal authority contains elements that are tyrannical and unjust, every successful civilization thus far has both sustained and restrained its rulers with widely accepted political rules. These rules may have been secular in the case of ancient Persia, but they have become religious after the rise of Islam and the Caliphate.⁸

In the Muslim era, political authority is therefore strengthened when linked to religion.⁹ The severing of the Caliphate from its worldly alliance with Muslim rulers entails two main risks: it could undermine these rulers' religious legitimacy among the people, and remove religious inhibitions against their own temptations toward tyrannical behavior.

By grounding the Caliphate in Muslim consensus, Ibn Khaldun does not permit its abolition. But he surely permits changes in how the Caliphate is understood, as consensus shifts according to novel circumstances. Ibn Khaldun gives two related examples. Originally, the position of Caliph was reserved for the members of the Quraysh. This stipulation made sense when the Quraysh were in fact the only group that had the power to govern the Muslim community, but became obsolete as their power evaporated. In Ibn Khaldun's time, it needs to be reinterpreted as meaning that whichever group is most capable of ruling ought to lay claim to the Caliphate: the Quraysh held that capability in the distant past, but other groups have assumed it today.¹⁰ Second, the insistence on the unity of the Caliphate made sense when a single Caliph was the undisputed ruler of the entire Muslim world, but not after that world had been divided among multiple, competing dynasties. When the mid-tenth century ruler Abd al-Rahman III of Spain declared his own Caliphate in response to the growing weakness of the Abbasid original in Baghdad, the opinion of local religious elites quickly began to acknowledge the legitimacy of multiple Caliphates, as long as each asserted its authority only in its respective region.¹¹ This novel opinion may have been questionable from a strictly religious point of view, according to which there could be only one legitimate successor to Muhammad, and has therefore continued to be opposed by a large number of scholars. Yet it is salutary from a political point of view, allowing every local dynasty to derive its legitimacy from its own Caliphate or that of whichever of its neighbors it chooses to swear allegiance. Ibn Khaldun might have hoped that the idea of a multiplicity of Caliphates, all devising some kind link to the prophet Muhammad, would gradually gain greater acceptance over time.

Seeking neither to extinguish nor restore the Caliphate, Ibn Khaldun takes upon himself the challenge of reconciling the Muslim community to its feeble remnant, despite lingering memory of what the institution used to or ought to be. He begins to do this by immediately modifying his initial definition: "in reality, the Caliphate is a substitute for the lawgiver, with regard to the guardianship of religion and the politics of this world." Proving that this change is no mere accident, Ibn Khaldun repeats the new definition almost verbatim at the beginning of two other chapters, each time speaking of its "reality" (*haqiqa*).¹² According to the first definition, cited at the beginning of this section, the Caliphate ought to influence

by force the destiny of all Muslims in this world and the next, while according to the second, more “realistic” definition, it may not even dispose of any force at all and has the more modest goal of preserving the religion of Islam after the death of its lawgiver in the face of the vicissitudes of this-worldly politics. The first definition would make it hard for Muslims to reconcile themselves to the Caliphate’s largely symbolic authority; the second would make it relatively easy for them to do so, provided that its nominal prestige as the heir to the prophet Muhammad serves a useful role in protecting the integrity of their religion and the legitimacy of their governments.

Ibn Khaldun bolsters his theoretical arguments against the abolition of the Caliphate through a pertinent historical example. The Almohad Mahdi appears to have been one of the few medieval Muslim rulers who dared to disavow the Caliphate by publicly proclaiming the well-known truth of its longstanding incompetence and weakness. Seeking a new source of religious legitimacy, he found it in a novel mixture of Ash‘arite theology about the unity of God with Shi‘a teachings about the infallibility of rulers and imams, through which he elevated himself above the impotent descendants of the Caliphs in both Spain and Baghdad. The Mahdi replaced the traditional Caliphate with what we may call a hybrid religious ideology designed to legitimize his own rule.¹³ Ibn Khaldun refrains from criticizing the Mahdi directly, but indicates doubts about his reforms in three ways. First, he recounts that they were not preserved by his successors, who reverted to claiming the Caliphal title of Commander of Faithful.¹⁴ Second, he displays his own preference for the Mahdi’s Almoravid predecessor Ibn Tashfin, “a good and conservative man,” who chose symbolic deference to the remnant of the Abbasid Caliphate over openly flouting its authority. He went so far as to send a distinguished emissary to Baghdad with the goal of obtaining official permission to use the Caliphate’s flags, colors, and titles.¹⁵ Third, he describes elsewhere how the Mahdi’s religiously-inspired revolt not only offended respectable Muslim opinion, but led to a gruesome *jihad* that uprooted the powerful Almoravid dynasty at the price of innumerable deaths.¹⁶ It seems likely that the ravages of this war hurt Muslim Spain and abetted its reconquest by the Christians, which gained momentum in the waning days of the Almohads. A dynasty that began as fiercely Muslim was eventually reduced to handing over territory to Christians in exchange for their support.¹⁷ The strong implication of Ibn Khaldun’s narrative is that the violent religious and political disputes likely to fill the vacuum occasioned by the rejection of the Caliphate will only weaken Muslim societies and their rulers.

We conclude that Ibn Khaldun opposed not only the abolition of the Caliphate, but also its open disregard by rulers. He understood that inexorable historical

processes had caused the original Caliphate's decline, and rendered hopes for its reconstruction implausible at best. Yet the destruction of what remained of this hallowed institution would not solve the problems caused by the disintegration of the Muslim community into several competing dynasties. On the contrary, it would only exacerbate these troubles, by removing the dynasties' traditional source of religious legitimacy without establishing any widely acceptable alternative. A better policy for rulers would be to follow the example of Ibn Tashfin in seeking the support of one of the existing Caliphates. Given the effectual weakness of the institution, this could be done without the slightest risk. It would lend the Caliphate no hard power but some symbolic authority, and considerable flexibility to adapt to the rise of new dynasties by offering or, in some cases, withholding its support. The new Caliphate would preserve the legitimacy of the old, but with barely a semblance of its unity and grandeur.

Towards a Muslim League of Nations: Iqbal's Critique of the Caliphate

OVER HALF A MILLENNIUM PASSED AFTER IBN KHALDUN'S DEATH BEFORE AN unusually audacious Muslim ruler finally decided to get rid of the Caliphate. Yet the great historian himself had not been forgotten. Two of the most impressive figures who sought to justify Ataturk's decision, Ali Abd al-Raziq and Muhammad Iqbal, as well as one of its most prominent critics, Rashid Rida, all felt obliged to engage Ibn Khaldun's arguments.¹⁸ For our purposes Iqbal, who composed most of his political writings in English, remains the most interesting and accessible of these three writers. By examining his critique of the Caliphate, and attitude toward Ibn Khaldun, we hope to bring the issues created by the abolition of the Caliphate and its aftermath into focus.

Ibn Khaldun had warned against shattering the prevailing Muslim consensus surrounding the preservation of the Caliphate. While Ataturk's elimination of it was not universally condemned, it did provoke widespread consternation across the Islamic world. In a country as distant as India, the Khilafat movement made a popular but futile effort to defend the Caliphate between 1919 and 1924. Their enthusiasm, however, did not rub off onto India's most famous Muslim philosopher and poet, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), who would attempt to bury the old imperial Caliphate once and for all. At the same time, Iqbal warmly praises Ibn

Khaldun. How should we understand this praise, in light of the former's aversion to the Caliphate and latter's support of it?

Iqbal's affinity for Ibn Khaldun stems partly from their shared critique of Arab imperialism within Islam. According to Iqbal, Ibn Khaldun understood that the fall of the Quraysh meant the end of Arabian imperialism and its replacement by a number of distinct but equal local authorities, non-Quraysh or even non-Arab, each of which could serve as the effective "Imam in the country where he happens to be powerful."¹⁹ This is an accurate representation of Ibn Khaldun's position. As we have seen, however, it did not entail the abolition of the Caliphate, but rather its multiplication, as local claimants seek to sanctify their political authority in their particular countries. There is evidence that the younger Iqbal agreed with this aspect of Ibn Khaldun's attitude toward the Caliphate. Writing around 1910, he invokes Ibn Khaldun's claim, "contrary to the old Arabian idea," that many different Caliphates may coexist simultaneously, provided that none contest the authority of another in its respective country. Iqbal notes that multiple Caliphates have been a feature of Islam for a long time: in that particular era, he might have been alluding to the Turkish Caliphate and its lesser known Moroccan counterpart. He gives no sign in this early writing of seeking the abolition of the Caliphate, a goal he ascribes to nearly-defunct Kharijite groups.²⁰

Writing around 1930, the later Iqbal has been emboldened by Ataturk's resolute action. He comes to identify the Caliphate not merely with Arabian imperialism, but with the "Empire of Islam" as such.²¹ This empire could be Arab, as it was in the early centuries of Islam, or Turkish, as it became much later. The unfortunate thread that runs throughout Islamic history, from the Umayyad period onward, is imperialism, which hijacked the original, egalitarian spirit of Muhammad's religion. While the rulers may have deceived the Muslim masses into regarding the Caliphate as a symbol of religious unity, it is better understood as a symbol legitimizing their despotic power. The elimination of the Caliphate represents not the "separation of church and state," but rather the liberation of Islam from imperial despotism. Ataturk, knowingly or not, has helped to restore the authentic "spirit of Islam."²² His decision to abolish the Caliphate is necessary, but not sufficient, for this purpose. Unlike 'Abd al-Raziq, who also dwelt on the despotism of the Caliphate but did not propose any alternative form of political order or religious unity,²³ Iqbal believed that Muslim unity would eventually be restored by the realization that "Islam is neither Nationalism nor Imperialism, but a League of Nations," composed of a "living family of republics." Establishing Muslim unity from the ground up, this league would no longer require any "merely symbolical overlordship" such as a Caliphate, whose location would inevitably favor a

particular city or region and therefore serve only to divide its members. “Far from serving any useful purpose,” Iqbal concludes, “it has really stood in the way of a reunion of independent Muslim states...All these rupture [sic] in Islam for the sake of a mere symbol of a power which departed long ago.”²⁴ In contrast to Ibn Khaldun, Iqbal despises a purely symbolic Caliphate as worse than useless, providing both a justification for despotism and then a pretext for various local quarrels.

Iqbal’s modern vision of an Islamic republican league breaks dramatically with Ibn Khaldun’s more conservative acceptance of the Caliphate and of monarchy. Iqbal quietly recognizes this fact, in crediting Ibn Khaldun with “the first dim vision of International Islam,” but certainly not the final vision.²⁵ Ibn Khaldun perceived the decline of the Quraysh, and the consequent need for several equal centers of power, but not the corruption inherent in imperialism itself. Besides, Iqbal’s summary of the various opinions on the Caliphate listed by Ibn Khaldun leaves out any mention of consensus (*ijma’*), the concept that most strongly justifies the Caliphate in the eyes of Ibn Khaldun. This omission can hardly be accidental, since Iqbal himself gives an impressive account of *ijma’* later in the same chapter.²⁶ It stands rather as a tacit acknowledgement of the fact that *ijma’* was still mainly on Ibn Khaldun’s side, with much of the Muslim world chafing at the sudden removal of their ancient, unifying figurehead. The most audacious critic of the Caliphate, Abd al-Raziq, had been censured and expelled by the Council of Grand Ulama’ in 1925.²⁷ Iqbal replaces consensus with a concept that is nowhere to be found in Ibn Khaldun, namely expediency, invoked to justify the abolition of the Caliphate by sovereign command once it no longer serves the purpose of rulers.²⁸ The Caliphate was abolished not, as Iqbal sometimes pretends to think, out of deference to any consensus reached by the Turkish people or assembly, but by the formidable hand of Ataturk himself, in the face of intense opposition.²⁹ Although Ataturk’s notion of expediency went against the *ijma’* of the present, Iqbal hoped that it would be confirmed by the *ijma’* of the future. This new consensus would have to be represented not by the juridical schools of the past, which were largely subservient to monarchs, but by independent Muslim legislative assemblies, “the only form *ijma’* can possibly take in modern times.”³⁰ Once the republican form of government and the new consensus surrounding it has come to prevail in Islam, controversy over the Caliphate will gradually subside.

Observing the fractious, disunited state of most Muslim countries today, not to mention the tumultuous relations between them, one may be tempted to dismiss Iqbal as extravagantly hopeful. In Iqbal’s defense, he does not regard the Muslim League of Nations as something that would sprout up overnight. It requires, first of all, that “every Muslim nation must sink into her deeper self, temporarily focus

her vision on herself alone, until all are strong enough to form a living family of republics.”³¹ The implementation of Iqbal’s universalist project can commence only with the national self-examination and reform of every particular Muslim people. The abolition of the Caliphate and the end of any hope of empire might facilitate this soul-searching, but does Iqbal expect every Muslim country to engage in it? He repeatedly voices concern about the conservatism of most Muslim peoples and elites, especially in his native India, and the fact that, thus far, only Turkey has begun to shake off its hold.³² Centuries of historical accretions, beginning with the triumph of imperialism and despotism in the Umayyad period, are not likely to disappear from Islam overnight. Iqbal does expect them to be questioned everywhere at some point. The initial result, however, will not be a flourishing Muslim League of Nations, but something closer to chaos: “the upheaval which has come to Turkey... is likely, sooner or later, to come to other Muslim countries...almost wholly determined by forces within.”³³ This upheaval may in the long run dissolve into the calm of a Muslim league, but even on this point Iqbal speaks less definitively than one might expect. He gives three possibilities for the character of this league, ranging from “a world-State (ideal),” to “a league of Muslim states,” to “a number of independent States whose pacts and alliances are determined by purely economic or political considerations.”³⁴ Finally, “history alone can answer” how non-Muslims, and especially the frustrated European ex-colonialists, will respond to the challenge posed by “politically united Islam.” Iqbal does not attempt predict the future any more precisely than this because he acknowledges its uncertainty: “Islam is passing through a period of transition. It is shifting from one form of political solidarity to some other form which the forces of history have yet to determine.”³⁵ Iqbal foretells a new era for Islam, but he is not quite sure whether it will be an era of peace and republican freedom, or one of prolonged uncertainty and turmoil. He is nonetheless willing to foretell it, because the alternative appears to be the perpetuation of a sterile conservatism that has left Muslims completely incapable of revitalizing their own religion or coping with the modern world.

We conclude that Iqbal agreed with Ibn Khaldun that the immediate aftermath of the abolition of the Caliphate would bring massive experimentation and upheaval, as new modes of political and religious legitimacy strove to replace the old. The decades of chaos that followed the abolition of the Caliphate could have been predicted by Iqbal no less than by Ibn Khaldun. Yet it seems probable that each would have viewed this period in a different light: Ibn Khaldun as proof of the dangers of destroying the traditional religious sanction of earthly Muslim rulers, and Iqbal as an inevitable period of transition that may still hope for a

salutary end, in the form of a new, more successful principle of unity, embodied in a harmonious Muslim League of Nations. Still, Iqbal remained strikingly tentative in defining the characteristics of his league, or offering any historical time-frame for its emergence. Efforts to form effective Muslim leagues have indeed been made, but have generally borne little fruit.³⁶ According to Iqbal's understanding, this failure seems inevitable, so long as individual Muslim states have yet to join the "living family of republics." With so many Muslim countries continuing to languish under the thumb of dictators or disintegrate under the pressure of civil strife, it may be hard to find a single Muslim state that meets the criteria for this select group. In this atmosphere of prolonged disappointment and growing frustration, longing for the vanished Caliphate has intensified. Unfortunately, nothing has happened to facilitate its effective reconstruction. In the final section, let us briefly examine this earthly Muslim limbo and its consequences.

“I Miss the Caliphate”

THE MOST NOTORIOUS RESURRECTION OF THE CALIPHATE COMES FROM NONE other than ISIS. I quote from their proclamation of the restored Caliphate:

There only remained one matter, a *wajib kifa'i* (collective obligation) that the ummah sins by abandoning. It is a forgotten obligation. The ummah has not tasted honor since they lost it. It is a dream that lives in the depths of every Muslim believer. It is a hope that flutters in the heart of every mujahid muwahhid (monotheist). It is the khilafah (caliphate). It is the khilafah—the abandoned obligation of the era. Allah (the Exalted) said, {And mention when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a khalifah"} [Al-Baqarah: 30].

Imam al-Qurtubi said in his tafsir (Quranic exegesis), "This verse is a fundamental basis for the appointment of a leader and khalifah (caliph) who is listened to and obeyed so that the ummah is united by him and his orders are carried out. There is no dispute over this matter between the ummah nor between the scholars, except for what has been reported from al-Asamm [the meaning of his name is "the deaf man"], for his deafness prevented him from hearing the Sharia."³⁷

It goes without saying that most Muslims have not recognized this peculiar Caliphate. Even Muslims with Islamist leanings, like Yusuf al-Qaradawi, tend to denounce it as illegitimate.³⁸ There is no accepted juridical rule as to how the Caliphate, once abolished, should be restored, and a charismatic rogue whose rule rests on fanaticism and brutality will never manage to create a new pan-Islamic consensus. Nevertheless, this declaration makes two valid points. First, as we have learned from Ibn Khaldun, Muslims did enjoy something resembling a consensus concerning the necessity of the Caliphate in medieval times, and second, the fractured Muslim *ummah* has yet to recover its honor and prestige in the post-Caliphal period. Perhaps these considerations explain why many Muslims who do not support ISIS, including al-Qaradawi himself, dream of resurrecting the Caliphate, albeit in a more patient and deliberate manner. The depth and breadth of this longing is described in a useful anthology entitled *Demystifying the Caliphate*. Informative and accessible, it illustrates how the symbol of the Caliphate, and in many cases hope for its restoration, continues to motivate Muslims from Britain to Indonesia in a wide variety of ways. Before discussing some of these movements, let us briefly trace the futile history of efforts to reconstruct the Caliphate.

The early efforts, which began immediately after Atatürk had laid the Turkish Caliphate to rest, centered mainly around two claimants: King Hussein in the Hijaz, and King Fuad in Cairo. Both attempted to bolster their claim by organizing conferences, each of which put all of the myriad disputes among and within Muslim countries on full display. Iqbal was right to assert that the Caliphate had become a cause of strife rather than unity. Even if Muslims mostly agreed about the general need for Caliphate, the independent nations and rulers that gradually emerged from the ruins of colonialism and empire could never agree on which of them should host or represent it. Hussein would soon be deposed by Ibn Saud, a Wahhabi with no interest in the Caliphate, while Fuad would effectively abandon his claim.³⁹

Having grasped that neither Turkey nor Arabia could offer a plausible home for the new Caliphate, Rashid Rida held out hope that the Arabs and Turks would agree to construct it in Mosul, in between the lands occupied by each nation, but this project never got off the ground.⁴⁰ Humpty Dumpty had fallen, and could no longer be put together again by any power on earth. Yet it was not sufficient, in the Islamic context, to honor his memory only in nursery rhymes. Recollections of the Caliphs and the authority they represent remain too vivid to permit them the gentle fate of the English kings and prelates who once bestrode the earth but now populate only tabloids and children's tales. Thomas Arnold, who wrote a landmark history of the Caliphate around the time of its apparent demise, rightly predicted

that the Caliphate “is likely to survive as a hope in the hearts of Muslim peoples for many generations to come.”⁴¹

Many hoped, of course, that the failure of the new Muslim rulers to renew the Caliphate in the midst of their own bitter rivalries would “seem to indicate a more secular trend, rather than a revival of the Caliphate.”⁴² This remark by Sylvia Haim, in her epilogue to Arnold’s work, held truer in the 1960s than it does today. It has become evident that the abandonment of the Caliphate by Muslim rulers has led not to its oblivion, but rather the passing of its mantle to subversive, non-governmental groups. Hizb al-Tahrir, founded by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani in the 1950s, was the first to aggressively call for a new Caliphate, conceiving its restoration as the primary goal of the new political party and ideology that could stand up to the twin Western evils of communism and capitalism.⁴³ Himself a learned jurist, Nabhani decried the absence of the Caliphate as “one of the greatest sins, to be punished harshly by Allah,” and sought to prove his claim by numerous citations from Islamic sources.⁴⁴ Unlike the consensus surrounding the Caliphate formed by the experience of later generations of Muslims, these sources do not appear to discuss the Caliphate in any clear, unambiguous manner. A generation earlier, ‘Abd al-Raziq probed the very same sources, concluding that the Caliphate is not really mentioned in them at all.⁴⁵ Yet, while al-Raziq did not found a political party and appears to have enjoyed only limited influence, al-Nabhani’s Hizb al-Tahrir has established a presence in dozens of Muslim countries.

This is not to say that the party has been a resounding success. Like so many enthusiastic theological-political movements, it seems to have greatly overestimated its initial prospects. Al-Nabhani consciously modeled his plan on the career of the prophet Muhammad, giving the impression that he expected to assume the reins of power in a least one country during his lifetime. The Caliphate would first arise in a particular country, and then gradually spread across the Muslim world. The party drafted a detailed constitution for this purpose.⁴⁶ Al-Nabhani seems to have harbored some hope of taking over Jordan, possibly by military coup in the 1970s, but by his death in 1979 this scheme had come to naught. The failure to accomplish its original aim within the expected timeframe brought about a period of prolonged crisis for the party, which hemorrhaged membership during the 1980s.⁴⁷ Like the idea of the Caliphate itself, however, it stubbornly refused to die. As hopes for renewing the Caliphate underwent a resurgence, the party began to interpret itself less as a political failure than as an ideological success.⁴⁸

The party has still not succeeded in seizing control of any country, and may not even be close to doing so, but it has established some presence in many of them. Originating in the center of the Muslim world, it has penetrated its most far-flung

regions. It has flourished both in resistance to dictators in Central Asia, and under the relative tolerance afforded by democracy in Britain and Indonesia. In every case, the party has cleverly adapted its strategy to local conditions, without compromising on its extravagant long-term goals. Let us briefly examine each case in turn.

In central Asia, persistent government corruption and endemic poverty breeds discontent, while decades of Soviet rule have loosened the hold of traditional strains of Islam, opened the way for the growth new-fangled religious ideologies. Hizb al-Tahrir has tens of thousands of members and many more sympathizers.⁴⁹ It has spread quickly in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, post-Soviet dictatorships each run by the same president since the early 1990s, as well as in Kyrgyzstan. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, it has learned to distribute clandestine leaflets and even solicit recruits in prison, where its members frequently find themselves. Widespread hatred of the dictators, whom the party is wont to blame on Americans and Jews, has clearly helped its cause.⁵⁰ In Kyrgyzstan the party has attempted, during more liberal periods, to operate in the open, although this has often provoked renewed repression by the authorities. Emmanuel Karagiannis concludes: “Hizb ut-Tahrir follows a different strategy in every central Asian country, adjusting to particular socio-political environments.”⁵¹

In Britain,⁵² Hizb al-Tahrir’s early activities in the 1990s struck many commentators as overtly homophobic, anti-Hindu, and anti-Semitic. Once the party’s global leadership realized the backlash this had caused, they urged their cadres to lower their public profile. The terrorist attacks on 9/11 and 7/7, followed by the inevitable British and American reaction to them, soon offered a new opportunity for the party to exploit Muslim grievances. They began to present themselves as the authentic voice for all Muslims and their desired Caliphate as their future protector against the ravages of Western neo-colonialism in the Middle East and perceived hostility to Islam in Britain. Sensitive to allegations of extremism, the party has sought to deny or downplay the virulently hostile or conspiratorial statements about Western intentions that have periodically crossed the lips of its members. The party has adroitly taken advantage of the liberty afforded by British civil society by setting up a number of front groups, which often pose as educational charities. As Ahmed and Stuart conclude: “The party has not rescinded its neo-fundamentalist aims. But the image it presents to British Muslim communities and wider British society is one of a legitimate Islamic political party.”⁵³

In Indonesia, a newly democratic Muslim country that was never actually governed by any of the great medieval Caliphates, the party has become quite influential on university campuses. While American students agitate for social

and racial justice, some of their Indonesian counterparts call for a Caliphate as an alternative to the injustices of both socialism and capitalism.⁵⁴ Poems and songs of the movement, one of them entitled “I Miss the Caliphate,” are apparently posted on YouTube.⁵⁵ These student groups are fond of emphasizing their peaceful nature: “With our soul, we declare to all that our struggle is verbal and intellectual, and not violent.”⁵⁶ Taking advantage of the democratic right to peaceful protests, the group that once plotted military coups in Jordan now claims in certain countries to be strictly committed to non-violence.

According to Taji-Farouki, the party’s proclivity to non-violence may derive from the view that military *jihad* can only be conducted under the rule of a Caliph.⁵⁷ Since it remains extremely unclear how that rule could be acquired peacefully, even in democratic societies, many commentators distrust the party’s official pretension against armed struggle.⁵⁸ Former British member Majid Nawaz, who makes use of his inside knowledge of the movement to present a brilliant critique of it, is skeptical of this pledge to non-violence. Nawaz maintains that the real goal of the movement, recognized internally, is still to establish a Caliphate by coup in a particular country, and then to wage war against those Islamic countries that refuse to join the new Caliphate voluntarily. To this end, it urges its members in the armed forces of various Muslim countries to prepare for a coup, while preaching peaceful action to its civilian members. At the same time, Nawaz argues that the party’s immediate effect, especially in democracies like Britain and Denmark, is to encourage Muslims to pass their time in idle talk and dreams of the Caliphate, rather than profitably participate in the local political system.⁵⁹

Hizb al-Tahrir does not currently constitute an imminent threat to Islam or Western civilization, but it should not be dismissed as an isolated phenomenon. Among fundamentalist Muslim groups in general, calls for restoring the Caliphate have grown shriller over time. The influential Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928, officially calls for a Caliphate, but it has never taken any real steps in that direction. The Brotherhood tends to believe that in the absence of genuine Muslim unity on the ground, the time for choosing a Caliph is not yet ripe. It has focused on mobilizing and uniting Muslims within the confines of particular countries and political systems rather than establishing a Caliphate.⁶⁰ Another famous Islamist of the mid-twentieth century, al-Mawdudi of India, interpreted the Caliphate metaphorically as a form of government reflecting God’s will, rather than any concrete institution.⁶¹ Osama bin Laden demanded the restoration of the Caliphate with somewhat more urgency, but he, too, refused to offer any practical details, holding that its return depended on “the permission of God.”⁶² He spoke elsewhere of a council of Muslims that ought to meet in an undisclosed

location, far away from the oppressive, illegitimate regimes of his time, to elect an imam who would lead Muslims in jihad, but the details of this proposal, and its relationship to the traditional Caliphate, remain murky.⁶³ Finally, ISIS emerged as the first jihadi group to take the matter of resurrecting the Caliphate into its own violent hands, relying neither on human agreement nor manifest divine blessing. Such developments could hardly occur in a vacuum of public disinterest: one poll taken in 2007 shows almost two-thirds of Muslim favoring, in principle at least, the restoration of the Caliphate.⁶⁴

Nawaz expresses the wish that fanatical Muslim groups such as Hizb al-Tahrir will fizzle, just as communism did in the past century. In laying bare the extremely tenuous link between the party's inflexible, tyrannical view of the Caliphate and the more adaptable concepts prevalent in classical Muslim tradition, Nawaz is certainly contributing to that desirable end. Yet we may suspect that yearning for the Caliphate has deeper roots in Muslim societies than communism ever had in Russia or China. Communism was a Western import, with little historical basis in Russian or Chinese culture, which collapsed once it had failed to deliver the promised economic and social benefits. The existence of the Caliphate, in contrast, had been part of the Muslim theological and political consensus for over a thousand years. Even the great rationalist historian Ibn Khaldun refused to challenge this consensus, while the modernist poet Iqbal believed that it could be broken only if eventually superseded by a new consensus that better reflected the original, egalitarian spirit of Islam.

As the centennial of the supposed coup-de-grâce against the Caliphate approaches, the questions surrounding its future have never appeared further from resolution. Ibn Khaldun attempted to reconcile the Muslim community to the largely symbolic Caliphate of his time, but since that effort presupposed the continued existence of the latter, it is hard to see how it could be replicated today. The efforts of Iqbal and Abd al-Raziq to persuade that same community to regard the Caliphate as a pernicious outgrowth of imperialism, rather than an integral part of their religion, have failed to take root. Iqbal's newer, firmer consensus based on republican government and an international Muslim league also appears as elusive as ever. Of course, so does the effective restoration of the Caliphate, at least in a way that would be accepted by a large majority of Muslims. In the course of the turmoil of the past century, any sort of meaningful Muslim consensus surrounding the Caliphate seems to have been irrevocably shattered. This contributes to a troubling absence of political and religious legitimacy, reflected in the frequent dismissal by Islamist groups of all or most existing Muslim regimes as *jahiliyya*, *kufir*, or *taghut*. In order to fill this vacuum, various invented ideologies

have flourished. Combining reinterpretations of classical Islam with notions taken from modern politics and totalitarianism, they could be viewed as contemporary versions of the Almohad alloy of Ash'arite theology and Shi'ite politics that briefly replaced the Caliphate in medieval Spain, to the chagrin of Ibn Khaldun. The new Islamist ideologies also resemble their medieval predecessors in their capacity to overturn governments and shed indiscriminate blood. Increasingly, they center on the resurrection of the defunct Caliphate.

It is possible that the destructive nature and eventual defeat of ISIS' Caliphate could dampen future attempts at restoration, but we should not count on it. These movements seem too varied in their goals, methods, and location, to be deterred by the failure of one particular group in one particular region. Furthermore, the political, religious, and historical factors that instill longing for the Caliphate are bound to remain in force. I am not about to predict the successful restoration of the Caliphate, but merely that movements aspiring to that end are unlikely to disappear any time soon.

NOTES

1. Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans., Franz Rosenthal. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958, 3.23, vol. 1, p. 387. In Arabic. *Muqaddima*. Casablanca: al-Dār al-Baydā': Khizānat Ibn Khaldūn, Bayt al-Funūn wa-al-'Ulūm wa-al-Ādāb, 2005, Vol. 1, pp. 327-328.
2. Ibid, 3.26, vol. 1, p. 427 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 355), 3.29, vol. 1, p. 465 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 381).
3. Ibid., 3.24, vol. 1, 399-401 (Ar. vol. 1, 335-37).
4. Ibid, 3.51, vol. 2, p. 156 ff. (Ar. vol. 2, 124 ff.).
5. Ibid, 3.24, vol. 1, pp. 389-92 (Ar. vol. 1, pp. 330-31). Ibn Khaldūn begins by invoking both divine law and consensus, but in the refrain mentions only the latter.
6. Pankhurst, Reza. *The Inevitable Caliphate*. London: Hurst & Company, 2013, pp. 17-19
7. Ibn Khaldūn, 3.29, vol. 1, pp. 448-49 (Ar. vol. 1, pp. 370), 3.31, vol. 1, p. 473 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 388).
8. Ibid 3.23, vol. 1, pp. 385-86 (Ar. vol. 1, pp. 326-27).
9. Ibid, 3.29, vol. 1, p. 449 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 370).
10. Ibid, 3.24, vol. 1, pp. 396-402 (Ar. vol. 1, pp. 334-37).
11. Ibid, 3.24, vol. 1, pp. 392-94 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 332), cf. 3.30, vol. 1, p. 468 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 384).

12. Ibid, 3.23, vol. 1, p. 388 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 328), 3.24, vol. 1, p. 388 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 329), 3.29, vol. 1, p. 448 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 370).
13. Ibid, 3.30, vol. 1, pp. 471-72 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 386).
14. Ibid, 3.30, vol. 1, p. 472 (Ar. vol. 1, pp. 386-87).
15. Ibid, 3.30, vol. 1, pp. 471 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 386).
16. Ibid, Introduction, vol. 1, pp. 53-54 (Ar. vol. 1, pp. 38-39).
17. Ibid, 3.9, vol. 1, 335 (Ar. vol. 1, p. 279), 3.32, vol. 2, p. 45 (Ar. vol. 2, p. 33).
18. al-Rāziq, 'Ali 'Abd. *al-Islām wa-Usūl al-Hukm*. Baghdād: Dār al-Mada lil-Thiqāfa wa-an-Nashr, 2004, p. 11, 14, 19, 28, 32, 34, 45, 46, 50, 73. Ridā, Rashid. 1988. *al-Khilāfa. al-Zuhrā' lil-Ā'lām al-'Arabi. al-Qāhira*, pp. 149-52. Iqbal, Muhammad. *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.
19. Iqbal. *Reconstruction*, pp. 125-26. The term "Imām" is used by Iqbal as a synonym for Caliph.
20. Iqbal, Muhammad. *Speeches, Writings, and Statements of Iqbal*. Ed. Latif Ahmad Sherwani. New Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 2015, pp. 145-46, 152.
21. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 125.
22. Iqbal, *Speeches*, pp. 152-53, 234-35.
23. al-Rāziq, pp. 27-28, 32-33, 63.
24. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, pp. 125-26.
25. Ibid, p. 125.
26. Ibid, p. 125, 137-140.
27. *Demystifying the Caliphate*, eds. Madawi al-Rasheed, Carool Kersten, and Marat Shterin. London: Hurst and Company, 2013, p. 6, p. 53.
28. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 125. Iqbal claims that Ibn Khaldūn ascribed the notion of expediency to the Mutazilites, but this too is plainly inaccurate. Ibn Khaldūn criticized the Mutazilites, along with the Kharijites, for dogmatically denying the necessity of the Caliphate. See Ibn Khaldun, 3.24, vol. 1, pp. 390-91 (Ar. vol. 1, pp. 330-31). Iqbal, in contrast to Ibn Khaldun, distinguishes Mutazilite from Kharijite views (Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 125).
29. See, for example, *Demystifying the Caliphate*, pp. 43-44. In the *Reconstruction*, Iqbal emphasizes the role of the Grand National Assembly in disbanding the Caliphate (p. 124), but in a later writing he acknowledges that the major responsibility lies with Ataturk himself (Iqbal, *Speeches*, p. 234).
30. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 138.
31. Ibid, p. 126.
32. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 117, 129, 131, 134. Iqbal, *Speeches*, pp. 116-17.
33. Iqbal, *Speeches*, p. 232.
34. Ibid, p. 238.

35. Ibid, p. 239.
36. For a long list of stillborn or ineffectual projects, see Landau, Jacob. *The Politics of Pan-Islam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. 267 ff.
37. “This is the Promise of Allah,” *Al-Hayat Media* (ISIS), https://ia902505.us.archive.org/28/items/poa_25984/EN.pdf (Ar. <https://thabat111.wordpress.com/2014/06/29/غیرفتو-مملکت-ادع-طلال-ع-ال-ایق-ن-ع-ملک>).
38. Qaradawi’s views are discussed in a recent issue of this journal. See Barnhard, Gavi. “The Patient Preacher: Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s Long Game.” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, March 2015.
39. For a summary, see *Demystifying the Caliphate*, 48–51. For a detailed account of these conferences, and methodical disentanglement of the disagreements that doomed them from the start, see Kramer, Martin. *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 80–122.
40. Riḍā, pp.81–86. In a somewhat ironical historical twist, the Caliphate finally has been brought to Mosul—by ISIS.
41. Arnold, Thomas. *The Caliphate*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1966, p. 182.
42. Haim, Sylvia G. Concluding chapter to Arnold, p. 244.
43. Taji-Farouki, Suha. *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate*. London: Grey Seal, 1996, pp. 37–45.
44. Nabhānī, Taqī al-Dīn. *al-Khilāfa*. Qāhira: al-Zuhrā’ li-a’lām al-‘Arabi, 1966, pp. 3–12.
45. See al-Rāziq, pp. 20–23. Nabhānī regularly glosses terms such as “oath of allegiance” (*bay‘a*) in the *hadīth* and “those in authority” (*awwala al-amr*) in the *Qur’ān* as referring to the Caliph, an inference that al-Rāziq denies (cf. Nabhānī, p. 4, p. 8 with al-Rāziq, p. 20, p. 22).
46. For an English translation, see Taji-Farouki, pp. 193–218.
47. Taji-Farouki, pp. 90–105.
48. Ibid, pp. 105–07.
49. Karagiannis, Emmanuel. *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir*. New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 58, cf. pp. 58–72. See also Naumkin, Vitaly V. *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, pp. 139–94.
50. Naumkin, p. 54.
51. Karagiannis, p. 71.
52. For the early history of the party in Britain, see Taji-Farouki, pp. 171–87. The party’s activities in Britain have been subject to an extensive analysis in this journal: Ahmed, Houriiya and Stuart, Hannah. “Profile: Hizb ut-Tahrir in the UK.” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 10, pp. 143–72. available at http://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1293/ahmed_stuart.pdf.

53. Ahmed and Stuart, p. 157, cf. pp. 150-57.
54. *Demystifying the Caliphate*, p. 192, p. 195.
55. *Ibid*, p. 197.
56. *Ibid*, p. 192.
57. Taji-Farouki, pp. 109-10.
58. For example, see Naumkin, pp. 153-58.
59. Nawaz, Majid, and Masieh, Dawud. *Explaining Hizb ut-Tahrir*. 3 video discs. London: Quillam Foundation, 2008. Nawaz's fellow prisoner in Egypt, Reza Pankhurst, remained a member of Hizb il-Tahrir upon his return to Britain, and has now published a book on the modern struggle for the Caliphate, cited in n. 6 above. It strikes me as an interesting mixture of genuine scholarship, mild apologetics for Hizb al-Tahrir, and virulent rants against American and British foreign policy, which for reasons explained earlier have become characteristic of the party in Britain.
60. *Demystifying the Caliphate*, pp. 127-28, 137-38.
61. *Ibid*, pp. 91-92.
62. Bin Laden, Osama. 2005. *Messages to the World*. Ed. Bruce Lawrence. Trans. James Howarth. Verso: New York, p. 121.
63. *Ibid*, pp. 229-30.
64. Pankhurst, p. 2.

Making the Islamic Case for Religious Liberty

By Abdullah Saeed

MANY MUSLIMS TODAY ARE TRYING TO COME TO TERMS WITH the modern concept of religious liberty. One of the most authoritative and influential definitions of religious freedom comes from Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Such a comprehensive understanding of religious liberty is essential for civil peace and prosperity in multicultural and pluralistic societies. Those modern, secular countries that can secure religious freedom for all citizens through rule of law and civic toleration are more stable and successful because they are able to bring together, on the same level playing field, a range of competing faith groups and

worldviews that may have little in common, philosophically or theologically. By contrast, when religious freedom is suppressed, it can have dire consequences for the exercise of other basic freedoms and rights, for a country's cohesion, and for political and economic development.

At a personal and ethical level, religious liberty is essential for people "to live justly." It enables individuals to do justice to themselves, to others, and to their communities.¹ In its most comprehensive sense, religious freedom promotes civic toleration and respect for human dignity because it is rooted in respect for the deeply human journey to seek religious truth. When societies restrict religious liberty, the result, quite often, is intolerance and increased societal tensions, which may eventually boil over.

Muslims, and non-Muslim believers alike, understand the importance of freedom for fulfilling their obligations to God, and for the expression of their respective faiths. Still, many Muslims feel uneasy with contemporary understandings of religious liberty, and some reject it entirely. Islamic tradition is much more restrictive of religious liberty than modern norms, and this tradition still carries great weight and authority among the majority of Muslims today. Many Muslims also see freedom of religion in the way it is expressed in Article 18 of UDHR, as a "Western" value and essentially alien to Islam in its aims and focus. Traditionally, religious communities have tended to perceive faith as a competition for members or adherents, and many Muslims fear that calls for religious liberty are actually calls for Muslims to convert to other religions (particularly Christianity). A great number of Muslims also worry that embracing religious liberty will lead to the destruction or weakening of Muslim identity and community.

In addition to these pervasive cultural attitudes, the individual right to freedom of religion, thought, and conscience is today severely constrained by many governments in Muslim-majority societies. At the same time, the use of political authority to control religious belief is widely seen as legitimate in these countries. Likewise, various Islamist movements also oppose religious liberty, as they strive to impose their own worldview in pursuit of political power. These combined pressures can be seen in the spreading intolerance and worsening sectarian conflict, both among different Muslim populations, and between them and other religious groups.

Because of these realities, many Muslims and non-Muslims have concluded that Islam is essentially opposed to modern ideas about religious liberty. This conclusion, however, is mistaken. There is, in fact, a great range of teachings within Islam and its traditions about religious liberty as it pertains to society and individuals. Indeed, the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad speak extensively

on the topic. As the belief in Islam requires fidelity to the Qur'an and the message of the Prophet, these sources all warrant closer examination.

The Qur'an on Religious Liberty

THE QUR'AN SAYS BELIEF IN GOD IS AN INDIVIDUAL CHOICE, OR RATHER, THAT it is a choice between an individual and God. It states, "Whoever is guided is only guided for the benefit of his soul. And whoever errs only errs against it. And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another" (Qur'an 17:15). The Qur'an provides for free will right from the creation of the first human beings. Adam and Eve are said to have been given free will, and it was through this which God tested them. They failed their first test, but in Islamic belief, their failure did not lead to the fall of the human race. Instead, the Qur'an presents free will and the testing of it as part of God's plan for human beings. It is one of the reasons humans were created. In fact, many Muslims believe that free will bestowed by God is what gives humankind a higher place in the order of creation.²

The Qur'an repeatedly expresses the theme that a person's dignity is intimately related to his or her individual freedom, particularly the freedom of conscience.³ For example, it affirms that God created humans "in the best of molds" (Q 95:4), and, in doing so, He honored humanity and conferred on it special favors (Q 17:70). In God's eyes, human beings have inherent worth and dignity. In recognition of this, God gave humankind the intellect and ability to discern between right and wrong.⁴ The Qur'an says, "Now clear proof has come to you from your Lord: if anyone sees it, that will be to his advantage; if anyone is blind to it, that will be to his loss—[Say], 'I am not your guardian.'" (Q 6:104).

An essential part of the Qur'anic conception of free will is the freedom to choose whether or not to believe in God, and in His way or religion. The Qur'an leaves space for human beings to reject Islam if they wish, and to follow what they desire. Many verses stress that all human beings are free to believe, or not to believe in God, or in a particular religion. For example, "Let him who wills believe in it [Islam], and let him who wills, reject it." (Q 18:29) Or, "Whoever chooses to follow the right path, follows it for his own good; and if any one wills to go astray, say [O Prophet, to him] 'I am only a warner'" (Q 27:92). The Qur'an acknowledges that there will always be believers in the One God, as well as non-believers (Q 16:9).

This choice is also about individual responsibility; human beings are responsible for what they do or fail to do on earth. For Muslims, part of this is believing

in the One God, following God's commandments and prohibitions, and following the moral path that God conveyed through His prophets.⁵ The Qur'an makes it clear that God will hold individuals accountable for the choices they make during their lifetime. What this means is that salvation, like belief itself, is an individual effort, not a collective or community matter.⁶

One of the critical ways the Qur'an affirms an individual's freedom to make choices is by rejecting the use of force in matters of faith. The Qur'an states plainly that no one should force others to believe.⁷ One of the most commonly cited verses in this regard is Qur'an 2:256:

There shall be no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from [the way of] error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing.

Affirming this, Ibn Qudamah (d. 1223 CE), a jurist of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, wrote:

It is not permissible to compel a disbeliever into professing Islam. If, for example, a *dhimmi* or *musta'man* is forced to accept Islam, he is not considered a Muslim unless it is established that his confession is a result of his own choosing...⁸

In the Qur'anic perspective, forced belief is no belief at all. Correct faith (*al-iman al-sahih*) only comes from individual certitude and conviction.

The Qur'an teaches that believers should also be wary of doing things for the sake of mere habit, tradition, or because of the influence of others. It clearly denounces practices and attitudes that are based on the blind adherence of ancestral precedents, instead of independent thought or personal conviction (Q 2:170).⁹ Forced belief is not sincere belief, and the Qur'an exhorts sincerity, and denounces hypocrisy in all human dealings (Q 61:3).¹⁰

In this same vein, the Qur'an lays down guidelines for Muslims when preaching Islam: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best..." (Q 16:125). It encourages Muslims to use courteous advice, sound reasoning, and elegant persuasion, rather than hostility or physical aggression in spreading Islam. After imparting the message, the Qur'an says to Muslims: "Say, '[Know,] then, that the final evidence [of all truth] rests with

God alone; and had He so willed, He would have guided you all aright” (Q 6:149). This is also evident in the example of the Prophet Muhammad. As the Qur’an explains, the Prophet did not have the power to force people to convert to Islam. It says that Prophet Muhammad was not to be a “keeper” over people (Q 10:108). Instead, the Prophet’s duty was only to convey the message of Islam, never to compel anyone to accept it. For example: “The Apostle [Muhammad] is not bound to do more than clearly deliver the message [entrusted to him]” (Q 24:54), and “Our Apostle’s only duty is a clear delivery of this message” (Q 64:12).

We can, moreover, see that Prophet Muhammad supported the idea of free choice when it came to religious belief and practice. In Mecca and Medina, the Prophet showed a great deal of tolerance towards other religious communities. They were allowed to manifest and practice their religions and even to govern their lives by their own religious rules and values. Muslims were encouraged not to abuse or slander those of other faiths—including even idolaters, whose beliefs were the antithesis of Islam. On one occasion, when the Prophet Muhammad could not convince some non-Muslims to embrace Islam, the Qur’an commanded him to tell them that: “[t]o you be your way [*din*, religion] and to me my way” (Q 109:6).¹¹ This same principle of tolerance was implemented by the Prophet in “The Constitution of Medina,” a compact created to establish relations between various tribes and religious groups, including the Jewish community, in the city of Medina. One of the articles of this document states that: “the Jews of Banu Awf are a community (*ummah*) along with the believers. To the Jews their religion (*din*) and to the Muslims their religion.”¹²

The Weight—and Blessings —of Islamic Tradition

THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE QUR’AN AND THE EXAMPLE OF THE PROPHET Muhammad does, in fact, support a robust conception of religious liberty. Yet despite this, the real-world prospects for religious liberty in many Muslim-majority countries are bleak. Among the world’s 25 most populous countries, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey rank among the countries with highest overall restrictions on religious belief and practice, according to a recent report by Pew Research.¹³ Furthermore, while debates over blasphemy and heresy are part of the distant past in the West, they are still commonplace in Muslim-majority countries

today. It is only in Muslim countries that one hears about cases of execution for the “crime” of apostasy. Although most of these countries do not officially sanction punishment for apostasy and heresy, several of them—including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia—still do.

These governments claim their power on the basis of Islam. Similarly, various Islamist movements also use Islam to impose their own ideological worldview and to promote intolerance and sectarian violence. It is true that some hadith support the death penalty for apostasy, and other hadith restrict religious freedom in other ways. However, these hadith are sayings that Muslim tradition has over time ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad; importantly, they are not necessarily the same as the actual actions of the Prophet.

Conversion from Islam existed in the Prophet’s time. For example, several Muslims left Islam immediately after the Prophet’s reported famous “night journey” to Jerusalem and to heaven (known as *Isra’* and *Mi’raj*). These people questioned how the Prophet could possibly have travelled to Jerusalem and then back to Mecca in one night, as the journey typically took weeks. Similarly, some Muslims migrated to Christian Abyssinia when the persecution they experienced in Mecca because of their Islamic beliefs became unbearable, and later converted to Christianity.¹⁴ The Qur’an also makes many references to hypocrisy (*nifaa*), and to hypocrites (*munafiqun*) in Medina who were, for all practical purposes, apostates. However, none were put to death. There is no evidence that the Prophet ordered the killing of any person simply because of a change in faith.¹⁵

Despite the core message in the Qur’an about religious liberty, Muslim jurists of the classical period that followed after the first generations of Muslims developed a set of principles and rules to govern religious life. By and large, they set down a range of restrictions on religious freedom and assigned penalties for flouting these prohibitions. These jurists’ main concern was with defining correct religious practice, and prohibiting acts of apostasy, blasphemy, heresy, and hypocrisy in religious affairs.

Historically, apostasy was defined as the “unbelief of a Muslim who had earlier accepted Islam... of his [or her] own free-will,” which suggests that an apostate is a Muslim who “rejects Islam and/or converts to another religion.”¹⁶ The ban on conversion from Islam developed on the basis of certain hadith or sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. The most obvious of these is the hadith that states: “Whoever changes his religion, kill him.”¹⁷ In other sayings, the Prophet reportedly orders the execution of certain individuals. These hadith are routinely used today to bolster the argument that the appropriate punishment for conversion from Islam is death. However, some of these traditions are considered weak,

unreliable, and too general, and it is therefore difficult to use them as evidence in support of a death penalty for apostasy.

Blasphemy laws placed yet more restrictions on the Qur'anic conception of religious liberty. Initially, these prohibited the use of foul language with respect to Prophet Muhammad (*sabb al-rasul*), although this was later extended to include foul language about God (*sabb Allah*), any of the angels, or about other prophets. Anyone using this kind of language was considered a grave sinner.¹⁸ Muslims who committed this sin were considered outside the fold of Islam, and could be punished with death. In some cases, non-Muslims were also executed for committing blasphemous offences.

Moreover, heresy was banned. In many cases, heresy involved the outward show of Islam, while in fact remaining faithful to one's former religion, or questioning the fundamentals of Islam, such as the prophethood of Muhammad, or the authenticity of parts of the Qur'an. Some scholars came to believe that such heretical beliefs should also be punished by death.

The transgression of religious hypocrisy dates back to the time of the Prophet. During the Medinan period (622-632 CE), the Qur'an refers on several occasions to hypocrites and hypocrisy. It warns Muslims that hypocrites are a danger to the Muslim community. One verse commands the Prophet to engage in jihad against any hypocrites and unbelievers who are engaged in hostilities; other verses warned them of punishment in hell.¹⁹ All of these restrictions came to be used in various ways to limit the religious liberty of either Muslims or non-Muslims (or both) within Muslim-ruled states at different points in time.

It is important to understand the context in which these rules governing religious life were developed and propagated. During the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods (8th to the 10th centuries CE), Islam was rapidly expanding and the Muslim community began to experience political power as they brought more and more non-Muslim lands and communities under their rule. In part, because of this, the great Muslim empire-builders began to grapple with novel issues about how to both establish their rule, and remain true to Islam in multi-cultural and multi-confessional polities. As empires expanded and Muslims came into contact with new peoples and religions, Muslim scholars began to grapple with how to define mainstream Islamic belief, and they faced growing political and intellectual pressures to determine Islamic positions on a range of issues. Because of this, a new Islamic orthodoxy began to emerge during Islam's second and third centuries, and the propagators and defenders of this new mainstream belief sought to strengthen it by labelling other views as beyond the fold, deviant, or heretical.

In some cases, certain Muslim jurists argued that non-Muslims—in particular, the “People of the Book,” or Christians and Jews—should be brought under Muslim dominance as a sign of humiliation. Not all jurists thought this way, however. Some jurists, for example, argued that Muslims needed to distinguish between those non-Muslims who came under Muslim rule through treaties or other agreements, and those who fought against the Muslim state and came under Islamic rule by force. In time, the idea of religious belief would become strongly connected with the idea of the superiority of Islam.

As more and more scholars sought to differentiate between Muslims and others at a theological level, restrictions such as blasphemy and heresy began to emerge. As such, the many practical issues that Muslims dealt with during this period of Islamic expansion, and while governing multi-confessional empires, later became religiously sanctioned practices concerning non-Muslims and their religious liberty.

In these ways, the rules governing religious life developed by Muslim jurists in the classical era differ considerably from religious liberty as it is widely understood today. Religious liberty, and the restrictions on it that were developed centuries ago to suit that particular period in time, were a reflection of various factors that emerged from the context in which the jurists lived. After the Prophet’s death, the boundaries between religious and political communities became more clearly defined.

However, not all the positions within classical jurisprudence on religious liberty were the same. In fact, there is a considerable range of opinion among the classical jurists. Each jurist had his own legal and theological views, reasoning, and rulings. This diversity and the remarkable fluidity within Islam over time should be recognized. It should also be seen as a blessing in disguise because, within Islamic Tradition, there can be found positions that are less restrictive of religious freedom as well as reasoning which can be used to support contemporary conceptions of religious liberty. The Qur’an, and the example of the Prophet Muhammad, also provide a strong basis for Muslims to rethink contemporary restrictions on this liberty from within their tradition, and to come to terms with the modern understanding.

Fostering Religious Liberty in Muslim Societies

IN LARGE PART BECAUSE OF THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS REALITIES OF THE classical era, a variety of traditions in Islam came to embrace rather restrictive notions of religious liberty. But such limited understandings of religious liberty do not necessarily have to be *the* Islamic understandings. Moreover, circumstances also change. Our contemporary social, political, cultural, and intellectual context is driving humankind toward greater freedom, not less. To succeed and live well in this era, Muslims need an updated Islamic understanding of religious liberty that is in line with the contemporary understanding and expectations. Importantly, the modern understanding and practice of religious freedom doesn't require a denial of Islam, for religious liberty seems also to be in line with the core message of the Qur'an and the example of Prophet Muhammad. How, then, can we foster a more modern and comprehensive understanding of religious liberty in Muslim societies? There are a number of possible strategies.

First, Muslim thinkers and scholars must be wary of blind imitation of received practice and, instead, dig deep into their own traditions to rediscover and engage the wealth of insights that these traditions offer. This means examining the texts, interpretations, rulings, and practices that have accumulated over many centuries, and particularly during the first three centuries of Islam, to see what resources exist within these traditions to support a contemporary understanding of religious liberty. As previously discussed, the diversity of Islamic Tradition means that there are resources within it that can be revived in support of modern religious liberty while remaining faithful to Islam.

As one example, the contemporary Egyptian thinker Muhammad Salim al-Awa introduces an element of legal flexibility in the body of traditional juristic opinion, which holds that apostasy, for instance, should be punished with death. There are a range of classical scholarly opinions on this punishment, and al-Awa argues that it is not a "prescribed punishment" (*hadd*) in the Qur'an, but rather a "discretionary punishment" (*ta'zir*).

This difference matters, because if the punishment is prescribed, then it (at least in theory) cannot be changed, but if it is a discretionary punishment, it can be changed in agreement with principles developed in Islamic law. By applying this legal methodology, al-Awa provides an opening for scholars to remain faithful to

Islam while moving away from the long-held position that apostasy is punishable by death.

Second, contemporary Muslims need to closely examine the foundations of the restrictions on religious liberty that exist in Islamic Tradition, and determine whether these are essential to Islam or not. Scholars need to ask if these restrictions actually have a basis in the Qur'an, or whether they are simply a product of the social or political contexts in which they first appeared. If these restrictions are shown to be derived from, and contingent on historical context, then work can be done to counter the assumption that these restrictions are an essential part of Islam. Indeed, as I have suggested, when the diverse and historically fluid traditions of Islam are examined more carefully, key restrictions on religious liberty may be found to have little solid basis in Islamic scripture, the authentic sayings, or the practices of the Prophet Muhammad, and the pious generations of early Islam.

Many Muslim scholars today, in fact, are coming to such conclusions. A number of contemporary thinkers have re-examined the texts associated with the punishment for apostasy, for example, and they have shown that there is no Qur'anic requirement for the death penalty, nor is there any basis for it within the Prophet's practice.²⁰ In addition to the excellent work of Tahar Jabir al-Alwani, the prominent legal scholar Mohammad Hashim Kamali, author of *Freedom of Expression in Islam*, for example, has this conclusion:

It may be said by way of conclusion that apostasy was a punishable offence in the early years of the advent of Islam due to its subversive effects on the nascent Muslim community and state. Evidence in the Qur'an is, on the other hand, clearly supportive of the freedom of belief, which naturally includes freedom to convert...²¹

Having this religious knowledge and understanding provides Muslims with a strong and confident basis to move away from a range of restrictions on religious liberty that they have inherited from tradition, but which may not be in line with the Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad.

Third, Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers need to identify and highlight the far-reaching political, economic, and social consequences that restrictions on religious liberty have in Muslim-majority countries. It is necessary to describe how these restrictions adversely impact the growth and development of these societies, intellectually and otherwise, and how this lack of freedom detrimentally affects the lives of both Muslims and non-Muslims. The reality today is that most Muslim-majority countries use restrictions on religious liberty to curtail other freedoms,

such as the freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly. Political power and religious authority are often intertwined, and limitations on religious liberty provide a convenient way to manage dissent and maintain the status quo, both religiously and politically. However, this places an enormous burden on the development of these societies. A 2007 study conducted by Brian Grim and Roger Finke found that government regulation of religion was the strongest predictor of religious persecution, even when controlling for other possible explanations, including religious homogeneity, armed conflict, population growth, and income inequality. These results indicate that attempts to regulate faith contribute to a culture that represses dissent from government-dictated orthodoxy.²² This establishes a vicious cycle of persecution.²³ More regulation leads to increased persecution, which in turn means less order and more violence.²⁴ Intellectual freedom, government transparency and accountability, civil liberties, and human rights cannot grow in heavily restricted societies.

Other research suggests that restrictions on religious liberty have a detrimental effect on economic development, including lowering GDP, and reducing productivity in the workplace, and in education. The suppression of religious liberty can also erode political stability, social cohesion and morale, and contribute to a climate of despondency, apprehension, and fear, that can lead to increased tension and even radicalization within communities. Interestingly, there is evidence of a strong connection between restrictions on religious freedom, and the extent of both conflict and militarization in a society. In countries where religious liberty is repressed, a greater share of the GDP tends to be spent on the military,²⁵ and this suggests that the costs of maintaining social stability are higher in societies that are religiously unfree. By contrast, a growing body of evidence shows that implementing religious freedom can have enormous benefits for society. *Foreign Policy* magazine's 2007 Failed States Index affirmed that "freedom of worship" may be a "key indicator of stability."²⁶ Furthermore, authors such as Thomas Walsh have found that "freedom of religion is consistent with other freedoms" and, in fact, "serves to bolster the existence of other freedoms."²⁷

Fourth, it is vital to encourage and support Muslim scholars who are already deeply engaged in rediscovering their traditions, and developing understandings that can support modern conceptions of religious liberty. Promoting and circulating the work of Muslim scholars who employ Islamic terminology and concepts to show that restrictions on religious liberty are not essential to Islam could prove particularly helpful. Supporting such scholars will help to make their very encouraging ideas more widely known among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Indeed, it is only by popularizing such ideas and understandings that they will one day

become the norm. This change must be driven by Muslim thinkers, scholars, and jurists, not by those outside the tradition. But to accomplish this, Muslims can be supported and provided platforms to circulate and express their views.

Fifth, although there may be great political and cultural reluctance to the loosening of restrictions on religious liberty in Muslim-majority countries, significant international pressure will help these societies to free up the space for Muslims to explore such ideas and practices within an Islamic context. This pressure requires that the international community document and publically highlight the human rights situation with regard to religious liberty in these countries. It must encourage Muslim-majority countries to give more room for the adherents of various religions, non-Muslim and Muslim alike, to function as freely as possible.

Finally, we need to address Muslim concerns and fears, whether real or imagined, that religious liberty is a guise for the project for the conversion of Muslims to other faiths. Dealing with these deep-seated fears will require empathy and patience, but it is vital. We must show that changes to thinking about religious liberty has great potential to help Muslim states and Muslim communities develop socially, politically, economically, intellectually, and spiritually, and to enhance Muslim thought. As the Iranian scholar Abdolkarim Soroush has argued:

To compel individuals to confess a faith falsely; to paralyse minds by indoctrination, propaganda, and intimidation, and to shut down the gates of criticism, revision, and modification so that everyone would succumb to a single ideology, creates not a religious society, but a monolithic, and terrified mass of crippled, submissive, and hypocritical subjects.²⁸

Ultimately, religious faith needs to be given sufficient space to flourish. That cannot happen unless governments and societies allow for, and respect the individual right to freedom of conscience, religion, and thought. Unless the restrictions on religious liberty in Islamic tradition are revisited, then repressive political and religious establishments, as well as extremist Islamist movements, will continue to have free reign to curtail Muslims' intellectual activity and more enlightened religious thought, and, in so doing, continue to halt the development of Muslim societies. Through empirical research, we need to continue to show the genuine benefits to economic and political prosperity and to civil peace that can only come from the establishment of a comprehensive conception of religious liberty. The more religious liberty Muslims have, the more they are likely to develop their societies harmoniously and also to fulfil their obligations to God.

NOTES

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Deconstructing Daesh

By Ahmed Abbadi

In 2003, after a series of suicide attacks in Casablanca, Mohammed VI, the King of Morocco, declared war on extremist teachings “from the East” that had infiltrated his country’s religious institutions. Since then the Moroccan government has been evolving a comprehensive strategy to roll back and defeat Islamist radicalism. This has involved intensified policing among susceptible populations, as well as a suite of other “soft” measures including community-driven development initiatives, governance and security sector reform, and new anti-corruption efforts. Importantly, the government’s campaign has also focused explicitly on the ideological dimensions of Islamism, and it has aimed to counter extremism through education and the renewal of Morocco’s indigenous traditions of toleration, Sufi piety, and Maliki religious law. One of the leaders in this effort has been the theologian Dr. Ahmed Abbadi, the Secretary General of the League of Mohammedan Scholars based in Rabat. What follows is a transcript of remarks that Dr. Abbadi gave at Hudson Institute on November 16, 2016. The transcript has been edited for clarity, and additions made by Current Trends have been placed in brackets.

THE ISLAMIC STATE—ISIS OR, AS I PREFER TO REFER TO IT, “DAESH”—understands the usefulness of complexity as a mode of organization and in waging asymmetric warfare. Instead of developing a hierarchical organization with a linear approach that can be easily understood by outsiders, Daesh is more like a puzzle with different people responsible for the different pieces. The group takes advantage of new technologies, spreads out in

several countries and, with a small number of people, creates what might be described as powerful “magnetisms”—attractive ideas that then inspire people into acting without necessarily being inducted into a centralized organization.

The dream of Muslim unity is the first of four “magnetisms” espoused by Daesh. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire vanquished any prospect of a central authority for Sunni Islam. Even at its height, the Ottoman Caliphate did not reflect the idealized “Islamic” State often spoken of in Islamic literature. It was, however, a symbol for an idea—the idea of all Muslims as a single nation, speaking different tongues, and belonging to different races and ethnicities. It provided a focal point for settling disputes and making rules and decisions for disparate communities that practiced Islam and had not entirely embraced modern Western ideas.

The founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, announced, while abolishing the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, that the various subjects of the Caliphate were now on their own. Turkey was to be restricted to Anatolia—a choice that was made by the Turkish leader, and one for which he took full responsibility, and which also had the support of the Turkish people. This move benefitted Turkey and led to its modernization, but it left others in the region as “orphans.” From Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, to Egypt, modern day Iraq, and what is today Jordan, and even as far away as Tunisia, Algeria, Kosovo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, several regions were suddenly cut off from what used to be their central decision-making authority.

Decisions were taken by the Caliph’s advisors in Constantinople—now Istanbul—and implemented by the Pashas for the primary benefit of the Ottoman caliphate, but secondary benefit to the local leaders. These local leaders were not taught and did not know how to make decisions. They were rulers in small matters, and acted as implementers of decisions made by the Ottomans in major matters. The end of the Caliphate marked the end of an entrenched way of life, and led to a feeling of loss that has, in part, endured to this day.

People in the Ottoman Empire’s non-Turk regions faced difficult questions, such as national identity and evolving indigenous political systems. Rather than confronting the new challenges, it was easier for some to embrace the belief that the resurrection of the caliphate and restoration of the pre-Western “Islamic” way of life was a panacea. The idea of a caliphate is seductive because it replaces that feeling of loss that resulted with the end of the Ottoman Caliphate.

Over the decades several scholars and ideologues like Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935), Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949), and Muhammad Taqi al Din al Nabhani (1909–1977) advanced the view of the Muslim Ummah’s unity and the centrality of the institution of Caliphate.¹

The Muslims in the region desire unity and they have tried for it both through religion and through ideologies. Parallel to the attempt by Hizb ut Tahrir to set up a caliphate, there were also attempts at unity through Pan Arabism, Pan Socialism, and Pan Communism, but none of these succeeded. It has been almost a century since the caliphate was abolished, but the vacuum is still there in the Muslim world.

Daesh came in offering “the divine way to implement al-Khalifa [the Caliphate].” Young Muslims all over are attracted to Daesh because of its offer of unity and sense of belonging to something greater, a sense that is lacking in their current lives. Whether they live in Egypt or in Europe, these young people do not feel a part of the society into which they are born. They may be employed or unemployed, educated or uneducated, married or single, but they lack a sense of belonging—the promise of the Ummah—that is central to their faith. Daesh offers them this dream. That is why we see men and women from the age of 16 to 40 who have joined Daesh.

The second appeal at the heart of Daesh is the dream of dignity. The Quran states that Muslims are the best (ideal) people before God, that God is *Adil* (just), and Muslims are supposed to do good, and avoid doing wrong (*Amr bil maruf wa nahy an al munkar*). The state was supposed to ensure this, but in most countries this did not happen. Today, most young Muslims living in the Middle East and North Africa face a lack of educational opportunities, unemployment, and often no future. Again, the modern state was supposed to help create these opportunities, but in most countries this has not happened. So the Muslim Brotherhood and other such organizations stepped into the vacuum left by the state and offered to provide education, ensure justice, and create an Islamic society. Daesh stepped in and said: “You’re wifeless? Come to me. I’ll marry you to the most pious, beautiful lady in the world. You’re husbandless? Come to me. I’ll marry you to a handsome jihadi. You are jobless? Come to me and I will give you a job in the Islamic State as head of intelligence or secretary of state, whatever you would like. You are willing to be a scholar, a true scholar of Islam? Come to me. I will give you the shorthand training required to make you a scholar in five days. If you die, don’t worry, you will go to paradise and have 72 virgins as a reward.” Joining Daesh gives you the opportunity to go from being nothing to becoming something, “from zero to hero.” This dream is magnetic.

THE ONLY WAY TO COUNTER THIS DREAM OFFERED BY DAESH IS TO OFFER AN alternative vision to these young people. If we do not succeed in doing that we will be beaten in this arena of Morpheus (Greek god of dreams).

The third dream is the dream of purity. Right from the earliest times there have been Muslims who believed that pure Islam is one without any dilution or *bid'ah* (innovation), and who have sought uniformity in Muslim practices, dress, cuisine, and beliefs, from the Middle East, to South and East Asia. During the 19th century, Salafists sought to propagate this belief across the Muslim world [and to remove any local or indigenous influences on Islam].

Daesh “hijacked” this dream by stating that only their version of Islam is true and pure because this is how the Prophet practiced Islam. [They have laid down codes for everything from war to slavery, from marriage to inheritance, from cuisine to dress, and from education to economy].

The final dream is that of salvation. [Muslims believe in the Day of Judgment and that you will be held accountable for all your past deeds, good and bad. Many ideologues and movements over the years have promised that, if Muslims live their lives in accordance with this particular version of Islam, they will find salvation on that day]. Daesh has come in to offer a way to eternal salvation or immediate damnation. What they say is: “This is the end of time, and we have the ark of Noah. If you want to save your soul, come to us. Take a seat in the ark. Otherwise, you will perish like the rest.”

This belief that the best in Islam lies in the past and not in the future is extremely powerful, and appears to have taken hold of the vast majority of Muslims. I believe we need to look around us, believe in ourselves, and understand that the best is still ahead of us.

The challenge we face is that we as leaders and governments have neglected this arena of ideas and dreams, and instead have had a formal, functional, and operational relationship with our people. [We do not have anything to offer them that they can believe in, that unites them and makes them feel part of something bigger than themselves]. We speak in a wooden language, whereas what they are looking for is something exciting and appealing, spoken in the language of their dreams and hopes.

Daesh has done just that. When we analyze their discourse and their material, what we see is they have used every medium possible—internet or print, audio or visual—to provide their messages. Their messages make the adrenalin of these young people flow, through subliminal messaging using music, imaging and words. The people at Daesh who do this are not super-humans; they are like you and me. It is just that they use the tools and technology that is available much better than what we have been able to do so far. Furthermore, they have a narrative; they know what they are arguing for.

I have met great minds at Google, Facebook and Twitter who are ready to help

us. What they need is the counter-narrative. The good news is that there are no less than 5 million Islamic scholars in the world. The bad news is that they do not have a clear mission. No one has cared to empower them, build their capacity, or teach them how to use these new technologies and tools so that they can counter the Daesh narrative.

I personally have been challenging my own team to come up with ways to counter what Daesh says. I gave them one tweet by Daesh and asked them to shape a counter-narrative that would not go beyond 140 characters. In the first attempt, my team failed. But they also soon realized that what is required is not to use Daesh's narrative, but to produce a unique and independent counter-narrative.

We need to shape our own narratives. Otherwise, we will be trapped inside the other's narrative, and will simply keep producing counter-narratives. The other [in this case Daesh] will continue to lead as long as we let them do so.

What if we take only 1 million from among those 5 million Muslim scholars and craft a training guide—a toolkit—and use new technologies that are present to create platforms through which these scholars can interact. We can use videos to speak to young people. Video screens and electronic gadgets are cheap today. For a few hundred dollars you can obtain the highest quality technological gadgets with the latest configurations. We need to build such capacities and empower these scholars for whom this is their full-time job. What these scholars need is a structure and training in diverse strategies of communication. I believe this is something within the realm of possibility. The people who crafted Daesh's narrative are not gods of these new technologies. They can be very easily defeated, and I am not exaggerating when I say "very."

Our problem is that we are putting rabbits in front of tigers. Why am I using the word rabbits? The reason is that if you place what I call a passionless functionary, someone without conviction, who is just doing the work to receive a wage at the end of the month, you will not achieve your goal. You cannot face Daesh, and those like Daesh, with people who do not have within them a flame of passion. In order to face them, we need the changes I have spoken about above. We need people with passion.

How do we achieve these goals? I will give you an example from today. This morning I felt thirsty and purchased a bottle of water. There were many brands, and one of those brands was called Smart Water. I'm not promoting this brand, but there was a reason why I bought this particular bottle. I read what was written and it claimed that water becomes sweat, evaporates, and they can recapture it. Then they put it in a bottle, add some aromas and other ingredients, and it becomes delicious water. What this advertisement said—what made it different from

the rest—was that this liquid was coming from the sky, not from underground like spring water. The minds who shaped this message were brilliant. These are the kinds of minds we need.

Let us turn to the world of comics and animation. Today, we need minds like Stan Lee [American comic book writer and chairman of Marvel comics] who created many Marvel heroes like Spider Man. Isn't it Stan Lee who said "With great power comes great responsibility"—a quote attributed also to Voltaire. We need to face Daesh with what he said. We need entertainment because youngsters are not to be preached or lectured to. They must be entertained and engaged in something that is dynamic and would appeal to them. Otherwise they will not remain interested.

We need to create this passion amongst our scholars when we ask them to build the counter-narrative and a new narrative. In order to create passion among our scholars, they must be exposed to the facts. They must be told if you do not act, you will be held responsible for what will happen to the world. If you do not act, your children will be recruited. If you do not act, your daughters will be recruited.

What is my complicated approach, and how do we avoid those touchy-feely approaches, those hasty and quick approaches in which we are currently trapped? How do we avoid antagonisms, such as hard power versus soft power, governments versus civil society and intellectuals versus politicians?

Notions of otherness generate antagonism. When they align with our actions, they create a complementarity. We need everyone to step up and help. However, we first need to adopt a comprehensive strategy. This strategy has to be shaped by all of us. We face Daesh in the arena of dreams, but we also face it in the arenas of politics, human rights, and the texts that they claim mastery of.

Daesh pretend they are the ones who have mastered our texts. To counter this, we need to reinvent new authorities. I believe those authorities are already in place. Here, I am referring to institutions such as Al Azhar [Egypt], Al Quaraouiyine [Morocco], Zaytuna [Tunisia], and Yarim [Yemen]. I am also referring to all the ancient schools throughout the greater Muslim world in Indonesia, Malaysia, and other countries.

What we need is empowerment of these institutions so that they regain their authority. They have faced a lot over the decades, as they have been subject to the deconstruction of religious authority by Salafists, by modernists, by successive Muslim Brotherhood waves, by other Islamists. They have also been stagnant, and not done enough innovation and renovation within their own schools.

Once again, it is both a matter of empowerment and the need for these authorities to understand that they can do all these things. They need to realize that they

are not alone, that there are millions like them around the world. If each one of these millions of scholars does his/her own share of the work, it can be done.

This comprehensive strategy also needs to take into account what makes the discourse of Daesh influential: grievances. We have deconstructed Daesh's [and other Islamist's] discourse, and extracted the 10 main grievances that lie at the heart of what is articulated.

THE FIRST GRIEVANCE IS BELIEF THAT THE WEST—THE UNITED STATES, EUROPE, Commonwealth countries, or any other Western country—has been conspiring against the Muslim world, and wants Muslims to remain weak and broken up into separate countries. “They are denying us the right to unite and dream of unity, and our governors, kings, are not doing anything about it. We need to step up and do it for ourselves and for you. Moreover, we are ready to give ourselves, our lives as martyrs for you, the sake of honor, and for a better future. We're here to serve you.” How can we counter such discourse if we do not think outside the box—like the Smart Water people did?

The second grievance is colonialism. “Those countries factually murdered millions of you here in the region, and no damage reparations or reconciliation were conducted to turn the page. They do not even send you a message that they have the will to do reconciliation movements globally and resolve the matter. Our governors, kings, presidents do nothing in this direction. We now oblige them to think about damage repair.” What is the counter narrative we have for this?

Third is the issue of Israel, and the fourth, the issue of double standards in international affairs.

Fifth is the issue of humiliation in the entertainment business, whether the print or electronic media, or the film industry. The argument made is about how the Muslim is portrayed negatively, and how the governments of the Muslim countries are not doing anything about this.

Sixth, the Muslim world is a “Molotov cocktail” from Iraq to Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina to Central Africa, to even Burma. There are conflicts all over the Muslim world, and this ensures there are enough problems that can be taken advantage of by groups like Daesh and others.

Seventh is the issue of Iran's expansion into the region, and the catastrophe in Syria.

Eighth is the belief that the West has infiltrated the traditional value system of the Muslims, and this has resulted in their losing touch with their values, norms, and belief. Daesh offers a way to go back to what they argue are the true Islamic beliefs and values.

Ninth is the falsification of history and geography. “History,” [as seen by the world today], they say, “jumps over 1,000 years of Islamic inventions, and reconnects directly with the Greco-Roman period and era without saying a word about you.” What a denial. “We are restoring it. As to geography, look at Africa and Asia. They seem smaller than Europe in the Mercator map. And north is up, which means that there is an egocentrism.” I would ask: Why don’t you admit that, when the Orient was ahead in earlier centuries, that too was egocentrism? It is amazing that they are using such arguments [and that people are agreeing with them.]

The final grievance is the insulting of the prophets and the burning of the Quran.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE GRIEVANCES THAT ARE IN THE AIR, BUT THEY DON’T EXIST individually or in groups. The Kingdom of Morocco is trying to come up with ways to counter the narrative behind these grievances. First, we have identified the underlying reasons why people are susceptible to Daesh’s magnetic message and, using messaging tools, we have tried to find ways to engage with them and respond.

Second, there are around 25 arguments based on the Sharia that Daesh and its supporters articulate. They look like the effect of a rifle in the brains of youngsters because the people who are shaped in such discourses wear the turban of scholars and knowledgeable people, and they act as the leaders of the masses suffering from injustice. [Just as a rifle in the possession of a young kid does not make him or her a good shooter unless they have obtained training, similarly these Daesh ideologues may wear the turbans of scholars and believe they are equal to them, but they are not.]

Third, we must not forget how swiftly and subtly the education system in countries changed after de-colonization and independence. We need to revisit what we are putting in the minds of our children, not just in the Muslim world, but outside as well. For the sake of our [young and easily susceptible] minds, we need to reform the curricula, to set up a safe and secure education system.

Here, I’m talking about the responsibility of the state. The aggressively secularist-laicist systems of education implemented by many modern Middle Eastern states have aimed to suppress religious freedom rather than try to work with religion. This needs to be re-evaluated. Religion has a responsibility to the state and society, and the state has the responsibility to guarantee the security of all its citizens. If states do not ensure security, including for the religious, then those citizens will pray for tigers once again, and groups like Daesh will gain popularity. What Morocco is now doing is to bear in mind that a linear approach—that is, a

top-down, authoritarian approach—will not do. We need reform to be horizontal—that is, multi-disciplinary, intersectional, egalitarian, and transversal—and to also be complementary between all forms of actions: political action, human rights action, educational action, soft-power actions. You name it, we need to have it.

Moreover, one of the biggest problems we face in Morocco—and throughout the world—is the fact that there is no structure to take care of problems on a daily basis in governments. What we have instead is a cacophony. Everyone “takes care of it,” but that means that no one takes care of it as they forget about it at the end of the day. There are no structures or systems or cultures of accountability that guarantee that the issue will be effectively taken care of by the end of the day. We need checks and balances and political responsibility.

How do we change this? We need to ask important questions relating to government accountability, questions that will help to embed a culture of accountability in society: Will someone be held accountable before the Parliament, the House and Senate, or the Congress? To whom should we would ask questions about what has been done? How did you [public official] spend public money? What is the output? Yes, there has been some, but was it the most optimal output? Again, to whom are we going to ask such questions?

This is particularly important for governments to remember as they deal with the long-term struggle against Daesh. Of course, in the neuro-linguistic realm, we know that when you pronounce ISIS, ISIL, Islamic State, or Daesh, things turn red. Everyone gets hyper-excited and we lose our capacity to think calmly and efficiently about the matter. People are even willing to give away their freedom. They are willing to give away their money. They are willing to give away everything just to get rid of those evil people. “Kill them all and we are yours.”

We must remember that throughout history, we have had times in which human rights and values are eroded on the pretext that the community or people are under siege, and the state must be protected. We have had people who took over and deprived their co-citizens of their freedoms in the name of security and protection. There is, to be sure, a need for vigilance, and this is why we need structures, checks and balances, and responsibility to ensure states are accountable to citizens.

TO EVALUATE OUR PROGRESS IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST DAESH, WE NEED BETTER measurements. This is why, in Morocco, we have been trying to deconstruct this notion of an “Islamic State” in order to demystify the ideology that Daesh is spreading. What does an “Islamic State” mean?

We have been diving deep into books of a scholastic nature and we have derived

six great characteristics that need to be observed to have what you can properly call an “Islamic State.”

First is the preservation of life. This is the role of any religion, to preserve lives. “Do not kill.” In every religion, you find this commandment. But this can be expanded into criteria, indicators and indices to allow measurement: what does the preservation of life mean? It means medical studies. It means training doctors and nurses. It means developing a pharmaceutical industry. It means security on roads. It means security in cities. To each of these, you would assign a grade and a certain amount of points. Then you would calculate if there is, in fact, a guarantee of preservation of life. Sweden has scored way better than Daesh in preservation of life.

What do you [Daesh] mean by the Islamic State? Let us look at, aside from preservation of life, the remaining five pillars: Preservation of religiosity, preservation of dignity, preservation of descendants and the species, preservation of intellect and rationality, and the preservation of property. We have analyzed Daesh along these six pillars and it has scored poorly in each of them, including in the protection of religion category.

However, we need people that deal with these issues on a daily basis. If it is simply a lecture here or there in which we occasionally tackle the issue and then just forget about it for weeks, then it will not work. We need to be aware of the facts, at least in my country.

There are hordes of people that are out to make money because they know there is money being given in order to counter violent extremism. So everyone thinks, why not me? It is a lot of money. How can I get it? How can I build up an NGO, a structure and a research center that would take care of extremists? This is why we have witnessed the creation of hundreds, even thousands of centers claiming to take care of such business.

I am saying this to point out the fact that measurement and demystification is one of the most efficient tools to dismantle the magnetism of Daesh. In Morocco we tried to incorporate members of the civil society, but there is a cacophony. Everyone claims that she/he is taking care of violent extremism and developing CVE [countering violent extremism] programs.

What is the role of states in integrating these highly needed efforts without denigrating the energy and dynamism needed to cure their societies? We need these people and their passion, but we also need clear and transparent indices to evaluate, measure, and point out their main responsibilities and tasks as part of the larger global strategy. We need to take every team and every crew, and hold them accountable, and in a clear way evaluate and measure their efforts. We

must make it clear that money will be given for these goals and they will be held accountable.

THE LAST ISSUE I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU IS THAT WE HAVE A CRUCIAL need today to rebuild authorities in Islamic countries. [This is not a new process; it has happened over years.] This is a result of what has happened starting from the 1950s with Abd al Karim Qasim (1914-1963) and Muhammad Najib ar Rubai (1904-1965) in Iraq, Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970) in Egypt, and Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938) in Turkey. All these people claimed to be socialists and neglected religious authorities of the state. Religion was thus not taken care of in an ideologically efficient and structured manner, thereby leaving a vacuum.

This vacuum was filled first by Islamists, then by Salafists, then by jihadi Salafists, and then what we know today as Daesh, al-Qaeda, and other such groups. Daesh initially found recruits in areas like Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Iraq. They brought former jihadists into their ranks, and with all their knowhow and expertise they gave birth to four new sets of characters: the initiator, the mercenary, the naïve and the firewood.

The initiators are people like the self-proclaimed caliph Baghdadi and his ilk. Soon afterwards, the second group, the mercenaries, took over and swallowed the initiators, who disappeared. No one listens to Baghdadi anymore, only occasionally when they feel the need to bring in these individuals' names again.

The third character in this cast is the naïve do-gooder, people such as the doctors who are willing to build up the Islamic State, and other such professionals. Last but not least, is the firewood for the oven: those youngsters who are brought in to die in the arenas of battle.

There is nothing we can say to redeem the first two groups, but we must talk to and influence the third and the fourth.

We need to shape new messages aimed at those people, to try and bring them in, similar to what is done with addicts. Like in the case of addictions, former addicts are the best counter. However, we need to make sure that the recovery is real. For this, we have to change not just school curricula, but many other aspects of society, including, for example, reforming prisons. Actions must be seen in all arenas, from schools to cartoons. For example, the end result should be colorful and joyful video games self-produced by former violent extremists. We in Morocco have been working on curricula. We have also been working in the domain of scholarship and history so that we may make clear what is to be derived and reinvented. We have been working on religious texts so that we can respond to those 25 quotes from the Sharia that are often cited by Daesh.

There are other items that need to be tackled and addressed as well. We have been working in the realm of dreams, competing with Morpheus, and trying to produce greater, genuine dreams. In Morocco, we also have been tackling the dimension of governance to make this sustainable, measurable and efficient.

NOTES

1. Rida was a Syrian Islamic scholar who launched Al-Manar (The Lighthouse), a theological journal in Arabic that focused on Quranic commentary. Al Banna was the founder of the Jamaat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen, or the Society of Muslim Brothers, or the Muslim Brotherhood as it is better known. Al Nabhani founded the Hizb ut Tahrir (Party of Liberation) that has advocated the resurrection of the Caliphate since the 1950s.

How al-Qaeda Survived the Islamic State Challenge

*By Daveed Gartenstein-Ross
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IN JULY 2011 DEFENSE SECRETARY LEON PANETTA CLAIMED THAT THE United States was “within reach of strategically defeating al-Qaeda.”¹ Panetta was not the first to remark on al-Qaeda’s imminent collapse, nor would he be the last. Observers in both the Middle East and the West saw the Arab uprisings of early 2011 as a repudiation of al-Qaeda’s worldview because dramatic political change had been accomplished largely without violence. They anticipated that al-Qaeda’s importance and popularity would drop sharply in the post-revolutionary period.²

But al-Qaeda and the jihadist movement defied these predictions. Nothing has benefited either the organization or the movement more over the past fifteen years than the instability wrought by the region’s revolutions. Yet even after early hopes about the Arab revolutions were proven wrong, al-Qaeda declinism endured. In 2014, the vast majority of analysts concluded that al-Qaeda had lost its dominance over the jihadist movement when a former affiliate, the Islamic State (IS), launched an enormously successful offensive into northern Iraq in June 2014, then began vying for the loyalty of various al-Qaeda branches.³ The most extreme version of this argument contended that “al-Qaeda is most certainly a distant

number two in jihadi circles,” and suggested that it was a real possibility the group could disband before 2016.⁴ Press coverage and analysis in the Arab world tended to mirror the al-Qaeda declinist position espoused by Western analysts and officials. One Algerian security expert provided a representative conclusion when he suggested that “al-Qaeda could disappear to make way for the more extremist” Islamic State.⁵ IS’s legions of online fans further pushed these perceptions of a declining al-Qaeda by publicizing, repeating, and often exaggerating each sign of disunity or pro-IS factions within the broader al-Qaeda network.

But rather than withering away, al-Qaeda has turned IS’s emergence into a strategic opportunity, pivoting off of IS’s brutality and doubling down on a more low-profile and sustainable approach to growth. Al-Qaeda has quietly, and yet relatively rapidly, gained ground in conflict zones across the Middle East and North Africa, including Syria and Yemen, where the group has seized territory and embedded itself within local communities.

Al-Qaeda’s decision to become more covert and discrete in response to IS’s ostentatious successes may seem counterintuitive at first. Indeed, it is the opposite of what most analysts expected. But it worked. Al-Qaeda weathered the IS storm. This article tells the story of how al-Qaeda survived and thrived despite the IS challenge. It focuses on al-Qaeda’s response to three key developments over the past decade: al-Qaeda in Iraq’s defeat in 2007–09, the 2011 Arab uprisings, and IS’s rise. The group’s approaches to all three developments are inherently interlinked. The course al-Qaeda charted as these challenges and opportunities arose explains why al-Qaeda is stronger now than it was in 2014, and why it is far better positioned than IS to succeed in the long term.

The Black Mark on al-Qaeda’s Reputation

AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ (AQI), WHICH LATER WOULD BECOME IS, WAS DECISIVELY defeated in 2007–09, during the course of the U.S.’s war in Iraq. This defeat damaged the global al-Qaeda brand. Thereafter, al-Qaeda became intent on adapting its strategy to remedy the damage inflicted by the excesses and ultimate failure of its Iraqi affiliate. The lessons al-Qaeda learned through its analysis of AQI’s failure during the Iraq war have been instrumental in shaping the group’s strategic thinking as it takes on IS.

For AQI and its founding emir Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, instrumental brutality was an essential tool of war. AQI used extreme violence to fuel its ascension to the forefront of the anti-U.S. insurgency. The group became notorious for its sectarian suicide bombings against Shia Muslims in crowded markets and mosques, and for showcasing its grainy but gory execution videos, including the kind of beheadings that would later become IS's signature. The group was equally brutal in suppressing populations over which it could exert power. In the official U.S. Marine Corps history of the "Anbar Awakening," which compiles oral testimony from American and Iraqi perspectives, the head of an Iraqi women's NGO known pseudonymously as "Miriam" recalls: "The ugliest torture was committed by al-Qaeda. If the discipline didn't work, the people were abducted and slaughtered. The head was put in a container and thrown away, or the neck cut and the head placed on the back."⁶ AQI also alienated the population by forcibly imposing a hardline version of *sharia* in areas that it controlled.⁷

AQI's savagery served two purposes. It helped AQI establish its dominance over Iraqi Sunnis, AQI's ostensible core constituency. Further, anti-Shia violence encouraged retaliatory attacks by Shias, thus advancing AQI's goal of inciting a sectarian civil war. AQI calculated that if it could inflame Sunni-Shia tensions, the jihadist group could insert itself into the chaos as the defender of the Sunni population.

This strategy had AQI flying high for a time, but then it came crashing back to earth. Col. Peter Devlin described AQI as the "dominant organization of influence" in Sunni-dominated Anbar province in an August 2006 intelligence assessment.⁸ But AQI's use of excessive violence ultimately backfired. In 2006, local tribesmen in Anbar, fed up with AQI's severe tactics and interference in the local economy, mounted an uprising.

Though there are multiple points in time, one could point to as the genesis of the tribal uprising, the most salient is September 9, 2006, when a number of sheikhs publicly announced their plan to fight al-Qaeda. They called their movement the *sahwa*, or "Awakening." The movement issued an eleven-point communiqué. Col. Sean MacFarland, then the commander of the 1st Brigade of the 1st Armored Division said, "Ten of them I would have written for them almost exactly the same way they wrote them."⁹ The other point, suggesting that the Awakening would have to kill the governor of Anbar, was more troublesome.

The *sahwa* sheikhs proved willing to speak and work with the Americans. The U.S. was able to capitalize on the opportunity because it had shifted from primarily keeping its forces in massive forward-operating bases that were walled off from the rest of the country to population-centric counterinsurgency. Ultimately U.S.

forces backed the tribal uprising, and it drove AQI from Anbar. Following the success of the Anbar Awakening, this model of resistance to AQI spread to other areas of the country where the jihadist group maintained a presence. AQI's brutality, once a sign of strength, now appeared to show how it had overplayed its hand and alienated the population. By 2010, AQI had become strategically irrelevant, a shell of its former self.

AQI's resounding defeat was a blow to al-Qaeda's global brand. AQI was the first al-Qaeda affiliate since 9/11 to hold significant territory, and its collapse suggested that al-Qaeda was ill-equipped to govern. More worrying for al-Qaeda was the manner in which AQI fell. It fueled the perception that al-Qaeda, which had pledged to defend Muslim populations against foreign occupying forces, was itself an alien occupier.

Even when AQI was at its peak, al-Qaeda's senior leadership saw this coming. In July 2005, Ayman al-Zawahiri, then bin Laden's deputy, wrote a letter to Zarqawi urging the impulsive militant to temper his behavior.¹⁰ Zawahiri was no pacifist—he advised Zarqawi to shoot prisoners rather than behead them—but he feared that Zarqawi's shows of brutality would alienate the population. As Zawahiri noted, “the strongest weapon which the mujahedeen enjoy ... is popular support from the Muslim masses.” Thus, the jihadists “must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve.” Later that year, Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, another senior al-Qaeda official, wrote a harsher letter echoing Zawahiri's advice. Atiyah told Zarqawi that military policy was subordinate to political objectives, and exhorted the Jordan-born leader to rein in his violent tendencies or risk eroding public sympathy for al-Qaeda.¹¹ Atiyah advised Zarqawi to overlook the population's “mistakes and flaws,” and to tolerate “a great deal of harm from them for the sake of not having them turn away and turn into enemies on any level.” But these calls for moderating AQI's behavior went unheeded.

The disagreements between al-Qaeda's senior leadership, and AQI in the mid-2000s, have fundamentally shaped al-Qaeda's subsequent strategy, including its response to IS's rise. With AQI in a state of collapse by 2010, al-Qaeda's senior leadership set out to restore the organization's global image. Documents recovered from bin Laden's Abbottabad compound provide a glimpse into the measures that al-Qaeda's leadership considered.

Al-Qaeda's early reforms focused primarily on changing the group's strategic approach. In a May 2010 letter to Atiyah, bin Laden proposed a “new phase” in al-Qaeda's campaign that would “correct [the mistakes] we made,” and “reclaim ... the trust of a large segment of those who lost their trust in the jihadis.”¹² Central to this new phase was a population-centric strategy that mirrored the approach

the U.S. had used to defeat AQI. Bin Laden warned that if al-Qaeda alienated the public, it could win “several battles while losing the war at the end.”¹³ In a separate letter to Nasir al-Wuhayshi, the emir of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Atiyah expounded on the need to win over the Muslim population, noting that “the people’s support to the mujahedin is as important as the water for fish” (a nod to Mao’s famous adage about the importance of the population for insurgents).¹⁴ This embrace of population-centric measures meant that the organization had repudiated AQI’s approach, which emphasized intimidating, rather than winning over, local communities. Indeed, Atiyah cited AQI as an example of the risks of alienating the public.

Al-Qaeda even considered changing its name to distance itself from AQI’s legacy. One unnamed al-Qaeda official argued that the name *al-Qaeda* had become associated with a “military base with fighters,” and did not make reference to the group’s “broader mission to unify the Nation [umma].”¹⁵ The author also noted that the group’s name had become dissociated from Islam, and in that way “reduces the feeling of Muslims that we belong to them, and allows the enemies to claim deceptively that they are not at war with Islam and Muslims, but they are at war with the organization of al-Qa’ida.” The official proposed several new names, including Muslim Unity Group (Jama`at Wahdatal-Muslimin), and Islamic Nation Unification Party (Hizb Tawhid al-Umma al-Islamiyya). Though al-Qaeda never changed the broader organization’s name, the group appears to have heeded the official’s advice in some of its expansion efforts. Several al-Qaeda front groups have adopted the name *Ansar al-Sharia*, while al-Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate eschewed the al-Qaeda label in favor of the name Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahli al-Sham, also known as the Nusra Front. (The conclusion of this article discusses Nusra’s recent announcement about its relationship with al-Qaeda, which has been widely portrayed as a dissociation.)

In September 2013, Zawahiri, who had replaced bin Laden as al-Qaeda’s emir, released the “General Guidelines for Jihad,” which institutionalized the reforms that the group had begun in the wake of AQI’s defeat.¹⁶ The document provides a revealing overview of al-Qaeda’s move to a more restrained and population-centric strategy. In it, Zawahiri instructs subordinates to avoid violence against religious minorities and “deviant sects” (referring to non-Sunnis) unless provoked, and cautions against behavior that could trigger a “revolt of the masses.” Zawahiri similarly advises al-Qaeda’s affiliates to refrain from killing women and children, to cease attacks in markets and mosques that could result in Muslim deaths, and to tolerate and collaborate with other Islamist groups, even those with whom al-Qaeda has profound ideological differences. In the event jihadists violate these

edicts or otherwise err, Zawahiri urges them to apologize, and to compensate those who were harmed.

The publication of the General Guidelines represented the culmination of more than five years of internal discussions and debates about how to wipe away the black mark left by AQI, and they have served as a strategic blueprint for al-Qaeda's confrontation with IS.

The Arab Uprisings: Al-Qaeda's "Historical Opportunity"

THE ARAB UPRISINGS OF EARLY 2011 PRESENTED ANOTHER TEST OF AL-QAEDA'S ability to adapt. As previously discussed, the conventional wisdom among Western analysts at the time held that al-Qaeda would seriously decline due to the paradigm shift brought by the uprisings. Nothing could have been further from what actually transpired.

Though analysts' predictions that the Arab uprisings would spell al-Qaeda's demise were wrong, the protests of early 2011 did pose real challenges for the jihadist movement. Jihadists played little early role in the protests, and the fact that peaceful protests forced authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt to step down legitimately challenged al-Qaeda's claims that violent jihad was necessary to topple the region's tyrannical regimes.

But rather than seeing the Arab uprisings as a liability, al-Qaeda's strategists saw them as a "historical opportunity," to quote Atiyah's assessment.¹⁷ Al-Qaeda strategists accurately calculated that the political turmoil and instability of the post-revolutionary environment would play to the group's strengths. Indeed, ungoverned spaces proliferated in places like Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, southern Libya, and the western mountains of Tunisia. These regions soon became jihadist safe havens. Dozens to hundreds of veteran jihadists were released from prison during and after the region's revolutions, giving al-Qaeda an immediate infusion of experienced manpower.¹⁸

Al-Qaeda also concluded that political dynamics in post-revolutionary countries had created a fertile environment for the group to expand its support base, and to introduce new populations to its ideology and theology. Post-revolutionary

governments sought to distinguish themselves from their authoritarian predecessors by lifting restrictions on religious expression. These loosening restrictions allowed al-Qaeda to publicly disseminate its salafi-jihadist views to the general public in post-revolutionary states without fear of a crackdown by state forces. As Hamid bin Abdallah al-Ali, a Kuwait-based jihadist commentator, remarked: “The Islamic project [will be] the greatest beneficiary from the environment of freedom.”¹⁹ Al-Qaeda strategists directed supporters in Tunisia, Egypt, and other post-revolutionary countries to engage in *dawa* (evangelism), and to “spring into action and initiate or increase their preaching, education, reformation, and revitalization in light of the freedom and opportunities now available in this post revolution era.”²⁰

Post-revolutionary countries became a testing ground for the reforms and policies al-Qaeda had implemented after AQI’s failed experiment. One such policy involved the use of front groups to conduct *dawa* and public outreach. Al-Qaeda calculated that use of its own moniker could alienate potential supporters and invite the attention of Western states. Thus, al-Qaeda established groups with ambiguous names, including Ansar al-Sharia in Libya and Tunisia, to mask its presence and spearhead its public campaign in new places.

The expansion of political freedoms in post-revolutionary countries thus provided al-Qaeda with an opportunity to pursue a dual politico-military approach. While the group’s military wing established safe havens and developed offensive capabilities, its political operatives focused on *dawa*: preaching, providing social services, and gaining the support of local populations. These political efforts were designed to lay the groundwork for an eventual military confrontation with the state.

Al-Qaeda’s emphasis on *dawa* and community outreach allowed it to amass a considerable following in Libya and Tunisia. A 2012 conference in Tunisia hosted by Ansar al-Sharia, for example, drew between 3,000 and 10,000 participants.²¹ Al-Qaeda’s outreach campaign eventually came to an end in Tunisia after an escalation in its violent activities caused the state to ban Ansar al-Sharia and crack down on it. Thereafter, the group transitioned from open preaching and outreach to warfare against the state.

Al-Qaeda now maintains a presence in almost every country that experienced significant turmoil during the Arab uprisings. The group’s strategic ingenuity enabled it to exploit both instability and also democratic reforms that emerged from the tumult of the uprisings. The group disproved those who viewed al-Qaeda’s strategic doctrine as stagnant and immutable. But the jihadist group’s next major challenge would come from within its own ranks; from a group that rejected al-Qaeda’s turn to a population-centric approach.

Countering the Islamic State Challenge

IS'S EMERGENCE PRESENTED AL-QAEDA WITH A CHALLENGE UNLIKE ANY OTHER THE group had encountered. Through al-Qaeda's various trials and tribulations prior to IS's rise, the group had at least managed to maintain unrivaled dominance within the jihadist movement. In turn, the lack of competition from other jihadist groups allowed al-Qaeda to pass up tactical victories that might make for good propaganda, but represented negligible strategic gains. Instead, al-Qaeda had a long-term vision for subtle yet real organizational growth and progressive destabilization of its state enemies. Typifying this approach was al-Qaeda's response to the Arab uprisings in which it adopted a deliberate expansion strategy, obscuring its activities and presence through the use of front groups.

IS's rapid ascension threatened to disrupt al-Qaeda's deliberate growth model, and oust al-Qaeda from its position of supremacy over the jihadist movement. IS's strategy was diametrically opposed to al-Qaeda's, and was designed, at least in part, to turn al-Qaeda's strengths into weaknesses. While al-Qaeda often grew through clandestine means, IS stole the spotlight at every opportunity. IS built a robust propaganda apparatus suited for the digital age, pumping out a constant stream of videos, photos, and statements advertising its victories, that were widely disseminated by its social media legions.²² Al-Qaeda has sought to build relationships with other armed groups, including non-jihadist factions, while IS wanted to dominate all Sunni Muslim groups. Al-Qaeda has maintained the appearance of a population-centric approach, while IS has openly advertised its brutality against residents of its caliphate.

With this brash approach, IS openly wooed al-Qaeda's affiliates, attempting to absorb its parent's global network. Many analysts believed IS had the decided upper hand in this intra-jihadist competition, and thus misunderstood the strategic course that al-Qaeda would travel. Analysts widely assumed that the only way al-Qaeda could remain influential was by replicating IS's conspicuous model—for example, by carrying out spectacular terrorist attacks. Typical of this view is a February 2015 *Foreign Affairs* article by Clint Watts, which argued that al-Qaeda was losing its competition to IS, but that it still had a "clear path back to contention: a dramatic follow-up to the Hebdo attack."²³ But al-Qaeda defied conventional wisdom. Rather than trying to replicate IS's model, al-Qaeda took the exact

opposite approach. Al-Qaeda reduced its public profile, downplayed its successes rather than publicizing them, and embedded further within local populations. In this way, al-Qaeda presented itself to the world as a more palatable alternative to its bloodthirsty rival.

Al-Qaeda leaders' interactions with the media provide a valuable lens for understanding the group's strategy for benefiting from IS's shocking rise. In a discussion with an Al Jazeera documentarian in early 2015, Abu Sulayman al-Muhajir, a high-ranking Nusra Front religious official who hails from Australia, accused IS of "delegitimizing" other Sunni Muslim groups.²⁴ Muhajir contrasted IS with the Nusra Front, which he portrayed as trying to "restore the right of the Muslim people to choose their leaders" in Syria. Muhajir's statement highlighted how al-Qaeda's localization strategy featured in its propaganda war with IS, as the Nusra Front was portrayed as an organic extension of the Syrian revolution and the Syrian people.

In June 2015, *The Guardian* published an extended interview with Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada, two of al-Qaeda's most senior religious figures, that revealed another remarkable aspect of al-Qaeda's strategy. Rather than trying to convince the audience of al-Qaeda's strength or continued relevance, the two ideologues instead concentrated on fueling the illusion that IS had already destroyed al-Qaeda. Maqdisi claimed that al-Qaeda's organizational structure had "collapsed," while Abu Qatada alleged that Zawahiri had become "isolated."²⁵ This portrayal was almost certainly disinformation. Al-Qaeda had numerous strengths at the time, including affiliates that were noticeably gaining in strength in Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and North Africa. If Maqdisi and Abu Qatada truly feared al-Qaeda's collapse, they likely would have pointed to these strengths to try to rally the group's supporters. Instead, their emphasis on al-Qaeda's weakness was seemingly directed at regimes feeling anxious about allowing the militant group to operate more openly.

These media themes were consistent with how al-Qaeda affiliates functioned in practice. After a coalition of Islamist rebel factions, including the Nusra Front, seized the northwestern city of Idlib in April 2015, Nusra emir Abu Muhammad al-Julani said in an audio statement that his group did not "strive to rule the city or to monopolize it without others."²⁶ Julani's remarks were intended to reassure both Idlib residents and other Islamist rebel factions that the Nusra Front, unlike IS, could cooperate with others, and would not forcibly impose its will on the population.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) adopted a similar approach to governance after it seized the Yemeni port city of Mukalla. The group appointed

a local council, known as the Hadhrami Domestic Council, to govern Mukalla. Initially AQAP adopted a gradualist, somewhat lenient approach to the implementation of *sharia*, though it eventually began cracking down more heavily on *sharia* violations.²⁷ By gradually introducing *sharia* and overlooking minor transgressions in its early months of governance, AQAP tried to win over local Yemenis, while distancing itself from IS. In a video released shortly after his death in June 2015, Nasir al-Wuhayshi indirectly criticized IS for focusing on policing minor transgressions, claiming that this approach reflected a “narrow understanding” of *sharia*.²⁸ Wuyahshi’s view was that it was theologically acceptable and strategically wise for *sharia* to be introduced slowly, allowing Yemenis to come to accept it, rather than alienating the population in the earliest stages.

But while al-Qaeda made these global changes, its local approach to countering IS was the most effective aspect of its anti-IS strategy. One reason analytic assessments of the competition between al-Qaeda and IS were generally inaccurate is that observers underestimated the strength, cohesiveness and loyalty of al-Qaeda’s regional affiliates. Al-Qaeda’s affiliates proved both willing and able to ruthlessly stamp out pro-IS sentiment within their ranks.

One place where al-Qaeda’s anti-IS strategy has been deadly effective is the Sahel region. In May 2015, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, a spokesman for the al-Murabitun jihadist group, pledged allegiance to Islamic State. (Al-Murabitun was formed in 2013 after an al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) splinter group led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar joined with another AQIM offshoot, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Sahraoui ostensibly did so on behalf of the entire al-Murabitun organization. Sahraoui’s announcement was not well-received by Belmokhtar, an al-Qaeda loyalist, who quickly released a statement reiterating al-Murabitun’s allegiance to al-Qaeda, and lambasting Sahraoui for failing to consult with other members.²⁹ Belmokhtar went on the offensive against al-Murabitun’s pro-IS contingent, wounding Sahraoui, and killing over a dozen of his men in clashes in June 2015. Several months later, al-Murabitun formally rejoined AQIM, cementing the group’s position within the al-Qaeda network.³⁰

Belmokhtar’s crackdown on Sahraoui shattered IS’s expansion prospects in the Sahel. Though Sahraoui re-emerged in a May 2016 audio statement, his first public statement in a year, his network is much diminished, and has dim expansion prospects while AQIM remains the region’s dominant militant force.³¹ IS’s failed push into the Sahel has also had a lasting impact on the group’s position in Africa, as it has prevented IS from establishing a territorial link between northern Nigeria, where the IS-affiliated Boko Haram operates, and Libya, which has served as IS’s North African command and control hub.³²

IS has fared little better in Somalia, where al-Shabaab, another al-Qaeda affiliate, mounted a merciless campaign aimed at rooting out IS supporters in its ranks. IS's early efforts to bribe Shabaab into defecting from al-Qaeda were rebuffed.³³ When IS changed tack and tried to convince Shabaab foot soldiers and mid-level commanders to form a pro-IS splinter group, it ran up against stiff resistance. Shabaab's intelligence wing, the *amniyat*, arrested at least dozens of pro-IS militants—and perhaps far more than that—while other IS sympathizers turned themselves in to government security forces to avoid the *amniyat*'s wrath. As one Shabaab commander put it, many IS supporters in Somalia apparently preferred to “fall into the enemy's hands, instead of meeting death in the hands of” the *amniyat*.³⁴

As a result of the *amniyat*'s crackdown, IS managed to establish only a small and tenuous foothold in Somalia. In October 2015, Abdulqadir Mumin, a Shabaab religious official, pledged allegiance to IS on behalf of a group numbering no more than 100 fighters.³⁵ The fact that Mumin was based in Puntland, hundreds of miles from Shabaab's stronghold in southern Somalia, may have enabled him to evade the *amniyat* initially, but he and his group soon found themselves in Shabaab's crosshairs. A month after Mumin's pledge of allegiance, Shabaab warned in a radio broadcast that it would “cut the throats” of IS members.³⁶ In December 2015, violence erupted between Mumin's faction and Shabaab militants in Puntland.³⁷ Several other small, pro-IS groups have emerged in Somalia since Mumin's pledge, but none have seriously threatened Shabaab's grip on power.

The Sahel and Somalia are not the only locales where IS has struggled to gain a foothold. In Afghanistan, IS has run up against a much stronger opponent in the Taliban, which has contained IS's growth and crushed several nascent pro-IS factions.³⁸ In November 2015, the Taliban largely wiped out the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which had pledged allegiance to IS several months earlier. The IMU's defeat prompted one of the group's supporters to remark that “what America and its agents could not do in 14 years, the Taliban did in 24 hours.”³⁹ IS's struggles in Afghanistan amount to a victory for al-Qaeda's coalition-building approach. While IS has decided to try to take on and crush all competing centers of power, al-Qaeda has built relationships with local power brokers like the Taliban. Meanwhile, internal discord hampered IS's growth in Yemen. Since December 2015, over 100 militants—more than 10 percent of the Yemeni IS branch's total manpower—defected from the group after expressing discontent with its *wali*, or governor.⁴⁰

Essentially, IS has struggled to establish a presence in most countries where al-Qaeda has a foothold. Even when IS was at its peak, the vast majority of al-Qaeda affiliates refused to defect, and instead hunted down and neutralized IS sympathizers. Now that IS is demonstrably losing territory in Syria, Iraq and Libya

all at once, its chances of wooing al-Qaeda affiliates are even further diminished. It is IS's global network, not al-Qaeda's, that is now vulnerable to fragmentation.⁴¹

The Future of the Intra-Jihadist Competition

ON JULY 28, 2016, NUSRA FRONT EMIR ABU MUHAMMAD AL-JULANI ISSUED A short video statement that was widely interpreted as dissociating his group from al-Qaeda.⁴² In the video, Julani announced the cancellation of operations under the name Jabhat al-Nusra and the formation of a new group called Jabhat Fath al-Sham, which would have “no affiliation to any external entity.” Rather than demonstrating the withering of al-Qaeda as a brand or an organization, Nusra's alleged dissociation from al-Qaeda represents a reversion to al-Qaeda's pre-IS strategy for Syria.

To be clear, in his statement Julani did not actually dissociate from al-Qaeda. Though the statement was clearly designed to leave the audience with the impression that Nusra had left al-Qaeda, Julani never outright said that this was happening. As Thomas Joscelyn has noted, Julani's statement that Jabhat Fath al-Sham would have “no affiliation to any external entity” is of less consequence when there has been a heavy movement of senior al-Qaeda operatives into Syria. It is likely that the senior al-Qaeda leaders in Syria are not considered an external entity under Julani's formulation. Further, Julani made no reference to his own *bayat* to Ayman al-Zawahiri, thus suggesting that it remains valid.⁴³

Before IS emerged as a significant independent challenge, al-Qaeda's Syria strategy was to have Nusra serve as a front group and unacknowledged affiliate. But the conflict with IS knocked this strategy off course when IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi publicly claimed that Nusra was subservient to him. In response, Julani acknowledged Nusra's affiliation with al-Qaeda, while appealing to Zawahiri to resolve his dispute with Baghdadi. *But originally, al-Qaeda did not want the ties between Nusra and the broader al-Qaeda organization to be known:* Instead, al-Qaeda wanted to pursue its front group strategy in Syria. In 2015, rumors surfaced that Nusra might leave al-Qaeda to form a new entity (as it ultimately did the following year).⁴⁴ It is entirely possible that the transformation of Nusra into Jabhat Fath al-Sham would have come a year earlier had al-Qaeda not perceived IS as such a threat to its global network at that time. Among other things, the

fact that Nusra dissociated from al-Qaeda the following year demonstrates that al-Qaeda no longer believes that the Islamic State can capitalize on such a move.

This is not a mere public relations move. The alleged dissociation from al-Qaeda may open Jabhat Fath al-Sham up to deeper cooperation with other rebel groups and greater support from external sponsors. Al-Qaeda theoreticians have made clear that they expect this precise benefit. Abdallah al-Muhaysini has said, for example, that the main obstacle other militant factions used as an excuse not to support Nusra—its affiliation with al-Qaeda—had been removed.⁴⁵ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi has spoken to the Arabic-language media about a *fatwa* he had issued a few years ago that permits “changing names if they become a burden on the mujahedin.”⁴⁶ In other words, al-Qaeda believes that in Syria it can reap all the benefits that it has experienced in other theaters through the use of front groups.

Today al-Qaeda seems to be the strongest it has been since 9/11, and is arguably in the best shape it has known in its history. Assuming one does not take Nusra’s dissociation from al-Qaeda literally, the organization is the dominant military force in significant swaths of territory in Syria and wields considerable influence across southern Yemen. Al-Qaeda’s newest affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), which was formally established in September 2014, has quietly established a foothold in parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and poses a growing threat to India and Bangladesh. Shabaab and AQIM are resurgent, with the former group intensifying its attacks on African Union forces and the Somali state after a period of relative decline.

Al-Qaeda’s successes can, of course, be attributed to factors that extend far beyond IS’s rise. Geopolitical developments, including the escalation of tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and certain Sunni states’ increasing willingness to work with unsavory actors to overthrow Bashar al-Assad’s regime, have benefited al-Qaeda in Syria and Yemen. Al-Qaeda also continues to exploit the instability produced by the Arab uprisings. But al-Qaeda’s handling of IS’s emergence has also been a factor in the former’s gains. While IS horrifies the world and alienates Sunni Muslims with its brutality, al-Qaeda has appealed to local populations and other armed factions by casting itself as a less extreme and more effective alternative to IS.

The conventional wisdom about IS and al-Qaeda has been wrong. IS did not devour al-Qaeda’s network. IS did not even force al-Qaeda to try to carry out spectacular attacks to reassert its relevance. Instead, al-Qaeda skillfully and subtly played off of IS’s rise to advance its position. Analysts’ failure to anticipate al-Qaeda’s moves has set back our ability to counter the jihadist group.

It’s clear that al-Qaeda is better positioned than IS to succeed in the future. IS’s

growth model, which emphasizes immediate, constant, and highly public successes, is undoubtedly effective when the group is winning. Indeed, when IS swept through northern Iraq in the summer of 2014, the group seemed nearly unstoppable, with its sleek propaganda apparatus amplifying its every victory. But it is not clear that IS ever prepared itself for a rainy day—and now a rainy season has arrived for its caliphate.

Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, has a track record of thriving in the face of adversity. In the case of both AQI's failed experiment and the Arab uprisings, al-Qaeda's capacity for strategic patience and its ability to adapt its approach enabled it to overcome challenges and capitalize on unanticipated opportunities. Al-Qaeda continues to play the long game today. While the international community remains narrowly focused on IS, al-Qaeda is flying below the radar, building its support base in countries like Syria and Yemen, establishing safe havens, destabilizing enemy states, and preparing for a post-IS future. Al-Qaeda also boasts re-establishment of the caliphate as its goal, but believes that IS was too hasty announcing the return of the caliphate when the foes of jihadists were still strong enough to bring IS's "state" to ruins.

Unlike IS, which is happy to alienate even prospective allies, al-Qaeda has maintained a relationship with donors and other external supporters. After the 9/11 attacks, the United States put considerable effort into shutting down the charity networks that supported al-Qaeda throughout the globe. But times have changed. With several states now openly aiding al-Qaeda in Syria, and elsewhere, opportunities for non-governmental and quasi-governmental organizations that support al-Qaeda to expand their assistance to the jihadist group have magnified. The longer the international community underestimates al-Qaeda's planning and potency, the more entrenched the group will become, and the more difficult it will be to uproot.

NOTES

1. Elisabeth Bumiller, "Panetta Says Defeat of al Qaeda is 'Within Reach,'" *New York Times*, July 9, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/10/world/asia/10military.html?mtrref=www.nytimes.com&r=0>.
2. As one journalist claimed: "Al-Qaeda had already looked marginal and on the back foot for several years. But the dawn of largely peaceful change in the Middle East and North Africa this

year rendered it irrelevant.” Ian Black, “Al-Qaida Already Looked Irrelevant After Arab Spring,” *The Guardian*, May 2, 2011, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/02/al-qaida-irrelevant-arab-spring>.

Peter Bergen, the bestselling author and CNN terrorism analyst, described bin Laden’s death and the Arab revolutions as “the final bookends” of the Global War on Terror. “It’s hard to think of anything that’s more seismic in terms of undercutting al-Qaeda’s ideology,” he said. Neal Conan, “Bergen Correctly Predicted bin Laden’s Location,” interview with Peter Bergen, National Public Radio, May 3, 2011. Former CIA deputy director Michael Morell has explained the intelligence community’s early assessment of the revolutions. In his memoir *The Great War of Our Time*, Morell regretfully recalled that his agency “thought and told policy-makers that this outburst of popular revolt would damage al Qaeda by undermining the group’s narrative. Our analysts figured that the protests would send a signal throughout the region that political change was possible without al Qaeda’s leading the way and without the violence that al Qaeda said was necessary.” Michael Morell, *The Great War of Our Time: The CIA’s Fight Against Terrorism from al Qaeda to ISIS* (New York: Twelve, 2015).

The vast majority of prominent analysts agreed with these assessments. See, for example, Fawaz Gerges, “The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda: Debunking the Terrorism Narrative,” *Huffington Post*, January 3, 2012 (arguing that “the popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain have not only shaken the foundation of the authoritarian order in the Middle East, but they have also hammered a deadly nail in the coffin of a terrorism narrative which has painted al-Qaeda as the West’s greatest threat”); Fareed Zakaria, “Al-Qaeda is Irrelevant,” CNN, March 7, 2011 (arguing that the Arab uprisings “represent[ed] a total repudiation of al-Qaeda’s founding ideology,” and thus we should “stop cowering in fear of an impending caliphate”). In turn, the media’s portrayal of the likely impact of the Arab uprisings reflected this analytic conventional wisdom. See, for example, Scott Shane, “As Regimes Fall in Arab World, al-Qaeda Sees History Fly By,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2011, which concluded that for most analysts, “the past few weeks have the makings of an epochal disaster for Al Qaeda, making the jihadists look like ineffectual bystanders to history while offering young Muslims an appealing alternative to terrorism.” As Bruce Hoffman, a highly-respected scholar of terrorism, noted: “The triumphalism of Osama bin Laden’s death coinciding with the ending of the first phase of the Arab Spring created a concatenation of judgment where anyone who stood in the way was kind of bowled over or knocked aside.” Quoted in Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “Interpreting Al-Qaeda,” *Foreign Policy*, January 6, 2014.

3. For example, Georgetown University terrorism scholar Daniel Byman remarked in congressional testimony that, “unlike Al Qaeda, [IS] looks like a winner: triumphant in Iraq and Syria, taking on the Shi’a apostates and even the United States at a local level, and presenting a vision of Islamic governance that Al Qaeda cannot match.” Daniel Byman, “Terrorism in Africa: The Imminent Threat to the United States,” testimony before the Subcommittee on

Counterterrorism and Intelligence of the House Committee on Homeland Security, April 29, 2015, available at <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/testimony/2015/04/29-terrorism-in-africa-byman/byman-aq-v-is-hsc-042315.pdf>. Michael Leiter, former director of the National Counterterrorism Center, similarly assessed that IS had succeeded where al-Qaeda had failed, by capturing the “global imagination” of the jihadist community. Quoted in Eric Schmitt, “ISIS or Al Qaeda? American Officials Split Over Top Terror Threat,” *New York Times*, August 4, 2015, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/05/world/middleeast/isis-or-al-qaeda-american-officials-split-over-biggest-threat.html?_r=0.

The State Department’s 2015 strategic assessment of global terrorism concluded that IS posed the “greatest threat globally,” while al-Qaeda, whose senior leadership had been “significantly weakened,” was trying to “reassert its relevance.” U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2015,” available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/258249.pdf>.

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Pakistan's Descent into Religious Intolerance

By Farahnaz Ispahani

WHEN PAKISTAN WAS CREATED IN 1947, ITS SECULAR FOUNDING fathers did not speak of an Islamic State. Muhammad Ali Jinnah declared that non-Muslims would be equal citizens in the new country. Reflecting his secular views, Jinnah—himself a Shia—tried to establish a multi-confessional state, and he nominated a Hindu, several Shias, and an Ahmadi to Pakistan's first cabinet. Today, however, Pakistan's religious minorities face discrimination and persecution. Throughout the country, Shia Muslims face smear campaigns from Sunnis that declare them "non-Muslims." Ahmadis—who were among Jinnah's most ardent supporters in his quest to create a Muslim homeland on the subcontinent—are now completely unrepresented, living as virtual outcasts in modern Pakistan. Moreover, the Pakistani government's policies and institutions have become deeply sectarianized, and non-Sunni Muslim representation at the cabinet-level is limited to mere symbolic appointments.¹

Things have become worse in the past few decades due to a combination of factors. These include years of radicalization of Pakistani society, an educational curriculum that breeds hatred for minorities, and a judicial system that is unwilling to protect minorities and often even condones the behavior of aggressors.

Pakistan's national security establishment also continues to protect radical Islamist groups involved in these attacks because these groups are considered useful for foreign policy needs.

Pakistan may have been the first modern post-colonial state to embrace the idea of religious purification, but the phenomenon of the majority insisting that religious minorities practice their faith and culture within limits prescribed by the majority now occurs in several other countries around the world. In Pakistan's case, this quest for purity started soon after independence in 1947 and has continued ever since. The country's first Constituent Assembly heard arguments by theologians like Maulana Abul Ala Maududi and Shabbir Ahmed Usmani about how Muslims needed protection from the negative impact of non-Muslim culture on the Muslim way of life. The clerics' view put forth the idea that Islam had set up a wall between believers and unbelievers.

Over time this "protection" meant not only purifying Pakistan of non-Muslims—such as Hindus and Christians—but also purifying the ranks of Muslims by demanding separation of Ahmadis and Shias. The demands of clerics, backed by street protests, forced the state to make concessions as early as the 1950s and have continued ever since. In the early years these groups—including Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema Islam, Majlis-e-Tahaffuz-e-Khatm-e-Nabuwat, Majlis-e-Ahrar-e-Islam, and Jamiat Ulema Pakistan—demanded action by the state in fulfilling their goals.

Over the last two decades, religious-political groups have grown in power. Some have obtained weaponry and funding while advancing Pakistan's foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Islamist parties of the 1950s and 1960s have spawned militant offshoots that no longer limit themselves to contesting elections, or making demands for legislation from the state. They directly attack minorities physically, and threaten to eliminate through terrorism, anyone who disagrees with their point of view.

The perennial dissatisfaction of the Islamist extremists, whose worldview is in many ways anchored in the seventh century, has not diminished, even after several constitutional and legislative changes, and the killing or migration of their victims in large numbers.

To say that Pakistan's religious minorities are under attack is a self-evident truth. Pakistani laws, especially ones that deal with blasphemy, deny or interfere with practice of minority faiths. Religious minorities are targets of legal as well as social discrimination. Most significantly, in recent years, Pakistan has witnessed some of the worst organized violence against religious minorities since the 1947 Partition. Over an eighteen-month period covering 2012 and part of 2013, Shias

were subject to 67 attacks, including suicide terrorist bombings during Shia religious observances.

In addition, 54 lethal attacks were also perpetrated against Ahmadis, 37 against Christians, 16 against Hindus, and 3 against Sikhs during this period. Attackers of religious minorities are seldom prosecuted—and if they are, the courts almost invariably set them free. Even members of the majority Sunni community who dare to question State policies of religious exclusion are just as vulnerable to extremist violence.

Pakistan was created as a homeland for South Asia's Muslims, but soon after Independence some religious and political leaders declared the objective of Pakistan's creation to be the establishment of an Islamic State. Much of the prejudice against religious minorities can be traced to the effort by Islamist radicals to make Pakistan "purer" in what they conceive as Islamic terms. Partition-related violence and forced migration meant that very few Hindus and Sikhs were left in the western districts of Punjab that became part of Pakistan. The estimated percentage of Muslims in the areas constituting Pakistan rose from 77 percent in 1941 to 83 percent in 1949.²

THE DESCENT BEGAN AS EARLY AS 1949, WHEN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY declared the objective of Pakistan's constitution to be the creation of an Islamic State. It reached a nadir with the "Islamization" drive under General Zia ul-Haq during the 1980s. Today, the country contends with a spectrum of armed militias and terrorist groups—many of which were sponsored by the State—each intent on imposing its version of Islam by violent means.

Pakistan's first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan (1947-1951), led the way in creating a national narrative for Pakistan that perpetuated a sense of Islamic victimhood. In March 1949, Liaquat Ali Khan moved in the Constituent Assembly what came to be known as the "Objectives Resolution": a declaration of the goals of the new State that would form the basis of its future constitution and laws. The Objectives Resolution accepted the premise that "sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to God Almighty alone," and that the State of Pakistan would exercise authority "within the limit prescribed by Him."

The resolution declared that "Muslims shall be enabled to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accord with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and the Sunna," and "adequate provision shall be made to safeguard the legitimate interests of minorities and backward and depressed classes." The net effect of the Objectives Resolution was

to define the State in Islamic terms, opening the door for further legislation based on the interpretation of Islam by a parliamentary majority.³

Very early in its life as a new nation, Pakistan was plunged into a power struggle between regional politicians, and bureaucrats or generals, with each side invoking religion to enhance its standing and credibility. These power struggles had significant implications for the debate about the role of religion in the running of the State. Pakistan remained bogged down by ideological debates and political divisions that prevented the writing of a Constitution for almost nine years. The absence of a Constitution meant that religious minorities lived on the toleration of the majority, rather than protections guaranteed by the rule of law.

It was Hindus and Sikhs who suffered most at Partition and immediately afterwards. However, soon Muslim sects also became targets, starting with the Ahmadiyyas. In March 1953, anti-Ahmadi protests spread across Punjab, resulting in the deaths of as many as 2,000 Ahmadis by rioting mobs before order was restored. The anti-Ahmadiyya protests anticipated the more brutal treatment decades later of non-Muslims and heterodox sects within the fold of Islam who did not accept the beliefs and practices of the Sunni majority.

A judicial inquiry commission, headed by Supreme Court Justice Mohammed Munir and Punjab High Court Justice Muhammad Rustam Kayani, produced a 387-page report after exhaustive hearings, concluding in early 1954. The Commission interviewed almost all leading clerics and found that they often considered each other's beliefs incompatible with Islam. Although all Islamists wanted Pakistan to become an Islamic State, their visions of such a State differed significantly. They seemed to agree only on their contempt for, and opposition to, non-Muslims. Moreover, their definitions of "non-Muslim" often extended to members of other Islamic sects with whom they had doctrinal differences.

The Munir Commission's conclusion on the issue of the definition of Muslim was: "no two learned divines are agreed on this fundamental. If we attempt our own definition as each learned divine has done and that definition differs from that given by all others, we unanimously go out of the fold of Islam. And if we adopt the definition given by any one of the *ulema*, we remain Muslims according to the view of that *alim* [scholar], but *kafirs* according to the definition of everyone else."⁴

One of the most noteworthy findings of the Munir Commission related to the Islamist leaders' attitudes towards non-Muslims. "According to the leading *ulema*, the position of non-Muslims in the Islamic State of Pakistan will be that of *dhim-mis*, and they will not be full citizens of Pakistan because they will not have the same rights as Muslims. They will have no voice in the making of the law, no right to administer the law, and no right to hold public offices."⁵

Pakistan's first Constitution of 1956—abrogated within two years—described Pakistan as “the Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” and included the Objectives Resolution as the preamble to the Constitution.⁶ Part 3 of the new Constitution laid down several “Directive Principles of State Policy,” which included Islamic provisions such as “Steps shall be taken to enable the Muslims of Pakistan individually and collectively to order their lives in accordance with the Holy Quran and Sunna,” and “to promote unity and the observance of Islamic moral standards.” The Pakistani State was now committed to securing “the proper organization of *zakat*, *wakfs* [religious endowments] and mosques,” to “prevent the consumption of alcoholic liquor,” and to “eliminate *riba* [usury or interest] as early as possible.” The 1956 Pakistan Constitution also barred non-Muslims from holding the office of head of State.

In October 1958, General Ayub Khan took power as Pakistan's first military dictator. Ruling over Pakistan for over ten years, Ayub saw Pakistan not as a conventional State defined by territory, but as a State defined by ideology. For Ayub, and indeed the Islamists of Pakistan, that ideology was exclusively Islamic. When Ayub arbitrarily framed a new Constitution for Pakistan in 1962, the new basic law also included several “Islamic provisions,” and restricted the office of president to Muslims. Further, a Council of Islamic Ideology was assigned the task of making recommendations to the government on bringing all laws “in conformity with [the] Quran and Sunna.” From the perspective of Pakistan's religious minorities, Ayub's self-styled benevolent authoritarianism offered little relief against the tide of intolerance that had engulfed the country since Partition. The minorities' treatment now depended on the dictator's view of each community.

To ensure that Pakistan's future citizens were all raised to become well indoctrinated in the national ideology, the Ayub regime, in all schools, made Social Studies compulsory from grades six to ten, and Islamic Studies from grades six to eight. An official report proudly proclaimed, “Students of Islamic history as now presented will develop confidence in themselves, and instead of looking for leadership to other Muslim countries, will try to lead others in the presentation of Islam.”⁷ The syllabus emphasized Islam's martial traditions, spoke of a long-standing conflict between Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent, and drilled into students' minds the idea that Pakistan was created to be an Islamic State.

Social Studies, later known as Pakistan Studies, was made a compulsory subject of study from Grade 5 through 12 in schools, as well as undergraduate programs at colleges. Its curriculum crafted a version of history that emphasized Islam's martial traditions, spoke of a long-standing conflict between Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent, highlighted a pan-Islamic *ummah* and depicted

other religions as inferior to Islam. It also drilled into students' minds the idea that Pakistan was created to be an Islamic state, and to be the center of a global Islamic revival.

General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime (1977-1988) went one step further. It ordered a revision of the educational curricula for all subjects to ensure that "the ideology for which this nation had achieved Pakistan" may "permeate" the lives of people. This resulted in "Islamic" elements being added even in the study of languages and the sciences. The basic aim of this policy was to create a new generation wedded to Islam, and what the state described as "the ideology of Pakistan." The most far-reaching consequence of this decision was to quash the potential for critical thinking in the next generation, in addition to encouraging a false narrative of history. Students were introduced to religious bigotry at an early age, making it difficult for ordinary Pakistanis to empathize with religious minorities when they were under attack.

THIS PROMOTION OF RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE LEGITIMIZED THE VIEW THAT religious minorities lived in the country only at the sufferance of the Muslim majority. Instead of the modern conception of inalienable human rights, the minorities' survival and religious freedom were made dependent on various interpretations of traditional Islamic law. Islamization of Pakistan was incremental. The developments under the military dictatorships of Ayub and Yahya paved the way for Zia's much harsher interpretation of Islamic law, primarily to the detriment of religious pluralism and minority rights.

In 1969, when faced with protests against his rule, Ayub handed over power to his chief of army, General Yahya Khan. Yahya imposed martial law, but also promised to hold multi-party elections for a new constituent assembly. Although all political parties in the country were allowed to contest the election, the military seemed to favor conservative parties—described in the official media as "Islam-loving"—who were expected to keep in check the influence of secular and socialist factions.⁸

A Martial Law Regulation was passed which pronounced a maximum penalty of seven years' rigorous imprisonment for "any person who published, or was in possession of any book, pamphlet, etc., which was offensive to the religion of Islam."⁹ This 1970 law foreshadowed the infamous blasphemy laws imposed under Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship a few years later.

The 1970 election, the ensuing civil war and the break-up of Pakistan were perhaps the most significant events in Pakistan's history since Partition. They were to greatly influence the nation's future policies relating to religion and religious

minorities. Indubitably, geography and ethnicity were compelling factors in the power struggle that precipitated East Pakistan's secession as Bangladesh. The glaring threat to West Pakistani hegemony posed by the Awami League's decisive victory could barely have been countenanced without incident, given the authoritarian tenor of the times. Less obvious though, was the fact that the east and west had sharply differing views on the role of religion in public life. It was a strong undercurrent drawing the two parts of Pakistan into direct confrontation.

Much has been written on the brutality of the Pakistan army in its attempt to suppress the 1971 uprising in East Pakistan. Estimates of those killed in the military operations range from a low of 300,000 (preferred by Pakistani officials) to a high of 3 million (cited by Bangladeshi officials). The Pakistani army's actions are widely described as attempted genocide, with even Pakistani generals later admitting that their orders were to secure control of territory even if it involved elimination of large numbers of citizens.¹⁰ But the most significant element of this tragedy in the context of understanding Pakistan's policies towards religious minorities is the Pakistan army's treatment of Bengali Hindus, who were Pakistani citizens at the time.

The humiliating defeat of the Pakistan army in the 1971 war with India, and secession of East Pakistan to become Bangladesh made it impossible for the military to continue in power. Soon after the surrender at Dhaka, General Yahya Khan handed over power to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, leader of the PPP, which had won the largest number of seats in West Pakistan during the December 1970 election.

Pakistan now had a representative government, contiguous territory, and, with more than 96 percent Muslims comprising the citizenry, a more religiously homogenous population. The country could make a fresh start, leaving behind the stultifying baggage of ideology and conflict that had accumulated since 1947. However, the loss of East Pakistan did not end the drive for Islamization. On the contrary, Pakistan's leaders persisted in nation-building through religion, rather than embracing inclusive civic nationalism. Pakistan's religious minorities were now more beleaguered than ever.

Bhutto's own inclinations and previous public pronouncements indicated his preference for a modern, secular State. But the Pakistan that Bhutto governed, first as president, and then as prime minister, had been influenced, in the words of one foreign commentator, by "a distinctly obscurantist tendency," and "an unconstructive harping on Islam."¹¹ Although religious parties fared badly in the 1970 election, they still retained a strong presence in Pakistani society.

Further, the proportion of non-Muslims in Pakistan's population had shrunk significantly with the loss of East Pakistan. When a census was conducted in

1972, none of the non-Muslim communities counted even a million members.¹² In the past, the larger proportion of Hindus in United Pakistan had given some voice, however limited, to non-Muslims; that would no longer be the case. Having achieved a measure of purity in relation to non-Muslims within Pakistan, Islamists were now getting ready to purify the country of unorthodox groups hitherto identified as being Muslim.

The 1973 Constitution not only retained the Islamic provisions from earlier versions but also added new ones. Islam was declared the “State religion of Pakistan,” and a promise was made to ensure that “all existing laws” conform “with the Injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah.” The constitution declared that “no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such Injunctions.” The preamble of the basic law spoke of enabling the Muslims “to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres, in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam, as set out in the Holy Quran and Sunnah.” But it also promised that “adequate provision shall be made for the minorities freely to profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures.”¹³

Bhutto initially tried to balance these “Islamic” measures with efforts to emphasize pluralism and tolerance for religious minorities. The PPP had been strongly supported by Shias, Ahmadis, Christians, and Hindus at the polls. These communities expected the party in government to protect them, and the PPP government acquitted itself well on this score in its first two years. While negotiating with India over what became the Simla Accord in 1973, Bhutto insisted that the Hindus who had fled Sindh during the 1971 war should return to their homeland.

IN 1974, TWO DECADES AFTER THE 1953 ANTI-AHMADIYYA PROTESTS, PAKISTAN once again faced riots targeting the Ahmadiyya community. This time round, instead of setting up a commission, the issue was taken to Parliament to debate and vote on whether Ahmadis were Muslim. Religious parties managed to secure support from members of secular opposition parties for a unanimous resolution which “recommended and requested the federal government to declare the Mirzais, Amadis, or Qadianis as a minority because they do not believe in Khatme-Nabuwat.”¹⁴

The Second Amendment of the Pakistani Constitution altered Article 106 Clause 3, which lists religious minority communities to include “persons of Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves ‘Ahmadis’).” The Ahmadis became the only religious minority listed in the Constitution, not by the name they use, but by pejoratives applied to them by their detractors.

Moreover, a new clause that attempted to define “Muslim” was added to Article 260 of the Constitution, transforming a purely religious question into a matter of law. “A person who does not believe in the absolute and unqualified finality of The Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace be upon him), the last of the Prophets,” it read, “or claims to be a Prophet, in any sense of the word or of any description whatsoever, after Muhammad (Peace be upon him), or recognizes such a claimant as a Prophet or religious reformer, is not a Muslim for the purposes of the Constitution or law.”¹⁵

It was a tragedy that instead of diminishing the difference between Muslim and non-Muslim over time, as Jinnah had envisioned, Pakistan had created a new non-Muslim minority through a constitutional amendment. It was a greater tragedy that this happened under an otherwise progressive and pluralist government. It is not unusual in the history of most faiths for religious leaders to classify members of other denominations as not belonging within the mainstream of their faith. But the purported heresy of a sect had not been made subject of legislation in any country in modern times before this.

ON JULY 5, 1977, PAKISTAN’S SECOND MILITARY COUP TOOK PLACE AND ITS THIRD military dictator, Chief of Army Staff General Zia-ul-Haq, took over the reins of power, deposing the elected Bhutto government. Zia legitimated his dictatorship by claiming the mantle of Islamization. He promised to be guided by “the spirit of the people’s struggle for Nizam-e-Mustafa,” from his first day in power. Zia changed laws by decree, imposed draconian punishments based on medieval interpretations of Islam, silenced secular critics, and changed school curricula to pass on his bigoted worldview to the next generation.

Hardline clerics with limited followings now preached on national television, and orthodox religious schools (*madrasas*) proliferated with State and foreign funding. Islamist militias, trained to fight the communist occupation in Afghanistan, also turned their guns on non-Muslims, Ahmadis, and Shias within Pakistan, often with a nod from Zia’s officials and political allies. If the 1947 partition virtually cleansed Pakistan of Hindus and Sikhs, Zia-ul-Haq’s decade-long dictatorship marked the beginning of a period of heightened sectarian violence in which all but the most obscurantist Muslim sects and groups were targeted.

At home, forceful advocacy of an Islamic State was Zia’s sole, albeit limited, source of legitimacy. Zia carefully nurtured his image as a man of Allah, with televised attendance at prayer congregations, and annual pilgrimages to Mecca. He also met regularly with clerics, many of whom were given State jobs and titles. Zia

thereby assembled a protective cohort of Islamist shock troops around himself, in addition to the uniformed military that he already commanded.

In February 1979, he ordered a revision of educational curricula to ensure that “the ideology for which this nation had achieved Pakistan” may “permeate” the lives of people. “Our text books and courses of study have drifted us away from our orbit,” he insisted. “Consequently, we had to devise a new educational policy to keep us within our intellectual orbit. The basic aim of this policy is to rear a new generation wedded to the ideology of Pakistan and Islam,” Zia said.¹⁶

Zia’s lack of tolerance for other faiths was particularly evident in his general disregard for the concerns of Pakistan’s minorities. While non-Muslims’ standing as citizens was reduced before the courts, the power of their franchise was also diluted by shrewd alterations to the electoral laws. Although Zia did not hold legislative elections until 1985, he changed the Representation of the People’s Act of 1976 to reintroduce separate communal electorates.

By 1980, the Islamization process expanded to include the implementation of *zakat*, a 2.5 percent annual wealth tax that is required by Islam to be used for the relief of the poor. The Zia government imposed *zakat* through a compulsory levy on bank deposits. In its first year, 485 million Pakistani Rupees were collected as *zakat* to be distributed through local committees, which would serve as a patronage network for Sunni Islamist parties. But Shias objected to the compulsory collection of *zakat* on the grounds that it was not in accordance with their religious law. Instead of *zakat*, the Shia paid *khums*—twice the amount the Sunnis paid. According to Khaled Ahmed, “it was traditionally aid to the Shia clergy, clearly a throwback to the history of Shias living as a suppressed majority, or a minority in Sunni states.”¹⁷

Zia and his fundamentalist advisers either did not anticipate a Shia backlash, or calculated that such a backlash would help consolidate Sunni opinion in favor of the regime. Led by a prominent Shia cleric Mufti Jafar Husain, on July 5, 1980, tens of thousands of Shias marched in Rawalpindi, near the capital, shutting down Islamabad. Violence ensued: one protestor was killed while fourteen were wounded. Zia amended the Zakat decree to allow anyone who considered compulsory deduction of *zakat* as being against his faith to seek exemption from the tax.¹⁸

Although the Shia had won the argument over *zakat*, Zia and his fellow generals were angered by the Shia’s ability to defy martial law. Moreover, they were fearful that Pakistani Shias would now rely on the new Islamic revolutionary regime in Iran for support. Zia’s regime responded by cultivating Sunni extremist groups that called for declaring Shias non-Muslim, with proscriptions similar to those that had earlier been issued against Ahmadis. Syed Vali Nasr cites reports

that “the martial law administrator of Punjab, General Ghulam Gilani, deliberately turned a blind eye to growing Sunni militancy and the rise of armed bands centered in *madrasas* after 1980, to address the problem of Shia resurgence.”¹⁹

Under Zia’s rule, Pakistan’s legal system was methodically transformed against religious minorities and their right to maintain or profess their beliefs openly.

In addition to unleashing violence against Shias, Zia also issued decrees that made it difficult for Ahmadis to publicly profess their faith. The hardline clerics who were calling for Shias to be declared non-Muslims were also not satisfied with the 1974 constitutional amendment that had declared Ahmadis non-Muslims for legal purposes. They wanted criminal penalties for Ahmadis who practiced their religion as if they were Muslims. Using his sweeping powers under Martial Law, Zia issued a Presidential ordinance in 1984 that barred Ahmadis from calling *Azan* (the call to prayer), and from describing their places of worship as “Mosque” or Masjid.

Zia’s ordinance went farther than the 1974 constitutional amendment in defining the terms “Muslim” and “non-Muslim.” The new definition described a “Muslim” as someone who believed “in the unity and oneness of Almighty Allah, in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Mohammad (PBUH: peace be upon him), and who does not believe in, or recognize as a prophet, or religious reformer to be a prophet, in any sense of the word, or of any description whatsoever, after Mohammad (PBUH).”²⁰ “Non-Muslim” was now defined by law to mean “a person who is not a Muslim, and includes a person belonging to the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, or Parsi community, a person of the *Qadiani* group or the Lahori group (who call themselves ‘Ahmadiyas’ or by other name), or a *Bahai*, and a person belonging to any of the scheduled castes [of Hinduism.]”

The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) were amended through Ordinances in 1980, 1982, and 1986, criminalizing anything causing dishonor to the Holy Prophet (SAW), Ahle Bait (family of the Prophet [SAW]), Sahaba (companions of the Prophet [SAW]), and Sha’ar-i-Islam (Islamic symbols). A simple complaint to the police over these “crimes” could result in arrest and trial leading to punishments of imprisonment, or fine, or both. Article 295A of PPC says that a deliberate and malicious act to outrage religious feeling of any class, by insulting its religion or religious beliefs, will be punished by up to 10 years imprisonment, or with fine, or with both; 295 B makes the defiling of Holy Quran punishable by imprisonment for life; 295 C mentions that the use of derogatory remarks in respect of the Holy Prophet be punished by death and fine; 298 A makes the use of insulting remarks in respect of holy personages as punishable by 3 years imprisonment, or with fine, or with both; 298 B mentions

the misuse of epithets description and titles reserved for certain holy personages, or place of Islam by Ahmadis, as punishable by 3 years imprisonment and fine; and 298 C makes an Ahmadi calling himself Muslim, or preaching, propagating his faith, outraging the religious feeling of Muslims, or posing himself a Muslim, a punishable crime for 3 years imprisonment and fine.²¹

These legal changes enabled bigoted Muslims to persecute and punish non-Muslims (Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus), and Ahmadis, by bringing false cases under the vaguely-worded Blasphemy Law. Apart from false cases of blasphemy or posing as Muslims, the Zia era also resulted in a plethora of cases concerning the abduction of Hindu women, and forcible conversions from the Sukkur, Larkana, and Mirpurkhas districts of Sindh. In one instance, the law was manipulated by powerful men who kidnapped a non-Muslim woman, claimed she had converted to Islam by producing false witnesses, and then threatened her with the dire consequences of apostasy if she denied her conversion to Islam.

The Pakistani government was accused internationally of abetting religious intolerance through legal formalities and requirements that encouraged private citizens to engage in intolerant or discriminatory acts in order to receive a government benefit. One example was the government requirement that Muslims sign an oath denouncing Ahmadis in order to get a passport or obtain government employment. The standard passport form issued by the Government, both in Pakistan and in other countries, contains a paragraph declaring that the signatory deems the founder of the Ahmadi sect an imposter.²² Although the denunciation paragraph is described as a declaration that sets Muslims apart from Ahmadis, it amounts to making it obligatory for other Muslims to denounce Ahmadis if they are to obtain a passport.

In August 1988, Zia-ul-Haq died in a helicopter crash. Over the next decade, a succession of civilian governments led alternately by Benazir Bhutto (1988-90, 1993-96), and Nawaz Sharif (1990-93, 1997-99), attempted to rule, thwarted each time by the entrenched military-technocratic-intelligence establishment.

Benazir, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter, and head of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), was voted to power in 1988 with the expectation that she would turn Pakistan away from Zia's Islamization. However, the constant opposition she faced from the religious clerics, Islamist organizations, and the establishment, proved that the order created by Zia did not die, and secular political forces were eventually forced into pragmatic compromises over Islamization.

This meant that for the most part, Benazir Bhutto's ostensibly secular government was cast as a helpless observer while the Islamists thwarted its leader's vision of a society that did not discriminate on the basis of religion. Incidents of

persecution of religious minorities thus continued in a pattern that had become familiar under Zia's rule. In addition to targeted attacks on Shias, the Ahmadis continued to be persecuted under the draconian Ordinance XX. There were several new cases of sect members being imprisoned for using Islamic symbols. Local officials in several jurisdictions paid little attention to the prime minister's calls for greater religious tolerance.

Her successor Nawaz Sharif, head of Pakistan Muslim League (PML), came to power with the support of Islamist parties, and in May 1991 passed the sharia bill that declared the Quran and Sunnah as the law of the land, not just the guideline for legislation, as had been the case since the Objectives Resolution of 1949. The sharia bill opened the way for courts to base their judgments on Islamic law, citing sayings attributed to the Prophet, or to medieval Islamic jurists, instead of adjudicating cases on grounds of Pakistan's laws. Opponents of the bill, including minority and women's groups, saw it as a further step towards making Pakistan a theocracy.²³

THE SITUATION DID NOT CHANGE WHEN BENAZIR BHUTTO RETURNED TO POWER as prime minister in October 1993, after the dismissal of the Sharif government a few months earlier. Bhutto spent her second term fighting fire, both domestic and foreign, the rise of the Taliban, and a faltering economy. In such an environment, there was little room for policy and legislative changes that were needed to end the widespread abuse and harassment of the various religious minorities.

In his second term, Nawaz appeared eager to burnish his credentials as a champion of Islam. By August, Sharif was ready to amend Pakistan's constitution "to create an Islamic order in Pakistan, and establish a legal system based on the Quran." This attempt at sweeping Islamization was similar to that undertaken by General Zia-ul-Haq, with one crucial difference: while Zia was a military dictator who lacked legitimacy, Sharif was an elected leader who was trying to move Pakistan farther along the path toward theocracy through an act of parliament. The inevitable consequence of the government nurturing the jihadi groups was unabated religious militancy and sectarian terrorism across the country.

In October 1999, Nawaz Sharif was overthrown in a coup d'état that brought the army back into power. General Pervez Musharraf styled himself as a reformer, and promised to push back religious extremism. Musharraf ended the separate electorates, though Ahmadis still could not vote because they refused to put their names in the non-Muslim register of voters.

Soon after the coup that brought him to power, Musharraf acknowledged

religious extremism as a problem that had to be dealt with by the government and the military. In his first address to the nation as Pakistan's ruler, Musharraf criticized the "exploitation of religion," spoke of Islam as a religion of tolerance, and reassured "our minorities that they enjoy full rights and protection as equal citizens in the letter and spirit of true Islam."²⁴

However, with the passage of his dictatorship, Musharraf reverted to defining the role of Islam in Pakistan's life in ways similar to those adopted by earlier leaders after Jinnah. Upon being asked what role Islam should have in Pakistan, he stated that Pakistan was "an Islamic republic," that "Islam is a *deen*, a way of life" and he was "a believer in taking Islam in its real, progressive form—a much broader, futuristic view, rather than a dogmatic and retrogressive one."²⁵

The new dictator was using language similar to that of earlier ones. He did not wear Islam on his sleeve like Zia-ul-Haq, but he also was not willing to embrace Jinnah's vision of religion having nothing to do with the business of State. Some of his rhetoric resembled that of Ayub Khan, Pakistan's first military dictator, who was not an Islamist, but inadvertently strengthened the Islamist cause while pursuing his external and domestic policies.

Under Musharraf, extremist madrasas continued to proliferate in an alarming manner even after the ouster of the Taliban from Afghanistan in 2001. The number of madrasas—ideological hothouses that almost invariably took a harsh view of unbelievers and apostates—had risen from 6,761 in 2000, to 11,221 in 2005, to 28,982 in 2011.²⁶ Thus, in the five years that also saw the terrorist attack of 9/11, the number of apostatizing seminaries had almost doubled in Pakistan. There were now 448 madrasas for women, too. The greatest number of madrasas was now in the city of Bahawalpur (where the October 2001 church attack on Christians had been perpetrated), followed by Lahore, Bahawalnagar, and Faisalabad.²⁷

As the madrasas minted more and more extremist mullahs, religious vigilantism intensified against non-Muslims, as well as Muslim sects. Pakistani laws, especially ones that deal with blasphemy, deny or interfere with practice of minority faiths. Religious minorities are targets of legal as well as social discrimination. Most significantly, in recent years, Pakistan has witnessed some of the worst organized violence against religious minorities since Partition. As previously mentioned, over an eighteen-month period covering 2012 and part of 2013, at least 200 incidents of sectarian violence were reported; these incidents led to some 1,800 casualties, including more than 700 deaths.

Many of those targeted for violence during this period were Shia Muslim citizens, who are deemed part of Pakistan's Muslim majority under its constitution

and laws. During the same year-and-a-half period in 2012–2013, Shias were subject to seventy-seven attacks, including suicide terrorist bombings during Shia religious observances. Fifty-four lethal attacks were also perpetrated against Ahmadis, thirty-seven against Christians, sixteen against Hindus, and three against Sikhs.²⁸

Attackers of religious minorities are seldom prosecuted; and if they are, the courts almost invariably set them free. Members of the majority community, the Sunnis, who dare to question State policies about religious exclusion are just as vulnerable to extremist violence.

Pakistan's religious minorities have often been the target of religiously-motivated attacks and persecution—these have risen in tandem with religious extremism in the country. Discrimination, harassment, and violence have been directed against all religious minorities, including Ahmadis, Christians, Shia Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Parsis, and Jains. Pakistan's small Christian community has particularly faced discrimination under the blasphemy law, with incidents on almost a weekly basis where Christians are attacked, lynched, and killed under false accusations of blasphemy. Anyone trying to seek a change in the blasphemy law or standing up for Pakistan's non-Muslim minorities, like former Governor of Punjab Salmaan Taseer, and former Federal Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, has been assassinated. Lawyers defending those accused of blasphemy have also been killed, like prominent human rights activist Rashed Rehman.

Pakistan's national discourse, aided by its school curriculum, generates religious prejudice against minorities. Although the country's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah envisioned a secular Pakistan, over the years, respect for the diversity of beliefs has eroded. Islamist groups have sought to purify Pakistan, which they deem to be the land of the pure. But history shows that these efforts at purification have only made Pakistan vulnerable to conflict, terrorism, and lawlessness.

The pursuit of religious purity is not an attainable goal. It has hindered Pakistan's progress and rendered it insecure. The country has drifted far from its founder's ideal, and has been engulfed in religious furies instead of cultivating humanistic passions. Violence against religious minorities has divided its people instead of uniting them, or even making them more pious. Instead of allowing bigotry to cloak itself in the garb of a state religion, Pakistan would advance better as a non-confessional State, as imagined by its secular founder. Although there is no sign of such fundamental change yet, Pakistanis must start working towards dismantling the constitutional, legal, and institutional mechanisms that have gradually excluded minorities from the mainstream of Pakistani life.

The proponents of pluralism and tolerance in Pakistan are small in number

and constantly feel besieged. They are under greater threat today than they were some decades ago, primarily because of the rise of vigilantes and terrorist groups who threaten to kill anyone who speaks out against the Islamist narrative. High profile assassinations of liberal and secularist individuals, coupled with violent attacks on even the smallest organization purporting to offer an enlightened view, of religion, have helped build an environment of fear. Still, some newspaper and magazine editors, talk show hosts for television programs, professors at universities, civil society activists, and human rights workers continue to raise their voice for a pluralist Pakistan. Quite often, these brave voices belong to individuals who, unlike the extremists, do not have well-funded organizations to support or protect them. The Pakistani government seldom defends the strongest voices for religious freedom in the country.

NOTES

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Justifying War: The Salafi-Jihadi Appropriation of Sufi Jihad in the Sahel-Sahara

By Abdulbasit Kassim
and Jacob Zenn

IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN ACADEMIC LITERATURE ON ISLAM, SUFI movements are conventionally portrayed as peaceful alternatives to the exclusivist, literalist, and inherently rigid Wahhabi variant of Salafism.¹ Similarly, a number of counter-radicalization initiatives—for example, the Moroccan government’s support of the Boutchichiyya Sufi movement, and the British government’s support of the Sufi Muslim Council and British Muslim Forum—are premised on the idea that Sufism is an Islamic alternative and bulwark against Salafism and political Islamism.² Drawing upon this conventional wisdom, some scholars have further suggested that the legacy of Sufi history and theology in the Sahel-Sahara region constitutes a potential force to counter the rising tide of jihadism in the region.³ The reality, however, can be more complex than this binary distinction suggests. During the jihadist campaigns of the 1800s in the Sahel-Sahara region, the Muslim scholars who led the armed movements identified themselves with the Sufi brotherhoods. In the Sahel-Sahara region

today, core ideological concepts that animated the historical jihads of the 19th Century—including ideas about *takfīr* (excommunication), *Dār al-Islām* (abode of Islam), *Dār al-Kufr* (abode of unbelief), *hijrah* (migration), and *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* (fealty and disavowal)—can be found in contemporary Salafist ideologies, and have been appropriated by present-day groups like Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda to justify their campaigns.⁴

Contemporary Salafis in the Sahel-Sahara region aim to delegitimize Sufism as a heterodox interpretation of Islam. At the same time, Salafis embrace the legacy of puritan reform of the Sufi scholars of the 1800s by effectively “Salafizing” their narratives without conjuring the Sufi legacies of the past jihadist campaigns.⁵ Salafi-Jihadis further build upon this process of Salafization by extending it to the jihadization of Sufi history and theology. On the one hand, the Salafi-Jihadis embrace the religious interpretations of the Sufi scholars of the 1800s to justify their present-day jihads. On the other hand, they present themselves as the heirs of the jihadist legacy and resistance against colonial rule that was led by the Sufi scholars of the 1800s—a legacy highly revered by the Muslim population in the region.

This is the case with the two main jihadist nodes in the Sahel-Sahara region today: al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its ally Ansar Dine in the Sahel; and Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. The appropriation of the history of pre-colonial jihad, in addition to the attempt to assimilate local conflicts in the region towards the cause of global jihadism, helps to explain the resilience and capacity of Salafi-Jihadi groups in the Sahel-Sahara region to survive longer than anticipated.

Genesis of Salafi-Jihadism in the Sahel-Sahara

THERE ARE TWO PREDOMINANT NODES OF JIHADISM IN THE SAHEL-SAHARA REGION today: AQIM and Ansar Dine, and Boko Haram and Ansaru. An examination of their relationship follows.

AQIM and Ansar Dine

AQIM evolved out of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC, per its French acronym), one of the only jihadist factions to survive the Algerian

government's crackdown on Islamist rebels following the government's nullification of the Islamist victory in the 1992 elections. By 2000, the Algerian army had crushed or reached an amnesty agreement with much of the Islamist opposition. The GSPC, however, survived by distancing itself from more ultra-*takfiri* factions to maintain a level of support from the population, and by shifting south to the Sahel to avoid pressure from the Algerian counter-insurgent forces. There, the GSPC became notorious for large-scale kidnappings of foreigners. The GSPC also began receiving returned Algerian fighters who had fought in Afghanistan in the early 2000s, and after 2003 the GSPC benefitted greatly from sending and receiving foreign fighters to and from Iraq, which enmeshed the GSPC in the then burgeoning al-Qaeda global network, whose center of gravity was shifting to Iraq. By late 2006, internationally-oriented militants exposed to the narratives and fighting in the Iraq war began to supersede the Algerian nationalists in the GSPC. In an effort to bolster its jihadist credentials, the GSPC formally joined al-Qaeda and rebranded itself as AQIM under the leadership of Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wadud.⁶

Since 2006, AQIM has carried out several large-scale operations in Algeria. However, much of its activity—per its name—has been in the broader Maghreb region, including supporting new al-Qaeda cells and front groups in Libya and Tunisia, such as Ansar al-Shariah, since the start of the Arab Spring in 2011. Former GSPC operatives in the Sahel region have also embedded deeply in clan and tribal networks in northern Mali, further south in Niger, and, more recently, in Burkina Faso. AQIM's focus on the Maghreb region necessitated it establish various local front groups and sub-affiliates in sub-Saharan West Africa to extend AQIM networks in a region where the physical terrain and human networks were relatively unfamiliar to AQIM's Algerian leadership.

The decisive moment for AQIM in sub-Saharan West Africa came after the overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi. Malian Tuareg mercenaries—who supported Qaddafi in Libya—returned to northern Mali and reignited the Tuareg rebellion, which has been recurring in northern Mali over the course of several decades. AQIM capitalized on this by winning defections from the secular Tuareg militias, to AQIM's new front group in Mali, Ansar Dine, which has since 2012 been led by Iyad Ag Ghaly, Mali's former consul in Saudi Arabia, a veteran of the 1982 Lebanon War against Israel occupation, and a Tuareg Salaf-Jihadi himself. Ansar Dine for a time occupied Kidal and parts of Timbuktu, while another AQIM offshoot, Movement for Unity [Monotheism] and jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), controlled Gao, which together form northern Mali's three main cities. Although the French-led military intervention in northern Mali in 2013, code-named Operation Serval, dispersed AQIM, Ansar Dine, and MUJWA fighters throughout

North Africa and the Sahel-Sahara region, Ansar Dine has remained highly effective operationally in Mali in harassing French and UN troops, as well as Malian security forces. Moreover, Ansar Dine has spawned more “localized” Salafi-Jihadi groups in Mali, such as its Katiba Macina (also known as Macina Liberation Front) in Fulani areas of Central Mali in 2014, and Ansaroul Islam in Fulani areas of northern Burkina Faso in 2016.⁷ AQIM was also able to attack prominent hotels in Bamako, Mali’s capital Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso’s capital, and Grand Bassam, near Côte d’Ivoire’s capital of Abidjan, in late 2015 and early 2016, with the support of newly recruited Fulani militants. These attacks signified, that from AQIM’s insurgent bases in Mali, it was capable of attacks cities that had previously been considered beyond the range of contemporary jihadist militancy in West Africa. In addition, these three attacks affirmed AQIM’s pre-eminence in West Africa in context of Islamic State’s then increasing efforts to pull recruits from AQIM to Islamic State and establish a foothold in West Africa.

Under Ag Ghaly’s leadership, in March 2017 Ansar Dine, Katiba Macina, AQIM’s Sahara Branch, and al-Mourabitun formed a new united group called Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims).⁸ The video announcing this group, which was branded by a new media agency called al-Zaleqa—referring to an eleventh century battle in which black Africans assisted the original al-Mourabitun to conquer parts of Iberian Spain, or Andalusia—featured at one table Ag Ghaly, Katiba Macina leader Muhammad Kufa (in his first ever video appearance), the leader of AQIM’s Sahara Region, Yahya Abu al-Hammam, AQIM Islamic law judge Abou Abderrahman al-Senhadj—who refers to his Berber roots—and Al-Has-an al-Ansari, the deputy leader of al-Mourabitun—presumably Belmokhtar was in hiding, injured or ill, or perhaps dead. The multiple ethnicities of these leaders, their merger together under one banner, and the video’s distribution through AQIM media channels represented a culmination of AQIM’s southwards expansion and localization in Mali and sub-Saharan West Africa.⁹

Boko Haram and Ansaru

Boko Haram, which refers to itself as Jamā`at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da`wa wa-l-Jihād (Sunni Muslim Group for Preaching and Jihad), emerged in the 1990s when a Nigerian student in Khartoum, Sudan, Muhammed Ali, became a disciple of Usama bin Laden, pledged loyalty to bin Laden, and later received a sum of up to 3 million to establish a jihadist movement in Nigeria.¹⁰ Ali lost some of this

initial seed money when the preacher intended to lead the movement came under government suspicion, and fled to Saudi Arabia without returning. Nonetheless, Ali later found a different young Nigerian Salafi preacher with a history of involvement in radical Salafi movements, Muhammed Yusuf, as a suitable leader of the movement. Ali handed over money and the reins of Ali's own followership to Yusuf in 2002, who led the movement until 2009.

Ali was killed in clashes with the Nigerian security forces in 2004. Later, in July 2009, Yusuf and over 1,000 of his followers were also killed in a four-day series of clashes with Nigerian security forces. Yusuf's deputy and successor, Abubakar Shekau, immediately went to work in connecting with AQIM, with whom Yusuf and his followers had quietly been developing relations in the mid-2000s. Shekau sent Khalid al-Barnawi and two other followers to meet with AQIM's brigade leader in Mali, Abu Zeid, in August 2009 to request training, funding, and other financial and strategic communications support from AQIM.¹¹

AQIM's leader, Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wadud, accepted the request, issued public statements in support of Boko Haram, and funneled at least \$250,000 through Khalid al-Barnawi to Nigeria as an "investment."¹² AQIM also sent Boko Haram's requests to become an al-Qaeda affiliate to Bin Laden.¹³ Although a formal affiliation was never established, cooperation occurred clandestinely, and al-Qaeda supporters made statements confirming an unofficial relationship between al-Qaeda and Boko Haram, and al-Qaeda support to Boko Haram in the years after Yusuf's death.¹⁴

The AQIM relationship with Shekau failed to mature into a more formal relationship because Boko Haram largely followed the same tactics as the ultra-*takfiri* Islamist rebels that the GSPC distanced itself from during the fighting in Algeria in the 1990s. In addition, Shekau wanted to focus almost exclusively on the "near enemy"—namely Nigerian Christians, government officials, oppositional mosques and preachers, and other places of "sin," such as beer halls, schools of Western education, or sports-watching parlors.

Under Khalid al-Barnawi's lead, and the patronage of former GSPC militants from Mali, Mauritanian, and Algeria, and with AQIM's "investment," a new faction, Ansaru, therefore emerged in northwestern Nigeria separate from Boko Haram in 2012. Like AQIM, Ansaru specialized in kidnappings of foreigners, especially engineers in northern Nigeria, and targeted Nigerian troops deploying to Mali at their base in Nigeria before Operation Serval in early 2013.¹⁵

Ultimately, however, Ansaru struggled to survive once AQIM was scattered throughout the Sahel region after Operation Serval. Shekau loyalists who saw Ansaru as "apostates" and traitors, and the Nigerian security forces, which ob-

tained a series of intelligence leads on Ansaru hideouts, also both began killing Ansaru members in 2012.¹⁶ While Ansaru has continued to survive until 2017, it has not been operational since 2013. Several key Ansaru leaders—not including Khalid al-Barnawi, however, who was arrested in April 2016—also integrated with Shekau, albeit hesitantly, and ultimately convinced Shekau to join Islamic State, which he did in March 2015. This led to Boko Haram’s re-branding as Islamic State’s West Africa Province.¹⁷ West Africa Province fully integrated into Islamic State’s global media system, but there were few other beneficial results for West Africa Province as result of joining Islamic State.

Indeed, by August 2016 the former members of Ansaru in West Africa Province cut off Shekau from communicating with Islamic State and succeeded in deposing him. The Islamic State named Muhammed Yusuf’s son as the new leader of West Africa Province, and Shekau returned to lead Boko Haram.¹⁸ Contradictions nonetheless remain in West Africa Province, with its leadership still opposing the ultra-*takfirism* of Shekau, and, although they never mentioned it, they also oppose same ultra-*takfiri* tactics that are employed by the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria, Jabhat Fath al-Sham (since re-branded Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in February 2017), recognized Ansaru’s existence in its magazine al-Risalah in January 2017, despite Ansaru’s being in operational dormancy and AQIM still being focused on Mali and North Africa and, at least for the time being, showing disinterest in Nigeria as a result of its past difficulties with Shekau.

Salafizing History

THE SUSTENANCE OF AQIM AND ANSAR DINE, AND BOKO HARAM AND ANSARU, can be attributed to their linkages to al-Qaeda, operationally, financially and ideologically, as well as their independent successes on the battlefield. However, there are distinct historical narratives that both nodes use to package Sufi jihadist history into “Salafized” local narratives as part of their recruitment and narrative strategy. Their purpose is to legitimize contemporary jihadist campaigns through the appropriation of the legacy of the “Sufi Jihads” of centuries past, which are widely considered to be legitimate by the population of the specific regions where they operate today. The following cases exemplify this.

Ansar Dine

During the course of Operation Serval, Dr Iyad Qunaybi, a prominent Jordanian ideologue sympathetic to Salafi-Jihadism, delivered a video message titled “Mali and the Torch of Freedom,” presumably intended to inspire fighters in Mali, and offer a perspective on the situation to the broader membership of jihadist groups.¹⁹ In the video message, Qunaybi offered his support for Ansar Dine, but went further to explain Operation Serval in the context of Islamic resistance to French colonialism and the colonial history in Mali. He said:

Mali is one of the ancient capitals of Islam where the Islamic University of Timbuktu was established nine hundred years ago. Thus, it has one of the oldest universities in the world. Mali lived under the light of Muslim countries for centuries, including the Kingdom of Songhai until the Sultan of Maghreb entered an alliance with Elizabeth I of England in Britain, followed by the invasion of 1591, which led to the destruction of the Islamic civilization and the enslavement of the Malian people, such as Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti.²⁰ What many do not know is the fact that many of the people forcibly enslaved by the Crusader West in Mali and other African countries, were graduates of universities and Islamic scholars such as ‘Umar b. Sayyid al-Senegali who died in 1864 AD and whose picture is kept in the American Historical Archive. (Dr Qunaybi showed the picture of Umar b. Sayyid al-Senegali)²¹

France occupied Mali in the late nineteenth century and they executed heinous crimes. They did not leave the country until they planted their agents to ensure continued control over the country’s finance while at the same time plundering its riches. The successive regimes oppressed the Muslim people, especially the Tuareg Arabs of Northern Mali and neighboring countries. Thereafter, liberal movements emerged demanding autonomy and better living conditions, but they did not espouse Islamic agenda, which explains why the international communities assimilated them into the call for negotiations with the central government. However, the negotiations always ended with false promises from the puppet central government until the revival of Islam emerged amongst the Tuareg groups. {...} From amongst these groups is

Ansar al-Din led by Iyad Ag Ghali, may God protect him, who had previously tried diplomacy by acting as the consul of the State of Mali in Saudi Arabia, but later retreated from that path and established Jama'at Ansar Dine. While allying with other Islamic groups, they worked together on the application of the shari`a and the liberation of Mali from the dominance of France and their client governments.²²

The appropriation of the histories of pre-colonial armed jihads, and of Islamic resistance to colonial rule was also a constant theme in videos produced by Ansar Dine, such as one titled “The Conquest of Azawad”:

Azawad, this remote section of the great Islamic desert has always been under the dominion of the Muslims and the Islamic conquerors who led conquests towards Europe and the South and West of Africa like Ibn Tashfin and Tariq ibn Ziyad. The educational and cultural tradition flourished in the area during the reign of Askia and thereafter. Through the ages, the residents of this pure Islamic area kept a strong hold on their true religion. They were happy with shari`a and made judgements according to Islamic law in every small and large issue until the beginning of the crusader's occupation in the last century when they imposed their own laws. The people of the land rebelled. They fought and sacrificed themselves and their money in defense of their religion, decency, honor and land. The occupying crusaders were able to divide them, which led to religious wars amongst them. After a long time of oppression and tyranny, Allah gave them relief. The local lions of unification rose to support the religion and to raise the banner of there is no god except Allah.²³

AQIM

Like Ansar Dine, AQIM has also conferred legitimacy for its contemporary jihads by reconstructing the history of pre-colonial jihads and the Islamic resistance to colonial rule in Africa. In his message to the revolutionaries in Libya during the “Arab Spring,” Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wadud adopted rhetoric like Qunaybi, where he labeled the contemporary “revolutionaries” as the grandsons of `Umar al-Mukhtâr:²⁴

My free brothers in Libya, the battle is heated and the emancipation hour is ticking, and the winds of liberation and martyrdom are blowing in Libya. Shaykh `Umar al-Mukhtâr had engaged the first battle for liberation, and it is time for his grandsons today to finish the march of jihad and engage in the second battle of liberation in order to remove the corrupt and corrupting rulers the Crusaders and the Zionists have enthroned on us to enslave us and steal our wealth and fight our doctrines. `Umar al-Mukhtâr said it: “we don’t surrender; we win or we die.” So either Libya will be liberated from worshipping the servants to worshipping the Lord of the servants, and move from the narrowness of life to the wideness of life, and the afterlife, or martyrdom for the cause of Allah so you win the great victory.²⁵

Boko Haram

The slain leader of Boko Haram in Nigeria also attempted to hybridize the narratives of pre-colonial jihads and the Muslim resistance against colonial rule in Africa with the narratives of contemporary jihadism in Africa. In one of his lectures before his death in 2009, Muhammed Yusuf labeled the Nigerian security forces as a remnant of colonial regiments, while narrating an event that took place between the Italians and `Umar al-Mukhtâr:

You may hear one of them saying that he is a security or police officer and his main duty is to protect lives and to ensure peace and stability: “You see we are Christians who were transferred here to protect your lives.” It is a lie; you came here to kill us. That was the same way `Umar al-Mukhtâr replied the Italians. They invited him to a meeting, but he refused to attend. They invited him again but he refused to go to them. [...] Then they told him that they brought new civilization to this land. They said they are not here to humiliate the people; rather they want them to be civilized, to progress, to learn to understand the world and enjoy it. `Umar al-Mukhtâr replied them by asking, “Who owns the land?” They replied him that it belongs to him and his people. Then he said: “We do not want your new civilization.” They told him: “We want to integrate your land to the world so that trade will flourish.” He told them: “We have our own system of trade.” He later gave them a condition that they can

go across the water, settle [temporarily], and be permitted to enter the land for trade, but not be permitted to settle there. They (Italians) disagreed with him. What they wanted was to settle in the land while `Umar Mukhtar was to be crowned as the king.

They promised to give him 50,000 Italian lira of that time.²⁶ They also promised to build a house for him but he said: “What about the other people?” They said: “But you are the king.” He said: “I am fighting because you have humiliated the other Muslims. How can I enjoy myself while the other Muslims are being humiliated?”²⁷

Ansaru

Ansaru reiterated this same pattern of hybridization in its call for jihad in West Africa. Specifically, Ansaru sought to revive the jihadist legacy of Shaykh `Uthmān Ibn Fūdī:

O descendants of `Uthmān Ibn Fūdī and al-Hajj `Umar al-Fūti, rise as one man, as there is no good in us if our honor is violated, our religion and symbols are held in contempt, and the best of our brothers and sons are killed, while we are quiescent, unmoving, since the root of humiliation is only demolished by a shower of lead.²⁸

Notwithstanding his expansion of the Tijaniyya Brotherhood in all the regions he was militarily involved, Shaykh `Umar Tāl al-Fūti was most likely cited by Ansaru because of his marital ties to Shaykh Muhammad Bello, the son of `Uthmān Ibn Fūdī, and because he had argued that recourse to arms would be necessary if an Islamic state was to be established in the Sahel-Sahara region, a position similar to Ansaru. To justify his military project, `Umar Tāl al-Fūti declared that the:

battle against infidels is the task to which I have committed myself—until the power of Islam replaces that of unbelief. As Ulama, it is we who have the responsibility of propagating the religion of god, of restoring the prestige of Islam in Futa Jallon, Segou, Nioro and Karta, because unbelief is rampant there. Once this battle is won, it will be easy to combat the Christians. Surely, the Islam in

which we believe does not countenance compromise with infidels. Whoever revels in their company is one of them.²⁹

In the wake of Boko Haram's territorial expansion and declaration of Islamic caliphate in northeastern Nigeria in 2014, Boko Haram, which by then had incorporated former Ansaru members, also adopted the colonial history of Hausaland as a frame of reference to legitimize its campaign:

The enemies of Islam—the Jews, Christians, polytheists, and their hypocrite minions—invaded the Sudanese state of 'Uthmān Ibn Fūdī until they occupied the Muslims' lands, defiled Islam's sacred places, and exchanged Islam's law for the Crusaders' constitution and the rule of ignorance [Scene of Ibn Fūdī and fighters riding on horses in battle]. This extended from their trashy ideas, but they were not satisfied, so they conscripted soldiers to protect themselves. This situation spurred revolutionary hearts from the people of faith to strive to return Allah's law to Allah's land, so they established small states in many locations, which expanded at times and grew at times. Finally, Allah made it easy for our fighting brothers in the Islamic State to establish the caliphate's kernel in the Levant [Scene of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's sermon at the great mosque, Mosul]. And in the same way, Allah made it easy for the fighters in the Sudan to establish courts that rule by Allah's law.³⁰

These above passages are useful for anyone seeking to understand the ideational dimensions that undergird contemporary Salafi-Jihadi groups in the Sahel-Sahara region. While Salafi groups in the region are "Salafizing" the puritan reform of the Sufi scholars of the 1800s by vindicating them from what they consider to be extraneous innovative practices (*bida'*), the Salafi-Jihadis are also incorporating in this process of Salafization some of the theological discourses of the Sufi scholars that provide legitimacy to their campaign. At this juncture, it is important to critically examine some of the theological discourses of the Sufi scholars of the 1800s that provide credence to the goals and visions of the contemporary Salafi-Jihadi groups in the Sahel-Sahara region.

A Case Study from Nigeria

NOT ONLY DO AQIM, ANSAR DINE, BOKO HARAM, AND ANSARU LEGITIMIZE THEIR jihads using historical comparison, but they also seek to reinterpret Sufi jihadist religious interpretation from centuries past in terms of contemporary Salafi-Jihadi ideology. This can most precisely be seen in the way Boko Haram and Ansaru leaders have come to portray themselves as the bearers of the legacy of ‘Uthmān Ibn Fūdī, despite distinct theological and methodological differences between Ibn Fūdī’s reform movement and the indiscriminate violence of Boko Haram.³¹

Despite the differences in their methodology, Ibn Fūdī and Boko Haram employed similar discourses to legitimize their respective pre-colonial jihad against the Hausa rulers and the contemporary jihad against the secular leaders of Nigeria, with particular respect to the theological discourses of *hijrah*, *Dār al-Kufr*, *Dār al-Islām*, and *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*.

Hijrah from Dār al-Kufr to Dār al-Islām

Ibn Fūdī’s *Bayān Wujūb al-hijrah ‘ala ‘L-‘Ibād wa Bayān Wujūb Nasb al-Imām wa Iqāmat al-Jihād* (The Exposition of the Obligation of Emigration upon the Servants of God and the Exposition of the Obligation of Appointing an Imam and Undertaking Jihad), a famous text of Islamic legal theory of jihad based on the Maliki school of thought provided an explanation of the theological and jurisprudential arguments to his *jamā* about the obligation of jihad in Hausaland at the start of what became known as the “Sokoto Jihad.”³²

The central theme of *Bayān Wujūb al-hijrah* is the exposition of the obligation of emigration from *Dār al-Kufr to Dār al-Islām*.³³ Ibn Fūdī’s theological judgement on *hijrah* is based on the idea that Muslims must emigrate from the lands where the rulers are non-Muslims, or where the *sharī’a* of Prophet Muhammad has been rendered ineffective by the rulers who profess Islam, to a land where the *sharī’a* reign supreme. He based this theological position on a principle in Islamic jurisprudence, “*hukm al-bilad hukm sultānihi, in kāna muslimān, kāna al-bilad bilad al-islām, wa in kāna kāfirān, kāna al-bilad bilad al-kufr yajibu al-firāra minhu ilā ghayrihi.*” This means that the ruling of a land is that of its ruler, if the ruler is a Muslim the land is a land of Islam, and if he is a non-Muslim the land is a land of unbelief, and fleeing from it to another land is obligatory.³⁴

There are other classical Islamic jurists before Ibn Fūdī that wrote extensively

on the Islamic jurisprudence on *Dār al-Kufr* and *Dār al-Islām*. Ibn Fūdī cited some of these jurists in his *Bayān Wujūb al-hijrah*. For example, Alā l-Din Abī Bakr b. Mas'ūd al-Kāsāni (d. 1191), a Hanafi jurist, made the prevailing laws being implemented in a land as a condition to judging the classification of a land into *Dār al-Kufr* or *Dār al-Islām*. al-Kāsāni stated that, "Verily, every state is attributed, either to Islam or to *kufr*. And the state is only attributed to Islam if its rulings are implemented in it, and it is attributed to *kufr* if its rulings are implemented in it."³⁵ According to Abū al-Hasan 'Alī Ibn Muhammad Ibn Habib al-Māwardī (d. 1058), a Shafi'i jurist, "*Dār al-Kufr* becomes *Dār al-Islām* if its inhabitants embrace Islam, and consequently, such land is governed by *sharī'a*."³⁶ Similarly, al-Qādī Abū Ya'lā al-Hanbalī also stated that, "Every *Dār* wherein the laws of *Kufr* have mastery over the Laws of Islam, then it is *Dār al-Kufr*."³⁷ While explaining the hadith of prophet Muhammad, which was also cited by Ibn Fūdī, "I am free from every Muslim who resides with the polytheists," Abū Muhammad 'Alī ibn Ahmad ibn Sa'īd ibn Hazm (d. 1064), a Zahiri jurist, stated that "the hadith refers to *Dār al-Kufr* or *Dār al-harb* because the *Dār* is only attributed to the one who is in control of it, the one who rules it and the one who owns it."³⁸

In his book *Ahkām Ahl Adh-Dhimmah* (Laws for the People of the Covenant), Muhammad ibn Abū Bakr (d. 1350), also known as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, said:

The majority have stated that *Dār al-Islām* is that which the Muslims have arrived in and upon which the rulings of Islam have been implemented. And that upon which the rulings of Islam have not been implemented is not *Dār al-Islām*, even if it is attached to it. As this *At-Tā'if* was very close to Makkah, yet it did not become *Dār al-Islām* with the Conquest of Makkah.³⁹

Similarly, Muhammad ibn 'Alī ibn Abdullah al-Shawkani (d. 1839), the Yemeni jurist, also stated that "*If the commands and the prohibitions in the Dār are for the people of Islam, then this Dār is Dār al-Islām {...} And if it were the opposite, then the Dār is the opposite.*"⁴⁰

In summary, it is evident from the above passages that two conditions can be deduced as the criteria that these scholars adopted in defining *Dār al-Islām* or *Dār al-Kufr*: the authority or ruler governing a land; and the type of law being implemented in a land.⁴¹

Based on these criteria, Ibn Fūdī classified the lands of Bilad al-Sudan into three categories: first, the lands where unbelief predominates and Islam is rarely

found; second, the lands where Islam predominates and unbelief is rare; and third, the lands where unbelief either from the rulers or subjects is rare and Islam predominates. According to Ibn Fūdī, the first category of lands in Bilad al-Sudan include the lands of Mossi, Gurma, Bussa, Borgu, Yoruba, Dugumba, Kutukuli, Tabanghu, Ghambi, and Bubula. These lands in the first category are all “*Dār al-kufr al-asli*,” meaning that it was never *Dār al-Islām* at any time prior to or during the jihad of Ibn Fūdī. In his discussion of the first category of lands, Ibn Fūdī added that his “judgment of these lands is passed with reference to the majority.” As for the third category of lands, Ibn Fūdī argued that these lands are unknown in Bilad al-Sudan.

The field of contention in Ibn Fūdī’s classification is the second category of lands where Islam predominates and unbelief is rare, which included Borno, Kano, Katsina, Songhay, and Mali. Ahmad Baba (d. 1627) had classified all these lands as the lands of Islam in his “*al-Kashf wa’l-bayān*.”⁴² Ibn Fūdī acknowledged the judgment of Ahmad Baba, but he argued that during his own era these lands are all *Dār al-Kufr* since the spread of Islam is only limited to the masses but even though the rulers profess Islam, Ibn Fūdī argued that they are polytheists. He declared *takfir* on them on the basis that they do not rule according to the *shari`a*, and they intermingle Islamic practices with non-Islamic practices and rites, which he called “*takhlīt*” (mixing).

Ibn Fūdī arrived at this judgment while relying on a previous legal ruling passed by Muhammad Abd al-Kārim al-Maghīlī (d. 1504). Askia al-Hajj Muhammad (d. 1538) had asked a similar question about Sunni Ali (d. 1492), the king of Songhay in his series of questions to al-Maghīlī.⁴³ In his response to Askia’s questions, al-Maghīlī said “If, then, his behavior is as you have stated (i.e. He professes Islam but engages in acts of polytheism), he is an unbeliever as are also all those who act like him.”⁴⁴ John Hunwick speculated that al-Maghīlī derived this ruling from the work of Iyad b. Musa al-Yahsubi (d. 1149), the judge of Ceuta.⁴⁵ In his analysis of Ibn Fūdī’s book “*Ta’līm al-Ikhwān bi l-umūr allatī Kaffarnā bihā mulūk al-Sūdān alladhina Kānū min ahl hadhihi l-buldān*” (Instruction for the brethren in those matters in which we have designated the kings of the Sudan as unbelievers, those of them who were from the men of these lands), Bradford G. Martin pointed out how Ibn Fūdī’s ideas on *takfir* of the Hausa rulers follow the doctrinal rulings laid down by Muhammad Abd al-Kārim al-Maghīlī in his two books *Misbah al-arwāh fi usūl al-falāh*, and *Ajwibat al-Maghīlī an asilat al-Amin al-Hajj Muhammad Askiya*.⁴⁶ The doctrinal rulings from al-Maghīlī, which gained authority throughout the Western Sudan, played an important role in Ibn Fūdī’s proselytism of the concept of *hijrah* from *Dār al-Kufr* to *Dār al-Islām* and his subsequent declaration of jihad in Hausaland.

Today, the Islamic jurisprudence of the classification of lands into *Dār al-Kufr* and *Dār al-Islām* is one of the theological focal points that contemporary jihadist groups in the Sahel-Sahara region have adopted to legitimize their campaigns against the governing regimes in the region. In his book “*Hādhihi ‘Aqīdatunā wa-Manhaj Da‘watīnā*” (This Is Our Creed and the Method of Our Preaching), the slain leader of Boko Haram, Muhammad Yusuf, argued that his “*preaching forbids working under the government that rules by some [source] other than what Allah has revealed, according to French, American or British law or any constitution, or system that is contrary to Islam and contradicts the Book and the Sunna.*”⁴⁷ Elsewhere, Yusuf argued that the lands in the region that have abandoned ruling with Islamic law are *Dār al-Kufr* and thus it is obligatory to overthrow the government and install a Muslim leader. Yusuf responded to the question, “What if the Muslims do not have the power [to install a Muslim leader]?” by saying Muslims must do two things: “they must emigrate [to lands of Islam] since they are powerless; or they must explore all means to acquire power to overthrow the unbelieving or apostate leader and install an Islamic caliphate.”⁴⁸

Although coming into existence almost a century after the decimation of the Sokoto Caliphate by the British colonialists, there seems to be a parallel between the argument put forth by Ibn Fūdī in his declaration of jihad against the Hausa rulers, and Boko Haram’s claim that even the Muslim rulers in Nigeria have apostatized from Islam because they do not govern according to the sharī‘a. This point can be deduced from Abubakar Shekau’s criticism of the constitution in 2009:

I need you to pay attention to this book. (Shekau holds up a book about how the Nigerian constitution is written, followed by thunderous applause and shouts of “Allahu akbar!”). Are you seeing this book? Ok. The title of this book is how our laws are made. That is how the laws of the country [Nigeria] are created. Now look at this again and you will see the constitution. It reads: how powerful the constitution is, that is, it is above all other form of law. What this means is that, it is above all laws, including the law of Allah. If you read what is written in the constitution, you will be surprised. Let’s go through a little. Surprise—“the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is the most powerful law of the land.” It says, “this constitution is meant to guide Nigeria and Nigerians in everyday proceedings.” The truth about this constitution is found in the introductory part of the 1979 constitution, which is still in force. It speaks about the supremacy of the constitution. It states that this

constitution is supreme and shall have binding force of all authorities and persons throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria (shouts from the listeners saying, “It’s a lie, lie, lie!”). In another section, it says, if any other law is inconsistent with the provision of this constitution, the constitution shall prevail. (Shekau holds up the book, with the cover picture showing the picture of the mace above the picture of the Qur’ān).⁴⁹

Because the Salafis in Nigeria have successfully “Salafized” the narratives of Ibn Fūdī while shying away from his affiliation to the Qadiriyya brotherhood, Boko Haram leaders do not pay strict attention to the denunciation of Sufi Brotherhoods, which have now become mostly pacifist. Rather, Boko Haram leaders focus on reviving the memory of the *Dār al-Islām* established by Ibn Fūdī prior to British colonialism as a means of gaining legitimacy in their competition with their Salafi counterparts. This line of thought is also evident in a statement from 2009 by Mamman Nur, who influenced the formation of Ansaru in 2012, but later reintegrated with Shekau and paved the way for Shekau’s pledge to al-Baghdadi before turning back on Shekau and deposing him from Islamic State’s West Africa Province. Nur said:

The time we went to Sokoto, we saw the original flag with which they waged the jihad of “there is no god but Allah” in the museum.⁵⁰ It was our forefathers who waged it at the time when the Europeans came. They fought at that time. They have folded the flag. It is folded, and in fact they will not even open it for you to see the inscription, “there is no god but Allah.” It has been folded and kept in the museum. At that time, they had honor, pedigree, and power. When they heard they [the British] had brought western education, they said: “By Allah we will not accept it!” They waged jihad against this. They waged jihad against this western education but yet today you are forcibly enrolling your son into western education?! And seeing it as the epitome of civilization? And saying that your heart is in good condition so you attend western education? Our forefathers, it was against western education that they waged jihad —against the Europeans. It is because of democracy that they killed them. It is because of democracy that they [Europeans] killed [Muhammad] Attahiru I,⁵¹ and all of them were fought and killed.⁵²

The binary division of the world into *Dār al-Kufr* and *Dār al-Islām* has also been adopted by other groups in the Sahel-Sahara region to provide legitimacy to their violent campaigns. In his exclusive interview with Ansar Mujahideen English Forum, Sandah Ould Bouamama, the press officer of Ansar Dine, stated that the Government of Mali is an apostate government ruling with secular legislations and it is incumbent for the Muslims in the country to migrate from *Dār al-Kufr* to *Dār al-Islām*—in the then “Islamic State of Azawad” in northern Mali.⁵³ Bouamama further stated that Ansar Dine opposes all other movements such as the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and the Azawad National Liberation Front (FNLA) that “seek to establish a secular state (*Dār al-Kufr*), and are prepared to combat terrorism and reject what they call the religious Islamic state.”⁵⁴ Bouamama also stated that there were Nigerians in the rank-and-file of Ansar Dine and MUJWA, which was supported by other media reports and a joint al-Murabitun-MUJWA video featuring an Ansaru member. This suggests the cross-fertilization of theological ideas between Mali-based and Nigerian militants deepened on the fields of battle.

Similar to Bouamama, during his broadcasted audio message to the people of Timbuktu after the city fell into the control of Ansar Dine, Iyad Ag Ghaly also alluded to the same binary division of the world.⁵⁵ In his message, Iyad Ag Ghaly preached that the disabling of the *shari`a* in *Dār al-Islām* and its replacement with man-made laws taken from the Jews and Christians in *Dār al-Kufr* resulted in oppression, aggression, immorality, disobedience, poverty, and deprivation.⁵⁶

Al-walā’wa-l-barā’ and Jihad

The theme of *al-walā’wa-l-barā’* is the fourth and fifth chapter of Ibn Fūdī’s *Bayān Wujūb al-hijrah*. Chapter four, which is titled *Fī Tahrim Muwalāt al-Kāfirin’* (On the Prohibition of Befriending the Unbelievers), started with an explanation of *al-barā’*.⁵⁷ Ibn Fūdī explicitly prohibited any union of friendship or alliance between the Muslims and followers of other religions—in this case between the Hausa rulers and all those labelled as unbelievers. Ibn Fūdī’s sole intention was to unite the ranks of his followers on a clear-cut ideological basis and to also encourage them to perform migration from the city-state of Degel and other neighboring states to the city-state of Gudu to join the jihad.

Ibn Fūdī backed his arguments with citations of the verses of the Qur’an, the Sunna and Ijma’ (consensus). In interpreting the definition of a Muslim in Hausa land,⁵⁸ Ibn Fūdī cited Qur’anic verses—3:28, 4:144, 5:51, 5:57, 8:73, 58:22, 60:1, including their *tafsīr* (interpretation), which have an important clause and a strict

ruling of “*takfīr*” on Muslims who befriend or support the followers of other religions even if there is a common blood relation or kinship. This is followed by a series of explanation of the reasons for the necessity of disavowal by Muslims from the followers of other religions. The failure to abide by this prohibition is equated with the spread of oppression, persecution, and corruption on earth, owing to the strength of unbelief and the weakness of Islam.

In chapter five titled “*Fī Wujūb Muwālat al-Muminīn*” (On the Obligation of Befriending the Believers), Ibn Fūdī expounded on the meaning of *al-walā’*, a phrase that refers to the loyalty, fealty or allegiance of a Muslim towards other Muslims. The basis of Ibn Fūdī’s theological judgement on the concept of *al-walā’* can be found in the Qur’anic verses 9:71, 49:10 and 8:1, the hadiths, and the ijma of the Sunni scholars he cited and, most importantly, by the explanation of al-Nafrawi in his “*Fawākih*,” where he defines *al-walā’* as showing love and sincere affection for Muslims, and avoiding whatever can create aversion such as rancor and envy. Towards the end of this chapter, Ibn Fūdī reiterated his discussion of *al-barā’* and argued that Muslims should openly distance themselves from the followers of other religions.

He cautioned, however, that such treatment should not be extended towards the *dhimmi*s, whose lives and properties have been protected through their payment of jizya to the *Dār al-Islām*.

By connecting *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’* to the Qur’an, the Sunna and ijma, Ibn Fūdī portrays the concept as an explicit divider for defining a Muslim and non-Muslim: the meaning of a Muslim is not limited to those who observe the Islamic rituals but also extends, most importantly, to those who totally eschew what Ibn Fūdī classified as “acts of unbelief.” According to this understanding and based on the earlier explanation of the definitional criteria of *Dār al-Islām* and *Dār al-Kufr*, Ibn Fūdī arrived at the conclusion that the lands being governed by the Hausa rulers are all *Dār al-Kufr*, since the rulers are “infidels.” This criterion therefore means that Muslims who had conflicting loyalties, or who failed to refrain from being loyal to the Hausa rulers or supporting them, would be excommunicated and fought against as followers of other religions. Once the jihad against the Hausa rulers was legally justified, the doctrine of *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’* endorsed the framing of the term “Muslims” to be used only for the followers and supporters of Ibn Fūdī. This resulted in a situation where all those who were not with “Muslims” were against “Muslims” and all those against “Muslims” were non-Muslims. Muslims were often in effect fighting Muslims.⁵⁹

The theme of *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’* is perhaps the most important theological focal point that features recurrently in the writings and sermons of the contemporary

jihadist groups in the Sahel-Sahara region. In his Kanuri-language sermon called “This is Our Creed” delivered prior to his 2009 declaration of Jihad, Abubakar Shekau said:

People of Yerwa (Maiduguri), I call on you. If you see an unbeliever in your midst, investigate him. If he is not a visitor, but belongs to the city, inform him that we are Muslims living in a Muslim city, and we are proud to be Muslims in a Muslim city. However, since we are Muslims, living in a Muslim city and are proud of Islam, how can our children and those of the unbelievers be going to same school? How can we and the unbelievers participate in the same political system, and go to the same judge to obtain justice?⁶⁰

Mamman Nur reiterated the same reasoning as Shekau in his criticism of the Salafi clerics in 2009, where he argued against their position that if Muslims do not participate in secular political systems, they would face ostracism and aggression:

What is the use of seeking status from them? For example, those who have doubts, what do they say? If we do not enter and join them, they will not allow us to pray. If we do not enter and join them, our admonition and sermons will be banned—is that not what they say? If we do not enter and join them, they will kill us. Now, if we leave the unbelieving government, then they will impose an unbelieving governor, an unbelieving councilor, or an unbelieving chairman upon us. Should we sit and allow unbelievers to rule over us? Since we have told you, it is only because we saw your name was Abū Bakr, `Abd Allāh, `Uthman and `Alī—that is why you wasted our time. If only we peeped and saw that the Governor’s name is John, the Chairman’s name is Joseph, that official’s name is Peter, then the talk is over. The talk would have been declared to be over for a long time. It is the love we have for you that made us wait until now. It is the need to make you understand—that is what made us to wait until now. The desire for you to come and let us go together is what made us to wait until now. Whether you like it or not, whether you love them or not, we will commence the jihād! If you are not aggressive, you left us and go, we will be aggressive towards you. This task is obligatory.⁶¹

Shaykh Usa Abu Muhammad, one of the commanders of Ansar Dine, also cited the principle of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* as a major factor that prevented their cooperation with the secular Tuareg MNLA during Ansar Dine's occupation of northern Mali in 2012.⁶² Sandah Ould Bouamama reiterated the same principle in his interview with Ansar Mujahideen Forum when he stated that "there will be no concession on the loyalty to the believers even if they are very far and on disavowal from the unbelievers, even if they are close relatives."⁶³ The loyalty to the believers was the chord that paved way for a working relationship between Ansar Dine and AQIM, as demonstrated in the audio recording of Abu Mus'ab Abd al-Wadud to the "mujahidin in Sahara Azawad," where he commended Ansar Dine and offered his advice to them on the matters of jihad and how to deal with opponents of the movement.⁶⁴

The same principle of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* was also invoked in the Islamic legal ruling opposing the participation of the Mauritanian government in Operation Serval. The Islamic legal ruling entitled '*Haqiqat al-Harb 'ala al-Muslimin fi Shimal Mali*' (The Reality of the War on Muslims in Northern Mali) was signed by 39 Muslim scholars in Mauritania, including Mohamed Salem Ould Mohamed Lemine al-Majlissi, a jihadist thinker repeatedly arrested and detained by Mauritanian authorities in connection with AQIM attacks. The ruling stated that the conflict in Mali is an extension of a series of colonialist campaigns in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, and Somalia with the ultimate aim of separating Muslims from their religion, and imposing the new world order (*al-nizām al-'ālam al-jadīd*). In his analysis of the Islamic legal ruling, Alex Thurston pointed out how the 39 signatories of this Islamic legal ruling framed the conflict in Northern Mali as an effort by "the enemies of the religion (*'adā' al-dīn*)" to "occupy Northern Mali (*ihtilāl shimāl Mālī*)." Based on this judgment, they forbade Muslims from aiding a Western-led military intervention that might harm Muslims in Northern Mali, and would also violate the principle of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* essential to the preservation of Islam.⁶⁵

There are methodological variations between the groups that existed during the pre-colonial jihads and the Muslim resistance against colonial rule in the Sahel-Sahara region, on the one end, and the contemporary jihadist groups in the region, on the other end. Nonetheless, contemporary jihadist groups have been able to effectively replicate the theological and jurisprudential discourses produced by the classical Sahel-Sahara scholars on jihad in their own sermons and writings, in the contemporary era. This is what gives legitimacy and sustenance to the contemporary jihadist groups in the Sahel-Sahara region. Despite the variation in time, the theological discourses of the contemporary jihadist groups are

crafted in a way that fits with the ideational narratives that have not only been transmitted from generation to generation, but have also been institutionalized and taught through Islamic schools, history texts, official curriculums and official and semi-official religious institutions in the Sahel-Sahara region.

Conclusion

THIS ARTICLE FOCUSED ON THE TWO MAIN JIHADIST NODES IN WEST AFRICA—AQIM and Ansar Dine, and Boko Haram and Ansaru. It showed that they rose in al-Qaeda structures (with Boko Haram eventually becoming Islamic State’s West Africa Province and then breaking away from Islamic State, while formerly al-Qaeda-affiliated Ansaru members paradoxically came to lead West Africa Province). However, both nodes have exploited distinct historical narratives and theological justifications to legitimize their jihads today: this hybridization of the past and present is aided by the Salafis “Salafization” of Sufi history and theology. The history and theology of the jihads of centuries past and the jihads today are evidently *similar enough* that both nodes have succeeded in exploiting history and theology for their own purposes.

If anything, this article presents a precautionary tale. Salafism is the fastest growing strand of Islam in Africa today.⁶⁶ Over the years, Salafism has established strong inroads in Africa through the funding of patrons in Saudi Arabia, the establishment of several Salafi religious centers across Africa, as well as the presence of vibrant Salafi-funded media, such as Sunnah TV, that is deeply entrenched at the grassroots level in various African societies. These elements of power have increased the general acceptance of Salafism over other strands of Islam, specifically Sufism. Salafism appears linked to jihadism in areas where an accompanying historical narrative can be revived to justify the violence of contemporary Salafi-Jihadis, such as North Africa, the Sahel, and Nigeria, as well as Somalia. In areas where Salafi influence is growing but the historical narratives are slightly more attenuated, such as Senegal, or the Kenya-Tanzania Swahili Coast, there is not yet a high-level of Salafi-Jihadi violence. If, however, al-Qaeda (or Islamic State) can revive a jihadist history and overcome the attenuation, the key two elements to inspire Salafi-Jihadi movements in these areas would exist: “Salafized” historical narratives and Salafism itself.

In this regard, it is important to recall that ten years ago—in 2007—prominent scholars considered Salafi-Jihadi movements “to have had little impact on Africa”

and that “Jihadism and extremism have made very limited inroads in sub-Saharan African countries overall.”⁶⁷ Ten years from now—in 2027—it may appear equally naïve to look back at the scholars of 2017, who are yet to recognize the explosive Salafi-Jihadi potential for regions of Africa rapidly witnessing an increase in Salafi influence. For these regions, al-Qaeda and other groups in the global jihadist movement may yet be able to recreate historical narratives to justify jihad today.

NOTES

1. Stephen Schwartz, *The Other Islam: Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony* (New York: Random House, 2008), pp. 1–34.
2. Mark Sedgwick, “The Support of Sufism as a Counterweight to Radicalization: An Assessment” in Marco Lombardi et al (eds.), *Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism Among Youth to Prevent Terrorism* (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2015), pp. 113–119; Mark Sedgwick “Sufis as ‘Good Muslims’: Sufism in the Battle Against Jihadi Salafism” in Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.) *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Fait Muedini *Sponsoring Sufism: How Governments Promote “Mystical Islam” in their domestic and Foreign Policies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
3. Jonathan N.C. Hill, *Sufism in Northern Nigeria: Force for Counter-Radicalization* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), pp. 1–56; Jonathan N. C. Hill, “Religious Extremism in Northern Nigeria Past and Present: Parallels between the Pseudo-Tijanis and Boko Haram,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* (2013) 102:3, pp. 235–244; Olabanji Akinola, “Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: Between Islamic Fundamentalism, Politics, and Poverty.” *African Security* (2015) 8:1, p. 4. This policy suggestion is akin to the “Good Muslims” and “Bad Muslims” appellation that the British colonial authorities adopted in repressing those Islamic groups who were perceived to threaten the status quo. See Jonathan Reynolds, “Good and Bad Muslims: Islam and Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* (2001) 34:3, pp. 601–618.
4. For an overview of the different jihads spearheaded by Muslim scholars in the Sahel-Sahara region from the 1800s. See Roman Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), pp. 108–134.
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 50. From the period of the state established by Ibn Fūdī and his successors (1812-1902).
 51. The last independent caliph of the state established by Ibn Fūdī.
 52. Author's translation of "Lecture on Returning to the Path of the Qurān and Sunna by Muhammad Mamman Nur and Muhammad Yusuf," March 15, 2009. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUot3BrT0FE> (accessed December 14, 2014). See also Zacharias P. Pieri and Jacob Zenn, "The Boko Haram Paradox: Ethnicity, Religion, and Historical Memory in Pursuit of a Caliphate," *African Security* (2016) 9:1, pp. 74-77.
 53. See New Open Meeting With Ansār ad-Dīn's Sandah 'Ūld Bū A'māmah (accessed January 5, 2017), pp. 20-21; 31.
 54. Ibid., p. 9. Bouamama is referring to the interview of Mossa Ag Attaher (MNLA Coordinator for Diplomatic Action in Europe) published on July 30, 2012 by the Tuareg media outlet Toumast Press. In the interview, Mossa Ag Attaher explains that secularism is the main pillar of the movement and that the MNLA stands against the implementation of *sharī'a* law. For a transcript of the interview see https://www.memri.org/reports/mnla-coordinator-diplomatic-action-europe-mossa-ag-attaher-secularism-foundation-our-combat#_edn1. See also Anna Mahjar-Barducci "The MNLA's Fight for a Secular State of Azawad" available at https://www.memri.org/reports/mnlasfightsecularstateazawad#_edn9; <https://www.memri.org/reports/mnla-political-bureau-member-nina-walet-intalou-issues-open-letter-free-world>.
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57. This theme is also the subject matter and the title of a book written by ‘Uthmān Ibn Fūdī, “al-‘Amr bi muwālāt al-Muminīn wa al-Nahy ‘an muwālāt al-Kāfirīn” in *Mukhtārāt min mu’alafāt Shaykh ‘Uthmān Ibn Fūdī al-hujām al-thālith* (Gusau: Iqra’a Publishing House, 2013), pp. 286-292; see also Ibn Fūdī, *al-Masā’il al-Muhimma*, op. cit., p. 302-303.
58. For Ibn Fūdī’s definition of a Muslim see Uthmān Ibn Fūdī, “Sirāj al-Ikhwān fī ahamm mā yahtāju ilayhi fī hadhā al-zamān,” trans. Abubakar Buba Luwa in *Selected Writings of Sheikh Othman Bn Fodiyo* (Gusau: Iqra’a Publishing House, 2013), vol. 2, pp. 234-235; “Uthmān Ibn Fūdī, ‘Nūr al-albab,” trans. Muhammad Isa Aliyu in *Selected Writings of Sheikh Othman Bn Fodiyo Fodiyo* (Gusau: Iqra’a Publishing House, 2013), vol. 3, p. 5. See also Robert Raymond Martenson, “The Life and Work of Usmaan Bii Fooduye with Special Reference to the Religious Nature of the Encounter Between the Hausa Muslim and Fulbe Muslim Communities,” PhD Diss., Hatford Seminary Foundation, Minnesota, 1977, pp. 60-89.
59. The implication of this interpretation becomes clear when it is extrapolated to the historical debates between the leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Kanem Bornu Empire over the legality of declaring Kanem-Borno as a lawful target of jihad as depicted in the correspondence between the erudite Kanem-Borno scholar Shaykh Muhammad El-Amin Al-Kanemi and Shaykh Muhammad Bello, the son of Ibn Fūdī. While citing the book “*Ajwibat al-Maghili ‘an asilat al-Amin al-Hajj Muhammad Askiya*,” Ibn Fūdī stated the three reasons for fighting the ruler of Kanem Borno and his followers: their partial acceptance of Islam; their hostility towards those who embrace Islam; and their support and assistance to unbelievers fighting against the Muslims. See “Uthmān Ibn Fūdī, ‘Najm al-ikhwān yahtādūna bihi fī ‘umūri al-zamān,” trans. Muhammad Isa Aliyu in *Selected Writings of Sheikh Othman Bn Fodiyo Fodiyo* (Gusau: Iqra’a Publishing House, 2013), vol. 3, p. 312-314. Murray Last and M.A al-Hajj provided a more detailed account of the dispute between the leaders of the Sokoto jihād and the Kanem Borno Empire see Murray Last and M.A. al-Hajj, “Attempts at Defining Muslim in 19th-century Hausaland and Bornu,” *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* 2,(1965), pp. 232-233. See also Bradford G. Martin, “Unbelief in the Western Sudan,” op cit., pp.51-57; Louis Brenner, *The Shehus of Kukawa: A History of the Al-Kanemi Dynasty of Bornu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973) pp. 40-42; Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usuman Dan Fodio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); p. 109-110; Loimeier, “*Muslim Societies in Africa*,” p. 118-119; Lamin Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 219-224.

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62. See New video message from Ansār ad-Dīn: “The Conquest of Azawad,” (accessed January 7, 2017). For details of how Ansar al-Din ousted the MNLA from the city of Gao see Azawad News Agency presents a new newsletter from Ansār ad-Dīn in Mali: “News Report, Issue #1” (accessed January 5, 2017). See also New statement from Majlis Shūrā al-Mujāhidīn in Gao: “To the People of the Cities in Northern Mali About the Reason for Its Fight With the MNLA (the Secular Movement),” (accessed January 5, 2017), and al-Murabitin Foundation for Media Production presents a new statement from Jamā’at at-Tawhīd wa-l-Jihād Fī Gharb Ifrīqiyyā’s Shari’ah Committee: “This Is Our ‘Aqīdah” (accessed January 7, 2017).
63. See Ibid., New Open Meeting With Ansār ad-Dīn’s Sandah ‘Ūld Bū A’māmah p.11.
64. See New audio message from al-Qā’idah in the Islamic Maghrib’s Abū Mus’ab ‘Abd al-Wadūd (‘Abd al-Malik Drūkdīl): “To the Mujāhidīn in Sahara Azawad” (accessed January 7, 2017) See also <http://jihadology.net/2014/03/19/the-jihad-media-elite-presents-a-new-release-from-al-qaidah-in-the-islamic-maghrib-general-guidance-for-the-project-of-the-islamic-jihad-in-azawad/> (accessed January 7, 2017).
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